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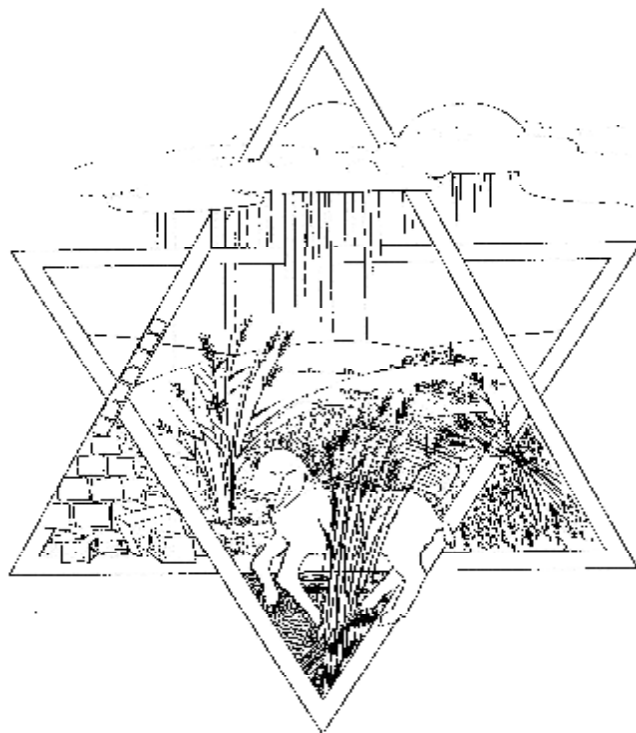
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All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version (NKJV), unless otherwise indicated. References from the King James Version are designated KJV, from the Revised Standard Version RSV, from the New International Version NIV, from the Living Bible LB, and from the Amplified Bible AB.

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Preface

We are living in a world which is politically unstable, economically struggling, spiritually deceived and morally confused. Frequent calls are made for drastic changes which will pave the way towards a new world order of peace, prosperity and unity. A humanistic model for a new world order is propagated in which a very inferior role is assigned to Israel and evangelical Christianity, apparently in the hope that they will soon vanish from the scene. The reason for the growing rejection of Israel and evangelical Christianity is due to the fact that they are too exclusive and biblical, and therefore cannot conform to the demands of an inclusive and egalitarian new world order. The values of spiritually committed Jews and Christians are non-negotiable and entirely incompatible with those of the secular world.

Contrary to the antichristian reforms of the world, is the biblical promise of a Christian new world order in which Jesus Christ will rule over the world from the restored throne of David in Jerusalem (Acts 15:16-17). He will govern in close association with His true church (evangelical Christianity) and the spiritually restored people of Israel, and righteousness will be established (Rev. 5:9-10; Isa. 62:1-4). Prosperity and peace will prevail everywhere; Israel and all the servants of the Lord will be highly esteemed, and people will endeavour to please the Lord (Isa. 2:2-4; Jer. 3:17).

The present partial restoration of Israel is firm evidence that the prophesied divine intervention is imminent. But prior to this will be the dark period of the seven-year rule of the Antichrist when all people on earth, including most of the Israeli's, will regard and follow him as the true Messiah (Rev. 13:3). When the true Christ comes a few years later, the kingdom of Satan will be destroyed and the kingdom of God will be established in its place (Rev. 11:15).

Are you prepared for the far-reaching changes that will occur shortly on earth? If we wish to have the correct perspective on the problems of our time and pursue the only feasible solution to the problems which confront us, we should make a study of biblical prophecies. Great blessings are in store for the righteous, but severe judgements will be poured out upon the wicked. By means of biblical prophecies the Lord has clearly informed us about major eschatological events: "We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as to a light that shines in a dark place" (2 Pet. 1:19).

One of the most significant prophecies concerning the last days was fulfilled before our eyes during the past few decades: the restoration of Israel in the land which the Lord had promised in an oath to their fathers. In this way, the reliability and literal fulfilment of God's promises to Israel have been confirmed beyond any doubt, thereby additionally validating the absolute credibility of the entire Bible as the Lord's inspired Word. Simultaneously, the restoration of Israel, and specifically the restoration of Jerusalem as their capital, is a sure indication to us that the church dispensation is drawing to a close, and that we are on the threshold of the establishment of Israel's Messianic kingdom (Luke 21:24; Zech. 8:22-23).

It is imperative to have the correct biblical understanding of Israel as God's people, to bless them by recognising their biblical claim to their land and capital, Jerusalem, and also to support them in various ways in their struggle for national survival. So doing, we will secure the Lord's blessings upon ourselves. Conversely, nations and individuals subject themselves to a curse when they curse, imprecate and persecute Israel, and try to drive them from their land (Gen. 12:3; Joel 3:2). The spirit which instils in people a hatred for Jews is the spirit of the Antichrist as it is opposed to everything which, from God's perspective, is good, honourable and constructive. During the coming tribulation period, this demonic spirit will be occupied with instigating all nations against Israel and will be trying to destroy them (Zech. 12:2-3).

A study of Israel is also important in assisting every Christian to learn from their mistakes and to enable them to assess their own spiritual dedication and commitment to the calling of the Lord. The experiences of Israel are a mirror in which we can see ourselves, knowing that the same dire consequences will follow if we do not serve the Lord wholeheartedly. In this regard Israel is an example to us from which we can learn various religious lessons (1 Cor. 10:1-12), but we will only be able to do so if we are well acquainted with the salient aspects of their history and

spiritual experiences: “But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness. ... Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:5, 11).

A long interruption

When considering Israel from the perspective of biblical prophecy, we should certainly not make the mistake of regarding them as being of solely historical and Old Testament significance because of the long interruption in their divine history as God’s special people – that was only a temporary phase in their long history. During the course of this interruption Israel was temporarily set aside as the Lord’s chosen representatives in order that He could show His mercy to the entire world. Throughout this time He offers to all people of all racial and cultural affiliations the opportunity to come into the right relationship with Him and serve Him as His own. In the church dispensation His disciples are not members of a chosen people, but believers from all nations – including those from dispersed Israel.

Referring to the times of the Gentiles, the Lord Jesus said: “And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). The Bible clearly distinguishes between Israel and the Gentiles. These nations are described in Hebrew as *goyim* (sing. *goy*) and in Greek as *ethne* (sing. *ethnos*). That means “ethnic groups”, “peoples”, “nations” or “heathens” since, in Old Testament times, all nations or peoples outside Israel were heathens (or pagans) who did not know the true God of Israel and were consequently hostile towards Israel.

In His prophecy in Luke 21:24, the Lord Jesus did not announce the beginning of the times of the Gentiles but rather its further continuation and ultimate conclusion. The beginning of Israel’s domination by heathen nations was during the Babylonian exile of Judah, and it still continues. During the time of Christ’s earthly ministry Israel was subjected to the rule of the Roman Empire, and a Roman governor with executive powers was stationed in Jerusalem.

In his *Reference Bible* (p. 1345) C.I. Scofield says: “The Times of the Gentiles is that long period beginning with the Babylonian captivity of Judah, under Nebuchadnezzar, and to be brought to an end by the destruction of Gentile world-power by the ‘stone cut out without hands’ (Dan. 2:34, 35, 44), i.e. the coming of the Lord in glory (Rev. 19:11-21), until which time Jerusalem is politically subject to Gentile rule (Luke 21:24).”

J. Dwight Pentecost (1985:1329) agrees with this statement: “With the incursion by Nebuchadnezzar an important prophetic time period – the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24) – began. The times of the Gentiles is that extended period of time in which the land given in covenant by God to Abraham and his descendants is occupied by Gentile powers and the Davidic throne is empty of any rightful heir in the Davidic line. The times of the Gentiles, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Jerusalem in 605 BC, will continue till the Messiah returns. Then Christ will subdue the nations, deliver the land of Israel from its Gentile occupants, and bring the nation Israel into her covenanted blessings in the millennial kingdom.”

The events described in Daniel 1 mark the beginning of Israel’s Babylonian exile, and were therefore a defining moment in the history of Israel as an independent covenant people of God in their own land with Jerusalem as their capital. This was the beginning of the times of the Gentiles in which pagan kingdoms ruled over Israel, pagan cultures and religious practices were imposed upon them, and in which the reckoning of time was done in terms of non-Jewish calendars, often with reference to pagan kings’ periods of rule.

After the fall of Jerusalem and the termination of Israel’s royal dynasty, the royal house of David would no longer be the representative of God’s kingdom on earth, as pagan kings would enforce their authority in the Middle East as well as the rest of the world. Even after Israel’s restoration from their Babylonian captivity they were still subject to the supreme authority of pagan world empires as the times of the Gentiles took its further course. During the entire New Testament period, Jerusalem was trampled by Gentiles, while the gospel that went out from Jerusalem, was proclaimed throughout the earth.

God's kingdom will only be manifested again as a visible reality on earth after Israel and Jerusalem have been fully restored and Jesus Christ rules from the throne of David. Before the birth of Jesus the angel Gabriel said to Mary, with regard to her firstborn Son: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). At His first coming Jesus was the suffering Messiah who laid down His life for the sins of the whole world, but at His second coming He will come as King who will also restore the fallen throne of David.

All efforts by dominionists, who are intent on visibly revealing God's kingdom on earth without a fully restored Israel and Jerusalem, are deceptive and unbiblical and are in effect used by the Antichrist to establish a humanistic and multireligious kingdom on earth in which Israel does not play the leading role. True children of God are still sojourners and pilgrims in a world which lies in the sway of the evil one (1 Pet. 2:11; 1 John 5:19). The purpose of the gospel is to save people from "the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4), and not to transform the entire world into a Christian world in an effort to manifest God's kingdom on earth. That will only happen after the King has come, who alone can restore the throne of David in Jerusalem.

We are living in a very important phase of world history, in which Jerusalem and Israel are increasingly being restored in anticipation of the coming of the King. In June 1967, Jerusalem was fully liberated from Jordanian control by Israel, and in August 1980 it was declared to be their eternal and indivisible capital. For the first time since the Babylonian exile of Israel, in 1980 Jerusalem was again returned to the status it had – i.e. the capital of an independent Israel, but still without a king.

Since the Babylonian exile there has never been a successor to David on the royal throne in Jerusalem – neither will there be one until the Messiah comes. In the religious sphere it is particularly evident that the trampling of Jerusalem still continues since the Temple Mount is controlled and trampled by pagans who worship their false gods in the very heart of Jerusalem. This situation will only change when Israel's Messiah-King comes, as He will crush Gentile rule (Rev. 19:19-20) and also "cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered" (Zech. 13:2).

We are rapidly approaching the time when David's throne will be restored, after which Jerusalem will, with even greater splendour than during the days of David and Solomon, be the centre of world events. A precondition for the dawning of this blessed time is that the spiritual problems of Israel first be addressed and eliminated. The nation should repent by receiving the Messiah as their Saviour, after which the Lord will respond by giving them a new heart (Ezek. 36:24-28).

Because Israel as a nation still refuses to recognise Jesus Christ as Messiah, the partially restored Jerusalem will again be surrendered to Gentile control during the coming tribulation. These events will be reminiscent of the Babylonian exile of Israel – albeit for a much shorter period of time, but nevertheless even more severe. Jesus warned Israel that they would accept the wrong messiah (John 5:43), that this impostor would desecrate the temple in Jerusalem (Matt. 24:15), and that Jerusalem would be invaded by its enemies and be partially destroyed by them (Zech. 14:2). Many Jews will have to flee the city in great haste in order to survive (Matt. 24:15-21). At the end of the tribulation period, Jesus the Messiah will suddenly descend upon the Mount of Olives, destroy the enemy forces, save the remnant of Israel, and establish His kingdom in Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4-9).

At this juncture, the times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled and Israel will be reinstated as the head of the nations. Times of refreshing will come to them from the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).

This book commences with Israel's calling as the people of God, and the concluding of an eternal covenant between Him and His people. Subsequently, we review the events which took place during the dark times of apostasy and immorality of this people, and also take note of the perilous consequences of their disobedience. We devote much attention to the first and second comings of the Messiah. During His first coming He was rejected by the great majority of Jews, which resulted in severe judgements being brought upon them. But at the second coming of Christ He will be welcomed and accepted as the Blessed of the Lord (Matt. 23:37-39; Zech.

12:10).

Jesus Christ wishes to make all of us part of His eternal and imperishable kingdom. We are currently living in the time in which His grace is being proclaimed to all nations on earth. However, this time will soon expire and will be followed by the time of assessing and judgement. If we abide in Christ, we will not place ourselves under judgement because we have passed from death into life (John 5:24; Rom. 8:1).

Those who do not take the prophecies regarding the end-time restoration of Israel in the land of their fathers into consideration, lack a biblical perspective on what God is presently doing in the world in preparation for the second coming of Christ. As was the case with the foolish virgins, these people are running the risk of disconnecting themselves from the real world. They are also neglecting to make preparations to meet the heavenly Bridegroom, who will come at an hour when nobody expects Him. The spiritual sleep to which they have succumbed prohibits them from being witnesses for Christ in the world; neither can they be a blessing to Israel by leading them back to the Messiah.

May this book contribute towards the spiritual awakening of Christians, to work while it is still day, and to provoke Israel to jealousy by the way in which they love and serve the Messiah (Rom. 11:11).

Johan Malan

1. Calling, Dispersion, and Restoration

Three important events which occurred in the four thousand year history of Israel have been covered extensively in the Bible. They are the founding of Israel as a nation in their own land, their world-wide dispersion because of their unbelief, and their end-time restoration with a view to the spiritual refinement and quickening of a remnant in Israel. Each of these important events occurs within the framework of a specific generation and represents major changes in their national existence.

A large part of the Bible deals with Israel because, in a special sense, they are the people of God. He called them and set them apart for His service, dispersed them among the nations because of their continued apostasy, and it is the same immutable covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who, in the end-time, restores Israel in the land of their fathers. There are important aspects of their calling and role in world history which are yet to be fulfilled, and for that reason a wonderful future is in store for them.

Calling and founding of the nation

The calling of Israel started with Abraham, who is the founding father of this nation. The Lord made the following unconditional promise to him and his descendants: "And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever" (Gen. 13:14-15).

He then confirmed the promise to Isaac, "...to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father" (Gen. 26:3). To Jacob He said: "I *am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants" (Gen. 28:13).

However, the Lord also told Abraham that it would be many years before his descendants would possess their inheritance: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land *that is not theirs*, and will serve its people and be afflicted by them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterwards they shall come out with great possessions" (Gen. 15:13-14).

Not only were the people of Israel unfaithful to the Lord at that time, but they also became the slaves of a heathen people. It was during that time of misery and distress that they remembered the Lord again and started to pour out their needs before Him day and night. Consequently, the Lord intervened in a mighty way to save them. The exodus from Egypt and the founding of the nation in the Promised Land should be viewed against this background.

As a symbol of God's intervention and His people's deliverance, every Jewish family had to slaughter an unblemished lamb and mark their doorposts with its blood. In this way, Israel had to learn the lesson that they could not, by their own means, obtain the inheritance God had promised to them. The sacrificial lamb was a type of the Messiah as the true Lamb of God who would, through His sacrifice, deliver His people from their spiritual slavery and enable them to inherit the kingdom of God (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Life in the wilderness

After the people of Israel left Egypt, they spent forty years wandering in the wilderness before they finally entered the Promised Land. In that time the Lord once again had to teach His backslidden people how to live faithful and obedient lives. They were not ready to claim their inheritance, for the sins of their old life were still too deeply ingrained in them. God's people had become so faithless that they even refused to turn to Him in their time of need. Instead of praying to Him, they longed for the affluence they had once known in Egypt. Idol worship was still so important to them, that they soon forgot the way in which God had saved them, and made a golden calf to worship.

Because of their apostatised hearts, they had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years before entering Canaan. Everybody who had been over 20 years old when they left Egypt, died during

that time. There were only two exceptions: Joshua and Caleb, the two men who had not rebelled against God. We read in Numbers 32:13 (KJV): “And the LORD’s anger was kindled against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed.”

During their time of wandering, the Lord used Moses to instruct and discipline Israel into understanding and accepting what it meant to be His chosen people and how they should walk in His ways of righteousness. Their relationship with Him would determine what kind of life they would have in the Promised Land. If they would follow and serve God, they would prosper – but should they again become unfaithful to Him by observing pagan religions, they would experience misery upon misery.

The Lord consistently made them aware of this choice which, ultimately, was a choice between blessing and curse, for He wanted them to live in a faithful and devoted relationship with Him. He wanted them to realise how serious the consequences would be, should they decide to desert Him. Additionally, He wanted them to appreciate the fact that He would not continue to be their keeper if they were to deliberately reject Him, for then He would chastise them.

Thorough training was given to Israel in the wilderness because it would directly affect their future lives in the Promised Land. Deuteronomy 28:1-14 contains a list of spiritual and material blessings which Israel would receive if they lived in faithful obedience. They would be made to be the principal nation on earth (the head and not the tail) if they remained true to the Lord and refrained from entering into compromise with pagan nations.

In Deuteronomy 28:15-68, we see what terrible curses would befall Israel should they forget the Lord and worship idols. Hunger, pestilence and natural disasters would plague them. They would not be safe anywhere and their enemies would conquer them. The vultures and predators would feast upon their slain on the battlefield, while the survivors would try to escape in fear to a place of safety. Ultimately, further warning is made of a great tragedy which would befall them:

“The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, *as swift* as the eagle flies, ... a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favour to the young. And they shall eat the increase of your livestock and the produce of your land, until you are destroyed. ... They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land; and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the LORD your God has given you. You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you” (Deut. 28:49-53).

Finally, Israel would be dispersed and live as exiles and strangers in all the countries on earth. During the Diaspora, spiritual decline and uncertainty would prevail among them. The hardships and suffering would serve as constant reminders of the blessings which they forfeited due to their disobedience to the Lord:

“Then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known – wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life” (Deut. 28:64-66).

The Lord often reiterated that, should the people of Israel continue to sin against Him, they would be scattered all over the earth, be persecuted and their country devastated. God said: “I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste” (Lev. 26:22-33).

The severity of the punishment Israel would receive should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, God’s unconditional promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would never be jeopardised by any of these judgements. There would always be a faithful remnant of His people

to ensure the fulfilment of His promises:

“Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I *am* the LORD their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I *am* the LORD” (Lev. 26:44-45; cf. Jer. 31:20).

God Himself confirms that Israel *will* be restored and converted, even though it might seem impossible from a human point of view:

“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If *any* of you are driven out to the farthest *parts* under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. Also the LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today” (Deut. 30:1-8).

Crossing the Jordan

Israel were bound to the conditions God had set for them when they crossed the Jordan River 40 years after leaving Egypt, and entered the land which God had promised them. From a biblical point of view this land has since that time been known as *Israel* – not *Palestine* (cf. Ezek. 11:17). Under the leadership of Joshua they conquered one city after another, and in those early years became a prosperous and victorious nation.

However, spiritual decline became the major characteristic of their history for the next 1 500 years until the Diaspora in AD 70. There were a number of important spiritual revivals during this period but these were few and normally only lasted for one generation. Following the death of a godly king or prophet the people soon returned to their idols and sin. No trial or affliction, not even the Babylonian exile, could bring about a permanent change in the nation’s spiritual life.

The prophets, who warned Israel of the consequences of their sins and tried to bring them closer to God, suffered severe trials and persecution. After the death of Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, the people of Israel remained in spiritual darkness for four centuries. Because they persisted in their iniquities, God temporarily stopped speaking to them.

The birth of the Messiah, Yeshua Ha Mashiach (Jesus Christ), brought an end to God’s silence and to the spiritual darkness: “The people who sat in darkness saw a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned. From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:16-17).

International Dispersion (the Diaspora)

The Messiah was the Lamb sent by God to rescue His people from the bondage of sin. John the Baptist introduced Him to the nation as follows: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The coming of the Messiah (*The Anointed One*) would be the final test for Israel. If they responded to His message and turned to God, the curses He had warned them about through the prophetic ministry of Moses would not come into effect. If they continued in the iniquities of their forefathers, they would be dispersed to all the countries of the earth. The leaders of the nation chose to reject Jesus, as illustrated in the parable of the wicked husbandmen in Matthew 21:33-46.

The Jews certainly did not realise what the consequences of their choice would be when they forced Pilate to crucify Jesus. On that day Pilate washed his hands in front of the people and said: "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see *to it.*" Then answered all the people, and said: "His blood *be* on us, and on our children" (Matt. 27:24-25).

In Matthew 23, Jesus spoke to the apostate religious leaders about the fact that they had rejected Him as well as the prophets sent before Him:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous ... Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' *guilt.* Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: *some* of them you will kill and crucify, and *some* of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate" (Matt. 23:29-38).

The Lord Jesus explained that by rejecting Him, the Jews would "fill up the measure" of their forefathers' iniquities, and that this would lead to the fulfilment of all the prophesied curses. Jerusalem and the nation of Israel would be cursed, as the prophets had warned. Because they rejected Jesus, their home (Jerusalem and the temple) would be destroyed: "Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came to *Him* to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them: Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:1-2). Jesus was deeply moved by the knowledge of the traumatic fulfilment of the prophecies regarding Israel and Jerusalem:

"Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying: If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For *the* days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

The Messiah warned those listening to Him that these things would happen in their lifetime: "Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation" (Matt. 23:36). They were the generation that rejected the Messiah, therefore the destruction of Jerusalem would occur during their lifetime, while the surviving Jews would go into international dispersion. Jesus said to His disciples:

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:20-24).

The fall of Jerusalem

The prophecies of Jesus in Luke 21:20-24 regarding the fate of Jerusalem were literally fulfilled during the generation of His earthly ministry. The Jewish historian, Josephus (1963), as well as the early church father, Eusebius (1926; cf. Malan 1993), gave detailed accounts of the fear and anxiety that befell the Jews in that time. The years after Jesus' ascension marked the beginning of a turbulent period of rebellion and lawlessness in the Middle East, as the Jews did not accept the Roman domination and refused to bow down before statues of the emperor. The violence

eventually became uncontrollable and culminated in the killing of thousands of Jewish men, women and children during the dark and bloody decade of the sixties.

Cestius Gallus, the Roman governor of Syria, marched on Jerusalem in AD 66 with a large contingent of soldiers. The Messianic Jews remembered what Jesus had said about the fall of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20), and were waiting for an opportunity to flee the city. The siege was effective. Most of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were suffering from low morale and were considering a surrender to the enemy. At that moment Cestius, for some inexplicable reason, called off the siege. This unexpected turn of events raised the hopes of the Jews of gaining victory and saving their city. They promptly chased down their enemies and killed 5 300 of them. However, the Christians realised the seriousness of the situation and fled to Pella in Trans-Jordan while the other Jews were in pursuit of their enemies.

Nero, the Emperor in Rome, was furious about the humiliating defeat suffered by his forces. He sent Vespasian, one of his best generals, to teach the Jews a conclusive lesson. Vespasian and his son, Titus, commanded an army of 60 000 men. They conquered town after town in Galilee and Judea. Not only did they conquer the towns, they also slaughtered thousands of Jews and flattened every town to the ground. Many of the Jews escaped to Jerusalem. They believed that the city was so strongly fortified that it would never fall at the hands of its enemies. This idea was exactly the opposite of the expectation entertained by the Messianic Jews. They hurriedly left Jerusalem because they truly believed that the destruction of the city was imminent.

During the invasion of the Roman forces, a number of Jewish resistance groups took refuge in Jerusalem. The ensuing power struggle between them finally led to civil war. They even set fire to the city's granaries to destroy the food supplies of opposition groups. In this way the people of Jerusalem turned on one another and weakened their own position. Jerusalem became its own enemy.

The Romans were delighted about the internal strife. They decided not to launch an immediate attack on the city, as that would have united the dissident groups against the Roman army. Vespasian became the new emperor and returned to Rome. His son, Titus, remained as sole commander of his armies in Palestine. In 70 AD he besieged the city for four and a half months before finally breaking through the walls and conquering the city. During this time 1.1 million people died, mostly of hunger. The situation became desperate and those who remained were so weakened that they could no longer bury the dead. Corpses were simply left in the streets to rot. The stench later became so overwhelming that the leaders of the rebel groups instructed their followers to throw the dead bodies into the ravines surrounding the city.

The sight of all the skeletal corpses in the valleys surrounding Jerusalem so shocked Titus that he called upon God to witness that he had not been responsible for the tragedy. According to Josephus (1963) 600 000 corpses were thrown in the ravines between 1 May and 20 July of AD 70. Amongst all the untold horrors of that time, are stories of starving mothers eating their own children to stay alive. Yes, Jerusalem truly was a city gripped by desperation and panic. This was all in literal fulfilment of the prophecies over an apostate Israel who had forgotten God and no longer honoured His Word:

"Therefore, behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. And in this place I will make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem, and will cause their people to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life. I will give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the earth. And I will make this city a horror, a thing to be hissed at. Everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its wounds. And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and their daughters, and everyone shall eat the flesh of his neighbor in the siege and in the distress, with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them. ... Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, behold, I am bringing upon this city and upon all its towns all the disaster that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words" (Jer. 19:6-9, 15).

Those who managed to escape from the city were either killed by the Roman swords or crucified on the trees outside the city. Refugees not caught by the Romans were waylaid and murdered by Arab thugs who cut them open in their search for money – for by then everyone had heard the stories of desperate Jews selling everything they had and then swallowing the gold coins before escaping.

Yet, the resistance groups still refused to surrender. Consequently, the Romans set fire to all the buildings, including the temple, and then razed them to the ground. The western wall and three towers were the only remaining structures in the city, which were used as a shelter by a Roman garrison who stayed behind to ensure that the Jews did not try to rebuild Jerusalem. The temple was demolished right down to its rock foundations to seize the gold that melted in the fire and flowed through the cracks in the floor. Not one stone remained upon another! A group of priests who had held out on the temple wall for five days came down and begged Titus to spare their lives. He answered that the time for mercy had passed and that they had to perish with the temple. They were promptly executed.

Dispersion and further persecution

Jerusalem was destroyed and 97 000 of the survivors were taken captive. Many of them were sold as slaves. This was the beginning of the world-wide dispersion of the Jews. Despite this shattering defeat, they once again tried to restore their country. Between 132 and 135 AD, a mere 60 years after the destruction of Jerusalem, they staged the *Bar Kochba* revolt against their Roman oppressors. 580 000 Jews were killed in this revolt that lasted for three and a half years. Practically all the remaining survivors were driven away. The Romans even pulled a ploughshare over Mount Zion and so fulfilled the prophecy of Micah. He said that Zion would be ploughed like a field because of the iniquities of the Jewish leaders. He further prophesied that Jerusalem would become rubble and the Temple Mount a forest (Mic. 3:9-12).

After the revolt, the dispersed Jews lived in relative peace for many centuries in their various countries of refuge. Then a time of terror began that lasted for more than five centuries. It started with the Vatican's first Holy War in 1096 which spread like wild fire through Germany, France, Spain and England. The Roman Catholic Church declared Judaism to be heresy, leading to the persecution and execution of many Jews. Helpless people suddenly found themselves surrounded by fanatical soldiers of the Inquisition. In their terror some parents even killed their children to save them from these murderous fanatics. Women and girls jumped into rivers with stones tied to their bodies to ensure that they would drown. The captives were murdered in the most savage ways after being forced to watch the destruction of their homes and the burning of their Holy Scriptures.

King Edward I of England persecuted the Jews, seized their property, and expelled the 16 000 remaining Jews from British territory. When an epidemic known as the Black Death swept through Europe between 1348 and 1350, the Jews were held responsible. It was alleged that they had poisoned the water supplies in Germany, thereby causing the disease. Furthermore, a malicious rumour was circulated which claimed that the Jews of Europe kidnapped and crucified Christian children during their annual Passover celebration. This, of course, aroused even stronger animosity which led to retaliations all over Europe. In Strasbourg, for example, the whole Jewish community was wiped out in a single horrific incident when all 2 000 of them were burned on a giant stake.

The persecutions in Spain were particularly violent. Spain became a living hell for any Jew who happened to be there at the time. The inquisition of Pope Gregory IX was intended to wipe out any existing form of Jewish 'heresy'. The Jews were called *marianos* (cursed ones) and thousands upon thousands were burnt to death at the stake. The bodies of people who had died as 'heretics' were dug up and burned, and any property they had left behind was seized without further ado. One of the Jews at the time wrote: "The smoke of the stakes at which the martyrs are executed is blown heavenward all over Spain these days, and there is no end to it. One third of the *cursed ones* died in the flames, another third are homeless and trying to find somewhere to hide, and the remaining third live in fear of persecution." In 1492, the Jews in Spain were ordered to leave the country within four months. Many of them died of hunger and other

hardships after leaving behind their homes and belongings. Their biggest problem was finding a country where the inhabitants would allow them to stay. Most of them fled to Eastern Europe and Asia, where a considerable number settled in Russia. Small groups crossed the Mediterranean Sea and reached the coast of Africa.

In modern times we have witnessed the return of anti-Zionism to Europe. The Holocaust, in which six million Jews were killed during World War II, can be regarded as one of the most horrific incidents of genocide of all times. The Holocaust claimed almost six times more lives than was the case during the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.

Thousands of Jews were also persecuted and killed in the former Communist USSR. Still, this is not the end of the suffering for God's chosen people. The worst is yet to come, for the Bible tells us that after the physical restoration of Israel there will be a great tribulation such as the world has never known before (Matt. 24:21-22). But, Israel will not be completely destroyed, as a remnant will be revived spiritually, and Israel will have a hopeful future through them in the land which God gave to their fathers. We already see the first signs of restoration but these are small compared to the wonders that will occur during the spiritual awakening of the entire nation.

The restoration of Israel

When Jesus said that Jerusalem would be destroyed and its people scattered, He also said that their dispersion would not last forever. Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles *until* the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24). The submission of Jerusalem was therefore to prevail for the duration of the present dispensation of the Gentiles, but it was never meant to be a permanent rejection.

During this dispensation members of all the nations, including the dispersed Jews, have the opportunity to enter into the kingdom of heaven by accepting the Messiah as their Saviour. At the end of this period Israel will be restored as a nation. Paul clearly refers to Israel's spiritual restoration at the end of the church age after the harvest has been gathered among the Gentiles: "For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:25-26).

The Messiah also used the preposition *until* or *till* to indicate that He would not permanently be rejected by the inhabitants of Jerusalem (the Jewish people). He said to the leaders of the nation: "For I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" (Matt. 23:39; cf. Ps. 118:26). After a long absence, Israel will welcome Yeshua in the name of the Lord, which is a sure indication that Israel is destined for a great spiritual awakening.

Prophecies on the restoration of Israel

There can be absolutely no doubt that the Lord will fully restore the Jewish people, their land, and their capital, Jerusalem:

"Behold, I will bring it health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and will rebuild those places as at first. I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me. Then it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honour before all the nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide for it" (Jer. 33:6-9).

The whole world will recognise it as the work of the Lord because He will change the hearts of His people. It is obvious that the spiritual cleansing of Israel will only occur after they have been gathered back into the land. They are gathered in unbelief but once they are in the land they will be spiritually revived:

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: ... I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle

clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep my judgements and do *them*. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Ezek. 36:22-28).

There are people who wrongly think (and also proclaim) that a revival in which the entire nation of Israel will be saved, will occur without any trials or tribulation. Many of these people strongly deny that Israel will be subjected to a great tribulation, and allege that prophecies to this effect were fulfilled during the Holocaust of World War II. However, the Bible teaches that the Jewish people will be gathered into their land in unbelief, and that they will only be saved after experiencing severe affliction and distress. At that stage they will no longer be dispersed as they were during the Holocaust, but back in their land and their city, Jerusalem:

“Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me; ... Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have all become dross, therefore behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As *men* gather silver, bronze, iron, lead, and tin into the midst of a furnace, to blow fire on it, to melt *it*; so will I gather *you* in My anger and in My fury, and I will leave *you there*, and melt you. ... [T]hen you shall know that I, the LORD, have poured out My fury on you” (Ezek. 22:18-20).

In times of great distress Israel will seek the face of their Messiah. Hosea says the following regarding the first and second comings of the Messiah, as well as Israel’s final redemption (explanatory notes between brackets):

“For I [the Messiah] *will be* like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, *even I*, will tear *them* and go away [the ascension of Jesus after He has announced the destruction of Jerusalem and the international dispersion of the Jews]. ... I will return again to My place [heaven] till they [the people of Israel] acknowledge their offence. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction [in the great tribulation] they will earnestly seek Me. Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days [of one thousand years each – cf. 2 Pet. 3:8] He will revive us; on the third day [in the third millennium after His first coming] He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight” (Hos. 5:14 – 6:2).

From this Scripture it is obvious that Israel, as a people, will only seek the Lord “in their affliction”. Zechariah mentions the shocking death-toll of the coming great tribulation when a remnant in Israel will be saved: “And it shall come to pass in all the land, says the LORD *that two-thirds* in it shall be cut off *and die*, but *one-third* shall be left in it: I will bring the *one-third* through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, This *is* My people; and each one will say, The LORD *is* my God” (Zech. 13:8-9).

The Lord Jesus says the following on this time of great distress when, after the Antichrist has declared himself to be God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, he will try to annihilate Israel and all other people who refuse to worship him:

“Therefore when you see the *abomination of desolation*, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, ... then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ... For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And if those days had not been shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matt. 24:15-16, 21-22).

A great tribulation is awaiting Israel, before a remnant of the nation will be saved to inherit the kingdom of the Messiah. Jeremiah also refers to this time when he says: “Alas! For that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it; and it *is* the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it” (Jer. 30:7).

During the coming time of tribulation under the false messiah an intense spiritual polarisation will

occur in Israel. The leaders of Israel, as well as the majority of the nation, will accept the Antichrist as messiah. The true Messiah has warned them against this fatal error of judgement: "I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (John 5:43). All deceived people everywhere will follow suit.

At the other end of the spectrum God will bring about a revival in Israel, from which 144 000 fearless witnesses for the Messiah will emerge. In the face of strong opposition, attacks and threats, they will proclaim that Yeshua is the true Messiah and Saviour of the world, and that the Antichrist with his false message of peace is the great deceiver. Tension between the followers of Christ and the Antichrist respectively, will run high and give rise to the active persecution of Messianic Jews and Christians among all nations. According to Daniel 9:27, 11:36 and 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, in the middle of the tribulation, the Antichrist will enter the Most Holy of the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and declare himself to be God. The spiritual battle will then adopt further and more intense proportions and take a turn for the worst.

The Jews who assumed that the Antichrist was the Messiah, will be utterly shocked and completely disillusioned when he declares himself to be God, abolishes the sacrificial service in the temple, erects an image of himself in the Most Holy, and demands the worship of all people. For the remaining 3½ years of the tribulation period they will probably take refuge in Petra in the Negev desert, south of the Dead Sea in Jordan, where the Lord will sustain a remnant of Israel. But the world-wide persecution of Christians and Jews will continue. In Zechariah 12 and 14 we read that hatred of the Jews will motivate all nations to deploy forces against Jerusalem.

At the height of the battle of Armageddon the situation will become critical for survival among the fugitive remnant of Israel as they are surrounded by their enemies. They will say: "Our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off" (Ezek. 37:11). Nevertheless, they will move to the Mount of Olives in anticipation of the second coming of Yeshua, where the Messiah and His heavenly army will rescue them:

"And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. ... And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths. It shall come to pass in that day *that* a great panic from the LORD will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbour, and raise his hand against his neighbour's hand" (Zech. 14:4, 12-13).

In the midst of great confusion these enemies will flee from the face of the Lord Jesus, and start killing one another. With exceeding joy the remnant of Israel will look up to their Saviour and King who had appeared on the scene so dramatically and at such an opportune moment. However, a great shock awaits them when they will see the wounds of the nails in His hands and feet. According to Zechariah 13:6, they will ask Him about the origin of these wounds, to which He will reply: "Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends." Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit they will experience bitter contrition for their sins, while calling to Him for forgiveness. These highly emotional moments are described as follows by Zechariah:

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only *son*, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem" (Zech. 12:10-11).

Because of their sincere repentance the Lord Jesus will forgive all the sins of the nation – that is the entire remnant of Israel that will have survived the great tribulation. To Israel it will indeed be a Day of Atonement as the whole nation will be spiritually awakened and saved on a single day. Following this, the nations will be judged and the long expected reign of the Messiah will begin with Jerusalem as capital of the world (Mic. 4:2-3).

Israel's suffering as judgements of God

We cannot conclude this chapter without giving a biblical explanation for the extreme suffering of Israel – the great misery and loss of life during the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in the first

century, the persecution of Jews among the Gentiles throughout the centuries, in particular the indescribable slaughtering of six million Jews during World War II, as well as the greatest suffering of all time that awaits them during the coming great tribulation. The question regarding the real cause of the Holocaust is very sincerely given by a Messianic Jew, Arthur Katz (1998) in his book, *The Holocaust: Where was God? An Inquiry into the Biblical Roots of Tragedy*. Excerpts from his book are offered with the kind permission of Art Katz Ministries (www.artkatzministries.org):

“The misappropriation of the sufferings of Messiah as being our own is inevitable for a Jewry that refuses a consideration of Him and is yet required to find explanation for our own historical sufferings. If we reject Messiah as the fulfilment of Isaiah chapters 52:13–53:12, who ‘was so marred more than any man,’ and then substitute Israel in His place, we are then brought to an inevitable place of collision. This ultimate logic of rejection forces us not only to be opposed to the Messiah if He were to come, but of necessity to envy His place – to *be* as the Messiah, to *be* ourselves the Suffering Servant, to *be* deified, to *be* the Messianic hope, and to *be* the civilization that is the answer for all” (p. 30).

“Why do men prefer some kind of a religious form that is not the knowledge of God in truth? Why is there this instinctive and deep aversion of the knowledge of God and a preference for a religious substitute? It is, I believe, because religion is that human amalgam of practice and thought that gives men the form of something in which they can engage themselves to their own satisfaction and, at the same time, shields them from the obligation that the true knowledge of God brings. Why do we not rush to the knowledge of God in truth if it is available? Why do we prefer Judaism, or Catholicism, or Protestantism, or even an occult alternative, to the knowledge of God in truth? Is it because the true knowledge of God brings requirement? To know God in truth is to know the requirement of God in truth – and *that* is not convenient for man. That is a profound reason why God is circumvented, and why we prefer a god of our own choosing who does not make demands. Even the Living God can be lost to us if we seek ‘convenience’ rather than the truth, as even contemporary Christianity testifies. What had happened to our God-given, biblical faith by the time the One who came as Messiah-King two millennia ago? It had become a hardened system, and His very presence threatened its perpetuation (see John 11:47-50!). If the system was to continue, then He, of necessity, had to perish, rather than be allowed to live to threaten it. We defended our calcified religious system *unto death*. We sought to keep it alive and perpetuate it rather than allow it to come to that end and new beginning for which Israel’s very God was calling. This is the tragic re-enactment of self-perpetuating ‘religion’ through all generations” (p. 39).

“In refusing to rightly interpret the Holocaust of God in the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth as the judgement for all sin, we, by that refusal, set in motion the very circumstance which made our own Holocaust inevitable. By refusing to interpret our catastrophes rightly (catastrophes that we set in motion), we make ourselves subject to the next. Such is the tragic continuum until the end” (p. 40-41).

“We suffered at the hands of the very nation we had esteemed. We lacked the understanding of the inherent depravity of *all* human nature. Therefore, we could not anticipate the evil that man could do – inhuman, if not bestial things, done to us by the very people who were the projection of our own concept of man in his exalted state. We had projected onto the German civilization our own lofty and idealistic view of ourselves – a view, I suspect, despite the tragedy of the recent past, we still essentially hold! We are a people given to a self-exaltation and self-congratulation in our own self-assessment. It pervades our religious services and our cultural life. So impressive are we in our own sight that we are blinded to that corruption inherent in the very nature of man as man, a corruption that is deeper than the issue of German civilization itself. That is to say, what we are as men in ourselves is yet to be recognized. We have not yet learned the lesson” (p. 46).

“God has a controversy with us concerning our alienation from Him. We have been unwilling to face the meaning of our own history, and to consider the horror that was the result of that alienation. The unhappy fact is that the interpreting of catastrophe as the consequence of (and

judgement for) sin is totally incompatible with contemporary Jewish self-assessment. It is outside our consciousness and consideration. We have a sense rather of our own innate self-righteousness and goodness” (p. 78).

“Catastrophe, as judgement fulfilled, is God’s penultimate provision to bring unto repentance those who would otherwise have no consciousness of that need. The failure to interpret catastrophe in that way, and the failure to see the hand of God in our judgements, must necessarily result in our seeking to place the blame on men. We will find the fault as being with the Germans and Hitler. This is not to say that they were blameless, but we are stopping short of seeing the greater truth. In the last analysis, those who blame men end up blaming God. If we will not see ourselves as the factor for the judgements that have come, then we will inevitably come to the place where God Himself becomes ultimately the evil one. God is judged and found wanting. If man will not accept himself as being the root cause of his own judgements, ironically, God is the one who ends up being condemned for inherent defect in His creation seeing that He was apparently ‘unable’ to intervene in preserving Jewry from calamity. We have a much greater facility to find fault with God than with ourselves. That in itself sums up how lamentable our condition is. ... How important, then, to rightly interpret our tragic past. We would be fools not to receive the benefit of that past and to anticipate what is to come again if its root causes are not recognized and dealt with repentantly. If our judgements are in direct proportion to our sins and the magnitude of our judgements indicate the magnitude of our sin, then we need to be awakened to something of which we are not personally and subjectively aware. It is for the lack of this consciousness that God gives us calamity in order to evoke the questions that we ourselves would never have thought to ask. On the contrary, so smugly satisfied are we with our condition that we think we represent the standard to which the whole world would do well to aspire. We would do better to understand our condition, not in the light of our own subjective fancy, but in the light of the scriptural judgements that we are catastrophically required to experience. ... [God] stretches Himself and extends His mercy, and He sends His messengers, which messengers we have historically rejected. In our resiliency, we somehow find a way to recover from our calamities ... finding a way to remove the onus of its true meaning as judgement, not seeing it in terms of our national sin” (p. 79-81).

“It is remarkable how much the interpretation of the Holocaust, as being the judgement of God, radically explains God as God, and brings with it a fear of God as Judge. This fear of God is painfully lacking in our modern consciousness. We have grown up without the sense of the awe of God and the fear of Him. This is one fruit of the unanswered questions raised by the Holocaust that we have chosen not to ask” (p. 7-8).

“We do not have a perspective of God as Judge. Consequently, we have paid a high price for the loss of the understanding of God, both in judgement and in mercy, in severity and in goodness. God’s dealings with Israel (past, present and future) are absent from our consideration or awareness, and we have therefore voided the most profound revelations of God given us in Scripture ... There is something about God in judgement that reveals God as He is not to be seen in any other way. Yet, it is the one aspect of the attributes of God from which we instinctively shrink. We cannot reconcile the God who is mercy and love, just and righteous, with a God who would be the Judge to bring affliction of this magnitude on mankind – and particularly on Jewish mankind. If our God does such things, then the most distasteful, the most painful, and the thing most calculated to destroy our own religiosity, becomes the most precious and true revelation of God. Is it not in this contradiction, if we would see it through, that the deepest revelation of God is to be found?” (p. 9).

“Could it be that we cannot understand the Holocaust from God’s perspective unless we bring eternity into view? Only eternal consideration makes the calamity of the Holocaust in any way intelligible. ... It is only in the hope of averting another fire, one that is inextinguishable and eternal, that makes this fire, in any way, comprehensible. If the one will teach us and save us from the other, then it makes supreme eternal sense. ... To omit eternity from our consideration is to disfigure reality itself” (p. 9-10).

“I once had the privilege of meeting the distinguished author, Elie Wiesel, a Romanian Jew and

famed winner of a Nobel Prize. He himself is a survivor of the Holocaust, and is probably one of the greatest spokesmen on the subject of the Holocaust. ... At the conclusion of his public address, I asked him privately: 'Mr. Wiesel, to what degree would you be willing to acknowledge that the sufferings that we have experienced as Jews, in all of the calamities of our history and especially the Holocaust, are the fulfilment of God's judgements forewarned prophetically in the concluding chapters of the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy?' He looked at me for a moment in a kind of shocked silence and then answered: 'I refuse to consider that.' Has that statement been echoing and reverberating up in the heavenlies ever since? Is it not in effect a summation of man's very self-exaltation over God? It begins significantly with the word 'I.' In this instance, it is not so much the matter of whether what is being stated is right or wrong, but that there is something higher than God's Word – the 'I' who can approve or refuse it! Is it human arrogance exalting its opinion, its thought and its will above God Himself? To refuse to consider the Word of God is to exalt ourselves above the Word of God and, by implication, denounce the Word and effectually reject it. Is this not in effect what we have done historically to the prophets sent to us?" (p. 11-12).

"We have a greater obligation than the Gentiles do because we are the 'people of the covenant.' We are the 'chosen ones' and have had the advantage of the revelation of God, of the Law given at Sinai, and of everything else that came to us *first* as His witness people. Upon us, therefore, comes the greater judgement. In what way are we Jews of today any different from the Jews upon whom God's judgements fell historically? The mere passage of time has altered nothing. To say, therefore, that present-day Jews do not deserve judgement is to presumptuously declare that the earlier, historical judgements were equally undeserved and invalid. To annul the validity and justice of those judgements is to, in effect, annul God. The God of wrath, fury, and judgement then, is yet God now. He will again express His wrath in fury and judgement before the age ends, and for the same reasons for which they came before. That is why He is calling us to repent now of our independent self-will, notions and opinions, and surrender before the Holy One of Israel while we can. His mercy is to call us to repentance before the fulfilment of what is apocalyptically prophesied in His word (see Isaiah 13:6; 65:6-7; Jeremiah 30; Daniel 12:1; Joel 2; Amos 8:8-10; Zephaniah 1:12; Zechariah 14:1-5)" (p. 88).

"I have a sense that these things are impending and near, and that the only thing that restrains them is the hand of God. Is not everything positionally in place and could explode in a moment? The weight of our Jewish unbelief and unrelatedness to God *must* bring us down. When He takes His hand away, then we will slip, slide, and fall into destruction and devastation in a moment. We are already under the sentence of condemnation until that condemnation is lifted by the receiving of that One whom God sent to bear it, namely, the Messiah of Israel – Jesus of Nazareth. In the continuing rejection of God's gift, all Israel stands under this sword of judgement, hovering over our heads, waiting for the moment when God simply takes His hand of restraint away. I would rather be proven false, but I believe that this present generation of Jews is going to suffer devastation on a world scale that will eclipse the Nazi era" (p. 89).

"We are going to be viciously hated and pursued, suddenly uprooted, losing everything in a day, having to flee with only what is on our back and in panic not knowing where we are going. ... We are going to suffer double for our sins but our God has said, 'I will restore.' How urgent, then, to believe that the God who promises judgement and fulfils it is also the same God who promises restoration and will also fulfil it. ... Not to believe God's judgement as the fulfilment of His Word *now* is to nullify all hope of believing for His future intervention *then*. This is the scenario for the last days, namely, the restoration of Israel by the unmitigated grace and mercy of God – so totally undeserved. We Jews are the epitome of what man is. We are the statement, in our humanity, that should forewarn men everywhere. God has chosen to use us as the witness people to demonstrate Himself, if not by our virtue, then by our vice" (p. 90).

"The nations are unconsciously waiting for our restoration to God, for we have a theocratic destiny as a 'kingdom of priests' (Exodus 19:6) and 'a light to the Gentiles' (Isaiah 42:6). ... God is waiting for us to own the death of our Messiah, and, by that acknowledgement, set in motion our salvation. But if we plead exemption in any measure, then we are lost without hope. The power of our deception needs to be broken, as well as our self-justification that opposes God, so

entirely summed up in our continuing rejection of Jesus of Nazareth. This same God is going to give us a historical opportunity to recognize our pathetic and dismal failure. Those who survive the tribulation shall never again fail, because God will give us a new heart" (p. 92; end of quotations from the book by Art Katz).

In the light of what Art Katz rightfully said, every Christian is committed to present to Jews the biblical way for the restoration of Israel. Were they not to be warned against the coming false messiah and the great tribulation, how would they ever be able to correctly assess the situation and take the right decisions during that time? It would be of no avail to merely offer humanitarian assistance to a people who still persist in rejecting the Messiah. Without Him they cannot be saved and share in the blessings of the Lord to themselves, their land and their nation.

It is obvious that, in Israel, as in all other nations of the world, there will be increased divergence and conflict in the end-time between the unbelieving majority and the believing minority. The Bible refers to the latter as the "remnant" in Israel, and in practice they are known as Messianic Jews. Although they are a small minority who will suddenly disappear when the Heavenly Bridegroom takes them away (Matt. 25:1-13; John 14:2-3), a revival will occur shortly after the rapture and the revelation of the Antichrist in which 144 000 Jews will powerfully be saved (Rev. 7:1-8). They will also convince many of their fellow Jews to reject the false messiah, and to accept and serve the true Messiah. But the Messianic Jews will still be a minority, since the majority will conclude a covenant with the false messiah and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (John 5:43; Dan. 9:27).

The whole remnant in Israel will be saved during the public coming of the Messiah at the end of the great tribulation. Israel will inherit the Messianic kingdom on earth only once they are a believing nation who serve the Lord wholeheartedly. However, a very difficult road lies ahead for this nation before the remnant will reach this wonderful destination.

2. Landmarks on the Way Back

The Lord Himself is leading His people back to the land that He promised to their fathers as an eternal possession. None of Israel's enemies can prevent this from happening:

“It shall come to pass in that day *that* the LORD shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. ... There will be a highway for the remnant of His people who will be left from Assyria, as it was for Israel in the day that he came up from the land of Egypt” (Isa. 11:11-12, 16).

“Set up signposts, make landmarks; set your heart towards the highway, the way in *which* you went. Turn back, O virgin of Israel, turn back to these your cities. How long will you gad about, O you backsliding daughter?” (Jer. 31:21-22).

There are a number of important landmarks that Israel will have to pass on their way to complete restoration from the countries to which they have become dispersed. However, they have the assurance that God is with them, that He leads them and that He will help them to overcome any barriers their enemies might put in the way to prevent them from being led back to the land they received from God Himself.

Theodor Herzl – the man who paved the way

The first steps on the way back to the land of Israel were taken more than a century ago by Theodor Herzl. Taking a firm stand against public opinion and ignoring the harsh criticism of his fellow Jews, he determinedly commenced the work towards the restoration of Israel.

In his short life of only 44 years, Theodor Herzl (born 2 May 1860) dedicated himself to the dream of getting the Jews back to their land, and succeeded in making his people aware of the fact that it could be done. For this reason he organised the first Zionist congress in Basle, Switzerland, on 29th August 1897. This was followed by a similar congress in London in October 1897. Dr William Heckler, a Messianic Jew, was a good friend of Herzl. He was the author of the book, *The return of the Jews to Palestine in accordance with prophecy*, and spoke about the Messianic expectations of Israel at both congresses.

Herzl established a fund to which people from all over the world donated substantial amounts of money. He made contact with various heads of state to win their support for his idea of a Jewish state in Palestine. He also had an interview with the Sultan of Turkey, as Palestine was under Turkish rule at that stage. The fund was not strong enough to buy all of Palestine, but Herzl offered the Turks large sums of money in exchange for occupation rights in parts of the country. He visited Palestine, but had to leave after only three days, as the Arabs had heard about his plans for a Jewish state and wanted to kill him.

Theodor Herzl died in 1904 at the age of 44. He requested that Dr. William Heckler spend the last few days of his life with him. Theodor Herzl's work did not die with him, for by then the dream of a Jewish state had already been established in the hearts of Jews all over the world.

The migration of Jews to Palestine steadily increased after the launching of Herzl's awareness campaign. The Arabs in the coastal town of Jaffa were violently opposed to the Jewish settlers arriving in the area, but the Jews finally bought some land from the Arabs and laid the foundation for the state of Israel as we know it today. The first 30 families settled on a hill outside Jaffa and decided to call it *Tel Aviv*, which means *Hill of Hope*. They didn't have much in the form of material possessions, but they used whatever they could find to sweep the gravel aside and called this, their first street, Theodor Herzl Street. They also built small houses of clay.

Those early settlers could not have known that Tel Aviv would be the capital of Israel from 1948 to 1980; neither could they have known that Jews from all over the world would still be settling there today. Many of the Arabs fled from Jaffa during the 1948 War of Independence, and in 1949 Jaffa became part of the fast growing Tel Aviv.

The work that Herzl started was carried forward by other enthusiastic leaders after his death. They also continued talks with the British government, because they were determined to establish a homeland for the Jews in Palestine. Britain would play an important role during this part of the history of Israel.

Chaim Weizman – the man who laid the foundation

Britain and its allies were in danger of losing World War I because of a shortage of explosives. This problem was unexpectedly resolved when Chaim Weizman, a well-known Jewish chemist at the University of Manchester, discovered a powerful new explosive that was to become known as TNT. One of its advantages was that the manufacturing process was relatively cheap. He offered it to the British government and it became one of the determining factors in the Allied victory.

When asked what reward he wanted for this great service, Chaim answered: "I don't want money. Just free Palestine and allow the Jews to settle there." That request led to the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917, in which the British government clearly stated that they approved of Palestine becoming the national homeland of the Jewish people.

A month later the British forces under General Allenby captured Palestine. What a profound difference it was to the previous invasions by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, Titus in AD 70, and the Turks in the Middle Ages! Not a single shot was fired when Britain captured Jerusalem, and no life was lost. General Allenby, a devoted Christian, did not want to destroy anything in the city where Jesus spent the last days of His earthly life – the city where He was crucified and buried, and where He rose from the grave. Therefore, he contacted King George and asked him for advice. The king's reply comprised only a single word: *Pray!* That is exactly what the general did, and that was the secret to his peaceful capturing of the city.

The Turks in the city suddenly became terrified and sent a delegation to negotiate their surrender. When the delegation reached General Allenby's tent, he and his officers were praying for just that to happen! He marched through the streets of Jerusalem on 11th December 1917 and gave all the people of the city the assurance that there would be peace and that they would be protected. On 24th July 1922, Britain received a mandate from the League of Nations. Palestine would be ruled by Britain in future and Turkey, who had supported Germany in the war, would have no further control over the area.

After the British mandate became effective, the Jews immigrated to Palestine in even greater numbers. They came from Europe, Asia and Africa. They developed the country and changed deserts into fertile farming land. The Hebrew language was once again spoken. Chaim Weizman was designated Commissioner of Palestine. He appointed a responsible government, and when the British mandate expired on 13 May 1948, he and his team were ready to take control. He announced the birth of the *Jewish state*, which was to be known as *the state of Israel*. The USA was the first country to acknowledge the new state. Chaim Weizman was the first President of Israel and remained in that position until his death in 1952. David Ben Gurion, who had been Prime Minister since 1948, succeeded him.

A stormy birth

The birth of the new Jewish state during the night of 14 May 1948 was truly a miracle. From the very first day, the protecting hand of God was often apparent in the life of Israel to deliver them from imminent danger. Of course, Israel's Arab enemies in the Middle East reacted violently and threatened to utterly destroy them, fulfilling the words of the Scriptures: "They have said: Come, and let us cut them off from *being* a nation; that the name of Israel may be remembered no more" (Ps. 83:4). Israel's more than 40 million Islamic neighbours wanted to destroy the new state with its 760 000 citizens from the outset.

As soon as the British left Palestine on 15 May 1948, six of the Arab states declared war against Israel: Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The enemies of Israel, however, took neither the God of Israel, nor the military genius of the Israelis into account and paid dearly for their error in judgement. During the war for independence of 1948, 600 000 Arabs fled from

Israel, leading to the further expansion of the new state's boundaries between the declaration of independence in 1948 and the cease-fire which was declared in 1949. Jerusalem was divided into two sections, a Western Israeli section and an Eastern Jordanian section. The Temple Mount formed part of the latter.

The Palestinian refugees were not allowed to return to their homes, but had to remain in the neighbouring countries (particularly Jordan and Lebanon). The deplorable conditions of the camps in which they were accommodated, led to the founding of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO). This organisation, initially led by Yasser Arafat, is violently opposed to Israel. Through the years it has succeeded in mobilising thousands of Palestinians in and around Israel in their struggle against the Jewish state.

The War of 1956

The unceasing hostility from across Israel's borders gave rise to strained relations with neighbouring countries. The Arabs refused to conclude peace with Israel or to recognise the new state. Border incidents became the order of the day. The port of Eilat was blocked and Israeli ships barred from the Suez Canal. The Arab states even tried to prevent the Israelis from using water from the River Jordan for irrigation projects in the Negev Desert.

The situation later became so unbearable that Israel attacked Egypt in October 1956. This led to their occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, which Israel held until 1967. In that year, after intensive international negotiations, they withdrew from most of the occupied territory.

The Six Day War

By May 1967 the political and military situation in Israel had reached critical proportions. All their efforts to defuse the explosive situation and ease the tension, had failed. President Nasser of Egypt ordered his army to take up positions of attack in Sinai. At the same time Jordan, Syria and Iraq, who were united for this purpose, issued statements to the effect that they were poised to destroy Israel. Despite all of these threats, Israel was the one who attacked on 5 June 1967, and the ensuing war lasted a mere six days.

God granted His people a miraculous victory. Many of Egypt's fighter planes were destroyed on the ground before they could take to the air, while a large tank division surrendered without offering any resistance. Israel's Messianic expectation reached new heights, and they even issued a series of postage stamps with the inscription "The Coming One".

During these few days, biblical Jerusalem (the Old City, or the City of David), as well as the adjacent West Bank area, were captured from Jordan and incorporated into Israel. The acquisition of this important piece of land had long been Israel's dream, as the Temple Mount had, until then, been out of bounds for the Jews. Soldiers and civilians alike all went to the Western Wall to offer prayers of thanksgiving, and there were intensely emotional scenes at the wall. The wall is all that is left of the temple that was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, when the Jews were led into captivity.

Following the Six Day War, the tension remained high between Israel and its neighbouring Arab states. The United Nations Security Council intervened to bring about an end to the war, but no official peace accords had been signed. By 1972, the situation had deteriorated to such an extent that President Sadat of Egypt again fanned the flames of anti-Jewish sentiment and announced his country's intention to annihilate Israel.

The War of Yom Kippur

The Day of Atonement, 6 October 1973, saw the beginning of yet another war in the Middle East. As this is the most important Jewish religious holiday of all, the Israeli security forces were demobilised and the attack took them by surprise. The attacks on the Egyptian and Syrian fronts were fierce and their enemy's Russian technology was highly advanced. After initially suffering big losses, Israel gradually took control of the situation and eventually won the war. After that, the war clouds receded and relative calm again prevailed. However, after a few years the tension again started to mount and the Arabs resumed their preparations for a new confrontation

against the Jewish state.

Jerusalem as Capital

A very important landmark in Israel's restoration was the declaration of Jerusalem as their eternal and indivisible capital in August 1980, and the immediate relocation of the office of the Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This move was made amid various calls for Jerusalem to have an international status and to be a centre where Jews, Christians and Muslims could enjoy equal rights. However, Israel withstood the pressure and stuck with their decision that this city, which had been conquered 3000 years ago by King David, remains their own and indivisible capital. According to Luke 21:24-32, the restoration of Jerusalem would be a prelude to apocalyptic events that will occur during the last generation before the second coming of the Messiah.

The Arab nations, particularly the Palestinians in Israel, were so upset about the events in Jerusalem that they declared a holy war (jihad) against Israel. They also used the bargaining power afforded them by their position as oil suppliers, to influence other countries not to acknowledge Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Their intimidation was so successful that all the embassies which had been moved to Jerusalem were moved back to Tel Aviv within only a few weeks.

During this critical time in September 1980, when the nations again turned their backs on Jerusalem, a few hundred Christians celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem for the first time. Despite the antagonism which orthodox Jews show towards Christians, these believers were warmly welcomed by virtue of an Old Testament prophecy that Gentiles would celebrate this feast in Jerusalem after the coming of the Messiah. On the last day of the feast, Christian pilgrims used the opportunity to open the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem. Through the years various Christian groups and churches have used this embassy to express their solidarity with Israel, and to support Israel's biblical claim to their land and to Jerusalem as their capital city.

However, the enemies of Israel continue with their hostilities and, with the aid of Russian weapons, relentlessly try to destroy the Jewish state.

The 1982 Attack on Lebanon

The situation in the Middle East further deteriorated after the change in Jerusalem's status in 1980, and prompted Yasser Arafat to visit Moscow for high level talks with the Kremlin. A final decision was reached in which Russia pledged active support to the PLO in its struggle against the state of Israel. While the Jews were still celebrating the declaration of Jerusalem as capital, the Russians were building a secret military base at Sidon, in Southern Lebanon. The underground bunkers could store weapons for an army of more than 500 000 men, at a stage when the PLO only had 19 000 "freedom fighters" in its army.

The Israelis discovered this arsenal when they attacked Lebanon in 1982. They seized 4 000 tons of weapons and ammunition and incapacitated an advanced Russo-Palestinian plan to destroy the Jewish state and transfer its land to the Palestinians.

The Syrians, who occupied Lebanon at the onset of the hostilities, were also drawn into the war against Israel, but in the first week they lost 80 MIG fighter planes in clashes with the Israeli Air Force, while Israel did not lose a single plane. Again the Arab powers were temporarily halted in their on-going endeavours to destroy Israel. Egypt had signed a peace treaty with Israel; Iraq was at war with Iran, and Jordan was afraid to attack Israel without the assistance of allies.

After 1982, Israel occupied parts of southern Lebanon in order to avert attacks on its own soil from Lebanon. During this time, Hezbollah (Party of Allah) was established with Iranian and Syrian assistance, with a view to launching attacks on Israel from Southern Lebanon. They have modern weaponry, including rockets which are supplied to them by Iran. Attacks by Hezbollah were one of the important factors which led to Israel ending its occupation of Southern Lebanon in 2000.

The Intifada of the Palestinians

Since 1987 the Palestinians have waged a terrorist war against Israel, from within their borders, known as the Intifada. One of the strategies frequently used by them is suicide bombings in Israeli busses, restaurants and other public places. The group primarily responsible for the attacks is Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement). They are a very radical Palestinian group that do not recognise the state of Israel. After the death of Yasser Arafat they engaged in party politics and won an election against the Fatah Party in Gaza, but are still opposed to peace accords with Israel, and are set on violent means to pursue Palestinian independence. All Palestinians who participate in the Intifada are notorious for demonstrations, looting, arson, stone-throwing, knife-attacks, rocket attacks, bombings, ambushes, kidnappings, blackmail and assassinations in their struggle for the liberation of Palestine.

In September 2000, the Intifada against Israel entered a new, intensified phase, known as the Al Aqsa Intifada, or the Second Intifada. Demonstrations started at the Al Aqsa mosque when the Israeli Prime Minister at the time, Ariel Sharon, accompanied by other cabinet members, visited the Temple Mount. The Muslims regarded this high profile visit as a sign that Israel intended taking over control of the Islamic dominated Temple Mount with a view to building their temple. Renewed pressure was subsequently exerted to gain Islamic control over East Jerusalem, and ultimately over the entire Jerusalem, as well as large parts of Israeli territory. The suicide bombers are religiously motivated to wage a holy war (jihad) against Israel, being under the deceptive impression that they will open their eyes in Paradise were they to die in explosions which kill Jews or Christians.

The struggle against Hamas in Gaza

The Hamas faction of the Palestinians operates against Israel from their strongholds in Gaza. The most important strategy they employ is the use of rocket attacks against Israeli targets, as well as suicide bombings. Spiritual leaders promise jihadists rewards in heaven if they sacrifice their lives and die as martyrs. This deceptive motivation is particularly strong in the Hamas movement. Jihadists live solely for the destruction of Israel and in the hope of gaining honour by dying as martyrs in the struggle. This is the reason for them continuing to launch rocket attacks against Israel and provoking Israel to declare war on them. Since June 2007 when Hamas took full control over Gaza in a coup and expelled the Fatah officials of Mahmoud Abbas, they have considerably escalated their rocket attacks on towns and cities in the southern parts of Israel. There were times when they fired up to 600 rockets per week at Israeli targets.

After Israel's military incursion into Gaza between December 2008 and January 2009 to destroy military targets and weaken their infrastructure, Hamas obtained bigger rockets from Syria and Iran and smuggled them in through underground tunnels from the Egyptian side of the border. They now have the ability to strike large towns or cities such as Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Bersheeva. Ashdod with its harbour is the fifth largest city in Israel. Bersheeva is the sixth largest city and also has a university. There is a possibility that Hamas may acquire even more powerful rockets and missiles with which they will be able to reach Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

From Israel's point of view it is a frightening scenario that their enemies are increasing in number with deadlier weapons. Hamas intends to expand their arsenal to be able to fire rockets and missiles into the entire Southern Israel. Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon have rearmed themselves after their involvement in the war against Israel in 2006. They are now able to attack most of the northern parts of Israel.

Leaders with feet of clay

Israel's leaders are slowly but surely yielding to the increased pressure against them – not so much due to military threats, but because of political pressure from the international community to divide their land in complying with the objective of America's Roadmap with its two-state solution. In 2005, Mr. Sharon ordered a Jewish withdrawal from Gaza as well as parts of the West Bank area. His successor, Mr. Olmert, further implemented this policy and even envisaged the division of Jerusalem between Israel and Palestine. The weakening political will of Jewish leaders is exploited by their enemies who keep up the pressure by launching more severe

attacks against Israel.

Mr. Netanyahu is offering stronger resistance, but has also accepted in principle, the creation of a Palestinian state which will encompass large parts of Israel's traditional territories.

The threat from the north

Serious danger is mounting from the north and north-east of Israel, particularly in Syria and Iran. These countries also support the Hezbollah terrorists, who launched a major missile attack on Israel in 2006 which forced the Jewish state into a retaliation which almost devastated Lebanon, but did not seriously incapacitate Hezbollah.

Iran is busy developing into one of Israel's most aggressive and dangerous enemies. The president of Iran has already made various public calls for the complete destruction of the Jewish state. Iran is also developing a nuclear programme to further strengthen its military position. Israel has responded to this threat by openly stating that military action might be the only way to stop Iran from producing nuclear weapons.

The fire of persecution

It is a perplexing phenomenon that the restoration of Israel is accompanied by such intense international animosity and so many wars and violence – including an escalating struggle within the country. However, according to the Bible, things will become even worse and lead to time of great trouble for Jacob (Jer. 30:7). The New Testament describes this perilous time as the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21).

The fact is that Israel is being restored to their land in a spiritually unsaved state, to be subjected to great distress which will force them to call out to the Lord for help – just as their forefathers did when they were oppressed by Pharaoh in Egypt. The Lord said that He would gather together His wayward people in Jerusalem in order to test them and to save a remnant (Ezek. 22:19-20). Israel has thus far not reacted spiritually to their distress, but their problems will dramatically increase in the near future, to the point where they will earnestly call out to the Messiah to intervene (Hos. 5:5).

However, the trouble for which Israel is destined cannot be an excuse to their enemies to hate and persecute the people of God. The Lord will judge Israel's enemies who do not bless Israel, but instead curse and try to annihilate them. In spite of all the resistance from their enemies, and the unbelief of Israelis themselves, the restoration of God's people must continue towards the wonderful future which awaits a believing remnant of the nation.

The exodus from Russia

The Russians, who have been among Israel's most notorious enemies, have run into serious political and economic problems. For nearly a century, Jewish emigration from Russia to Israel was severely restricted while the communists mercilessly persecuted the Russian Jews. Suddenly, the tyrannical regime of the USSR fell and the doors were flung wide open. One million Jews, almost half of Russia's Jewish population, who had indicated that they wanted to immigrate to Israel, were allowed to do so. The modern Pharaoh had no choice but to let God's people go. The plagues he had to deal with left him with no choice: the iron curtain had come down, Russia's economy was crumbling, and one republic after the next gained independence from the disintegrating Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. Yes, this Russian leader had no choice but to say: "Go, if you want to go!" This is a fulfilment of the following prophecy:

"Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that it shall no more be said: The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt; but: The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them. For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishermen, says the LORD, and they shall fish them; and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks" (Jer. 16:14-16).

The people of Israel welcome these newcomers into their territory, but finding work and

accommodation for everyone is quite a problem. There must be many of them who feel like saying: "The place *is* too small for me; give me a place where I may dwell" (Isa. 49:20).

The fishermen used by the Lord are evangelists who lead Jews to the Messiah, and strongly impress it on their hearts that it is the will of the Lord for them to return to the land of Israel. Orthodox Jews are also reminded of their duty to return to the land of their fathers to assist in protecting and rebuilding it. The hunters which the Lord uses are hostile people who persecute Jews, thereby forcing many of them to leave in the hope of finding a better opportunity for survival in Israel.

A new day

The full remnant of Israel will be saved after the dark night of the tribulation. They will then truly be a blessing to the whole world (Rom. 11:12). The Arab nations, who have tried to destroy Israel since 1948, will then also become Christian, having been freed from the intimidating influence of Islam. Together with Israel they will serve King Jesus with great enthusiasm:

"In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria, *even* a blessing in the midst of the [earth], whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying: Blessed *is* Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance" (Isa. 19:23-25).

Only people with a real sense of spiritual destiny can understand God's plan with the nations and, in particular, with the nation of Israel. All Christians should give their full support to the physical restoration of Israel, while earnestly praying for the spiritual revival of that entire nation. The spiritual needs of Israel's deluded enemies should never be excluded from those prayers.

3. Palestine or Israel?

The intense global interest in the creation of a Palestinian state within the traditional territory of Israel is heading for a climax in the very near future. Major world powers, as well as international bodies such as the UN, are directly involved in the establishment of such a state, thereby raising the significance of this key factor in their efforts to bring about peace and a new balance of power in the Middle East and the rest of the world.

However, serious fears are already being expressed that the entire process of promoting the emergence of Palestine will not only be detrimental to Israel but in fact threaten its very existence. From a biblical point of view, a future world without the physically and spiritually restored Israel will be an evil world that will provide the opportunity for the global control of the Antichrist. This new world will be utterly anti-Jewish and anti-Christian.

These fears are corroborated by the fact that the evil forces which drive the “Palestinian Plan” are far-reaching and intent on permanently changing the political, economic and religious landscape of the world. These forces will have an impact on global events far outside the Middle East, and possess the potential of laying the foundations for an entirely new world order.

All countries are already showing strong signs that they are taking decisions and adopting policies that will initiate reforms towards political globalism. A transformation of this nature will change the world and affect the destiny of all other countries in an unpredictable way, depending on who gains control over the emerging world government. As far as the planned transformation of the Middle East is concerned, it is obvious that the international community would prefer to have Palestine play a key role in this region.

It is important that the origin of the name “Palestine” first be investigated in order to determine the legitimacy of the present process of establishing such a state. The further implications of this drastic move will then be considered.

Origin of the name Palestine

The following are abridged excerpts from Wikipedia articles on Palestine [2011(a), (b) en (c)]:

The name “Palestine” is the cognate of an ancient word meaning “Philistines” or “Land of the Philistines”. The Hebrew name *Peleshet*, usually translated as *Philistia* in English, is used in the Bible to denote the southern coastal region that was inhabited by the Philistines to the west of the ancient Kingdom of Judah.

In the 5th century BC, Herodotus wrote in Ancient Greek of a district of Syria, called *Palaistinê*, whence *Palaestina*, whence *Palestine*. *Palaestina* was commonly used to refer to the coastal region and shortly thereafter, the whole of the area inland to the west of the Jordan River. The latter extension occurred when the Roman authorities, following the suppression of the Bar Kochba Revolt in the 2nd century AD, renamed “Provincia Judea” to “Syria Palaestina”, in order to complete its dissociation with Judea.

During the Byzantine period, the entire region (Syria Palestine, Samaria, and Galilee) was named *Palaestina*. The Byzantines also renamed an area of land including the Negev, Sinai, and the west coast of the Arabian Peninsula as *Palaestina Salutaris*. The Arabic word for Palestine is *Philistine* (commonly transcribed in English as *Filistin* or *Falastin*). When the Arabs took over Greater Syria in the 7th century, place names that were in use by the Byzantine administration before them, generally continued to be used.

The use of the name “Palestine” in English became more common after the European renaissance. The name was not used during Ottoman times (1517–1917). Most of Christian Europe referred to the area as the Holy Land. The name “Palestine” was officially revived by the British after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and applied to the territory that was placed under British Mandate.

Some other terms that have been used to refer to all or part of this land include Canaan, Greater Israel, Greater Syria, the Holy Land, Judea, Israel, Kingdom of Israel, Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael or Ha’aretz), and Zion. The events of the Four Gospels of the Bible took place almost

entirely in this country, which in Christian tradition thereafter became known as The Holy Land. According to biblical tradition, the United Kingdom of Israel was established by the Israelite tribes with Saul as its first king in 1020 BC. In 1000 BC, Jerusalem was made the capital of David's kingdom. The First Temple was constructed in this period by King Solomon.

The end of the 19th century saw the beginning of Zionist immigration. The First Aliyah (Jewish immigration to Israel) was the first modern widespread wave of Zionist aliyah. Jews who migrated to Palestine during this wave came mostly from Eastern Europe and from Yemen. This wave of aliyah began in 1881-82 and lasted until 1903. An estimated 25,000 to 35,000 Jews immigrated during the First Aliyah. The First Aliyah laid the cornerstone for Jewish settlement in Israel and created several settlements such as Rishon LeZion, Rosh Pina, Zikhro Ya'akov and Gedera. Tel Aviv was founded on land purchased from Bedouins north of Jaffa.

The Second Aliyah took place between 1904 and 1914, during which approximately 40,000 Jews immigrated, mostly from Russia and Poland, and some from Yemen. The Second Aliyah immigrants were primarily idealists, inspired by the revolutionary ideals then sweeping the Russian Empire, and they sought to create a communal agricultural settlement system in Palestine. They thus founded the kibbutz movement. The first kibbutz, Degania, was founded in 1909. Tel Aviv was founded at that time, though its founders were not necessarily from the new immigrants. The Second Aliyah is largely credited with the Revival of the Hebrew language and establishing it as the standard language for Jews in Israel.

Ottoman rule over the eastern Mediterranean lasted until World War I when the Ottomans sided with the German Empire and the Central Powers. During World War I, the Ottomans were driven from much of the region by the British Empire during the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

Under the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, it was envisioned that most of Palestine, when freed from Ottoman control, would become an international zone not under direct French or British colonial control. Shortly thereafter, British foreign minister Arthur Balfour issued the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which promised to establish a Jewish national home in Palestine. A British-led force commanded by Edmund Allenby, captured Jerusalem on 9th December 1917 and occupied the whole Palestine following the defeat of Turkish forces.

Great Britain administered Palestine on behalf of the League of Nations between 1920 and 1948, a period referred to as the British Mandate. The mandate included a large region east of the River Jordan, referred to as Transjordan.

Palestine and Transjordan were incorporated, under different legal and administrative arrangements, into the Mandate for Palestine issued by the League of Nations to Great Britain on 29 September 1923. Even before the Mandate came into legal effect in 1923, British terminology sometimes used "Palestine" for the part west of the Jordan River and "Trans-Jordan" (or "Transjordania") for the part east of the Jordan River. On a 1927 British Mandate stamp of Rachel's tomb, the word "Palestine" is shown in English, Arabic, and Hebrew – the latter includes an acronym for *Eretz Yisrael* (The Land of Israel).

In the years following World War II, Britain's control over Palestine became increasingly tenuous, and early in 1947 the British Government announced their desire to terminate the Mandate. On 14 May, the Jewish Agency declared the independence of the state of Israel. On the same day that the State of Israel was announced, the Arab League announced that it would set up a single Arab civil administration throughout Palestine, and launched an attack on the new Israeli state.

In 1950, Transjordan was renamed the "Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan" to include officially those portions of Palestine annexed by King Abdullah in 1949. In the course of the Six Day War in June 1967, Israel captured the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) from Jordan, and the Gaza Strip from Egypt. From the 1960s onward, the term "Palestine" was regularly used in political contexts. The Palestine Liberation Organization has enjoyed status as a non-member observer at the United Nations since 1974, and continues to represent "Palestine" there.

The 2.4 million West Bank Palestinians (according to Palestinian evaluations) live primarily in four blocs centred in Hebron, Ramallah, Nablus, and Jericho. In 2005, Israel withdrew its army

and all the Israeli settlers were evacuated from the Gaza Strip, in keeping with Ariel Sharon's plan for unilateral disengagement, and control over the area was transferred to the Palestinian Authority. However, due to the Hamas-Fatah conflict, and to local elections, the Gaza Strip has been in control of Hamas since 2006. Even after this disengagement, the UN, Human Rights Watch, and many other international bodies and NGOs consider Israel to be the occupying power of the Gaza Strip because Israel controls Gaza's airspace and territorial waters and does not allow the free movement of goods in or out of Gaza by air or sea. (End of abridged excerpts from Wikipedia articles).

A name born from hatred

It is obvious from the above account that the name "Palestine" is derived from Philistia, the land of the ancient Philistines, which was situated in the southern coastal regions of Israel, more or less in the area of the present Gaza strip. The Philistines disappeared as a distinct group by the late 5th century BC. The application of the term "Palestine" to the entire region west of the Jordan River was an ill-conceived and propagandistic decision by the Roman Empire in an effort to undermine the national interests of Israel by depriving them of any rights to their land.

The Roman campaign of hatred against Israel, as well as the attempted genocide against this nation, was heartily approved of by the surrounding nations who all spontaneously started using the name Palestine when referring to the land of the subjected or dispersed Israelites. This name was in general use up to the restoration of Israel in 1948, but this was only the name of a territory and not of a distinct people who would refer to themselves as Palestinians. Arabs of Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese and Transjordanian extraction roamed the area, among scattered Jewish families who also lived there. It was not until 1928 that certain Arabs living in Palestine started referring to themselves as Palestinians. Due to the nature of this artificially created name there were even Palestinian scholars who questioned the validity of the term Palestine. Dave Hunt (2005) says:

"As late as the 1950s Arabs refused to be called Palestinians. To the British Peel Commission in 1937, a local Arab leader testified, 'There is no such country as Palestine. Palestine is a term the Zionists invented.' Professor Philip Hitti, Arab historian, testified to an Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry in 1946, 'There is no such thing as Palestine in history – absolutely not!' To the UN Security Council in 1956, Ahmed Shukairy declared, 'It is common knowledge that Palestine is nothing but southern Syria.' Eight years later, in 1964, Shukairy became the founding chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Like Arafat, he was no 'Palestinian', but indeed born in Cairo."

After the 1956 war against Egypt, the political and military situation in Israel soon again became critical. The unceasing hostility from across Israel's borders gave rise to strained relations with neighbouring countries. The Arabs refused to conclude peace with Israel or to recognise the new state. Border incidents became the order of the day. All Israel's efforts to defuse the explosive situation and ease the tension, had failed.

During this phase, and leading up to the Six Day War of 1967, an internal threat arose from the ranks of the Arabs within Israel. They regarded it as politically expedient to identify themselves as Palestinians who should strive to regain their so called ancient homeland. Consequently, they started rallying themselves under the banner of a deprived Palestinian people who were called upon by various Muslim leaders to fight the Zionist and imperialist forces that illegally occupied their land. Many Arabs from surrounding countries were invited to Palestine and to join forces in the struggle against the Zionist occupation. Overnight, they also became Palestinians for the sake of expediency.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established and they adopted a highly revolutionary constitution. The following articles, or sections of articles, clearly demonstrate this approach:

Article 7. It is a national duty to bring up individual Palestinians in an Arab revolutionary manner. All means of information and education must be adopted in order to acquaint the Palestinian with his country in the most profound manner, both spiritual and material. ... He must be prepared for

the armed struggle and ready to sacrifice his wealth and his life in order to win back his homeland and bring about its liberation.

Article 8. The phase in their history through which the Palestinian people are now living, is that of a national struggle for the liberation of Palestine. Thus the conflicts among the Palestinian national forces are secondary, and should be ended for the sake of the basic conflict that exists between the forces of Zionism and imperialism on the one hand, and the Palestinian Arab people on the other hand. On this basis, the Palestinian masses, regardless of whether they are residing in the national homeland or in a diaspora, constitute ... one national front working for the retrieval of Palestine and its liberation through armed struggle.

Article 9. An armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine; thus it is an overall strategy and not merely a tactical phase. The Palestinian Arab people assert their absolute determination and firm resolution to continue their armed struggle, and to work for a popular armed revolution for the liberation of their country and their return to it.

Article 15. The liberation of Palestine, from an Arab viewpoint, is a national duty. It attempts to repel the Zionist and imperialist aggression against the Arab homeland, and aims at the elimination of Zionism in Palestine.

Article 22. Zionism is a political movement organically associated with international imperialism, and antagonistic towards all actions for liberation, and to progressive movements in the world. It is racist and fanatic in its nature, aggressive, expansionist, and colonial in its aims, and Fascist in its methods. Israel is the instrument of the Zionist movement, and a geographical base for world imperialism placed strategically in the midst of the Arab homeland to combat the hopes of the Arab nation for liberation, unity, and progress. Israel is a constant source of threat *vis-à-vis* peace in the Middle East and the whole world. Since the liberation of Palestine will destroy the Zionist and imperialist presence and will contribute to the establishment of peace in the Middle East, the Palestinian people look for the support of all the progressive and peaceful forces and urge them all, irrespective of their affiliations and beliefs, to offer the Palestinian people all aid and support in their just struggle for the liberation of their homeland.

Article 23. The demands of security and peace, as well as the demands of right and justice, require all states to consider Zionism an illegitimate movement, to outlaw its existence, and to ban its operations... (End of excerpts from the PLO constitution).

The hatred of Jews is clearly evident from these statements, as well as the fact that no future of any nature is envisioned for Jews in Palestine. According to Palestinians, their land comprises the whole region between the Mediterranean and the River Jordan, bordering on Lebanon in the north and Egypt in the south. Constitutionally, no provision is made for a so-called two-state solution, and therefore no recognition is given to Israel.

Any subsequent decisions to recognise Israel and enter into peace accords with them are justified in terms of a long-term strategy to ultimately drive all the Jews from their land. The former PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, said: "Piece by piece, we will destroy Israel with peace."

Palestinianism became synonymous with hatred of Jews and the total annihilation of Israel, whether by means of peace accords that demand big concessions from Israel, terrorist activities, full-scale war, or a combination of these methods. The revolutionary cause of the Palestinians was soon accepted, financed and supported by all Muslim countries, particularly those in the Middle East. The creation of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital has become the vision of all Muslims as they see it as a global control centre for Islam's future world empire.

Due to overwhelming support at the UN, the Palestinian Authority launched intensified efforts in September 2011, aimed at a unilateral declaration of independence. However, the US and a few of its allies reject a form of Palestinian statehood which is not based on the outcome of negotiations with Israel, as that would be a certain recipe for war in the Middle East. Negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians could, however, not yet be sustained for a number of reasons. The most important of these are the following:

- Israel's conditions for negotiations are that the Palestinian Authority formally recognise the

existence of the state of Israel, and also end all attacks against its territory. The Palestinian faction of Fatah is prepared to conditionally comply with this demand, but Hamas in Gaza refuses to do so. Hamas reluctantly agreed to stop all hostilities, but did not honour their commitment for very long.

- The PA under Mahmoud Abbas demands the withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied territories of Palestine, and insists on the recognising and honouring of pre-1967 borders. That means that the entire West Bank area would be transferred to the PA, including East Jerusalem, which contains the Temple Mount. The international community supports this demand. Israel's government has agreed to make further concessions, but is under tremendous pressure from right-wing orthodox parties not to disregard Israel's biblical mandate to the land by withdrawing from Israeli territory and dividing Jerusalem. As a result of this pressure, the Israeli government continues to allow the erecting of new settlements in territories occupied in 1967.

Whose land is it?

The origin of Israel dates back to Abraham, who is the founding father of Israel. God said to him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are – northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants for ever" (Gen. 13:14-15). This promise of the land was later confirmed to Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 26:3, 28:13).

In a very special sense they are the Chosen People of God. He called them to be a holy people and led them to the Promised Land; He then dispersed them among the nations because of their disobedience; and it is the same immutable covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who will restore Israel to the land of their fathers in the end-time. Note how explicitly Israel's ownership of the land is confirmed in this scripture:

"For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. ... Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be my people, and I will be your God" (Ezek. 36:24-28).

The land to which Israel returns after their long exile is still called *Israel* by God and not *Palestine*: "Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel" (Ezek. 11:17).

Keep in mind that: "Israel is a major topic in the Bible. The word 'Israel' occurs 2 565 times in 2 293 verses. More than enough prophecies have already been fulfilled in Israel's unique history to prove that the God of Israel (203 times) is the true God" (Hunt, 2010). Regarding the Palestinian claim to the land, Dave Hunt (2005) says:

"The land to which God brought Abraham and which He gave to him and to his heirs, was called 'Canaan' (Gen 12:5, 6-8; 13:7-17, etc.). There was no such land as Palestine and no such people as Palestinians. Its early inhabitants were Kenites, Kenizites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizites, Rephaims, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites (Gen 15:19-21). God never promised anything called 'Palestine' to Abraham and to his heirs. The only land He promised was Canaan: 'And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God' (Gen 17:8) ... Even had there been a land of Palestine and Palestinians, the Arabs could not possibly be descended from them. They claim descent from Ishmael, who was certainly not a Palestinian. His father, Abraham, was from Ur of the Chaldees, and his mother, Hagar, was an Egyptian. Neither of them was one of the original inhabitants of Canaan, nor even remotely related to such a people. The land was already settled when Abraham with his wife, Sarah, and her maid, Hagar, arrived there."

Judgement against Israel's enemies

Israel's divine mandate to the land surely implies that God will judge those nations who fail to recognize Israel's biblical right to the land, and who are guilty of persecuting Israel, driving her

from her God-given heritage, or trying to divide the land between Israel and her Arab enemies. God says: “For behold, in those days and at that time when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgement with them there on account of my people, my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up my land” (Joel. 3:1-2).

Dave Hunt (2010) says: “In Zechariah 12:2-3, God declares: ‘Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem. And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.’ This is an amazing prophecy not only that Jerusalem, which was then in ruins, would become a burden to the whole world, but that all of Israel’s neighbours would be united against her. They have fought one another in the past. Yet today, for the first time in history, ‘all the people round about’ are united by Islam to destroy Israel. For more than 50 years, Israel’s neighbours have launched surprise attacks against her and she has proved too strong militarily, even though they outnumber her forty to one. God said, ‘I [will] make...Judah like a hearth of fire among the wood ... and they shall devour all the people round about...’ (Zech 12:6). Soundly defeated every time, her Muslim neighbours feign a desire for peace, hoping to deceive and ultimately destroy her – a strategy established by Muhammad. The real battle is not between Arabs and Jews, but between Allah and Yahweh. There is no question of the outcome, but it will be costly for both sides: Israel will be severely punished for rebellion, and her enemies will be destroyed. Exactly as foretold, Jerusalem is a burden to all people of the world. More than 60,000 individual votes have been cast in the UN against Israel. This tiny nation with one 1,000th of the world’s population has occupied one-third of the United Nations’ time – a burden indeed! ... Scripture declares that every nation in the world will join together to invade Israel in the last days and be destroyed in the battle of Armageddon: ‘I will gather all nations [surely all includes America] against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken. ... Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations...’ (Zech 12:9; 14:2-4.) ... There is no more appropriate place and way to destroy the nations that have abused Israel than when they, in the spirit of Satan, come to effect once and for all what Hitler called the ‘final solution to the Jewish problem’.”

It is obvious that biblical warnings to the enemies of Israel and their capital, Jerusalem, are not seriously considered, which explains why the international campaign for the establishment of an Islamic Arab state in Israeli territory continues unabated.

Christian Palestinianism

An important change is taking place in the hearts and minds of many people in favour of the spiritual and political claims of Palestinians in traditional Jewish territories. These Palestinians are now regarded by some as being the original inhabitants and also the spiritual heirs to the Promised Land – all at the expense of Israel.

In his article, *Christian Palestinianism* (www.pre-trib.org/articles) Thomas Ice describes a Christian movement which is expressing itself against Israel in favour of the Palestinians, as “Christian Palestinianism” – a big spiritual and ideological threat to Israel. This liberal theological dogma is in opposition to Christian Zionism, which is focussed on emphasising Israel’s biblical rights and actively supporting the full restoration of Israel in an undivided land. Christian Palestinianism propagates an anti-Jewish theology in which the restored Israel plays no part, and in which the Palestinians are regarded as the legitimate owners of the entire Palestine. According to them, there should not be a state of Israel which can interfere with the rights of the Palestinians. This liberation theology for Palestinians also enjoys great support in the secular world.

Many of the Palestinian Christians have embraced the politically-motivated and anti-Israel liberation theology and proclaim it for the sake of their national survival. It is strongly anti-dispensational and does not recognise a future Messianic state for Israel; rather, it pursues an alternative kingdom here and now. A large number of Palestinian Christians do not even read the Old Testament because of the central role which Israel occupied during the dispensation of

the law. A few do read it, but only selectively. They recognise no relationship between biblical Israel, the present Jews and the modern state of Israel.

Theological Palestinianism poses a very big danger. An Egyptian scholar, Bat Ye-or, presents a chapter about the Islamisation of Europe in her book, *Eurabia* (2005). According to her, Palestinianism paves the way for the Islamisation of the church. It is a kind of replacement theology in which Israel is replaced by the Palestinians. In the process, the four Gospels are disengaged from their Jewish connection and attached to the Palestinians to make the New Testament more acceptable to Islam. Notably, Jesus is rendered a Palestinian Saviour.

A British Jew, Melanie Phillips, published a book entitled *Londonistan* in 2006, in which she warns England that Islam is taking over their country and culture, mainly because the church has become pro-Islamic and against historic Christianity. She describes the rise of Christian Palestinianism as follows: "When Arab Christians reinterpreted Scripture in order to delegitimise the Jews' claim to the land of Israel, this kick-started replacement theology, which roared back into the imaginations, sermons and thinking of the Anglican Church. This revisionism held that Palestinian Arabs were the original possessors of the land of Israel ... and that they are the true Israel."

In this new form of replacement theology Israel is not only replaced by the church, but specifically also by the Palestinian Christians. In the process, the Bible is robbed of many of its basic statements regarding Israel, and gradually reinterpreted in terms of the Koran. Donald Wagner (2003) wrongly argues that about half of the population in Israel at the time of Christ were not Jewish, thereby justifying his claim that Arab Christians are biological descendants of the original church in Acts 2 in Jerusalem. However, the church Father Eusebius (reprinted in 1926) confirms in his book on church history that the early church was virtually 100% Jewish.

Hank Hanegraaff of the Christian Research Institute also rejects dispensationalism and the restoration of Israel, and now promotes Palestinianism. He accuses Israel of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and describes supporters of Israel as racists. However, it is obvious that the Bible teaches about the physical and spiritual restoration of Israel in their own land. People who object to this teaching are opening the door to replacement theology and the increased acceptance of Islamic points of view.

Christian churches have to decide whether they believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible. If so, they are committed to accepting Israel as a people in their own right, to whom alone the promise was made that they would forever occupy the land of Israel. Their unbelief was indeed the cause of the Diaspora, but the Lord is returning them to revive them spiritually and make them a blessing to the whole world (Rom. 11:1-32).

Israel's future is not in the hands of orthodox Jews who continue to reject the Messiah, but in the hands of Messianic Jews who have accepted Jesus as Messiah and are serving Him. Although they are a small minority group, the Bible prophesies great and wonderful things for them. We should support them so that their testimony to unsaved Israeli's can go out clearly and unambiguously. According to the Bible, the whole remnant in Israel will eventually accept Jesus and truly become a Messianic people. Do not associate with the enemies of Israel because, according to Genesis 12:3, the judgements of God rest upon such people.

The Kairos Palestine Document

To the Palestinians, the new South Africa has, in various respects, become a role model for political liberation from domination by a selective and oppressing group. In 1994, a radical transition was made in South Africa from a multi-ethnic dispensation to integrated majority rule, in which no right to self-determination was granted to the former dominant group. The Palestinians also envisage a transition in their land in which the present Jewish government will lose all its power and ultimately vanishes from the scene.

It is conspicuous that some of the prominent spiritual leaders in South Africa paved the way theologically towards a total and unqualified surrender to the intimidating demands of the majority. Motivated by a politically-driven liberation theology, leading preachers and theologians

of different churches turned their backs on the biblical principle of the self-determination of peoples, or nations, in their own territories (cf. Acts 17:26), and contrary to this principle embraced the idea of non-ethnic majority rule.

In 1985 a group of ecumenical preachers, many of them from Soweto, accepted a Kairos document in which apartheid (separate development) is declared a sin, and in which an integrated political system for South Africa is called for (“kairos” means “a special moment” or “the moment of truth”). Palestinian Christians followed this example and on December 11, 2009, issued the “Kairos Palestine Document” in which they call on all Christians in the world to support the cause of Palestinian liberation. Included in their document is the following statement: “The injustice against the Palestinian people, which is the Israeli occupation, is an evil that must be resisted. It is an evil and a sin that must be resisted and removed.”

On March 31, 2010, a group of ecumenical Christians and Muslims in South Africa reacted to the Kairos Palestine Document by expressing full solidarity with them. They also endorsed the replacement theology, in which Israel’s biblical position and rights are assigned to the Palestinians. In their letter they say, among others:

“Our dear Palestinian brothers and sisters ... Thank you for the document written by you, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the descendants of Jesus Christ and whose ancestors were the first to receive his message. Yours is a proud history of keeping the faith in the Holy Land, and we salute you for doing that despite the most difficult situation into which you have been placed. From our perspective, we can see how you are being pressurized and forced out of your own land, and we urge you to continue to resist that with love, and to continue to show what our Lord Jesus Christ taught us.”

Kairos South Africa supports a similar transition in Palestine, in which no Israeli rights are guaranteed and effectively no future is offered to them. On April 4, 2011, they issued the following press release as South Africa’s contribution to the objectives of Christian Palestinianism:

Kairos Southern Africa’s response to Palestine Kairos: The Palestine Kairos document was launched in South Africa on Monday evening 4 April 2011, at a meeting of Kairos Southern Africa in Bredell near Johannesburg. The document is called: *A moment of truth – A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of the Palestinian suffering.*

The notion of a Palestine Kairos Document was inspired by the South African Kairos Document as a Christian testimony of faith during the last, dark days of apartheid. Palestinian lay people, theologians and church leaders came together to express a testimony of faith in relation to their experience under the occupation of Palestine by Israel.

In response to the message of the Palestine Kairos document, Christians from South Africa and countries in Southern Africa gathering at the conference decided to state the following:

“We fully honour this faith commitment and courageous witness as expressed by Christian brothers and sisters in Palestine. This testimony of faith, hope and love is a profound expression of Christian faith under circumstances of gross injustice.

“We feel seriously challenged by the Palestinian witness of faith in general as well as by their Kairos document, and consequently:

- We affirm with the Palestinians that the core of the ‘conflict’ between Israel and Palestine is the occupation of Palestine by Israel. We affirm with them that the occupation of Palestine is a fundamental evil to be resisted as an obligation of faith. Moreover, we also consider the Christian theological justification of this occupation based on Zionism as a heresy. We have to deal with our own complicity towards putting the credibility and integrity of the Christian gospel at stake in the Holy Lands. We will have to challenge our own reading of the Bible in lending support to the death and destruction in Palestine today.
- We consider the Zionist ideology as racist. Furthermore, we consider the State of Israel to be an apartheid state. For South Africans, the similarities between the situation faced by

Palestinians and the situation faced by us under apartheid are clear, striking and extremely painful.

- We accept our complicity to the injustices suffered by Palestinians albeit through widespread ignorance, silence and apathy in our society.
- We will challenge our society, government, political parties, business community, civil society, and indeed the churches and the Christian community in general about their complicity regarding this.
- We stand in solidarity with Palestinians in their commitments towards non-violent resistance against the occupation. We support the call towards boycotts, divestments and sanctions (BDS) against the Israeli government.
- We promote an ethical code of conduct about pilgrimages and other tours to the Holy Lands. We are concerned that, as things stand now, such tours obscure the present-day realities in Palestine under the Israeli occupation.

“Just as the white community in general and supporters of South African apartheid locally and abroad were challenged to change, we also challenge the conscience of all who support the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This change is possible.

“Whilst we reject the racially exclusive solution of Zionism to the holy land, we pray for an inclusive and just peace where the dignity and equality of all inhabitants are upheld.

“Rev. Moss Nthla, Chairperson: on behalf of Kairos Southern Africa.”

The rise of Chrislam

Another recent development which also favours the further promotion of Christian Palestinianism is Chrislam, which is an effort towards the ecumenical reconciliation of Christianity and Islam. This is an attempt to merge Christianity and Islam into a worldwide mega-religion. On one of their websites (www.chrislam.org/) this movement’s ecumenical approach is articulated as follows: “We are brothers. We are a family of God. Not one of us is better than the other in His eyes.” According to them, the two major monotheistic religions are closely related and should join hands.

The Chrislam movement has gained impetus from statements issued by prominent theologians and politicians, which proclaim that Christians and Muslims worship the same God and also serve the same Jesus. I.A. Ibrahim (1997:57) says: “Muslims respect and revere Jesus (peace be upon him). They consider him one of the greatest of God’s messengers to mankind.”

However, Jesus in the Quran is neither the only-begotten Son of God, nor the Messiah who was divinely appointed to restore the throne of David. Rather, he is viewed as a prophet who was appointed by Allah to prepare mankind for the coming of Muhammad. Islam also denies the atoning death of Jesus. Ibrahim (1997:58) says: “Muslims believe that Jesus was not crucified. It was the plan of Jesus’ enemies to crucify him, but God saved him” Islam clearly promotes *another Jesus* who is foreign to the divine revelations of the Bible.

Chrislam has utterly failed in its efforts to identify common ground between Christianity and Islam. The Islamic concept of a Creator-God who is singular and has no Son, cannot be reconciled with the Christian concept of the Triune God – neither is there any correlation between the Islamic Jesus who is the uncrucified son of Mary, and the Christian belief in the crucified and risen Son of God who Himself is God.

The great end-time conflict

There are good reasons why the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is playing a prominent role on the world stage. Events related to the emerging new world order focus strongly on Palestine, Israel, and more specifically, on the city of Jerusalem. In spite of the fact that the Palestinians are not historically significant and are not ethnically a well defined and coherent people, they find themselves in the area where the future of the world will be determined. Their claims for statehood are used by revolutionary forces to gain influence in the land and city destined by God

to be the centre of the Messiah's world government.

The mustering of power which is currently taking place in the world will, in the near future, culminate in an antichristian new world order in which Israel's territory will be further reduced to the point where this country will be faced with extinction. Jerusalem will probably be placed under international control and assume a multireligious character. Liberal, ecumenical-minded Jews will collaborate with the false messiah to effect this transformation (Dan. 11:32). The final result will be a fully-fledged world government and alliance of world religions under the control of the false messiah.

However, when the true Messiah comes, a Christian new world order will be instituted with Jerusalem as its capital. The boundaries of Israel will then be considerably expanded, while the artificially created state of Palestine will cease to exist and its inhabitants will either remain in Israel as "foreigners" or return to their countries of origin, i.e. Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, or Syria.

4. The Faithful Remnant

Since the beginning of Israel's history, this nation has been central to the struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. God called Israel forth from the heathen world to be His people, set apart for Him, a nation who would live to honour His Name. They were to take a stand against this world and against the forces of evil. Therefore, He named them *Israel* which means *Warriors for God*.

It is understandable that Satan, God's enemy, would do everything possible to harm or destroy Israel physically and spiritually. To that end he incites their heathen enemies to attack and confront them. He also makes use of more subtle attacks in the form of temptations, such as he used to tempt Eve in the Garden of Eden. The spiritual polarisation in Israel is proof of the degree of success he has had. Many Jews have forgotten the Lord, many have turned to a form of godliness without real spirituality, and others have even turned to idols.

Nevertheless, there has always been a faithful remnant in Israel – a group of Jews who are truly worthy to receive the blessings that God had promised His people. In one of the darkest hours of their history, when Elijah thought that he was the only faithful one left in Israel, God gave him the assurance that there were 7 000 others who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Of course, the faithful remnant was always a minority group, but that is not the determining factor. No, *they* are the true Israel and it is from them that the Lord Jesus came in the flesh (Rom. 9:4-5).

Do you reject and condemn Israel for the sins of the majority? Or do you pray for the restoration and protection of the Jews because you know that there is still a faithful remnant in their midst? The apostle Paul said: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved" (Rom. 9:27; NIV). The same situation prevails world-wide, as the majority of the members of all nations have left the ways of the Lord, and are now on the road to perdition. We must be certain to recognise this distinction between the adherents of light and darkness, otherwise we may wrongly generalise and judge a whole nation.

The courage of the faithful remnant in Israel runs like a golden thread through their long history of four thousand years. When God called Abraham, he obeyed without question and received the promise that the Saviour of the world would be born from his descendants (Gal. 3:8-9, 13-14). The two generations which followed Abraham, that of Isaac and Jacob, continued to lay the foundation of this outstanding nation.

The people of God often became faithless and disobedient, and He called leaders like Joseph, Moses, Caleb, Joshua, David and the prophets to lead them back to Him. These men mostly worked and witnessed in a society that not only rejected them, but openly threatened their lives. However, they knew what the consequences of disobedience were; therefore they continued to witness and preach regardless of the price they had to pay.

Joseph was condemned, thrown into a well and sold to the Midianites. Moses had to flee to the wilderness because his people had rejected him after he killed an Egyptian to protect one of his own. Caleb and Joshua were the only two spies who believed that the Lord would enable His people to conquer the Promised Land, but the majority report of the other ten spies was accepted. The Jews were so enraged by Caleb and Joshua's persistence and bold stand for God that they wanted to stone them. Even David knew firsthand what it was like to be rejected by his own people. He spent many days and nights fleeing and hiding in caves. Many of the prophets were hunted down, imprisoned and killed. We know that the Lord Jesus Himself met with severe hostility. He was persecuted, falsely accused, sold for the price of a slave and finally crucified with a common criminal on each side of Him.

God used the powerful witness of saints like these to lead thousands of His people back to Him. After all his hardships, Joseph became a powerful man in Egypt who saved his whole family from starvation. Moses became the great leader who freed Israel from the land of slavery and taught them the ways of the Lord. Joshua, who had not been afraid at the sight of the pagan Canaanites, led the twelve tribes into the Promised Land, and achieved one victory after another. David became one of the most famous fighting kings ever to reign in Israel, and an

ancestor of the Messiah. The prophets prepared the people for the arrival of the Messiah and King. Even in times of decadence and apostasy, they helped to preserve, protect and encourage the faithful remnant of God.

All the Messianic prophecies and atonement rites of the Old Testament were fulfilled in the suffering and death of Jesus, the Messiah. He was the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and it is therefore not necessary for priests and prophets to intercede any longer. The veil which secluded the Sanctuary was torn when He was crucified. The door was opened, and now anyone can approach the throne of mercy and ask for forgiveness in the name of Jesus. The church of the Lord Jesus was founded with the conversion of 3 000 Jewish people at Pentecost. After the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the faithful were sent out to the uttermost parts of the earth as witnesses for the Messiah. On this mission to a hostile world, the struggle and persecution would continue unabated.

In the New Testament, the war between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan intensified. Apart from the church, Israel remained an important target to the forces of evil, since they are still the covenant people of God (Lev. 26:44-45; Ezek. 36:24-29; Acts 15:16; Rom. 11:1-33; Heb 8:7-13).

The Messianic Jews were persecuted right from the beginning (see Acts 8:1-4). This hostility would continue to a lesser or greater degree throughout the centuries. The nineteenth century saw a large increase in the numbers of Jews accepting Jesus as Messiah, but the opposition of orthodox Jews remained strong.

Because of social rejection it is extremely difficult for an orthodox Jew to become a Messianic Jew; consequently, there are virtually no Messianic Jews who are unsaved nominal believers. If they take a decision to become followers of the Messiah, they count the cost and go all the way. Therefore, the statistics of conversions in Jewish communities are much more reliable than statistics pertaining to Western countries, where there is a large nominal Christianity – people who only belong to churches, but having no testimony of being born again.

A clear distinction should be made between saved and unsaved Israelites. The vast majority of Jews are only circumcised in their flesh and not in their hearts, and therefore are not among the true, spiritual Israelites (Contenders for God). It is with a view to this distinction that Paul says: "For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel" (Rom. 9:6). Only those whose hearts have been renewed are truly Israelites, or Jews: "...but *he* is a Jew who *is one* inwardly, and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, *and* not in the letter" (Rom. 2:29).

That is the reason why Messianic Jews often call themselves "completed Jews". They have been spiritually quickened and therefore belong to "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). These people are the believing remnant in Israel. We should not practice replacement theology by applying the terms "Israel" or "spiritual Israel" to the church among the Gentiles, as these terms only refer to saved Israelites.

A completed Jew is a Jew who has met the Messiah, the hope of Israel, and dedicated his life to Him – he is a Messianic Jew. In his testimony, *A completed Jew*, Jeff Miller says: "I accepted Jesus into my life and He completed me" (www.precious-testimonies.com/BornAgain).

In an article on Messianic Judaism, Wikipedia [2011(d)] says: "Messianic Judaism states that Jesus is not merely a man, but the Jewish Messiah and 'God the Son' (one person of the Trinity), and that salvation is only achieved through acceptance of Jesus as one's Saviour. Any Jewish laws or customs that are followed are cultural and do not contribute to attaining salvation."

However, orthodox Jews regard a "completed Jew" in the Messianic movement as a "lost Jew" because he confesses a Messiah who is not recognised by them, and also because he no longer finds his salvation in law observance. Consequently, the modern Jewish disciples of the Messiah experience just as much opposition from orthodox Jews as was the case with the first century disciples.

Co-ordinating bodies and missionary organisations

The Messianic movement is statistically small compared to the great majority of orthodox and agnostic (non-practising) Jews, but they are making good progress and are rapidly expanding. There are various large, international missionary organisations, as well as co-ordinating bodies for Messianic congregations, of which the most important ones are mentioned below. They introduce themselves as follows, and on some of their websites more information may be found on the testimonies of Messianic Jews:

Caspari Center for Biblical and Jewish Studies (www.caspari.com). "Caspari Center is a network of people: Jews and Gentiles throughout the world working together to raise awareness of Jewish believers in Jesus and support the growth of Israel's congregations. Our passion is to support emerging leaders who will transform Israel by developing and leading mature, confident and visionary Messianic communities. ... For a number of years we have been praying for new premises for our center in Jerusalem. We have now moved in to our new premises at 55 HaNevi'im (Prophets) St. in Jerusalem. ... The book *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, is the first in a series edited by Caspari Center associate scholars Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, and examines the formative first five centuries of Christian history as experienced by individuals who were ethnically Jewish, but who professed faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Available now at our online store."

Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations (www.umjc.net). "(1) We believe the Bible is the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of G-d. (2) We believe that there is one G-d, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (3) We believe in the deity of the L-RD Yeshua, the Messiah, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory. (4) We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential. (5) We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the believer is enabled to live a godly life. (6) We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation. (7) We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in the L-RD Yeshua, the Messiah. (8) We believe in the process of discipline and conflict resolution taught in Matthew 18:15ff, as applicable to all congregants and leaders. (9) As Jewish followers of Yeshua, we are called to maintain our Jewish biblical heritage and remain a part of our people Israel and the universal body of believers. This is part of our identity and a witness to the faithfulness of G-d."

British Messianic Jewish Alliance (www.bmja.net). "It is with great concern that we witness the rapid growth of worldwide anti-Semitism, all too often these days in the guise of anti-Zionism. We wish to express our concern that anti-Jewish sentiment is so frequently manifested in British society. We call upon the church to oppose it. As Jews who are part of the church we are distressed to hear anti-Jewish attitudes expressed in the church and in the name of Christianity. We call upon our fellow believers from many nations to acknowledge that Jesus was a Jew, and to disavow all racism aimed at Jewish people both inside and outside the State of Israel. We call upon the church to publicly affirm God's ongoing relationship with the Jewish people, and his determination to continue to work with them since he has not cast them away. Even more unthinkable [and insulting] would be the idea that a Covenant God should ditch his first choice in favour of another. When we hear people in the churches suggesting that God's promises to us are null and void we are concerned, not just for what that says about us, but also for what it says about God, as if He were fickle. Our very existence into the 21st century speaks for itself. We are part of a large, diverse and vibrant Messianic Jewish movement that professes Yeshua [the name 'Jesus' in its Hebrew form] is Messiah, Saviour and LORD."

The Messianic Times (www.messianictimes.com). "*The Messianic Times* has become the leading international Messianic Jewish newspaper since its inception in 1990. Started as a quarterly publication, it is now published six times per year by *Times of The Messiah Ministries*. It includes news from the worldwide Messianic community, Israeli current events and analysis, opinion pieces, book, music and film reviews, informative articles, and a directory of Messianic Jewish congregations. *The Messianic Times* seeks to provide accurate, authoritative and current

information to unite the international Messianic Jewish community, teach Christians the Jewish roots of their faith, and proclaim that Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah.”

The Messianic Prophecy Bible Project (www.messianicbible.com). “Zev Isaacs, the son of a Holocaust survivor, raised in Montreal’s Jewish community, began his search for God while completing his degree in International Relations at York University in 1987. During his search, he was challenged by his mother’s new faith in Jesus (Yeshua), and by his Jewish friend’s conversion to Orthodox Judaism. Confused, Isaacs began to meet and discuss the objections to the Messianic prophecies with Jews for Judaism and Aish HaTorah. On Saturday mornings he would meet with a Messianic Rabbi to learn about Yeshua and the validity of the Messianic interpretation. After more than one year of studying the Messianic prophecies and struggling through the objections, he finally realized that Yeshua was the promised Jewish Messiah. Isaacs was determined to one day publish a Bible that would expose the truth of the Messianic prophecies. Isaacs founded *The Messianic Times* newspaper in 1989 and resigned in 2002 to devote himself fully to the work of the Bible Project.”

Jews for Jesus (www.jewsforjesus.org). “Jewish people tend to dismiss evangelistic methods and materials that are couched in Christian presuppositions and lingo, because they reinforce the assumption that Jesus is for ‘them’ not ‘us’. In order to get beyond that assumption, we have to be innovative. We place full-page gospel proclamations as paid ads in leading newspapers and magazines such as Newsweek, Parade, and The New York Times. We also broadcast evangelistic messages on billboards, in commuter trains, in bus transit shelters and on secular radio stations. Others have begun using some of these avenues to an extent, but Jews for Jesus have been on the cutting edge of making the messiahship of Jesus an unavoidable issue to Jewish people via the secular media. We also conduct special witnessing campaigns during the summer months in New York City, Toronto, Paris, London, Moscow and various other cities throughout the former Soviet Union.

“It is difficult, even as a Jewish mission, to keep the focus on sharing Christ with the unsaved. Jewish evangelism is difficult. Jewish people have a long-standing tradition of unbelief, and often view with contempt those who seek to share the gospel. The discomfort of being vulnerable and the pain of rejection that necessarily accompany effective missionary work can take their toll if not handled properly. If we don’t keep that vulnerability, that pain, in perspective, the natural desire to avoid them can slowly erode any commitment to direct evangelism.

“A second difficulty in maintaining the focus on evangelism is the fact that there are so many distractions. Whether it be leading tours to the Holy Land, conducting prophecy conferences or attempting to win support for the state of Israel, there are many worthy endeavours that simply do not add up to Jewish evangelism. No Jewish mission can afford to take on these endeavours at the price of neglecting to speak directly to the unsaved. That is why you will find us Jews for Jesus out on the streets and on college campuses handing out our gospel tracts. That is why you will find us calling on the telephone and meeting in person with unsaved Jewish people. It is all part of our Jews for Jesus commitment to remain visible, vulnerable and available as we maintain direct Jewish evangelism as our priority.”

Trumpet of Salvation. (www.trumpetofsalvation.com). “With the new birth of Jacob Damkani also came a calling to proclaim Yeshua to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, no matter what the cost. Distributing tracts he printed himself, he evangelized in the streets of Israel despite the resistance of his family and the hostilities of many orthodox Jews. In 1984, Trumpet of Salvation to Israel was founded. Since then Jacob has dedicated his life full time to this calling. The autobiography of Jacob Damkani, *Lama Davka Ani? (Why Me?)*, has helped many Israelis come to faith in Yeshua and also many Christians to understand the origin of their faith. Available in Hebrew, Russian, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish.”

Testimonies

Below are the testimonies of a few Messianic Jews who were mightily used by the Lord as shepherds among the large majority of the lost sheep of the house of Israel, to ensure that

among this nation a remnant will be gathered to the glory of the Lord's name. For more information on the testimonies of Messianic Jews, see Malan (1993), Gartenhaus (1998), as well as the websites mentioned above:

Leopold Cohn

Rabbi Leopold Cohn was born in Berezna in the eastern part of Hungary in the nineteenth century. At the age of thirteen, after his *Bar Mitzvah*, he decided to become a rabbi as he had become aware of the need for spiritual leadership. While studying, he was intensely aware of his people's dispersion, and that they had been waiting for the Messiah for such a long time. It became one of the focal points of his research and prayers. Article 12 of the Jewish creed, which confirms the belief that the Messiah *will* come even though He may tarry, became an integral part of his morning prayers.

Repeating these words so often, had turned the belief in his heart into a burning desire for the fulfilment of God's promises. He desperately wished to see his people restored soon. He finally discovered that repeating the prayer for Israel was no longer sufficient. He would sit on the bare floor at night and mourn the destruction of the temple, while begging the Lord to send the Messiah soon.

The young rabbi often wondered why the Messiah was not forthcoming, and when He would actually come. He then discovered these words in the Talmud: "The world will exist for six thousand years. There will be chaos for two thousand years, two thousand years will be spent under the Law, and the time of the Messiah will be two thousand years."

With great enthusiasm he began to study the work of Rashi, a well-known Jewish expositor, but this provided no answers. "After the two thousand years the Messiah will come and destroy the wicked kingdoms." These words confused him even more, for that indicated that the Messiah had already come! Instead of seeing the Messiah, the people of Israel had been scattered, and this was one of the most devastating facts in the history of his nation to account for.

"Could it be possible that the time of the Messiah had come without the fulfilment of the promise?" Leopold Cohn asked himself. He was deeply disturbed and confused and decided to seek an answer in the original Scriptures of the Old Testament. Daniel 9 provided some answers, and he discovered a wealth of profound and hidden truths. For example, from Daniel 9:24 he deduced that the prophecy of the 70 weeks referred to a period of 490 years.

Rabbi Cohn was accustomed to the complex and often abstract arguments of the Talmud (the Jewish scriptures containing their religious traditions, ethical standards and laws) and became fascinated by the clear and simple statements in the Word of God. He started to question the credibility of the Talmud, because it differed from the Holy Scriptures in so many instances. "Please open my eyes so that I can see the wonders in Your Word," he prayed.

At that stage he was still unfamiliar with the New Testament; therefore he did not seek any answers there. He approached the rabbi of a nearby town and told him about his doubts and confusion regarding the Talmud. Instead of acquiring advice, he received a vicious scolding and was insulted and humiliated. The rabbi ended his long speech with the following reproach: "Have you now undertaken to explain that which cannot be fathomed? You, who are little more than a child, now have the audacity to question the teachings of the Talmud! Aren't the teachings of our fathers good enough for you any more? You speak exactly like the American apostates who believe that our Messiah has already come. I want to warn you that if you continue with these blasphemous thoughts, you will be shamed *and* you will be dismissed from your position. Maybe you would then like to join the faithless in America?"

The young rabbi was deeply shocked by his colleague's reaction, but he could not forget his reference to America as a place of freedom! Yes, it was there that he would be able to continue with his research about the Messiah of Israel.

Rabbi Cohn arrived in the USA in March 1892 and immediately made contact with the Messianic Jews. He bought a Hebrew translation of the New Testament, and as he read the very first words, he knew that he had found the answers he had been seeking for so long: "The book of

the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

For the first time he understood the vivid description of the suffering Messiah in Isaiah 53. This led to much soul-searching, but he finally realised that Yeshua, the Messiah, the One in whom Israel would be exalted, was the same Jesus whom the Christians worship. He gave his life to the Lord Jesus and promised to serve Him, whatever the cost would be.

The price he had to pay for his faith was very high indeed. The Jews rejected him as a traitor and even planned to kill him. His friends helped him to escape, and he continued with his studies in Scotland. He returned to New York in 1893 and started to work among his own people. Those were extremely hard times for him and his wife. There were times when they didn't even have enough to eat. He sold his wife's jewellery and used the money to pay for the hall in which their meetings were held.

Even worse than their material problems, were the troubles they ran into when people who had pretended to be friends, attacked Reverend Cohn. One afternoon as he was delivering a New Testament to an unknown person who had requested a copy, a strong man attacked him. He was repeatedly hit and kicked. The man then threw him down, grabbed him by the ears and banged his head against the floor again and again, shouting in Hebrew: “These ears have heard that we may not have any foreign gods. They should be torn off because they now listen to the Christian idols!”

He went home, bloody and beaten, but he knew that he had suffered for the truth. He also knew well that Jesus had said that the student cannot be higher than his master. Jesus had been persecuted and attacked – His followers could expect no less.

Reverend Cohn worked hard and his congregation of converted Jews grew constantly. The work he did to preserve and restore the remnant of Israel was recognised and widely acclaimed. In 1930 he received an honorary doctorate in theology from the Wheaton College in Illinois.

Leopold Cohn was indeed a bold and fearless soldier of the cross. He was truly a blessing to the church of Christ.

Albert Nathan

Albert Nathan's parents were orthodox Jews and he grew up in a community that totally rejected Jews who had accepted Jesus as their Messiah. To them the Christian faith was something to joke about, and not something to be taken seriously. At the age of nineteen, Nathan went to the USA on a business trip, intending to enjoy as much of life as he possibly could during the six months that he was to be gone. One day he heard lovely music coming from a hall in New York. He thought it was part of a choir concert, and promptly went inside.

Imagine his shock when he discovered that the music was part of a dedication service, and that the people were singing praises to the Lord Jesus! He immediately got up to leave, but it was not to be. A few of the people standing at the door, wanted to know whether their singing was so terrible that he couldn't bear to listen to it! They assured him that he was more than welcome to stay. He wanted to sit close to the door, but was led to the front of the hall. Someone gave him a Bible and hymn book to use. He sat down, feeling like a prisoner.

The childlike and intimate way in which these faithful people spoke to their heavenly Father in prayer, impressed Nathan. Like a bolt of lightning the thought suddenly and clearly occurred to him: “God is my merciful Father. He wants to find me, for He wants to save me from my sins and conceit.” The young soloist invited him home after the meeting and asked him whether he, too, walked in the light of the Saviour. “How could I?” Nathan answered, “I am not a Christian, I am a Jew.” “I'm delighted to hear that,” the man said, “because Jesus first came to the Jews.” They prayed together, and Nathan accepted the Lord Jesus as his Saviour.

It wasn't an easy decision, and the consequences were very serious. He realised that he would not only have to leave the world behind, but that he would also be rejected by his family and friends. He wrote to his parents to inform them of his decision. His mother, who loved him dearly, answered: “Your letter is much harder to accept than your death would have been!” That was the beginning of a long struggle, one in which Nathan, through Bible study and prayer, clung to the

love and mercy of the One who had carried the world's hatred and rejection, the One who had accepted the cross.

Albert Nathan was baptised and then studied for four years before becoming an evangelist. He worked in America, Morocco and Spain over a period of nineteen years, and led many Jews, Arabs and Spaniards to Jesus. He became widely known as a man who truly loved his fellow-men, and when he died at the age of 43, many of the Moroccan Jews who had come to Jesus through his ministry, mourned his early death.

In one of his very last sermons he used Galatians 2:20 as the main Scripture: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Hermann Liebstein

Hermann Liebstein was born in Russia. After completing his studies, he remained in Bucharest and Istanbul for a while, before going to England. His parents were orthodox Jews, but he was not really interested in or concerned with religion.

In England he met with the Jewish Mission, and that motivated him to read the New Testament. He then compared it with the prophecies in the Old Testament, and came to the conclusion that Jesus was undoubtedly the Messiah. Isaiah 53 was the Scripture that finally convinced him. He realised that the Messiah had also suffered and died for *his* sins, and he wanted to give his whole life to Him for opening the gates of heaven to him.

Hermann was concerned about what his parents' reaction would be, because he knew that they would be devastated by grief and sorrow. But he also knew that Jesus had said that no one who values his father or mother above Him, can be worthy of Him. Satan and the Holy Spirit were locked in a deadly battle for his soul, but the victory went to God. Hermann Liebstein gave his whole life to the Lord Jesus and was baptised. On that memorable day he said:

"My Christian friends, I realise that this is a very important moment in my life. In the presence of the Almighty and everybody here today, I profess my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I know that my confession will infuriate all my friends who do not believe, and I know that I have caused my dear mother more sorrow than she can bear. But I also know that the path to glory is paved with sorrow and struggle. Therefore I accept the cross of our Lord with joy, and I regard it as an honour to suffer for His Name."

Liebstein was a very enthusiastic Christian and helped wherever he could. He was a lawyer and gave free legal advice to other Christians who could not afford to pay his fees. He remained an active member of the British missionary movement that worked among the Jews, and often carried out important and difficult assignments without expecting compensation. He was a popular man and his life made a lasting impression on those who knew him.

His work was always done in a thorough and disciplined way. His notes on the book of Revelation were published and proved that he was an able and practical expositor of the Bible, one who was truly led by the Holy Spirit. He was also an excellent public speaker and he used this ability to serve the Lord.

The church felt the loss of Hermann Liebstein deeply when he left for the Father's house, but God is true and faithful and He always calls new disciples to do His work and proclaim His message of salvation.

Chaim Gurland

"I lived in two different worlds – first as an orthodox Jew, and later as a Christian. I first lived under the curse of the law, which is a limited world of fear and superstition. But then God in His mercy helped me to reach the light, to leave death behind and reach true *life*. After that I had the privilege to be a messenger of the gospel. I brought the good news of God's mercy and salvation through the work of Jesus to Jews and non-Jews alike, for I know that I have a duty to everyone."

These are the words of Chaim Gurland, the son of an enthusiastic rabbi in Lithuania. His

intensive study of God's Word started at the tender age of five. The life of Elijah made such an impression on the young boy that he ran away from home one day because he also wanted to be taken to heaven as Elijah had been. It took his parents days to find their hungry child again.

His parents wanted him to become a rabbi, and he complied with their wishes. However, the three years he spent at the rabbinical seminary led him to doubt that the Talmud was truly inspired by God. He was not at liberty to talk about his doubts, and wrote afterwards that the day of his induction had been the unhappiest day of his life.

He openly questioned the Talmud in the synagogue, and challenged the others to debate the matter with him. No one accepted his challenge, and the leading rabbi insisted that he withdraw his statements. He refused, and finally had to resign two years later. After that he became a private teacher, which was not a well paid position. One day he received a New Testament in Hebrew from a peddler. For the very first time he read what Jesus had said to the people who had followed Him to the mountainside. He read the words that Paul had written to the believers, as well as all the other truths in the New Testament. This led him into more doubt, and he became very sad and depressed.

Shortly afterwards he was contacted by Pastor Faltin who knew Jews in Kishinev. The pastor promised to teach him German if he would read through the Hebrew Bible with him, because he wanted to improve his knowledge of Hebrew. Chaim agreed.

They progressed as far as Isaiah 53, which the Jews never read, because they know that the Christians regard this Scripture as a description of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah. Chaim asked the pastor to skip that part, but he answered: "I pray that God will give you the courage to discover His truth and merciful salvation with me."

After considering it for a while, Chaim agreed. The pastor first turned to the New Testament and read the verses describing Jesus' suffering and death. Then they read the prophetic chapter which was written 700 years before the birth of Christ. Chaim admitted that it was a perfect description of the suffering Jesus, and of the work that had been done on Calvary for lost sinners. That led to many discussions between the pastor, the teacher and his wife. Chaim and his wife finally accepted the overwhelming evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, and committed their lives to Him as the Saviour.

The Jewish community was shocked and furious when they heard that Rabbi Gurland was to be baptised in Pastor Faltin's church. Some of them said that his baptism would lead to tragedy for the community. It was also rumoured that a number of Jews had threatened to murder him, were he to abide by his decision.

When Pastor Faltin asked him whether he would prefer to be baptised quietly in the rectory, he answered: "No, Jesus Christ is a living and powerful Saviour. He can protect me; and if He should choose *not* to, I am willing to suffer and die for Him."

The whole Jewish community was in an uproar on the day he was to be baptised. The church was packed, for many Jews had come to witness the occasion. Gurland then told the congregation how he had discovered the heavenly light through the words of Isaiah 53, and confirmed his faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Saviour. There were no incidents during the service, and Jesus who had once calmed the sea, calmed the stormy emotions on that day.

After the service an elderly lady walked up to Gurland and said: "I have been praying for eighteen years that God would save your soul."

That was the beginning of a new period of training and studying. After his baptism he became known as Rudolf. He studied theology in Berlin and became a Protestant minister. His induction sermon was based on the words of Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

Although he worked in Kishinev with Pastor Faltin, he did not forget his fellow Jews. He often talked to them about Jesus and led many of them to the Lord. Chaim Gurland became well-known for his work in Germany and Russia.

A few years later he joined the missionary movement working among the Jews. He led Bible study classes for the Jews and ministered to many others through correspondence. The Holy Spirit used him to lead many fellow Jews to Jesus. Apart from that, he spoke in many churches and to many groups. He told them about his ministry and tried to make them aware of the importance of the work that still had to be done among the Jews. At one stage he wrote: "The work among the Jews cannot be left to a few people; it is a part of the church's work in which we must all be involved."

Chaim Gurland suffered many disappointments in his work. Often he was severely tested and he was involved in an intense struggle, but he succeeded in making Christians deeply aware of their Jewish neighbours. He lived in two different worlds. At times he would convey his own enthusiasm to Christians and at other times invited his Jewish brothers to the Messiah through whom Jews *and* non-Jews would be saved.

He was nearly 74 when he died. Before his death he requested that Psalm 122:1-4 be read at his funeral: "I was glad when they said to me: Let us go into the house of the LORD. Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD."

Paul and Rolande Ghennassia

Paul Ghennassia explains the life-changing meeting with the Messiah that he and his wife had: "We have found the Messiah." What a joyful cry it was when Andrew imparted this wonderful news to his brother, Simon Peter (John 1:41). It is indeed with no less joy that my wife and I wish to tell you: We have found the Messiah, the One of whom Moses spoke (Deut. 18:15-20). Both of us Jews from practising religious families, we were numbered among those who detested and despised Jesus Christ, having been taught from childhood to consider Him a renegade and impostor. In our straying lives we were His enemies. Isaiah's statement represented our real condition, although we professed faith in God with our lips:

"They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, *there* is no soundness in it, *but* wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment" (Isa. 1:4-6). Yet His love was seeking us and the blessed moment of His revelation to our souls in distress was fast approaching.

Trouble came suddenly upon our home. My wife was afflicted with a tumour on the left foot and had severe decalcification. She had to be sent to the hospital. Our children had to go into an orphanage because I could not care for them both, due to their age and my work. I found myself alone to face my distress. These lamentable conditions drove me towards very bitter thoughts, to the point of doubting the existence of God. Sometime later my wife returned home, although she was not healed, and just as suddenly a further trial afflicted her – a purulent eczema transformed the whole of her body into one great wound.

It was enough to make one despair of everything, since the cup of our distress was full. This was the very moment chosen by the Lord to reveal Himself to us. One of our neighbours attended services where prayer was offered for the healing of the sick. She proposed that such prayer should be offered for my wife, and we attended. A few days after this, the eczema had gone, while the tumour was also healing.

This remarkable healing created an intense urge in my wife to attend the meetings, no matter what the cost. After much hesitation on my part, I finally agreed to take her. Thus I attended the 'conference' which was an entirely new experience to me. I was hiding myself as much as I could so as not to be seen by an existing acquaintance, as I was thoroughly ashamed to be in such a place. I was indeed very much surprised to hear the preacher state with conviction what I had hitherto denied with my whole heart, namely that Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah predicted by the Scriptures, the Lamb of God by whose blood 'whosoever' could be saved!

A few days later the healing was complete and we were rescued from the depths of despair. Peace, joy and hope flourished in our hearts. In the tempest of our trial God was showing us “the Sun of Righteousness ... with healing in His wings” (Mal. 4:2).

We had already started reading the New Testament with much interest. Meanwhile everything was changing in our home, now that we had been freed from sickness and the trail of discouragement. The change in my wife became more and more evident. The periods in which she was filled with tears were over and she was singing hymns. She was happy, with a heart delivered of a load. I felt myself becoming a new man, and now I realise that this was due to reading the New Testament, through which Jesus was becoming a more familiar person to me. Yet, this did not convince me of His deity, indoctrinated as I was by my traditional education. It was evident that my hatred of Him had somehow dissipated and that my heart was grateful for all the good we had received through His precious Name. But I still thirsted for the answer to the one question that kept on haunting me: “Was He or was He not the Messiah of Israel, of whom I had so often heard in my youth? Was it possible that He had come, that the people had not acknowledged Him, and not received Him?”

I bought a copy of the French Rabbinical version of the Old Testament, determined to find the truth about Jesus. I took refuge in my room and with supplication asked God to shed light on the subject. I told Him I was prepared to fully obey and follow the way He would show me. Then I opened my Bible, searching in every one of its books. I did not need to search for very long, for it seemed as if God was leading me to all the right passages in the Scriptures. Every text which speaks of the Messiah became clear to me, showing Him as the Son of God (Ps. 2), with His divine attributes (Isa. 9:5-6), His miraculous birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:1-3; Isa. 7:14), His work of atonement on the cross to save men (Ps. 22; Isa. 53), and as the One who would return to the midst of Israel who would see Him whom they had pierced (Zech. 12:10).

It was marvellous to see how all these prophecies applied to Jesus, and could only apply to Him. Every verse identified in the rabbinical version as an ‘obscure passage’ became crystal clear to me. It was so prodigious that I was literally shaken with all this light flooding my soul. All this meant that Jesus really was the Messiah, and that His people had not acknowledged Him. But as for me, now that I knew and was convinced of the truth within myself, I had to proclaim it. A deep assurance had flooded my heart. Jesus is without the slightest doubt the Saviour that was to come. I now understood why He had to be crucified on Golgotha. It was to redeem me by His blood.

Without further delay my wife and I confessed our faith in the Messiahship of Jesus and, shortly afterwards, we received a mighty baptism of the Holy Spirit imparting to us an extraordinary strength and vigour.

So in 1953 we came to know our Messiah and since then the grace of God has continued to grow in our lives. During all these years we continuously experienced the joy of being reconciled to God through Jesus our Messiah. For this reason we have an increasing desire to inform our Jewish brethren about the One who is and remains the Hope of Israel.

P.D. Weiss

This remarkable man of God tells his story of salvation and of his walk with the Lord: I was born in Poland where my father was a respected rabbi; my mother was a pious woman who spoke Hebrew and Polish fluently. After some years at a Talmudic school, where I had studied many additional subjects, I returned home. I did not, however, intend staying at home because my opinions and way of thinking had changed. I no longer had an inner peace. Beforehand I had been very interested in the Talmud and other Jewish classical writings, meditating on them, but then became engrossed in the Old Testament prophecies. Once again I studied the *Hagada* (Jewish traditions) and my doubts began to grow. Perhaps the writers of the Talmud had made a big mistake by condemning the greatest man in the history of their nation to death. Maybe they had some reason for having invented the most fantastical tales about His birth. The more I studied the *Hagada*, the clearer my insight became, when finally the joyous though terrifying thought occurred to me that Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah. I compared the explanations

of the Talmud with the Old Testament prophecies, and saw that everything foretold by the holy prophets, from beginning to end, had been fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

From that time forward I did not have any peace of mind, yet somehow I lacked the courage to reveal the secret of my heart to anybody, knowing that my voice would be like that of a preacher in the wilderness. I was still young and thus kept everything secret for a while. However, one day I heard Jewish people telling nasty stories about the Saviour, and I became so agitated that I could hardly control myself. On returning home, my mother could tell by the look on my face that something unpleasant had happened. I did not want to tell her, but when she insisted, I revealed to her what had been going on in my mind. In anger and consternation she cried out: "Do you really know what you are saying? The devil has taken possession of you to draw you away from the Lord. What shall your fate be on the day of judgement?" But when she noticed that harsh words would get her nowhere, she pleaded with me to rid my mind of those ideas while there was still time. I replied that up to that day I had never grieved her, but had always taken trouble to please her. The way I was now causing her to worry, must be proof of my conviction of the truth. I could therefore not change my way of thinking. Before I had finished speaking, my father entered the room and we became quiet. Later during that night my parents awoke and started talking about me. During the year that followed, I was carefully watched by them, and when they saw me reading a book other than the Talmud, it was burned.

One day my father spoke to me very sternly. I told him that no threats or curses would ever change my mind. This was the first of many long discussions which made life very unpleasant. Considered to be a great sinner, I was regarded as being the cause of every affliction and grief. Eventually I ran away from home to my uncle in Lodz. He was a rich man who had no children, and was pleased to have me stay with him. After he received a letter from my father informing him about me, his attitude towards me changed drastically and I had to leave him. Then friends invited me to stay with them. I earned a living by teaching, while I continued to study. At last I passed my examination and became a rabbi.

A friend invited me to a Baptist Church where a missionary was to speak. We went along and listened to him addressing a large gathering in words filled with the Spirit and Truth. Afterwards when I confirmed the truth of the missionary's words, it caused uproar. The other Jews who had heard the message, cursed me and wanted to tear me to pieces, and I had to hide myself. The next day I left Lodz and travelled to Vilna where I continued my studies. My parents had given me a wife when I was still very young, and after our wedding I was obliged to accept the office of a rabbi in a small Polish town. It was the beginning of a difficult time.

On the Sabbath before the Passover I had to speak in a synagogue in Chomez. In my pocket was a New Testament and a Hebrew book of the same size. By mistake I took out the New Testament and accidentally dropped it. Somebody near me picked up the book, and when he tried to hand it to me, he noticed that it was a New Testament. He screamed as if a snake had bitten him and told the congregation that I, their rabbi, was in possession a New Testament. He added that they would be punished along with me for my sin. As a result of this, I told them that I would resign from my office as their rabbi, which I did a few days later.

What suffering I had to endure at that time! My mother died of worry and my father decided never to see me again. Afterwards, I was appointed as a religious instructor and teacher of Hebrew by the Jewish congregation in Warsaw, a position which I held for nine years. At the time, HK, a former teacher, was appointed inspector of religious instructors. One day he and my colleagues were gathered in my classroom for a discussion, when the sorry plight of the Russian Jews came under discussion. We were considering ways to improve their position. I tried to convince them that their propositions would lead to nothing, and then I emphasised that the position of us as Jews would not improve before we were prepared to acknowledge the awful mistake our ancestors had made by denying Jesus. We would have to recognise Jesus Christ as our Messiah, He who had shed His blood on Golgotha to liberate us from our sins. This prompted a discussion, but not an angry one, because all my colleagues present were free-thinkers and the inspector himself an avowed atheist. However, he had hated me for a long time and now seized the opportunity to report me to the Board of the Jewish congregation.

On attending a Sunday evening service of the Warsaw Mission, two Jewish young men entered the hall. After the service they went to the Jewish congregation to tell them that I was a baptised Jew, and that they had seen me kneel with other Christians in the church. The Board met and decided to dismiss me without any remuneration or compensation, and without the opportunity to defend myself.

It was a long time before any compensation was offered to me. When I appeared before the Board to receive the money, I asked them: "Why was I dismissed before any investigation had been made?" One of the Board members answered: "If we had asked you to come, you would not have told the truth. Now we do not believe you any longer in the matter, because two witnesses have, according to Jewish law, sworn before a rabbi to the truth of their statement, and you have forfeited your right to be believed." To this I replied: "Gentlemen, you are mistaken; I am always ready to speak the truth." "Did you pray with the Christians and kneel with them? Were you baptised some time ago?" I answered calmly: "I have not yet been baptised, but hope that it will happen soon." That was enough; I was not allowed to say another word, and was bombarded with abusive language and ridicule. But I remained calm and respectful.

During the ensuing pause one of the men jumped up, turned to me and screamed: "You trouble-maker, how dare you utter those religious opinions so calmly and defiantly in our presence? We know that as a former rabbi you will attack us verbally and in writing, and slander Jewry, you wicked traitor." One of the men ran to me, with his hand raised ready to hit me, and shouting: "Yes, it would be best to kill him." My reply was: "Gentlemen, I am in your power and you are free to do it. I do not hate you; no, on the contrary, I love you. But I sincerely regret that you are so stubborn, and do not want to admit that much evil has happened to us because we had slandered and crucified our Redeemer."

Now the excitement flared up once more and I was not allowed to say another word. One of them, however, asked me: "If the congregation were to take you back and pay you a good salary on condition that you promise not to contact the missionaries again, would you be willing to do it?" To this proposal I answered: "I will never sell my soul for money." So the public connection with my countrymen had ended and with it my source of income (end of personal testimony).

P.D. Weiss accepted Jesus, was baptised and became a powerful witness for the Messiah. He also became a student of the New Testament and attended the services of the Warsaw Mission. He was totally rejected and ostracised by the other Jews, and his conversion led to opposition to the Mission. However, Weiss became a valued worker at the Warsaw Mission. He travelled widely and remained a powerful witness for Christ amongst his fellow Jews. He astounded them with his knowledge and the practical way in which he used the Talmud. Many of the orthodox Jews maintained that it was regrettable that a man with such talents had "lost the way". His funeral was attended by many Jews who wanted to pay their respects to this bold Messianic Jew.

Mitchell Seidman

My training and experience as an engineer has taught me to search for facts, analyse them and find answers. Sometimes, even in engineering and science, we make basic assumptions that cannot be proved. Why then are they accepted? The answer is that they work when put to a test, whereas other assumptions fail.

I have personally investigated and tested God's promises in the Scriptures to see if they work. The Old Testament promises that anyone who searches for God can find Him, if he searches for Him with all his heart. Testing this promise, I have found that God does reveal Himself to me through His Son, the Messiah. God is a living reality in my life, and as He has promised, I found peace and joy through the love of Christ.

How can a Jew believe in Christ? I have accepted Him because what the Scriptures promised fits perfectly together with the facts of history, and my personal experience has verified the promise of God's Messiah.

Richard Wurmbrand

Richard Wurmbrand, founder and director of Christian Mission International, is called a modern day John the Baptist. He was truly one of the greatest Messianic Jews of the 20th century. This outspoken witness for Christ spent fourteen years in a Rumanian prison, and having been regarded as an undesirable person thereafter, was sold to the Christians of the West.

From the USA he organised and controlled an underground missionary network covering all the Communist countries and later spreading to the Arab world, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Through his organisation he even reached the most remote islands in the Pacific Ocean. Although he was deeply concerned about the salvation of all mankind, he worked with a special zeal to introduce Jews all over the world to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In his book *Christ on the Jewish road* (1993) Wurmbrand stresses the importance of the people of Israel – not only in the past, but also in the present and the future. He points to the fact that, due to the exceptional talents of the Jewish people, they have been responsible for producing much of that which has proven to be beneficial and detrimental to the world. For that reason no one can ignore their role in the future of the world.

In the broader sense of our existence we all live in structures created by Jews. The Christians live according to spiritual principles set by Jesus Christ, a Jew. The Jews are the founders of capitalism as well as Marxism. The nuclear age can also be traced to the work of a Jew – Albert Einstein. It is true that there are many differences among the Jews. It is also true that the more conservative element among them is a minority group. But we dare not ignore the fact that this faithful remnant is going to play a very important role in the lives of millions of people in the years to come.

Let us consider what Richard Wurmbrand says in the preface to his book (1993:7-10):

“Thou hast chosen us from amongst the peoples,” the Jews declare daily in their synagogues. “Salvation is of the Jews,” said Jesus (John 4:22). “The dirty Jews are the cause of all our troubles,” say the anti-Semites. ... Some people find in Christianity their true happiness; others hate Christianity and would like to see it destroyed. It is a Jew, Jesus, who is the cause of their happiness or their fury.

Some people benefit from capitalism; others feel that they are exploited by the capitalist system, and would like to see it overthrown. No one would deny that the Jews were instrumental at an early point in time in founding this system, and that they still play a highly important role in economic and financial life, out of all proportion to their numbers. Whether you feel attracted or repelled by capitalism, your attitude will to a large extent be determined by Jews, whom you will probably never have seen face to face...

Communism may be to you a source of joy or suffering; it derives from the Jew Marx and a host of Jewish champions of this idea, without whom the revolution in the East would have been impossible. The fate of a farmer in Vietnam, who has never seen a Jew in his life, will, ultimately, depend on whether he reads the book about the Jew Jesus or the book about the Jew Marx. Which ever one triumphs, either the Christian civilisation or the Marxist world, both are closely bound to a Jewish name.

Some people place their confidence in modern science, its peak achievement being in atomic physics, a science capable of enabling mankind to live in a Utopia. Others wait, in fear and terror, for the destructive atomic war which they believe will be the final result of this science. In both the West and the East, atomic science is to a large extent in the hands of Jews. Einstein gave the United States a start in atomic weapons. The Jew, Teller, is the father of the nuclear bomb. The Rosenbergs, also Jews, gave atomic secrets to Russia. In scientific books the universe is named after a Jew: we speak of Einstein’s universe, as though we lived in this universe as the guests of a Jew.

And this is really so, for we are in very fact the guests of a Jew; only His name is not Einstein, but Jesus Christ. He is a human being and a Jew, but also God – a marvellous God, of whom we read in His holy book, from Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: “...of whom (the Jews) as

concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom. 9:5). A people from whom God came!

Mine has not been ordinary missionary work; I have worked among these people who in the holy book of the Christians are called “a chosen people”, a people from whom a God has come, but who nevertheless are ignorant of this God, a nation which is either blessed or cursed by millions of people – as the source of their happiness or their misery – a race whose fate has determined and will determine more than any other nation, the fate of the entire world.

The Jewish people have given to the world the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, a book written by Jews, but which is at the same time the Word of God – the only book capable of satisfying the spiritual needs of the world. And it will satisfy these needs when it is once again in the hands of those who have written it, and when they gather around Him who is the chief subject of the book, Jesus, the Messiah of the Jews and the Saviour of the nations.

The overwhelming majority of mankind lives in dire sin, bereft of the true faith. Murder, exploitation, oppression, fornication, deceit, envy, debauchery and slander are widespread. Mankind is bound to suffer speedy destruction unless it is converted and rouses itself from the spiritual death in which it now lies. But the Scriptures tell us that the conversion of Israel will be life from the dead (Rom. 11:15).

Jesus and the Jews are indissolubly linked to one another. “Where is He that is born King of the Jews?” the Magi enquired when He came into this world (Matt. 2:2). “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews,” was the inscription on the Cross (Matt. 27:37).

The Old Testament prophecies have the same message. Moses told the Jews: “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren” (Deut. 18:15). Isaiah, who prophesied the birth of Jesus eight hundred years before it took place, declared: “For unto **us** a Child is born, unto **us** a Son is given” (Isa. 9:6) – *us* meaning the Jews. When he foretold the new covenant which Jesus would establish by shedding His blood on the Cross, Jeremiah declared: “Behold ... I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31).

Jesus Himself said: “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). He also declared that He was the Saviour of the world, but in the passage above and in similar statements He established His special relationship with the Jewish people.

The intention of my entire missionary work, of which I give an account in this book, was to make Israel conscious of this relationship, a relationship which can never be broken, however much we may oppose it. (End of quotes from Wurmbrand’s book).

Jacob Damkani

A modern and very courageous Messianic Jew tells his story on his website www.trumpetofsalvation.com and in his autobiography, *Why Me?* (1997). The following are excerpts:

My name is Jacob Damkani and I was born in 1952 by the Sea of Galilee to a religious Jewish family of the tribe of Judah. By the grace and the mercy of God, I was born again in 1977. Only then did I understand my true God-given identity and experienced what it really means to be a true Jew. Ever since that glorious and awesome day of my new birth, I have counted everything of my past as rubbish. By His grace and with His help, I want to know nothing but Him who was crucified – and whom God has raised from the dead.

Trumpet of Salvation to Israel was founded in 1984 as a mission whose purpose is to proclaim Yeshua to the lost sheep of the house of Israel at any cost. By God’s grace and with His power which is at work within us, we are not ashamed of the Gospel nor do we fear any opposition to the Gospel, *for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek* (Rom. 1:16).

Our government does not know how to define who is to be called a Jew. But we who have been born of God’s Spirit know for certain that apart from Yeshua, no-one knows what true biblical

Judaism is all about.

My boast and pride is in the God of my forefathers from whom all blessings flow. All glory, honour, praise and adoration belong to Him, by whom the willingness to lay my life down has been worked within me. For Him alone, I would deny myself, pick up the cross, follow Him and break the fear in the heart of the church in Israel. I did not think too much about the dangers of evangelism in Israel. I just knew God had called me to follow Him and present our risen Lord to His covenant people. I just knew I had to do it and I was certain that He would empower me in my service towards Him.

After I returned to Israel (I had been in the USA for 8 years), I lived with my younger sister, Carmella, in my parents' home in Holon. My other brothers and sisters were married and lived in their own homes. My dear beloved mother was at the age of 69 still working to clean houses, but one night she suddenly died while on duty.

My dear father, who was married to my mother for over 50 years and raised eight children with her under extremely difficult and trying circumstances, had suddenly lost his beloved wife. From then on he was no longer himself. All of a sudden in his brokenness, he was overcome by some demonic power which took hold of him and came against me. My father started to curse me, accusing me for the death of his wife, blaspheming the Lord, threatening to burn my New Testament and all of my other books and literature which I was using to spread the Gospel.

After a few long weeks in which I endured these heavy attacks, I decided to move out. I left my father's home as I could no longer take his blasphemy and continuous threats to burn my books. I knew very well that it was not my father cursing and blaspheming the Lord and me, but Satan himself who so much wanted to stop my work in Israel. All the attacks, harsh violence, beatings and bloodshed which I experienced in the streets of Israel did not stop me from presenting the Gospel and pressing on for the high calling, but now Satan was desperately trying to stop me by using the death of my mother and my father's intense grief against me. I was not fighting against flesh and blood and all my prayer and fasting did not help.

I found myself sleeping in different houses. Brothers in the Lord loved to host me; dear Ilan Zamir blessed me so much during this time, as well as my sister Frieda and others. I kept praying for my dear father and visited him often in Holon. I realized that he was getting into all sorts of trouble. My love and concern for him grew and I did not know how to help him.

During this time, in a most miraculous way, the Lord provided me with the money needed to purchase a house. It is located in Jaffa, a mere three minutes walk from where Peter had his vision (Acts 10). This vision led Peter to take the gospel to the Gentiles for the first time – to a man named Cornelius. It was 2000 years ago when the apostles marvelled at the conversion of the Gentiles. Why is it beloved, that today the church marvels when Jews come to Yeshua?

From Jaffa the Gospel went to the Gentile world and now, after 2,000 years, the Lord wants to bring the Gospel back to His Jewish people from Jaffa. This house has become a centre for designing and preparing tracts, books and video cassettes in Hebrew – presenting Yeshua in His Jewish context progressing from the Old Testament into the New. We make all of our printed material available free of charge for the use of the whole body of Christ in Israel.

By God's grace, *Trumpet of Salvation* has managed to print and distribute over 200,000 copies of the book, "Lama Davka Ani?" ("Why Me?"). As our budget allows, we place articles in Israel's national newspapers proclaiming Yeshua in His Jewish context through the Old Testament. The response is overwhelming; people call and write, asking to receive New Testaments and other reading materials.

To say the least, *Trumpet of Salvation to Israel* in Jaffa is a 'train station'; the number of people who are coming to visit is great and they come to ask about the Lord and what it means for Jewish people to believe in Yeshua. At *Trumpet of Salvation*, before people make a commitment we ensure they understand their need to count the cost of what true faith is all about. Many Israelis come to faith and what a privilege it is to disciple them to that point where they can withstand family and societal pressure, after which we place them in the body of our Lord in

accordance with their geographic location.

All praise be to God! Honour and glory belong to Him alone! In every congregation in Israel you can find Israelis who came to faith because of the work of God in *Trumpet of Salvation to Israel*. Do you believe that if you are born again you are also called? It is up to you, beloved, to respond to the love of God which calls you from the cross. If you only start to follow Him, living your life in accordance with all that Yeshua and His Kingdom require, you will find yourself living the most exciting and colourful life in which no tears, sorrow or pain could prevent you from following the King, the true lover of your soul.

Consider now this marvellous truth: The Lord has commissioned His disciples to take the gospel unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Now that the gospel has reached the four corners of the earth, God is gathering His covenant people back to their Promised Land as dry bones. The Jewish people are still dead in their sin and God is pushing them into the corner as He did in the time of the judges, only this time not by the Ammonites, Edomites or Moabites, but by their Moslem neighbours. Now most of the world stands against Israel and she feels so lonely, she is in great despair and losing all hope. As Israel is coming to the end of her rope, could it be that now it is not Gideon, Deborah or Samson who are to be God's spokesmen, but you, the Gentile believers, who are called to provoke the Jews to jealousy?

Israel as a nation always seems to be standing at the crossroad. As long as they continue to turn their back on Yeshua, they will continue to make the wrong turn. God no longer has Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah, Paul, Peter, or John to work with Him on earth, but He has you, born of His Spirit, whoever and wherever you are.

For over 20 years the Lord has used *Trumpet of Salvation to Israel* to teach, encourage, challenge and mobilise Jewish and Gentile believers to present the Jewish Gospel to Jewish people in a Jewish way. By God's grace we disciple many Israelis who come to faith, teach them the basic principles in their new found faith and establish them in the truth of God. We help them understand that their life is now about God and His kingdom. We encourage them and help them to withstand the pressure from family and the religious orthodox. We then help them to find a Messianic congregation which is suitable to them, and thus help to build the Messianic Jewish believing community in Israel.

(For newsletters and more information on *Trumpet of Salvation to Israel*, contact them at: trumpsal@netvision.net.il)

Fall and rising

From what we know about the lives of the Messianic Jews discussed above, it is obviously not easy to be a shepherd to the people of Israel. Jesus came to glorify His people, but because of the spiritual resistance by many of them He was "destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against" (Luke 2:34). Even today the proclaiming of His Messiahship is a highly emotional issue, as it is no easy task to break through the resistance created by the rabbinical traditions of the past 2 000 years.

We also know, however, that no human arguments are stronger or more convincing than the working of the Holy Spirit. Proof of this truth lies in the fact that so many Jews were led to Jesus during the past 2 000 years. Their existence also proves that God has not given up on His chosen people. It is true that Israel were dispersed because they were a sinful and disobedient nation, but in His infinite love God still wants to draw them to Him. He has given the firm assurance that all the promises He made to their forefathers will be fulfilled (Lev. 26:44).

In the dark days of the great tribulation, God will gather the remnant of His people, those who have not bowed before the Baal of the end- time – the false messiah (Rev. 7:2-8). Amidst unequalled struggles and persecution such as the world has never known, the Lord will keep them upright and strengthen them to be His witnesses. Yes, Israel is the only nation on earth that enjoys God's promise of eternal protection: "I *am* with you; for I will make a complete end of all the nations to which I have driven you, but I will not make a complete end of you. I will rightly correct you, for I will not leave you wholly unpunished" (Jer. 46:28).

Israel is nearing the final stage of their punishment and purification, but God will reveal Himself powerfully through His faithful remnant. Many of His people will call upon His Name during their time of suffering and tribulation. Israel will indeed be purified and saved in the end-time, and then gather at the feet of the Messiah to receive the fulfilment of all the promises regarding His kingdom (Zech. 12:10; 13:9). In that kingdom Jerusalem will be the capital of the world (Isa. 2:2-3; Zech. 14:9).

Will your attitude and endeavours be of any assistance to introduce the people of Israel to their Messiah? God wants you to work towards that end – and you owe it to them!

Promises of restoration

“At that same time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people. Thus says the LORD: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; Israel, when I went to give him rest. The LORD has appeared of old to me, *saying*: Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice. ... For thus says the LORD: Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel! Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the ends of the earth. ... They shall come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim *is* My firstborn. Hear the Word of the LORD, O nations, and declare *it* in the isles afar off, and say, He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd *does* his flock. For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. ... Set up signposts, make landmarks; set your heart toward the highway, the way in *which* you went. Turn back, O virgin of Israel, Turn back to these your cities. How long will you gad about, O you backsliding daughter? ... And it shall come to pass, *that* as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD. ... Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; ... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The LORD of hosts *is* His name): If those ordinances depart before Me, says the LORD, *then* the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever. ... Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that the city shall be built for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ... It shall not be plucked up or thrown down anymore forever” (Jer. 31).

These promises are true – no one can doubt them:

- God will again restore Israel as the leading nation, even more so than they were during the days of David and Solomon.
- As the people of Israel were scattered across the length and breadth of the earth, they will be gathered from the north and all the corners of the earth in the last days to be established in their own land.
- The One who had scattered Israel, will gather her and protect her. The identity of Israel has not changed during their exile. The same nation that was scattered is being restored to the land, and a remnant of them will also be revived spiritually.
- Just as literally as the cities of Israel were destroyed during the dispersion of the nation, they will be rebuilt and filled with people during the nation’s restoration. Jerusalem will be rebuilt *for God* in the millennium.

- The restoration of Israel does not only imply that the Jews will return physically to their country; they will also be changed from within and will love God.
- God's love for Israel has not changed at all. He will conclude a new covenant with the restored remnant of His people. This agreement will be everlasting, as the saved members of the remnant of Israel will have new hearts that will only be inclined towards God through the Messiah.
- God's covenant with Israel is as unchanging as the order of the universe.
- In the millennium, Jerusalem will be rebuilt as The City of the Great king!

5. The Messiah

All the Old Testament prophecies regarding the arrival of the Messiah can be divided into two different categories. The one contains references to the suffering Messiah – the One who came as a Servant and as the Lamb of God. The other category contains references to the Messiah as King and mighty Ruler. The Jews were not able to distinguish between these two categories, and that was the reason why they had such a misconception about the coming of the Messiah in the first century. They expected the reigning Messiah who would only come once to free them from the Roman yoke, and then re-establish the throne of David in Jerusalem (Luke 19:11; Acts 1:6). They simply could not, or would not, accept the fact that He first had to come as the suffering Messiah to pay the price for the sins of His people. That is why they were not well disposed to recognise Him.

The term “Messiah” is often used in this book. Please note that “Christ” and “Messiah” have the same meaning, since Christ was derived from the Greek word for “The Anointed” and Messiah from the correlating Hebrew word. For a complete exposition of the names and works of Christ, see Malan (2011).

The suffering and reigning Messiah

The following are examples of the two categories into which the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament are divided:

The suffering Messiah in the Psalms

In Psalm 22, the suffering and death of the Messiah have been foretold in vivid terms:

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? *Why are You* so far from helping Me? ... I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All those who see Me laugh Me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, *saying*: He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him! ... Be not far from Me; for trouble *is* near; for *there is* none to help. ... They gape at Me *with* their mouths, as a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to my jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the assembly of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look *and* stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (Ps. 22:1, 6-8, 11, 13-18).

The reigning Messiah in the Psalms

Psalm 2 describes the Messiah’s judgements upon the rebellious nations during His second coming:

“Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against His Anointed, *saying*: Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the LORD shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me: You *are* My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give *You* the nations *for* Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth *for* Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish *in* the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him” (Ps. 2).

The suffering Messiah in Isaiah

One of the most striking prophecies about the suffering Messiah who died to pay the price for our sins, has been recorded by Isaiah:

“Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or

comeliness; and when we see Him, *there* is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgement, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked – but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor *was any* deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He put *Him* to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the travail of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53).

The reigning Messiah in Isaiah

Mention is also made by Isaiah of the reigning Messiah and His righteous government:

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there will be* no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa. 9:6-7).

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days, *that* the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say: Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD” (Isa. 2:2-5).

The suffering Messiah in Zechariah

Israel was told to look out for a humble Messiah riding on a donkey:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He *is* just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zech. 9:9).

In Zechariah 12:10 it was foretold that the suffering Messiah would be pierced by his own people after they had rejected Him in ignorance. This serious mistake would be the cause of many trials for Israel.

The reigning Messiah in Zechariah

The arrival of the reigning Messiah will be quite different to the way in which Jesus approached Jerusalem on a donkey at His first coming:

“And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. ... And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. ... And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in

their mouths. ... And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zech. 14:4, 9, 12, 16).

Birth of the Messiah-King

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14).

In accordance with the original Hebrew manuscript, the word “almâh” has correctly been rendered “virgin”. The Strong’s Concordance explains the Hebrew word “almâh” as follows: “a lass [as veiled or private]; damsel, maid, virgin”. This noun was derived from ‘*âlam*, which means: “to veil from sight, i.e. conceal [lit. or fig.]; hide [self], secret [thing].”

The word “almâh” definitely indicates an unmarried but marriageable girl who is still a virgin. She is ‘concealed’ and did not yet have intercourse with a man. If this word is rendered “young woman”, as in the RSV, it should be done with the clear understanding that she is still an unmarried virgin. The Amplified Bible says: “Therefore the LORD Himself shall give you a sign, Behold, the young woman *who* is unmarried *and* a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel – God with us (Matt. 1:22-23; Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:3-5).” These facts are corroborated by the New Testament account:

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. ... So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, God with us. Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS” (Matt. 1:18, 22-25).

Apart from the fact that the Messiah’s birth was to be a sign which is clearly above the natural order of things (in this case the assertion that Mary was a virgin) there is also another very important reason why Jesus could not be conceived by a man: this concerns the sinful nature of humans which is hereditary (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22). It was imperative for Jesus not to have a biological father, in order that His blood (and life) should not be contaminated by the original sin. The genetic information in terms of which the blood of the unborn child is formed is determined by the DNA of the father. That is the reason why paternity tests can be conducted.

Unlike other people, Jesus did not inherit a sinful nature through His birth (Heb. 4:15; 7:26-28), and was therefore the spotless Lamb of God who could be a perfect sacrifice for our sins. By spiritual conformity to Him in His death and resurrection we are able to partake of His divine nature (1 Cor. 15:45-49).

There was yet a further reason why Joseph could not be the biological father of Jesus, as that would have disqualified Him to claim the throne of David. According to a statement in Jeremiah 22:28-30, none of the descendants of King Coniah would sit on the throne of David. In the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, Jeconiah is mentioned (Matt. 1:12). But through adoption Joseph accepted Jesus as his eldest son and main heir, and for that reason He qualifies to be the heir to the throne of David, and was generally addressed as the Son of David (Matt. 9:27; 21:9).

The genealogy of Jesus through His mother, as recorded in Luke 3:23-38, also links Him to David. This genealogy is reckoned through David’s son, Nathan, while the one in Matthew 1:1-17 is reckoned through David’s son, Solomon. Through His mother Jesus is, therefore, also the Son of David, and this line of descent is not affected by the prohibition against Jeconiah’s biological descendants to become king of Israel.

The scribes and high priests in Israel were in a position to check any claims on the descent of Jesus, as well as His hereditary right to the royal throne of David, but they never disputed it on these grounds. Among the people He was generally known as the Son of David, and was accepted in this capacity without questioning it. Even before the birth of Jesus an angel

appeared to Mary and said: “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David” (Luke 1:31-32). The time will come when He will rule from the throne of David in Jerusalem. An angel also appeared to Joseph and told him that Jesus would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). He would, therefore, be a Messiah-King to Israel – not only a Ruler but also a Saviour.

The two genealogies of Jesus emphasise His two capacities as King of Israel and Saviour of humanity. The genealogy in Matthew is only reckoned up to Abraham, who was the first Hebrew. That is a Jewish genealogy by which Jesus’ position of King is emphasised. In Luke, the genealogy of Jesus is reckoned further back to the first man, Adam, and from him to God. Adam is described as “the son of God” (Luke 3:38). As a descendant of Adam, Jesus is the Son of Man who came to seek and to save all the lost descendants of Adam (Luke 19:10). This fact ties up with the worldwide perspective of the Gospel of Luke, as opposed to the more restricted Jewish perspective of Matthew.

Adam and Jesus are both described as sons of God. Adam was the first human being who was created by God – he was not born from a human family. Because Adam heeded the devil’s advice to disobey God’s orders, he died spiritually and received a sinful nature. These spiritual and moral attributes were transmitted to all his descendants on earth (Rom. 5:12), resulting in all of them being born with a sinful nature, which renders them children of God’s wrath (Rom. 3:10; Eph. 2:3). The unsaved Jewish leaders who only had a form of godliness, found themselves in the category of children of the devil (John 8:44) – that being the reason why they rejected Jesus as Messiah and tried to kill Him.

As man, Jesus was begotten by the Father (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:1-5) and is the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). All people who put their trust in Him and are born again as new creatures, are saved from the coming wrath of God upon the wicked (1 Thess. 1:10). People who were dead in their sins and iniquity are made alive by Him (Eph. 2:1-2).

Through the first Adam, who was a disobedient son of God, the entire human race has fallen into sin. Through the last Adam, who is the perfect and sinless Son of God, those who believe in Him can share in God’s new creation. All people (Jews as well as Gentiles) who realise their lost state and receive the Lord Jesus as Saviour, are accepted as children of God. The Holy Spirit regenerates them, and thus becomes to them “the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba Father” (Rom. 8:15). Through Jesus Christ we are adopted as children of God (Eph. 1:5).

All Israelites who were under the law must also be redeemed by the Messiah to receive the adoption as sons (Gal. 4:5). If salvation by virtue of law observation was possible, they would not have needed the last Adam as Messiah, but now they are deeply dependent on Him (Acts 15:7-11).

To be able to do this redemptive work, Jesus not only had to be the Son of David and King of Israel but also God Himself who could walk among men and pay the price for their salvation. According to John, He is indeed God and the Creator of the world, who was incarnated in order to transform all those who believe in Him into children of God (John 1:1-14). Jesus said, “I and *my* Father are one” (John 10:30). If someone does not believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus he cannot be saved (John 8:23-24).

The Jewish scribes refused to believe the facts on the deity of Jesus. Jesus posed the question to them on how the Messiah could, at the same time, be the Son of David and the Lord of David (Matt. 22:41-46). They could not answer Him because they did not believe in the deity of the Messiah. People who accept the Lord Jesus as the promised Messiah know that He is God. The doubting Thomas later said: “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

Paul understood the great extent of the revelation of God the Father through God the Son, and confessed: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). Jesus is Lord (Kurios – Acts 10:36) and God (Theos – Rom. 9:5). In his epistle Peter refers to “our God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1). John says: “...we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). Long before the first coming of the

Lord Jesus, Zechariah already wrote about His glorious second coming: “Thus the LORD my God [Yahweh my Elohim] will come, *and* all the saints with You” (Zech. 14:5).

Many of the modern scribes deny the deity of Jesus. The inevitable consequence of their unbelief will be that they, as well as all those who entertain similar views, will die in their sin (John 8:24, 58). All people who reject the virgin birth and deity of the Lord Jesus have a very limited comprehension of Him to whom all things are possible. Jesus Christ came that we may have life, and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). Only He can offer to Israel and the nations new life and hope for the future.

Salvation and judgement

In Isaiah 61 we find one of the various Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. The Messiah was sent to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the opening of the prison to those who are bound therein by Satan. At His second coming, the Messiah will judge all those who refused His saving grace. He will then save the remnant of Israel from the bondage of sin and establish them in their land:

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn” (Isa. 61:1-2).

Isaiah 61 refers to aspects of both the first and second comings of the Messiah. Verse 1 refers to all three Persons of the Trinity: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me”. The Messiah was anointed by the Lord’s Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17) to be Israel’s Priest-King as well as the Saviour of the nations (Isa. 49:5-6).

The Lord Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-2a during a sermon in Nazareth’s synagogue and applied it to Himself: “The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me, Because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to *the* captives and recovery of sight to *the* blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD” (Luke 4:18-19).

It is conspicuous that the Lord Jesus only quoted the first half of Isaiah 61:2 as far as “the acceptable year of the LORD”. The second part of the sentence, “and the day of vengeance of our God”, was not mentioned in His teaching. In this way, He clearly indicated that His works would be divided between two comings. During His first coming He accomplished the works mentioned in verse 2a, which is the announcing of God’s grace upon sinners, and at His second coming He will fulfil the role which is described in verses 2b-3 – that includes the pouring out of God’s wrath upon a wicked humanity, as well as saving, comforting and establishing the remnant of Israel after they have passed through the great tribulation (Jer. 30:7).

When the Messiah returns, it will be “the day of vengeance of our God”. That refers to the day of the Lord’s wrath during the coming tribulation, when all those who did not accept the message of the Messiah’s first coming, will be judged. Panic-stricken people will call out to the mountains and rocks: “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Rev. 6:16-17).

At His second coming the Messiah will change the sorrow of the remnant in Israel into joy. He will remove their mourning and give them a garment of praise (Isa. 61:3). They will rebuild the old ruins of their country, and strangers shall tend their flocks (v. 4-5). The saved Israel will be called priests of the Lord (v. 6), and everlasting joy shall prevail in their land (v. 7).

The Lord says that, during this time, He will conclude an everlasting covenant with Israel (v. 8). Jeremiah also refers to this new covenant: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. ... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jer. 31:31, 33).

Israel will be known and respected by all nations as a people who serve the Lord with all their

heart (Isa. 61:9). Zechariah says: "In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard *that* God is with you" (Zech. 8:23).

The saved Israel will proclaim the praises of the Lord during that time, and abundantly rejoice in His mercy: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments, and as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels" (Isa. 61:10).

The righteousness of Israel will be a blessing to all nations of the earth, among whom they will proclaim the Messiah with great zeal (v. 11). "Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isa. 27:6).

Is the Lord Jesus also your Saviour? If so, eternal joy awaits you. Upon those who reject Him, the wrath of God will be poured out. Seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him when He is near! (Isa. 55:6). The acceptable year of the Lord, which was announced at the Messiah's first coming, still prevails. The way to Golgotha and a new life is open to all who are heavy laden under a burden of sin. No repentant sinner will be turned away, since the heavenly Shepherd has come to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10). He promised that: "...the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37).

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). He breaks the power of sin and delivers you forever from the shackles and bonds of Satan. Paul says that Christ has blotted out the charges proved against us, by destroying them and nailing them to Christ's cross (Col. 2:14). We can no longer be confined in Satan's prison as slaves of sin, by remaining there under his power and authority. Believe it, accept it, and stand firm in the liberty by which Christ has set us free, and do not again become entangled with a yoke of bondage to sin (Gal, 5:1).

Types of the Messiah

Apart from various Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, there are also a number of types of the Messiah. The sacrificial lamb that had to be slaughtered when the Jews left Egypt was a type of the Messiah who had to shed His blood to deliver His people from their sin. The analogy between the Passover lamb and Christ is obvious. Paul said: "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7).

Jesus was introduced to Israel by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Peter used the same symbol of the lamb when he wrote to Messianic Jews: "...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). From these scriptures it is evident that there first had to be a suffering Messiah who could lay down His life for the sins of the people before He can reign over His liberated people at His second coming.

The rock that was cleaved in the desert, from which the water flowed for the people of Israel, was a symbol of our rock, Jesus Christ. He is the rock that was broken for us (1 Cor. 10:4). Because Christ was cleft like the rock (crucified) He could become to us, through the Holy Spirit, streams of living water to quench our spiritual thirst forever. For this reason He calls all who are thirsty to come to Him and drink from the well of life (John 7:37-39). This image of Christ also emphasises the fact that He first had to come as the suffering Messiah who, through His death on the cross, could become the water of life to His people and also to the whole world.

The manna that fell from heaven in the wilderness was a type of Jesus, who is also described as the Bread of life: "Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said to them: Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Then they said to Him:

Lord, give us this bread always. And Jesus said to them: I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:31-35).

The work of grace of the suffering Messiah who gave Himself to us to become the bread and water of life, is indispensable to every person. He must first, spiritually speaking, become your Saviour before he can become your King.

The serpent that Moses made in the desert and put on a pole, was a type of the work that Jesus did when He died on the cross: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The people were bitten by poisonous snakes in the wilderness, and would surely have died if they did not look up at the serpent for healing.

Israel and all the nations of the world are facing certain death because of the lethal venom of the serpent, Satan. Through Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden, his evil has permeated all of mankind. Therefore, all people must in faith lift up their eyes to the cross of Jesus Christ where He delivered us from the curse of sin (Gal. 3:13). Only in Him there is salvation and healing for everyone who truly believes. Our glory is in the crucified Messiah who laid down His life for us, and by virtue of His redemptive work we will one day be able to reign with Him in His kingdom.

Furthermore, there are quite a number of Old Testament persons who are types of Christ, the Messiah, of which Isaac and Joseph were two of the most well-known ones.

Abraham loved his son Isaac dearly, so it must have been a very traumatic experience to receive the following order from the Lord: "Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen. 22:2). Abraham obeyed, and willingly gave his only son to die. Likewise, Jesus was the only-begotten and beloved Son of the Father, who was willing to give Him over to die in order to become a ransom for our sins.

Isaac and Jesus were both prepared to do what the Lord had said. Isaac even carried the wood on his shoulders and climbed the mountain on which he was to die as a burnt offering. Many years later the temple of the Lord was to be built on that very same mountain. Thousands of animals were sacrificed there and became types of the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who was to be offered in Jerusalem for the sins of the entire human race. Like Isaac, Jesus was prepared to lay down His life, and He carried the wooden cross on His shoulders on His way to the place where He was to be sacrificed.

Isaac was raised from the altar and given back to his father: "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, of whom it was said: In Isaac your seed shall be called, accounting that God was able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense" (Heb. 11:17-19). Many centuries later the Messiah gave His life so that others could be saved, but He rose from the dead and returned to His Father in heaven. He gained victory over death.

Joseph – a type of the Messiah

In Joseph we find one of the most obvious types of the Messiah in the Old Testament. His life not only portrayed the Messiah with reference to His first coming, but also with reference to His second coming. We see in Joseph's experiences the suffering Messiah who was rejected and unjustly condemned by His people, but also the reigning King who will rule from the throne of David and lead his people in righteousness. The following excerpts from Genesis 37 to 50 are specifically significant concerning Joseph as a type of Jesus:

"Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children ... And Israel said to Joseph: Are not your brothers feeding *the flock* in Shechem? Come, I will send you to them. So he said to him: Here I am" (Gen. 37:3, 13). Jesus was also the dearly beloved Son who was prepared to go to His brothers, the Jews, when His father sent Him. He "stripped Himself [of all privileges] so as to assume the guise of a servant (Phil. 2:7 AB; cf. Matt. 15:24).

We read that Joseph's brothers saw him coming from afar, and "even before he came near to

them, they conspired against him to kill him. ... Then Midianite traders passed by; so *the brothers* pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty *shekels* of silver. And they took Joseph to Egypt” (Gen. 37:18, 28). Jesus was also betrayed and sold for the price of a slave: “Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill *Him*. ... Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said: What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you? And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver” (Matt. 26:3-4, 14-15).

Joseph was imprisoned by his owner because Potiphar’s wife had accused him falsely. Two of his fellow-prisoners came from Pharaoh’s palace – one was later freed, but the other one was executed. Jesus, who was innocent and without any sins, was also accused, crucified and sealed in a stone grave with guards outside. Two criminals were crucified on either side of Him – the one received eternal life while the other one died in his sins.

Joseph was finally freed and promoted to the second most powerful position in the country. “Can we find *such a one* as this, a man in whom *is* the Spirit of God? ... You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you” (Gen. 41:38, 40). We know that Jesus was exalted after returning to heaven and that He sits at the right hand side of the Father: “Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9).

Joseph had the answer to the problem which faced the starving people: “So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians: Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do” (Gen. 41:55). In the same way the Father sends a perishing world with their needs to His Son: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (Matt. 17:5). The secret to eternal life lies in obeying the words of Jesus Christ (John 6:63).

Joseph’s assistance was offered to famine-stricken people in all the surrounding countries: “So all countries came to Joseph in Egypt to buy *grain*, because the famine was severe in all the lands” (Gen. 41:57). Jesus, who sits on His Father’s throne, offers the bread of life to an entire perishing world: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger” (John 6:35).

Israel was also afflicted by the famine: “When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons: Why do you look at one another? And he said: Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die” (Gen. 42:1-2). So they went to Egypt, where Joseph acted ungrudgingly towards them and saw to it that they had enough to eat: “Joseph gave a command to fill their sacks with grain” (Gen. 42:25). Jesus also accepts all people who come to Him. He satisfies their needs for salvation without reproaching them for the past sins that they have committed against Him. His promise is clear: “...the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37).

The eyes of Joseph’s brothers were blinded to his true identity: “Joseph recognised his brothers, but they did not recognise him” (Gen. 42:8). Although the people flocked to Jesus when He came the first time, they did not recognise Him as the Messiah and King of Israel. Jesus said: “You know neither Me nor My Father” (John 8:19).

Joseph arrested his brothers and insisted that the youngest one be brought to him. “Then they said to one another: We *are* truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying: Did I not speak to you, saying: Do not sin against the boy; and you would not listen? Therefore behold, his blood is now required of us” (Gen. 42:21, 22). The fathers of Israel’s tribes threw their brother into a deep well without thinking of the consequences.

Jesus received the same treatment. “Then the governor said: Why, what evil has He done? But they cried out all the more, saying: Let Him be crucified. ... And all those people answered and said: His blood *be* on us and on our children” (Matt. 27:23-25). They obviously did not know what they and their children would have to suffer because of this fatal decision.

Joseph saw how anxious his brothers were, and turned away so that they would not see his tears. He knew that they were still suffering because of what they had done to him so many years ago. Jesus experienced the same pain: “Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying: If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For *the* days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:41-44).

Joseph felt no anger when he saw his brothers again – only love; and his love is a symbol of God’s love for Israel. “*Is* Ephraim My dear son? *Is he* a pleasant child? For though I spoke against him, I earnestly remember him still; therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the LORD” (Jer. 31:20). Joseph’s brothers bowed before him, just as he had seen them bowing in his dreams so many years ago (see Gen. 37:6-8). In the New Testament we read that every knee will bow before Jesus Christ and that every tongue will confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11).

Joseph revealed his true identity when he and his brothers met for the second time: “Then Joseph said to his brothers: I *am* Joseph; does my father still live? But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers: Please come near to me. And they came near. And he said: I *am* Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45:3-5).

When Jesus comes the second time, the people of Israel will recognise Him as the true Messiah and King whom they had crucified: “And I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication. And they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him as one who is in bitterness for his first-born. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of *the city of* Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo [over beloved King Josiah, who was mortally wounded at thirty-nine, and for whom the people’s grief was extraordinarily deep. Like that will be the mourning of Israel, when they recognise as their once crucified Messiah Him Who has come to reign]” (Zech. 12:10-11; AB). “And *someone* will say to him: What are these wounds in your hands? Then he will answer: *Those* with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zech. 13:6). “They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say: This *is* My people; and each one will say: the LORD *is* my God” (Zech. 13:9).

We also read the following regarding to the second meeting between Joseph and his brothers: “And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth; and the men looked in astonishment at one another” (Gen. 43:33). Jesus, King of the Jews, can also tell the tribes apart. He will establish them according to Ezekiel 48 in the land when He comes again as King. Then, many Jews will again be greatly surprised.

Joseph’s whole family joined him in Egypt where he could look after them and see to all their needs. “Hasten and go up to my father, and say to him: Thus says your son Joseph: God has made me Lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children” (Gen. 45:9-10).

When the Messiah comes again, all the Jews still living in other countries will return to Israel to live with their King: “I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. ... Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country *for* which I lifted My hand in an oath to give to your fathers” (Ezek. 20:41-42). All prophecies on the occupation of the land only apply to the people of Israel, and cannot be transferred to other peoples or to the church.

What did Joseph’s brothers do after that? They told everyone: “Joseph *is* still alive, and he *is* governor over all the land of Egypt” (Gen. 45:26). When Jesus comes again, Israel will believe in Him and tell the world that the Messiah is alive and that He is King over all the earth. Their

witness will be dynamic and powerful.

The King who will come again

The disciples, who recognised Jesus as the Messiah at His first coming, didn't know about the dispensation of world evangelism that would begin after He had been rejected by Israel. They thought that He would re-establish the throne of David during that time and become the ruler of the restored kingdom of Israel:

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying: Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And He said to them: It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts. 1:6-8).

Jesus did not deny that He would re-establish the kingdom of Israel, but He said that the time for it had not yet come. Before that could happen, the world has to be evangelised. The idea of reaching out to the Gentiles was unacceptable to most Jews, but Paul defended his calling to evangelise the Gentile nations in terms of the world-wide mission implied by the messianic prophecy in Isaiah 49:

“When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: We had to speak the Word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the Word of the Lord” (Acts 13:44-48; NIV).

Jesus also used a parable to explain to His disciples that nothing would come of their hopes of Him immediately becoming King of Israel. For that purpose He would return later:

“Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them: Do business till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying: We will not have this *man* to reign over us. And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. ... But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay *them* before me” (Luke 19:11-15, 27).

This parable referred to Herod Archelaus, successor and son of Herod the Great in Judea. Archelaus reigned between 4 BC and AD 6. It was his father, Herod the Great, who had commanded the killing of all the baby boys after the birth of Jesus (Matt. 2:16). The magi from the east had told him about the birth of the King of the Jews, and he had felt threatened by the news (Matt. 2:1-2). Herod the Great died shortly after the massacre he had initiated, and his kingdom was divided between his three sons. Herod Archelaus became king of Judea, Herod Antipas the tetrarch of Galilee, and Herod Philip the tetrarch of the area east of the Jordan.

Emperor Augustus decided to uphold Herod's will in Rome, even though the Jews had sent a delegation to complain about Archelaus' atrocities. “But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying: We will not have this *man* to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). After his return, Archelaus had his adversaries executed.

Matthew 2:19-23 confirms the fact that Archelaus was a much feared ruler. It was because of him that Joseph and Mary settled in Galilee and not in Judea after their return from Egypt: “But when he (Joseph) heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets: He shall be called a Nazarene” (Matt. 2:22-23).

The deeper meaning of this parable does not refer to Archelaus as the ruler of the Jews in

Jerusalem, but to Jesus Himself. He is the man of noble descent who had been born in a lowly stable in Bethlehem: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2).

Jesus didn't reign as King when He came to earth the first time. That is why, in the parable, He describes Himself as the Man of noble birth who has to go to a far country to receive His kingdom. Archelaus travelled to Italy, but his status was diminished and he was made governor (etnarch) instead of king. He did not rule for long either.

The description of the ruler's journey to a far country alludes to Jesus' ascension. In heaven He now fulfils His High Priestly function as Mediator and Intercessor. When He comes back from the *far country*, He will rule as King: "After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things" (Acts 15:16-17).

The trumpets will sound when the Messiah comes in all His glory for the second time: "Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying: The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15).

During the time of the King's absence, which is after His ascension but before His return, His followers are to proclaim His message of salvation to the ends of the earth. They are to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and all over the world. He saw to it that they would be equipped to do it, for they would receive power when the Holy Spirit had come upon them (Acts 1:8).

The nobleman in the parable of Luke 19 called his servants before he left, gave each of them ten minas and said: "Do business till I come." The money is not a symbol of Jesus' salvation and grace, but of the enabling power that all believers receive from the Holy Spirit. The servants already belong to their Master. He has bought them and they are now in His service. Therefore, He also gives them the necessary equipment without which they would never be able to carry out the difficult assignment that He has given them.

"Do business till I come", is a command for the Master's servants to attend to the affairs of His kingdom until His return. No servant can attempt this task without being equipped and strengthened by the Spirit of God. As soon as the King returns, He will summon His servants to give account of their handling of the affairs of His kingdom during His absence. Those who have been faithful to Him will be rewarded: "And behold, I am coming quickly; and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev. 22:12).

When His servants have been rewarded, the King will turn to those who rejected Him: "But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay *them* before me" (Luke 19:27). From this sequence of events it is obvious that God's will begin in His house. First, the Christians will appear before the judgement seat of Christ where their works will be tested. Only after that, the sinners who rejected the Lord by refusing His authority over their lives will be judged according to their evil works: "For the time *has come* for judgement to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:17-18).

From this parable the sequence of events during the revelation of Jesus Christ is very clear. His first appointment is with His servants who have to give account of their lives and to receive awards of grace. After that, His wrath will be poured out upon His enemies as the inevitable consequence of their wicked works. Only then, the kingdom of the Messiah will be revealed.

The correct Messianic expectation

In order to be able to distinguish the false messiah from the true Messiah, the biblical exposition about the way in which both of them will be revealed, must be carefully heeded. During the first

half of the tribulation, Israel will be subjected to the tremendous seducing power of the false messiah. Jesus warned them against the false messiah, who will have such a great influence in Israel at this time:

“And Jesus answered and said to them: Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying: I am the Christ, and will deceive many. ... For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you: Look, He is in the desert! do not go out; *or*: Look, *He is* in the inner rooms! do not believe *it*. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. 24:4-5, 24-27).

The Messiah’s public return on the Mount of Olives at the end of the great tribulation will be a highly dramatic event. It will be like lightning that shines from east to west. The whole sky will be lit. Every eye will see Him, also those who crucified Him. Unprecedented earthquakes will occur, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two. Then, sudden darkness will befall His enemies who will be deployed around Jerusalem in anticipation of His coming. They will be thrown into disarray and start killing one another (Zech. 14:4-14).

In spite of the tremendous satanic powers inherent in the false messiah, he won’t be able to imitate the above event. His appearance will, nevertheless, be highly dramatic. He will even cause fire to fall from heaven (Rev 13:13). The main characteristic of his appearance will be an announcement of world peace. He will unite all religions into a false spiritual brotherhood under his personal leadership, and make the following statement: “I am the Messiah and Redeemer of humanity, and I will bring peace to the world!”

Israel and all the other nations are warned against false messiahs who will emerge from the deserts of the Middle East, do astounding miracles and proclaim themselves as the saviours of mankind. They will be deceivers who are not to be trusted. Even if such a person is allegedly in the inner room of a certain building, or for that matter on the television screens in private houses, people are warned not to expose themselves to his lies and false pretences.

That is the reason why Israel must not accept a messiah who comes in any other way than that described in the Bible, or anyone who offers another kind of peace. The false messiah will unite all the spiritual enemies of Israel – that is Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and others – into an alliance of false world religions and seduce Israel to join hands with them. Those who do not enter into this alliance and refuse to accept the false messiah as leader will be persecuted in the cruellest ways possible.

Jesus warned His followers against this self-acclaimed world messiah (John 5:43). Israel will soon face the hour of their final choice between the true Messiah and the false messiah. When making their choice, they will have to remember that the true Messiah never compromised with the ideologies of this apostate world. Neither will He try to effect peace and unity with the false religions of the world when He comes again. His peace offer is still open to all people, but everyone who accepts it must accept Him as the only Messiah and as the only way to the kingdom of heaven: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).

Israel’s rejection of the Triune God

To have the right biblical perspective on the great tragedy of Israel’s long Diaspora, it must be understood against the background of the continuing apostasy and profound spiritual deadness of this nation. With the exception of a few God-fearing men and women, Israel have for many years turned their backs upon God. They were hiding behind a high wall of sin, agnosticism, and a lifeless form of orthodox worship in which there is no room for the Messiah, Yeshua.

It is evident that Israel rejected the Triune God in three stages. First, they rejected the Father, then the Son, and finally the Holy Spirit. In the parable of the tenants (Matt. 21: 33-43) Jesus indicated to the Jewish leaders that they were the tenants who, up to that point, rejected the Husbandman (God) in two stages: firstly they rejected his servants, and then they also rejected

and killed His Son.

Rejection of the Father

Israel is the nation that was called and set apart by God. According to the parable they were to Him like a vineyard. He planted it, hedged it around and also built a tower. Israel was well cultivated and guarded, and had every opportunity to bear much fruit. In the persons of Moses and the prophets, God sent His servants to them to act as spiritual leaders so that His purpose with them could be achieved.

Under the provocation of evil kings and false prophets the nation rejected, ill-treated and killed God's servants (the true prophets). In the time of Jesus this spirit of rebellion against God had for centuries been strongly established. Jesus warned them that God would soon hold the wicked tenants accountable for having killed His servants (Matt. 23:34-36).

Before Messiah, the last prophet that God sent to gather a spiritual harvest among His people was John the Baptist. However, the leaders of the nation also rejected him and did not protest when Herod killed him. Jesus strongly denounced them for not having accepted and believed this great prophet (Matt. 21:25). But they also turned their backs on John the Baptist and approved of his wicked murder.

Rejection of the Son

Jesus is the Son who was, in the fullness of time, sent to Israel as Messiah to lead them as a flock into the kingdom of God. The leaders were even more hostile towards Him: "But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance" (Matt. 21:38).

That is exactly what happened to Jesus: "Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill *Him*" (Matt. 26:3-4). Through this treacherous act the leaders of Israel also rejected the second person in the Godhead, the Son. In this way they explicitly sided with their rebellious fathers who rejected the Father by killing His prophets (Matt. 23:37-39).

Because of the rejection and killing of His Son, God severely punished the leaders of Israel and their misguided followers. Jesus knew that they had sealed their own fate, but He nevertheless took great pity on Jerusalem and its spiritually blinded inhabitants who did not realise that God had visited them through the Messiah, and consequently rejected Him at their own peril (Luke 19:41-44).

Rejection of the Holy Spirit

In His patience and mercy, the Father was prepared to overlook the times of ignorance, and, after the crucifixion of His Son, to give Israel another opportunity to accept Jesus as their Messiah and thus enter into His kingdom. This opportunity was offered to them during the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the early Christian church in Jerusalem. The final act of rejecting the renewed offer was the stoning of Stephen, who was the first martyr of the Church of the Messiah among the Jewish people.

In a long speech, Stephen reminded the leaders of the sins and rebellion of their forefathers (Acts 6:8-7:60). He likened those who killed the prophets to the leaders of his own time who killed the Messiah, and also accused them of resisting and rejecting the Holy Spirit: "*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:51-52).

Stephen put the nation in the dock, accused them of repeated rebellion against God, found them guilty, and condemned them to God's rejection, punishment and extradition from their land. In principle he put the seal on the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the nation that started in 70 AD. The impending tragedy had, by Israel's own doing, become unavoidable.

The prophetic significance of the three critical murders committed by Israel is discussed by

Warren B. Wiersbe (1989:433). He also confirms that the death of Stephen brought judgement upon Israel. It was their third murder directly related to rejecting the Triune God. They *allowed* the murder of John the Baptist who was sent by the Father; they *asked* that Jesus as the Son of God be crucified; while they *killed* Stephen themselves, thereby rejecting the Holy Spirit who spoke to them through the apostles and the early church.

As a result of these events, the commission to be the representatives and witnesses of God in the world, was taken away from Israel and given to the rejected disciples. From their ministries and missionary endeavours the church of Christ among all nations emerged.

Despite all these grave errors and misjudgements, the spiritual restoration of Israel as a nation will definitely occur. In a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit they will realise and confess their sins of rejecting God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit: "I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced..." (Zech. 12:10). The entire remnant will then be reconciled with the Messiah (Zech. 13:9), after which they will inherit the promises of the millennial kingdom.

The Messiah as Bridegroom

A very important sign is given in Mathew 25:1-13 to end-time Israel that Jesus is the Messiah, and this sign will be fulfilled at the rapture when Christ comes as the heavenly Bridegroom to secretly receive His bride and take her away. The rapture will occur during a spiritually dark time of the world history when Messianic Jews as well as evangelical Christians among the Gentiles will be ridiculed and rejected because of their Bible-based belief in Jesus Christ. During that time, shortly before the tribulation period, the spirit of the Antichrist will actively deny the deity of Jesus, question His resurrection, ascension and second coming, denounce the Bible as the inspired Word of God, and also belittle promises such as the rapture.

During the first coming of Jesus there was great hostility towards Him and His small group of true disciples. He said that He would go to His Father but the disciples were afraid to remain behind alone. The night before His crucifixion the Lord Jesus made the following comforting promise about meeting them again and taking them to heaven: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

This promise was made after the analogy of traditional Jewish marriage customs in biblical times. The first important step in the Jewish marriage was betrothal, which comprised the conclusion of a marriage covenant. In the time of Jesus it was customary that such a covenant was concluded because of the initiative taken by the prospective bridegroom. For this purpose he travelled from his father's house to the home of his prospective bride. There he negotiated with her father on the bride-price (*mohar*) which he had to pay. After the bride-price was paid the marriage covenant was concluded. From that moment onwards the future bride was declared to be separated and dedicated only to her future bridegroom. As confirmation of the covenant they drank from a cup of new wine over which a blessing for the betrothal was declared.

The first statement that must be made from a study of this analogy, is that the sanctified church of Christ is His bride (Eph. 5:22-23). Just as the Jewish bridegroom took the initiative by leaving his father's house to travel to the house of his prospective bride, Jesus left His Father's house during His first coming to the world, which is the abode of His future bride. Through His death on the cross He paid the full price to redeem His bride so she can belong to Him. Paul said to the church: "You were bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:20), while Peter also confirmed that we were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

During the same night when Jesus made the promise to the early disciples that He was going to prepare a place for us, He instituted Holy Communion. He passed the cup of wine to His disciples with the words: "This cup is the new covenant in My blood" (1 Cor. 11:25). That was a confirmation of the eternal bond that we have with Him through His death on the cross.

As the Jewish bride was declared to be holy and solely dedicated to her bridegroom, we also have an obligation to appear before Christ holy and without blemish. Paul says that our hearts must be “blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 3:13), and further explains the need for sanctification: “...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it ... that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).

After concluding the marriage contract, the bridegroom returned to his father’s house where he stayed for about a year to prepare a place for his bride and himself. During that time he didn’t see his bride and she kept herself busy with making a wedding garment and collecting necessities for married life. As Christians, we are in the same situation. During the present time of seclusion while we wait on the Bridegroom to return we must work on our wedding garment (Rev. 19:8) and prepare ourselves for our future position in heaven. We also have the responsibility to extend the invitation to become members of the bridal congregation of Christ to all people. There is also a real danger that we may be tempted by Satan during this time and seduced to become unfaithful to Christ, thereby backsliding from our holy relationship with Him.

The carnal Corinthians did not heed the command to holiness (1 Cor. 3:1-17), and Paul warned them that because of the worldly spirit which they harboured, they would fall victim to satanic deception and become unfaithful to Christ: “I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I might present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds be may corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2-3). From the parable in Matthew 25 it is also evident that five of the virgins had too little oil in their lamps. That is an indication that they didn’t walk in the fullness of the Spirit and were therefore not worthy to appear before the Bridegroom and accompany Him to His Father’s house. There was a serious shortcoming in their lives.

At the end of the year of seclusion the Jewish bridegroom fetched his bride to come and stay with him. She knew more or less when the time was ripe, but not the exact day when he would come. He usually came at night because it was a secret meeting between him and her. She went out on the road to meet him, and on this occasion he didn’t show himself to the rest of her family members. His arrival was preceded by a shout, which was the good tidings that the bridegroom had come for his bride (Matt. 25:6). By then it was too late to make further preparations for the coming of the bridegroom.

In a similar way the heavenly Bridegroom will secretly come for His bride at the end of the church dispensation. He will meet her outside planet earth in the air, and on this occasion He will definitely not reveal Himself to the rest of the world. His coming will also be announced by a shout: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

When, the next morning, the family members of the bride discovered that she and her friends had disappeared, they knew that the bridegroom had taken them away during the night. As a separate group the family members then departed to the house of the bridegroom to attend the marriage feast.

The moment when Messianic Jews suddenly disappear at the rapture, together with all the other members of the bridal congregation of Jesus, many of the Jews who remain behind will know that the heavenly bridegroom has taken them away to be with Him. That will provide strong evidence to them that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the world, and because of that realisation, there will be a big spiritual awakening in Israel in which 144 000 Jews will be saved shortly after the rapture (Rev. 7:1-8). However, the majority of the nation will still be spiritually blinded and conclude a covenant with the false messiah to become members of his false bride of deceived worshippers (Rev. 17:3).

The same shocking discovery of the sudden disappearance of evangelical Christians will also be made elsewhere in the world, where it will be obvious that some people have vanished without a trace from their homes or places of employment (Matt. 24:40-42; Luke 17:34-36). There will be only one biblical explanation for this phenomenon, and that is that the heavenly Bridegroom has taken His bride away from planet earth!

When the Jewish bridegroom and his companions arrived at his father's house, his bride was still veiled and he took her to the bridal room ("huppah") where they spent seven days alone to consummate the marriage. In the meantime, the guests started arriving to celebrate the consummation of the marriage. After the seven days the bridegroom introduced his bride unveiled to the guests so that all of them could see her. That was cause for great jubilation and festivities.

In a similar way, the Messiah will take His bride to a secluded place where the rest of the world will not be able to see her. The seven days of the "huppah" prophetically refer to a year-week, which will be the seven years between the rapture and public revelation of Jesus Christ and His bride to the whole world. After the union between Christ and His bride, seven years will indeed elapse before the celebration of the marriage feast of the Lamb here on earth.

At His second coming, the Lord Jesus and His bride will be revealed to the whole world: "When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). After this revelation, the marriage feast of the Lamb will be celebrated on earth. The remnant of Israel, who will only be saved at the second coming of Christ, will be among the guests: "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:7-8). As the bride of the Lamb she will appear before Him in a spotless robe.

In a Psalm on the marriage of the Messiah, this illustrious occasion is described as follows:

"All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes *and* cassia, out of ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad. King's daughters *are* among Your honourable women; at Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir. ... The royal daughter *is* all glorious within *the palace*; her clothing *is* woven with gold. She shall be brought to the King in robes of many colours; the virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to You. With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought; they shall enter the King's palace. ... You shall make [your sons] princes in all the earth" (Ps. 45:8-16).

After the marriage feast of the Messiah, His reign of peace will be instituted in which His holy ones will rule with Him as kings. With a view to this wonderful prospect they will sing to the Lamb in heaven, before His second coming: "You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:9-10). If you have been bought with the precious blood of the Lamb and you are a sanctified, active member of His bridal congregation you will also share in the glory of His future revelation (Col. 3:4). We will judge the world with Him (1 Cor. 6:2) and also rule with Him as kings.

But as for now, in this dispensation, we are not judges or kings but soldiers for the cross, servants of God, and followers of the suffering Messiah who is still rejected by Israel and the world at large. We enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations, but in all these things we are more than conquerors in Him who loved us and laid down His life for us (Rom. 8:37). If we do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1), we will please God by living in conformity with the life of His Son, and will consequently be ready when the heavenly Bridegroom suddenly appears to take His bride away!

6. The False Messiah

Throughout the entire history of humanity, Satan has been engaged in a war against the kingdom of God on earth. During Old Testament times this battle was focused upon Israel as the chosen people of God, and in New Testament times his attacks and deception were extended to also include the Christian church. The persecution and spiritual blinding of dispersed (and partially restored) Israel still continues because Satan knows that, according to God's promises, Israel is destined to be restored and spiritually revived in their land to play a very important role in the future world after the second coming of the Messiah.

The final objective of Satan's war is the establishment of a satanic new world order which will be controlled by a false world messiah – the Antichrist. From God's perspective, this spiritual war will culminate in the final conquering and destruction of the satanic powers, and in the establishment of a Messianic reign of peace with Jerusalem as world capital. The powers of darkness will be utterly broken and all their supporters condemned to hell.

This very old conflict started in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were deceived by the devil to heed his advice and thereby rebel against God. During the thousands of years before the coming of Christ there were times when not only the pagan nations were blinded by Satan to worship idols, but large-scale apostasy also occurred in Israel as God's people. At times it appeared as if the entire Israel would be conquered and destroyed in the fierce battle which was fought for their souls. Even Elijah almost surrendered against the onslaughts and said: "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life. But what does the divine response say to him? I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (Rom. 11:3-4).

The Lord often intervened to ensure that a believing remnant would be preserved in Israel. In the New Testament church there is also a relatively small group of true disciples of Jesus who found the way through the narrow gate, and through the grace of the Lord they persevere on this way. But the battle continues since we are living in a world which lies in the sway of the Evil One (1 John 5:19). Satan is the god of this age who blinds the minds of people (2 Cor. 4:4). Jesus calls him the ruler of this world (John 14:30). Through the spirit of the false messiah, many people in Israel *and* in the church become untrue to the true Messiah (1 John 4:3). In the end-time the false messiah will be revealed as a person who will rule the world for seven years in association with the false prophet.

The false messiah in Daniel

Daniel 9 contains a description of 70 year-weeks in Israel's divine history, in which two messiah's play a prominent role – the true Messiah and the false messiah:

"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness. ... Know therefore and understand, *that* from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, *there shall be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks [a total of 69 weeks]. ... And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. ... Then he [the false messiah] shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate" (Dan. 9:24-27).

In this Scripture the divine history of Israel, from the end of the Babylonian exile to the beginning of the Messiah's reign, is placed within the framework of 70 year-weeks. In this context, a week (or year-week) denotes a period of seven years (Lev. 25:8). Seventy year-weeks refer to a period of 490 prophetic years of 360 days each. In verse 24 it is clearly stated that at the end of this period the measure of Israel's sin will be full. The iniquity of the nation will then come to an end and everlasting righteousness will subsequently prevail. After these 70 weeks Israel will be fully reconciled with God and serve Him wholeheartedly (Jer. 31:34; 32:38-40).

From the going forth of the command to restore Jerusalem until the cutting off of the Messiah, 69 year-weeks would have elapsed (Dan. 9:25-26). Since 1 Nisan 445 BC when King Artaxerxes granted permission to Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-8), 69 year-weeks (483 prophetic years) had indeed elapsed until the crucifixion of the Messiah on 14 Nisan, 32 AD. All that remains after this date in Israel's divine history as a people until the dawning of the Messiahs reign of peace, is seven years – the 70th year-week of Daniel which will be introduced by Israel's covenant with the false messiah.

With the birth of Jesus the Messiah did come to Israel, and there was certainly the possibility that the kingdom of the Messiah could have been established for them if they had accepted Him as Messiah-King. But that did not happen, and the Messiah was rejected and "cut off" (Dan. 9:26). "He came to His own (Israel), and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). Through this act of rejection, God's watch in the divine history of Israel stopped ticking. Consequently, there was a very long gap between the 69th and 70th year-weeks, in which mainly Gentile people were invited into the spiritual kingdom of God, which was nowhere on earth established as a physical reality (John 18:36).

After His resurrection Jesus commanded His disciples to proclaim the gospel to all people on earth (Mark 16:15). That refers to the times of the Gentiles, not the times of Israel, in which the Gentile nations would get the opportunity to be saved. Individual Jews can also be saved during this time, but Israel as a nation would remain in a rejected and dispersed state among the Gentiles. That would continue to be the case until the end of the church dispensation, when Jerusalem and Israel will be restored and the last generation progresses until the 70th week of Daniel takes effect: "Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24; cf. Rom. 11:25).

We are now living in the time of the progressive restoration of Israel and Jerusalem; consequently, the 70th year-week of this nation's divine history can start any time. According to Daniel 9:27, this year-week will commence when the prince of a future kingdom (the Antichrist or false messiah), will conclude a covenant with Israel and many other nations. His entry into the world scene will probably coincide with a big war (the Russo-Arab invasion of Israel – Ezek. 38 & 39), and he will claim credit for the victory. At a critical moment he will come to Israel's rescue as a self-imposed prince of peace, and he will also be praised by the international community for averting a possible third world war as well as a threatening global economic collapse.

These highly dramatic events will have a decisive influence on the Jewish people, their government and their religious leaders. To further increase the excitement, this 'saviour' will claim the throne of David by means of his deceptive 'proof' that he is a descendant of David. Israel will enter into a covenant with him in which they will accept him as the promised Messiah. He will also grant them the right to rebuild the temple and to reintroduce the sacrificial service, as that would ensure their continued rejection of Jesus as the Lamb of God.

During the festivities which will mark the inauguration of the false messiah, a spiritual revival will occur in which 144 000 Jews will dissociate themselves from their government's treaty with Satan's "angel of light" and instead accept Jesus Christ (Yeshua Ha Mashiach) as the true Messiah. They will openly take a stand against the false messiah, and that will give rise to them being severely persecuted. The false peace wrought by the Antichrist will only last for 3½ years. In the middle of the year-week of seven years he will enter the Holy of holies in the rebuilt temple and declare himself to be God (2 Thess. 2:4; cf. Dan. 11:36). An image of him will be placed in the temple, and all people forced to worship him and his image (Rev. 13:14-15). At that stage he will abolish Israel's national religion and its sacrificial service: "...in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering" (Dan. 9:27).

Because of the desecration of the temple through forced idolatry, Israel will revoke their covenant with him and reject him as their messiah. In reaction to this dramatic move, the Antichrist will be infuriated and order the genocide of all Jews. On that day Jews will have to flee for their lives without losing a moment to get away from the false messiah and his forces (Matt. 24:15-22). Daniel refers to this terrible time of trouble which will befall Israel. People will be panic-stricken, not knowing what to do. Some of the Jews will recognise the false messiah in the

hope of securing peace, safety, and economic advantages from him. Others will reject him and face harsh persecution:

“And forces shall be mustered by him [the false messiah], and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily *sacrifices*, and place *there* the abomination of desolation [an image of the false messiah]. Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out *great exploits*. And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet *for many* days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering. Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help; but many shall join with them by intrigue [spies of the false messiah]. And *some* of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify *them*, and make *them* white, *until* the time of the end; because *it is* still for the appointed time” (Dan. 11:31-35).

The false messiah in Revelation

We read the following on the false messiah and his co-ruler in Revelation 13:

The false messiah: “Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet of* a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And *I* saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him? And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation” (Rev. 13:1-7).

The false prophet: “Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number *is* 666” (Rev. 13:11-18).

Daniel’s description of five world empires

The symbolism in Revelation 13 is similar to that found in Daniel 7, in which the Babylonian Empire is depicted as a lion, the Medo-Persian Empire as a bear, the Greek Empire as a leopard, and the Roman Empire as a vicious animal with ten horns on its head. That means that characteristics of all four of these empires will be revived in the end-time empire of the false messiah. His fifth world empire will therefore not only constitute a revived Roman Empire, but also a revival of all the evil characteristics of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Greek Empires. When the beast’s empire is fully-fledged it will reveal the following characteristics:

- The Antichrist will follow the tradition of the Babylonians who deified their kings. He will declare himself above all that is called god and even challenge the authority of the God of heaven. He will cause an image of himself to be erected in the temple at Jerusalem and force all the citizens of his global empire to worship the image. Those who refuse to do so will be cast into the fiery oven of persecution. He will make relentless attacks on the Jewish state and try to annihilate all its citizens.

- As in the Medo-Persian Empire, he will trample upon all the nations, make an end to their independence and incorporate them into his own empire. He will establish a merciless dictatorship and rule over his global kingdom with the irrevocable and unchangeable laws of the Medes and the Persians. He will also order the eradication of the Jewish nation.
- The Greek Empire was depicted by Daniel as a leopard with four wings. It operated highly mobile armies characterised by skilful military manoeuvres that enabled them to carry out their attacks with speed and efficiency. The Antichrist will revive these tactics in his well-disciplined armies. He will be able to deploy airborne striking forces practically overnight in any part of the world. An anti-Jewish policy also reigned supreme in the Syrian province of this empire. The Greek dictator, Antiochus Epiphanes, was a fanatical hater of the Jews and as such also a type of the Antichrist.
- The fourth beast with its ten horns and teeth of iron had a terrible appearance. This is symbolic of the brutal, ruthless and intransigent attitudes by which the Roman Empire made its authority and sovereignty felt. During the invasion of Israel and the siege of Jerusalem, hundreds of thousands of Jews were gruesomely murdered, crucified upon trees and sold as slaves, while many of the survivors were taken as captives of war to other parts of the empire. An even more devastating war of annihilation will be waged against Israel by the Antichrist during the great tribulation.

The description in Daniel 7 ties up with Daniel 2:31-45 in which the same world empires are depicted as a great image which was revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. The head of the image was of gold (Babylonian Empire), its chest and arms of silver (Medo-Persian Empire), its belly and thighs of bronze (Greek Empire), its legs of iron (Roman Empire), and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay (the end-time, restored Roman Empire of the Antichrist).

The Roman Empire was never conquered and subjected by another world empire, and that explains the fact why only four world empires are mentioned since the time of Nebuchadnezzar, and that these four will be revived as part of the end-time empire of the Antichrist. Although the Roman Empire ceased to exist as a political entity in the 5th century AD, the influence of Europe continued throughout the centuries, leading to the colonisation of large parts of the world by European nations. In the end-time, the ancient Roman Empire with its strong European base will be revived and again become the major power block in the world. This is already happening.

It is also significant that the Roman Empire gained control over the territories of the preceding three empires, i.e. the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, and Greek Empires, and for that reason the revival of the Roman Empire will also constitute a revival of these other world empires. All indications are that the Antichrist's future world government will be controlled from the Middle East, from a region that formed part of all four of the previous world empires.

In view of these facts it is obvious why the Antichrist is depicted as a composite beast with symbols derived from all four world empires, i.e. a mouth of a lion, the feet of a bear, the body of a leopard, and a head of a ferocious animal with ten horns on its head (Rev. 13:1-2). He will, therefore, not only revive the Roman Empire but at the same time also the Babylonian, Medo-Persian and Greek Empires. All four of them were strongly focused upon the Middle East and, among others, tried to annihilate Israel. When the Antichrist and his empire will be destroyed, all his predecessors who were conquered and assimilated by the Roman Empire, will also be finally destroyed. This fact is in agreement with Daniel 2:44-45, where the great image which represents all four of these empires, will be destroyed at the same moment when it is struck by the Rock (Jesus Christ), who will establish His own kingdom in the place of these kingdoms.

Daniel 7:11 refers to the destruction of the Antichrist during the second coming of Christ. In this verse the prophet describes the fourth beast with the ten horns on its head, and another little horn (the Antichrist) that arose among them (Dan. 7:7-8, 20-21). The ten horns refer to the Roman Empire which will be restored in the end-time during the rise of the Antichrist (the little horn), after which this empire will be destroyed by Christ, bringing an end to the times of the Gentiles. After that, Christ's kingdom, in which Israel will play a major part, will be revealed and established on earth.

Daniel 7:12 contains an interesting reference to the first three beasts of Daniel 7 – the lion (Babylonia), the bear (Medo-Persia), and the leopard (Greece). The NKJV says that “their lives will be prolonged for a season and a time”, but the NIV rendering comes closer to the basic meaning: “The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.” That seems to suggest that the first three had physically lost their authority, but that their spirit and nature (their anti-God and anti-Israel ideology) lived on in their conquerors. Their final destruction will be concurrent with the destruction of their ultimate representative, the Antichrist, at the end of the tribulation period.

At the time when the European Union represents most of the Mediterranean countries, as well as those in the Middle East and North Africa, the Antichrist will arise from within the boundaries of the ancient Roman Empire and consolidate three of the Empire’s provinces (or countries) under his personal control (Dan. 7:8). Those will probably be Arab countries to the north and northeast of Israel, among which will be Syria and Iraq. This development is evidenced by the fact that, from Israel’s point of view, the Antichrist will also be known as the “Assyrian” and “king of the north” (Isa. 10:12-14; Dan. 11:31-45). We can anticipate the future extension of the European Union into the Middle East in order to strengthen its economic interests by the inclusion of oil-producing states, and also by trying to bring peace to one of the politically most volatile regions on earth.

Turkey has already applied for EU membership, while America’s gradual withdrawal from the Middle East also forces other countries in this region to look to Europe for military protection and development aid. The military involvement of EU countries in the liberation of Libya has paved the way for strong economic and diplomatic ties between Arab countries and Europe in the new geo-political dispensation which is presently emerging.

Various factors are prompting the revival of the ancient world empires. It is evident that elements from all four of the previous world empires are awakening from the dust of an almost forgotten past. It is also evident that a serious power vacuum is prevalent in this region, as well as ominous economic problems which are largely the consequence of poor government.

Isaiah says: “Therefore it shall come to pass, when the LORD has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *that He will say*, I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks. For he says: By the strength of my hand I have done *it*, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent; also I have removed the boundaries of the people, and have robbed their treasuries; so I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant *man*. My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people, and as one gathers eggs *that are* left, I have gathered all the earth; and there was no one who moved *his* wing, nor opened *his* mouth with even a peep” (Isa. 10:12-14).

The false messiah will have no trouble in removing the boundaries between nations to implement his policy of globalisation. He will also succeed in obtaining control over the world economy, thereby assuming great authority. To this end he will have the full collaboration of the deceived political leaders of his time: “The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast” (Rev. 17:12-13).

Israel and the nations will be heavily persecuted – like never before in world history. They will only be saved from the end-time Assyrian’s global force and reign of terror by the Lord’s intervention (Isa. 10:23-25; Mic. 5:4-6).

Sole ruler

During the last half of the tribulation, referred to as “the great tribulation”, the Antichrist will be a sole ruler and military dictator on earth, who will use maximum power to enforce his authority. No earthly power will be able to challenge him, as to him will be “given authority over every tribe, tongue and nation” (Rev. 13:7). There will not be a single nation with a sovereign government, and all of them will be compelled to heed his military decrees. Political disloyalty will not be tolerated, and rulers who implement different policies will be summarily removed (Isa. 10:13).

The Antichrist will be a modern Nebuchadnezzar who will rule the planetary citizens of his global empire with an iron fist. The characteristics of other well-known military dictators of historical times, e.g. Nimrod, Alexander the Great, Nero, Hitler, and Stalin, will, in a surpassing way, be reflected by his actions.

After the time of false peace has expired, 3½ years of great tribulation will follow which will, spiritually speaking, be the darkest time in the entire world history. The satanic triumvirate of the dragon, the Antichrist and the false prophet will then make their final move in a bid to end the power of the Triune God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) on earth and to kill their remaining followers. The false messiah will claim the position of God by arrogantly declaring himself in the temple in Jerusalem to be God: "...the man of sin [will be] revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess. 2:3-4).

Daniel also warned against this end-time God-man who will, through the most intense deception, exalt himself to becoming a king and God to the world community to determine their destiny: "Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods. ... He shall regard neither the God of his fathers ... [but] he shall honour a god of fortresses" (Dan. 11:36-38).

The false messiah will pretend to be God and demand the loyalty of all people. But it will be obvious that he is acting deceitful as he will still recognise an authority above himself, i.e. the god of fortresses, who is Satan. It is Satan who instigates evil dictators to conquer fortresses and to achieve their political and religious objectives through the use of force and intimidation.

Revelation 13:3-4, 8 clearly confirm this religious takeover by the false messiah, and also the fact that all deceived people on earth will follow and worship him. Through the mediation of the false prophet, who will also work great signs and wonders to deceive people, the beast will place an image of himself in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, and force all people to forsake their own beliefs and to worship him only as God (Rev. 13:14-15).

Such an absolute form of religious slavery requires that the alliance of false world religions which functioned during the first half of the tribulation under the universal messiahship of the Antichrist, be dissolved and declared null and void. Only then can all people be forced to worship the beast as God. According to Revelation 17:16, there will be a violent end to organised world religions when they become obsolete.

Apart from the political and religious power of the Antichrist, the world's economic power will also be used by him to control and enslave humanity in all spheres of life. Through the introduction of a computerised, cashless economy, the buying and selling transactions of all economic active people on earth will be controlled (Rev. 13:16-18).

It is evident from Revelation 13 that numbers or codes will be allocated to people, without which they will not be able to buy or sell. No cash will be in circulation. The system of electronic funds transfer (EFT) will only be accessible to people who have "the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (Rev. 13:17). That means that a formal oath of allegiance will have to be taken towards the Antichrist as the god and king of this world, before a personal identity number (PIN) will be allocated to applicants. However, by doing so they will be selling their souls to Satan, as they would recognise the political, religious and economic status of the Antichrist by taking the oath. They will then be consciously associated with the beast.

The eternal night of God's judgement will befall those who take the oath of allegiance to the false messiah by accepting and worshipping him: "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. 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 ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name" (Rev. 14:9-11).

The military campaigns of the Antichrist will not only be aimed at earthly targets, since the biggest military force the world has ever seen will be deployed in Israel against a heavenly army: “And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse [Christ] and against His army” (Rev. 19:19). This mobilisation of forces will lead to the dreaded battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:14, 16), in which the true Christ and the false christ will meet face to face: “Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Rev. 19:20).

The faithful remnant in Israel who respect God’s Word and who will consequently have the ability to discern, will resist and reject the false messiah when he declares himself to be God. They will be severely persecuted during the final 42 months of great tribulation, and will have to flee to the wilderness in an effort to survive. However, at the coming of the true Messiah they will witness the condemnation of the false messiah and the false prophet, be fully reconciled with the true Messiah and subsequently share in all the blessings of His millennial reign.

7. The Time of Jacob's Trouble

According to biblical prophecies there is definitely a time of great distress and tribulation coming for Israel and the entire apostate world, from which only a small remnant will be saved. Jeremiah explicitly mentions the coming day of the Lord: "Alas! For that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it; and it *is* the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it" (Jer. 30:7). The "trouble" not only refers to the wrath of God which will be poured out upon rebellious humanity, but also to the deception and fury of the false messiah which will be unleashed upon all the subjects of his global empire. In reaction to the severe trouble, a minority of Israel and the nations will turn to the true Messiah and be saved (Rev. 12:11), while the majority will follow and worship the false messiah. Many people will die during the judgements of God while they are in "the valley of decision" (Joel 3:14).

The coming time of trouble coincides with the 70th year-week of Daniel, when the false messiah will conclude a covenant of seven years with Israel and many other nations (Dan. 9:27). This seven-year period is clearly divided into two halves of 3½ years each or, even more specifically, as 42 months (Rev. 11:2; 13:5) or 1 260 days each (Rev. 11:3; 12:6). In this way the length of the 70th year-week is literally and unambiguously confirmed; 42 months of 30 days each being exactly 1 260 days, or 3½ prophetic years of 360 days each. These are clearly not symbolic expressions.

During the first 3½ years Israel and the Gentiles will regard the false messiah as the true Messiah and share in the deceptive benefits of his false world peace and unity. During this time Israel will rebuild the temple in Jerusalem – oblivious of the evil plans which the false messiah will have in mind for the project. This will not so much be a time of physical tribulation, but of spiritual deception as never before. The second 3½ years will comprise a great tribulation which will be unequalled in world history (Matt. 24:21).

Great deception

During the first 3½ years of the tribulation period, Israel and the Gentiles will be the victims of intense deception, and most of them will accept the false messiah as "the Messiah" and special representative of God. As universal messiah he will be the cohesive factor among all the religions of the world. To the nominal Christians of that time he will be the Christ, to Muslims the Imam Mahdi (who will allegedly act in unison with Jesus, son of Mary, who is the Muslim Jesus), to Hindus he will appear as a new incarnation of Krishna, to Buddhists he will be introduced as the Maitreya Buddha, and to Jews he will be their promised Messiah. All faiths will be closely related religions that accept one another by virtue of the deceptive premise that all of them worship the same God and should therefore all be followers of the same Messiah.

During this time Israel will rebuild their temple as part of their covenant with the false messiah. By this act they will indicate their continued rejection of Jesus as Messiah and Saviour, and it will be an overt expression of their support for the "alternative messiah".

The 144 000 sealed ones

The conversion of 144 000 Jews and their dedication to the service of the Lord will be a very important event at the beginning of the tribulation period, just after the revelation of the Antichrist. The 144 000 will be the first group which will represent the ongoing spiritual restoration of Israel as a people: "And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed" (Rev. 7:4).

There is nothing vague about this statement and it is completely unjustifiable to identify the 144 000 Jewish evangelists as the church, or as any other group of people outside Israel. In this chapter, no use is made of symbolic language. The twelve tribes of Israel constitute a well-known historical nation; consequently, the term *Israel* is not a symbol or allegorical description of the church or any non-Jewish group.

Likewise, the number 144 000 is not symbolic, but literal. Its components are not 3 X 4 X 12 X 1 000 as is sometimes alleged (3 referring to the Triune God, 4 referring to the four corners of the earth, 12 referring to the 12 apostles, and 1000 referring symbolically to any large group of

people), but its components are 12 000 X 12: it is 12 000 people from each of the 12 tribes of the children of Israel. According to Ezekiel 48, the Promised Land – which is much bigger than the present Israel – will be subdivided and allocated to the twelve tribes during the millennial reign of the Messiah.

From a dispensational point of view it is quite obvious why the 144 000 Jews will be saved and dedicated to the service of the Lord. After the Lord Jesus removes His church, which He commissioned to be the light of the world during the present dispensation, He will utilise the spiritual potential of Israel to make His light shine in the dark night of the tribulation period. When Elijah was caught up to heaven, his mantle and prophetic ministry fell upon Elisha. Likewise, after the rapture of the church, the Lord will find a substitute in the Messianic Jews to be His witnesses during the reign of the Antichrist.

Revelation 7:1-8 ties up with an extensive series of prophecies in the Bible in which the guarantee is given that the Lord will not only restore Israel physically to their land, but that they will in the latter days also experience a spiritual revival: “Now therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: ... Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely. They shall be My people, and I will be their God; then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me” (Jer. 32:36-40).

Today there are many thousands of Jews who have been exposed to the New Testament facts about the Messiahship of Jesus, but most of them are deferring a final decision because of uncertainty, or because of the threat of persecution. A decision will only be taken after the rapture has occurred and all the Messianic Jews (those who have previously accepted Jesus as their Messiah) have been taken away at the rapture and as part of the church of Christ. A thorough re-evaluation of the facts related to the Messiah will then have to be made by those who have been left behind. According to Zechariah 12:10, the Holy Spirit will work powerfully among them and many will accept Yeshua Ha Mashiach (Jesus the Messiah).

From this revival the Lord will have 144 000 of his servants sealed early in the tribulation and appoint them to a special evangelistic ministry (Matt. 24:14). As happened with Daniel's three friends, they will be kept safely in the fire of tribulation so that they can continue to fulfil their ministry in a particularly trying time.

The salvation of the 144 000 will occur after the church dispensation, as their religious position is clearly related to their national identity – also with regard to the tribe to which they belong. That is distinctly different to the situation that prevailed during their dispersion among the nations in the church age when national identity was not relevant to the salvation of people. Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ Jesus no distinction is made between Jew and Greek. However, after the church age, God will again deal with Israel as a nation that was called by Him. The physically and politically restored Israel must also be spiritually restored.

The 12 tribes of Israel mentioned in Revelation 7 have a special composition and are also listed in an uncommon order. They are Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Of the two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, who were adopted by Jacob as his own according to Genesis 48:5, only Manasseh is mentioned. Joseph is mentioned in the place of Ephraim. Usually, Joseph does not feature among the 12 tribes when both his sons are mentioned, e.g. in Ezekiel 48. Levi is also not usually mentioned as the Levites do not inherit tribal land like the other tribes. As priests, God is their inheritance and they must settle on the Holy Land. However, in Revelation Levi is taken up in the list in the place of the tribe of Dan.

Why has Dan been omitted from the list in Revelation, compared to the one in Ezekiel 48? The reason is that Dan is probably the tribe from which the Antichrist will emerge. In Genesis 49:17, Jacob said about this tribe: “Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider shall fall backward.” In the spiritually restored Israel there is no

place for the rebellion that is associated with Dan.

The tribal names in Revelation, as well as the order in which they appear, have a special significance. All the names have meanings and when the meanings are put together in the order in which the tribes are listed in Revelation 7, a significant statement is made. The introductory words are in Revelation 7:4: "144 000 of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed." In conjunction with the subsequent tribal names and their meanings, the sentence may be read as follows: "144 000 sealed Israelites who **praise and honour God** (*Judah*); because they **see the Son** (*Reuben*) **they overcame** (*Gad*) and are **happy** (*Asher*); their **struggle** (*Naphtali*) He made them **to forget** (*Manasseh*) by **hearing** them (*Simeon*); to **him who adheres to God** (*Levi*) **there is reward** (*Issachar*) and **residence** (*Zebulun*); **may the Lord add** to them (*Joseph*) through **the Son of His right hand** (*Benjamin*).

The persecution of saved Jews

For obvious reasons, there will be tremendous polarisation and conflict between the followers of the true Messiah and those of the false messiah. The supporters of the false messiah will be in the vast majority and stand firmly behind their long-expected messiah. Even when he reaches out to other nations and religions to also offer himself to them as messiah, thereby drawing Israel into an alliance of world religions, his followers will remain blind to his deception. The Antichrist will oppose the true Messianic revival with all his might, as they will brand him as a false messiah and warn their fellow Jews, as well as other people, against him. They will be regarded as a great threat to his position in Israel and also to his world empire, which he will consolidate with great success.

A most violent persecution of Messianic Jews will be instituted. Like Nebuchadnezzar of old, the Antichrist will announce extreme punishments for those who refuse to join his state religion and honour and worship him as Messiah. Like Daniel's three friends, the 144 000 will resist and withstand all pressure which is applied against them by absolutely refusing to bow down before the Antichrist. Daniel's friends reacted as follows to the orders of the mighty king of their time:

"Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king: O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up" (Dan. 3:16-18).

The Lord will strengthen and save His faithful witnesses in the hour of great peril, as He did with Daniel's friends and also with Daniel himself in the lions' den, after he had continued to worship the true God of heaven three times a day despite royal decrees to the contrary. The persecution will nevertheless continue and its level of violence will escalate.

In Revelation 14:1-5 the 144 000 are seen surrounding the Lamb on Mount Zion. After their earthly ministry they will be united with Him and occupy a special place in His kingdom. It is said of them that they never defiled themselves with women as they walked in purity before the Lamb from the beginning. What does that mean? In 2 Corinthians 11:2 the church of Christ is depicted as a chaste virgin. In Revelation 17:4-5 the false, unfaithful world church is referred to as "Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots". The apostate church will amalgamate with many false religions whose members are portrayed as 'harlots', and the false church as the mother of them all.

The 144 000 are a group that never have any involvement with these religious harlots, or unclean women. They were not defiled by the false religions; neither do they originate from the degenerate and false Christian church of the end-time. Consequently, they do not entertain any distorted theological views. They are therefore a new undefiled 'virgin' group that is redeemed from Israel by the Lord Jesus. They will faithfully follow Him and refuse any association with the false world religions. As a result of their uncompromising attitude they will also be discredited and persecuted by the alliance of world religions that gave its full support to the Antichrist. John said of this treacherous and defiled bride of the Antichrist: "And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus" (Rev. 17:6).

The two witnesses

Following the rapture, the world will be in utter spiritual darkness and, in addition to the 144 000 Jews who will be assigned to the evangelistic ministry, the Lord will raise up two special witnesses who will wield great power. Revelation 11 makes mention of these two outstanding witnesses who will be mightily used of God to proclaim the truth and strongly rebuke His enemies:

“And I will give *power* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, Come up here. And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. In the same hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand people were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven” (Rev. 11:3-13).

Various commentators are of the opinion that the two witnesses will be Elijah and Moses in mortal, physical bodies, who will return to the land and people of Israel. However, it is not a foregone conclusion that Elijah and Moses will personally be sent back to earth to be slain by the Antichrist and his evil forces, which implicates Moses dying for a second time. It is more likely that two outstandingly gifted and godly Messianic Jews, perhaps even drawn from the ranks of the 144 000 evangelists converted to faith in Yeshua Ha Mashiach, will be raised up ‘in the spirit and power’ of Elijah and Moses.

It would, therefore, be advantageous to investigate aspects of the roles, exploits and ministries of these two great prophets of Israel, particularly with a view to their end-time recurrence. They were singled out for the great honour of appearing on the Mount of Transfiguration with the Redeemer-Messiah Himself (Matt. 17:1-3), which was a precursor to the future revelation of the Lord Jesus in His kingdom during His second coming. The parallels between the ministries of Moses and Elijah and those of the two witnesses are quite striking.

Regarding Elijah’s role as prophet, it is recorded in the last two verses of the Old Testament that the Lord of Hosts declared: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5-6).

This prophecy was partly fulfilled at Christ’s first coming. When the disciples mentioned that “the scribes say that Elijah must come first,” Jesus replied: “Elijah has come already.” They then understood that He had referred to John the Baptist (Matt. 17:10-13), whom the angel Gabriel prophesied would “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God” and “go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:13-17). When John was asked the question as to whether he was the prophet Elijah, he said: “I am not” (John 1:21). He did, however, fulfil a preparatory role during the Messiah’s first coming, just as another prophet will prepare the way for the Messiah’s second coming.

The prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6 will finally be fulfilled shortly before Christ’s second coming when,

just as John the Baptist acted in the spirit and power of Elijah at Christ's first coming, the two witnesses will act in the same spirit and power before His second coming. They will prepare His way by turning many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and the hearts of the fathers to the children, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

For 3½ years, that is during the first half of Daniel's 70th week and before the dark days of the great tribulation in the second half of the week, these two witnesses will minister so powerfully to the people of Israel that a remnant of the nation will return to the God of their fathers. In defiance of the Antichrist's ideology of abolishing national identity to achieve world unity, the two witnesses will succeed in restoring the remnant's national identity and calling as a people uniquely chosen of God.

There will be a serious generation gap, most probably due to the younger generation preferring to abandon their distinctive national identity in favour of the Antichrist's globalism and the worshipping of the cosmic Messiah of all faiths, while the older generation will cling to orthodox traditions and a lifeless form of godliness due to the continued rejection of the true Messiah. The inspired ministry of the two witnesses will succeed in bridging this gap and unifying the generations in a new-found faith in the coming Yeshua Ha Mashiach.

Elijah is known as the prophet who was used powerfully by God to perform great miracles in Israel. When he ascended to heaven in a whirlwind, Elisha, his successor, said of him: "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" (2 Kings 2:12). To Israel, he was worth more than its defence force and chariots because the power of the Lord worked so strongly through him. The two witnesses will come in that same power and the fear of the Lord will come upon many people. Elijah raised the widow's child from the dead and confronted the prophets of the false religion of Baal, successfully calling down fire from heaven to defeat them. He also "prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months" (Jas. 5:17). In the spirit and power of Elijah, similarly the two witnesses will miraculously use fire to defeat the false prophets of the Antichrist's world religion and to shut up heaven so that no rain falls during the days of their prophecy, i.e. 3½ years.

The two witnesses will also come in the spirit and power of Moses. He was the great leader whom God raised up to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness and to the borders of the Promised Land. He also fulfilled the role of mediator through whom God gave His Law to Israel, and who also interceded on their behalf before God, when they fell into sin. Like Elijah, Moses was used mightily by God to perform signs, wonders and miraculous acts of power:

"Since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34:10-12).

Moses directly confronted the wicked Pharaoh concerning his oppression of the children of Israel and announced severe plagues upon the land and people of Egypt. Likewise, the two witnesses will oppose the Antichrist and his wicked global empire that will oppress the people of Israel, and strike the earth with awful plagues. They will use their miraculous power to kill any enemies who seek to harm them.

Moses was an outstanding type of Christ whom he foreshadowed and clearly prophesied of: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear" (Deut. 18:15). By means of this prophecy Moses was clearly preparing Israel for both the first and second coming of their Messiah. Tragically, the nation rejected Him at His first coming.

The two witnesses will urgently and powerfully prepare the remnant of Israel for the imminent second coming of their true Messiah and strongly urge them to abrogate and renounce their covenant with the false messiah. The witnesses will admonish and teach the remnant of Israel that they, along with the witnesses themselves, will have to suffer reproach and persecution for their loyalty to the true Messiah, Jesus, and His coming kingdom in which Israel will have a key

role to play.

Both Elijah and Moses faced great opposition and suffered affliction because of their faithful witness and dedication to God and His people. Of Moses it is said: "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasure of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ [the Messiah] greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:24-27).

By taking a firm stand against the kingdom of darkness which will be ruled by the Satanic triumvirate, the witnesses and the remnant of Israel will pay a heavy price of persecution for resisting the false messiah. But they will be richly rewarded if they willingly suffer hardships for the sake of the true Messiah.

The powerful witness and exploits of the two witnesses will have a world-wide impact during the first half of the tribulation period. It is no wonder that the Antichrist and his followers will be furious because of their activities. When the Antichrist usurps all power and authority in the middle of the tribulation period, he will turn his fury towards the two witnesses, fight against them and kill them. But the Lord will raise them from the dead after three and a half literal days and summon them into heaven, to where they will ascend in full view of their enemies, their mission having been successfully accomplished.

Subsequently, the dark and stormy period of the Antichrist's reign of terror will engulf the entire world and all its inhabitants for 42 months of the most appalling and gruesome tribulation in the history of mankind. Not many will survive the wars, pestilences, disasters and judgements that will befall the wicked during the awful day of the Lord.

The middle of the week

In the middle of the tribulation period Satan will make another effort to wipe Israel from the face of the earth. He wants to prevent the survival of a remnant of the nation who will be able to meet the Messiah on the Mount of Olives to be spiritually restored and established in His millennial kingdom as the head of the nations. If that takes place, Satan knows very well that it will be at the expense of his own world empire under the leadership of the Antichrist.

The outcome of a war in heaven between the kingdoms of God and Satan will be an important reason for the intensified struggle on earth, as described in Revelation 12:

"And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven: Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. ... Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Rev. 12:7-12).

Before his expulsion, Satan's attention is divided: Firstly, he accuses believers before the throne of God, day and night, and claims control over their lives when they are sinning and rebelling against God. Secondly, he is engaged in deceiving the nations and destroying the physical creation of God. In the middle of the tribulation he and his fallen angels will be cast down from heavenly places and barred from further access to the throne of God. After this further humiliation they will focus all their attention to events on earth. From that moment on, Satan will vengefully do everything within his power to destroy God's people and His creation by attempting to make the world uninhabitable, by committing genocide against the Jews, and by ordering the summary execution of all who confess allegiance to the Lord.

That will also be the time when the Antichrist will declare himself to be God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, demand the compulsory worship of his image, rule by way of military decree, and

will not hesitate to use maximum power to subdue and eliminate his adversaries.

The flight to the wilderness

During this time, Satan will devise an evil plot to kill all the Jews who refuse to worship the Antichrist as God, and who have withdrawn from his satanic world order:

“Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time [3½ years], from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth” (Rev. 12:13-16).

This flight of Israel to a place in the wilderness, possibly Petra in the Negev desert, south of the Dead Sea in Jordan, will take place very hurriedly. It will occur shortly after the Antichrist has declared himself to be God in the temple, resulting in his rejection by many in Israel. They will then withdraw from his satanic new world order in which they were involved for the first 3½ years. When his image is placed in the temple and all people are forced to worship it, the Israeli people who refuse to do this, will have to flee in great haste, as the Antichrist will pursue and attempt to kill them (Matt. 24:15-22).

The prophecy in Matthew 24:15-22 clearly applies to Israel and is aimed at protecting a remnant of this nation from annihilation by Satan and the Antichrist during the dark days of the great tribulation – that is the last 3½ years of the tribulation period. The Sabbath laws are enforced only in Israel, which state that only a short journey of less than two kilometres may be undertaken on the Sabbath day. So, if their flight had to be on a Sabbath, the forces of the Antichrist would catch up with and kill them along the way. The Jews should pray that their journey not be impeded by winter cold, expectant mothers or those with small babies as that would also hinder their escape.

The rift between the Antichrist and Israel will occur so suddenly, and his measures to stop them from getting away will be so rapidly instituted (much like those of Pharaoh before the Exodus), that there will scarcely be time for them to pack their clothes or gather provisions for the journey. They will have to get away as quickly as possible. Up to that moment, according to John 5:43, they will have accepted the Antichrist as Messiah, but when he declares himself to be God they will immediately realise that he is a false messiah. They will then have to stay out of his reach, as Israel’s reaction will pose a real threat to his new world order.

Israel will be protected by divine intervention from being overtaken and annihilated by the Antichrist and his satanic forces. An earthquake may occur, forming a large crevasse which will swallow up or stop the pursuing ground forces of the Antichrist. This could represent another parallel with the destruction of Pharaoh’s forces. A further possibility is that other revolts against the world government of the Antichrist will erupt in other places, thus forcing him to turn around and react to those threats. Daniel says: “But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many” (Dan. 11:44).

Another part of Satan’s war is described in Revelation 12: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17). The Antichrist will act with equal fanaticism against Messianic Jews, as they will reject him and love and worship only Israel’s true Messiah, Jesus Christ. In this sense they are also offspring of the woman, Israel.

The desecration of the temple in the middle of the tribulation period will be a sign given by the Lord to the inhabitants of Judea that they should hastily flee to the mountains to survive. The temple which they will build in the first half of the week, and the reintroduction of animal sacrifices (which will once again demonstrate their rejection of the unique, once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, for their sins), will shortly afterwards be the cause of great disillusionment and tragedy to them. According to Daniel 9:24, a time of great deception and

falling away lies ahead for the people of Israel before their sins will end and they will be brought into a state of 'everlasting righteousness'. Because of this, they will have to endure a time of severe trials and purification.

This process of suffering and testing was foreseen long before by Moses, who warned Israel of a time of great distress in the last days: "When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them" (Deut. 4:30-31).

The day of the Lord

The second half of the tribulation period comprises the 3½ years between the Antichrist's desecration of the temple when he will declare himself to be God, and the second coming of the true Christ on the Mount of Olives. It will be during this time of "great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21) that the Lord will protect a remnant of His people in the wilderness. Derived from prophecies in the Old Testament, even orthodox Jews are aware of the judgements of the day of the Lord, as well as the destructive consequences that those judgements will have.

The day of the Lord will be great and terrible when the powers of heaven will be shaken. People will be plagued by scorching heat and droughts, and also by total darkness and severe earthquakes. Sinners who have hardened their hearts will be destroyed together with their works, and end up amongst the rubble of a devastated world:

"Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for *its* evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a mortal more rare than fine gold, a man more than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger" (Isa. 13:9-13).

Isaiah recorded other similar warnings about the judgements of the Lord's day to ensure that people would not simply brush them aside and disregard them. The reason for these judgements and the global extent of the destruction, being an excessively wicked generation of people as in the days of Noah and Lot, is emphasised repeatedly:

"Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants. ... The land shall be entirely emptied and utterly plundered, for the LORD has spoken this word. ... The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men *are* left" (Isa. 24:1-6).

Joel says that the day of the Lord will come "as destruction from the Almighty" (1:15), for "the day of the Lord *is* great and very terrible; who can endure it?" (2:11). Zechariah also ensures his readers that a day of the Lord is coming when Jerusalem will be besieged and taken by its enemies, and that half of the city will go into captivity (14:1-2). During this time of great distress the Messiah will suddenly appear on the Mount of Olives and destroy His enemies (14:4-5, 23-13). Directly afterwards, He will establish His reign of peace and the nations will go up to Jerusalem every year to honour the Lord (14:9, 16).

Malachi says: "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts. ... But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings" (Mal. 4:1-2). Unrepentant sinners will be judged but believers who remain true to the Messiah will be blessed.

Encounter at the Mount of Olives

After the accord with Israel has been broken and the false messiah has declared himself to be

God, another 42 months (1 260 days) will pass before the true Messiah will make His appearance on the Mount of Olives. When the appointed time draws near, the surviving Jews will return from their place of refuge to Jerusalem. They will be determined to be at the Mount of Olives on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*). It will be an extremely dangerous time for them, as the false messiah will still endeavour to kill all the Jews he can find. At that stage there will be a powerful multi-national force in Israel. They will be under the command of the false messiah, and based between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea (Dan. 11:45).

The Jews who return to Jerusalem to await the Messiah will need to have strong convictions about His coming, as their journey and approach to the city will be fraught with danger. The enemy will be all around them, and a heavily armed strike force will be closing in on them with every passing minute. Many houses will be plundered in Jerusalem as the invaders start demolishing the city. People will flee to the Mount of Olives in panic. Some will even lose hope and say: "Our hope is lost; we are completely cut off" (Ezek. 37:11; AB).

Just as the false messiah is about to annihilate the remnant of Israel, the dramatic event of the second coming of the Lord, as described in Zechariah 14, will occur:

"For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, *making* a very large valley; half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee *through* My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Thus the LORD my God will come, *and* all the saints with You. It shall come to pass in that day, *that* there will be no light; the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to the LORD – neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen *that* it will be light. ... And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. ... And this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths. It shall come to pass in that day *that* a great panic from the LORD will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbour, and raise his hand against his neighbour's hand" (Zech. 14:2-7, 9, 12-13).

At the moment that the true Messiah arrives on planet earth, the Mount of Olives will be cleaved and the darkness of God's judgements will become physically manifest, just as it happened almost 2 000 years ago when God's judgement for the sins of the world were carried by Jesus on a cross outside Jerusalem. At His second coming, grief and sorrow will overcome those who rejected the substitutionary death of Jesus and worshipped false gods and a false messiah who could not offer any sacrifice or atonement for their sins.

Even at this critical moment, when the wrath of God is poured out over a sinful world, mercy and grace will still be offered by Jesus to those who put their faith in Him, and trust Him for salvation. When the dark clouds of judgement envelope Jerusalem and its surroundings, the remaining Jews there will flee into the place of refuge created by the sudden rupture of the Mount of Olives. There, literally at the feet of Jesus, they will be safe. Great confusion will reign among their enemies as they are overcome by divine judgement, and they will start killing one another.

As the evening approaches it will become light again, for by then the victory will have been achieved. The false messiah and the false prophet, the two leaders of the worldwide rebellion against God and His people, will be captured and cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone (Rev. 19:19-20). Jesus will reach out to His people in order to bless them. They will be terrified when they see the marks in His hands, and their first words to Him will be: "What are these wounds in your hands?" and He will answer them: "Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zech. 13:6). How will the Jews account for the fact that the Messiah will have wounds in His hands when He descends onto the Mount of Olives? How will they be able to explain where these wounds were inflicted on Him? It could certainly not have been in

heaven! They will indeed look on Him whom they had pierced during His first coming.

It will be a dramatic reunion, one in which joy will be mingled with sorrow. The remnant of Israel will grieve for what they had done and the nation will accept Jesus as the Messiah (Zech. 12:10-14). All will be lost for the false messiah and his hordes of followers on this, last day of the tribulation:

“And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh” (Rev. 19:19-21).

Aftermath of His coming

After the Messiah has made His dramatic return to the Mount of Olives and has revealed Himself as the One who was crucified by Israel during His first coming, they will enter a period of great mourning: “They will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his* only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a first-born. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land shall mourn, every family by itself, ... In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 12:10-12; 13:1).

The period of mourning will probably last for 30 days, as was customary in Israel. The following are two examples: “Now when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days (Num. 20:29). “And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping *and* mourning for Moses ended” (Deut. 34:8).

Zechariah likens the death of the Messiah to that of an *only son* and a *firstborn*. The mourning which followed the death of an only son or a firstborn was particularly bitter and profound. The light of a family was deemed to be extinguished by the death of an only son. With the death of a firstborn, the first instalment of God’s blessing, and therefore the most loved, was removed.

The mourning for the Messiah is also likened to the mourning for King Josiah. According to Duane Lindsey (1985:1567): “The future mourning of Israel over her Messiah is likened, in the second place, to the weeping on the day when godly King Josiah, the last hope of the fading Judean nation, was slain by Pharaoh Neco II, at Hadat Rimmon, traditionally identified as a village near Jezreel, in the plain of Megiddo (2 Chron. 35:20-27). Thus the greatness of the mourning at this final outpouring of the Holy Spirit can be compared only to the weeping for a most extreme individual (Zech. 12:10) and to corporate catastrophes of the nation.”

Rev. Isaac Jennings (1866:302) says the following regarding the mourning of Israel during their national repentance:

“The great mourning of the last days described by Zechariah, when *the whole land* shall mourn, and every family *apart* unite in the act, refers to the repentance of the Jewish people, and their deep contrition in view of their past unbelief, when, convinced of the sin of rejecting the Messiah, they shall *look on Him whom they have pierced*, and *shall mourn*, and find cleansing in the *fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness*; and so *all Israel shall be saved* (Rom. 11:26). *Blessed are those who mourn* thus (Matt. 5:4), *for they shall be comforted*, through the pardoning mercy of our God freely remitting all their sins, and imparting peace to their souls.

“This subject vividly reminds us of **sin**, as the original cause of all mourning, and of the source of all the sufferings and all the ills that *flesh is heir to*. It reminds us too of the blessed object of the coming of the Son of God into the world to save from sin, and therefore, finally, to save from all mourning and all sorrow. From the day that our first parents went forth in sadness from the garden of Eden until now, earth has been a *vale of tears*; and such it shall ever continue to be, till the second coming of our Lord to *create all things new*, when sorrow and sighing shall flee

away, and earth again, in more than primeval beauty, in greater than Edenic bliss, shall become the abode of everlasting joy!"

Regarding the fountain which will be opened for Israel's sins on the day of the Lord (cf. Zech. 13:1), Lindsey (*op. cit.*, p. 1568) states: "On the day of Christ's crucifixion the fountain was opened *potentially* for all Israel and the whole world. At the Second Advent of Christ, the fountain will be opened *experientially* for the Jewish nation. The spiritual cleansing of the nation is associated in other passages of Scripture with Israel's spiritual regeneration and the inauguration of the New Covenant (e.g. Jer. 31:31-37; Ezek. 36:25-32; Rom. 11:26-27). 'The house of David' (political leaders) and 'the inhabitants of Jerusalem' include all the people of the land who need cleansing. The terms *sin* and *impurity* can refer specifically to idolatry ... but they probably have a broader reference here to the total sinful condition of the people."

Daniel's schedule of events regarding the end-times also makes provision for the 30 days of mourning following the great tribulation and the second coming of the Messiah: "...and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, *even* to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered. ... And from the time *that* the daily *sacrifice* is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, *there shall be* one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed *is* he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days" (Dan. 12:1, 11-12).

The following timeline is evident from these verses:

- From the time that the false messiah abolishes and prohibits the sacrificial offerings and defiles the temple by placing an image of himself in the Holy of Holies, 1 260 days will run their course before the advent of the Messiah on the Mount of Olives (Dan. 9:27; Rev 13:5). After a further 30 days of mourning, the spiritual reconciliation between the Messiah and the remnant of Israel will be complete. By that time, it would have been 1 290 days since the false messiah's self-deification in the temple.
- The marriage feast of the Lamb, the restoration of the throne of David and the judgement of the nations will last a further 45 days (Rev. 19:7-9, Acts 15:16-17, Matt. 25:31-32). By then it would have been 1 335 very dramatic days since the very evil day when the false messiah declared himself to be God in the temple and had instituted his satanic reign of terror. After 1 335 days, the Son of the living God will have crushed the evil powers and established His kingdom of peace. The Jews who survive the terrible onslaught during the 1 260 days of great tribulation, will witness the return of the Messiah. After 1 290 days they will be spiritually restored, and after 1 335 days they will enter the promised kingdom of the Messiah.

It is clear that end-time events regarding Israel are scheduled to take place between the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel and the establishing of the Messiah's reign on earth. Of particular significance to the Jews is the strong challenge to be able to distinguish between the seducing powers of the kingdom of darkness, and the voice of the Holy Spirit who calls them to repentance on the strength of the atoning death of the Lamb of God – the One who has the wounds in His hands. Only a minority of them will, however, make the right choice.

The spiritually regenerate Israel will be joyous in the Lord, they will serve Him with one accord, and proclaim His praises among the nations (Isa. 12:3-6; 40:9). The Lord says that He will give Israel a heart to fear Him forever, also for the future generations; therefore they will not turn away from Him. The Lord will rejoice in them and do good to them (Jer. 32:37-42). Israel's fullness will be riches for the Gentiles (Rom. 11:12). "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *that* the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. ... For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:2-3).

8. Rebuilding of the Temple

There is widespread talk in Israel concerning a revival of their temple culture which has been discontinued for almost two millennia after having been ended by the Roman Empire which destroyed the second temple in AD 70 and dispersed Israel from their land. Particularly among orthodox Jews, there is growing consensus that the temple culture needs to be fully revived before Israel will once again enjoy the privileges of prosperity and an unthreatened existence, which will follow if they honour their ancient covenant with God. Various religious leaders are of the opinion that peace in Israel and the Middle East can only be secured in this manner, as their honouring of God by way of the temple service will bring peace to Israel as well as all other nations. The condition for peace is that they should be prepared to serve and worship God at the temple in Jerusalem, and subsequently commit themselves to conducting their affairs in accordance with His Word.

According to biblical prophecies it is clear that two more temples will be built in Jerusalem in the end-time. Revelation 11 makes specific reference to temple service in Israel and to the desecration of the temple during the tribulation. Which temple is this? In the history and prophecies about Israel, reference is made to the following four temples:

1. The temple of Solomon. This temple was destroyed just before the Babylonian captivity, but after the return of Israel it was rebuilt. It is commonly referred to as the first temple. The temple was a holy place where the Lord revealed Himself to Israel, but the nation at large did not walk in accordance with His guidance and precepts.
2. The temple of Herod. This temple was built for the Jews by Herod in the last century before the birth of Christ. It is known as the second temple. It was Herod's purpose that the temple service would occupy the Jews to the extent that it would suppress their Messianic expectation. Herod was a type of the Antichrist since he strongly denied that Jesus was the Messiah or King, and tried to kill Jesus shortly after His birth.
3. The end-time temple of the tribulation period. This temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem after a covenant is made between Israel and the Antichrist (Dan. 9:27). It is referred to as the third temple. The Antichrist will deceive Jews into accepting him as their promised Messiah, and encourage them to seek spiritual cleansing through ritualistic sacrifices, thereby explicitly rejecting Yeshua and His sacrifice on the cross. After 3½ years he will declare himself to be God in this temple and, like Herod, he will attempt to kill the true Messiah.
4. The millennial temple. This temple will be built in Jerusalem following the second coming of the true Messiah (Ezek. 40-44). It is described as the fourth temple. During the millennial kingdom it will serve the purpose of referring back to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who was crucified for the sins of the whole world (Heb. 10:5-12). In this way people in the millennium will be able to appreciate the authenticity of the blood atonement which was made when the spotless Lamb of God was sacrificed for our sins. The activities in the temple typologically referred to the Messiah's work of grace.

Modern Israel is rapidly approaching the time when the third temple will be built. In Revelation, John refers to the measuring of the temple, as well as its desecration for a period of 42 months during the tribulation period:

"Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying: Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city under foot for forty-two months" (Rev. 11:1-2).

This prophecy was given 25 years after the temple of Herod (the second temple) had already been destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD and can therefore only refer to a future, rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. However, one of the major stumbling-blocks which needs to be overcome, is the presence and high profile of Islamic religion on the Temple Mount where two of their famous temples have been erected, the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosque, with a third one which has been added more recently. Muslims allege that, from the rock upon which the Dome

of the Rock was built, Mohammed ascended to heaven and later returned with a command by Allah to subject the whole world to the authority of the Koran. They also believe that it will be to this place that Isa, whom they regard to be the true Jesus, will return to complete the Islamisation of the world. To them, the Temple Mount is the third holiest place after Mecca and Medina.

Muslims clearly do not intend abandoning their control over the Temple Mount; neither will they demolish the Dome of the Rock to allow for the building of the Jewish temple. However, the view entertained for many years that the Dome of Rock occupies the site where the temple should be built, appears to be incorrect. Various experts hold the opinion that the temple can be built directly to the north of the Dome, leaving space of about three to four metres between the two buildings. Despite the unlikely nature of this prospect, it should be borne in mind that the Antichrist will be accepted as the common messiah of all faiths, leading to a deceptive spiritual reconciliation among the various faiths. A multireligious ecumenical situation such as this would allow for close co-operation between the mosque and the temple. Therefore, the possibility exists that they may both be accommodated on "God's holy mountain", where they will co-exist peacefully during the first half of the tribulation period.

Various organisations in Israel are preparing for the building of the temple and the reintroduction of the priestly service.

Revival of the temple culture

Israel's traditional religion revolves around the temple service, which calls for the reinstatement of a fully functioning temple in Jerusalem. Modern Israel is on the threshold of the revival of their Old Testament temple culture and their reverting back to these practices will have far-reaching consequences for the entire Jewish nation – including their form of government. The following reforms are contemplated by the leaders of the temple project:

- The power of the Sanhedrin should be extended to enable them to rule the nation in conjunction with a king. This king must recognise the supreme authority of God and govern his people by means of his own officials as well as the Sanhedrin. The Lord will be consulted through the mediation of a high priest before important decisions are taken, thereby observing a theocratic form of government. At present Israel has a secular, democratic government which is not recognised by orthodox leaders.
- Jewish culture should be rooted in the temple service, which by necessity requires the building of a temple in the prescribed place on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The end-time restoration of Israel on their own land cannot be regarded as complete until a temple has been erected and has become fully operational as the symbol of Israel's political, religious and cultural life. The temple is regarded as the heart of biblical Jerusalem *and* the entire nation.
- According to the orthodox Jewish faith there can be no reconciliation between God and man without regular sacrifices in the temple for the remission of the people's sins: "...without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22; Lev. 17:11). Orthodox Jews who do not accept the final sacrifice of the Messiah as the Lamb of God (cf. John 1:29; Heb. 10:1-18) see themselves as having no alternative but to revert to the Old Testament's sacrificial system. Jews who do not share this view are regarded as apostates and even enemies of Israel.
- A new basis for international relations is envisaged through the temple service and its associated form of government. Isaiah 2:2-4 is often quoted in support of their vision since this scripture describes Jerusalem as world capital where a government of righteousness for all nations will be established. God will rule and His reign will bring about an end to all hostilities between nations. The building of the so-called "Third Temple" is associated with the coming of the Messiah. Under His rule Israel will be a blessing to the whole world.

Preparations for the rebuilding of the temple are at an advanced stage, and this is the source of great expectations for the imminent coming of the Messiah. The following are the most significant indications of the revival of the temple culture:

The new Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin is a traditional Jewish council of religious leaders who, during biblical times, were the highest judiciary body within the framework of the Torah in Israel. On 13th October, 2004, after an absence of almost two millennia, a Sanhedrin was again instituted in modern Israel. This body, however, does not enjoy official status in Israel and is recognised only by orthodox Jews. The new Sanhedrin comprises 71 prominent rabbis and other Jewish scholars.

The founders of the modern Sanhedrin regard their forming such a council as nothing less than their duty (*mitzvah*). Maimonides, a 12th century Jewish scholar, described the steps that should be taken to form a Sanhedrin. During the time of the second temple (the temple of Herod during the first century) the Sanhedrin was the supreme body responsible for the administration of justice from a religious point of view. The 71 members of the Council were seated in a semi-circle in a special room on the Temple Mount.

During the meetings of the present Sanhedrin the possibility of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem is a major point of discussion. They are trying to determine the exact spot where the third temple should be built. This is a very difficult assignment since they are not allowed to do archaeological excavations on the Temple Mount, which is under the control of a Muslim committee.

After Israel had recaptured the Temple Mount from Jordan in 1967, they ceded the area to Muslim control due to the presence of the mosques there which are constantly being visited. To Muslims, this site is highly significant. However, Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Koran and Muslims are simply using the presence of Palestinians in Israel to undermine the Jewish nation and deprive them of their rights to the land and the city of Jerusalem. This is the main reason for the strong Islamic resistance to the rebuilding of the Jewish temple, as well as excavations on the Temple Mount to expose the foundations of the previous temple. The new Sanhedrin formed a committee of professors, archaeologists and religious leaders to investigate and thereby attempt to determine the correct location of the temple with a view to its rebuilding, and to submit their report to the full Council.

Rabbi Chaim Richman, one of the executive members of the Council, said that it is most fitting that the new Sanhedrin considers the rebuilding of the temple since it is of great significance to the cultural and religious identity of the Jewish nation. He expressed his disappointment at the government's withdrawal from certain parts of Israel's territory, thereby relinquishing Israel's dream of full restoration. The Sanhedrin seeks ways to strengthen the roots of the Jewish faith by once again uniting Israel as the Chosen People around the temple service and the Torah.

Members of the Sanhedrin do not recognise the present democratic government of Israel and have committed themselves to electing a king to rule over the nation. This is a dangerous course which orthodox leaders have embarked on, considering the fact that the false messiah will pretend to be a descendant of David and lay claim to the royal throne of Israel.

In an effort to honour the demands of the Torah, the Council wrote to all governments early in 2007, emphasising that the world was on a disastrous course. In terms of Isaiah 2:2-4, they proposed that the temple be rebuilt in Jerusalem in order to once again experience the presence of God in pursuing peace on earth.

For obvious reasons, the Sanhedrin will welcome the false messiah when he appears on the scene, since he will pretend to be the true Messiah and will speak to their hearts by allowing Israel to rebuild the temple. Great disappointment will be soon to follow.

The Temple Institute

Rabbi Chaim Richman of the Sanhedrin is also CEO of the Temple Institute in Jerusalem. This Institute collects and manufactures furniture, altars, special equipment and robes for priests, which are all requirements for the resumption of the temple service. They have already produced golden lampstands, a bronze laver as well as a golden crown for the High Priest. The robe of the High Priest is ready, as well as garments for 120 priests.

All these items still need to be purified by sprinkling them with specially prepared purification

water (cf. Num. 19:1-9). To be able to prepare this water they first need to find a red heifer with no hair of any other colour on it. The heifer must then be slaughtered and burnt, after which a small amount of its ash can be used to prepare holy water. The problem is that, for the sake of continuity, the remains of the previous red heifer's ash must first be found and placed on top of the present heifer when it is ritually burnt.

Archaeologists are still searching for a container with ash that was used during the time of the second temple, and for the Ark of the Covenant, which were both hidden in an unknown place. Should the ash of the previous red heifer not be found in time, and no heifer which complies with all the demands of the Torah be available in Israel, the temple equipment cannot be purified. Chaim Richman says:

"The temple equipment has been made in a state of impurity since all of us are presently impure. And we will remain impure until we find a red heifer of which the ashes can be used for purification ceremonies in the way prescribed by the Torah. Should no red heifer be found the High Priest will enter the Most Holy on the Day of Atonement in a state of impurity."

What a great advantage we have in the New Testament to be purified by the blood of the Lamb when we approach the Lord's throne of grace through the torn veil! We do not need earthly priests as mediators as we have a great High Priest who has prepared the way for us (Heb. 10:19-22).

A new altar for burnt sacrifices

The modern Sanhedrin is so strongly committed to reconciliation with God by way of Israel's Old Testament sacrificial service, that they started building an altar in November 2009 in accordance with biblical instructions. After the completion of the altar, invitations were extended to Jews all over the world to attend the Passover in Jerusalem at the end of March 2010, when Paschal lambs would have been slaughtered and sacrificed on the new altar. However, the Jewish government refused to permit these sacrifices, in fear of provoking anger among Muslims.

Schools for priests

Various Jews from the tribe of Levi are being trained as priests in special schools in Jerusalem and New York. There are 613 Old Testament laws with which they have to acquaint themselves. In July 2007, a major conference for priests and Levites was held in Jerusalem. Jews with the surname of Cohen are descendants of the first priest, Aaron, and may thus be trained as priests.

Restoration of the Temple Mount

The *Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement* is an orthodox group which strictly observes Israel's biblical mandate to their land. The leader of the movement, Gershon Salomon, is actively concerned with emphasising the importance of rebuilding the temple among Jews in Israel and abroad, particularly in the USA.

Gershon and his followers have made a few attempts to lay a 4½ ton cornerstone to commence the building of the Third Temple on the Temple Mount, but the Israeli police have prohibited them from doing so because, following the Six Day War in 1967, the Temple Mount was placed under the control of a Muslim committee, the Waqf. Any efforts to rebuild the Jewish temple on this site will give rise to a new jihad against the Jews by militant Muslims. Israel's government tries to avert such a situation, thereby suppressing the ideal of orthodox Jews to build the third temple at this point in time.

Meanwhile, the Temple Institute, the Sanhedrin, as well as Gershon Salomon's group, keep on proclaiming the message that the rebuilding of the temple is demanded by the Torah, and that it will also be a blessing to the world by introducing a time of international peace and harmony among the nations. They often quote the following Scripture from Isaiah 2 and Micah 4:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *that* the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His

paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD" (Isa. 2:2-5).

From an orthodox Jewish point of view it is a very noble objective to pursue, therefore one can appreciate the reason for their being so passionate about the temple project. However, their vision for Israel and the world is lacking in one important aspect, and that is due to the fact that the Torah and all the sacrifices and feasts of the Old Testament only had a preparatory role to play with a view to the coming of the Messiah. These institutions and practices were all fulfilled in the Messiah and His once for all sacrifice on the cross.

It is, therefore, completely erroneous to assert that the rebuilding of the temple and the observance of the law will be the solution to the world's moral and spiritual problems. The shadowy practices of the law can neither save Israel nor the world – only the Messiah's atonement on the cross can do that. Once He rules from the throne of David in Jerusalem and the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9), global peace will prevail and all nations will abandon their weapons to recycle them for the manufacturing of agricultural implements. Israel as a nation will have to discover this important truth before they can flourish spiritually and materially. By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in the sight of God, for by the law is the knowledge of sin, but no deliverance from sin (Rom. 3:20). The law is Israel's tutor to the Messiah as only He can save from sin (Matt. 1:21; Gal. 3:24).

Further Jewish prophecies

Another Jewish rabbi, Judah Ben Samuel, prophesied that ten jubilee cycles of 50 years each (cf. Lev. 25:8-13) would elapse between the occupation of Jerusalem by the Turks and the beginning of the Messianic era. Nicoletta (2010) said the following on these prophecies:

"Rabbi Judah Ben Samuel was a top Talmudic scholar in Germany. Just before he died in the year 1217 he prophesied that the Ottoman Turks would rule over the holy city of Jerusalem for eight jubilees. That is 400 years (8 X 50). The Ottoman Turks did take control of Jerusalem 300 years after the rabbi's death in 1517 and, in accordance with this prophecy, lost Jerusalem 400 years later in 1917. It was during WWI in 1917 that the British General Edmund Allenby walked into Jerusalem on Hanukkah without firing a shot. The timing of this with the holy day and the ease at which it occurred indeed make this moment of history extremely significant. ... The Rabbi then went on to say that after the eight jubilees, the ninth jubilee would have Jerusalem being a no-man's land, which it was from 1917 to 1967 until the Six-Day War. The Rabbi's prophecy then stated that in the tenth jubilee Jerusalem would be controlled by Israel and then the Messianic end times would begin. That would bring the time to 2017."

Although there are different opinions regarding the rabbi's prophecies, they are nevertheless remarkable in their accuracy. The culmination of 400 years of Turkish control over Jerusalem is a well known historical fact. It is notable that he foresaw a subsequent fifty-year period during which Jerusalem would be a no-man's land, followed by 50 years of Jewish control prior to the Messianic end-time. Since 1917, Palestine had been a British mandate during which it did not really belong to any nation. In 1948, following the independence of Israel, biblical Jerusalem (the eastern part of the city) was nominally under Jordanian control while an escalating conflict continued over who the rightful owners of Jerusalem were.

During the Six-Day War in June 1967, the Old City and the entire West Bank area were recaptured by Israel, which resulted in the whole of Jerusalem being under sole Jewish control for the first time since the Babylonian Exile. This brought an end to fifty years of tussle over the ownership of Jerusalem and large parts of the land of Israel. This would, according to the rabbi, be followed by 50 years of Jewish control over the city until 2017 when the Messiah's reign of peace is expected to begin.

Bible students know that Israel's control over Jerusalem and the future rebuilt temple will only last until the middle of the tribulation period (Daniel's 70th year-week). After that, the Antichrist

will declare himself to be God in the temple (2 Thess. 2:4), Israel will revoke their covenant with him because of this, and will then be forced to flee hastily from Jerusalem and other Jewish territories (Matt. 24:15-21). This crisis will be followed by 42 months of great tribulation before the Messiah will come to establish His reign of peace.

However, there is no clear biblical support for the time-frame of this prophecy made by Judah Ben Samuel, and it is merely quoted to shed light on Jewish thoughts regarding the rapidly approaching end-time. Many of them also expect the imminent coming of the Messiah when Israel will fulfil their role as God's people. One aspect of this prophecy, which is corroborated by Scripture, is the statement that the long period of Jerusalem's trampling by the Gentiles will be followed by a period of Israel's partial restoration, and only then will the Messiah come and introduce Israel's full restoration.

A multireligious approach

The sensational but very disturbing news from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem is that the Third Temple will be a house of prayer for all monotheistic faiths, of which Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the most important. The Lord's words in Isaiah 56:7 are quoted as justification for this announcement: "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." This statement is wrongly interpreted in a multireligious way in order to also give recognition to non-biblical faiths such as Islam.

A Jewish website, www.godsholymountain.org/ promotes the idea of "God's holy mountain" being open to all faiths. According to current plans, the religious activities in nearby Islamic mosques as well as those in Roman Catholic sanctuaries will be integrated into the temple service. The executive director of the Temple Institute, Jehuda Glick, says that they are waiting on the coming of the Messiah as only he can authorise the building of the temple.

The multireligious thinking which is foundational to the campaign for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem is exactly in accordance with the biblical account of the temple for the coming tribulation period. John says that in the end-time a false messiah will appear on the scene and that he will be followed and worshipped by the members of all religions: "And all the world marvelled and followed the beast ... and they worshiped the beast, saying, who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him? ... And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation" (Rev. 13:2-7).

The promise in Haggai 2:9 is also quoted with regard to the rebuilt temple: "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former. ... And in this place I will give peace, says the LORD of hosts." The Sanhedrin extends this promise to all nations without the prerequisite of them having to abandon their own form of faith.

The Antichrist will be recognised as the Messiah-King, not only by Israel, but also by all the nations of the world. This false prince of peace will be globally accepted and recognised as religious and political leader by way of formal treaties. The covenant with him will be in force for seven years, which is known in Israel as a year-week: "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate" (Dan. 9:27).

At the beginning of the year-week all nations will be allowed to continue practising their own religion on condition that all of them recognise, worship and follow the new world leader as their common messiah. The Antichrist will be Messiah to the Jews, Christ to the deceived Christians, Krishna to the Hindus, the fifth Buddha to the Buddhists, and the Imam Mahdi to the Muslims.

All the major religions will fully support this self-declared God-man – including deceived Christian churches which will be functioning at virtually full strength after the rapture. These will be the churches that had previously rejected the virgin birth, deity and resurrection of the true Christ, together with various other fundamental Christian doctrines. Because of their spiritual treason against evangelical Christianity they will be committed followers of the false christ of all religions and fully immerse themselves in his global culture of sin. The Bible describes this false christ in terms of his true character as the "Antichrist" (1 John 2:18) and "the man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:3).

The Antichrist will be so strongly motivated by his inclination to self-deification that he will declare himself to be God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem at the mid-point of the seven-year tribulation. He will further exalt himself above all religions by raising his position from messiah to that of God. Paul describes him as the one “who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4).

After 3½ years, not only will he order the termination of the daily sacrifices and offerings in the rebuilt temple, but also abolish other religions and have their places of worship demolished or burnt. The beast and the kings who rule with him “will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire” (Rev. 17:16).

That will mark the end of the Antichrist’s association with the alliance of world religions, which John describes as “the mother of harlots” – an ecumenical body, or mother organization, to all the apostates (Rev. 17:5). After this moment the Antichrist will no longer merely be their common messiah but he and his image will have to be worshipped as the only God by all people.

A strong demand of their worship will not only be imposed upon the Jews but also upon the followers of all other faiths: they will either have to worship the Antichrist and his image in the Most Holy of the temple as God, or be subjected to summary execution. The false prophet will globally enforce the worship of Satan and his false christ, and will also possess the occult power to make the image to speak: “He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (Rev. 13:15).

The Lord Jesus referred to this situation, when He said that the Antichrist will defile the Most Holy place of the temple by placing his image there. The Jews, who would refuse to kneel before the image and to worship the new world leader as God, will have to flee for their lives in great haste (Matt. 24:15-22). Long before Daniel had referred to this end-time dictator and said: “And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation (the image of the beast)... Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god... he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many” (Dan. 11:31, 36, 44).

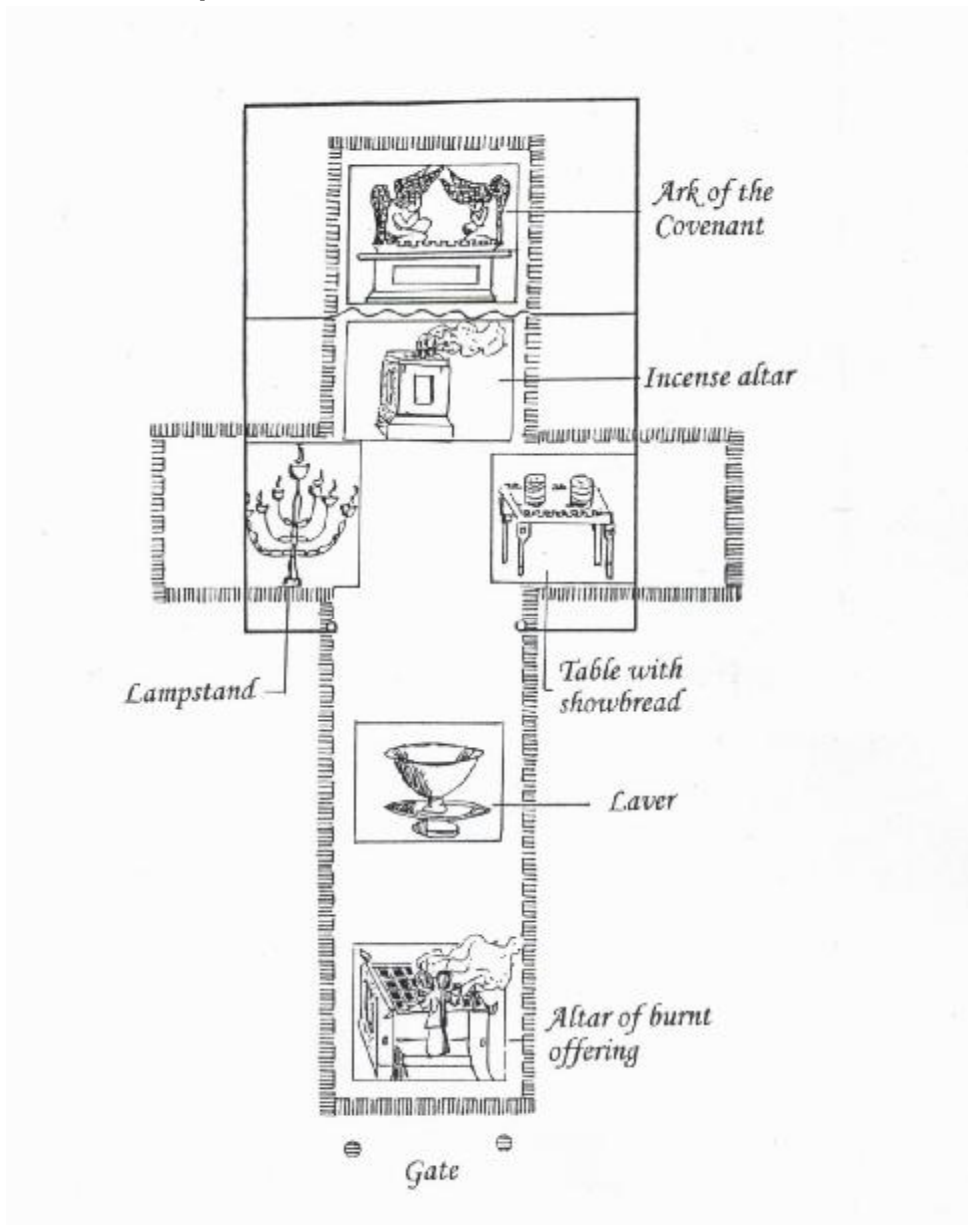
Israel’s continued national rejection of the deity and Messiahship of Jesus is paving the way for the concluding of a covenant with the Antichrist. They will be entering into a covenant with death as this “other messiah” will go forth from Satan – and one of his hidden, major objectives will be to annihilate all Jews. The international community will welcome and support the concluding of a covenant with the new world leader as they will all be deceived by his ecumenical approach and false offer of peace.

Israel’s current intention to build a temple which will be a place of worship to all nations is part of the multireligious deception to which all people and faiths are presently being subjected. This will lead to a covenant with the Antichrist, and he will grant Israel the right to build a temple in which members of all faiths will be welcome. This temple will create the ideal opportunity for the Antichrist to deceptively declare himself to be the universal “god of this age” (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4) and to demand the worship of all people. The orthodox sentiments of the Jews will suit him well, since the majority of Israelis wish to rebuild the temple because of their continued rejection of the true Messiah and His sacrifice on the cross. They want to reinstate the Old Testament system of sacrifices for the atoning of their sins. These are the sacrifices which the Antichrist will ban when he declares himself to be God in the temple.

We are on the threshold of the rapture and the revelation of the false Christ of all faiths. Israel (with the exception of a small group of Messianic Jews) is preparing the way for him, as are all the apostatised Christian churches who have become unfaithful to the true Christ. The non-Christian religions have long been preparing for the coming of the false messiah. Shortly after the Antichrist’s restrainer (the true church as a temple of the Holy Spirit) has been taken out of

the way, he will be revealed (2 Thess. 2:6-8). Following this, the Jewish temple which dates back from the pre-Christian era will be rebuilt as the symbol of a Christ-rejecting new world order under the leadership of the Antichrist.

Symbolism of the temple



Orthodox Jews do not realise that the temple itself is an image of future things, and that its symbolism directly refers to the Messiah's redemptive work. The entire plan of the temple, the symbolic meaning of its furniture, as well as the activities in the temple and in the outer court, point to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God and the dedication that we owe to Him.

The gate leading to the court provides an entrance to the Lord's sanctuaries, and was fulfilled at the coming of the Messiah. He said: "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved" (John 10:9). On entering the court we first encounter the altar for burnt offering, where sacrifices were made for the atoning of people's sins. All these repetitive sacrifices pointed to Jesus' once for all sacrifice (John 1:29). "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). Further on, we come to the laver where the priests washed their hands after offering the sacrifices, resulting in the water being mixed with blood. That was the proof of a completed sacrifice. After Jesus had died on the cross, water and blood flowed from His side as a sign that He had died and laid down His life for us (John 19:33-34).

As one enters into the Holy place and walks straight forward one reaches the incense altar. It had an overlay of gold and was used for the burning of incense as a continuous sweet aroma to the Lord. This sweet-smelling aroma symbolised continuous prayer.

Right at the back of the incense altar was the veil which divided the Holy from the Most Holy place. The Ark of the Testimony (or Ark of the Covenant) was here, which represents God's throne of grace. Only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy on the Day of Atonement, to atone for the nation's sins. The true presence of the Lord was therefore not accessible to the people and the ordinary priests, as they were prohibited from entering the area behind the veil. However, the divide between the Holy and Most Holy was removed by the personal sacrifice of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. We read in Luke 23:45 about the moment when Jesus died on the cross: "Then ... the veil of the temple was torn in two".

That means that the Old Testament's sacrificial system and prayers by High Priests were abolished and that every believer is now permitted to enter before the Lord's throne of grace, through prayer. Paul says: "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:19-22). Since that moment the need for the temple service has become redundant as the Lord no longer reveals Himself to believers through mediators.

All the focus points mentioned above follow a straight line which runs from the gate through the altar for burnt offerings, the laver and the incense altar, to the Ark of the Covenant behind the veil. This line represents the man-God-relationship, and is an illustration of how a person may enter from the sinful world onto the path to salvation, to be reconciled with God through the Messiah. That is the vertical perspective which reaches upwards to the Lord's throne of grace.

There is another line which lies perpendicular to and cuts across this one to form a cross – that is the horizontal perspective. At the two sides of the Holy place there are, respectively, the golden lampstand and the tables with the showbread. The lampstand refers to the Messiah as the light of the world, and the showbread to Christ as the bread (or sustainer) of life.

Through His crucifixion the Lord has, on the vertical level, opened the way to His throne of grace in heaven in order that sinners may be forgiven and be spiritually regenerated. For that reason He could stretch out His arms horizontally on the cross to be the light to a dark world and the bread of life to perishing humanity. It is His express will that both of these perspectives be observed in the lives of His disciples. We should walk according to His ways, experience the continued cleansing by His blood (1 John 1:7), and pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17); but we must also move out to proclaim Christ to a lost world.

These two perspectives – love towards God (vertical), and love towards our fellow-humans (horizontal) – are reflected by the two tablets containing the law and also in Christ's summary of the law, commonly referred to as the New Testament's law, or fundamental principle, of love (Matt. 22:37-39; John 13:34-35). These are the same two perspectives which we also encounter in the temple service.

The temple of God is a place where the Lord reveals Himself in His holiness and love, and from where the message must go out that the Saviour has come to seek and to save those who are lost. In the New Testament, the temple of the Lord is in the hearts and lives of people who were regenerated by Him, and through whom He reveals Himself to the world. He only lives in a holy temple, and that is the reason why He expects us to be blameless in holiness.

However, many Christians do not realise that they were called upon to be temples of the Lord and to live holy lives. To such believers Paul asks: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). How does the temple service function in your life?

Consider the great dilemma in which the orthodox Jews are who still adhere to the Old Testament shadows of the temple service, simply because they refuse to accept that Jesus

Christ is the Lamb of God who sacrificed His life for our sins and opened the way to God's throne of grace through the torn veil. Their situation is indeed lamentable, and it amounts to a form of self-imposed spiritual exile. According to their own perceptions, the absence of a physical temple prohibits these people from being reconciled with God. Even if they do build a temple, they will be barred from God's presence by a veil, except for one day a year, when they will seek God's presence in vain through obsolete animal sacrifices.

The discovery must first be made that the sign of the cross in the plan of the temple prophetically points to the Messiah who came in the fullness of time to fulfil the law and the prophets. How wonderful it is, that the day will indeed come when the remnant in Israel will look on Him whom they have pierced, and bitterly grieve for Him (Zech. 12:10). Only then will the whole nation who survived the time of Jacob's trouble, conclude a new covenant with the Lord and no longer serve Him through the mediation of priests and animal sacrifices.

9. The Spiritual Significance of Jerusalem

Jerusalem is much more than just the capital of Israel – it is the heart and soul of Judaism, the epitome of their cultural, religious and political life. This city is an essential part of Israel's existence as the chosen people of God, and all their future dreams are built around Jerusalem and all the promises of its glorious future. The spiritual centre of the city is the Temple Mount, where the temple was the visible expression of the divine mandate which the covenant people held over the city as well as the entire land of Israel. The king of this unique city and land is destined to fulfil a world reforming role in which all nations will rejoice:

“Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, *in* His holy mountain. Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, *is* Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God *is* in her palaces; He is known as her refuge” (Ps. 48:1-3).

The presence of the house of the Lord on Mount Moriah was, for many centuries, the tangible proof of God's interest in this city, its inhabitants, and the whole land which He gave to them as an everlasting possession. The temple was not only the symbol of God's presence, and the holiness which He expected of His people, but also of the guarantee of protection against all Israel's enemies in the neighbouring pagan world: “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people from this time forth and for ever” (Ps. 125:2). God said about this city: “I will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst” (Zech. 2:5).

An important part of the Lord's involvement with Israel and Jerusalem is the promise that He would send the Messiah to them. To orthodox Jews, the full glory of the city will be manifested when the Messiah comes, the temple is rebuilt, and when, according to Isaiah 2:2-4, the law of the Lord will go out from Jerusalem to the whole world. That will be a time of peace on earth when the Gentiles will feel so secure that they will not even have the need for military training. Israel will be honoured as God's special servants by all nations. However, orthodox Jews do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah as He did not fulfil the promises of exalting Jerusalem and its inhabitants. To the contrary, He proclaimed judgements upon the city and its people because of their unbelief (Matt. 23:37-39).

But Messianic Jews believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that He will come again to save the remnant in Israel, to restore the throne of David, and rule the whole world from Jerusalem. All Christians who literally believe biblical prophecies also share the expectations of Messianic Jews regarding Jerusalem and its inhabitants. These prophecies commit all of us to love Jerusalem, to conduct a study on this city and its people, and to pray for the fulfilment of the wonderful promises which the Lord made to them (Isa. 62:6-7). During the world-wide revelation of the Messiah when He appears on earth for the second time, Jerusalem and the temple will, more than ever before, radiate the glory of God's presence, and only then will the remnant of the nations fully realise that they should embrace Him to share in true peace on earth.

Historical development

The divine history of Jerusalem started 4 000 years ago when Melchizedek, a man of God, was the king of Salem. He was such a special priest of God that even Abraham, the father of all believers (Gal. 3:6-9, 14) promptly honoured him:

“For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all, first being translated king of righteousness, and then also king of Salem, meaning king of peace, without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually” (Heb. 7:1-3).

Melchizedek was a type of Jesus, or, according to some commentators, an Old Testament appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ. He was the priest-king of righteousness and peace. These are titles of the Lord Jesus as He is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. He is also King of the Jews, *and* of the whole world, with His earthly throne in Jerusalem (Luke 1:32; Acts 15:16-17). Furthermore, He is our righteousness and peace.

Abraham went to Salem, where Jerusalem was later built on Mount Zion and the Temple Mount

(Moriah), to offer a tenth of his spoils to Melchizedek. In like manner Israel would, during subsequent centuries, go up to the “house” of the Lord to offer their possessions and lives to Him.

Abraham later returned to Mount Moriah to sacrifice his son, Isaac, to God. The instruction of God to him was clear: “Then He said, Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Gen. 22:2).

On this mountain, where the temple of God would be built a thousand years later and where many animals would be sacrificed as a prelude to the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God just outside Jerusalem on Golgotha, Abraham had to sacrifice his only son to God. Isaac was a type of the Lord Jesus as he was made an innocent sacrifice after having carried the wood for the burnt offering on his own shoulders. At the last moment Isaac was raised from the altar and substituted with an animal, as he was only a type of the Lamb of God who would be sacrificed for the sins of the world in the fullness of time (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

This place, where Melchizedek was a priest of God and where Abraham would have sacrificed his son to God, was very special as it was chosen by God to have His name abide there. Five hundred years after Abraham, Moses said to the people of Israel that, after entering the land and having driven out all their enemies, they should worship God on the specific place that would be chosen by Him:

“But *when* you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit ... then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD” (Deut. 12:10-11).

Five hundred years later, that is approximately a thousand years before Christ, King David captured the city of Jebus from the Jebusites and called it Jerusalem, meaning *Founded Peaceful*. It was also called *Zion* because of the hill on which it was built, and the *City of David*. King David was the most important fighting king who ever ruled in Jerusalem, and he achieved great victories for the Lord. It was also from David’s lineage that the Messiah was born many years later.

David wanted to build a house for the Lord’s name in Jerusalem, but God said that David’s son would do that (2 Sam. 7:12-13). After having built the temple, God said to Solomon: “I have sanctified this house which you have built to put My name there for ever” (1 Kings 9:3). God said that Jerusalem is “the city which I have chosen for Myself, to put My name there” (1 Kings 11:36). By His own decree, God’s Name is forever linked to Jerusalem.

The glory of the Lord

Solomon built the first temple, and the glory of the Lord entered into it. God was worshipped in the temple and He revealed Himself to Israel through the service of the priests and prophets. As long as the people would serve the Lord and obey His commandments, Jerusalem would be a safe fortress. However, times of spiritual decline set in, leading to the neglect of the temple service in Jerusalem. God-fearing kings restored the temple service during their reign, after which decline again set in. Due to the persistent apostasy of the nation and their leaders, the glory of the Lord eventually departed from the temple and He surrendered them to their enemies. During the Babylonian siege of the 6th century BC, the city and the temple were plundered and destroyed and many of the Jews exiled to Babylonia for 70 years.

The destruction of the city and the exile of its inhabitants did not terminate God’s eternal commitment to Jerusalem. After seventy years in captivity, Israel were restored to their land and they rebuilt the temple and re-instituted the temple service. Once again, obstinacy and apostasy set in, leading to the departure of the glory of the Lord. After Malachi, there was a four hundred year long ‘prophetic silence’ in Israel as the Lord sent no prophets during this time. Relying only on their own strength, Israel could not prevail against their enemies. The temple became

completely dilapidated and fell into ruins while spiritual darkness prevailed in Israel.

From around 40 BC, Herod the Great ruled as king of Judah. He had a new temple constructed in Jerusalem to win over the favour of the Jews, and also in an attempt to suppress their Messianic expectations. This temple is regarded to be the second temple, or the temple of Herod. As a result of this, the temple service was once again fully restored.

The first coming of Yeshua

By far the most significant revelation of God to Israel *and* the whole world was the birth of His Son, Jesus, in a Jewish family. According to Messianic prophecies He was not only destined to be the Saviour of Israel (Matt. 1:20-21), but also to be God's salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49:6). In Jerusalem, that wonderful city chosen by God to reveal Himself there, Jesus proclaimed the message of eternal life. He also taught in the temple. However, Jesus and His message were rejected by the majority of the leaders and inhabitants of the city, thereby bringing great misery upon themselves.

God revealed Himself to Jerusalem and its inhabitants, but in spite of clear messianic prophecies they did not recognise the Messiah and collectively, as a nation, rejected Him. In a planned betrayal of Jesus He was falsely accused, arrested, tried and convicted innocently in Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders insisted so strongly that He be crucified, that the Roman governor, Pilate, conceded to their request for the sake of maintaining popularity among the Jews.

The Lord Jesus was crucified on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Here, He made atonement for our sins by paying the price for the transgressions of a lost humanity to God. Calvary will stand out forever as the expression of God's condescending love and forgiveness, and as the only door to eternal life. There is no other name under the heaven given to us whereby we must be saved – only Jesus Christ and Him crucified (Acts 4:12). Nobody comes to the Father but by Him (John 14:6).

Jesus was buried outside the gates of Jerusalem but rose from the dead three days later. On the Sunday of His resurrection He preached to His disciples in Jerusalem in what can be described as the first service of the dispensation of the Christian church. A week later, He delivered the second sermon (John 20:19-29). Forty days after His resurrection Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives. Just prior to His ascension He gave the Great Commission to His disciples. That ministry would only commence after another very important event took place in Jerusalem. Jesus said to them:

“Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:46-49).

That was the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out over the disciples, the process of world evangelism began. On that day, three thousand souls were saved and became members of the body (or church) of Christ in Jerusalem. From that day onwards, the gospel of salvation would be preached in Jerusalem and beyond.

Prophecies by Yeshua

Many people argue that the divine purpose of Jerusalem expired with the moving out of the disciples to preach the gospel in the rest of the world. But what about God's decision that His name would forever dwell in Jerusalem? Was that decision rescinded when Israel rejected Jesus and crucified Him? Not at all! The long-term future of Jerusalem was always, and still is, securely fixed in the divine counsel and purposes of God.

The prophecies of Yeshua should be studied, both before and during His famous Olivet

Discourse, to gain more clarity on the role and significance of Jerusalem. He described both the first and last generations of the present dispensation between His historical first coming as humble Saviour, and His future coming as mighty King. These generations are directly related to events that occur in and around Jerusalem. The future of this city is as certain and firm as a rock!

We first have to define the term “generation” since the Lord Jesus has placed these two series of events each within the framework of a generation which will not pass away until all the things prophesied about it have been fulfilled. There are different definitions of the concept “generation”, depending on the context in which the Bible uses it. In the original languages the word “generation” often refers to a group of people – a kinship group, a tribe, or various other groups with specific characteristics, e.g. an “evil generation” (Luke 11:29). However, in most cases “generation” refers to an age group within a particular society, tribe or nation. In this application of the term there is a chronology of generations as younger ones succeed the older ones. It is in this context that Matthew 1:17 says: “So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations”.

In the prophecies of Christ, reference is made to chronological generations as both of them have a time framework with a clear indication of a beginning and an end. However, it should be kept in mind that a generation is only an approximate indication of time which cannot be used for fixing a specific date. A complete generation (the lifespan of a person) may, according to the Bible, be anything from 70 to 80 years (Ps. 90:10). In some cases reference is only made to an adult generation, as they are the decision-makers who are held responsible for the actions of a community or nation. In this case, a period of about 40 years is implied, as political and religious maturity is only reached at the age of 30 in Israel (cf. Num. 32:13; 1 Chron. 23:3; Luke 3:23).

When the Messiah’s prophecies are read we should at least be able to clearly discern the two critical generations of this dispensation, without trying to arrive at specific dates. As far as the first generation is concerned, the Lord Jesus in His capacity as the Son of Man, addressed His contemporaries in Israel who brought severe judgements upon themselves and the entire nation for rejecting the Messiah:

“Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ *guilt*. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: *some* of them you will kill and crucify, and *some* of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:32-38).

Many of Christ’s earthly contemporaries were indeed still alive when Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD and its surviving inhabitants carried away to other countries as captives of war. That generation was held accountable for the cumulative iniquities of Israel over a very long period – they filled the measure of their fathers’ guilt.

A large part of the first generation was a transitional period between Israel and the church, during which they coexisted. The church of Christ among all nations was gradually established during that generation, while the writing was on the wall for Israel because of their unbelief and rejection of the Messiah. Jerusalem would be destroyed and the nation dispersed before that first generation had passed away.

The first generation would be followed by a long period in which Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles “until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom. 11:25). At the end of the dispensation of world evangelism Jerusalem again features strongly, but this time in the situation of the last generation:

“And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. And there

will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near. ... Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. ... Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:24-36).

After the end-time restoration of Israel and their capital, Jerusalem, we are in a situation described as the last generation. The tables are now being turned, as Jerusalem is progressively restored for the resumption of Israel's role in God's plan of salvation, while the church should prepare herself to be taken away at the rapture to escape the coming judgements. We are, therefore, once again in a transitional period during which Israel and the church coexist. This generation will not pass away before the church has been glorified and caught away, Israel and the unbelieving nations have been subjected to the tribulation period, a remnant of Israel has been saved by the Messiah, and Jerusalem as well as Israel has been fully restored.

Jerusalem as world capital

After the second coming of Christ, Jerusalem will be elevated to become capital of the whole world. The Lord Jesus will be the King of kings and lasting peace will prevail everywhere (Isa. 2:3-4). It will be a time of absolute and unprecedented peace on earth: "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart" (Jer. 3:17). Satan will be bound during the millennial reign of Christ and consequently be unable to deceive the nations into hating and fighting one another (Rev. 20:2-3). They will seek the favour of the Lord in Jerusalem and also honour His people, Israel:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; the inhabitants of one *city* shall go to another, saying, Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, and seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also. Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard *that God is with you*" (Zech. 8:20-23).

During this time, Jerusalem will be a city of brilliance and glory as never before in history. Every child of God should earnestly look forward to this time of divine harmony and peace on earth when Jerusalem will rise from the ashes of shame and deprivation: "Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city" (Isa. 52:1).

"Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet home, a tabernacle *that* will not be taken down; not one of its stakes will ever be removed, nor will any of its cords be broken. But there the majestic LORD *will be* for us a place of broad rivers *and* streams. ... For the LORD *is* our Judge, the LORD *is* our Lawgiver, the LORD *is* our King; He will save us" (Isa. 33:20-22).

"The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ... Your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night, that *men* may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles, and their kings in procession. For the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish, and *those* nations shall be utterly ruined. ... Also the sons of those who afflicted you shall come bowing to you, and all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel. ... Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise" (Isa. 60:3, 11-12, 14, 18).

Prayers for Jerusalem

Because Jerusalem will be a blessing to the whole world after the second coming of Christ and the setting up of His millennial reign, we should join Isaiah in exclaiming: "For Zion's sake I will

not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp *that* burns" (Isa. 62:1). In these dark days of hostility and attacks against the City of the Great King we should constantly remind the Lord of His promises to bless Jerusalem. He commanded us to intercede for Jerusalem: "I have set watchmen upon your walls, O Jerusalem, *who* shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isa. 62:6-7).

We should never forget Jerusalem as a place of divine revelation – not its past, neither its wonderful future. David said: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love you" (Ps. 122:6). The struggle for the control of Jerusalem is a struggle between light and darkness. The Lord Jesus will return to Jerusalem and rule the world from this city: "In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east" (Zech. 14:4). The kingdom of darkness does everything in its power to avert this situation and tries to conquer Jerusalem with a view to estranging it from Israeli control and transforming it into a non-Jewish, pagan city.

Let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem in the words and in the deep longing of the Jewish captives at the rivers of Babylon: "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *her skill!* If I do not remember you, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth – if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:5-6).

Jerusalem has an eternal future because the Lord has decided that His name will forever abide in this city. Not only will it be the world capital during the millennial rule of Christ, but on the new earth we will dwell in the New Jerusalem which the Lord Jesus is now preparing for us. This magnificent city with its golden streets and pearly gates will descend from heaven onto the new earth, and the bride will forever dwell in it with the Lamb. John said:

"Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and* be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:2-5).

Long ago the promise was also made to Israel that after the resurrection of the just a wonderful future awaits them in the presence of the Lord: "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken. And it will be said in that day: Behold, this *is* our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This *is* the LORD; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." (Isa. 25:8-9).

Be sure that you are born again and by virtue of that a member of the bride of Jesus Christ and a future resident of the New Jerusalem. You will then share in the eternal glory and joys of the kingdom of God. The great deeds of God's salvation that were done and revealed in earthly Jerusalem should be proclaimed in the whole world as that is the only doorway to heavenly Jerusalem.

Israel's position in the Millennium

From Israel's point of view, it is very obvious that the promised Messianic reign has not yet dawned, and that the blessings and glory for which Jerusalem is destined have not yet been bestowed upon it, due to the following four reasons:

1. According to the prophets, the Messiah's millennial reign will bring unprecedented blessings to Israel. Biblical prophecies confirm that Israel will be re-gathered to their land, spiritually revived, elevated above all nations, and abundantly blessed in every sphere of life (Deut. 28:1-14; 30:1-4; Ezek. 36:24-28; Isa. 60:1-22; Hos. 14:5-8; Rom. 11:26-27), but none of these blessings were fulfilled during the past 2 000 years. To the contrary: during their international dispersion there was no other nation that suffered as many continuous afflictions as the Jews. Even during the 40 years prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, their land was a

cauldron of conflicts, hatred and revolt against the Roman oppressors.

2. During the Millennium the Messiah will, apart from His world-wide kingship, also be King of the Jews. The fact is that the Jewish nation has never accepted Jesus as their King and Messiah. Their leaders have not yet had their eyes opened to enable them to recognise, as their Messiah, Him whom they have pierced (Zech. 12:10). If Jesus has already accepted His position as King on the throne of David (Luke 1:32; Acts 15:16-17) then He, as King of the Jews, is a King without a people. To interpret prophecies in this way, practically amounts to the rejection of the Bible's basic meaning and to ascribe other meanings to it in accordance with replacement theology.
3. In the promised thousand-year reign of Christ, Jerusalem will be exalted above the hills as capital of the world. The nations shall flow to it to be instructed in the ways of the Lord (Isa. 2:2-3), and Israel will be honoured by the international community (Isa. 60:10-15). However, during the past 2 000 years Israel was dispersed and Jerusalem has been trampled by the Gentiles.
4. During the coming Millennium, Israel will fulfil their calling as the people of God, and evangelise the whole world. They have thus far as a nation not yet accepted the Messiah, and could therefore not proclaim His praises among the Gentiles.

Israel's position in the Millennium, when the Messiah will rule from Jerusalem, is strikingly described by the prophet Isaiah:

- "In that day the Branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth *shall be* excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped. And it shall come to pass that *he who is* left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy; everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgement and by the spirit of burning, then the LORD will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there *will be* a covering" (Isa. 4:2-5). Before the Lord reveals Himself in all His glory to the believing remnant of Israel, there will be a time of judgement in which the wicked will be destroyed.
- "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse [the Messiah], who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious" (Isa. 11:10). The nations will specifically seek the King of the Jews so that they can share in the glory which He bestowed upon Israel.
- "And in that day you will say: Praise the LORD, call upon His name; declare His deeds among the peoples, make mention that His name is exalted" (Isa. 12:4). Israel will first have to be revived spiritually before they will be able to proclaim the praises of Messiah in all the world and thus be a blessing to all nations.
- "In that day a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will have respect for the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 17:7). People all over the world will then have complete insight to the fact that Jesus, the Holy One of Israel, is the Creator and Saviour of all people. He is the great God and our Saviour.
- "In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; *God will* appoint salvation *for* walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in" (Isa. 26:1-2). Jerusalem will have unrivalled glory as the city which contains the Messiah's government. No other city in the world will be able to compare with it.
- "Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit" (Isa. 27:6). The message of salvation (the gospel of Christ) will be proclaimed throughout the world during the millennial reign of the Messiah, since all mortal people will still be born with the sinful nature of the first Adam. In this future dispensation Israel will be the evangelists and they will, in a spiritual sense, fill the world with fruit.

- “In that day the LORD of hosts will be for a crown of glory and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people” (Isa. 28:5). Israel’s glory will not be of themselves, but of the Messiah, and they will find their greatest joy in His virtues.

These and many other blessings will characterise the Messiah’s millennial kingdom when He will reign from the throne of David in Jerusalem. His glorified church will reign with Him, and righteousness will prevail on earth. Israel will play a leading role in world affairs, and will be the Lord’s special witness among all nations.

10. Jerusalem, the City of Rock

The Old City of Jerusalem (Mount Zion and the Temple Mount) as well as its immediate surroundings, are closely related to the world-reforming teachings and redemptive work of Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of David. The Mount of Olives is the scene of His soon expected second coming (Zech. 14:4-5), while the throne of David will be restored on Mount Zion (Amos 9:11-12; Acts 15:16-17) and a new temple built on the sacred site designated for this purpose (Ezek. 40–44).

On closer examination it soon becomes evident that there is a much more intimate relationship between Yeshua and Jerusalem than is commonly assumed – even insofar as every building in the city bears witness to Him as the Rock that was cleft for us. The ancient tradition of building with hewn stones in Jerusalem renders a unique appearance and character to the city, and directly links it to its real owner, King and Saviour. He is not only known as *Lamb of God* and *King of kings*, but also as *Rock*, *Foundation* and *Cornerstone*. The last mentioned three titles are closely related as they all reflect Yeshua as the *Cornerstone* of Israel and its capital city, and as the basis or *Foundation* of every person on earth who truly believes in Him as the *Rock* upon which his or her life is built:

The Rock

The Messiah said: “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” (Matt. 7:24-27).

Jesus Himself is the Rock upon which He builds His church, as promised in Matthew 16:16-18. It is obvious that only the life of a born again person is built upon the Rock, Jesus. This association offers him stability and crisis resistance to prevail against the storms of life. A person not anchored to this Rock does not have the strength or ability to withstand these onslaughts.

The Foundation

Paul said: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). There is no spiritual foundation other than Jesus, the Rock that was cleft for us. To build on any other foundation is to build on sand and to be heading for failure and disaster when the storms strike. Even if you live a successful life in a secular sense, based on the foundation of your own achievements, you will not survive the dark storms of God’s final judgement. All those who have not built their lives on Jesus the Rock, will be uprooted and cast away from the presence of God forever!

The Cornerstone

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whoever it falls, it will grind him to powder” (Luke 20:17-18). According to Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Peter 2:4-7, Jesus is the Cornerstone of the building of God into which we are built as living stones to be a spiritual house to His glory. This is the fulfilment of promises made in Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22. To those who do not trust in Him He will be a Stone of stumbling who will condemn them to perdition. There is no middle ground between these two attributes of Messiah. He is either the Cornerstone upon whom your life is built and who supports and sustains you, or He is the Stone of stumbling who will bring you to eternal ruin. It all depends on the nature of your relationship with Him.

The cleft Rock

We need to more closely examine the typology of Jesus as the Rock that was cleft for us. Paul says that the Israelites in the wilderness “all drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ [Messiah]” (1 Cor. 10:4). In the wilderness the people yearned for water, and the Lord said to Moses: “Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you

shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink” (Ex. 17:6).

The striking of the rock points prophetically to the crucifixion of the Messiah by the leaders of the nation. He was nailed to a cross and His body pierced, [sacrificed] for our sins. The result of the striking of the Rock was that a fountain of living water was opened to quench the spiritual thirst of the entire world. Jesus said: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive” (John 7:37-39).

It is obvious that in the events at Horeb there was a typological portrayal of the Trinity. The Father was there, as He said to Moses: “I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb” (Ex. 17:6). The rock that was to be cleft represents Christ (1 Cor. 10:4), while the water that flowed from the cleft rock depicts the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39). It was clearly the plan of God the Father to give His Son to be “struck” on our behalf, so that the water of the Holy Spirit could quench the thirst of a perishing world.

Why was it such a great sin in the eyes of the Lord when Moses, at a later occasion, again struck the rock? As the rock is a type of the Messiah, it was only to be struck once for the spiritual thirst of the nation. In the same way a Passover lamb was only to be slaughtered on one occasion during the exodus; the rock likewise was to be struck once only:

“But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Heb. 7:24-27).

When the people of Israel camped at Horeb for the second time, Moses was instructed to speak to the rock and not to strike it again: “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water. ... Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod” (Num. 20:7-8, 11).

This disobedience of Moses and Aaron was a very serious offence in the eyes of the Lord – so serious in fact that he and Aaron were not permitted to lead the nation into the Promised Land: “Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (Num. 20:12).

Under the New Covenant it is likewise a very serious sin to crucify Jesus twice (Heb. 6:6). He was struck once, and now we should merely ask for the living water (John 4:13-14; Luke 11:13). We only need to pray for the living water and it will be given to us freely (Rev. 22:17). The saving grace of the Lord Jesus is at the disposal of everybody.

The crucifixion of Jesus

With the crucifixion of Jesus, the Rock of Ages was cleft for you and me. It is highly significant that He was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem in the quarry of Solomon where the stones for the building of the temple were hewn. A large part of the mountain was excavated for building material, until an area was reached where the rock became crumbly and not suited to hew building blocks. From a distance the holes in the side of the excavated mountain resemble the eyes, nose and mouth opening of a skull. The name Golgotha (*Place of a Skull*) was probably derived from the skull-like appearance of the mountain side.

Another possible explanation for this name is that it originated from the skulls that were lying there during the time of the Roman occupation. The Roman authorities annually executed about 200 criminals on this site north of the city by crucifying them. The bodies were not buried but left to decompose in the quarry.

Stones for the temple

It is no coincidence that Jesus was crucified in this particular place. The stones for the temple of Solomon that were hewn there, point prophetically to the Rock of Ages who was cleft in the same quarry so that each of us may be built up as temples of the living God:

“And the king commanded them to quarry large stones, costly stones, *and* hewn stones, to lay the foundation of the temple. So Solomon’s builders ... quarried *them*; and they prepared timber and stones to build the temple. ... And the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel *or* any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built” (1 Kings 5:17-18, 6:7).

A perfect work

When the Lord Jesus gave Himself over to be cleft in the quarry of Solomon, He did a perfect work for us – nothing needs to be added or taken away from it. On the building site of the temple it was prohibited to continue shaping the cornerstone or any other stones. They had to be delivered in exactly the right size from the quarry.

We must go to Jesus where He was cleft for us on the cross, so that we may be made into living stones that are suitable to be built into the house of the Lord. A stone that was not formed and prepared in the quarry was not suitable to be built into the temple. Likewise, every person who has not been to the cross is unsuitable for the kingdom of God – he is cast away. The invitation to the quarry of God at Golgotha, outside the gates of Jerusalem, still stands:

“Coming to Him *as to* a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up *as* a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ [Yeshua the Messiah]. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame” (1 Pet. 2:4-6).

Rejected by His people

Jesus as Cornerstone was rejected by the spiritual leaders of the nation: “The stone *which* the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing; it *is* marvellous in our eyes” (Ps. 118:22-23).

Because Israel refused to build their national house upon the Rock of the Messiah, but chose to rather continue the religious sacrifices of the Old Covenant, they disregarded the messianic promises and the solid foundation of the Messiah Himself, and in effect built on sand. That is the reason for them not being able to withstand the continued oppression of the Roman Empire, and they eventually crumbled as a nation and were dispersed.

The Messiah who was rejected by them became the Cornerstone of the Church among all nations, as promised by God (cf. Isa. 49:6). Many Jews have accepted Jesus as Messiah in His capacity as Saviour and Cornerstone, and have built their lives upon Him. However, the large majority of orthodox, reformed and non-practising Jews still deny and reject Him to their own detriment. For this reason they find that the going is tough and that their lives are unstable. Since the Six Day War of 1967, an orthodox religious group called *Temple Mount and land of Israel Faithful Movement*, have tried in vain several times to lay a cornerstone of 4½ tons on the temple Mount where the temple is to be rebuilt. Permission is denied them by their own government to proceed with the project.

Even if orthodox Jews would succeed in laying a cornerstone and building the temple, it will be completely at variance with the New Testament revelations of the Messiah. Since His crucifixion and resurrection during His first coming, He has been the only spiritual cornerstone upon which Israel and all other people could build their lives. It is lamentable that modern Jewish scribes and scholars continue to reject the evidence regarding the first coming and atoning death of Jesus, and take their refuge in legalistic and manmade substitutes for His redemptive work.

Why don’t the orthodox Jews in Israel go back to the quarry of Solomon where the cornerstone for the first temple was hewn? Here they will get a clear indication of the true Cornerstone that

God provided to the nation. Thousands of Christian pilgrims from all over the world visit the site every year. The special interest shown by them in the place of crucifixion is a sign to Israel to draw their attention to the Cornerstone who was rejected by their fathers, and is still rejected by the majority of the present generation. Close to this place they will also find the empty tomb, hewn out of solid rock. That is another sign of the risen Messiah who still invites all people (also Israel) to come to Him outside the city gates where He suffered and died for all of us (Heb. 13:11-13).

There is no substitute for the only true Cornerstone provided by God for the lives of individuals *and* nations. His kingdom on earth is built upon this Rock. For all those who reject Him, He is a Stone of stumbling who will destroy them in the coming judgement of God.

Jerusalem, the rock city

The instruction for the building of the temple with hewn stones has given rise to a similar practice among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. After the nation's return from the Babylonian captivity, their intentions with regard to the rebuilding of the temple were expressed as follows: "Let it be known to the king that we went into the province of Judea, to the temple of the great God, which is being built with heavy stones" (Ezra 5:8). The same building material was also used all across the nation to construct their houses: "The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones" (Isa. 9:10; also see Amos 5:11).

Jerusalem is unique due to the fact that it is the only city in the world in which all the buildings have been constructed with hewn stones. In 1996, the city celebrated its 3000th anniversary since it was captured by David from the Jebusites in 1004 BC. Even after all these years the tradition of building with hewn stones is still followed. A municipal regulation to this effect is enforced in Jerusalem. No bricks may be used. Concrete constructions are allowed on condition that they are covered with stone tiles. The appearance of these buildings is the same as that of stone buildings. In most cases thick hewn tiles with a rough stone surface are used, and in only a few instances are stone tiles with a smooth surface used. Even the embankments of the streets and the terraced slopes in the city are paved with hewn stones.

My Rock and my Salvation

Many people immediately notice the uniqueness of Jerusalem as the rock city, because all the buildings have the same rock-faced appearance. However, its symbolism as the city of the great King, the Rock that was cleft in the quarry of Jerusalem for all mankind, is seldom recognised. Israel itself is oblivious to the metaphoric relationship between their rock-like capital and the spiritual rock of their salvation, despite the fact that God revealed Himself to them from the earliest days as their Rock and their Salvation (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 62:2).

Moses reprimanded Israel for their spiritual ignorance: "Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered you" (Deut. 32:18). The God of Israel is a Rock, and there is no rock like Him (1 Sam. 2:2; 2 Sam. 23:3). He gives to Israel a strength that is far above that of their enemies (Deut. 32:31). For this reason king David could sing, "I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; ... my strength in whom I will trust; ... my stronghold" (Ps. 18:1-2).

David was mindful of the fact that before God could be his strength and refuge, He would first have to be his Saviour who would save him from spiritual darkness: "He brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps" (Ps. 40:2). While David was fleeing from Saul he often found shelter in caves high up in the mountains. In the safety of his rock fortress he also realised that God was his only protection against his enemies: "Be my rock and refuge, a fortress of defence to save me. For You *are* my rock and my fortress" (Ps. 31:2-3). He understood the relationship between physical and spiritual shelter, and thanked the Lord for His faithful protection and salvation.

Every resident of Jerusalem who enters his home of rock should be reminded of the merciful God of Israel who earnestly desires to spiritually shelter His children. On entering their homes built of hewn stones, they should pray: "In You, O LORD, I put my trust. ... Be my strong

habitation to which I may resort continually; ... for You are my Rock and my Fortress. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked" (Ps. 71:1, 3-4). "For in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

There will be joyful songs of praise in Israel when the nation has been reconciled with their Messiah-King, who is a mighty Redeemer and the only true refuge for His people: "Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the LORD *is* the great God, and the great King above all gods" (Ps. 95:1-3).

Allen Ross (1985:862) confirms the Messianic nature of Psalm 95, referring to the time when the Messiah will rule as King from Jerusalem: "This enthronement psalm calls for the people to acknowledge that the Lord is a great King above the gods. ... The congregation is exhorted to worship their Creator."

Capital of a rock kingdom

During the coming reign of the Messiah on earth the rock city, Jerusalem, will be the capital of a Rock Kingdom. This symbolism is derived from Daniel 2 where the Messiah's coming is likened to a rock that will utterly crush and replace the pagan kingdoms of this world:

"You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:34-35).

Without a doubt, the interpretation of this dream refers to the coming of the Messiah and His reign on earth: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold" (Dan. 2:44-45).

When this Rock strikes the earthly kingdoms, the prophecy in Revelation 11 will be fulfilled: "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Rev. 11:15).

The Rock Kingdom will be the greatest of all kingdoms and will fill the entire earth. The throne of the Messiah will be in Jerusalem – the very city where His body was once broken so that He would become a Cornerstone upon which all people who trust in Him, can build their lives. At present He is in heaven, but soon He will return to Jerusalem in Person to establish His kingdom visibly on earth: "After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen down. I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things" (Acts 15:16-17).

If we have sought to take refuge in the Holy One of Israel and have built our lives upon the Rock, we will be safe for all eternity. We will not come into judgement as we have passed from death into life (John 5:24). For that reason we can also sing: "Rock of Ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee..."

Not all people have this blessed assurance, and they have every reason to fear the future. Dark clouds of the impending judgements of God are gathering around the world, and soon millions of people will be flung into an eternity of separation from the Messiah because they have not built their lives upon the Rock of our Salvation.

11. The Feasts of Israel

The annual cycle of the seven feasts of Israel explains the basic principles of God's plan of salvation for Israel and the nations. A strong prophetic application is evident from the feasts, and in their chronology we can clearly distinguish the way of salvation for humanity. It starts with the sacrificing of the Lamb of God on the cross, proceeds to the resurrection life and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, then leads to the period of the gathering of a harvest for God; subsequently, this is to be followed by the sounding of the trumpet at the end of the harvest season, the tribulation period, the second coming and conversion of the remnant of Israel as a nation, and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth.

The Lord confirms in His Word that the feasts of Israel were not of human origin, but were instituted by *Him*, and must therefore be celebrated in the correct order every year: "The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, these *are* My feasts ... which you shall proclaim at their appointed times" (Lev. 23:2, 4).

These feasts are fulfilled in the New Testament and are described as "a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:17). They are all Messianic feasts which are finally fulfilled in Him. During His first coming, the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the wave offering of the Feast of Firstfruits were fulfilled; then ten days after His ascension, i.e. 50 days after His resurrection from the dead, the feast of Pentecost was also fulfilled. During the events of His second coming the last three feasts will be fulfilled, jointly referred to as the Harvest Feast.

Although we as Christians should not celebrate these feasts in their shadowy, Old Testament form, they nevertheless give us a clear prophetic picture of things to come. We celebrate fulfilled New Testament feasts.

1. The Passover

The Passover is celebrated in Nisan, the first month on Israel's religious calendar. That is the spring month in the northern hemisphere, which partially overlaps with March and April on the Gregorian calendar. Israel's deliverance from their Egyptian slavery and spiritual oppression which lasted for centuries, introduced a completely new phase in their history as a people. The "winter" of barrenness was over, and through the Lord's intervention Israel was set free to start a very special journey to take possession of the Promised Land. This new beginning (a national rebirth) explains why the Lord changed the starting-point of Israel's calendar to begin during the spring of their exodus, and no longer during autumn: "This month *shall be* your beginning of months; it *shall be* the first month of the year to you" (Ex. 12:2).

However, Israel's civil calendar which starts with the *Rosh Hashanah* on 1 Tishri (in September or October on the solar calendar), is still in use. Tishri is the seventh month on the religious calendar. Israel's months are based on the cycles of the moon and always start with the new moon. Since 12 lunar months only total 354 days, the Jewish calendar often provides for leap years with a 13th month in order to keep track with seasonal years. That explains the fact why their feasts, which are scheduled in terms of their own calendar, annually have fluctuating dates on the Gregorian calendar. However, the fluctuation is limited due to Israel's feasts being connected to specific seasons within the annual agricultural season, and therefore always synchronise with the seasons in solar years.

The first of the annual feasts starts with the full moon in Nisan (which is two weeks after the new moon): "On the fourteenth *day* of the first month at twilight *is* the LORD's Passover" (Lev. 23:5). The establishment of the Passover was the first guideline for God's plan of salvation that was to be fulfilled 1 500 years later when the Messiah was crucified for the sins of the world. Moses told the people of Israel:

"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. ... Now you shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take *some* of the blood, and put *it* on the two door-posts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. ... For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that

night, and will strike all the first-born in the land of Egypt. ... Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you *are*. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt” (Ex. 12:5-7, 12-13).

In the New Testament, Christ is called “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Peter’s words also indicate the connection between the Passover and Jesus’ death on the cross: “...you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19; cf. Eph. 1:7; Heb. 9:22).

Right from the beginning it was clear that the Passover pointed to a future event, therefore it makes sense that it would be fulfilled during a future Passover celebration. Viewed against this background, it was no mere coincidence that Jesus was crucified during the Passover celebrations. However, the Jewish leaders wanted to prevent it: “After two days it was the Passover, and *the Feast of Unleavened Bread*. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put *Him* to death. But they said: Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people” (Mark 14:1-2).

But they could not prevent the prompt fulfilment of this feast, and Jesus was crucified on Friday, the fourteenth day of the month Nissan (in April 32). He died at three in the afternoon (Mark 15:34-37), at exactly the same time that the lambs were slaughtered in Egypt during the first Passover. It was conclusively proven that He was dead (John 19:32-37). Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so quickly, and granted permission for Him to be buried (Mark 15:42-45). So it happened that He was buried before the evening and the onset of the Sabbath (Luke 23:52-54; John 19:31).

We read the following regarding the day of the crucifixion in Mark: “Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent council member ... came and went in boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus” (Mark 15:42-43).

John Grassmick (1983:191) says the following about this Scripture: “Jesus’ burial officially confirmed His death, an important point in early Christian preaching (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4). The designation *Preparation Day* is used here as a technical name for Friday, the day before the Sabbath (Saturday) as Mark explained to his non-Jewish readers. Since no work was allowed on the Jewish Sabbath, Friday was used to prepare for it. This reference confirms that Jesus was crucified on a Friday.”

2. The Feast of the Unleavened Bread

“And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it” (Lev. 23:6-7).

According to John 19:31, the Sabbath directly after the crucifixion of Jesus was an important day. Not only was it the weekly Sabbath, but also the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For the Jews this was a feast of soul-searching and cleansing. As yeast symbolises sin, the eating of unleavened bread indicated that the believer was honestly committed to live a holy life. Therefore, they had to remove all the yeast from their houses for the duration of the feast. This rule was to be applied so stringently, that they even had to sweep out the crumbs of leavened bread and burn it outside (Ex. 12:15). This is a symbolic act which points to sanctification. People should also be spiritually purified by forsaking their sin.

This feast was fulfilled when Christ died. He was the seed that had fallen in the ground and died in order to grow and bear fruit (John 12:24). As the perfect and sinless Son of God, *He* was the unleavened bread of life through whom we could gain spiritual life. That was why Jesus said: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:51). He does not only deliver us from our bondage to sin, but also gives us spiritual strength to persevere in the way of the redeemed.

It is expected of us to identify so intimately with Christ as the unleavened bread of life that we purge out all the leaven of sin from our lives. Paul says, “Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

The Jews had to search their houses on their knees for traces of yeast. In the same way we must search our lives in the light of God’s Word and leave all traces of evil behind. Pray the prayer of David: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if *there is any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23-24).

3. The Feast of the Firstfruits

The following feasts are all linked to different stages of the annual gathering of the harvest. This third feast is known as the feast of the sheaf of Firstfruits:

“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it” (Lev. 23:10-11).

Because Israel is a winter rainfall area, the first sheaf of grain was given to the Lord as a sacrifice in the spring. This had to happen on a Sunday (the day after the Sabbath), and it was a very meaningful event, for this celebration was intended to make the people of Israel acceptable to the Lord.

The Feast of the Firstfruits was usually celebrated close to the time of the Passover. The grain was almost ready to be harvested when the Jews left Egypt (Ex. 9:31). This feast adds to the significance of the spring month of Nisan as the beginning of a new life. Not only did Jesus rise from the grave in that month, but the Jews were also led out of Egypt in Nisan. In the year 32, the ceremony was conducted on Sunday morning – the day on which Jesus rose from the grave. It was the day after the Sabbath: “Now when *He* rose early on the first *day* of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene” (Mark 16:9).

The seed that had fallen in the ground (the death and burial of Jesus) bore its first fruit on that Sunday morning when Jesus rose from the grave. It also pointed to the beginning of the harvest of souls, for the whole harvest that would be gathered after that, would be acceptable to God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Furthermore, this feast signalled the transition from the old covenant to the new; that is why it had to be celebrated on a Sunday, the first day of the week and symbolically the beginning of a new dispensation. At the very beginning of the church age the observance of the Lord’s day was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week. Because of the finished work of the Messiah, we can celebrate resurrection day every Sunday. We have entered into the new covenant with God through Him, and are therefore active partakers in the resurrection life of Jesus our Lord: “And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! ... But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:17, 20).

Some people have a problem with the fact that Jesus was not in the grave for three full days and nights (i.e. 72 hours), and make all sorts of efforts to move the day of His crucifixion from Friday to the preceding Wednesday. The fact is that the Jews practice a form of inclusive reckoning of time in which a part of the day is also described as a full day. It has already been indicated that Jesus was buried on the Friday afternoon, shortly before the beginning of the Sabbath, and that He rose early on the first day of the week (Sunday). The day on which He was crucified (Friday) was therefore the first day, Saturday (the Sabbath) was the second day, while Sunday (the day of His resurrection) was the third day.

The men who were on their way to Emmaus confirm these facts. On the day that Jesus rose from the dead (Sunday), they were walking along the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13). Not being

aware of the fact that Jesus Himself had joined them, they were discussing the events related to His crucifixion early on the Friday morning, and added: "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive" (Luke 24:21-23). Sunday was, therefore, the third day after the crucifixion of Jesus, which had occurred on the preceding Friday.

4. Pentecost

The feast of the first sheaf and the feast of Pentecost together constitute the Feast of Firstfruits. They are also referred to as the Feast of Weeks as they are separated by exactly seven weeks. It was instituted as follows:

"And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: Seven Sabbaths shall be completed. Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring from your habitations two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. *They are* the firstfruits to the LORD" (Lev. 23:15-17).

Only the first and the fiftieth days of the Feast of the Firstfruits were celebrated. On the fiftieth day, a Sunday, two leavened loaves were brought before God as a wave offering. Remember that leaven is the symbol of sin, therefore these two loaves do not point to the Messiah. They must be seen as prophetic symbols of two groups of believers – those in Israel and those in the Gentile world. Despite their salvation, the believers from Israel and the nations are not sinless and perfect, and must therefore be consecrated to the Lord. That is the purpose of this ceremony.

Orthodox Jews celebrate the beginning of the dispensation of the law at *Pentecost (the feast of the fiftieth day)*. They believe that the people of Israel arrived at Sinai fifty days after their departure from Egypt. It was there that God gave Moses the law (Ex. 19:1-3). It was for the celebration of this feast that the Jews from all over the world gathered in Jerusalem on the day that the Holy Spirit descended (Acts 2). They did not realise that the Passover, the Feast of the Unleavened Bread *and* the Feast of the Firstfruits had already been fulfilled through the atoning work and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, they did not realise that the dispensation of the law had been consummated.

The new dispensation of grace, ministered by the Holy Spirit, was to come in its place, "for the code of the law kills, but the Holy Spirit makes alive" (2 Cor. 3:6; AB. See also Heb. 8:7-13 and Jer. 31:31). At Sinai, 3 000 people died because they were punished under the law for worshipping an idol (Ex. 32:28). On the day of Pentecost, of which we read in the New Testament, 3 000 people were saved when the new dispensation was introduced by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:41).

The beginning of the dispensation of the church at Pentecost indicates that it replaces the dispensation of the law. It was another example of God's perfect timing, since 40 days passed between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and another ten days while the disciples were praying and waiting for the Holy Spirit to be poured out. This total of 50 days is exactly the same as the time that expired between the two wave offerings of the Feast of the Firstfruits. We still recognise this chronology, as we celebrate the resurrection of Christ on the Sunday after Good Friday, His ascension 40 days later on a Thursday, and Pentecost ten days later, again on a Sunday.

It is important to note that Pentecost is not celebrated in isolation, but follows after a countdown from the first day of Firstfruits. It forms part of a whole cycle of feasts and is directly linked with the Passover festival 50 days earlier. For this reason the outpouring of the Holy Spirit must always be seen in its close association with the whole series of events that include the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Gathering the harvest

After the final day of the Feast of the Firstfruits, a period of four months follows during which the harvest is gathered. The last three feasts are then celebrated after the harvest, in the seventh month. The long time-span between these two groups of feasts has prophetic significance. It refers to the dispensation of the church, for in that time the harvest of the kingdom of heaven is to be gathered. Those working for God must give all they have to complete their task within the available time: "Do you not say: There are still four months and *then* comes the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (John 4:35).

On another occasion Jesus said: "The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers *are* few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into His harvest" (Luke 10:2). In one of the parables a field is used as a symbol of the world, and the final gathering of the harvest as the end of the world (Matt. 13:38-39).

We do not know exactly how long it will take to gather the harvest in the heavenly barn, but we do have an indication, as Christ said that Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24; also see Rom. 11:25-26). The end of Jerusalem's trampling by Gentiles is a sure sign that the dispensation of world evangelism is drawing to a close now. This very special city only awaits its final political and spiritual restoration under the Messiah. God's trumpet could sound any time now, and after that Israel and Jerusalem will pass through the dark time of Jacob's trouble before the light of the Messiah's presence will suddenly and brightly arise.

5. God's trumpet

The Feast of Trumpets starts with a holy day on which the trumpets are sounded: "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, on the first *day* of the month, you shall have a sabbath-*rest*, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation" (Lev. 23:24). This feast is celebrated as thanksgiving for the harvest, and also an appeal to the people to repent from their sins and to serve God wholeheartedly.

Orthodox Jews blow the trumpets (*shofars*) in their synagogues every year on the first and second days of Tishri, with the final sounding just before dusk on 2nd Tishri. The extension of the feast to also include the second day of Tishri was done much later to provide for Jews who live in other time-zones of the world, so as not to be excluded from the significance and blessings of the harvest season's last trumpet at the beginning of Tishri.

As far as the kingdom of God is concerned, Israel's harvest festival in Tishri marks the end of the harvest, or virtually the end of it, as only the after-crop is then still to be reaped. This feast will prophetically be fulfilled when God's spiritual harvest among all nations, including the Messianic Jews, will be gathered in heaven:

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17; cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-52).

Directly following the last trumpet, Jews observe what is known as the *seven awful days* in the period between *Rosh Hashanah* on 1 and 2 Tishri and the Day of Atonement on 10 Tishri. This is a time of anxiety and humiliation in which prayers of repentance are offered in the synagogues; widows and orphans receive help, and peace is even made with enemies. It is generally agreed by spiritual leaders that there are things present in most people's lives that are not pleasing to the Lord, and these need to be put in order through repentance – especially during this time of the year.

The seven awful days from 3 to 9 Tishri, prophetically refers to the tribulation period of seven years. A "week" in biblical prophecies often refers to a period of seven years (cf. Dan. 9:24). The end of the worldwide gathering of the harvest will mark the beginning of Daniel's 70th year-week, a time in which Israel and the unbelieving nations will be tried and persecuted and Jerusalem will

be surrounded by the armies of hostile nations (Zech. 14:2). This will be a short, decisive and very difficult time for Israel and all nations, as they will have to make a choice between the true Messiah and the false messiah, and be prepared to face the consequences of their decision. It will be a decision between life and death, which will determine their final destiny.

Although this year-week is referred to as the time of Jacob's trouble, there will also be a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Israel (Zech. 12:10; 13:1), leading to a spiritual awakening in which 144 000 Jews will be saved (Rev. 7:1-8). They will preach the gospel under very trying circumstances, constantly being threatened by the false messiah and his forces (Rev. 12:11).

6. The Day of Atonement

"Also the tenth *day* of this seventh month *shall be* the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD" (Lev. 23:27).

This is the most important religious feast in Israel. It was also the only day of the year in which the High Priest was permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies behind the veil to atone for the sins of the nation. This feast will be prophetically fulfilled when the Messiah sets foot on the Mount of Olives at His second coming and every eye shall see Him, also those who pierced Him.

On that day, Israel as a people will be reconciled with Him. Only then, according to Daniel 9:24, everlasting righteousness will prevail among them. That only applies to Israel as a people since they are not yet reconciled with God through the Messiah. This troubling thought on the Chosen People's spiritual alienation was already expressed by Jeremiah: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!" (Jer. 8:20). But Hosea confirms the ultimate spiritual restoration of Israel: "Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you when I return the captives of My people" (Hos. 6:11).

On this day, a remnant from all nations will also be saved – those who survived the great tribulation and the battle of Armageddon, and who did not enter into a covenant with the Antichrist. In His Olivet Discourse, the Lord Jesus says the following on the dramatic day of His appearance:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:29-30).

In his visions on the end-time, John says: "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they *also* who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him" (Rev. 1:7). The majority of modern Jews, particularly the religious orthodox, still condone their forefathers' act of rejecting and crucifying Yeshua and are therefore also described as "they who pierced Him". They will mourn because of Israel's corporate sins, and be joined by the survivors from all nations who will likewise be guilty of rejecting the Messiah.

On this day, the day of the spiritual awakening of a remnant from Israel and the nations, the Lord will pour out His wrath upon His enemies to destroy them. Israel knows from past experience that if they did not find favour in the eyes of the Lord during the "seven awful days" before the Day of Atonement, He could reject the sacrifice of the High Priest and surrender His people to their enemies. At His second coming He will show mercy to those who look up to Him in faith, but to the wicked it will be a day of divine wrath which will consume them in one moment before the face of the Lord (Rev. 19:19-21; Zech. 14:12).

The Feast of Tabernacles

"The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the Feast of Tabernacles *for* seven days to the LORD. ... You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All who are native Israelites shall dwell in booths, that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I *am* the LORD your God" (Lev. 23:34; 42-43).

This is a joyous feast that is celebrated after the harvest to thank the Lord for all His goodness during the year which has passed, and for the harvest that was gathered. Apart from its annual importance, the feast also has historical significance in referring to Israel's exodus from Egypt when they dwelt in booths (or tabernacles) in the wilderness. While reflecting on these times, many Israelis sleep in temporary shelters in their gardens during the feast and thank the Lord that He led His people safely through the wilderness to take possession of the Promised Land. Thirdly, the feast has a definite future perspective as it clearly alludes to the coming of the Messiah. When He comes, the final harvest of the kingdom of heaven will have been gathered, and the Messiah will rule over the world from Jerusalem.

Because of the strong Messianic expectation during this feast, the brothers of Jesus asked Him (according to John 7) to attend the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem and to declare Himself as Messiah. There was much reasoning and argument about Him, but the spiritual leaders did not accept Him as the promised Messiah. However, at His second coming they will accept Him. On the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the rabbis read Zechariah 14 in the synagogues. This chapter deals with the following themes:

- the coming of the Messiah and all His saints (verses 4, 5);
- the kingship of the Messiah (verse 9);
- the exaltation of Jerusalem (verses 8-11);
- the destruction of Israel's enemies (verses 12-15); and
- the compulsory participation of the other nations in the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem during the Messiah's reign (verses 16-18).

In Zechariah 14:16, there is a clear indication that Gentiles will celebrate this feast annually after Israel's Messiah-King has returned to establish His kingdom on earth: "And it shall come to pass *that* everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles."

By virtue of the same Scripture, Christians from various countries decided to confirm their solidarity with Israel by also celebrating this feast. In 1980, the year in which Jerusalem was reinstated as Israel's capital by a former Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, 1 000 Christians from 20 countries participated in their own Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. They were greatly surprised when Jewish leaders heartily welcomed them, and declared that in terms of Zechariah 14 it was an indication to them that the coming of the Messiah is drawing near. This event received overwhelmingly positive publicity, and the Christians were asked to take part in the Jerusalem March, positioned in front of the Israeli Defence Force.

On the last day of the feast, the International Christian Embassy was established in Jerusalem. This embassy represents Christians who acknowledge Israel's biblical mandate to the land, and also liaises with the Israeli Government. They are involved with the relocation of Jews from other countries to Israel, particularly the immigration of thousands of poor Russian-speaking Jews. Activities at the embassy are initiated daily with prayers for the safety of Jerusalem, as commanded in Isaiah 62:6-7 and Psalm 122:6 – "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem".

The following year (1981) saw a tremendous increase in the number of participants as 3 500 Christians from 35 countries attended the Feast of Tabernacles; 400 of them were from South Africa. Interest in the feast continued to increase, and at the turn of century about 6 000 pilgrims from more than 80 countries were in attendance.

The return of Jesus will also be the fulfilment of the Feast of Tabernacles. Believers will then all praise God for having saved them from the bondage of sin, and for having protected them in this dangerous and evil world. They will thank and praise Him for the great harvest of believers that have been gathered into the kingdom of heaven. Great joy will prevail when God's plan of salvation, which started with the sacrificing of the Passover Lamb, has been consummated with the institution of the Messiah's millennial reign in Jerusalem.

Personal experience

How do you experience the fulfilment of the feasts in the Messiah? Every saved person begins his or her pilgrimage at the foot of the cross, where the blood of the Lamb was shed for sinners like you and me. When we take our refuge in Him, our sins are forgiven and we are clothed with the garments of righteousness that only Jesus can give us. From there we progress to the experience of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit endows us with His power to become harvesters for the kingdom of heaven. When the Lord returns with the sounding of a trumpet to gather the final harvest for the glorious revelation of His kingdom, He wants to find us out there in the fields, busy inviting people into His kingdom.

Those who remain behind when the Lord takes away His children will face the greatest tribulation of all time under the tyranny of the Antichrist. When the saints return with Christ after seven years, the empire of the false messiah will be destroyed during the battle of Armageddon. That judgement will be followed by the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom on earth. If we wish to share in the final triumph of the Messiah, we have to follow Him all the way and also experience rejection and persecution by the world. It is only after we have suffered with Christ that we will also be glorified with Him and reign with Him (Rom. 8:17; Phil. 1:28-29; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:10).

This is not an easy journey, and some people turn back along the way. They simply cannot bear to carry the weight of the cross all the way to the end of the narrow road and rather opt for an easy way out, by claiming the benefits and trouble-free life of experiencing the Millennium right now. In so doing, they follow the teachings of the prosperity gospel and kingdom now theology. They are those who are not prepared to be crucified to the world, or to let go of their worldliness and let it be crucified to them. They are not spiritually strong enough to bear the loneliness and sacrifices that may be required of them during their walk in the service of the Lord. They find it hard to accept the fact that true believers are strangers and pilgrims in a world which lies in the power of the evil one (Heb. 11:13; 1 John 5:19). Will their faith prevail under circumstances of persecution?

In reality, most people try to avoid the way of the cross and therefore do not even set out on the pilgrimage through the seven feasts to the final destination of eternal glory. This was also the case when Jesus was with us in the flesh. Large crowds followed Him as He was performing miracles and healing the sick. They enjoyed listening to Him, and thousands ate in amazement after He miraculously multiplied the fishes and loaves. They wanted to make Him king of Israel at all costs!

However, when Jesus spoke about the principle of discipleship and the need to partake of His body and His blood to be saved, large numbers of opportunistic followers regarded it as harsh words and turned away from Him. Even many of His regular followers, with the exception of the twelve, did not understand what He had said and deserted Him. Only a small core group remained with Him and believed that He was the Saviour from whom alone they could receive eternal life (John 6:51-66).

Are we not still in exactly the same situation today? Large crowds are flocking together where healings and other miracles are said to be performed, where the prosperity gospel is proclaimed and sinful consciences are soothed. They are stirred by messages which speak of untold blessings and they crave ecstatic experiences. But that is just where it ends, for the moment they hear of self-sacrifice, Christ's cross and the coming judgement, they lose interest and withdraw. They are not prepared to be soldiers for the cross, but rather pursue the benefits offered to them by kingdom now theology (dominionism).

Except for a small group of faithful Messianic Jews, Israel would not accept the way of the cross, and therefore God's plan of salvation was offered to the Gentiles. Even in the Gentile world, few follow the way that leads from the cross the open grave, the experience of Pentecost and on to the harvest fields of the world. The professing followers of Jesus, who are mainly interested in the fringe benefits of Christianity, soon become spiritually confused, lose their vision, and lapse into a mere form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5). Many of them are followers of men and become involved with cults that deviate greatly from the truth (Matt. 24:4-5).

In Egypt, salvation was only granted to those who had the faith to seek protection under the blood of the lamb. They embarked on a journey that, although dangerous and fraught with trials and tribulations, led to the Promised Land. Are you also on this journey and are you making progress in your spiritual life? The annual feasts, as expressions of our faith in the Messiah, are meant to be times of refreshing in the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19). It strengthens your vision and commitment, while you are once again endued with power from on high to fulfil your calling as a follower of the Messiah in an evil world.

Hanukkah

The religious character of the Jewish feasts implied that, in biblical times, they were all associated with the temple service. Even feasts that were not prescribed by the Old Testament have this same religious character. One of these feasts is Hanukkah, which is also known as the Festival of Lights. This festival is celebrated for eight days, starting on the 25th day of the Jewish month Kislev (December on the Gregorian calendar). The Hanukkah lampstand has nine candles, and during the festival another one is lit every night, until all nine of them are burning at the end of the feast.

“Hanukkah” means “dedication” and was derived from the dedication of the temple during the Maccabee period of their history in 165 BC. Three years earlier, in 168 BC, the temple was desecrated by the Greek dictator, Antiochus Epiphanes, who was king over the Syrian Province. He forced the Jews to worship Greek idols and placed an image of their god, Zeus, in the temple. He also forced the Jews to eat pork.

In 165 BC, Judah Maccabee defeated the Greek and Syrian forces and drove them out of Jerusalem. Thereafter, the temple was purified, dedicated to the Lord and the temple service was resumed. That took place on 25 Kislev. However, a big problem arose in that there was a small flask of oil which was only sufficient to keep the lampstand (menorah) burning for one day.

It takes quite a few days to prepare and purify olive oil for this purpose (cf. Lev. 24:2). However, during the eight days that was needed to prepare new oil, the lampstand in the temple kept on burning with the little oil that was in it. This miracle during the temple dedication of 165 BC is still annually commemorated, along with the victory over Israel’s enemies.

Like all the other annual festivals, Hanukkah contributes to the strong desire among orthodox Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. Their objective is to once again integrate the celebration of their feasts with the temple service. They believe that when this is achieved Israel will once again enjoy great blessings from the Lord. This sentiment is expressed on various Jewish websites, of which the following are two examples:

Colel Chabad say on their website: “We celebrate Chanukah – the festival of lights – for 8 days commencing on the eve of Kislev 25 which this year coincides with December 20, 2011. Coming in the dead of winter, Chanukah celebrates the triumph of light over darkness, of purity over contamination, of spirituality over materialism. Which is why it is such an important occasion for giving *tzedakah*, especially to widows, orphans and impoverished families through organizations like *Colel Chabad*” (www.colelchabad.org/Chanukah).

Another website echoes the same sentiments: “Hanukkah is the annual Jewish Festival of Lights that starts on the 25th day of Kislev as per the Jewish calendar. It is an eight-day festival of religious observance by Jews across the world. ... Hanukkah celebrates the victory of Jewish troops led by Judah Maccabee over the Greek soldiers, the miracle of purified oil, which lit Menorah for eight days continuously, and the rededication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem” (<http://www.hanukkahcelebrations.com/facts.html>).

12. Our Relationship with Israel

Negative attitudes and sometimes even blatant hatred of Israel is widespread throughout the world but, on the other hand, there are also supporters of this people among those who recognise Israel's biblical mandate to their land and who earnestly pray for the spiritual restoration of Israel.

It is encouraging that there are increasing numbers of Jews who receive Jesus as Messiah, despite the fact that they still constitute a relatively low percentage. For obvious reasons, Messianic Jews are viewed with contempt by orthodox Jews. In much the same situation as that which prevailed during the first century (cf. Acts 8:1-4), they are regarded as heretics who have defected from the God of their fathers. As the numbers of Messianic Jews in Israel increase, there is a corresponding increase in the resistance against them from the orthodox establishment. This tendency is indicative of the impending severe persecution of Messianic Jews who will be saved during the time of Jacob's trouble (the coming tribulation period):

"And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. ... You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put *some* of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake" (Luke 21:12-17). "Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God a service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me" (John 16:2-3).

It is our duty to pray for the young Messianic congregations in Israel so that, during these trying times, they will stand strong in the Lord. The resistance which they are experiencing will also spread to other countries. All the false religions will eventually join hands to form an alliance of world religions that will recognise the Antichrist as their common Messiah. Forming part of that alliance will also be orthodox Jews, who will follow the false Messiah and obtain the right from him to rebuild the temple. A major rift will develop between the supporters of the true Messiah and the false messiah.

Israel and the nations

There are widely diverging attitudes entertained by different nations towards Israel. This is an important matter since the judgements of God have been pronounced upon the enemies of Israel, but blessings upon those who support them. In spite of the spiritual darkness in which the majority of Jews are currently, there is no justification whatsoever for conducting a campaign of hatred against them. In fact, apart from rejecting God, this is one of the most dishonourable and detrimental things anyone can do, as it provokes the anger of God (Gen. 12:3). Large world empires have been destroyed in the past because they tried to annihilate Israel. Among them are the once mighty Babylonian, Assyrian and Roman Empires, who were all sworn enemies of Israel.

A major test for the nations' disposition towards Israel is the present struggle for control over Jerusalem. Those who support the division of the city between Israel and the Palestinians, or who call for international control over the city, are diametrically opposed to Israel's biblical right to the city. With perfect clarity, Zechariah 14 describes the judgements of God that will come upon nations foolish enough to engage in a war against Jerusalem. In the final analysis, the hatred of Jews (anti-Zionism) is the ideology of the Antichrist as it is aimed against Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ. Christians should completely denounce and resist this ideology.

Replacement theology

There are also other ways in which Israel are denied their identity and position, thereby robbing them of the promises regarding their restoration to the land which the Lord gave to their fathers. One of these efforts is made within the framework of replacement theology, which advocates the replacement of Israel by the church. Promises made to Israel are spiritualised and applied to the church, which results in a strong denial of there being a literal people (or nation) of Israel which will be restored to their land in the end-time. This practice amounts to a total disregard of the

true Israel's identity and calling, and represents a form of theological anti-Zionism.

Churches that regard themselves as being Israel by using descriptive terms such as the "spiritual Israel" or the "Israel of the New Testament", can easily become involved in the deception of dominionism. They take all the promises of blessing which are to be Israel's during the future millennial reign of the Messiah (the kingdom dispensation), and apply them to the present dispensation of the church. Resultant from this thinking, the church adopted a position of dominion in which Christians strive to live like kings endowed with great authority, wealth and honour. They are expected to use these special powers to do signs and wonders, start revival movements, destroy satanic strongholds, and even attempt to take over the whole world for the kingdom of God. In accordance with this approach, adherents are not to wait for Christ to establish a Christian new world order at His coming, but to use the power of their faith to manifest the kingdom of heaven in the present, during the church dispensation. They make the erroneous supposition that the church was commissioned and empowered to take over the world and become rulers.

In this way, the deceived church rejects the idea that they are sojourners and strangers in a world which lies in the power of the Evil One, and in which they should be prepared to suffer for Christ and enter into His kingdom through many tribulations (1 Pet. 2:11; 1 John 5:19; Acts 14:22). Instead of this they pursue a visible kingdom and see themselves as "Israel".

Rather than trying to replace Israel we should commit ourselves towards recognising them, assisting them and praying for them.

Our duty towards Israel

Not only should we recognise Israel as a people with whom God has concluded a covenant, but we should also actively support them. If we wish to ensure the blessings of the Lord upon our own lives we should bless Israel. Don't be hasty to condemn them because they rejected and crucified Jesus. Even though it certainly was an act of unbelief on their part, it was also part of God's plan for the saving of sinners throughout the world. Without the substitutionary death of Jesus, you and I would never have been able to become Christians – Israel's stumbling and sin opened the way for us to be saved:

"I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!" (Rom. 11:11-12).

In their fallen state, Israel is a source of blessing to us, but the Lord has said that in their spiritually restored state they will be an even greater blessing to the world. Considered from every point of view, we owe gratitude, blessing, intercession, and support to Israel. We should provoke them to jealousy by the way in which we worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through the Messiah, Yeshua. We should also pray for the peace of Jerusalem if we wish to live in peace in our own country (Ps. 122:6).

The need for all believers to actively intercede for Jerusalem arises from the fact that, historically and prophetically, this city is closely associated with both Israel and Christianity. It was in Jerusalem that Yeshua revealed Himself as Messiah, died on the cross to atone for our sins, rose from the dead on the third day and ascended to heaven 40 days later. Ten days after His ascension, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon 120 faithful and praying disciples in Jerusalem. That event heralded the birth of the Christian church, and the disciples were commissioned to proclaim the message of salvation from Jerusalem to the furthest ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). During this time Israel would be dispersed and Jerusalem trampled by the Gentiles, only to be restored again in greater glory than before.

It will be to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, that the Messiah will return at the end of the great tribulation to judge the unbelieving nations, save a believing remnant of Israel and the nations, and to establish His kingdom on earth. In answer to the prayers of the saints and in accordance with His holy will, the Messiah will elevate Jerusalem to the status of world capital – the city of the great King! (Ps. 48:2). Subsequently, during the Millennium, the Lord Jesus, the son of

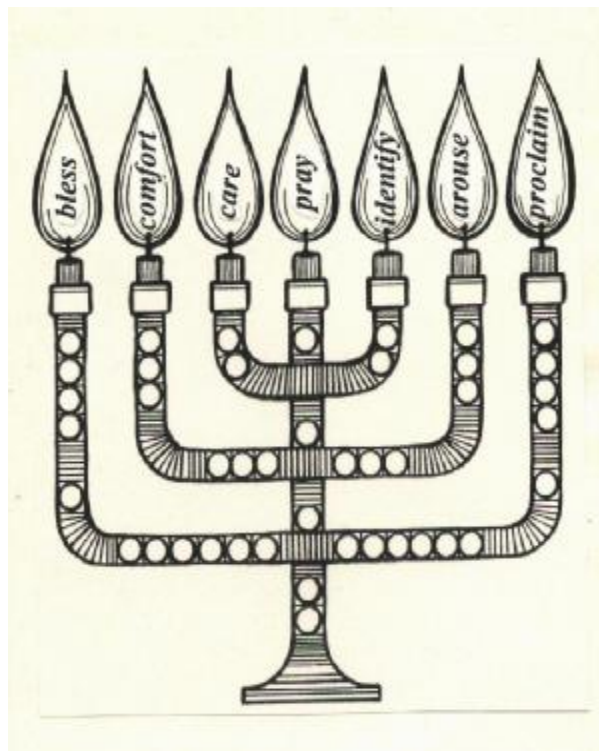
David, will reign over the world from the restored throne of David (Luke 1:32; Acts 15:16-17). Do you pray for the fulfilment of these wonderful promises? (Isa. 62:6-7; cf. Isa. 52:1-2). Remember that only the Messiah is the peace of Israel and Jerusalem (Eph. 2:14) and that we should pray that Israel be reconciled with Him.

Israel is the target of a well organised and severely hostile campaign of anti-Zionism. Concerted efforts are being made to undermine the interests of Israel in every sphere of life, to slander them and render them the black sheep of the international community. Satan is the evil power behind this campaign. He knows that the restoration of Israel will occur during the last generation before the coming of the Messiah and he is doing everything in his power to prevent them from returning to the Promised Land, to destroy them as a nation and to hand control of their country to their enemies.

Satan is actively concerned with assuming control over Jerusalem because he knows that this city is destined to be the capital of the Messiah's kingdom after the destruction of the Antichrist's world empire. Tremendous pressure is exerted to alienate this city from the Jews by either internationalising it or handing it over to the Palestinian Authority as their capital. In particular, the devil is trying to prevent Israel from retaining control over the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives, as this area is clearly identified in the Bible as the place where the second coming of the Messiah will occur, and also where Israel will be reconciled with Him (Zech. 14:4-5).

The Bible gives very clear directions to the nations, particularly to the Christians, on what their conduct and responsibilities towards Israel should be. God has promised to bless those who adhere to this advice, both the giver and the recipient. These directions are often given in the imperative form and are therefore commands. If you want to know God's will regarding your relationship with Israel, and at the same time secure blessings for yourself and your nation, you must observe these commands.

In Revelation 1:13, Christian congregations are likened to lampstands. As witnesses of Christ they must be like lights shining in a dark world. The lampstand referred to in this instance, has seven branches. It also features in the Jewish religion, and is called a *menorah*. Apart from our general commission as witnesses of Jesus in the world, these seven candles must also be made to light up Israel's way, as indicated in the illustration.



However, many Christians and Christian congregations have lost sight of their spiritual mission and are bogged down in self-centred activities. They have clearly apostatised and only serve

Jesus Christ with their lips. These congregations have become spiritually estranged from God, therefore it is no wonder that they have also lost touch with Israel as the covenant people of God. Jesus admonishes such congregations lovingly, but sternly: "I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent" (Rev. 2:4-5).

The key concepts which are stated in the Bible regarding our responsibilities towards Israel, are mentioned below. Observing these commands will result in a comprehensive programme of caring for Israel in every sphere of life. The focus and mission of a ministry of this nature is to win the hearts of the Jews and to show them the way to the Father through the Messiah, Yeshua.

1. Bless them

Right at the beginning when God called Abraham, He said: "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). To bless someone is to ask for God's favour or protection over him, and also to act accordingly. The act of us blessing Israel is a practical demonstration of doing the Lord's will and will ensure His blessings upon us. To curse someone is to condemn him and to express the wish that he be struck by disasters and be afflicted by evil powers. Those who have an evil disposition and engage in such negative practices, usually bring the curses intended for others upon themselves. Do you want to enjoy the blessings of the Lord? Then serve Him with all your heart and bless His people!

2. Comfort them

"Comfort, yes, comfort My people! says your God. Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned" (Isa. 40:1-2). We should speak tenderly to the heart of Jerusalem's inhabitants, encourage and motivate them to return to the Lord through the Messiah, because He is a forgiving and merciful God. They should also know that that in the midst of all the hostility and attacks, they have Christian friends who stand by them. However, this nation should realise that, not only are they the innocent victims of their many enemies, but they are also forfeiting God's blessings because of their own spiritual waywardness. Israel cannot be truly comforted without leading them back to the great Comforter, who alone is able to permanently wipe all the tears from their eyes (Isa. 25:8).

3. Care for them

In order to bless and comfort Israel in a meaningful way, we need to back up our positive attitude of spiritual support with practical programmes to care for them and lend a helping hand where the most urgent needs exist. The logistics of caring for Israel can take on a variety of forms:

- Awareness programs should be organised to inform people about Israel's biblical and practical situation, and to suggest ways in which to render assistance.
- Diplomatic support can be offered to Israel by protecting their territorial integrity against any claims which advocate the division of their land or capital city.
- Counter the evil ideology of anti-Zionism (anti-Semitism) by emphasising that, from a biblical point of view, the rejection of Israel simultaneously amounts to the rejection of the God of Israel, who has granted certain clear-cut rights to His covenant people.
- Address the spiritual needs of Israel in a very sensitive but convincing way by indicating to them that various Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus as Messiah.
- Render financial and material support where needed, particularly in the relocation of Jewish immigrants. Also support poor Jewish families in Israel.

Apart from preaching to his fellow-Jews and introducing them to Yeshua, the Messiah, Paul also organised practical programmes to care for them in various other ways: "For the present,

however, I am going to Jerusalem to bring aid [relief] for the saints – God’s people there. For it has been the good pleasure of Macedonia and Achaia to make some contributions for the poor among the saints of Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and surely they are in debt to them, for if these Gentiles have come to share in their [the Jerusalem Jews’] spiritual blessings, then they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings” (Rom 15:25-27; AB).

In which programmes are you involved to care for those in Jerusalem who are going through such hard times? Thousands of immigrants from poor countries are arriving in Israel with virtually nothing except the clothes on their bodies.

4. Pray for them

At the heart of any support programme for Israel is prayer: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love you” (Ps. 122:6). All of us should take to heart the promises on the future glory of Jerusalem, and pray accordingly: “I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isa. 62:6-7).

Not only should we pray for the present needs of Jerusalem and Israel, but also for the full restoration of this land and its people. That will only happen when the Messiah has been accepted by them as the Holy One of Israel and the only Saviour of His people. Until Israel is reconciled with Him they will not have lasting peace, but will continue to be at variance with God’s purposes for them as a Messianic people. Consequently, they will be heading for the time of Jacob’s trouble. Only a redeemed Israel under the authority of their Messiah-King will have true peace.

5. Give full recognition to them

Never doubt Israel’s right to exist. Give full recognition to them as the people through whom the Word of God has come to the whole world: “What advantage then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God. What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all!” (Rom. 3:1-4; NIV).

There has always been a faithful remnant in Israel with whom one could identify spiritually, while still proclaiming the gospel to the unsaved majority. Never forget the facilitating role of Israel in bringing the true faith to the world. Even though the majority of Jews were unfaithful to the Messiah, it is due to the witness of the faithful minority that we could also become members of the household of faith. We have no reason to boast in ourselves:

“For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root supports you” (Rom. 11:15-18).

6. Arouse them to jealousy!

We should awaken Israel spiritually by arousing them to jealousy. We should serve the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in such a convincing and inspiring way through the Messiah, Yeshua, that Jews become jealous: “So I ask: Have they stumbled so as to fall – to their utter spiritual ruin, irretrievably? By no means! But through their false step *and* transgression salvation [has come] to the Gentiles, so as to arouse Israel [to see and feel what they forfeited] and to make them jealous” (Rom. 11:11; AB). Have you presented the truth regarding the fulfilment of the wonderful Messianic promises in the Old Testament to a Jew, and distanced yourself from nominal Christians who are antagonistic towards Israel and further alienate them from Christ?

7. Proclaim the Messiah to them

It is a tragedy that some Christians are ashamed to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the

Jews as they do not want to offend them and arouse their resentment. Paul said: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom 1:16).

If we adopt the correct attitude of love and compassion, and the correct approach from the Old to the New Testament, fruitful service can be rendered to Jews. This was done during the first century and there is no reason why it cannot be done today. It can indeed, provided the Word is once again proclaimed with boldness in Jerusalem: "And the Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). But how will they come to faith if nobody witnesses to them about the Messiah?

Support the Messianic Movement

The Bible charges all Christian churches with the responsibility of becoming involved in evangelising the Jews (Acts 1:8). Israel's spiritual fall brought about by their rejection of the Messiah was not permanent. Their blinding contributed towards the achievement of a wonderful purpose, i.e. the evangelisation of the entire non-Jewish world. Their fall resulted in us receiving spiritual riches, and because of this we are their debtors. We should portray our gratitude towards Israel, as they rejected the salvation which was initially destined to be theirs, and it was subsequently offered to us. We are being spiritually enriched by it and should now have compassion on Israel. By the way we live our lives, it should be made evident to them what it is that they have missed.

We must not make the mistake of abandoning our duty to evangelise the Jews by arguing that the Lord has given them a spirit of blindness and deep sleep. The Lord only hardens the hearts of people who have already hardened themselves, and He will only place a veil over those who are so negatively inclined that they refuse to see. All people are responsible for their own misery. The veil over Israel is removed by God when they repent (2 Cor. 3:14-16; Acts 17:30); therefore, all Jews can turn to the Messiah for salvation.

There is no barrier in the way of Jewish evangelism since the Holy Spirit convicts all people of their sin and also of the righteousness of Christ (John 16:8). The duty of proclaiming the gospel to Jews was assigned to Peter and various other apostles, and work of this nature has been conducted throughout the church dispensation.

Jewish evangelism is a very big challenge since deep-rooted prejudices must be overcome before a Jew will accept Jesus as Messiah. Firstly, a Jew has to come to terms with the internal problem of societal disapproval and rejection by his orthodox compatriots when he receives Jesus as Messiah. Secondly, there is the external stumbling-block of a predominantly anti-Jewish world which must be overcome. Jews are often raised with a mindset in which they are expected to view Christians as their critics and enemies, and it is not easy to overcome this barrier of resistance in order for them to become followers of Christ.

It is the duty of Messianic Jews as well as evangelical Christians to overcome these strong prejudices and prove them wrong by demonstrating the love of the Messiah to orthodox as well as agnostic Jews. The more Israel becomes isolated and internationally rejected, the more they will be receptive to and thankful for the aid and support they receive from evangelical Christians and Messianic Jews. The situation is already changing.

It should be clearly stated that our main obligation is towards Messianic Jews. Paul says, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). We should strongly support the Messianic movement by assisting with its expansion. Israel's entire future is dependent on them as the Lord is preparing the whole nation to once again be His people in the true sense of the word. Those who refuse to be spiritually revived and become Messianic will die in their sins, but the remnant who are reconciled with the Messiah represent the small beginning of the true Israel of the future.

It should always be remembered that the spiritual awakening of the entire nation is the Lord's ultimate purpose with the restoration of Israel. At this stage we should not be overly concerned

with the promotion of Israel's political or economic stability, or in bringing peace to the Middle East, as that will only be achieved after the Messiah has come. We should indeed assist where great need exists, but our main priority should be to promote the Messianic movement. Assistance of this nature is focused on the full spiritual restoration of Israel.

It is obvious that the spiritual awakening of Israel has not yet occurred. Indeed, since the beginning of the church dispensation, the Messianic movement has been in existence in a small way, but the majority of Jews have not yet awakened spiritually – particularly not the political and spiritual leaders of Israel. Now that Israel has been physically and politically restored to their land, it has become all the more imperative to expand the Messianic movement among them. This obligation should be pursued with greater dedication so that more Jews can become conscious of the Lord Jesus and His biblical claims to being the Messiah of Israel, while they also become informed about the coming of the false messiah. They should also come to know that, in accordance with traditional Jewish practice, similarly the heavenly Bridegroom will secretly come to take His earthly bride away (Matt. 25:1-13).

Knowledge of this nature is critically important to prepare the future group of 144 000 Jews to resist the false messiah shortly after the rapture, and to accept the true Messiah as Saviour. They will replace the Messianic Jews who will have been taken away at the rapture, and through their dynamic witness the Messianic movement in Israel will grow strongly. According to Revelation 11:1-14, two special witnesses with great powers will also minister during that time and proclaim Jesus as Messiah. Due to their ministry many Jews and Gentiles will be saved.

However, the deception of the false messiah will be so strong and convincing that the majority of the unsaved Jews will conclude a covenant with him and follow him (John 5:43). The deceived, unsaved Jews will be disappointed when, in the middle of the tribulation period, their new found messiah proves to be false when he proclaims himself to be God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (2 Thess. 2:4). They will revoke their covenant with him and, according to Matthew 24:15-22, they will have to flee for survival to a place in the wilderness. Only then will their spiritual perspective be corrected and they will start seeking the true Messiah as explained in Hosea 6:1-2. At that time they will fully realise that Israel's afflictions during the previous two thousand years were caused by their rejection of the Messiah who was born in the house of David.

When the remnant in Israel see the true Messiah descending upon the Mount of Olives at the end of the tribulation period, all of them will heartily welcome Him and be reconciled with Him (Matt. 23:39). According to Zechariah 12:10, they will weep at His feet while repenting of their sins. At that point the Messianic movement will have achieved its full and glorious purpose.

Do you wish to join in realising this worthy purpose? If so, become a supporter of the Messianic movement in Israel and also across the globe. At the end of this wonderful journey the Lord will say of Israel: "No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34).

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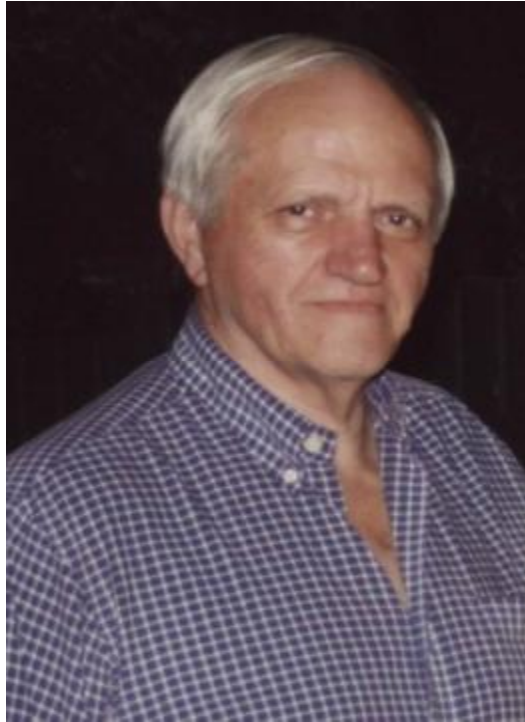
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In August 1978, Johan Malan was appointed professor of Anthropology at the University of the North (presently the University of Limpopo) near Polokwane in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, and in January 2006 he retired. He and his wife, Wilma, now live in Mossel Bay. They have two married sons.

As the son of a missionary, the late Rev. J.S. Malan, Johan, from a very young age, received thorough training in the Bible at home. He regards himself as an evangelical Christian who observes the literal, grammatical-historical method of interpreting the Bible. Because of this approach he fully accepts the large body of prophecies related to the literal restoration of Israel in the land of their fathers.

As a cultural anthropologist, Johan and his wife visited various kibbutzim in Israel in 1993, where he conducted research on communal farming and also wrote two articles on this subject for a scientific journal (Malan, 1994, 1995). At the same time, Johan made contact with Messianic Jews in Israel. One of them later translated his book on Israel into Russian, mainly for distribution among the large number of Russian-speaking Jews who immigrated to Israel. Visits to Finland and Estonia gave rise to the translation of some of his books into Finnish and Estonian.

Johan still keeps abreast of events in Israel, and now offers a new and extended edition of his book on Israel.