

MID-EAST e-NEWS

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Contexts

Historical	
<i>Roman Amman</i>	1
Religious	
<i>Rabbinic Judaism - principles</i>	2
<i>Christian Zionism - summary</i>	3
Calendar	
<i>This Month</i>	4

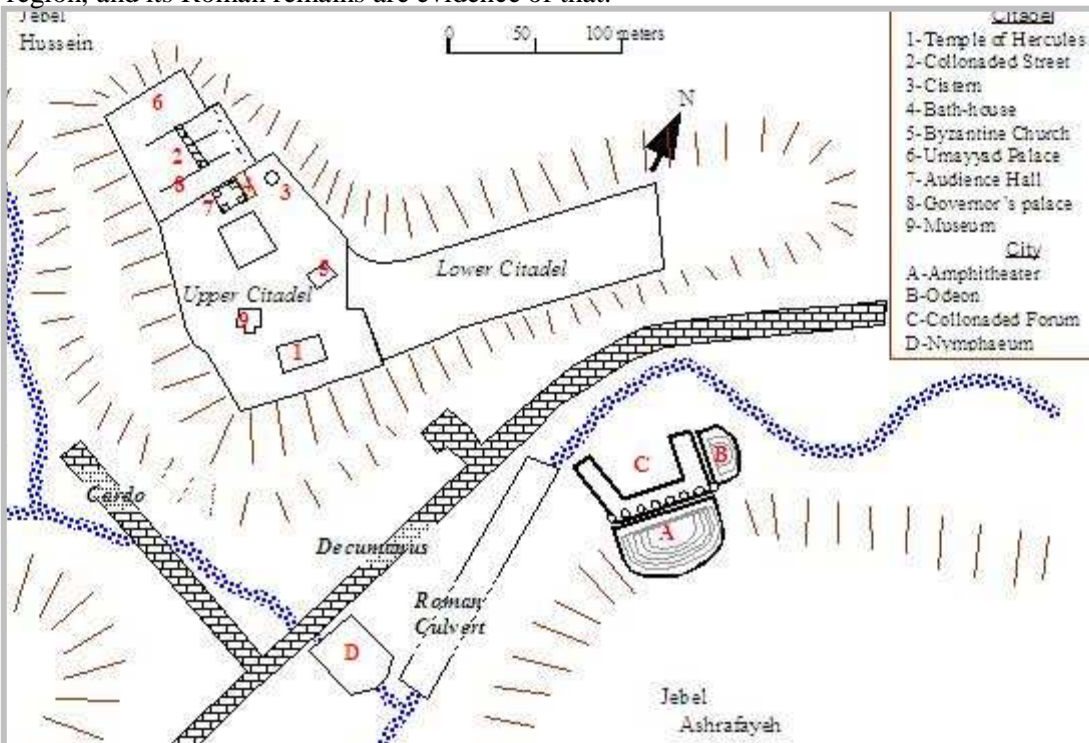
Welcome

Items that did **not** make it into this issue:
May 2: Details of a US-sponsored timetable for steps towards peace in Israel, with May 15 as a start date for Israel and PNA.
May 11: Reported Jordanian/Israeli discussions on a Jordan federation incorporating the West Bank.
May 13: King Abdullah's cancelled trip to Ramallah, West Bank.
Troubles in Gaza continue, with multiple failed attempts at ceasefire.

Write me at pkclark@pmbx.net & let me know what you think.

Roman Amman

Amman was the city where Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, was sent to his death by King David. Some of the Ammonite walls still remain from that time around the Lower Citadel (see map). Amman continued to be a significant city in the region, and its Roman remains are evidence of that.



The columns of the *Temple of Hercules* (1) look down over the modern city, where bustling streets follows the lines of the old Roman *Cardo* and the *Decumanus*. Water from across the citadel hill was channeled to an enormous cistern (probably covered with a



culvert to cover a section of the river.

wooden roof) to preserve the precious liquid. The *Amphitheater* (A) in the valley below the citadel is built out of the rock of the hillside.

Unless one knows where to look, in Amman it is easy to forget that a river runs through it. Even the Romans built a

(Continued on p2)



Rabbinic Judaism – some Principles

A fixed tenet for the interpretation and application of Jewish law, *Halakha*, is that interpretations should be not be considered fixed, immovable, but responsive to debate over the ages. A consequence of this is that the writings & pronouncements of the later scholars can be said to have more importance than those of an earlier period. Rodkinson, who has written at length on this issue attests that the strength of the Talmud “is, to those who rightly understand it, that it has never purposed to make fixed rules, to last for all ages; deliberation and reasoning concerning the Halakhas according to the circumstances is the principle of the Talmud” (Michael Rodkinson, p29), and “the spirit and object of the Talmud itself, [is] that the Halakhas should be matter for discussion, and modified in accordance with the requirements of the time and place” (p30).

This principle continued to be difficult to maintain, since the tendency was (as with Karo’s *Shulchan Aruch* - see e-News 83) for Rabbis to attempt simplifications of the Talmud, for those who did not have the learning or opportunity to read every relevant statement. These simplifications then, in practice, became more dogmatic than the original Talmudic pronouncements, carrying more weight. Rodkinson again: “As soon as the Gaonim had permitted to propound decisions of the Halakhas, and to fix them, those Gaonim, who succeeded them, were compelled to teach that these decisions of the former Gaonim, even though given without proofs, are holy for the people, as if given from Mount Sinai.” (Remember the Gaonim/Geonim are those scholars in the period immediately after the Talmud’s completion.) Note here, the consequence that these writings were “holy for the people, as if given from Mount Sinai”.

It can be difficult for us to comprehend the authority of the Rabbinic scholars, but from these examples we can draw comparison to the authority of Papal decrees upon the Catholic congregations. Rabbis to whom this authority has been awarded were often contemporaries of each other, unlike the Popes, and are possibly more numerous than the number of Popes that have held office over the same period, but the writings of each are revered, nonetheless.

As an appendix to our brief discussion of the *Two Rabbis* (e-NEWS 86-88) I want to quote again from an online message from the Rabbi of a Baltimore, Maryland, synagogue. Having addressed the position of Nahmanides (e-NEWS 88) he then summarizes the approach of Maimonides to the scriptures:

“For Maimonides, ‘Tradition’ is not secret or mystical, but publicly transmitted, and accessible to all. Maimonides wrote his Mishnah Torah to render the entire oral Torah canon accessible to all Israel, just as his biblical namesake, Moses the son of Amram, taught the entire Torah to the entire nation of Israel. Intuition is appropriate when the law is unclear, and educated guesses must be made. His theological tract, Guide to the Perplexed, is better understood as “Signposts for the disoriented.” But there can be no prophecy or intuition in conflict with God’s public, democratically accessible divine law.”

And then, stating his own position, the Baltimore Rabbi concludes:

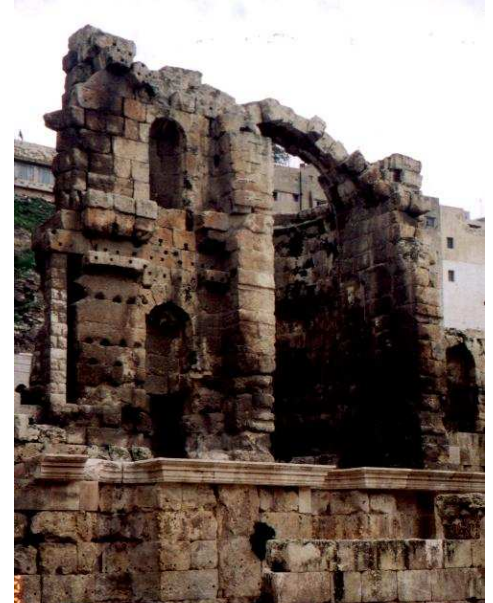
“When religion is defined with intuition, buildings fall, because the biased intuition of bullies does not allow those whom it takes to be wrong to have rights. When belief is tempered with reason, we fulfill the Isaiah mandate, ‘come let us reason together.’ [Isaiah 1:18] It is the Maimonidean reason that is ultimately gentler because it is convincing.”

(http://jewishdowntown.org/rabbis_corner/2006/two-understandings.php)

In the next issue of e-NEWS we will conclude this series by looking at the interactions of Jesus with the Rabbinical Judaism of his day.

Roman Amman (cont.)

A *Nymphaeum* (D) is a standard feature of established Roman cities – others can be seen in Umm Qays and Jerash, to the north, and Petra to the south. It celebrates the Roman love of water features, and mythology.



The Nymphaeum may be neglected by Amman’s tourists – few as they are these days – but its location, right in the middle of the city, makes it an easy destination. As the map shows, another stream actually flows under the Nymphaeum to meet the river. A tunnel under the ruins allows one to see what is left of this, though the river is now submerged beneath a busy road. Back in the citadel, the pillars of the *Colonnaded Street* (2) – with drains taking water to the cistern – now lead to the *Audience Hall* (7), a later, Islamic period, construction.



Christian Zionism: Summary

In the previous article we outlined the experience of Israel in the land, and the areas under their control at different times. During the reign of David and Solomon this included the territory promised to the Patriarchs, “*from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.*”

1. Prophecy

Regarding the land of ancient Israel, Scripture ...

<i>What we believe about the Bible's prophecies affects our view of Israel today.</i>	is not clear	indicates that Christians have replaced the Jews	indicates a converted remnant of Jews	has a distinction between Jews & Christians	prophesies that the Jews will reoccupy the land
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We have already considered issues such as whether the promises are *literal*, and *conditional*. More recently we presented material on the topic of Israel, addressing the question of whether the current *entity*, the State of Israel since 1948, is that mentioned in prophecy, as well as the *identity* of the population – whether it is to be purely Jewish (Rabbinic, Karaite or Messianic) or more heterogenous.

2. Conditions

Any prophecy of a return to the land of Israel...

<i>What Biblical prophecy says about any conditions laid upon the Jews for their return to the Land?</i>	is not conditional	will be by those who have Jewish ancestry	indicates it will be repentant Jews who occupy the land	suggests that Jews are recognizing Christ	indicates that the Messiah will bring them into the land
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Our latest topic has been the *geography* of the prophesied Israel, and we have looked at how Patriarchal promises have been fulfilled, at least in part.

3. Entity

The status of the modern State of Israel...

<i>Since 1948 Israel has existed as a nation, but is this political entity necessarily the fulfillment of scripture?</i>	is not the promised return of prophecy	is a manipulated political phenomenon	is an 'Abramic' return, but not God's method	may be the return prophesied in scripture	clearly is the return prophesied in the Bible
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Alongside this, we have also introduced the consideration of our attitude towards the fulfillment of prophecy. This will be developed further in the following topic, **6. Support**, in the next edition of *e-NEWS*. Whatever our opinion on the geographic extent of the Israel of prophecy, it is perhaps more pertinent to consider our attitude towards the acquisition of the land. If we believe that Scripture seems to indicate that in those days Israel's borders will extend to include 'some of what is now Syria and Lebanon' (see below), it does not necessarily follow that we will act upon this belief. We could take the positions that many Rabbis did when the 'politicals' (political Zionists) were encouraging the Jews of Europe to move to Palestine; they refused to participate, on the belief that it would happen by God's hand, and not by the political maneuverings that they were witnessing.

4. Identity

The ethnic makeup of a prophetic Israel would be...

<i>Could the prophesied Israel include non-Jews (both racially and by religion)?</i>	whoever is resident	including Secular Jews	Jewish and Christian believers	Conservative, Reform & Orthodox Jews	Only Jews recognized by the Orthodox
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Lately I have been reading in Jeremiah, who was writing immediately before the Babylonian Captivity, about his concern for his people. In a passage in chapter 3, verses 14-18, he addresses the return of the people – a remnant, implicitly, in this passage – and observes a progression of time from their arrival to the recognition of Jerusalem as 'The Throne of the Lord.' “*In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance*” (v18).

5. Geography

The prophesied return of Israel will include...

<i>Prophecies include a wide area of the Middle East – Israel today is only a small part of that.</i>	the present State of Israel	plus the West Bank & the Gaza Strip	plus the Sinai	plus what is now Jordan	and some of what is now Syria and Lebanon
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This passage, and there are others similar, projects a change of heart of the people, in which they no longer “*follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts*” (v17). Jeremiah also addresses - what seems to be for Christians today who are interested in Israel – the Jewish Temple and sacrificial system: “*men will no longer say, “The ark of the covenant of the Lord.” It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made.*” (v16).

This Month

Apr	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	May	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16										
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