

Mid-East e-News

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Welcome

A Blessed New Year to y'all. We are pushed for space this issue, so I'll yield this space to our Christmas/New Year-themed front page. As background to the location of the Dec. 26th earthquake readers might want to refer to issue 19 and its coverage of Indonesia, and in particular the Aceh province.

Email your responses to pkclark@pmbx.net, & check the web for back issues.

Wise Men From The East

During the Bethlehem Star presentation that I attended in mid-December it was remarked that many of the families taken captive by Babylon (in about 587 BC) did not return to Jerusalem when Cyrus' decree allowed it, nor when Nehemiah after receiving permission from Artaxerxes.

There were three assaults by Babylon, and among the royalty and leaders taken into captivity by the first was Daniel. When Daniel was able to not only interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, but even tell him what he had dreamed, the king put Daniel in charge of all the wise men. Apparently Daniel remained in Babylon for the rest of his life, so the visions that he witnessed and are recorded in his book were experienced during this time.

Daniel's visions and prophecies, including some that he was told to "seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end," included predictions on future kingdoms that would rule the Holy Land, and also the sequence of events – and even the length of time – that would pass until the Messiah came.

Daniel 2:24-49 records God revealing to him what the King had dreamt the previous night, as a result of which he was appointed the chief of the wise men. The description, of kingdoms of Gold (Nebuchadnezzar), Silver, Bronze and Iron, leads into a prophecy of an eternal kingdom. This passage has parallels in **7:1-28** (during the reign of Belshazzar), **8:1-27** (2 years later) and **11:2-45** (during the reign of Cyrus). All of these refer to the Beautiful Land, and show an obvious concern for the future of Daniel's homeland. **Daniel 9:21-26** even gives a date for the Messiah to be "cut off."

It is beyond the scope of this article to look at the different kingdoms that were described so thoroughly in these passages, but commentators recognize specific events and kings of Persia, Greece and Rome in the descriptions. At Christmas time, however, I am interested in the possible origins of the Wise Men we read about in **Matthew 2** as having come "from the East." Daniel's leadership of the 'Eastern School' of Magi could well have led to an awareness of future events in Israel that would be marked by the stars. These may well have alerted Daniel's students and successors to the future appearance of a king – and significant kingdom – in Israel. Perhaps his influence was one of the factors that caused the Babylonian *Magi* to 'jump on their camels and ride to Jerusalem' when they saw the star.

The descendants of those who remained in Babylon continued to live in the Middle Eastern countries up until recent times. A table in issue 30 of *e-News* listed the populations of Jews in Arab countries in 1948. Many of these were, even then, ready to stay in the land of their birth, but their lives were made intolerable by the Arab countries in which they lived, and by 2001 only 1 percent of them still remained, most of those being in Morocco.

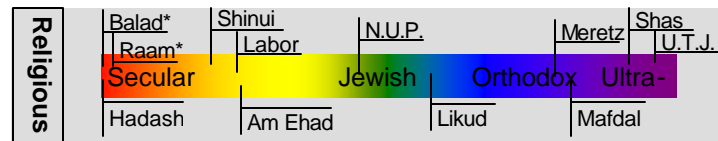
Babylon is in Iraq, close to Baghdad. In 1950/51 almost all of the Jews living in Iraq were brought to Israel in the appropriately-named Ezra and Nehemiah airlifts, bringing to a close the long line of Jews to have lived in Mesopotamia since the time of Nebuchadnezzar. These Mizrahi Jews now comprise a significant population group, as we have looked at in previous issues, within the modern state of Israel.

Plan of Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.



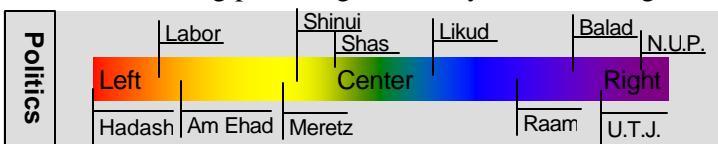
Israel - Politics

Over the last month the situation in Israel's politics has changed significantly. On Dec. 1st the secular party, Shinui, voted against the annual national budget, and its ministers in the Likud-led coalition were subsequently fired by Sharon. Shinui is avowedly anti-religious (the only groups less sympathetic to Judaism are Arab-based parties), and the point at issue in the budget was subsidies for religious groups. The ideal partner for Sharon to invite into the now shaky coalition was Labour (The plan to withdraw from Gaza had originated from Peres' party), but in August Likud had prohibited discussions on this issue. For more than a week after Shinui's withdrawal Sharon worked on persuading his party that the alternative to inviting Labour was early elections. Then, on Dec. 10th the



party ruling was reversed and Sharon received permission to approach Labour with an invitation to join the coalition.

These negotiations have not proceeded smoothly, as Labour's left-wing position gives it very different budget



priorities. At one point the Labour representative abruptly left the negotiations, saying, "Do they think they can laugh at us? Let them manage without us." On Dec.30th the final sticking point, the position of Peres as senior deputy-P.M. was finally sealed.

Israeli/Palestine Conflict

Arafat died on Nov. 11th and was interred in Ramallah on the 12th. He had been elected President of the PNA in 1996, and until his death retained almost total authority over administrative and security matters. Arafat was Chairman of the PLO and leader of its largest member group, Fateh. As PLO leader he was succeeded on his death by Mahmoud Abbas, who had been the PNA's first Prime Minister in May 2003, the position established as part of the ground work for the Road Map.

Abbas is now the front-runner in the election for President of the PNA scheduled for Jan. 9th. The current Prime Minister is Ahmed Qurei, who succeeded Abbas when he resigned over Arafat's unwillingness to allow him real authority. Qurei has been able to bring some of the security forces under his authority this year.

Over the period of the Intifada Hamas has won a greater following among Palestinians, even as it continues its hard-line approach, regularly attempting assaults against Israeli military and civilian targets. However, it recently announced that it has been in communication with the EU and the US, indicating a willingness to enter negotiations.

With the change in leadership, both sides have been making comments that allow for much progress in the direction of peace over the next months. One first step would be for a halt to the *Intifada*, a position which Abbas has put forward, calling publicly for an end to violence.

Sharon has already accepted the idea of a peace conference in London, possibly in February.

Palestinians are concerned about the unilateral nature of the Gaza pullout, since it could create a *fait-accompli* in the West Bank, where the Road Map seeks to further reduce the number of settlements.

A reader wrote, after reading in e-News 30 about Operation Shlomo (Solomon) of 1991, that he, a Christian from New Zealand, had the good fortune to be involved in this operation:

It happened during our last weekend at the base when on the Friday afternoon - eve of the Sabbath (when in the past everything became quiet) but on this day it was all action. Traffic was heavy, aircraft at a nearby Airforce Base were very active, and this was supposed to be the Eve of the Jewish Sabbath. It wasn't until Sunday that we learned from an officer what had taken place, and were told that in an indirect way we were a part of this operation as we carried out duties of soldiers who were then able to be part of the rescue. It seemed everyone was red eyed (such was the mood) "over joyed," even we Kiwis emotionally wept silently when the news was told, tears streaming down our cheeks. We realised we had witnessed an ancient prophecy come into reality.

Many of the Falasha (Ethiopian Jews) had been rescued, but a number of others had been left behind, as the Israeli authorities had no intention of bringing the *Falash Mura* with them. They are descendants of Jews who had converted to Christianity in the previous century. About a hundred had been waiting with the rest of the Ethiopians, and though the IDF were instructed not to bring them, orders were ignored and they were able to join their compatriots in a new life in Israel.

In 1992, as many more Christian Falash Mura began to congregate in Addis Ababa, Israel agreed from humanitarian grounds to allow access to some – plus, a few had Jewish relatives, and would qualify for entry. In 1997 an attempt was made to bring closure to the continued problem and the 4,000 that had collected in the capital were brought to Israel. This resulted in another 30,000 collecting in and around the Ethiopian capital. The Israeli government was unwilling to invite what may be an unending influx of non-Jews into the country. Since then a 2003 law allowed about 2,500 per year to join the Aliyah, but these must undergo ritual conversion to Judaism, due to continued doubts about their Jewishness.

(Search the internet for *Falash Mura* for more information)

Crusades - Raynald and Saladin: A study in contrasts

After the Second Crusade had retired in defeat a number of its participants chose to remain in the Latin Kingdom. After Raymund of Antioch was killed, Raynald married his widow, Constance, becoming Prince of Antioch. He began to acquire his reputation for infamy early, attacking the Latin Patriarch there, and later taking a fleet and attacking the Byzantines in Cyprus. After pressure from Baldwin III he was forced to

"He was short and stout, red-faced and blind in one eye; and his features revealed his low birth. But he was a soldier of genius; and few generals have been so devotedly loved by their men."

(Runciman, S. The History of the Crusades.)

apologize to the Byzantine emperor, and could be seen leading Manuel Comnenus's horse when he entered the city of Antioch in 1159.

The following year Raynald was leading his men in plundering some Armenian peasants when he was captured by Seljuk troops and imprisoned in Aleppo. He was held for 17 years, to return to the Latin Kingdom only in 1176. In that same year he married the widow of Humphrey III, Lord of Oultrejourdain. This region was across the Arabah in what is now Jordan. The major fortifications of Kerak and Montreal dominated the landscape, and the territory had access to the Red Sea ports. It was from here that Raynald assisted Baldwin III in his defeat of Saladin at the Battle of Montgisard (see previous issue).



The walls of Kerak castle

In 1181 Raynald began attacking the caravans that passed to the

east of Kerak, on their way from the Red Sea to Damascus. Saladin's protests to Baldwin III, over this breach of treaty agreements, were met with the retort that Baldwin was "unable to control his unruly vassal." This led to war in 1182, during which Raynald attempted to use ships on the Red Sea to attack Mecca, the holy city of Islam. The ships were captured, and Saladin responded by attacking Raynald at Kerak. The timing of the siege was unfortunate for Raynald's nephew, whose marriage to Isabella of Jerusalem was being celebrated. When he discovered the reason for the revels, Saladin is said to have asked for the location of the tower where they were residing, so

as to avoid disturbing them. The siege was relieved by Raymond III arriving with another force of troops.

In 1185 Raynald successfully agitated to have Guy placed on the throne after the death of Baldwin IV. That same year, continuing his deprivations against the traders, he attacked a caravan which included Saladin's sister. Guy attempted to placate Saladin by remonstrating against Raynald, but the gesture was vain. Raynald protested that, whatever Guy said, there was no peace or apology between him and Saladin.



Medieval illustration of the battle at the Horns of Hattin

In 1187 Saladin defeated the Crusaders soundly at the Battle of Hattin. The battle had been widely awaited, and Crusaders collected all the forces available to them, still to be defeated on these hills between Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee. Amongst the prisoners were Guy and Raynald. One story says that Saladin offered the cup (coffee) of hospitality to Guy (thereby promising him his life). Guy passed the cup on to Raynald, but Saladin protested that he had not offered Raynald the cup, and proceeded to personally behead him for the affronts he had suffered.



Statue of Salah Ad-Din beside the walls of Damascus

[Read more about the Battle of Hattin in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Hattin]

This Month

Dec	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31				
Dec	M	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F				
Europe				Ukraine: Court orders re-run of election runoff					Ukraine: Pres. powers reduced			Yuschenko poisoned			Israel's Vanunu voted 'rector' of Glasgow Univ.																Ukraine: Yanukovich resigns as PM				
Sudan			4 villages raided-15 die									Govt. troops attack rebels																				Govt. claims rebels (SLM) attacked govt forces.			
Turkey													Morocco summit to discuss democratic reform																			Govt. & SPLA agree to peace treaty			
Asia														Explosion in Manila market kills 15																					
Pakistan																																			
Afghan.																																			
Arabia																																			
Iraq																																			
Syria																																			
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Palestine																																			

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