

MID-EAST e-NEWS

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Welcome

King Abdullah or Jordan made the comment that he could see three civil wars looming in the region: amongst the Iraqis, Palestinians, and Lebanese. Others, I am sure, have considered this possibility. The purpose of this journal is to inform readers of the situation in the Middle East, as broadly as possible, and clarify issues that pertain to the region. For many of us, that can provide us with information to aid our prayers for the people and nations concerned. I hope the article here on page 1 helps us focus our participation more effectively.

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

A View of the Goal

In the previous issue I wanted to encourage folks, as we look at events in the Middle East, to remember that we are called to be participants, rather than spectators. Intercession is not a spectator sport. As I wrote, however, in the back of my mind I was thinking that I was missing something. Preparing the This Month calendar gives me ample opportunity to reflect on the way things are (or are not) progressing in the Middle East – whether we consider Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, or wherever.

As I did this I read an article from Iraq on the people losing a 'sense of hope' in the situation. I wondered, as I read that, whether it is this sense of hope that is lacking in our intercession.

As I was looking for the above-mentioned article I did a search on my computer, for "hope", obtaining some interesting results... after the Iraq Study Group report was published: "*In the Arab world, commentators held out little hope Bush would reactivate peace efforts.*" on UN efforts to prevent war: "*The proposed U.N. resolution has prompted a lively debate about whether it would help stabilise Somalia, as the U.S. and Britain hope...*" "Saudi Arabia's ambassador" referred to "*the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki as the best hope for stability.*"

perhaps Arab League secretary, Amr Moussa, had the best perception of what hope involves: "*Asked for details about his efforts [in Lebanon], he said: 'It is still at its beginnings but I see that it is a start that gives some hope.'*" whereas the hope of the publisher, that the ISG report might be a bestseller, is no more than a mere chance, one that will probably not be fulfilled. Referring to the paperback sales of the ISG report, the publisher "*can only hope for a repeat of the success of ...'The 9/11 Commission Report' in 2004. [which] sold more than 1 million copies.*"

These phrases, taken from news reports of the last two weeks, remind us that the Christian sense of *hope* in God's purpose is more than recognition of a faint chance that it may occur. We need to translate that difference into a sense of action, to intercede with a *sense of hope* that things can change, and that our Lord would intervene to initiate that change.

This week I bought one of the local football team's t-shirts (US translation: 'soccer'). Each game, for 90 minutes they have their eyes on the goal, and between them are working towards that goal. Are we? Do we persevere in prayer for the people, places, politicians and decisions in this region, or are events causing us to lose our sense of direction? A heavy cross wind may cause the players of CSS Sfax to change their tactics, keeping the ball closer to the ground, but their goal does not change. In our *Great Game* are we focused on the goal? Do we want change? Do we expect it?

Two Rebellions

In AD 68 a rebellion against Rome began amongst the Jews. It culminated in a final defense in the Temple at Jerusalem, and in its final destruction. This was a cataclysm for the Jews, and particularly for the religious leaders, many of whom died defending the temple.

Whereas the High Priests were focused on Temple sacrifice, and therefore were located in Jerusalem, the Pharisees were to be found across the country, in the local synagogues. When the Romans destroyed the Temple, then, the High Priests lost everything, but the Pharisees were able to capitalize on their loose-knit organization. They were also fortunate in that Johannan, their leader in AD 70, was able to escape the temple.

The Pharisees did not support the rebellion against Rome. Their leader, Johannan, was arrested by the rebels as Vespasian's army was approaching. He is said to have faked his death, and was carried out of the city in a coffin. Once the rebellion was crushed he was then able to persuade Vespasian to accept the Pharisees as the Jewish religious leaders.

(Continued on p.2)

Lebanon's Struggle

Modern Lebanon has a *confessional* system of representation in Parliament – a system that depends upon the population's religion. For this reason, 18 sects have been officially recognized in the country, and their representation in parliament depends upon their approximate proportion in the general population. Since no census has been held since 1932, this is necessarily an approximation, and is one of the issues being exploited at the current time.

The issue of concern, actually, is how each faction can maintain its power both within parliament and within the general populace. Historically, the alliances that the various groups have made have fallen apart when either group perceives that it would be to their benefit. For this reason Michel Aoun, who recently returned from exile in France, after a generation resisting Syrian influence in Lebanon, has now allied his Free Patriotic Movement with pro-Syrian Hezbollah.

The posts of President, Prime Minister and Speaker of the Parliament are designated for the Maronites (from a time when they had a slight majority in the population), Sunni, and Shi'ites respectively. Since the demographics have clearly

Lebanon's Demographics

Christian	Shiite	Sunni	Druze
39%	35%	21%	5%

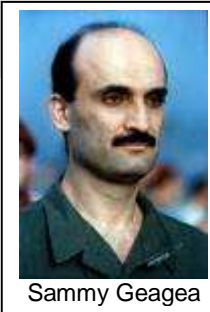
However, a census has not been taken since 1932, due to the sensitivity of the issue in Lebanon.

Non-Muslim Sects

(Orthodox)	(Catholic)	(Protestant)	
Greek	Maronite	Evangelical	Jewish
Jacobite/Syriac	Melkites (Greek)	(inc. Baptists,	
Armenian (Gregorian)	Armenian	7 th Day Adventists)	
Coptic	Roman Catholic (Latin)		
	Syriac		
	Chaldean		
	Assyrian		

changed – though not so much as has at times been claimed – Hezbollah is leading a campaign for a change in the constitution to enable them to have more control over government legislation.

Soon after Aoun's return last year – he was exiled for his part in the Civil War of the 1970s and



Sammy Geagea

1980s – a past ally of his, Sammy Geagea, was pardoned and released from prison. Geagea had led the *phalangists*, the armed militant wing of the Maronites, also known as the Kataib. In the latter part of the Civil War Aoun had turned on Geagea and the two Maronite factions had fought each other. Aoun had been appointed Prime Minister, but the Christian and Muslim factions had been unable to agree on a candidate for the Presidency. Even after most other groups had accepted the Ta'if Accord of 1989, which was intended

to bring an end to the Civil War, Aoun continued to fight. His group was eventually subdued by the new president, Elias Hrawi, though only with the support of the Syrian military, and Aoun was sent into exile.

Today it is Syrian pressure that has kept Emile Lahoud in office, and the 3-year extension to his presidency is due to lapse in 2007. All parties involved in the current stand-off must surely have their eyes on potential candidates for this post.

(Next issue: the people involved.)



Gen. Michel Aoun

Political leadership

President	Maronite	Emile Lahoud	In 2004, at Syria's insistence, his 4 year term was extended another 3 years.
Prime Minister	Sunni Muslim	Fuad Siniora	A long-time ally of assassinated ex-PM Rafik Hariri, Siniora has not been successful in reducing Syrian influence in Lebanon's affairs.
Speaker of Parliament	Shi'ite	Nabih Berri	He has now in the post for as many as 14 years. He is pro-Syrian, but less strongly than the Syrian-supported Hezbollah.

Hezbollah had 5 of its members returned to Parliament in 2005. All five withdrew from parliament recently, as part of a campaign to force the government's resignation.

Two Rebellions (cont. from p.1)

It must be mentioned at this point that the other group of religious leaders known to us from the New Testament, the Sadducees, did not accept the oral law of the Pharisees. This may also help us recognize some of the distinctions made between them as we read the Gospels and the book of Acts.

The Yeshiva is the religious academy at which rabbis are trained. Their studies are of their *oral* Torah, the Mishnah/Talmud, not the Pentateuch (Torah), nor the Biblical books of History, Poetry or Prophecy (Nevi'im, Ketuvim). The first *yeshivot* were opened in the decades following the destruction of Jerusalem. The central Yeshiva, and the headquarters of Pharisee-ism from 80 AD was at Yavneh.

Some years later, the leading rabbi, Judah HaNasi ('the prince', 135-220) persuaded the Romans to appoint a representative for Jews across the empire. (The scattered Jewish population may have been as high as 7%.) This they did, and the appointment of Rabbi Judah HaNasi begins the period of the Patriarchate, which survived until... (continued on p.3)

Identity - Whose Task Is It?

Looking at Israel today, in the light of prophecy, it is difficult to see how it may develop without trying to consider multiple issues simultaneously. It is difficult to resist that challenge, but we shall; first continuing to look at the issue of *identity* – how Jewish is it necessary for Israel to be? – and not turning to the challenge of *geography* – how large is the prophesied Israel? – until a future issue.

In both these cases... (says he, trying to balance two balls while leading his readers to believe he is only dealing with one issue)... in both these cases it will be appropriate to ask ourselves a couple of questions:

1. Whether indications in the Biblical text that prophetic Israel will have a distinctly Jewish identity and a distinct, and quite large, geographic territory, should be taken (i) entirely literally, (ii) interpreted as generalizations, or (iii) recognized to be possibilities, conditional upon any number of qualifications that Israel may or may not now possess. (And, no, these alternatives are not mutually exclusive.)

2. Whether the responsibility for bringing this prophesied condition to fruition is to be considered a goal of believers, affecting day to day decisions of political will, financial and even prayer support; or whether the larger goal should be left to the One who ordained them, while we focus on the issues more at hand over which we have been specifically given a Biblical mandate. These last would generally include social welfare, personal and political ethics, witness to unbelievers of the presence of a personal God who offers salvation to mankind.

Our answers to these two questions will affect our attitude to Israel today even more than our position on the earlier topics that we have discussed. It may even be said... ok, I will say it: Many of those who do not accept that Biblical prophecies are actually intended to refer to a literal Jewish state some time in the future, (those who turned off this series as we discussed Entity in e-News issues 69-74), would be very interested in our answers to these questions. It is probably in our response to these questions that the greatest differences between believing Christians lie, in terms of the role of Israel. In fact our excessive dogmatism on these answers may be partly responsible for our brothers' and sisters' unwillingness to accept the significance of Israel. Our insistence on taking responsibility for bringing about this future prophetic state may serve to alienate many, when in fact it is the method (the means, or our role in it) that is for them the greatest concern, rather than the recognition that a future Israel may be in God's plan.

Having said that, we must wait until the next issue, the New Year issue of 2007, to discuss our approach to the topic of identity, the Jewish-ness of the prophetic Israel.

Two Rebellions (cont. from p.2)

...the beginning of Rome's decline in the 4th century. The conduct of all Jews in the empire was the responsibility of this agency, through its centers in Sepphoris, Beit She'an and Tiberias.

It was during the Patriarchate that the Mishnah and Gemara were developed. In actuality, the Gemara is the collection of interpretations of the complex and cryptic Mishnah. Also, for the first time, the Gemara uses Scripture – teachings and instructions in the Torah/Tanakh – to defend Mishnaic laws. Perhaps this indicates that the man in the street still considered the books of Moses as more authoritative than the Mishnah. (see e-NEWS 59. Note that in that article the Rabbinic books are not listed in chronological order, but in parallel with Christian writings.)

Next Issue: Writings of the Patriarchate

From the Talmud...

In the Talmud, one of the most prominent rabbis is Judah haNasi, often called simply "Rabbi." As great a rabbi as he was, even he could make mistakes. One day, a calf being led to slaughter broke free and sought refuge under his robes, bellowing with terror. Yehuda pushed the poor animal away, saying: "Go; for this purpose you were created."

In Heaven it was said: "Since he showed no pity, let us bring suffering upon him." And then he was afflicted with very painful gallstones and other illnesses. He prayed for relief, but his prayers were ignored, just as he had ignored the pleas of the calf.

Then one day his cleaning lady found some baby weasels in the house and was about to expel them violently with her broom, but Yehuda said, "Leave them alone! It is written: 'His Mercy is upon all his works.'"

And from Heaven was heard: "Since he has shown compassion, let us be compassionate with him." And Rabbi Yehuda was healed of his gallstones and his other afflictions.

from Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Bavli), Tractate Bava Metzia 85a
(source, Wikipedia)

This Month

Nov	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	Dec	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	
Sudan	Jinjawid attack refugees in Chad			Govt. opens new offensive-with Jinjawid							Hundreds killed in South-battles between army & SPLA erupt							Darfur harvest is fine, food aid is reduced			Govt. & Jinjawid use rape as military tactic									
Fighting in South																					Blair suggests no-fly zone over Darfur									
Somalia				Floods in South, 5 killed by crocodiles							OIC letter calls for killing of prominent Kenyans, Somalis, uprising in Ethiopia			OIC clash with Ethiopian troops			Islamists detain, expel journalist		UN approves sending African peacekeepers to Somalia											
Islamist groups controlled by Al Qaeda, with 4,000 foreign fighters involved				Puntland prov. adopts Islamic law							Baidoa suicide bomb kills 9					Fighting between OIC & govt. troops, inc. Ethiopians at Dinsoor, Maddoy					OIC surround Baidoa govt.		AU wants to support Somali govt.							
Pakistan	Suicide bomber attempts attack on police in Peshawar			BBC reporter released by militants			Indian troops in 2-day battle with Kashmir Islamists						Snow & freezing rain hit quake survivors in N Pakistan						Pakistan claims to have aided Afghanistan by arresting 500 Taliban this year											
				2 nd moderate cleric killed in Waziristan									Musharraf proposes joint rule of Kashmir																	
Afghan.	Flooding kills 60 in Baghdis prov, NW			Floods kill 40+ in Urozgan, SW			Suicide bomb kills 2 NATO (Canadian)			Kandahar suicide attack-8 killed						Taliban reject peace talks														
							US forces kill 7 Taliban nr Kandahar			Suicide bomb kills 2 civilians			70+ Taliban killed in Helmand		Suicide bomb hits troop convoy-2 killed			Suicide bomb misses Helmand gov.kills 8												
							55 Taliban killed in clashes			Roadside bomb kills 2 NATO																				
Arabia				Knife attack on Briton in Jubail, Saudi Arabia			Protests in Bahrain against election fraud -Shiites object to Sunni govt. policies			Qatar to pay 40,000 Palestinian education workers' salaries						Saudi clerics call on Sunnis to resist Shiites														
										Saudi detains 139 terrorism suspects			Saudi militants attack Jeddah prison			US criticizes UAE weapons data														
Iraq	14 kidnapped inc 4 US, Austrian			Mayor of Hibhib killed			9 police kidnapped			Car bombs in market kill 51			Mortars spark Sunni/Shia clashes			Suicide bomb kills 70 day laborers														
US Deaths: 3/30: 2,317 5/31: 2,459 7/31: 2,578 8/31: 2,626 9/30: 2,700 10/31: 2,806 11/15: 2,858 12/15: 2,942	9 shot at Baghdad bakery			US raid in Sadr City, 3 killed			Kirkuk oil storage bombed			35 insurgents held in Baquba			10 US killed in clashes			Bomb hits Samarra 'Golden Mosque'														
	Warrant issued for Ad-Dari arrest			Troops rescue 2 hostages, 13 held			US F-16 crashes nr Baghdad			2 Shiites attack funeral, are killed			US troops & tanks kill 14 in Ramadi after being attacked from mosque			4 South Africans kidnapped														
	55 bodies found in Baghdad			3 police killed in Baquba			US battle with insurgents-5 girls shot			Air strikes on foreign insurgent houses-8 die			Marshlands back to 50% of area			Kirkuk suicide bomb kills 5														
	5 hostages rescued, 1 killed			6 bombs kill 200+ in Shia area of Baghdad - 3-day curfew imposed			US troops raid mosque, arrest 14			7 US troops killed			US air strike kills 32, inc insurgents			9 killed as gunman raid Shia home														
	SCIRI leader killed in Baghdad			3 US die in Anbar fighting			UK rpt: 13/112 Iraq battalions can work independently			Baghdad Mandaean leader killed						13 killed in Mosul														
	Hilla suicide bomb kills 22			3 US die in Anbar fighting			UK rpt: 13/112 Iraq battalions can work independently			Baghdad Mandaean leader killed						US soldier killed in Nineveh province, 2 in Anbar														
	Shia health minister abducted			Tel Afar suicide bomb kills 22			Police stn. attacked nr Samarra			Helicopter crash-4 US killed, 12 survive						Shiite sheikh killed in Basra														
Many Shia/Sunni couples forced to divorce by families, clan. Mosque preachers advocating peace are being killed by Sunni extremists. Situation deteriorating, with more calling it civil war. Saudi & others approve of Iraq Study Group report.	Baghdad bus stn. bombs-6 die			Sunni mosques attacked & burned in Baghdad-30 killed			28 found in Baquba grave			Militants occupy Siniya, US troops seal off town			Karbala car bomb kills 6																	
	Gunmen rampage thru Baquba, curfew imposed			UK soldier killed in Basra			52 bodies found in Baghdad			US troops seal off town			Karbala car bomb kills 6																	
	TV actor killed			22 killed in US raid			Pres. Bush begins talks with Maiki in Jordan. Sadr bloc withdraws from govt. in protest			Shia leader Hakim meets with Pres. Bush in D.C.			Shia militias torch Sunni homes			2 Shia homes attacked, 9 killed														
	Prof's killed in Kirkuk, Hilla			Anbar tribes battle & defeat Al Qaeda, killing 55, holding 25			4 US killed in Anbar & Diyala			Last 44 Italian troops leave			63 are killed by army			Mortars kill 5 in Baghdad restaurant														
	Floods & mudslides make 3,000 homeless in Kurdistan			25 bodies found in Baquba			14 rebels raid convoy, are killed			3 car bombs kill 16 in S Baghdad			Security vehicle raid, \$1m taken																	
Syria				Diplomatic relations with Iraq restored			Militant kills self after border capture						Syria forcibly deports Ahvaz Iranian exiles																	
Lebanon	50,000 bomblets cleared			Pierre Gemayel assassinated			Shia protesters block airport after comments during funeral			Hezbollah trains Mahdi army			Protesters & Sunnis clash, 1 killed			Opposition supporters rally in Beirut														
										Mass demonstration & sit-in outside parliament, led by Hezbollah			Siniora accuses Nasrallah of attempting a coup																	
													Pres. Lahoud rejects Hariri assassination trial plans																	
Egypt				Police find 2 tons of explosives in Sinai									500kg explosives found in Sinai			Court frees 2 MB politicians														
Israel				Rocket from Gaza kills man in Sderot			Israel willing to exchange prisoners for IDF soldier			Man throws petrol bomb, is shot dead						3 rockets hit Sderot, 20 fired since 11/26 'ceasefire'														
Ceasefire is tenuous but holding.	Militant killed in Nablus raid			Gen. Halutz probes cluster bomb use-he had prohibited it			WB militants fire on IDF, 2 are shot dead			Protester shot dead in Nablus			Minister suggests freeing Barghouti			Stone thrower killed during clashes nr Ramallah														
	Gaza rocket hits Sderot, nr Olmert house, kills woman			Arab-Israelis allowed compensation for riot deaths in 2002			CEASEFIRE effective in Gaza			Israel willing to allow Badr brigade to provide security in Gaza			Israel agrees to leave S.Lebanon Ghajar village			Israel stops Haniyeh entering Gaza with \$30m from Iran-clashes between Hamas-Fatah														
WB & Gaza	Hamas brings in \$4m via Gaza			100s of Gazans occupy home about to be bombed-IDF cancels bombing			Abbas: all groups accept truce			Rice visits Abbas in Jericho			2 trying to cross Gaza fence shot & injured			2 more shot near Gaza border			Gunmen attack govt. convoy in Gaza			Fighting breaks out between Fatah & Hamas militants								
tension between Hamas & Fatah increases, especially after Dec.11 killing of 3 children	Abbas meets with Shbair J may consider Abbas' truce									Hamas says unity govt. talks have failed			Rocket fired from Gaza			Gunmen kill 3 sons of Fatah official			Hamas judge killed in Gaza		Haniyeh convoy attacked & son injured, 1 killed,									