

he has been brought out he negotiates an easier journey to Zoar. Then, when the fire pours upon Sodom and Gomorrah, he is too frightened to stay in Zoar, and reverts to the angels' first suggestion of residing in the mountains.

In the earlier part of the angels' visit to Sodom, Lot began well by taking on a commitment to the visitors to look after them. When the threatening mob assembled outside his door, Lot was very brave to go out to reason with them. But as a man his options were limited. All he could really have done was to have stood before the door until they crushed him and beat the door down, and perhaps he should have left it at that. The mention of his

daughters may have been a ploy to distract the mob's attentions or play for time. Whether this be so or not, Lot's actions are his own responsibility and not God's. They cannot reasonably be used to attack God or the Bible.

Lot is not presented as an example of supreme faith. It is true that he is called "righteous" (2 Pet. 2:7,8). However, Peter goes on to say, "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (v. 9). In Lot's extreme dilemma of whether to sacrifice his guests or his daughters, he was delivered by the angelic power of his guests.

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Gleanings from the Land

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Israel expands its ports

ISRAEL'S TWO main ports are Haifa, developed by the British during their period of rulership of Palestine, and Ashdod, developed by Israel in the 1960s. There are ambitious plans for expanding both as part of a programme of improving Israel's infrastructure, which has already led to the opening of a new terminal at Ben-Gurion airport, the building of the Trans-Israel highway and major upgrades to the rail system.

The expansion of port facilities at Ashdod involves the creation of a new port north of the existing one. Work began in 1999 and is due to finish this year. It will more than double the capacity of Ashdod, and there are plans to incorporate up-to-date technology to speed the transit of goods and to provide security safeguards. Haifa already has a capacity greater than the combined capacity of the old and new ports of Ashdod, and plans are to double its capacity in two



PICTURE: TONY BENSON

Haifa, Israel's biggest port.

stages, the first of which has recently started and is scheduled to be completed in 2009. To accompany this doubling of Israel's port capacity along its Mediterranean coast, there is scheduled a development of other facilities, including a free-trade zone designed to encourage the Palestinian Authority and Jordan to trade through these ports.

All this involves an expectation of a period of economic growth in Israel and greater peace and prosperity in the Middle East,

developments in line with our traditional understanding of prophecy, though to an extent far exceeding that anticipated by the Brotherhood 150 years ago.

Source: "A port for all seasons", Hanan Sher, *Jerusalem Report*, 19 September 2005.

Development of the Negev

ANOTHER big development initiative in Israel concerns

the Negev, the southern region of Israel, and largely desert or semi-desert. The word means 'dry' or 'parched', and is the usual Hebrew word for 'south' in the Old Testament. The present region that bears this name is usually regarded as extending from northwest of Beer-sheba to the southern tip of Israel at Eilat. The Negev makes up sixty per cent of the territory of Israel (excluding the territory occupied in 1967 and often referred to as the West Bank), but contains only eight per cent of the population. Of this eight per cent, about 200,000 live in Beer-sheba, about 170,000 are Bedouin Arabs and about 140,000 are Jews resident in the rest of the area.

During 2005 the Jewish National Fund embarked on a project known as Blueprint Negev to develop the Negev to provide homes for another 250,000 Jews over the next five to ten years. Twenty-five new communities are planned, with seven having been established already. Thirty new reservoirs have been built to retain water

from the infrequent rainfall. The project involves providing not only houses but good education, health and transport facilities, along with employment opportunities, including the development of the area's considerable potential for tourism.

The Jewish National Fund was established at the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901 to develop the Land of Israel (then Palestine and part of the Ottoman Empire) and since then has planted over 240 million trees, built over 185 reservoirs and dams, developed over 250,000 acres of land and established over 250 parks.

The first prime minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion, was very enthusiastic about development of the Negev, and lived there with his wife in a simple home at Kibbutz Sede Boker for his final years. Towns such as Mitzpeh Ramon and Arad were founded in the Negev in the early years of the state but, while much of the rest of the country has prospered, have declined in recent years to become places of poverty and unemployment. This

problem was caused partly by dumping poorly-educated new immigrants from Middle Eastern countries into the Negev in the initial stages, and partly by the fact that the main industry of the area was textiles, which has dwindled almost to nothing due to competition from countries with lower wages.

The new development plan aims at attracting people from other parts of the country that are overcrowded and expensive, and new immigrants from North America who want housing comparable to what they presently enjoy. It is envisaged that many will work in new hi-tech industries to be established in the area, or even commute to the Tel Aviv area from Beer-sheba on the recently modernised railway line or the new Trans-Israel Highway.

In his prophecies of the restoration, Jeremiah twice speaks of the revival of "the cities of the south" (32:44; 33:13), whilst Obadiah says that "the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south" (v. 20). The reason why plans are now being developed for the increased settlement of this region is the fulfilment of what God said through Ezekiel: "I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it: and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded" (36:10). If Israel is to continue to attract Jews from other parts of the world then efforts will need to be made to accommodate them in the less-settled regions of the country such as the Negev.

Source: "Restorative for a shrinking homeland", staff article, *International Jerusalem Post*, 2-8 December 2005, and full-page Jewish National Fund advertisement in the same issue.

PICTURE: TONY BENSON



Mitzpeh Ramon, founded in 1954 as a development town in the Negev.

PICTURE: © iStockphoto.com/FRED DE GROOT



Migrating storks, using thermals to soar and glide.

Arabian horses in Israel

THE HORSE is mentioned many times in the Bible, mainly in the context of war or as a mount for kings. It is thought to have been first domesticated in the plains of central Asia, from which it was introduced into the Middle East. The Arabs later bred horses for speed, and the modern racehorse was bred in about 1700 from Arab stallions and English mares to give a combination of speed and strength. Rich Arab sheiks are today prominent racehorse owners, preserving the ancestral love of the Arabs for fine horses.

The Law of Moses warned future kings of Israel against having many horses (Deut. 17:16), and the ownership of horses is not particularly associated with Israelis today. However, the achievements of the modern State of Israel are

legion, and among them is the breeding of some of the world's finest racehorses. There are ten sizable horse-breeding studs, and horses from Israel have won championships all over the world, out-competing countries like Germany and the USA with ten or more times the number of horses. A Swedish horse-breeding expert is quoted as saying, "It is amazing that Israel can produce horses of such quality, given the size of the country and the fact that they started from scratch".

Source: "Arabian knights: a noble breed unites Israelis of all stripes", Shula Kopf, *International Jerusalem Post*, 7-13 October 2005.

Migrating birds

THE PREVIOUS "Gleanings from the Land" ([Dec. 2005, p. 455](#)) commented on the importance of the Huleh Marshes in northern Israel as a wintering

ground and migration stopover for cranes, and Israel has long been recognised as an important part of the route of birds migrating between Eastern Europe and Africa. The prophet Jeremiah refers to the migration of four species of bird—the stork, the turtle dove, the crane and the swallow (8:7)—and migrating birds must have been a familiar sight to David caring for his flock on the Judean hills.

It is estimated that half a billion birds of all species fly through Israel each year, many of them stopping off for food and water, and this of course occurs twice yearly, in spring and autumn. On one day last September, 105,000 of one of the species mentioned by Jeremiah, the white stork, are estimated to have passed over Israel, one seventh of the world's population. A few days later 40,000 lesser spotted eagles were counted passing over Tel Aviv in five hours, forty per cent of the world's population.

Because of the variety of its habitats and its position on one of the major flyways of bird migration, Israel has 540 species of bird either living there or passing through, as compared with, for example, 258 in Germany, which is over twelve times bigger in area.

Israel has become a world centre for the study of bird migration, and is beginning to see the tourism potential of this, given that Britain, for example, is believed to have about two million birdwatchers, and the whole world estimated to have seventy million.

Source: "For the birds," Ina Friedman, *Jerusalem Report*, 31 October 2005.

"I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together" (Isa. 41:19).