HE GATHERED THEM TOGETHER INTO A PLACE CALLED IN THE HEBREW TONGUE

ARMAGEDDON
EDITOR’S NOTE: It must never be forgotten that Armageddon is a judgment of Revelation 16, and as such it is primarily a judgment upon Gentile nations because of their treatment of God’s people, both of the Jews and of those Gentiles who believe the true Gospel. The Redemption process is one that involves difficult times, but it must be remembered that the salvation of Israel (and not its destruction by Gog) is the objective outlined in the Prophets when they speak of the events of the last days. We must maintain this balanced view.

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” John 17:17
“And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” — Revelation 16:12-16.

Almost 100 years ago the political Euphrates, identified by many with the Ottoman Turkish empire, was “dried up” and removed, making way for a different Middle East which was to include a Jewish Homeland. Sixty-four years ago the Jewish State emerged as the nation of Israel, and its existence has been challenged ever since the war of Independence in 1948. It has survived many attempts to crush it since. The State was born after emerging out of the ashes of the Holocaust and since then it has suffered war, terrorism, the hostility from the world’s political body—the United Nations, and continuing threats to exterminate it. In recent years this implacable hatred of Zionism has been championed by Iran.

Israel has not been backward in defending itself, and has managed to overcome her enemies more than once. Her ability to do so has frequently astounded the world, evoking the term “miracle” on some of the more prominent occasions, such as June 1967. But the world is now moving into a different era when technology has become all-important. The development of the Stuxnet virus is said to have been Israel’s means of attack upon Iran’s nuclear programme.

World Fears Israel’s Response

Several news media outlets have voiced concern as to what Israel might do in the face of Iran’s nuclear programme. One fear is that Israel could launch an E.M.P. attack—the explosion of a nuclear device in the upper atmosphere which would produce an electromagnetic pulse virtually paralyzing everything on the ground:

“Coupled with cyber-attacks, Iranians would not know it happened except for a massive shutdown of the electric power grid, oil refineries and a transportation gridlock. Food supply would be exhausted and communication would be largely impossible, leading to economic collapse. Similarly, the uranium enrichment centrifuges in Fordo, Natanz and widely scattered elsewhere, would freeze for decades.”

“Behold I come as a Thief”

A devastating blow against Israel’s enemies could come from an entirely unexpected quarter. In his book *Eureka* John Thomas expected that this would be the case in the Land of Midian (Isaiah 9:4; Habakkuk 3:7). In identifying the one who comes as a thief, he says:

“The Eternal Spirit incorporate in the Saints, to whom judgment is given, is the justifier, rectifier, vindicator, and redeemer of the holy land and nation. Habakkuk, in his vision of this event, in ch. 3:13, “thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, for salvation with thine Anointed.” This Anointed One is the Christ in fullness—the One Body consisting of the Lord Jesus and his brethren “glorified together.”

This Christ Body will gain an entrance by defeating certain Arab peoples. By this time Iran will have become subservient to Russia who will move to occupy the Land of Israel (Ezekiel 38). But his occupancy is short-lived, for as John Thomas saw it:

“The sudden and unexpected attack of a hitherto unheard of power, will come upon the Dragon, the Beast, the False Prophet, the kings of the earth, and of the whole habitable “as a thief.” The situation will be an astounding novelty in the “balance of power.” The Christ in fullness in the Great City Babylon, and none suspecting even that the Lord Jesus had individually descended from heaven! Could any surprise be more complete! Here then is the Eastern Question in a phase not dreamt of in the philosophy of the worshippers of the Beast.”

Habakkuk’s prayer of chapter 3 will then be answered, and in vision we see the Yahweh-Man (or One Body in Christ) moving to thresh the nations. This is Armageddon:

“Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine Anointed; thou woundest the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.”

Today we see hostility towards Israel and the things of Zion rapidly increasing. Iran, with some other Arab nations joining in the chorus, demands that Israel be wiped off the map. Among the loyal supporters of Iran is Russia. The European Union does not go quite that far (yet!) but is preparing to ban imports from Israel if they come from West Bank settlements. But the E.U. and the Vatican favour the transfer of Jews from the settlements and claim that Israel is intolerant of Christianity. That Christianity (especially the Roman version of it) has been intolerant of Jews for many centuries does not seem to be an issue!

While the hostility against Israel continues to mature and Iran routinely threatens the existence of Israel—and at the same time develops weapons capable of achieving that objective—there is little sign of the world doing anything to prevent another holocaust. “Don’t attack Iran, Russia starkly warns Israel and the U.S.”—such was one headline in a Canadian paper.

What is Israel to do?
The Valley of Jehoshaphat

By Don Pearce  RUGBY, U.K.

The word Armageddon is a very evocative one; it speaks of an event of cataclysmic import. It only occurs once in Scripture and that is in the symbolic book of Revelation (16:16) and describes the events surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus to save his nation of Israel from the hands of their enemies.

Scripture also uses the term “earthquake” to describe the devastation of this period. In fact the term earthquake is used in the Bible to describe the terrible happenings of the Babylonian and Roman destruction of Jerusalem as well as to describe the ground shaking events of the French Revolution. God’s judgments poured out by Nebuchadnezzar in Old Testament times and by Titus in New Testament times were truly terrible in their severity as God punished His people for their faithlessness. But the events that unfold at the time of Jesus Christ’s return will be truly apocalyptic. What is encapsulated in Armageddon will be God’s judgement on a godless world that has sought to destroy God’s chosen nation of Israel; the culmination of centuries of persecution of the Jews and the followers of Jesus Christ by the churches of Christendom.

But out of these fearful events will be seen not just the severity of God, but His goodness too. For these judgments are the necessary precursor to the Kingdom of God, when God’s nation will dwell in peace in their land, guided by the twelve apostles (Matt. 19:28), walking in truth and uprightness, and bringing glory to God’s Name. The rest of the earth will also be at peace and the conflict between Jew and Arab will be over. As sons of Abraham, they will live in harmony and join together in the worship of God and their acknowledged king—the great descendant of Abraham, the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. The rest of the world will have submitted to Zion’s King and under the wise direction of an innumerable host of immortalised saints they too will reflect praise and glory to God, the creator of heaven and earth.

So although we are going to look and see what the prophet Joel has to say about this period of death and destruction, have at the back of your mind, that there is a reason and a purpose for this black period; it is the final period of darkness before the most glorious day that will then dawn for this earth. The beauty and blessings of Eden will once again be the lot of the inhabitants of this earth who have the privilege of being the generations that live in the Kingdom of God upon this earth.

From Joel’s position in the Minor Prophets (the 10 books that follow Daniel), it would appear that he was a prophet fairly early on in Israel’s history. The whole book concerns God’s judgments upon His people Israel. In his opening verses he calls upon the nation to weep, howl and lament for the severity of what is to come.

“For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white” (Joel 1:6, 7).

He had spoken, under inspiration from God,
of waves of locusts coming up and consuming what was left.

“That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten; and that which the locust hath left hath the cankerworm eaten; and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten” (Joel 1:4).

These different stages that the locust undergoes form an incredible prophecy concerning the future of Jerusalem. It is as dramatic as the dream that King Nebuchadnezzar saw which was interpreted by Daniel, from God, as recorded in his 2nd chapter. Instead of 4 metals we have 4 stages of the locust! My Interlinear Bible describes them thus:

“What was left by the cutter, the swarming locust ate; and what was left by the swarming locust, the locust larvae ate; and what was left by the locust larvae, the stripping locust ate” (Joel 1:4).

The locust egg, having hatched, goes through several stages before it is fully grown and at each stage they have vociferous appetites. Now Hebrew letters also have a numerical value. And when we look at the value of the four Hebrew words used in this verse to describe the different stages, we find a hidden prophecy of incredible significance! The values of these 4 stages are as follows.

Gazam = 50; arbeh =208; yelek =140; chesil = 108 (See Fred Pearce’s ‘From Hosea to Zephaniah’ pages 28-29 for greater details).

Now when we look at the history of Jerusalem’s down treading we find that from its fall in BC 588 to the fall of Babylon and Cyrus’ decree in BC 538 was 50 years! Jerusalem was under Persian control until Persia fell to Alexander the Great in BC 330—a period of 208 years! The Greeks themselves were defeated by the Romans at the Battle of Magnesia in BC 190—140 years later. There followed a period of respite when the Maccabees brought freedom to Jerusalem. Finally from Herod the Great in BC 38 through to AD 70, Rome held sway and Jerusalem was again destroyed after a period of 108 years! Now one can argue over exact dates, but here is a remarkable history of the down treading of Jerusalem. With the ending of the Temple worship and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, the Jews have been scattered, awaiting the call of their Messiah. Many older readers will have witnessed the return of Israel to their land and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Somewhat younger readers will remember the taking of Jerusalem in 1967. However these events do not mark the end of Jerusalem’s troubles. We are still in the times of the Gentiles, and we know that for one final time Jerusalem is to be taken and controlled by Gentiles. This period of great trouble for Israel will not last for long, for in their time of distress the Jews will cry to their God for help and will be heard, when their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ will appear to their God for help and will be heard, when their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ will appear...
unstopable locust invasion (2:2-10). What we need to know is that God describes these Babylonian invaders as His army (2:11) and that this is the day of Yahweh (2:1, 11). It would bring to an end the political heavens of the kings of Judah, and a temporary end to Temple worship.

“The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?” (Joel 2:10, 11)

Then there follows a remarkable section in Joel’s prophecy; as in so many of the prophets, God inserts pictures to do with His coming Kingdom. God, through Joel, tells of another army which I sent among you” (Joel 2:25).

So who is this “Northerner” (army is not in the original), who is going to be destroyed in the region between the east sea (Dead Sea) and the utmost sea (the Mediterranean)? What were the great things that he had done? Well it can’t have been the Babylonians or the Persians or the Greeks or the Romans, for they were not destroyed in Israel, they were the victors over Israel. No, it is clear that this is a power that comes up after these 4 powers have played their role in Israel’s history.

“And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you” (Joel 2:25).

These are the very names that we read of in Chapter 1:4! So if God is going to restore these lost years, it clearly has to take place after the time period of the last of the locust phases. We have other clues that this is referring to a yet future invasion. The outcome for Israel is that they will be amply blessed.

“And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and your people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed” (Joel 2:26, 27).

Joel speaks moreover of God pouring out His Spirit power (vs. 28-29). We know that Peter quotes from these and subsequent verses whilst speaking to those who had gathered to listen to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. The bestowal of the Holy Spirit gifts in the First Century was a foretaste of what is yet to come when Israel’s Messiah is back on this earth. Earlier (v. 23), Joel had spoken of God sending the early rain (which ensured the grain grew) and the latter rain (which gave it the final growth to ensure a good crop). The events of the 1st Century were like the early rains, ensuring that the message of the Lord Jesus as Israel’s Messiah could flourish. We still await the latter rains when, under the returned Lord Jesus, the gospel will go forth once again with signs and miracles.

And so this 2nd chapter concludes with a picture of trouble for Israel, the detail of which will be opened up in the 3rd chapter.

“And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call” (Joel 2:30-32).

Clearly this portends God’s judgments upon a grand scale. It will affect Israel’s political and religious powers—they are to be plunged into darkness ahead of what Joel describes as the great and the terrible day of the Lord. There have been other days of the Lord, as when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians and the Romans, but this is the final one, the climax of God’s purpose with Israel. This is the time which leads to what the book of Revelation calls Armageddon and spoken of by so many prophets as this special issue relates. The day when there will be a remnant in Israel who cry out to their God for help and are heard! When these Jews are saved by the Saviours (Christ and the saints) they will recognise their Messiah as being none other than the one their forefathers crucified so long ago. When they see in his hands and feet the scars of the nails that held him to the stake, they will mourn and weep for their hard heartedness.

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn” (Zech. 12:10).

Now Peter, quoting Joel 2:32 on the Day of Pentecost, stops half-way through the verse. He recognises that the events of Pentecost were only a partial fulfilment, and so he doesn’t complete the verse because the words for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call, lie in the future. But the pathway of escape from God’s wrath is the same. On the day of Pentecost, with deeply troubled consciences, they asked Peter what they should do to be saved. Peter’s answer was simple:

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Zechariah reveals the same solution to the troubled Jews who have had their eyes opened to the enormity of Israel’s sin in rejecting their Messiah.

“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1). They too will be baptised into Christ and become his people.

So let’s turn to the details of this coming day as recorded in Joel’s last chapter. The scene is set in the opening verse; it sums up what the chapter is about—God will restore His people.

“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem” (Joel 3:1).

Bring again means turn back. They will not be in captivity. So how is this to happen? Joel is clearly linking it to the events of the previous section which involves the destruction of the Northerner, a time when they will be delivered, and a time of God’s blessings.

“I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land” (3:2).

Now the appropriateness of “the Northerner” for these nations whom God brings down into Israel is not revealed here. It was for later prophets such as Daniel and Ezekiel to reveal this detail. Ezekiel clearly describes a group of nine nations in his 38th chapter that come against Israel at a time when they have been regathered to their land. Not all of them come from the north; among them is Libya and Ethiopia (Sudan). But the leader, Gog and the majority of these people do indeed come from the North as Ezekiel clearly shows in verse 15.

“And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter
days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes” (Ezek. 38:15, 16).

Other articles have dealt with Gog’s leadership of the nations that come against Israel, showing it to be the power of Russia working with Europe and Iran.

Daniel is quite specific in describing the invading power as King of the North.

“And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over. He shall enter also into the glorious land” (Daniel 11:40, 41).

The nations gather in Israel and overcome the Jews living there and scatter them among the nations, and part my land (v. 2).

“And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink” (3:3).

Things don’t change in warfare; many armies still pillage and rape. Joel indicates the nations around Israel have gleefully joined in to lend a hand with the destruction of the State of Israel.

“Yea, and what have ye to do with me, O Tyre, and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine? will ye render me a recompence? and if ye recompense me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompence upon your own head; Because ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things: The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border” (3:4-6).

Why should they sell Jews to the Grecians? There are two interesting links. The first is that in World War II, Hitler set up mobile gassing squads for the sole purpose of going into Palestine after they had conquered it, to gas the Jews there. Hitler wasn’t given the opportunity, his army in the Middle East was defeated by Britain and he never obtained control of the region. Interestingly he had a back-up plan and made arrangements for Jews to be sent to Greece (which Germany had conquered) to be held in prisoner of war camps there. Again, this was not put into operation because the British retained control of Palestine. The other interesting link is that today the Greeks and the Israelis work well together. It is not difficult to see that in this future day, Greece will seek to repay kindnesses to the Jews by offering to pay for them to be sent there. God’s anger is not directed against Greece, but those who were happy to receive money to get rid of the Jews.

Tyre and Sidon and the coast of Palestine, speak to us of Lebanon and Gaza, home of Hezbollah and Hamas, implacable foes of Israel, sworn to her demise. So God’s wrath is not only against the Northerner, but Israel’s neighbours for the destruction they are going to inflict on the Jews in Israel. In fact their punishment is explained before Joel deals with the Northerner’s punishment.

“Behold, I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompence upon your own head: And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off: for the LORD hath spoken it” (3:7, 8).

God will save Israel and move those people who are not descended from Jacob eastward, for God promised to Abraham the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean. Just as Abraham sent his other sons eastward to live in what we today term Saudi Arabia (Gen 25:6), so too in the Kingdom Age, they will be sent eastward. The Sabeans (RV men of Sheba) came from the country of the Queen of Sheba in the southern extremity of the Arabian Peninsula, far away from Israel. Descendants of Abraham’s other children will be blessed in Abraham and given their inheritance to the east of Israel. In the Kingdom this will be a lush, fertile region and they will live in peace and harmony with Israel. Isaiah chapter 60:6, 7 describes them coming to Jerusalem with their offerings which will be offered acceptably upon the Temple altar. The nations listed are all from sons or grandsons of Abraham.

So back to Joel 3:2. God is going to gather

Lands surrounding Israel in the time of the Prophets will be involved with her again in the Latter Days when Messiah comes to deliver her from her enemies
the nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Where is this? It does not appear in the index of my Times Atlas of the Bible which is pretty comprehensive. Some commentaries refer to the Kidron Valley as the Valley of Jehoshaphat, but this tradition only goes back to the 4th century AD. The word for valley used here is used for a broad valley; a different word is used for a narrow valley like the Kidron. Who was Jehoshaphat? He was one of the good kings of Judah, who walked in the ways of his father David. If we ascribe an early date to this book of the Minor Prophets, then the deeds of this King of Judah would be very real, possibly some 50 years earlier. We read of a great victory when he went out against the Ammonites, the Moabites and the Edomites, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 20. Putting their trust in God, there was a great destruction of the enemies of Judah.

"For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another" (2 Chron. 20:23). Israel didn’t have to fight— their enemies killed themselves; it was a case of mass self-destruction! All Israel had to do was to collect the great spoils, which took them 3 days. They then assembled and praised God for His great deliverance, naming the valley where they assembled, the Valley of Berachah, which means blessing—coming from the root word ‘to kneel in praise to God.’ Its location would be some way south of Jerusalem—their enemies perished in the wilderness of Tekoa (2 Chron. 20:20) about 12 miles (20 km) south of Jerusalem.

Perhaps, instead of being a specific location, the name is rather like that of Armageddon, a title that expresses what is to happen, rather than a precise spot and the meaning we have to tease out from the Hebrew words. The valley of Jehoshaphat means “the valley of the judgment of Yahweh,” a very appropriate name for this is indeed God’s judgments on a world that has despised His people Israel and sought to destroy them. We note that God terms Israel, my heritage, my people in my land! (Joel 3:2). Other prophets indicate that it is upon the mountains of Israel that the hosts of the Gogian Northerner will fall, though this does not preclude a decisive battle to the south of Jerusalem, where the enemies fall out amongst themselves. Ezekiel speaks of such an event, though this takes place throughout all my mountains.

“And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God: every man’s sword shall be against his brother” (Ezek. 8:21). The prophet Haggai likewise says, “And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen; and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother” (Hag. 2:22).

A similar happening took place in the days of Saul (1 Samuel 14:20) and also in the days of Gideon (Judges 7:22).

Now this assembly of nations against Israel is no ordinary event—they gather to destroy Israel. We know today that Israel is hated and despised and many seek to drive her off the face of the earth. Ahmadinejad of Iran has been increasingly vocal in his words against Israel.

“Anyone who loves freedom and justice must strive for the annihilation of the Zionist regime in order to pave the way for world justice and freedom” (02-Aug-12).

Or as one of his Brigadier General’s expressed it: “… the forged regime will be wiped out of the map and thrown into the trash bin of history for ever” (18-Aug-12).

It is for this purpose that the nations assemble against Jerusalem

“Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles: Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up” (Joel 3:9).

Who issues the proclamation? It comes from God! He is bringing the nations against His people for a two-fold purpose. To punish Israel for their waywardness, but also to punish those who come against His people. This might not sound fair, punishing somebody for doing what you want them to do. But hear in mind that God knows the thoughts and intents of men’s hearts. They don’t realise that in coming against Israel they are doing God’s will. They come because it fits their desire to rid the earth of the Jews. This has its origins in centuries of Church-led persecution against Jews. Hitler’s burning desire to make Germany Judenfrei (Jew free) was not a new phenomenon. Throughout Europe and Russia acts of anti-Semitism are rising. The nations will learn the hard way that this is God’s heritage. His people, His land (3:2). The phrase prepare war is an interesting one. Rotherham translates it hallow a war. It is the language of a religious war. The Hebrew word has occurred earlier in Joel (1:14; 2:15, 16) where it was translated sanctify. In the words of Isaiah this is the climax of a millennia-long contest:

“For it is the day of the Lord’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion” (Isa. 34:8).

With the intent of destroying God’s nation, they have set out in a holy crusade. That’s why God is so angry and will plead for my people and my heritage (3:2). It is clear that many nations join in.

“Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord” (3:10, 11).

We witness many nations building up their armaments, recycling their possessions for the acquisition of weapons. God’s judgement on the assembled hosts is to treat them like corn ready to be threshed, or grapes to be crushed under foot in the winepress.

“Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about. Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great” (3:12, 13).

This is the language of several of the prophets; it is the language too of Revelation. Encapsulated in the word Armageddon (a heap of sheaves, in a valley, for judgment) and amplified in Rev. 14:14-20 as a corn harvest and grape harvest. In the world of nature, the grain crops are harvested some time before the grapes are picked. Thus it conveys a 2-fold harvest. The first of corn is a description of the Northerner’s defeat in Israel and then later God’s judgments are poured out on Europe in the form of the grape harvest. There is appropriateness to this; Russia is very much associated with cereal growing and Europe, especially the Mediterranean, with vines.

“Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:14).

Ah yes, God is in control, this is not a sad ending for God’s people; their oppression is the signal for God to act—it is the day of Yahweh. Israel’s God is about to reveal His hand and His mighty power. Israel might be despised by the nations but they are not forgotten of their God. It is God’s mighty ones who are going to come to save Israel (v. 11). Who are these mighty or powerful ones? They are the Lord Jesus and his
saints, once mortal, but now made immortal, and against whom no power can stand. Like their Master, they will be given power over the forces of nature and at their hands the nations who have come against Israel will be “threshed.” The word decision in verse 14 above is better translated incision or cutting. It is the term used for “a threshing sledge with sharp teeth” (Strong) and is translated threshing instrument in Amos 1:3 and Isaiah 28:27. Several years ago we saw examples of such threshing instruments in a museum in Paphos in Cyprus. The stamp issued by the North Cyprus postal authority (page 8) illustrates it in action. The underside was filled with holes into which sharp stones were jammed, to give the cutting action that severs the corn from the stalks.

“The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining” (Joel 3:15).

It is not certain from the account here just when Israel’s political and religious “heavens” are darkened, but other scriptures clearly indicate that this is as a result of the nations taking control of Israel; slaying many people, sending off others as prisoners, whilst others flee into today’s Jordan (Edom, Moab and Ammon). This then fits with the situation described earlier in this chapter (3:2-6). There is to be a new heavens and earth to take the place of the old, wherein dwells righteousness (2 Peter 2:13), which will see the enemy destroyed and Israel delivered. Ezekiel ch’s 38 and 39 detail this as does Daniel in his 2nd, 7th and 12th chapters. Zechariah also fills in details of the events of this time in his closing three chapters. Joel continues:

“...be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion” (3:19-21).

When Israel came out of Egypt under Moses, Pharaoh tried his hardest to frustrate God’s plan; the Edomites too came against Israel in the wilderness and wouldn’t allow them to pass through on the way to the Promised Land. Daniel 11:42, 43 tells us that Egypt will come under the power of the Northerner before Israel is taken. She will experience desolation for a period and be punished for her hatred of Israel. Like other nations she will have to submit to Israel’s coming king. From Isaiah 11:15, it appears that part of the typological changes caused by the earthquake, the Nile is diverted and discharges into the Red Sea. This would be a particular punishment for Egypt, for Zech. 14:18 tells us that in the Kingdom she will still depend upon the Nile for her prosperity. It would necessitate a shift of her population to follow the new course, and away from its present course. The earthquake will probably be responsible for the destruction of Edom’s territory. It will in any case no longer belong to Edom, but be part of Israel’s possession. Again there is an intriguing reference to the southern end of the newly revived, and no longer Dead Sea, that there will be marshy places for the collection of salt (Ezek. 47:11). Also in this region will be Hamongog— the burying place of the Gogian armies, the Northerner, where people in the Kingdom can be reminded of the folly of those who despised God’s people.

Joel’s dramatic pen pictures vividly remind us of the foreknowledge of God. Long before the modern nations of today came into being, God was able to tell of their future destiny, and to tell of the future for the ancient nation of Israel, whose destiny will be a glorious one, when they turn to God in faith and render praise and service to their Messiah, throughout the Kingdom Age. And even more wonderful is that we who are Gentiles can, in God’s great mercy, play a role in that Kingdom age as the brothers and sisters of Israel’s Messiah. Kings and priests in the Kingdom of God!

“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands: Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing... And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:9-12, 14).
ne of the most marvellous ways in which our faith can be strengthened is to witness the outworking of the Divine hand in the movements of the nations in these last days. This article is going to focus on four specific alliances that demonstrate the accuracy of our key prophetic expectations and hopefully encourage us to hold fast unto the end.

Ezekiel 38 describes in general outline a pattern of international alliances that both support and oppose the latter-day invasion of Israel. Whilst the nations were known to some extent by the people of Ezekiel’s day the prophet’s attention was focused on their eventual whereabouts in the latter days. Whether they were nearby or far away at the time Ezekiel wrote is not really relevant because God would only be interested in visiting them at the time of the end.

This can be demonstrated from the words of verse 8:

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

The Hebrew word for “visited” is paqad which in this context of warfare has the idea of visiting and numbering troops for inspection. This mustering for war would take place at a time far distant from Ezekiel’s day. These powers would migrate near and far and be subject to many internal conflicts but in the latter days they would be clearly identifiable and ready for war.

By the way it should be noted that the phrase “latter days” is defined in this verse as the time when Israel has been repatriated into the land following an international dispersion. The initial return from worldwide exile began in the latter part of the 19th century and accelerated rapidly during and after World War 2 culminating in the appearance of a Jewish State in 1948. There can be no doubt that we are currently living in the latter days.

The identity of these latter day nations has been discussed in previous issues of The Bible Magazine (Vol. 16 # 1; 18 # 4; 20 # 4; 21 # 4; 25 # 3). The map below summarises the main prophetic layout of the land with the red dotted line illustrating those nations within and without the Gogian confederacy.

Based on this outline we can expect the following groupings of nations to take place:

- The Aggressors — Russia, Western and Central Europe, Turkey and the Caucasus region, Iran, Libya and Ethiopia.
- The Protestors — USA, Britain, Australia, Canada, India and those Arab countries that make up the Saudi Arabian peninsula.

Recent Russian Consolidation of Power
Vladimir Putin is back on the political horizon and is already stamping his aggressive brand of leadership on the world stage. Despite a vocal protest from noisy demonstrators against this new 6 year term, Putin’s inauguration was welcomed by 3,000 hand picked officials, including the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, in a lavish ceremony fit for a king.

According to a recent Reuters report the Russian patriarch called the Putin era ‘a miracle of God’ and other faiths agreed.

“Patriarch Kirill, a bearded cleric seen as a modernising figure in the Russian church, the largest in Orthodox Christianity, compared the period preceding Putin’s ascent to power to the 1941 Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. ‘What were the 2000’s then? Through a miracle of God, with the active participation of the country’s leadership, we managed to exit this horrible, systemic crisis,’ Kirill told a meeting at the ancient St. Daniel’s monastery.

‘I should say it openly as a patriarch who must only tell the truth, not paying attention to the political situation or propaganda, you personally played a massive role in correcting this crooked twist of our history,’ Kirill said. The gathering was also attended by four mufitis from predominantly Muslim Russian regions, a Buddhist lama, an Armenian bishop and representatives of Roman Catholics and other Christian churches.

‘Muslims know you, Muslims trust you, Muslims are wishing you success,’ said mufit Ravil Gainutdin. Mufit Ismail Berdiyev from the turbulent North Caucasus added: ‘You are the only person who has shown the United States its place’” (Reuters 8/2/2012).

The final act of the Russian Presidential Inauguration ceremony occurred when the newly sworn-in president visited the ancient Annunciation Cathedral for a blessing from the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Cathedral of the Annunciation was originally the main building of the complex of the Grand Kremlin Palace.

In this picture the Patriarch gives a blessing to the new president and the two exchanged gifts of holy icons.

In this picture the Patriarch gives a blessing to the new president and the two exchanged gifts of holy icons.
warships in the eastern Mediterranean for war games and was sending three warships carrying some 360 marines to Syria. She has drawn a line in the sand and has warned the West to proceed no further.

In relation to Russia and Iran the two countries have had a long history of being geographic neighbours, rivals, competitors and partners. Still present in the Iranian collective memory is the time when Tsarist Russia expanded territorially into wide parts of what had hitherto been part of “Greater Iran” in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Tehran lost Tbilisi and Baku to Russia in the 1813 Treaty of Gulistan and the khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan in the 1828 Treaty of Turkmenchay. This last conflict became a historic disgrace which not only took from Iran important former politico-cultural spheres of influence but also granted Russia an exclusive navigation and trading right in the Caspian Sea.

Despite this rocky history Russia and Iran are currently allies embracing each other in a desire to dominate the region. Iran adamantly upholds its legitimate right to nuclear enrichment for civilian purposes and is vociferous against Western arrogance and perceived double standards. Russia supports this burgeoning self-confidence and increasing military presence in the region because it keeps in check western influence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Russia and Iran are both major energy exporters. They have deep-seated interests in the South Caucasus; they are both firmly opposed to NATO’s missile shield and both want to prevent the U.S. and E.U. from controlling the energy corridors around the Caspian Sea Basin. Ezekiel 38 predicts the coming day when this mutually beneficial relationship will result in a formal military alliance against the people of God in Israel.

**Russia and Western Europe**

The European Union has its roots in energy, given that the European Coal and Steel Community and the EURATOM treaties were two of the three first contexts on which the European alliance was founded. The European Union is almost 50% dependent on imports for its energy consumption and it will be 70% in about 15 years time. A large part of its oil and gas imports will come increasingly from Russia. This means that the need to ensure greater energy security and better regulation of energy supplies will turn energy policy into a much more politicized issue.

Many energy and security issues in Europe take a strong east-west slant for geographic reasons: Russia is close to Europe; it possesses huge oil and gas reserves; and it is a natural energy supplier for the European Union. Hence the ties that bind Gog, Gomer and Magog together are the network of oil and gas pipelines that spread like tentacles across the landscape. As the European Commission’s Second Strategic Energy Review of 2008 forecasts: “Europe will continue to rely on oil and gas imports until 2020, despite efforts to switch to a low-carbon economy.”

So whilst political alliances will wax and wane Russia remains a necessary partner for the European Union’s energy and security. Both Europe and Russia need each other and analysts predict that this mutual dependency will be required for at least the next several decades.

**Alliances on the Arabian Peninsula**

The next area of interest lies within the Arabian Peninsula. Within the last 5 years or so there has been a more aggressive foreign policy emerging from the member nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) which was formed in 1981. The immediate objective was to protect member states from the threat posed by the Iran-Iraq War and Iranian-inspired activist Islamism (also seen as Shiite fundamentalism). In a series of meetings, chiefs of staff and defense ministers of the Gulf States developed plans for mutual defense and launched efforts to form a joint command and a joint defense network.

The alliance consists of six members:

1. **The Kingdom of Bahrain**—Its 1.2 million people enjoy a GDP per capita of $40,500. Its economy grew 4.5% in 2010.
2. **Kuwait**—Its population is double that of Bahrain. They enjoy the 10th highest standard of living ($48,900 per person). The country holds 9% of the world’s oil reserves.
3. **The Sultanate of Oman**—Its dwindling oil reserves means it’s increasingly relying on tourism to improve the lifestyle of its 3 million residents.
4. **Qatar**—The richest country in the world, with a GDP per capita of $179,000 for its 848,000 residents. It has 25 billion barrels of proven oil reserves and 14% of the world’s natural gas reserves.
5. **The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**—The largest of the GCC countries (26 million people) has 20% of the world’s proven oil reserves. Its GDP per capita is only $24,200.
6. **The United Arab Emirates (UAE)**—Its 5.1 million people enjoy a per capita GDP of $49,600 thanks to a diversifying economy that includes Dubai and the world’s tallest building, the Burj Dubai.

The chaos emerging from the recent Arab spring revolutions combined with the threat of war from Iran have made the Council states decide on expanding the alliance to include Jordan and Morocco as well as boosting the Peninsula Shield (GCC’s combined military force) to include 100,000 troops before the end of 2012. Saudi Arabia particularly has been using its wealth to finance covert operations in Syria.

The map below shows the proposed member states of a new look Gulf Confederation in which national economies and military commands combine after a European Union model. Suffice it to say that it bears a striking resemblance to the territorial extent of Sheba and Dedan mentioned in Ezekiel 38.

Where Arab alliances over the years between countries like Egypt and Syria have ended in miserable disasters this grouping of Arab countries is very different and has stood the test of time. The following map illustrates Europe’s major natural gas pipelines with Ukraine being the main route for Russia’s gas exports to western Europe.
In addition to this Britain and the USA are committed to strengthening and deepening the security architecture in the region by quietly moving significant military reinforcements into the Persian Gulf to deter the Iranian military from any possible attempt to shut the Strait of Hormuz and to increase the number of fighter jets capable of striking deep into Iran if the standoff over its nuclear program escalates. The US has doubled the number of minesweepers assigned to the Gulf to eight vessels and added an unspecified number of F-22 stealth fighters and F-15C warplanes on to two of its bases.

The merchants of Tarshish became locked into an alliance of mutual geo-political security with Sheba and Dedan when Washington sent a strong signal to Tehran that it will not tolerate any closure of the Strait.

As part of the ongoing link between these nations more than 12,000 soldiers took part in a series of Middle East war games in Jordan in May 2012. The exercise was called Eager Lion and the participants represented 19 countries, including Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Pakistan, Qatar, Britain, France, Italy, Spain and Australia. It is envisaged that this exercise will become an annual event.

A telling photograph (below) taken from the Christian Science Monitor site which depicts American and Jordanian officers standing in front of a lion! How ironic that they should adopt the symbolism of Ezekiel 38.

A Closer Look at Western European Alliances

Whilst Ezekiel 38 portrays Europe and Russia in close alliance, we know from the books of Daniel and Revelation that western Europe in its final phase is made up of a number of diverse European countries dominated by Germany and the Papacy. Details of these explanations can be found in previous issues of The Bible Magazine (Volume 20 # 4).

The basis of this understanding lies within the visions of Daniel 7 and Revelation 16-17. The 4th beast of Daniel which will exist right up until the time of the Lord’s return (Dan 7:16-26) is a western European super-state based on the foundation of the Holy Roman Empire laid down by Charlemagne in AD 800. It has gone through several phases since that time but it is in essence the same Catholic-dominated and Germanic-centred power which will flourish in the time of the end.

In Apocalyptic terms (particularly Rev. 16-17) the three key European prophetic areas in the latter days can be depicted as follows:

The beast of the earth today is essentially the European Union with its headquarters in Brussels whilst the false prophet can be identified with the current Papal power centred in Rome. The dragon power based in Istanbul

Charlemagne’s empire ruled over most of the western Roman Empire except for Spain & Britain.

will be discussed in more detail later in this article.

Turning to the area of western Europe the last 15 years have witnessed a dramatic expansion in the number of member countries joining the European Union. In fact it has increased so rapidly that it has begun to spill beyond the borders of its key prophetic boundaries. So what God has done in the past few months is to use the financial crisis in Europe to rein in its expansiveness and to precipitate a political crisis which has resulted in the isolation of Britain from Europe.

It all began at a European Union summit held in Brussels on 9th December 2011. On that occasion the British Prime Minister David Cameron decided to veto a new EU treaty and in so doing isolated himself from the rest of Europe. He demanded taxation exemptions for financial institutions in London and when this request was refused he decided to move against the proposed treaty changes.

The reaction from the European press was startling. Der Spiegel wrote: Bye, Bye Britain. Le Monde carried the headline: 27 member Europe is finished. Die Presse wrote: Europe is united without UK.

Since France and Germany could no longer push through their fiscal reforms within the wider EU community because of this veto, they decided instead to narrow their reforms to those EU members who had adopted the Euro as their currency. This had the effect of creating a two-speed Europe in which the inner core of EU countries who used the Euro became the financial engine of the rest of Europe. If we were to compare the map of Charlemagne’s empire in AD 800 with the size of the new Europe we would find a remarkable similarity.

There have been 2 significant outcomes of this new alignment. The first is the growing strength of Germany at the heart of Europe and the second is the advancement of the idea of European political unity.

Under a headline: Germany finds itself back in power in Europe, the Los Angeles Times featured an article on 27th February in which it described Germany as the unquestioned boss amid Europe’s debt crisis and economic woes. It went on to say: “For nearly 70 years, Germany’s grand national ambition has basically been not to have one. “After losing two world wars and carrying out a horrific genocide, the country set to working its way back into the European fold, content to focus on rebuilding its shattered economy while dutifully leaving continental leadership to the likes of France. “The plan has been a roaring success—so much so that, in one of history's great ironies, Germany today finds itself right back where it wasn’t supposed to be: dominating Europe. “As the region’s richest, most populous nation, with control over purse strings rather than panzers, Germany is the unquestioned boss amid Europe’s stubborn debt crisis and deepening economic malaise.”

In addition to this France’s Challenge magazine featured Angela Merkel on its cover with the headline: The German Europe.

So what Germany failed to achieve in two world wars she has achieved in the last few years through fiscal discipline and austerity. But the economic crisis in Europe at the moment has fostered a greater interest in political union. The BBC online News service ran this article on 7th June 2012:
Germany’s Chancellor Merkel urges EU Political Union

“German Chancellor Angela Merkel says the EU needs a political union even if it means some countries integrating faster than others. “Speaking on German TV, she called for ‘more Europe,’ including a budgetary union, saying ‘we need a political union first and foremost.’

“Step by step we must from now on give up more competences to Europe, and allow Europe more powers of control.” Spiegel Online echoed that address by Merkel.

“European leaders have long insisted they will do everything to save the euro. Now, a plan is forming that would dramatically change the architecture of the European Union. Brussels would be granted a significant say in national budgets and debt would be communalized. But the hurdles such a plan might face are high.

“We need a so-called fiscal union,’ she said during an appearance on German public broadcaster ARD last week. ‘Which means more joint budgetary policy.’ Up to that point, Merkel had merely repeated that which she always demanded. But then came the new tone: ‘More than anything, we need a political union,’ she said. ‘That means that we must, step by step through the process, give up more powers to Europe as well and allow Europe oversight possibilities.’

“Merkel is carefully preparing the public for the possibility that great changes are coming and that established certainties are no longer valid. Her message is that Europe only has a future when the Germans too give up large portions of their national sovereignty. That is the extent of her message, but it is plenty nonetheless.”

Debt is forcing the weaker EU member states to lose their fiscal sovereignty and therefore the concept of deepening integration on fiscal policy and economic governance is gaining ground. As The Guardian observed (Germany weighs up federal Europe plan to end debt crisis — 5/6/12):

“Europe’s leaders appear to be edging towards an ambitious and controversial new blueprint for a federalised eurozone after Paris and Brussels threw their weight behind Spain’s pleas for an EU rescue of its beleaguered banks.

“At the start of three weeks likely to be crucial to the survival of the euro, the new French government and the European commission voiced strong backing for a new eurozone ‘banking union’ to save the single currency.

“The plan could see vast national debt and banking liabilities pooled—and then backed by the financial strength of Germany—in return for eurozone governments surrendering sovereignty over their budgets and fiscal policies to a central eurozone authority.”

The proposals being drafted call for a form of eurobond whereby Germany and other smaller creditor countries guarantee the debts of the struggling member states. In return for this bail out, Berlin is insisting on major steps towards a Eurozone federation or political union with budgetary, fiscal, and scrutiny powers vested in Brussels and in the European Court of Justice. This would mean vast transfers of sovereignty from member states to a central power—exactly as Scripture expects.

A Closer Look at Turkey and the King of the North

Turkey has provided an interesting example of the way in which God uses a nation through different phases of its existence. In the first century it was the centre of much of Paul’s early work in establishing the Truth amongst the Gentiles. Towards the end of the first century it became the centre of much apostasy. Later the development of the Byzantine empire and its subsequent fall to Islam are all recorded in fascinating detail in the Apocalypse.

When we come to the time of the end we find that the gradual demise of the Ottoman empire was predicted in Revelation 16 (The Bible Magazine Vol. 11#5; 12#2; 13#2; 18#1,4). And yet despite that we find that the influence of Turkey is still an important factor in the last days because in Rev. 16: 13 the frog spirit influence of humanism, the rights of man and similar political philosophies emanate from the mouth of the dragon. Apocalyptically speaking this symbol referred to the eastern area of the ancient Roman Empire based in Constantinople or modern Istanbul. So whilst the Ottoman Turk has lost its empire, its political influence is still keenly felt right up until the time of Armageddon.

When we examine the movements of Turkey over the last 5 years we find an astonishing increase in political clout within the area of Eurasia. Before we look at this however we need to examine the prophetic picture of the time of the end in Daniel 11:40-45. In v. 44 we are introduced to three powers—the king of the north, the king of the south and a third power simply referred to as ‘him.’ The map below illustrates their territorial relationship to Israel:

In ancient times the king of the north was the Seleucid power—a foreign power which occupied the area of southern Turkey, Armenia, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, part of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Its main rival was Egypt ruled by the Ptolemy’s and this power was known as the king of the south.

These two rival powers disappeared from the pages of history when Rome dominated the area and swallowed them up in a series of dramatic campaigns. Rome is introduced into the prophecy in Daniel 11:36 as ‘the king who shall do according to his will.’ This power would continue until destroyed by Christ or as Daniel was told would ‘prosper till the indignation be accomplished’ (v. 36).

This power would be a military power supportive of a peculiar religious persuasion in its dominion (v. 37-39). In essence when the Roman Empire divided into east and west, the military emperors in the east publicly supported the papal ambitions of the Bishop of Rome in the west. As time progressed the eastern part of the empire fell to Islam and this religious persuasion is the dominant constitution of the dragon at present.
So contextually the old imperial eastern Roman power (now Islamic in nature) is still in the mind of the prophet when he receives the details concerning the latter days. Hence the ‘him’ of v. 40 refers to this eastern imperial power centred in Istanbul.

Whilst various empires would wax and wane and the kings of the north and south would fade into oblivion, suddenly at the ‘time of the end’ all three powers would be back on the stage for their final appearance (v. 40).

Two key events would occur. The first would be when the king of the south (a foreign power in occupation of the ancient Ptolemaic empire in Egypt) would push at Turkey (‘him’) and the second would be when the king of the north (a foreign power in occupation of the ancient Seleucid empire in Eurasia) would come against Turkey (‘him’). The first of these predictions occurred during World War 1 when a number of Commonwealth powers under the leadership of Britain occupied Egypt for a brief time and then pushed the Turk out of much of the Middle East. The second prediction is yet to occur.

What Daniel saw was a foreign power take control of these ancient Seleucid countries—Armenia, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, part of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—and when these were in his control he would become the king of the north and invade Turkey.

So with this background in mind we note that Turkish power is on the rise once more and although Turkey will never regain its previous empire nevertheless it has a significant role to play in bringing the nations together for the battle of Armageddon.

On June 18, 2010 The Australian ran an article on Turkey as follows:

**Turkey expands Influence in Middle East**

“On June 9, Turkey voted against increased sanctions on Iran in the UN Security Council. This action confirmed the fears of many Western pundits, already inflamed by harsh denunciations of the Israeli attack on the Gaza flotilla, that the only Muslim-majority member of NATO had defected to the enemy camp—militant Islamism.

“In fact, the changes in Turkey’s foreign policy over the past few years owe nothing to ‘clash of civilisation’ dynamics and instead reflect the governing AK Party’s pragmatic pursuit of Turkey’s national interests.

“Turkey’s new activism startles some observers because it marks a dramatic change from decades of an inward-looking orientation encapsulated in founder Kemal Ataturk’s phrase ‘peace in the world, peace at home.’

“Allof sudden Turkey is awake and although it is a member of NATO it is charting its own independent political course based on its own national needs. It has been persistently denied EU membership (because prophetically it stands as a dragon power independent of the beast of the earth power) and is therefore looking eastwards to its more traditional partners.

“Turkey’s economy has been growing at such a rapid rate that it prompted writers at the Wall Street Journal to refer to Turkey as “Eurasia’s rising tiger.” Maintaining growth at a rapid rate of 8.8% during a second quarter in 2011 marred by regional instability, Turkey’s durable economy has managed to attract persistent praise from high-ranking economists.

“This steady rise to economic prominence makes the nation a more influential global force, granting it the capability to adopt a more aggressive foreign policy with relative impunity. This has certainly been true in relation to the Middle East. The Arab Spring has created uncertainty in the Middle East and Turkey has stepped in to provide friendship and stability which has been warmly welcomed by fragile Arab regimes.

**The Southeast Europe Times** commented on the recent rise of Turkey in the Balkans

“Over the past decade, Turkey has carried out a multi-dimensional and multi-regional foreign policy. With its EU membership prospects in limbo, the country has not only looked to the east, but also towards its ‘near abroad’ in the Balkans.

EU regional player Greece’s increasing social-financial problems provide ample room for Turkey—whose economy in 2011 ranks twelfth in the world, with a GNP of $10,000 per person—to take control of the regional rudder.

“After Yugoslavia’s disintegration, Turkey’s strategic interest returned to the Balkans, also a former Ottoman territory. This time around, the influence is economic and cultural but it soon will become geopolitical,” military-political analyst Petar Shkrbina told SETimes. ‘Erdogan knows that Europe needs Turkey and not the other way around. The main networks of gas and oil pipelines will go through Turkey.’

“The Balkan countries, primarily Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), but increasingly Serbia as well, have achieved significant political co-operation with Ankara. In the past several years, the economic ties have strengthened as Turkish investors eye the opportunity to secure a foothold in the Balkans marketplace” (11.7.11).

But the most significant events happening in relation to Turkey involve those countries which prophetically make up the ancient Seleucid empire.

On 24 October 2010 Today’s Zaman (the most-circulated English-language newspaper in Turkey) ran this feature:

**ECO Istanbul Summit showcases Turkey’s Growing outreach to a diverse Region.**

“Turkey called for intensified contacts among countries in Eurasia as it hosted a summit of 10 nations on Thursday, saying it will bring prosperity and stability to the diverse region. “In addition to illustrating Turkey’s growing influence, the economic summit—gathering leaders from Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asian states together in Istanbul—also offered an opportunity for Turkey to seek more support for its bid for the creation of a new and modernized Silk Road. Ankara believes that historical, economic and political relations, which were maintained within the region historically thanks to the Silk Road, can be revitalized via today’s railroads, highways and air links.

“Turkey, which is located exactly at the center of the Eurasian continent, attaches much importance to the maintenance of peace, security, stability and welfare all across this geography. Towards this direction, we are trying to constitute regional dialogue and cooperation mechanisms and implement comprehensive regional economic cooperation projects in fields such as energy, communication and transportation,” Turkish President Abdullah Gül told the visiting leaders on Thursday, while delivering a speech at the opening of the 11th heads of state and government summit of the 10-member Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

“ECO was established by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey in 1985 as an intergovernmental regional organization aiming at promoting economic, technical and cultural cooperation among the member states. In 1992, it was expanded to include seven new members, namely Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.”

In other words Turkey has been carefully nurturing economic cohesion between a number of countries that make up the ancient king of the north territory. If we were to depict this on a map there is a remarkable sense of symmetry.

What does this mean? It means that an identifiable group of nations known as the Economic Cooperation Organization is taking shape in the very region formerly known in Scripture as the king of the north. Daniel 11:40 indicates that one day this group of countries will be occupied by a foreign power after which it will turn upon Turkey and simultaneously invade Israel. We know that this foreign power will be none other than Russia and that is why we see Putin shoring up rogue countries like Syria and Iran. They are stamping their influence upon this region in a bid to eventually dominate it.

The fact that we see this loose union of nations forming a cohesive entity occupying the very area once known as the Seleucid empire is testimony to the ever-advancing purpose of God in relation to his purpose at the time of the end. We are very privileged to witness these developments and it is surely our prayer that the Lord will return soon to save his people and fill this world with his Father’s glory.
The name “Armageddon” only appears once in the Bible, and that is in Revelation 16:16. The words are “And he gathered them together into a place (Greek: topos) called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” The Greek word used here (topos) is that from which we derive our English word topography. “It is used of a region or locality” says Vine’s. So what region is this; what locality are the nations to be gathered into?

The actual name given—“Armageddon”—is a symbolic name. It is a sign-name. Revelation 1:1 tells us that Jesus Christ sent the Revelation “and signified it” (that is, indicated it by sign) by his angel unto John, in order to show his servants things which must shortly come to pass. The gathering of the nations to a “place” called Armageddon is of course part of the vision. The “place” or locality is a specific region, but its name title or sign is indicated by the Hebrew: Armageddon.

Armageddon

This name has been researched by many writers, the majority of whom are discussed by E.B. Elliott in his Horae Apocalypticae. A place called in the Hebrew Armageddon, he says, is “the Mountain of Gathering, Mountain of Destruction, or Mountain of Delights, as Grotius, Virtinga, and Brightman respectively explain it, all with reference to its probable Hebrew etymology.” But he continues comparing this with the prophecy of Daniel:

“Just as in the Apocalypse the Antichrist is described as drawn, together with his Antichristian confederacy, to Armageddon,—some country or place without the territorial limits of the ten kingdoms of the Popedom, which, it was observed, had by some been conjectured to be Judaea,—so we have inferred from this prophecy in Daniel, that either the Turk, or the Pope, is to be gathered in military strength to that very country, here clearly defined as “the glorious holy mountain.” Nor does it seem undeserving of remark that the extent of the hill-country of Judah, between the two seas, has been estimated at about fifty miles square... And let me not fail to add, in corroboration of these views, that there are three other well-known prophecies in the Old Testament,—viz. in Ezekiel, Joel, and Zechariah,—which seem all to point similarly to some grand destruction of an anti-Christian confederacy in the mountains of Judah or Israel, immediately at or before the final conversion and restoration of the Jews, and the commencement of the consequent glorious predicted times of blessedness.”

Elliott’s analysis of the Hebrew name Armageddon may be no more accurate than his estimated square miles applied to the hill country of Judah, but his connection to the region of Judah through the prophecies of Ezekiel, Joel, and Zechariah is worth some consideration.

Ezekiel’s prophecy describes an international confederacy being “gathered” (38:13) against “the mountains of Israel” in the latter years. This is a very similar picture to that given in Revelation 16:16 where the kings of the earth and of the whole world are “gathered” (verses 14 and 16) to the place called Armageddon.

The prophet Joel (chapter 3) also sees that when God brings again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, he “will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat” to plead for His people of Israel. Many writers have connected this prophecy to that of Revelation 16:16 where the kings of the earth and of the whole world are “gathered” (verses 14 and 16) to the place called Armageddon.

Zechariah also presents us with yet another piece of the picture as he describes a gathering of all nations against Jerusalem to battle (Zechariah 14). If we put these pieces together we see that the area involved consists of the mountains of Israel, Judah and Jerusalem. This is “the place,” and today it is known to the world as the West Bank; or the “occupied” territories.

A Prophecy for Our Time

The great world wars of the 20th Century were, at the time of their history, sometimes...
and W.H. Boulton commented: “The fact that Armageddon is said to be so called “in the Hebrew tongue”, and is defined to be “a place”, sufficiently indicate the error of the popular application of the name. It would be incongruous to speak of a conflict waged mainly in other countries by a name particularly associated with the Hebrew tongue. It must relate to a conflict in Palestine, where place-names in Hebrew exist.”

Palestine was the name by which the Holy Land was known prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948. Today there are two official languages—Hebrew and Arabic, but Hebrew is spoken by over 70% of the population and was revived by Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858-1922) at the turn of the century. He was for some years contemporary with Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) the founder of political Zionism. So the words of Revelation 16:16 are telling us that these events require a Hebrew nation—they could only happen in our time.

Not only has the Hebrew language and nation re-appeared, the Biblical heartland—the “place”—was returned to Jewish control in 1967. This was an event that stirred the spirits of Christadelphians everywhere. The Christadelphian magazine for July had an article headed “The Bible and the Middle East” and the opening paragraph conveys some of the excitement of the time:

“The news from the Middle East stirred brethren and sisters everywhere, and with it came the urge to tell our hope to the world in the light of current events. In many parts of the country lectures were arranged on the relation of Israel and the Middle East to the prophetic hope and the Gospel of salvation.”

Prophecy was fulfilling before our eyes, and everyone knew it! So the stage was set for Armageddon:

“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land” (Joel 3:1-2).

Now consider the comment made by a Bible expositor 12 years before the June war of 1967. He wrote: “Because Jerusalem (i.e. old Jerusalem) must be possessed by the Jews prior to Christ’s return, so that he might manifest himself to them as their deliverer and Saviour, the ejection of Hashemite Jordan from there is a foregone conclusion. We can look then, for developments which will result in Israel’s getting possession of the whole city, and for a dreadful conflagration kindled by that spark throughout the Middle East” (Apocalypse & The Gospels, F. Bilton, 1955).

It has taken several years for the situation to mature, but any realistic analysis must reach the conclusion that the steps towards “a dreadful conflagration” have followed that Middle East war of 1967.

The so-called “occupied territories” of Judea and Samaria (also known as the West Bank) are at the very centre of the Arab-Israeli dispute today, and this of course includes the controversy over the city of Jerusalem. In Isaiah 34:8 this is termed “the controversy of Zion.” The nations of the world seek to impose what they call a “two-state solution” to answer the problem—in the words of Joel’s prophecy they want to partition (or part) God’s Land. This idea has been tried in the past and it didn’t solve anything. It is not going to succeed today either. In fact the Jewish population in this disputed territory is growing, and this is God’s work as He prepares for the great day.

First Hand Information

Recently we visited Israel and went to the territory under discussion here. We met a member of the Israeli Knesset (Parliament) in Beit El, one of the Jewish settlement “villages.” His words to us were:

“Israel will overcome, because we see as in a graph that since we came here we are always growing—we are growing and growing; and when we are suffering we are growing even more.

“For instance, in this case, when Netanyahu decided about the freeze, we knew of the idea and started to build many, many houses before the freeze. It you go around you will see that construction. So as to the question of how many people will live here, we will have millions of Jews who will come back to Israel. Judea and Samaria will very soon be full of Jews, just as in the other parts of Israel. Nobody can stop it because it was spoken by God through the prophets—and the words of the prophets will become a reality.”

These were the words of Ya’akov Katz, MK. We also interviewed his assistant and spokesman Baruch Gordon who also lives in Beit El. He told us that Ya’akov Katz had access to the Central Bureau of Statistics which is under the Prime Minister’s Office:

“Not everyone has free access to it. According to these official statistics how many Jews do you think live in Judea and Samaria?

“Six and a half million Jews live in Israel right now (we are not counting Arabs). Not counting East Jerusalem and area—as of December 2011 it was 342,000. Add on to that the 300,000 Jews who live in East Jerusalem (that is across the 1967 border): you are talking about 650,000. That amounts to one tenth of the population of Israel now living beyond the Green Line.”

Since that interview (that is in the space of about six months) MK Ya’akov Katz told Arutz Sheva news channel: “Today there are 700,000 Jews living beyond the Green Line (that is beyond the 1967 border).” That means that over 14% of the Jewish
population now live in the so-called West Bank—and it is increasing rapidly.

**“Dwelling Safely”**

It was a remarkable prediction that John Thomas was able to make in his book *Eureka* when he wrote:

“It may be remarked here, that there will have been a considerable gathering of Israelites upon the mountains of Israel before the invasion of the country by Gog, and his capture of Jerusalem. This appears from the Spirit’s address to Gog in the eighth verse of this chapter. In this place he says, ‘In the latter years thou shalt come into the land brought back from the sword, and gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been continually waste; but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them.’”

The one feature that is missing in all this today is that of Israel dwelling safely. This is what the prophecy of Ezekiel 38 requires: A state of peace and prosperity has to develop. Looking at this question realistically we have to conclude that the only way this can be achieved is by the Arabs being subdued. But how could that happen?

We must note two verses in particular from Ezekiel chapter 38. Verse 8 says “they shall dwell safely all of them;” in other words this becomes a place of refuge such as we read of in Ezekiel 34:28, but not because the people are obedient (see Ezekiel 39:26).

Verse 11 says that they are “at rest.” A situation such as we read of in 2 Chronicles 20:29-30, and also the periods of rest such as we read of in the book of Judges (e.g. 5:31). They are to be “dwelling without walls and having neither bars nor gates”—a situation that we do not see today.

With this state of security there will have developed a prosperity—cattle and goods—“in the midst of the land” (verse 12). This “midst of the land” corresponds to “the mountains of Israel” as can be seen from the use of the phrase in Judges 9:37. This is the area around Shechem, and once again draws our attention to the disputed West Bank. John Thomas continued in the quotation from *Eureka* to remark:

“It is evident from these last words (“in the midst of the land”) that “the land brought back from the sword” is not the land according to the original Abrahamic grant; but only that “tenth part” of it of which Isaiah was informed in ch. 6:13, “shall return and be grazed.” This tenth in the midst of the land is the locality of Armageddon...” He continues to say:

“The return of security and prosperity to this tenth of the land, must either precede the development of the “One Yahweh” man; or be concurrent with the operation in the recesses of Teman; or it may be in progress both then and before.”

This may need a little explanation for some of our readers.

**The “One Yahweh” Man**

In the quotation from *Eureka* above, the author was saying that “security and prosperity” would be seen in “the midst of the Land” (in Judea and Samaria—the West Bank) contemporary with the resurrection and development of the One Body of the saints in Christ. As we have considered the events now taking place upon the mountains of Israel and in the midst of the land, and as things now stand, it means that we today are on the very threshold of this momentous event.

The name “Yahweh” is the Name revealed to Moses as recorded in Exodus chapter 3:14. The Jews do not pronounce the name, substituting it with “Hashemi” (the Name) or “Adonai” (the L ORD). The English Bible usually follows the same practice, although the 1881 Revised Version and some others have a marginal note informing us of the meaning of therefore, he will come against Ezekiel’s Gog just as he came against Goliath—“in the Name of Yahweh of hosts, the Mighty Ones of the armies of Israel.” But in that day he will not stand as one young man; he will be accompanied by many other bearers of the Name—multitudes who will have been incorporated into he Name. Thus:

“Behold, the name of the L ORD cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire: And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err” (Isaiah 30:27-28).

This name-bearing multitude will be all one (Galatians 3:28). They are a multitude that cannot be numbered—yet they are the ONE YAHWEH MAN in whom the Eternal Spirit resides, manifesting the character, renown or Name of their Father who is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.”

The many in one are united in name, character and purpose, and are therefore the One Yahweh Man of whom the Spirit declares in Isaiah 26:19,

“Thy dead shall live; thy dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, (lights, mg) and the earth shall cast forth the dead. Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the L ORD cometh forth out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity...” (Revised Version).

**The Divine Purpose**

When the People of the Name have been called forth from their graves and approved by their King, they will then be directed to the work of redeeming Israel and preparing them for the work of conquering the nations. John Thomas wrote:

“How long a time may elapse from the arrival of the Lord Jesus at Sinai, to the perfected development of the ONE YAHWEH NAME (Zech. 14:9; Deut. 6:4) does not appear from the record: the interval however, will, I conceive, afford time enough for the development of the divine purpose with respect to the tenth of the land.”

This purpose is to develop those Jews dwelling in the midst of the land (the tenth) in such a way as to antagonize the nations of the world by the Truth that will begin to be made known. This will be the result of the influence and teaching of Christ and his immortal (but invisible) saints—the “hidden ones” of Psalm 83:3. It is in this way that Christ will come as a thief to an unbelieving and unsuspecting world, so that he gathers them together “into a place called in
the Hebrew tongue Armageddon." The nations are gathered to this "place" for judgment—and that is one suggestion concerning the sign-name given: Arma—heap of sheaves; gai—valley; don—judgment. It has the same sense as the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2); for Yehoshaphat, in Hebrew, signifies the Judgment of Yah. Joel says:

"I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land."

The word rendered "plead" in this verse is the Hebrew shaphat, meaning judge, pronounce sentence against (Strong). The sense is repeated in verse 12, which reads:

"Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about."

The actual valley of Jehoshaphat which is usually identified near to Jerusalem as a literal location could never accommodate all the nations (heathen) and must therefore be taken metaphorically rather than literally. The idea here is the same as that suggested by the name “Armageddon.” Joel 3:13-16 confirms this:

"Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, persecuted the Jewish people, spoiling and murdering them in a horrific series of inquisitions and holocausts, inspired by an illogical hatred known as anti-Semitism. The history of it all is well documented and well known, but when the assembly of Gog’s forces come against the land and people of Israel in the latter days, enough will have been enough. The God of Israel will not keep silence any longer. Through the prophet Isaiah He says:

"The L ORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once."

Through Ezekiel He says:

"And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord God, that my fury shall come up in my face. For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains of Israel, Judah and Jerusalem (verse 1, etc.).

**Judgment with Justice**

The nations have much to answer for, and God says through the prophet that he will "plead" with them for His people and heritage Israel. For many long centuries the nations have scattered and

A typical threshing floor where wheat is separated from chaff:

"Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundest the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.” Habakkuk 3:12,13.

Compare Don Pearce on page 4.

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By Frank Abel

Those who love the Bible must be frequently irritated by the way Biblical words or ideas are often trivialized in the world about us. You may have heard that something is as slow as “the second coming of the Lord,” or have encountered a phrase incorporating the word Bible, such as the “Bible of Gardening.” Some of you may have seen the marginalization of the Biblical word “Armageddon” by the Macdonald’s Restaurant chain when in 1998 they ran an advertisement to help draw attention to the movie Armageddon and of course, hamburgers. Sacrilege is involved when people associate the great decisive battle of Armageddon and the disastrous effects it will have for billions of people on this earth to a movie or a mere eating experience at a restaurant. It’s a bit like the record of the adulteress in Proverbs 30:20, who just wipes her mouth and states “I have done no wrong,” and then goes about her normal life.

Armageddon will be an enormously important battle that will so change things that the life of every human being on the planet will somehow be impacted. The nation of Israel will be greatly humbled by defeat and a great loss of life in this coming battle. The prophet Zechariah declares that two-thirds of the nation will be killed in the destruction (Zech. 13:8-9). The prophecy goes on to state however, that God “will bring the third part through the fire.” The prophecy declares this to be a great watershed in the history of the nation, for from that time on they will never again be estranged from their God. Neither will the nations of the world ever again treat them as the scum of the earth (Zech. 8:23).

When you ponder the way the news media deals with a major storm, a hurricane or typhoon, we see another notable way in which the battle of Armageddon is trivialized. Generally, weather systems are first spotted as tropical storms, but as they grow in strength they are named and categorized by their severity. Through the news, people are warned of the probable path and time of arrival of such major storms and planned events begin to be either cancelled or postponed. Citizens are shown busily boarding up windows, buying up bottled water and generally hunkering down. In recent years there have been some very bad storms which have done an incredible amount of damage to heavily populated areas. However, in comparison to the storm that is about to hit this world, “called in the Hebrew tongue, ARMAGEDDON,” the damage and influence of the greatest hurricane will be considered miniscule (Ezek. 38:9, 18-23). Why are people not being warned about Armageddon?

Why then is the world showing so little concern about a major event in world history that will result in the loss of hundreds of millions, if not billions of human lives? Is it because they don’t see the signs? Is it because they don’t know about the battle of ARMAGEDDON? Could it possibly be ‘Noah’s day’ all over again, when a huge boat was slowly assembled on land, but being such an oddity, not a single person other than the builders, took any notice of the implications? Are we so conditioned by hearing news concerning war, destruction, violence and loss of life, that it just doesn’t make an impact anymore? Have you noticed that with little alarm, the world is moving closer to the edge of the actual use of weapons of mass destruction? Have you noticed that Iran continues to develop a WMD capability and the means to destroy Israel? Have you witnessed how, once again, the United Nations organization is proving helpless to stop the development of the conflict in Syria that has the potential to engulf the world in warfare?

Advertizing the movie “Armageddon” through McDonalds

ARMAGEDDON—the Battle of the Great Day of God Almighty!

The storm clouds of hurricane strength wind give good reason for boarding up windows and having a strategy of how to best deal with a coming tempest. However, to be prepared for Armageddon there are no literal windows to board up and the ‘materials’ needed for survival cannot be acquired at Home Depot, or WalMart. To start your preparation, you need a Bible and to start reading it, in order to know what is coming.

“And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame. And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon” (Revelation 16:12-16 KJV).

As you can readily see, these words were not
written for a novice in the matters of Bible prophecy, neither were they written for people gripped in the panic associated with the start of such a battle. They were written for someone who has already invested hours of time in the Bible, thereby gaining an understanding of the words and phrases needed to open the teaching of this passage. There is no effective way to ‘speed read’ the Bible. Before the student of the Bible reads the last book of the Bible, they will normally have read the first book, at least the first 10 chapters where the times of Noah are documented. Those chapters challenge the reader to comprehend what it must have been like for the whole world to discover too late, that the ark was being built for the survival of a great flood (Gen. 7:11-24). Only eight people survived and they constituted the builder and his family. With the mass ignorance associated with the destruction of so many in ‘the deluge,’ it is not hard to see that today’s society can follow the same scenario. Too many of us are so caught up with living our own lives that we know too little of what the Bible has to say about Armageddon. The ‘great day of God Almighty’ will come upon this world as a thief in the night. The Lord did say, “Behold, I come as a thief” (Rev. 16:15).

Will the Rapture provide a Refuge from Armageddon?

In various parts of this world there are people who are not totally ignorant of Bible teaching and who having their heads up, recognize the signs of coming conflict. Could they also fail to be prepared for the battle of ARMAGEDDON? Unfortunately, that possibility is only too true. This was first made clear to me during the early 1970’s when Hal Lindsey produced the book “The Late Great Planet Earth.” This book was a best seller and appealed primarily to the Evangelicals of Christendom whether, Catholic or Protestant. The book established a number of points of belief for Evangelical Christians on the subject of Armageddon and the coming conflict. One of those points of belief was very attractive to the reader for it claimed that all of the faithful would be provided a path of escape from the conflict through the ‘Rapture.’ It would be comforting to think that when the weapons of mass destruction are brought out, you and I would be comfortably positioned in heaven looking down on the conflict like watching killing and destruction on television. But do not be misled, it is a false comfort and you need to know the truth to find protection for both yourself and your loved ones. With an open Bible, we will endeavour to show you the truth and how that none of us will watch Armageddon from the comforts of heaven for that idea is not Biblically sound on a number of levels.

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which are asleep in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:13-18 KJV).

The Bible quotation cited above is the prime quotation used by those who believe in the ‘rapture.’ It was taken from a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Thessalonica where he was providing comfort to them by giving assurance that those who had died in Christ...
would rise again from the grave. In doing so, he writes as if all those who rise from the dead will be righteous believers. There is no problem for the reader in this, as long as it is understood that the comment only relates to ‘righteous believers.’ The Bible tells us however, that righteous believers are not the only ones that will rise from the dead. It was revealed to the prophet Daniel that, “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Who are these who rise from the dead to receive shame and everlasting contempt? Obviously the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4 do not reveal the whole counsel of God on the matter and by further searching the Bible we will find other very important events that are not mentioned.

Before Armageddon, will some be ‘caught up’?

The expression of being ‘caught up’ is not unique in the Bible. The word in the Greek means to seize or grip by force and does not of itself indicate direction, either up or down. One other example of what this means is found in the Acts of the Apostles.

“And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea” (Acts 8:39-40 KJV).

The record of Philip being “caught away” by the Spirit of the Lord is an example of the use of the same word in the Greek. There is no doubt that Philip was taken and others were left behind and there is no indication that he had a choice in the matter. He was taken from the view of the eunuch and then was found by others at Azotus, about 20 miles away. The use of the Greek word, “harpazo” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 does not indicate that believers would be caught up to heaven, just caught away to some other spot. This is quite reasonable when you think that the Lord will descend from heaven for the occasion. The occasion of his descent will be for the resurrection of the dead, judgment of the dead and living, and to be with saints at the battle of Armageddon. The work of the righteous is to be fulfilled on the earth, not from heaven (Zechariah 14:5).

In summary then, there is no doubt that the Bible teaches many people will be suddenly and unexplainably removed from public view at the time of the return of Jesus Christ from heaven. They will not just be the righteous, but will include everyone who is called to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. The events that follow will be very diverse, for it will be a mixed multitude who will be summoned to the Day of Judgment.

Those ‘caught up’ go to Judgment!

One of the mistakes that is made in the teaching of Hal Lindsey and those who hold similar beliefs is to suggest that people rise from the dead in an immortal state. Attendance to the complete record of the Scripture illustrates that no one will rise from the dead in an immortal state, for that would nullify attendance at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The Apostle Paul stated that all of those who believe the Gospel must make an appearance before his Judgment Seat.

“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:10-12 KJV).

Lest one think that somehow judgment takes place before death, or at the instant of death, a search of the Bible makes it clear that the judgment follows death.

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27 KJV).

Now the resurrection of the dead is a major teaching of the Bible, so major in fact that if there is no resurrection of the dead, there is no hope in being a Christian.

“For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished” (1 Cor. 15:16-18 KJV).

As the Apostle Paul told the believers at Corinth, if the dead don’t rise, then those who have died have truly perished. The idea then, held so commonly in Christendom, that believers go to heaven at death is false. The truth is that those coming out of the grave are alive again, but still not immortal, for immortality is a gift to be granted to the righteous at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

To suggest therefore, that anyone has immortality before attending the Judgment Seat of Christ, is to nullify the necessary experience of attending the Judgment Seat. With the following remarks, the Apostle Paul warns us particularly against taking comfort in that view.

“For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor. 4:4-5 KJV).

The Apostle Paul would not pass judgment on his acceptability to God before it was declared by the Lord Jesus Christ at his Judgment Seat. How much more then should we defer judgment on our acceptability till the day when the Lord will judge the secrets of our hearts?

“He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom. 2:6-9 ESV).

It is essential to see that when the Apostle Paul was writing to the congregation at Rome he stated that the righteous would only receive ‘eternal life’ at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 2:16). It must occur to the reader of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 therefore, that the comfort only is meaningful to those who after having been caught away, will also subsequently, be approved at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Idea of ‘Rapture’ is Inappropriate

The words of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 were written to comfort the bereaved of those who had died, while also being “in Jesus.” To “sleep in Jesus,” one was required to be a believer of the
Gospel and to be baptized before death (Mark 16:15-16; Gal. 3:27-29). There is no comfort in the words of the Apostle concerning those who died without being "in Jesus."

The passage in our focus, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, is wrested from its original meaning by the teaching of the 'Rapture.' The English word 'rapture,' means ecstatic joy and cannot justifiably be considered a synonym for 'comfort' which primarily means to 'sooth, console or reassure.' Even the word in the Greek translated comfort, means to 'invite to console.' In the Evangelical Christian approach there is a subtle shift in the significance of the meaning from grieving the loss of a loved one, to the ecstatic joy of being 'caught away.' That is not the emphasis of the passage in question. Those who think they will be 'raptured' and thereby escape the tribulation associated with the battle of Armageddon, while ignoring the need to believe the Gospel and be baptized are placing their confidence in a falsehood.

The Apostle Paul when writing to the ecclesia at Thessalonica was only referring to those who are justified through belief and baptism when he said: "wherefore, comfort one another with these words."

Not everyone who is 'caught away' will be Ecstatic about it!

We have established that before anyone is granted the gift of eternal life they must first be approved at the Judgment Seat. The following quotation from Jesus’ words illustrates that not everyone who appears at the Judgment Seat will be accepted and it remains but a little step to realize that not everyone will be ecstatic about being there.

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:21-23 KJV).

These words of Jesus, cited from Matthew, are prophetic of the fact that some people at the judgment seat of Christ will be rejected by Jesus and will not be comforted by the decision they hear. In another place the Lord stated similar words:

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared

A Fanciful theory (and novel) that is subversive of the Truth.

for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41 KJV).

What is revealed about Judgment Day amply illustrates that both the righteous and the wicked come to the Lord at the same time for judgment. Those directed towards his right side will truly be comforted by being welcomed into his kingdom while those on his left will be rejected, a decision that will be no comfort to them or their friends. It reinforces the fact that the correct teaching of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, generally known in Christendom as 'the rapture passage' does not provide an escape from the wrath of God for disobedience.

Who will be ‘caught up’ and who will be Left Behind?

In preparing for this magazine article, it was helpful to review what Evangelical Christians have to say about the ‘rapture’ in their books and their movies. The movie “Left Behind” although filled with drama concerning the mystery of missing people, adds several ideas to increase the appeal of this event, but without Biblical support. The Scriptures do not support the idea that the clothes of ‘loved ones’ would be left behind as evidence. The believer must place his/her faith in the simple fact that the judge of all the earth will do what is right (Gen. 18:25).

How to be prepared for Armageddon

In order to prepare for Armageddon, we should give attention to the Gospel message of the Bible and attempt to understand and believe it. Those who believe it will want to be baptized, that is, fully immersed in water in accordance with the Scriptures and the symbol of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who have done so need not fear the battle of Armageddon. They will be ‘caught away’ at the Lord’s return: will be taken to the place of judgment, and if found to be righteous will be welcomed into the ranks of those who will be with Christ at Armageddon when the nations are brought into subjection.

“But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father” (Rev 2:25-27 KJV).

Will procrastinators be given a Second Chance?

The Evangelical Christians in their publications about those who will be ‘left behind’ suggest that some of them will repent of their former attitude and will then become Christian. This seems too good to be true, for it suggests a second chance, something the people in Noah’s day, and Lot’s day did not get. Knowing the reasoning that we are all privy to, who wouldn’t want the best of both worlds so that when we can no longer receive any satisfaction from worldly things, we then turn on our spiritual life and receive those benefits as well. God is not
mocked by such reasoning.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8 KJV).

Consider again what Jesus had to say about those civilizations in the past and how God’s judgments came upon them.

“And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:26-27).

In Noah’s day there were no survivors except those in the Ark.

“Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:28-29).

In the day of Lot, when the day of destruction came at the hand of God, there were no survivors.

“Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed” (Luke 17:30).

Someone might ask the question, “How could the Lord say that the day in which the Son of man is revealed will be like the days of Noah and Sodom and there still be survivors on the earth at all?” A careful reading shows that the destruction in the days of Noah was on all flesh (Gen. 6:13). The destruction in the days of Lot was on the inhabitants who lived on “the land of the plain” where the wickedness was concentrated (Gen. 19:28). The common part to both of these destructions was that there were no survivors of the target group. There was no second chance provided for any of those who were set aside to receive the judgments of God. Yet in the days of Lot, others not in the target group lived on.

If then something is to be made of the words of the Lord, “even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed,” it must be that there will be no survivors of the group targeted to receive the judgments of God.

Armageddon will lead to a World-wide Government

Don’t trivialize the coming day of Armageddon. The age that is coming on the earth as a result of the intervention of God will be a matter of great appeal and satisfaction to those who are looking forward to the fulfillment of the promises in the Bible. The Lord Jesus Christ will rule the world with divine wisdom, power, and endurance (Isaiah 11). Disputes among nations will cease, munitions will be destroyed and nations will no longer be trained and armed for war (Isaiah 2). The nation of Israel will be the leading nation of the world and will provide members to participate in the administration of the world government (Micah chapters 4,5,7). The righteous will be granted eternal life with a body fashioned like to that of the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:21).

Will you be there to see the fulfillment of Scripture? It depends on whether you take the warning associated with Armageddon seriously!

“Now is the time to prepare ourselves for Christ’s coming through belief of the Truth and obedience in baptism”

In the eleventh chapter of Romans, Paul compares all mankind to two olive trees of the wild and cultivated species. The twelve tribes of Israel to whose country the olive is indigenous he likens to “a good olive tree,” with a “holy root,” representing “the fathers” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, on whose account the whole nation is beloved. The rest of mankind he compares to “a wild olive tree,” which is smaller and inferior in all its parts. Eliphaz in Job 15:33, compares a wicked man to an olive tree whose flowers fall before their season, and consequently brings no fruit.

Such is the primary import of these two trees, symbols of Israel and the Gentiles. But, the Israelitish Olive Tree, and the Gentile Olive Tree, signified something more than this in the symbols before us. There was a speciality to be represented which had been apostolically elicited. This was the adoption of believing Gentiles into the Israelitish Family, that they might be Israelites in every particular, except the accident of birth according to Nature. This adoption, Paul styles “grafting in;” and figuratively represents the process, as a breaking of branches off from the wild Gentile olive, and inserting them into the place of certain sapless branches of the good Israelitish olive, which had also been broken off, and cast away. This teaches allegorically that while the good olive tree represents the Israelitish peoples generally; there is nevertheless a Gentile element in the nation, equally interested in the promises made to their fathers, which are “the fatness of the tree.” Thus, the good olive tree represents “the Israel of the Deity,” constituted of Israelites and Gentiles, who believe “the promises covenanted to the fathers;” and who, since Pentecost, A.D. 34, have believed “the truth as it is in Jesus;” and by immersion into him, have been adopted, or grafted into the Commonwealth of Israel, as it will be in the times of restitution.

This union of Israelites and Gentiles into One Body, or Holy City, was represented to Zechariah, by connecting the two trees by means of two golden pipes with the one golden bowl of the lightstand; the idea of branch-union being set forth in the connection of the pipes with certain branches of the trees...

This lightstand shone with the light of the word, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path” (Psa. 119:105). This was “the golden oil” of the good olive, by which the lightstand burners were fed. It was “the unction from the Holy One by which they knew all the things” they witnessed; and by which they were taught, “and is the truth” (1 John 2:20, 27). By the shining of the light from this lightstand, the gross darkness of catholic superstition and idolatry were made tormentingly manifest. The god of the earth, his cardinals, bishops, priests, deacons, monks, and such like, were exhibited to the peoples of the Court (i.e. Christendom), as profane mountebanks, and blasphemous impostors. The light showed them to be, what they are to this day, unrepentant hypocrites, and a generation of poisonous serpents. Multitudes were enlightened to discern this; and caused thereby to desert the temples of the Roman god.

(Eureka by John Thomas)
here is to be a mighty invasion of the land of Israel at the crisis of Israel’s redemption; such a happening that Ezekiel, speaking of the overthrow of the Gogian confederacy (in chapter 39: 8), says: “Behold it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord God; this is the day whereof I have spoken.” It is a happening of gigantic proportions, a mighty clash between human power and divine. The question naturally arises, What brings this about? There must be a cause equal to the effect. The purpose “to take a spoil and to take a prey” (38:12), is a part of the answer, but alone is not sufficient to account for so great a happening.

A further reason for this invasion of the land is that it represents a crusade. By the time this invasion takes place a great issue will have developed in the world: Babylon the Great versus Zion—the great issue of the Apocalypse through the centuries coming to a head. At this time will be revealed two headships: the Daystar of Babylon (Isa. ch. 14), and the Daystar of Israel (Rev. 22) and they join issue in the land of Israel, contending for rulership of the world. So the European confederacy comes as a “Christian” crusade against the Jewish development in the land of Israel.

We shall get the proper sense of all this by studying the implications of a particular phrase in Isaiah ch. 34: “For it is the day of Yahweh’s vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion.” The great overthrow in the land of Edom, south east of Jerusalem, is vengeance by God in a controversy which he has with the people of the earth. What is this “controversy of Zion?”

What is Zion?

First we ask, what is Zion? Zion is a word, or theme, that runs right through scripture. It is first mentioned as the stronghold adjacent to Jerusalem that David took and made the city of David. Here the temple was built by Solomon, and Zion became associated with God’s presence. The Psalmist speaks of it as God’s chosen rest. Later the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah personify Zion as a woman. In his lamentations Jeremiah laments over the widowhood of this Zion woman. “How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people? how is she become a widow... her children are gone into captivity before the enemy. And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed.” So Zion is used as the mother of Israel, and the prophets speak of Zion downtrodden and desolate while her people are scattered through the long centuries in the lands of the enemy. In contrast we have those wonderful chapters at the end of Isaiah where Zion rises to glory. “Awake, awake: put on thy strength O Zion... shake thyself from the dust; arise and sit down, O Jerusalem” (Isa. 52:2). Passing on to New Covenant times, Paul says that the believers are not associated with the Mount Horeb first covenant, “But ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God... and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant” (Heb. 12:18-24). And going right on to the last revelation, we have in chapter 14:1, “And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on Mount Sion, and with him 144,000”—Mount Sion as a symbol of the rulership of the coming age. So Mount Zion is a theme through the Bible covering God’s work in the earth, involving the land, the people, and the constitution, and the city of Israel. Even when Israel are scattered among the nations, they are still “the children of Zion” (Zech. 2:7). And according to Paul all the believers in Christ belong to Mount Zion, though they too have been sojourners amongst the nations and persecuted.

A Controversy Throughout the Centuries

What then is involved in the words “the controversy of Zion?” A controversy implies an antagonism, a hostility, a continuing contest. God has had a controversy with the peoples of the earth over “Zion” right from the days of the birth of his nation when Pharaoh hardened his heart against God. The Gentiles have always despised the things of God, scorned his promises, turned away from his law, hated his people, invaded his land. In Jeremiah’s time they scoffed at the sabbaths, Lam. 1:7; later they joined with apostate Jewry in putting Jesus to death: and through the centuries since, they have persecuted the Jews and the faithful believers. Christendom pre-eminently has been the enemy of Zion. Her doctrines are a denial of all that God has promised to do for Zion and Israel, and she has cruelly persecuted those who have stood for the truth concerning these promises.

A Crusade Against the Land

So there has been a continuing controversy and hostility regarding “the things of Zion” throughout the centuries. In Isaiah chapter 34, God declares that when the great overthrow takes place in the land, this is God’s vengeance. His recompense for all that the kingdoms of men have done through the centuries. He is striking the first blow that will settle for ever the controversy of Zion. The “things of Zion” concern religion, and it is unmistakable that there will be this religious element in the invasion of the land; it is a Christian crusade against the Jews and their religion. As we shall see, by this time the people of the land will have progressed in faith, having been under divine instruction (Christ and the saints being in the earth), and there will be something distinctly “of Zion” in the land of Israel, provoking this Christian crusade.

We can now begin to see the significance of the Image confederacy (depicted over the page: Daniel chapter 2) that comes down on the land and which has a Babylonish head. It is plain from Revelation ch. 17 and 18, that the Papal system is the religious part of the Babylon the
DANIEL’S VISION OF ARMAGEDDON
“Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.”

Daniel 2:34,35.
Great system. We can imagine the Pope expressing great indignation at the Jewish developments in the land of Israel, and the probable desecration of their “holy” places! So it is fitting that the Papacy shall be the religious head of this great confederacy, which coming down upon the land, brings to a climax the controversy of Zion, and receives a recompense at the hand of Christ that makes all nations “know that I am Yahweh” (Ezek. 38:23).

The Divine Education of Israel

A “world issue” has yet to develop before the great invasion of the land, and the taking of the city of Jerusalem. It will take time for this religious issue, Babylon the Great against Zion, to develop. The situation matures after Christ is here. “Behold I come as a thief... And he gathered them into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” To “gather” nations is a symbol for controlling world affairs and policies so as to cause them to come to Armageddon. The work of Christ is additional to the gathering work of the frog-spirits which has been operating already for years.

“The Lord” is the centre of this “world issue.” How do the things of Zion develop to be a world issue? There is very little Bible Zionism in Israel today (1970—P.B). True, they bear God’s name, they are back in His land, they have the Law and the Prophets—but their heart is far off in unbelief of the promises made to their fathers. For Zion to become a world issue, so that the controversy of Zion can come to a head, changes must yet take place in Israel.

Divine Instruction for Those Dwelling in the Land

In broad terms we know from the prophets that Israel’s heart must be changed. Moses put on record long ago: “If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they accept the punishment for their iniquity then will I remember my covenant with Jacob... and I will remember the land” (Lev. 26:41-2). But this is a work of time, and must proceed in stages. The prophets reveal that considerable progress in divine ways will have taken place before the great invasion. The invasion is in one sense a testing of the faith of the nation, some responding, many failing. “Two parts therein shall be cut off and die... And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined” (Zech. 12:8-9).

Let us now look at this divine education of Israel at this time. First, we recall the words of Jesus before his crucifixion: “Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 23:39). If Jesus were to appear now and deliver Israel from the enemy, there would be no scriptural understanding or spiritual discernment in them, so that they could say: “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of Yahweh.” So it is obvious that a great development is needed before this time. Malachi tells us about this change. Chapters 3 and 4 are concerning the day of Christ’s coming: “Who may abide the day of his coming?” and it speaks of the purifying of the nation. In chapter 4 he comes as the Sun of righteousness to those that fear him, to those who are in the book of remembrance (vs. 4,2,3,16). Then after the resurrection there is a work in Israel “before the great and dreadful day of Yahweh.” These are Malachi’s words: “Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord; and he shall restore the heart of the fathers in the children (Bro. J. Thomas) and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth (eretz—land) with a curse.” This is clear enough. Before that dreadful day of which we have spoken so much, in order that some of the nation may be saved, Zechariah (13:8-9) says one third is saved, there is a teaching mission to Israel in the land. Elijah, and probably others from the resurrection with him, revive the real power of the Law of Moses in Israel, and turn their hearts back in measure to the faithful spirit shown by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Bro. Thomas). This is a work that has to be done before the great and dreadful day in the land, before Armageddon. (Bro. Thomas shows that there is to be a similar teaching later, to Israel in dispersion, See Elpis Israel, Part 3, chapter 6). John Baptist did a similar work in Judah “in the spirit and power of Elias,” before Jesus was revealed to the nation. So it will be in

Jewish settlers on the Judean hills remember the Promises

The Hebrew text is from Genesis 17

“The Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and he gathered them into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.” To “gather” nations is a symbol for controlling world affairs and policies so as to cause them to come to Armageddon. The work of Christ is additional to the gathering work of the frog-spirits which has been operating already for years.

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A Later Phase of the Year of Recompenses

Although this will be a great and decisive blow in the controversy of Zion, it does not finish the matter. Human opposition and indignation will increase as a result of this great overthrow. The book of Revelation shows that the scarlet coloured beast with its ten horns will gather new armies to “make war with the Lamb.” This is briefly mentioned in Revelation 17:14, and enlarged in Revelation 19:11-21. The section concludes with the beast and the false prophet being cast into the lake of fire. This is after the fall of Babylon the Great in Revelation chapter 18. So we see the destruction of Babylon the Great is a process, and this only begins at Armageddon.

This later stage of the controversy of Zion appears to be included in the language of Micah chapter 4, the chapter that opens with the law going forth from Zion in the latter days. In verse 10 the daughter of Zion is in captivity in Babylon, and the verse concludes “there shall thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.” Now notice particularly the next three concluding verses of the chapter: “Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of Yahweh, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; for I will make thy horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many people; and I will consecrate their gain unto Yahweh, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.” This surely is the language of the controversy of Zion! It tells us that in the process of redeeming the daughter of Zion from Babylon the Great, the nations are drawn by God into the threshing floor; words very reminiscent of “He gathers them to Armageddon” which Bro. Thomas gives the meaning “heap of sheaves in the valley of threshing.” The nations for their part recognise that it is the controversy of Zion, and say, “Let her be defiled, let our eye look upon Zion;” they still desire to bring shame and nakedness on the things of Zion. But though there is a threshing in the land of Israel, the language here appears also to cover the work of Israel in her subsequent warfare with Babylon in its European phase, where many of the Jews will still be held captive. The Spirit in Zechariah calls on Israel to rise against the governments of the nations: “Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith Yahweh... Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon” (Zech. 2:6,7). Jeremiah in his chapters on Babylon describes how they will deliver themselves from Babylon. “Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms” (Jer. 51:20); or as Micah says, “I will make thy horn iron and thy hoofs brass.” We conclude that as the great Image is shattered by the Stone power smiting its feet, and it is subsequently ground to powder, so in settling the controversy of Zion there is the shattering blow in the land of Israel, and this is followed by the warfare of the harlot and ten horns against the Lamb and his people (Rev. 19:11-23).

Israel at Rest, Dwelling Safely

This instruction to Israel in the land will take time, measured in terms of years. John Baptist was preaching the gospel of repentance for ‘31/2 years before the cross was manifested. Appropriate to such a work there must be comparative stability and peace in Israel at this time. And this is exactly what we find will be the case. Ezekiel chapter 38 describes a remarkable time of there being peace and prosperity before the Northerner thinks his evil thought and says: “I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates” (the language of Ezekiel’s time for a peaceful state). Today the land of Israel is the very reverse of this. These words of Ezekiel have not yet been fulfilled, and they most certainly will be fulfilled. We must accept God’s words with child-like disposition. Three times in this chapter does the prophet declare it will be at
a time of peace and tranquility that the Northerner comes down like a cloud upon the land. First, in v. 8, “and they shall dwell safely, all of them;” then v. 11 already quoted; and again v. 14; “Say unto Gog. Thus saith the Lord Gog; In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come...” The tenor of this last quotation is that the peaceful unarmed state is an enticement for the Northerner to come. It is debasing the sense to apply these phrases to a past or present situation. The Hebrew word translated safely does mean “safely;” “confidently” is an extended meaning of the word. And it is re-enforced by the more absolute term “at rest!” And still further defined as unarmed. “Walled cities” means a state of defence as Deut. 1:28, enforced by the more absolute term “at rest!” How will this unlikely change come about? By now we will have realised that Christ is at this time in the earth, not revealed to the world, but associated with his saints in influencing the affairs of the earth, just as now he works with the angels of heaven to the same end. This divine superintendence behind the scenes, favourable to Israel, would be somewhat similar to the time when Israel went into the land, and Joshua on a brief occasion saw the “Captain of the Lord’s host” with a drawn sword, but apart from this their conquering was apparently natural.

The situation could be as in the time of Jehoshaphat at which we were looking: “The fear of God was on all these kingdoms... so the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about.” And in this time of peace the divine teaching of the nation will proceed. As it proceeds the “controversy of Zion” develops. For as Israel becomes more Israelitish so the issue between Christendom and Zion will rapidly mature.

It is possible that the presence of the Tarshish powers in the land at this time will help in bringing about some Great Power stability in the area—as already suggested. There is a phrase used twice in Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39, that may have some bearing on this. “I will turn thee back (or about, R.V.), and put hooks in thy jaws (control of policies) and bring thee forth” (38:4). “I will turn thee about, and will lead thee on, and will cause thee to come up” (39:2 The AV here appears incorrect, see RV, RSV and Brother Thomas). The language suggests that there has been an arresting of Gog’s progress, a driving back, in order that he can be “turned about and brought forth.” It may be that it is during this temporary reversal of Gog’s progress that the land is able to dwell safely and at rest.

The Coming of Christ
To most readers the extent of things that have to happen before the great invasion of the land will be a surprise. The first reaction may be to feel that the return of Jesus is still some way off. But this would be a wrong assessment. The point to grasp is that much of the happenings before Armageddon take place after the return of Jesus and the resurrection. There is a period of time, measured in years one would expect, in which Christ and the saints, with an unseen hand, control the affairs bearing on the land. There is the standing up of the Image, the development of the controversy of Zion, the divine instruction of Judah. This is the time covered by the apocalyptic phrase; “He gathered them into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.”

THE STIMULATION OF PROPHECY
Published by Graham Pearce in the 1970’s
With the Euphrates dried up; with the ‘Way’ in Israel preparing space; with the socialist frog spirits flowing from the Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet to every corner of the earth—what an amount of prophecy is fulfilled and is fulfilling! How wonderful is the word of God that it can condense into a verse or two complex and mighty world-wide activities stretching over a century and more.

At that time the most momentous event of our lives is to take place: “Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth.” How stimulating is a correct understanding and belief of fulfilling prophecy to maintain our expectancy, self-examination and preparedness. How sad it is that so few brethren and sisters are allowing these influences to operate. For how many will it be an unexpected thief-like coming for which they are not ready?

“Found naked to their shame.” Similar language is applied to the ecclesia at Laodicea; it was spiritually poor, blind, and naked, rich in the things of this world. The hour is late, brethren and sisters. If on self-examination we think we may be in the Laodicean class, let us buy gold and eyesalve. It requires our initiative. Put on one side the confusing propositions of many of today’s writers. Study the careful unfolding of scripture by our earlier brethren, not only in prophecy, but in the whole realm of divine revelation. It needs determination and patience to lift our minds and hearts to be in tune with the divine mind. Let our increasing appreciation of the harmony and beauty of the word of God develop our character, regulate our actions, increase our experience in the narrow way of separation. So shall we possess the ‘tried gold’ of faith that endures and sees the eternal things, waiting for the appearing of our saviour and king.

He Gathered them to Armageddon
In verse 14 we have the frog spirits doing a work of ‘gathering the nations—causing them to flow together—in readiness for the war of that great day of God Almighty. Distinct from this there is a specific gathering to Armageddon in the land of Israel. This is after the resurrection, and the sequence of ideas is that the gathering to Armageddon is done by Christ and the saints. By this time the saints have been ‘made like unto the angels.’ They are not seen or known by men, and like the angels they will work behind the scenes exerting such influences on men and affairs as causes them eventually to come to Armageddon. This gathering to Armageddon will almost certainly take years to accomplish. Not only have the policies of the nations to be influenced and shaped, but in the land the nation of Israel has to be developed in spiritual things—a work of Elijah turning the hearts of the children back to the ways of their fathers before the great and terrible day of the LORD. This will result in a growing Jewish hostility to the ‘christian’ idols that abound in the land of Israel; and this in turn will stir up the indignation of ‘christian’ Europe. The Beast, Dragon, and False Prophet will be ‘gathered together’ into Nebuchadnezzar’s Image of human power, an thus confederated, and supported by the many nations they influence, they will invade the glorious land. The coming down on the land is not only to take a great spoil, but it is a christian crusade, and initiates the “year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.” For an enlargement of this theme, see the booklet World Events & the Coming of Zion’s King.

The record of the sixth vial closes with the gathering to Armageddon. The great overthrow
in the land of Israel becomes the ‘Way’ into Babylon the Great. Armageddon itself may be regarded as the end of the 6th vial or the beginning of the seventh. Armageddon involves the breaking of the mighty image on the mountains of Israel, to be followed by an extensive work of grinding it to powder. After a pause in which the gospel of coming judgment on the nations is preached, resistance to Christ’s rule centres round the Beast, the Harlot, and the Ten Horns of Europe. The Rainbowed Angel strides forth with his feet one on the sea and the other on the earth, and roars as a lion.

‘He’ or ‘they’ Gathered?

It will be noticed that the Revised Version and most modern versions read at verse 16 “they gathered” instead of “he gathered” as in the A.V. The intended sense in the R.V. is that the frog spirits of verse 14 do the gathering to Armageddon, and this view is favoured by most brethren in their recent interpretations of the Apocalypse. It fits in with their idea that Christ does not actually appear and carry out the Judgment of the Household at this point in time despite the wording of verse 15: “Behold, I come as a thief, blessed is he that watcheth... lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” It is of some importance therefore to examine whether ‘he’ or ‘they’ is correct. From a simple grammatical point of view the Greek is certainly “he gathered,” but it is pointed out that the plural “spirits” in verse 14 can take a singular verb, and therefore it is permissible to refer the “He gathered” to the frog spirits. This, of course, ignores the fact that the immediate context to “He gathered” is the thief-like coming of Christ, and the natural sequence is that it is he who gathered. Modern translators having no belief in the literal appearing of Christ in the earth again, fall back on their “rational” interpretation of “he gathered” and consider it makes more sense to refer it back to the gathering done by the frog spirits. But to us who know God’s purpose, it is satisfactory to take the straightforward sense of the Greek that it is Christ who is referred when the text says “he gathered.”

The Seventh Vial: It is Done!

When the pouring out of the seventh vial is completed, the divine judgment expressed in the vials is accomplished, for we are told in chapter 15 “in them is filled up the wrath of God.” The seventh vial covers the period of the transfer of the kingdoms of this world to the rule of Christ and is a time of great woe.
As the Arab “Spring” brings storms in the Middle East the Israeli-Palestinian conflict takes a back seat!

By Don Pearce  RUGBY, U.K.

Our last update concentrated on the euro-crisis, so we will spend most of our time looking at other matters, but first a few words on the euro.

The situation has not changed very much since May, the European summer holidays—and the Olympic Games—mean that few meetings have taken place recently. However this does not mean that the euro problem has gone away—it is festering and promises to make things very difficult this autumn.

“Over the past couple of years, Europe has muddled through a long series of crunch moments in its debt crisis, but this September is shaping up as a “make-or-break” month as governments try to save money. I have just read a grim article on the growing anarchy in Greece. With 50% unemployment amongst youngsters they seek a scapegoat. This is readily found in the foreign workers in Greece. Violent attacks have been carried out at night in the past, now they are being carried out in broad daylight. The police turn a blind eye, indeed they have been implicated in some of the attacks. Another article speaks of the rising cases of mental health problems, as poverty brings in its wake depression, just at a time when health budgets are being slashed in an endeavour to balance budgets. Apparently many doctors in Greece have not been paid for a number of months and are only seeing patients if they can pay. The dark future has driven a sharp increase in suicides; a poignant reminder of the human cost of this unfolding tragedy.

Borrowing costs for these southern European countries has risen to unsustainable levels. Drastic action is needed; one plan is for them to leave the euro and go back to their old currencies. But this will come at a great financial cost as their debts would still have to be repaid in euros by converting their much devalued local currency.

With no clear way forward, we just have to wait and see what Germany, as the powerhouse, decides to do.

Once again it can be seen that Germany has benefitted from this crisis. Germany has been able to make substantial savings as lenders are willing to lend money to Germany at no interest, or even negative interest rates, meaning that they actually pay Germany to borrow from them, knowing that their money is at least safe! In fact Stratfor (14-Aug-12) under the headline Germany: Trade Surplus Widens, quoted an OECD report that said that German was on target to end up with a trade surplus of up to $200 billion, by the end of the 2012 fiscal year! It would be a staggering performance, if it came any way near this figure.

Step by step the Nations are being Prepared for their Role at Armageddon

What we want to examine this time is something we have looked at many times, but as we get closer to the time of the fulfilment of so many of the end-time prophecies, we can discern changes of direction in nations in preparation for this time. There are two items which build their main strength from oft-quoted verses in Ezekiel 38. The first are the verses that speak so clearly of Israel’s economic might at the time of the Gogian invasion, the other is just a single verse (v. 13) that in just a few brief words, describes those countries that will be opposed to this invasion. The two matters are not unrelated—Israel’s rising wealth, brings with it a growing interest for the Tarshih powers to be in the region. Let’s pull these verses together.

“And thou (Gog) shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages (Israel); I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates,

“To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land.

“Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?” (Ezekiel 38:11-13).

The Middle East has been quietly changing; the power of the oil-rich Arab states is waning. Also the Arab “Spring” has shown to the world that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not at the centre of Middle East troubles! The surrounding Arab nations are only paying lip-service to this conflict; they are not prepared to back it up with hard cash. It is the US, Britain and the EU that keep the Palestinians afloat! The picture for Hamas is not rosy. It’s losing its paymasters and the new Egyptian leader, President Morsi, seems determined to destroy the smuggling tunnels which are responsible for creating most of the millionaires there, as well as contributing some 25% of Hamas’ income. Hamas and Fatah can’t get on and their fellow Arabs are losing interest in their cause. Could we see a shift as the strong nations, Saudi Arabia in particular, see that working with Israel, rather than against her, will boost their own incomes? After all this is what scripture is indicating when in verse 13 above, it is Sheba and Dedan who lead the list of nations opposed to the invasion of Israel by Gog.
The hypocrisy of the West is shown in that they supported humanitarian missions to relieve Israel’s “terrible” siege of Gaza (home incidentally to over 600 millionaires), yet where are the flotillas bringing aid to Syria?

“The conflict in Syria has also claimed roughly four times as many victims in the past 20 months as were killed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past 20 years. The residents of Gaza continue to enjoy more international assistance than virtually any other population on the planet, but almost no aid is reaching the two million people displaced within Syria—roughly 10% of the country’s population.” (Wall Street Journal 04-Sep-12).

With US presidential elections in November we await the results to see what effects it will have on Israeli-US relations. Will America become more withdrawn, especially as her energy dependence on the Middle East is diminishing, as we shall see in our next section? Is the scene being set for a more active role for Britain in the Middle East? Ezekiel lists the merchants of Tarshish—Britain, before her young lions, America, Canada, India and Australia. Britain is certainly working hard to increase her trade with Israel and is active in the Middle East. We live at an exciting point in the world’s history as Britain’s ties with Europe are being loosened and the Commonwealth is now seen as the engine to drive her exports forwards. Events are unfolding which will see the return of the Master to his household, unknown for some time to a world preoccupied with its own problems. The stage is surely being set for that dramatic revelation of the Lord Jesus to his nation and to the world at that coming contest in the land of Israel—the great battle of Armageddon.

So let’s see how things are quietly being moved forward under the control of the Lord Jesus and his myriads of angels that pull and push to move the nations to their appointed positions. Seeing these changes brings the study of God’s prophetic word alive! **Fundamental changes in the World of Energy**

So let’s start by turning to the changing world of oil and gas. The Middle East nations have for many years been the centre of oil production. The main body that co-ordinates oil production is OPEC—the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. This was founded in Baghdad, Iraq, with the signing of an agreement in September 1960 by five countries namely Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. It was during and following the Israeli/Arab Yom Kippur War of 1973 that OPEC used the “oil weapon,” pushing up oil prices in reprisal for Israel’s advancement into Egypt and Syria. As of November 2010, OPEC members, (now numbering 12), collectively hold 79% of world crude oil reserves and 44% of the world’s crude oil production capacity, according to Wikipedia. Russia is the main rival, and she has been working hard to dominate the supply of gas and oil to Europe, seeking to tie countries to her through a network of pipelines. The Arab Middle East countries are finding their grip on the markets being seriously threatened. The three main threats are:

- The United States rapid development of shale oil.
- Israel’s huge gas and oil fields off-shore and potentially huge on-shore shale oil reserves.
- China’s huge shale oil reserves.

Let’s look at these 3 significant areas. Firstly America’s changed situation.

**American Shale Growth Threatens Global Energy Independence**

“The growth of oil and gas exploration in shales begun in North America is setting off a global race for shale E&P (exploration and production) development and threatens to turn the old conventional energy order on its head. “Based primarily on the phenomenal growth of domestic energy production from shale E&P in the United States, the world is waking up to realize that we are not running out of oil or natural gas” (Forex Pros 02-Sep-12).

The US—and Canada—are exploiting their shale oil and gas reserves. Because of the US’s financial struggle, the steadily rising energy prices have been a brake on its economic revival. Shale has been known about for years, but extracting its gas and oil in an environmentally friendly way has been the problem. New techniques and the need for America to become less dependent upon the whims of Middle East oil producers have proved a big incentive to its exploitation. In the past year, US gas prices have virtually halved as a result, continuing a trend over the past few years.

“A massive gas supply glut has kept US natural gas prices depressed, with Henry Hub now at $3.07 per million British thermal units—less than a quarter of the high it reached in the summer of 2008. There has been a surge in shale gas production, powered by techniques such as hydraulic fracturing that have opened vast reserves long considered too difficult and expensive to exploit” (Financial Times 26-Jul-12).

Worse still—from OPEC’s viewpoint—America is heading towards energy self-sufficiency. “ConocoPhillips Chief Executive Ryan Lance has caused a stir by warning an audience including OPEC oil ministers that North America could become self-sufficient in oil by the middle of the next decade, ending the region’s dependence on imports.”

“‘In 1990, North American reserves and production were falling, but thanks to unconventional, proved reserves have risen 68% since then,’ Lance told an audience of OPEC ministers on Wednesday. “‘North America could become self-sufficient in oil as well (as gas) by 2025,’ he said at a conference before OPEC’s policy-setting meeting in Vienna” (Reuters 14-Jun-12).
Energy experts say he is probably a bit over-optimistic, never-the-less as America’s dependence upon the Middle East oil lessens, so America’s commitment to defend her position there could weaken.

Britain on the other hand, although she has substantial shale oil and gas reserves, is less keen to exploit them due to the environmental effect on this small island. Are we seeing the possibility for Britain’s role in the Middle East to increase, to be the dominant power instead of America?

This would certainly fit in with our traditional, biblical, understanding of Britain’s role in the Middle East. As this article in The Times (24-Aug-12) put it:

“As the US increasingly draws more of its energy needs from the Americas—a geopolitical revolution of our times—the UK may increasingly have to manage this (defence) alone. At present we simply cannot do it.”

He was referring to the defence of Britain’s interests in the Middle East; the defence cuts have left Britain with a much shrunken navy which would struggle to defend her interests around the world. The author was urging the government to re-think its strategy, concluding the article with this comment:

“England expects that every man will do his duty. Wake up, Prime Minister, and do yours, before it is too late. There’s war on the wind. Can’t you smell it?”

We have briefly considered the “geopolitical revolution of our times” to quote from the Times article above, that is bringing energy independence to America at this significant time in the world’s history as we build up to the end times of man’s history. Let’s turn to the 2nd threat to OPEC domination—Israel. This is now familiar territory which, let’s remind ourselves, has again been a phenomena of just the last few years. After years of jokes about the lack of energy reserves in the Promised Land, whilst Israel’s neighbours abounded in it, we have a startling reversal of fortunes.

Israel’s Emergence as Energy Superpower Making Waves

“The emerging new energy picture in Israel has the potential to be one of the biggest news developments of the next ten years. Potentially, the energy revolution and the change in Israel’s outlook have more political implications than the Arab Spring.

“Many obstacles exist and in a best case scenario some time must pass before the full consequences of the world’s new energy geography make themselves felt, but if production from the new sources in Israel and elsewhere develops, world politics will change. The countries along both coasts of the Persian Gulf erupted into global prominence in the 1970’s when world energy shortages catapulted them into previously undreamt of wealth and political influence. Those countries will still be rich; for the most part, their energy is cheaper to produce than the more unconventional sources in the rest of the world, including Israel.

“The ability of the Arab governments to influence political opinion in Europe and the rest of the world is likely to decline as more oil and gas resources appear—and as Israel emerges as an important supplier. We could be heading toward a time when the world just doesn’t care all that much what happens around the Persian Gulf—as long as nobody gets frisky with the nukes” (Via Meadia 02-Jul-12).

“For Israel and other nations in the Eastern Mediterranean, a 2010 USGS study of the discovered oil potential off the coast of Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Gaza suggest that there may be as much as 1.7 billion barrels of recoverable oil and 3,500 billion M3 of natural gas and 5 billion barrels of natural gas liquids. If developed that is enough resource to make each of these nations or prospective nations energy independent and likely net exporters. This, of course, also adds to the ongoing regional tension with new opportunities for energy development disputes” (Forex Pros 02-Sep-12).

Field of dreams: Israel’s Natural Gas

The Financial Times Magazine (31-Aug-12)

Israel’s.”

New finds continue to be discovered, since our last map in the spring we have to add the Shimshon and the Pelagic fields. The UK’s reserves by contrast are less than the single Tamar field! Israel too has the huge shale fields and one of the young lions is eager to help!

“In late June, Canada and Israel signed an energy agreement that will allow for more co-operation and collaboration on energy issues. For example, Israel stands to benefit from Canadian expertise in developing yet another major find in Israel: the Shfela Basin southwest of Jerusalem, containing about 250 billion barrels of shale oil, the third-largest such reserves in the world” (The Canadian Jewish News 07-Sep-12).

There are several issues we need to explore, but before we do, let’s briefly look at that 3rd area that is putting pressure on OPEC—China’s shale gas.

China’s thirst for Energy

China’s huge expansion has helped drive oil prices ever higher. Her thirst for energy is shown in the figures. In 2000 she consumed some 4.7 million barrels a day; in 2012 she will consume about 9.7 million barrels a day! 2/3rd of this has to be imported, so China is at last waking up to her vast supplies of shale gas.

“The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that China contains the world’s largest reserves of shale gas, with 36,000 billion M3 of “technically recoverable” shale gas. About 10 million tons of oil can be produced from these reserves annually. The U.S., by contrast, has 25,000 billion M3 of estimated shale gas reserves.

“Developing this domestically available shale potential can assure that China has the secure energy resources to sustain its economic growth and better yet more widely distribute the benefits of the growth into the rural areas of the country” (Forex Pros 02-Sep-12).

So we can understand that the consequences of the “world’s new energy geography” are extensive and have come at the right time to diminish the influence of the Arab Middle East suppliers, and increasingly shift energy influence to America, China and Israel!

Russia’s Reaction

Russia, as we remarked earlier, has been pursuing a simple path of making Europe dependent upon her energy supplies. Europe has become alarmed at the prospect of being held to ransom by a Russia that is not always rational in
her actions. Europe’s attempts to thwart Russia’s encircling pipelines have however proved unsuccessful. With great speed Russia and Germany pushed through the Nord (North) Stream twin pipeline. The 1st was completed last year; gas started to flow November 2011 and this September the final link in the second pipe-line was put in place. Testing and commissioning is being carried out and it is expected to be delivering gas before the end of the year. The capacity of the two pipes is 54bnM³. Russia and Germany are exploring the possibility of installing 2 further pipes to doubling the capacity.

To counter this dependence, Europe has been exploring ways of bringing gas from the Caspian region to Europe, by-passing Russia, but this Nabucco pipeline is still awaiting substantial backers and its future is in doubt. Instead Russia has alternative plans—the South Stream pipeline which would run from Russia across the Black Sea sea-bed to the Balkans and up into Europe. This is a more expensive alternative, its costs increased considerably when the route was re-planned to avoid transiting the Ukraine. It is however ahead in the backing stakes, and there is talk of it being commenced at the end of the year, though there are several obstacles to be overcome.

Russia is anxious to kill off any rivalry to her dominant position as chief gas and oil supplier to Europe. Hence Russia’s keen interest in the “upstart” Israel’s threat to be able to sell the expected large surpluses of gas from the Tamar and Leviathan fields at competitive prices. In addition to Israel turning out to be a key player, Cyprus too sits atop these Levant Basin gas fields. Test drilling at the Aphrodite field gave such promising results that it has given rise to a sudden world-wide interest in the exploration of other blocks in the Cyprus maritime zone.

**Gazprom seeks Israeli Gas**

Russia wants to keep this new source of energy out of Europe, to enable Russia to maintain a high price for her energy. Gazprom is the biggest oil and gas firm in Russia, in fact it is Russia’s biggest company and although it only ranks 35th position in the world’s top 100 firms, it ranked No 1 by profits according to the Fortune500 list for 2011. (Caution: world rankings are difficult things—every list differs!) Gazprom is keen to get involved with helping Israel develop her gas fields, she can then have a say in where it is sold. There are 3 main ways to transport gas; expensive pipelines; LNG (liquid natural gas) a pressurisation process which compresses it into a transportable liquid; and turning gas into electricity via a gas fired generating station and exporting the electricity. Russia is keen to develop her LNG market and has already signed a Letter of Intent—a rather tentative document—with the Levant LNG Marketing Corp., a consortium set up to market Israel’s gas.

“Russia’s Gazprom announced this week that its Swiss-based subsidiary Gazprom Marketing and Trading, created just last year, has signed a letter of intent with the consortium exploiting the Tamar offshore Israeli natural gas deposit to begin talks for marketing gas from Tamar and another offshore field, most probably Dalit. “Gazprom would purchase the liquefied natural gas (LNG) from a company that the Israeli consortium would create, Russian business newspaper Vzglyad reported. Gazprom’s interest is principally to keep Israeli natural gas out of the European markets, where Russia is the principal foreign supplier.

“Gazprom’s discussions on Tamar are focusing on the quantity of 2-3 million tons of LNG per year as from 2017, Reuters reports. The amount is equivalent to 2.8-4.1 bcm per year (bcm/y) after re-gasification. According to Gazprom’s own unconfirmed report, the price would be based on Asian market norms, which are lower than those in Europe. However, as the letter of intent does not prevent Israel from opening negotiations with other potential partners, this particular aspect of the report may be seen merely as a statement of Gazprom’s preferences” (Asia Times 28-Aug-12).

**Visiting Russians are seeking Cooperation in Energy, Space**

In June, President Putin, newly elected to his 3rd term in office, came to Israel with a big team of advisers. He was keen to see first-hand what the competition was!

“The most important item raised between Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday was an offer by Russia’s state-owned energy company Gazprom to join in developing Israel’s offshore gas reserves. The largest extractor of natural gas in the world and Russia’s biggest company, Gazprom wants to open a local subsidiary that will engage in drilling and offshore and onshore pipeline operations.

“On the Israeli side, no one has rejected the Gazprom offer out of hand and officials are willing to explore the proposals, the sources said. Future international tenders in the Israeli gas sector will be open to Gazprom” (Haaretz 26-Jun-12).

“Possibly the most important Energy Bridge in the World”

Israel has been helping Cyprus develop her off shore energy supplies. Cyprus is a divided country, with Turkey claiming control of the north of the island and the south aligned to Turkey’s long-time foe, Greece. Southern Cyprus has been a member of the EU since 2004 and the member of the eurozone since 2008. We remember the big falling out between Turkey and Israel in 2010 over the Gaza blockade flotilla which resulted in 9 Turkish activists deaths on the Mavi Marmara. Since then Israel’s friendship with Turkey has waned but has blossomed with Greece. So it was not unexpected when Israel
offered assistance to the Greek part of the island to develop their potentially vast resources of gas and oil—much to Turkey’s consternation!

With Cyprus’s population being 1/7th of Israel’s (and that includes the population of Northern Cyprus) they are potentially in the running to be big gas exporters. Israel and Cyprus are actively pursuing a very ambitious scheme to ship electricity generated from the excess gas to Europe. Underwater cables would carry the electricity from the coast of Israel to Cyprus. Onshore lines would carry it across the island and connect to a cable between Cyprus and Crete and link up with an existing cable to Greece!

“An ambitious project to construct underwater electric cables connecting Asia with Europe via Cyprus is making good progress, according to those behind the project. An announcement released by DEH Quantum Energy said the working groups assigned to study the project’s feasibility were working “feverishly” and are ahead of schedule. “The committee said the market analysis so far showed that this was a viable project. Israel, Cyprus and Greece are studying a project to construct a submarine cable that will carry 2,000 megawatts in both directions, allowing Israel to sell electricity when production is high and have a back-up when reserves drop. “The aim is to complete feasibility studies by the end of the year with a view to complete the project in 2016. It will take three years to build and cost an estimated €1.5 billion. (Cyprus Mail 05-Jul-12).

The chairman of the Electricity Authority of Cyprus described the project as being “possibly the most important energy bridge in the world.” The planned cable would be able to carry 2,000Mw, with the possibility of being duplicated by 2020 to double the capacity. An interesting plan!

Russia keen to help Cyprus

It may not be without significance that Russia has been keen to help Cyprus’s struggling economy. In the eurozone and closely linked to Greece, Cyprus has been suffering from the euro’s problems. The EU is looking to help with loans, but they come at a price—EU control of her financial affairs. Russia has also been in talks offering loans without the EU’s strings and at a price—EU control of her financial affairs. Russia has also been in talks offering loans, but they come at a price—EU control of the Mediterranean sea.

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In sign of Warming Ties, Chinese warships dock in Haifa for First Time

As part of Israel’s growing status she is reaching out to the vast markets of China. She is also looking for China’s help in developing Israel’s infrastructure.

“Three Chinese warships are in Haifa Port as part of a four-day goodwill visit marking 20 years of Sino-Israeli diplomatic relations—the first time Chinese naval ships have docked in Israel.

“The visit, which includes tours and celebratory events, comes amid reports of strengthening military and diplomatic ties between China and Israel. China is a top Israeli trading partner but military ties suffered over the last decade, in part because the US aborted Israel’s sale of reconnaissance aircraft to Beijing” (The Times of Israel 15-Aug-12).

Earlier in the year Israel and China signed an agreement for the Chinese to construct a railway link between Red Sea port of Eilat and the Mediterranean ports of Ashdod and Haifa. This is a potential revenue spinner for Israel as ships would unload their cargoes at the one coast, tranship them across Israel and load onto another ship on the other coast. This apparently makes economic sense as the sea distance is shorter through the Suez Canal and the transit fees through the canal are high. It is a project that China is backing as Europe is a large export market and this rail link would reduce her dependence on the unstable situation in Egypt. For Israel, it makes Eilat so much more accessible. The railway will carry passengers as well as freight with a potential journey time, of only 2 hours to cross Israel. It will boost Israel’s drive to develop the Negev region, which represents a large chunk of Israel’s land area, but has a very small population. Much of the line exists across to Beersheba, and is being upgraded to run trains up to 160 kph. The new work involves upgrading the last section from Beersheba to Zin and then extending down to Eilat and also linking the Dead Sea town of Sedom to the new line. Sedom is the centre of the Dead Sea chemical works and the rail link will facilitate the rapid movement of chemicals to Eilat for export to Asia. The new link is designed for passenger train speeds up to 300kph. It is hoped the work will be completed by 2018.

A high-tech Bridge between London and Israel

There are a growing number of economic links being built by the British government under David Cameron, with Israel. Unlike the long years of the Labour government, this Conservative dominated coalition, is much more active in its relations to Israel.

“Israel’s got the technology, and Britain has the markets—or at least access to them. Why not bring the two together, letting British companies get access to Israeli start-up technology, to bring new products and services to existing and new markets? “That’s the logic behind a new effort launched by the UK Israel Tech Hub and UK Trade and Investment group at the British Embassy Israel, together with London-based Tech City Investment Organization. The project, called TexChange, will bring Israeli entrepreneurs to London (and other UK locations) to meet with entrepreneurs, investors, and other tech people.

“The first group of 15 companies is set to be selected in the coming days, said Naomi Krieger, director of the UK Israel Tech Hub, and the first event will take place in November. Later on, she said, the program will bring British business and tech people to Israel to meet with entrepreneurs and start-ups, she added, with exchanges taking place three to four times a year.”

“...The idea is to create an on-going flow of Israeli entrepreneurs to the UK and vice versa,” said Krieger. ‘It will create a platform for collaboration of entrepreneurs and companies, giving British corporations a route to benefit from Israeli technological innovation, and tying Israeli companies to the UK’s leading companies, markets and service providers’” (The Times of Israel 02-Sep-12).

As always there are many more items we would have liked to have dealt with, but space forbids. Let us rejoice that we can see the signs abounding that reassure us of God’s incredible foreknowledge, and the assurance we have that things will come to pass exactly as foretold through His prophets. Let us look with keen anticipation that the coming of the Lord is nigh!

Footnote
1. The Henry Hub is a distribution hub on the natural gas pipeline system in Eth, Louisiana. Due to its importance, it lends its name to the pricing point for natural gas futures contracts traded on the New York Mercantile Exchange—Wikipedia.
By Ron Kidd  LONDON ON.

1948 the State of Israel was declared in the face of tremendous odds. The British mandate over Palestine had run its course and Britain was evacuating the area as quickly as possible; the Arab nations surrounding the newly formed state were posturing in preparation for all out war. From a Christadelphian perspective it was a thrilling period because we were aware that down through the corridors of time the message of the prophets was clear: “He that scattered Israel will gather him, as a shepherd doth his flock” (Jeremiah 31:10). The time had come.

After 1948 another important event occurred; the ancient capital of Israel, Jerusalem, was captured by the Israelis in 1967. The emotion associated with this event, not only for the Israelis, but also for Christadelphians worldwide was electrifying and the words of the Lord Jesus Christ began to resonate from our platforms—“Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). The words of the prophet Joel also became relevant, who wrote, “For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations…” (Joel 3:1-2). The time seemed altogether right for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the establishment of the Kingdom.

Both events have taken place in the life time of the writer and the events of the Six Day war in 1967 particularly are indelibly graven on my mind. My wife and I were sitting on an airplane on June 6, 1967 travelling to a new life of gospel proclamation in Newfoundland and it became the defining moment in my own life.

Forty five years have passed since that flight; sixty four years have elapsed since Israel’s Declaration of Independence and the Lord has not yet come. We are reminded of the words of the Lord when he exhorted his disciples: “In your patience possess ye your souls” (Luke 21:9).

It is important, periodically, to take stock of the fulfilling word of prophecy and the events that have transpired in the light of it. However it is a mistake to try and make prophecy fit events as they unfold; the correct way is to determine what the prophecy is saying first, then look for the events that may fulfill it. The capturing of Jerusalem in 1967 was essential to the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, not because it brought to a conclusion the times of the Gentiles, but because it was necessary in order for other prophecies to be fulfilled at the time of the end. For example, the prophet Zechariah describes some of the events to be expected, one of which is that Jerusalem would be a burdensome stone and all nations would be gathered against it (Zechariah 12:3). The anti Jewish feelings and the all out opposition by the United Nations assembly to Israel’s position towards Jerusalem illustrates the direction in which the nations are heading, setting the scene for Zechariah’s prophecy to be fulfilled. It is not difficult to appreciate that had Jordan held its grip on Jerusalem after the Six Day war, the picture today would have been entirely different. Furthermore Zechariah also informs us that the city of Jerusalem will again be overthrown when all the nations finally converge in the Middle East, and half the city shall be taken into captivity (Zechariah 14:1-2). For this prophecy to be fulfilled the events of 1967 had to take place.

Care therefore must be taken that in witnessing the purpose of God fulfilling before our eyes, we don’t apply to political events prophecies that do not fulfill all the Biblical criteria.

Ezekiel 37

Since 1948, despite four major wars, Israel has enjoyed tremendous success; it has become a leader in economic growth and both its natural gas and oil findings make Israel an important producer. Israel’s economy is larger than all of its neighbours combined. But we need to remember that Israel’s success story over the past sixty years has been by divine decree, for when Gog directs his attention towards the mountains of Israel it will be for the purpose of taking a spoil and a prey (Ezekiel 38:13). Like the days of Jeroboam II God has allowed a fleshly minded nation to prosper (2 Kings 14:25-26); during Jeroboam’s reign Israel prospered in order to further the purpose of God: “And the LORD said not that he would blot the name of Israel from
under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash” (verse 27). It is evident that modern Israel’s prosperity will not continue indefinitely. Ezekiel prophesied against the “mountains of Israel” in chapter thirty six saying, “they have made you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side, that ye might be a possession unto the residue of the heathen” (verse 3).

For a number of years there has been considerable disagreement regarding who will bring about Israel’s downfall; the “they” of verse 3 has been frequently identified with the Arab nations round about Israel. But while the surrounding Arab nations will seek to benefit from Israel’s demise (as is evident from verse 4), they will not be the power that humiliates Israel; this important work is reserved for “Gog, of the land of Magog” (Ezekiel 38:2), described by Daniel as “the king of the north” (Daniel 11:40-45).

There are several hints that Israel will experience such a devastating blow that it will shatter the confidence displayed since statehood. We have already alluded to Zechariah’s prophecy which speaks of the capturing of Jerusalem and half of the city being taken into captivity (Zechariah 14:2). Daniel describes the king of the north “planting the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain”; an indication of Israel becoming an occupied nation (Daniel 11:45). Isaiah paints a picture of a nation full of despair: “The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me” (Isaiah 49:14). Ezekiel describes Yahweh intervening on Israel’s behalf because they have “borne the shame of the heathen” (Ezekiel 36:6).

It is in this setting that Ezekiel 37 finds its fulfillment. The prophet introduces us to a broken nation: “Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off from our parts” (Ezekiel 37:11); hardly the present appearance of the Israeli people. There is the temptation to view this prophecy as having some application to the events that occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries: the beginnings of the Zionist movement under Theodor Herzl, or the Declaration of Independence in 1948. There are, however, a number of details in the prophecy which run counter to this view. Brother Thomas eloquently described the restoration of Israel prior to the manifestation of Christ as being “partial and primary;” he did not anticipate prior to Jesus’ return, neither have we seen, the restoration of the whole house of Israel. He believed it would occur after Jesus’ manifestation. This is what Ezekiel describes for us: “Then said he unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel” (verse 11). In the vision Ezekiel surveys a valley full of dry bones being resurrected to life by the spirit of God entering into them and standing before him as one nation, “an exceeding great army.”

We will consider some of the details of this prophecy more closely to confirm the point we are making.

Son of man: This title occurs ninety three times in the book of Ezekiel. It is also a title used by the Lord Jesus Christ in his role as Judge: “And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man” (John 5:27). Ezekiel is performing a typical role; he represents the Son of man. It is the word proceeding from the Son of man that causes the bones to form into a living organism.

Dry bones: This term describes the condition of Israel after being decimated by the Gentiles. Frequently throughout scripture Israel is depicted as a “carcase”; Moses wrote: “The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies...thy carcase shall be meat unto all the fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth” (Deuteronomy 28:25-26). This is repeated by Jeremiah in chapter 7:33. Some might argue that a carcase is different from dry bones insofar that assumption; Bible prophecy often speaks about Israel as a divided nation and distinguishes between the house of Judah and the house of Israel (Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 3:18; 31:31; 33:7; Zechariah 8:13; 10:6; 12:7). Ezekiel 37 is all about uniting the divided nation and making them one nation again under one King: “And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all” (verse 22). What is important to realize is that in gathering the “whole house of Israel” the prophecy does not suggest that this is accomplished all at the same time; other latter day prophecies clearly teach that there will be a structured return to divine favour by the whole nation. When Jesus first manifests himself it will be the Jews living in the land that will be saved first. The term “Judaoh” often describes those living in the land in contrast to “Israel” outside the land. This is supported by a statement recorded by the prophet Zechariah where we read, “The Lord shall save the tents of Judah first” (Zechariah 12:7). This will be followed by a concentrated work of gathering those Jews that remain outside of the land.

And the breath came into them, and they lived: this detail is of great significance. The breath is essential for life; Adam became a living soul by receiving the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). But the term is also used in a spiritual sense. Israel ceased to be the kingdom of God following the Babylonian invasion (Ezekiel 21:26-27); it became a dead carcase and continued in that state until it was further ravished by the Romans in AD 70 (Matthew 24:28). Jesus Christ came to this spiritually dead nation and tried to breathe life into it by proclaiming the gospel; his words are described as spirit, giving life (John 6:63) and the spirit is described as the truth (1 John 5:6 RV). Unfortunately Israel did not listen: “The wind (i.e. spirit or breath) bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whither it cometh, and whither it goeth” (John 3:8, see also ch. 5:37). The reference to the spirit is also found in Ezekiel in the context of their restoration, we read, “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them an heart of flesh” (verse 19). Jeremiah speaks of spirit breathed process in different terms when he describes Israel entering into a “new covenant” (Jeremiah 31:31-33; 32:38-41). In scriptural terms therefore the breath of life in Ezekiel 37 is a reference to Israel being taught the truth and the outcome, “and ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves” (verse 13). This last comment hardly seems applicable to the nation that declared its independence in...
intervention of Jesus will be accompanied by an earthquake of great magnitude (Zechariah 14:4-5); that Jesus and his saints will make war on Gog, the occupier of the glorious holy mountain, who will in turn “come to his end, and none shall help him” (Daniel 11:45).

We may summarize our conclusions of the vision as follows:
- Ezekiel is presented with a vision of the nation of Israel in a state of despair following the invasion of the land by Gog of the land of Magog.
- The bones represent “the whole house of Israel”, a carcass that has been picked bare by the nations.
- As the prophet begins to prophecy there is a noise and a shaking, indicating that the work of the Lord Jesus Christ has commenced and Gog has been overthrown.
- The anti-typical Son of man (the Lord Jesus Christ) speaks to the bones, “O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord” (verse 4), breathing life into the dead nation (verse 5). This introduces the process of education for Israel in preparation for its role in the kingdom of God.

Ezekiel provides his own summary of events at the conclusion of chapter 39 in which he provides an outline of the details covered in chapters 37 to 39. It will be observed that the mercy that God shows to the whole house of Israel occurs after they have borne the shame of defeat by the hand of Gog.

Ezekiel 39:25-29 — Summary of Events
“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD: Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name: After that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies’ lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; Then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them anymore there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God.”

Ezekiel is concerned with the Whole House of Israel (Ezek. 37:11; 36:10). This applies to the total restoration of the nation (see 39:28).
- Mercy is extended after Israel’s humiliation; after they have borne their shame (Ezek. 38:18; 34:29; 36:6; 37:13)
- Israel’s humiliation takes place when they dwell safely in the land, a detail highlighted in Ezekiel 38:11
- As part of the process of restoration Israel receives the knowledge of the Truth (Ezek. 28:26; 39:22; 34:30)
- The knowledge of God is equated with God’s spirit being poured out upon Israel. Divine favour returns (Ezek. 34:25; 36:26-27; 37:14)

God’s preservation of His people has got nothing to do with any moral superiority Israel may profess, it is directly linked to the “oath which (God) swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:73). At the beginning of their nationhood God was quick to remind Israel that “the Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people… But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers…” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). Thus when God visited His people and heard their groaning, he was remembering His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob (Exodus 2:24).

The present atmosphere in the Middle East would suggest that it is only a matter of time before Israel is once again plunged into conflict with its neighbours. The signs of the times shall impress upon us that we are on the verge of the next phase of God’s revealed purpose. The prophet says, “We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace… Alas! For the day is great, so that none is like it: it is the time of Jacob’s trouble…” (Jeremiah 30:5-7). Daniel reminds us that it will be “a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to the same time” (12:1). This day will soon be upon us; notwithstanding with one united voice the prophets declare with equal certainty that Israel will “be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1).

When Israel’s dry bones are spread throughout the valley of God’s judgments they shall hear a voice behind them saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it” (Isaiah 30:21). The spirit power of God’s word administered by the resurrected saints, led by Elijah, shall enter into Israel’s dry bones causing them to rise up “an exceeding great army” (Ezekiel 37:9, 10); and God will make them “one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king unto them all…” (Ezekiel 37:22). At that time Yahweh says, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Ezekiel 37:28).

Editor’s Note:
We cannot ignore the fact that the whole house of Israel has already been “cut off” and thus has existed as ‘dried bones’ for some 2,000 years. It is difficult to deny that a process of physical restoration has already commenced as a necessary basis for spiritual revival which is yet future, and which will be the work of the “Deliverer” when he comes to turn away ungodliness from Jacob— Romans 11:26.
By Paul Billington  BRANTFORD, ON.

There can be no doubt that any serious Bible believer would seek to avoid the Mark of the Beast at all costs, for the consequences of not doing so are horrific! Look at the words of Revelation 14:9-11,

“And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made”

Genesis 3:1.

Further, in Revelation chapter 15 which deals with “the seven last plagues” there are those who will have gained victory over the beast:

“And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made”

stood on the sea of glass, having the harps of God” (Verse 2).

So what is it that must be overcome—what must we gain victory over? We have to know what this is. In Revelation 20:4 we see the same issue:

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

This is the language used to describe those who will be accepted into the kingdom of Christ and into the Millennium age. They will be people who have been willing to sacrifice—and in some cases will have lost their heads! These are words for us to think about: What do we stand to lose for the Truth’s sake?—our jobs, our businesses, our position...

Are we under pressure of any kind to submit to a “politically correct” philosophy and lifestyle? Do we “worship the beast”?

The Beast

A Little examination of Bible passages will soon lead us to a correct understanding of the subject before us. For example, and to begin our investigation look at Genesis 3:1-5.

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the L ORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.”

So, here was a lie—an untruth—which developed into that prevalent and extensive...
doctrine known as the immortality of the soul. This teaching is found in all major religions, both ancient and modern and in early times it led to the worship of both the beast (the serpent) and the fruit of the tree. This is seen in many ancient illustrations, some of which we reproduce opposite.

Now let us consider how the human mind can be poisoned by feeding it with information which is not in harmony with the mind of God, and when it has no respect for His word.

Cain “who was of that wicked one” (1 John 3:12; i.e. he was the spiritual seed of the serpent —Genesis 3:15; John 8:44) brought of the fruit of the ground (Genesis 4:3; representing the wisdom that comes from beneath, “earthly, sensual, devilish,” James 3:15). He doubtless brought literal fruit, but his action revealed a state of mind that was alienated from the revealed word of God. Cain was ambitious for he “went out from the presence of the LORD” and therefore from His fellowship, “and he built a city” or society (Genesis 4:16-17), upon which he impressed his own character (or made his mark). This appears from the name given to his son Enoch, which means initiated or instructed (Gesenius and Davidson lexicons). He gave the same name to his city, showing that it was a society instructed and educated according to “the way of Cain” (Jude verse 11). Thus the mind of the serpent (animal thinking) was passed on—impressed or stamped—upon that society, which was therefore governed by the carnal mind (mind of the flesh)—Romans 8:7.

After the great Genesis flood we find that this apostasy was repeated, with Nimrod virtually re-enacting the career of Cain, “and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel” (Genesis 10:10). Gesenius’ lexicon tells us that the name Nimrod means “rebel” and it has been suggested that Genesis 10:9 can be rendered “… Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter against the LORD.” Here was another ambitious individual who was the founder of “a great city” (verse 12), the city known to us as Babylon.

If the reader has followed us in the study of this development, he will understand why Daniel’s prophecy depicts the kingdoms of men as beasts.

**Signs upon the Forehead**

The forehead represents the seat of the mind, and it is remarkable that the ancient Egyptians associated the forehead of their Pharaohs with the serpent. Not only did Pharaoh identify visibly with the serpent-mind by his head dress, he believed the serpent’s lie “thou shalt not surely die.” No one could actually see an immortal soul of course, so a figure or sign for it was used, known as the “ankh.” It was in the form of a cross with a halo! The Hebrews were forbidden to use it, or have it tattooed upon them. In Leviticus 19:28 the Law stated:

“Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you; I am the LORD.”

Young’s Literal translation of this passage reads:

“Ye do not round the corner of your head, nor destroy the corner of thy beard. And a cutting for the soul ye do not put in your flesh; and a writing, a cross-mark, ye do not put on you; I am Jehovah.”

There is considerable evidence that this sign, or mark, was used extensively in the pagan world.

Under the word cross Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament words has the following explanation of the word:

“STAUROS denotes, primarily, an upright pale or stake. On such malefactors were nailed for execution. Both the noun and the verb stauroo, to fasten to a stake or pale, are originally to be distinguished from the ecclesiastical form of a two beamed cross. The shape of the latter had its origin in ancient Chaldea, and was used as the symbol of the god Tammuz (being in the shape of the mystic Tau, the initial of his name) in that country and in adjacent lands, including Egypt. By the middle of the 3rd cent. A.D. the churches had either departed from, or had travestied, certain doctrines of the Christian faith. In order to increase the prestige of the apostate
ecclesiastical system pagans were received into the churches apart from regeneration by faith, and were permitted largely to retain their pagan signs and symbols. Hence the Tau or T, in its most frequent form, with the cross-piece lowered, was adopted to stand for the cross of Christ."

This connection between the familiar ecclesiastical trade mark and its pagan origin has been noted by many and for this reason it has come to represent a false form of Christianity. As John Thomas expressed it in his book *Eureka*:

“The sign of the cross is the universal character of the Apostasy, both in its Romish and Protestant manifestations. It is erected upon their temples, or spiritual bazaars, and upon the flags of protestant and papal nations, as well as upon the hands and foreheads of individuals….”

**“A Mark upon the Forehead”**

In contrast to the pagan signs used by apostate religions there are cases where this idea of symbolic marking of the mind or forehead is a desirable feature. For example, in Ezekiel chapter 9 it ensured that the angel of judgment would pass over those who qualified:

“...And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house” (verses 4-6).

Here were certain individuals who were distressed by the behaviour of their fellow-citizens. In this case we see an attitude of mind — a sigh and a cry — concerning the abominations being committed. Like righteous Lot who was “vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked” (2 Peter 2:7) they had developed a different mind-set to that of their contemporaries. They were sanctified and separated by the word of Truth (compare John 17:17).

This idea can be seen again from Exodus 28:36-38 where the garments of Aaron are described:

“...And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, like the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD. And thou shalt put it on a blue lace, that it may be upon the mitre; upon the forefront of the mitre it shall be. And it shall be upon Aaron’s forehead, that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the LORD.”

Seeing this engraving on the golden plate upon Aaron’s forehead would bring to mind the character of holiness which God desired in His people. It speaks of being dedicated and separated to Yahweh.

Again in Deuteronomy 11:18-19 we learn how the children of Israel were to place a “sign” upon their hand and upon their forehead. The “sign” in this case represented the word of God:

“Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

This was to be a sign-mark, for the same word is used in Genesis 4:15 where we read that “the LORD set a mark upon Cain.” The one “mark” is a good sign, the other is a sign of rebellion and apostasy — showing that we can be impressed with either the Truth, or with falsehood.

**A Character Impressed**

It helps us to understand the process involved when we consider the two related Greek words charagma and charakter.
The first of these words, charagma is usually translated “mark” and as Strong’s concordance informs us it means “a scratch, etching, stamp.” It means “to engrave, impress.” Parkhurst says that the Greek word is from the Hebrew “to engrave.”

The related Greek word charakter refers to the figure that is stamped, and it is from this that we get our word character. In Hebrews 1:3 it is rendered “express image.” So the ideas conveyed to us by these expressions clearly involve the creation of a “mind” and character through a process of impressing thoughts and beliefs by education, initiation, instruction which can be carried out by various means of persuasion.

The Mark of the Beast

From what has been already said the rather obvious conclusion begins to emerge: the unbelieving animal mind produces its own philosophy on a so-called “rational” basis, and seeks to impress its ideas upon others—usually with the intention of controlling and ruling over them. The Bible’s example of Nimrod, the founder of Babel has already been mentioned.

From Psalm 49:20 we learn that:
“Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.”

This is telling us that man who has no spiritual understanding is a mere animal—even though he may sit upon a royal throne and govern an entire nation—and even though he may be a university professor with great learning in some academic field. A mind that is void of goldy wisdom is like the beast of Genesis chapter 3.

Not only that, but a committee or governing body composed of such unenlightened “beasts” will inevitably manifest the characteristics of a beast. Such a beast may be a political body or it may be an ecclesiastical body—or both. Such was the case with ancient Babylon, and such is the case with modern democratic and religious systems also. To receive the “mark” of such a beast in the forehead is to be instructed and impressed with its teachings and its character.

But as we turn to Scripture and to the Apocalypse, the important question is: What is the mark of the Beast? The answer given in Revelation 14:11 is, it is “the mark of his name.”

The name of the beast (that is to say, his reputation) according to Revelation 13:1 and 17:3 is “the name of blasphemy.” The Greek word for blasphemy, says Thayer signifies slander, speech injurious to another’s good name — reproachful speech. Vine tells us that it is from the word blapto, to injure, and pheme, speech. Hence defamatory speech.

This name of blasphemy is associated with what comes out of the beast’s mouth—his doctrine or teaching:
“And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven” (Rev. 13:5-6).
thinking is in harmony with the Divine mind. In Revelation 7 the judgments of God are held back until the servants of God have passed through this sealing process and are impressed in their foreheads with teachings of the Truth. In other words, the judgments are delayed until the process of education has been completed. This is equivalent to being “sealed with that holy spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13) which promise is contained in the Bible. So the only way in which this can impress a man’s mind is through his constant study of the word of God.

Both the mind and the heart (emotions) must be involved in this—and one way in which to stir the heart is through music—thus in Colossians 3:16 we read:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

We should understand what is involved in all this: There is a battle for the mind being waged, and that battle is between the world’s thinking and the word of the living God. A Jesuit writer once boasted of the achievements of the Roman Church during Middle Ages, and wrote: “Without the benefit of electronic media or mechanical transport, a monolithic and unitary mind was created, accepted, elaborated, perpetuated.”

Well, today, there is a powerful media at work, seeking to capture our minds and cause us to “worship the beast.” That is why the philosophy of Humanism is the reigning ideology and doctrine of our time, together with the foolishness of “political correctness” which cowards so many people into submission.

The only antidote to the world’s mental straight-jacket is the word of the Truth—to be impressed and sealed in our minds by it, for as Jesus said (John 8:31-32):

“... If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

*Uniting the Nations*

The unitary mind being formed by the “mark of the beast” being impressed upon the societies of the world today is bringing together those nations symbolized as the ten horns, or kings, on the beast in its latter-day Roman phase. We read of this in Revelation 17:12-14,

“And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to worship the beast which is” (emphasis added; Rev. 17:14).""

We just cannot submit ourselves to the spirit of our times, with its Equality, Brotherhood of Man, and notions of Liberty. This is the unclean spirit like frogs (Revelation 16:13-14) that is bringing the nations together and uniting them against the Bible, and against the people of the Bible, and against the nation of the Bible—Israel.

The Jewish people were commanded to be a separate people. In Leviticus 20:24 God says to the children of Israel: “I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people.” And again in verse 26:

“And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.”

The world calls this ‘racist;’ so they say that Israel is an apartheid state, and so the hostility of the world is seen to mount up against the Jewish state. This will lead to Armageddon, as is described elsewhere in this issue of The Bible Magazine.

But the true Bible believer is also called upon to be separate (e.g. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). He cannot be an ecumenist. He cannot be regarded as “christian” in the world’s sense of that word. In fact a belief in the true Gospel, the Hope of Israel, will ensure his separation, for he must identify with that Israelitish Hope. It is this Hope and this identity that will strengthen the believer so that he may overcome the world through faith (1 John 5:4). His faith is in Jesus Christ the son of God—He who is the saviour of Israel (see Acts 13:23).

So the apostle John wrote words which we must read with understanding:

“And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his number, and over the mark which he had put on their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4).
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Theme:
The Great Secret of Godliness

Teenage Session:
The Great Secret of Godliness

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Theme:
The Trial of our Faith (1 Peter)

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THE BIBLE MAGAZINE Vol. 25 ISSUE No. 4
As fanaticism and violence erupt once again in the Islamic world we will naturally wonder just where this is leading. In the middle of such a crisis (which is only a few days old as these lines are being written) it is unwise to indulge in speculation about a possible outcome, or how it will effect developments in other areas of concern.

What we know of the events themselves is based upon the news articles and commentary which comes to us through the usual media channels. The spirit of madness that possesses the adherents of Islam resulted in the death of a United States ambassador and three of his co-workers to mark the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre. The frenzy has spread across the Arab world with reports of violent riots in Libya, Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon, Egypt—and rowdy rallies in Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Jordan, Kenya, Bahrain, Qatar, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Iraq. We are reminded once again of the words of Jesus in Luke 21:25-26:

“... and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”

A Historical Perspective

The cover of Time magazine shown here has the date April 16, 1979. Many more militant uprisings and news headlines have been seen on the subject since, including the Twin Towers tragedy, the furore over silly cartoons of Mohammed, and the never-ending foolishness of the multicultural, politically correct policies that hamper normal policing and justice. On his election to the presidency of the United States, Obama went out of his way to give sweet speeches about Islam in Egypt, but all to no avail. To quote a Bible principle:

“When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD” (Isaiah 26:9-10).

And again:

“ But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked” (Isaiah 57:20-21).

Everywhere these people go, and into
whatever culture they insinuate themselves, the result is always the same—turmoil and unrest; a disruption of society. We see it in their countries of origin, and we see it wherever they decide to go in order to spread their way of life. As events unfold we see that an inevitable crisis is developing, for either Islam will come to dominate the world, or there will be some kind of backlash by the Christian world in order to counter it.

After all, this is what happened in history. Islam began moving into Europe until the Catholic Church organized opposition to it, and that led to the Crusades and other battles. From the Bible we know that it is Rome that will dominate the world and lead events towards Armageddon.

There can be no doubt that Scripture teaches us to expect a divided Middle East at the time of the end. When the great power of the north prepares under the leadership of “Gog,” certain nations—namely “Persia (Iran), Ethiopia, and Libya” will be with them. These are the countries that witness the uprise of Islamic fanaticism today. But other Arab countries named as Sheba and Dedan appear with “the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof.” So there is a north-south division at the time of Gog’s invasion of the Land. Daniel chapter 11 presents this to us as the king of the south and the king of the north (verse 40). The same north-south division can be seen from Zechariah chapter 6 and the two mountains (i.e. kingdoms) of brass. There are those of the “north country” and then those of the “south country” (verse 6).

What we look for then, based on this understanding of the prophetic word, is for some Islamic countries to gravitate towards closer links with the world of Gog (that is the Russo-European block), while others will find that they have more in common with capitalist nations and the English-speaking countries. The current upheavals may lead things in this direction, but time will tell!

But there is another aspect to all this which should not be overlooked. As outrageous and fanatical as some Islamic peoples appear, Scripture speaks of a time to come when some will turn from their madness and embrace the Truth of God. In Isaiah chapter 60 the areas of Midian, Sheba and Kedar are specifically mentioned as associating themselves with Israel and her God. As most Bible atlases will show, this is the area that is known today as Saudi Arabia. Isaiah 42:11-12 also speaks of a time when those people will “give glory unto Yahweh.”

The question is, what brings about this transformation? There are probably two reasons: first the severe discipline brought to bear upon them through overwhelming superior power, such as is indicated in Habakkuk 3:7 (a Day of Midian), and secondly, instruction in the way of Truth. Such a development will accompany the coming of Christ with his saints.

Abraham was promised that his son Ishmael would become a great nation—which has happened historically through the rise of Islam—but a greater future lies before them when they are converted by the Messiah who comes to redeem his people of Israel.
his subject is relevant to everyone because all will have experienced situations in their lives that require forgiveness to be extended to another. It is especially relevant for those who are believers and followers of Jesus Christ.

Fundamental principles are involved in this matter of forgiveness: it is something which we must do if we are to be saved. It is a subject that we need to understand fully in the light of Scripture teaching—and as we shall discover, our attitude is the key as to whether we fulfill this command regarding forgiveness, or not.

Forgive... and Forget!

Each one of us has at some time been hurt, sinned against and even been angered by the words or actions of someone else. It may have been intentional and with the purpose of upsetting us, or it may have been quite unintentional—quick and hasty words (or actions) without thinking. In either case the challenge we face is: What do we do about it? How do we handle it? Do we sin by retaliating? Do we allow ourselves to become filled with hate, the spirit of revenge and malice? Do we disturb our own peace of mind through an ongoing and festering of improper feelings and attitudes?—or, do we forgive and forget?

We may very well wonder how it is possible to forgive in some circumstances or, our feeling may be: “I’ll forgive but I’ll never forget!”

We will have all struggled with ourselves in this way at times (some far more than others). Yet, when someone has wronged us, it is vital to our spiritual well-being and our salvation that we handle such incidents in the correct way—and it is to Scripture that we turn for our instruction and guidance.

Let us be clear: The forgiveness that Scripture requires, automatically must include forgetting.

We will all know the Lord’s prayer recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. In verse 12 we are told to pray in these words: “... Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” The account in Luke 11:4 uses the word “sins”—“... Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.”

We must be careful here. We must beware of the attitude which says: “That’s okay if you can do it... Yes, I do pray for forgiveness for my sins...”

This whole matter of our forgiveness towards those who may have “hurt” us—who sin against us—that takes on a very serious aspect in view of our Lord’s words in Matthew 6:14-15. We cannot ignore these words:

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

Let us be clear: The forgiveness that Scripture requires, automatically must include forgetting.

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses”—Matthew 6:14-15.

Consider the gravity of this teaching. Our own forgiveness—which every last one of us needs—“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23)—is directly predicated upon the attitude that we display towards those who sin against us. If we forgive and forget—God will forgive and forget. If we do not, God will not forgive us. It cannot be more clearly stated!

It is important that we appreciate that the forgiveness we extend to others includes forgetting. Every disciple of Christ must understand this. Let us ask ourselves: When God forgives us for a sin—does He remember that sin against us? Of course not! The wholesome quality of Divine forgiveness is expressed in Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12 and 10:17, where God says “... their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

A Divine Principle

Luke chapter 15 is a key Scripture regarding repentance and forgiveness. In verses 7 and 10 we are told that there is joy in heaven and in the presence of the angels when a sinner repents. There is no marking of iniquity (Psa. 130:3), no keeping track—it is finished; it is forgiven and forgotten—and joy is expressed!

The Lord continues in the 15th chapter of Luke to illustrate this by way of the parable of the prodigal son. Here was a son who had squandered his substance with riotous living, but when brought to poverty and want, returned to his father. In this parable the father represents God, who forgives the sin of his son and forgets it! There is no caution on the father’s part here: “When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran...” to greet him (verse 20). Love and joy were expressed because he had returned to the father’s house.

In verses 25 to 32 however, we see a sad ending with a powerful message for us. The
The writer of this article was much beloved, and has written several articles for this magazine in the past; the article reproduced here was written in 1999.

He fell asleep in Christ just over a year ago, but we hope to meet him again soon when he is risen.

“Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?”—Matthew 18:32-33.

Self-importance has no place in God’s true children. Rather, and in recognition of our own need to be forgiven, we will forgive and forget; we will show forth comfort and love.

Also verse 35.

“So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.”

The message is both clear and powerful when we consider how much we stand in need of forgiveness because of the multitude—and magnitude—of our sins, and when we consider how great is God’s mercy, His compassion, His love, that He should forget and forgive our sins.

God Knows Our Hearts

When someone wrongs us we must, in humility, recognize how we ourselves stand before God. We must remove from ourselves any vestige of that attitude which says: “You don’t do that to me! For I am somebody to be reckoned with...” Self-importance has no place in God’s true children. Rather, and in recognition of our own need to be forgiven, we will forgive and forget; we will show forth comfort and love. It may not be easy for us, but this is not an optional matter as verse 35 of Matthew 18 makes clear.

Let us never forget the Lord’s teaching in Matthew 7:1-5, “For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged.” How on earth can we be so concerned about someone else’s fault (error, sin) when we have faults—and even greater sins in our own life. “Thou hypocrite” says Jesus (verse 5).

If Jesus Christ—who had no sins—when being crucified by evil and wicked men could find it in his heart to ask his Father to forgive them, is it not a lesson to us that we should likewise have that attitude? What an example for us to follow!!

“Blessed are the Merciful”

Personal experience teaches the amazing truth that there is a joy—an inner peace—a contentment, when forgiveness and forgetting truly takes place. It is a fact: it is the truth! It can be done if we want to—indeed, it must be done.

It all has to do with the “attitude” we have towards ourselves—recognizing our own great need of God’s mercy and forgiveness. Then, in turn, we recognize the need for mercy and forgiveness to be extended to others who may have wronged us.

The rewards for following Scripture teaching are beautiful. There are no continuing hatreds stored up to poison our system—but rather an inner peace of mind as we experience the laws and teachings of God being put into practice in our lives—and as we thus become eligible for salvation through God’s grace.

It was Jesus who taught in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the merciful... for they shall obtain mercy.”

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”—Hebrews 10:16,17.

elder brother was not willing to forget what had past—and this despite his father’s position. He would not forgive because he was not going to forget—see verse 30.

With that background let us now consider the clear teaching of 2 Corinthians 2:5-8. Here, believers were to forgive a sinner and forget. They were to comfort. They were to confirm their love toward him. The point is that with the forgiveness, there was to be a spirit of restoration and love... That same spirit which God has towards those who repent before Him! The apostle was enjoining upon the believers at Corinth a Divine principle: that God loves a repentant sinner and forgives as He forgets the sin, restoring the person back into favour with him (see Isaiah 43:25).

This principle is applicable to us! We also must “blot out” the sins of others against us, and remember them no more.

The Key Issue

We are now faced with a personal challenge: How do we learn to forgive? How can we do it? When we have been badly hurt this can be very hard indeed. There are situations when we may ask ourselves: How is it possible?

To ascertain the answer we must go to God’s word—and here we shall discover the great bearing that attitude has upon this matter.

So we must seriously question—and answer—at such times, our attitude towards ourselves! “What kind of opinion do I have of myself?” This is the crux of the matter. The key as to whether we forgive and forget is our attitude about ourselves—in relation to what has been done against us. In other words, the key is found in our attitude towards those who sin against us in light of the fact that we sin against our God daily! It is a matter of attitude about the small debt (or sin) against us, in relation to the huge debt we have with God.

In Matthew 18:21,22 we are told that forgiveness is to be without limit: “until seventy times seven.” Then there follows (verses 23-25) the parable of the unmerciful servant. Again, there is a powerful lesson for us.

Now remember, we are discussing “Learning to Forgive”—How is it done?

In the parable the king represents God, and the servant who owed 10,000 talents has no way to pay his debt. This servant pleads for forgiveness and for the opportunity to make things right again. The King (God) is moved with compassion—remember the father of the prodigal son in Luke 15—and forgives the debt. This same servant then turns to a fellow servant who has by comparison a very small debt and demands instant payment—and he refuses to show him any mercy having him thrown into prison!

What an incredible attitude in light of his own great debt which had been forgiven!

Now read Matthew 18:32,33 and note the principle—the key—upon which the unmerciful servant should have forgiven, and forgotten the debt:
Guide books for Israel often use the terms Megiddo and Armageddon interchangeably. The Christian community today links the site at the head of the Valley of Esdraelon with the end-of-times battle referred to in the book of Revelation, and every year many dozens of tourist buses make Megiddo a regular stop on their tours. One guide says “In the New Testament, the book of Revelation names Armageddon (a corruption of the Hebrew Har Megiddo—Mount Megiddo) as the place where the last great battle will be fought when the forces of God triumph over the forces of evil.” Other articles in this issue explain the meaning and location of Armageddon in scripture, so let us have a look here at the significance of the tell/mound located at a very important intersection for those armies and individuals passing through the Land over the past five thousand years.

Megiddo is an ancient site, with occupation levels going back for millennia, and it is one of the better known archaeological sites outside Jerusalem. There is a valuable source of water beneath the tell which would have prompted the initial settlement, just as the Gihon spring brought the Jebusites to settle the site of the City of David. Megiddo looks eastward down the Plain of Esdraelon, (the Greek rendering of Jezreel) which is also called the Valley of Jezreel, or simply the Emek or valley, towards Beth Shean and the Jordan River. Jews returning to the land in the late 1800’s found the valley floor marshy and malarial, but relatively uninhabited, and in need of draining. When Barak and Deborah fought against Sisera, and the army of Jabin, king of Hazor (Judges 4), Sisera was defeated, in part, because his chariots were “discomfited” in the marshy ground near the river Kishon, which flows past the tell, from the mountains of Gilboa to the sea at Haifa. A volcanic causeway runs the length of the valley, and has always provided a dry and secure, non-marshy path down to Jezreel and the fords of the Jordan below Beth Shean. The Sea of Galilee is reached by way of a route north of Mount Tabor. The natural moisture in the valley helps make the Emek one of the most fertile areas in the land.

Driving inland from the Mediterranean coast, Megiddo comes into view at the entrance to the valley. The tell does not block the road, but stands as a sentinel at the end of the Aruna/Iron pass through the Carmel range of mountains. At the turn of the 20th century the mound stood higher than it does today. A century of archaeological work has lowered the height by some 20 feet/7 metres. In ancient days, the city stood even higher above the plain, but the natural sloughing of the mound, the deposit of debris by the Kishon River, and the lowering by excavation have all combined to reduce the relative elevation.

Further down the valley, and a thousand feet...
(300 metres) above the northern escarpment, lies Nazareth. Growing up in the village, Jesus had a view of the major highway that ran along its floor, as well as the location of many biblical events. On the east, just beyond Mount Tabor dominates the eastern end of the valley, with Mount Gilboa—the location of King Saul’s last battle—rising to the south.

Our earliest written records of Megiddo come from the Egyptians who exerted control over the coastal areas lying between Egypt and Mesopotamia. During the days of her empire, Egypt used Megiddo as a garrison town, because of the importance of controlling traffic along the primary coastal road, the Via Maris. Pharaoh Thutmose III came north about 1470 BC with the intention of putting his Canaanite vassals in place. What he encountered was a coalition of the local rulers who met him at Megiddo. The Pharaoh tells us that he surprised his opponents with his unexpected appearance after traversing the Aruna Pass with his chariots. His men and chariots had to travel in single file, and were very exposed to any forces protecting the access route. Although he was outnumbered, the element of surprise combined with his tactics in battle resulted in both the defeat of the Canaanite armies, and the taking of the city seven months later. Rather than forming up his smaller army east of the city in the broad valley, he set himself west of the mound in the narrower valley which limited the maneuverability of the larger number of his opponent’s chariots. This description of the battle of Megiddo is “the earliest account of a major war in antiquity,” we are told.

The site of Megiddo is a strategic point for the Fertile Crescent. The Carmel Mountains force the coastal highway to move inland to the east-west valley giving access to the Sea of Galilee and northwards to Damascus. All of the traffic from Babylon, Assyria, Egypt and Phoenicia flowed through the Mediterranean population centres and this road junction. Each of these powers saw the importance of controlling the area. Even Napoleon passed through after his failure at Acre.

The king of Megiddo was one of those defeated by Joshua and the children of Israel, and in the days of the Judges, Deborah and Barak fought the army of Jabin, King of Hazor below the city. The kings of Israel and Judah saw the importance of the city. Solomon built it up as one of his chariot cities, and would seem to be responsible for the large six-chambered gate. After the division of the kingdom, Ahab King of Israel continued to fortify the city, and to keep his chariots there. The Assyrian records tell us that he brought 2,000 chariots into battle. Ahab also appears to have been responsible for the construction of the extensive water system. His Phoenician wife Jezebel took up residence with him at Jezreel, further down the valley, but the route to her homeland on the Mediterranean coast was secured by the city of Megiddo. Elijah had his encounter with the priests of Baal on the Carmel range to the north of the city. 1 Kings 18:46 tells us “And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah, and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.” His run may have been as much as 25 miles! (or 40 km) King Josiah later tried to control the passage of the Egyptian army which was going up to Carchemish on the Euphrates to support the Assyrians against the Babylonians. Josiah believed that he had to block any attempts to support the Assyrians, the enemies of Israel. In seeking to close the gateway to the north, he lost his life at Megiddo. Ahaziah, king of Judah, also died at Megiddo after fleeing, wounded, from Jehu at Jezreel. The last major battle to be fought in the valley came at the end of the First World War, when the British General Allenby and his British and Commonwealth troops pushed the remaining Turkish forces out of the land. After the war, he chose the title, Viscount (later Lord) Allenby of Megiddo.

Excavations at Megiddo have been going on since 1903. The German Palestine Society was the first to begin explorations, and over the intervening century, the Americans and the Israelis have also played a role. Many of the techniques and systems in use in Israel and the Middle East today had their beginnings at Megiddo.

Our travel guide paints a picture of the valley today—“The Jezreel Valley is a green fertile plain, covered with fields of wheat, cotton, sunflowers and corn, as well as great grazing tracts for multitudes of sheep and cattle.” Megiddo stands watch over this scene, as it has for many centuries. A peaceful picture indeed.
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