

A window on Israel today

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Growing interest in Jesus (Yeshua)

DURING the latter part of May and into June there was a campaign in central Israel called *Jews for Jesus*. This was organised by Revive Israel, a Messianic ministry which has offices just outside Jerusalem. In its newsletter this group reports that over 2,000 Israelis contacted them for information about Jesus. This upsurge in interest came from both secular and religious Jews.

One of the activities during the campaign was a course on Israeli history and culture that included Jesus and the New Testament. Messianic Jews suffer from frequent harassment and attacks because of their belief in Yeshua (Jesus). It appears that this intolerance is generated really from ignorance about Jesus and his teachings. Writing in the Revive Israel newsletter a Sahar S. states that a group of students who visited their offices were surprised to discover “that Jesus loved the God of Israel . . . and that the promise of a new covenant was written in the Hebrew prophets (Jeremiah 31)”.

It is interesting to see Jews taking an interest in Jesus, albeit the Jesus of orthodox Christianity. The Revive Israel ministry believes in the Second Coming of Jesus and that this will be preceded by sweeping evangelism in Israel driven by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They quote Acts 1:6-8 and Romans 11:15,26 as the basis for their preaching mission and their guidance by the Holy Spirit, but they do not appear to preach about the

coming judgement on Israel prior to the appearance of Christ.

They have members who travel and speak internationally as part of the mandate as they understand it of Yeshua (Jesus) to be a “light to the nations”. In the past year they have held revival meetings and teaching seminars in France, Germany, Korea, Kazakhstan and Mozambique, as well as the US, but most of their activities take place in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

We know from Scripture that the conversion of Israel will not happen until Christ delivers them from the northern invasion and the apparent destruction of the nation and its people. As the prophet Zechariah says in 12:9-14, only at that time will God through Christ pour out “the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him”. Only after the period of mourning will the Second Exodus take place, and Jews worldwide will return to Israel to acknowledge Christ as their saviour and King.

Source: *Israel Today*, 16 Jun. 2010.

Tourism and tourist guides

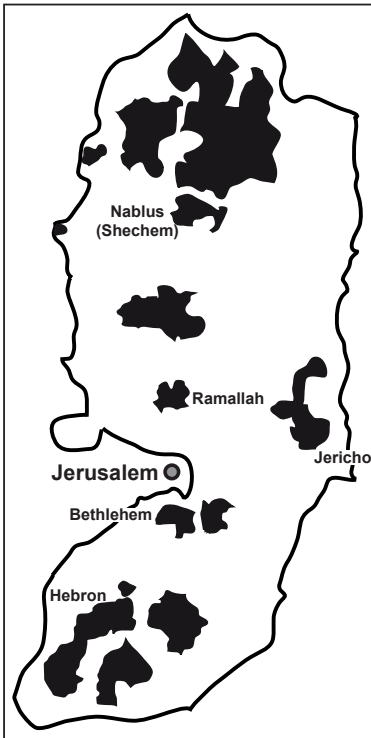
FIGURES issued by the Ministry of Tourism in Israel show that there has been an increase so far in 2010 over 2009 of forty-two per cent. Much of the increase is attributed to evangelical Christians, who are apparently flocking to Israel in greater numbers this year. For the first time since the Intifada in 2000, Israeli tour guides will be allowed to enter and lead

groups of pilgrims and tourists in Bethlehem and Jericho. A new pilot scheme has been set up between the Israeli and Palestinian tourism ministries and the Civil Administration of Judea and Samaria. Altogether twenty-five Jewish guides and twenty-five Jewish bus drivers will take part in the pilot scheme.

All Jewish Israeli citizens have been banned up to now from entering the areas controlled exclusively by the Palestinian Authority. This in part was to avoid the kidnapping of Jewish citizens (as in the ongoing case of Gilad Schalit, an Israeli soldier kidnapped some three years ago and still not released); any Jews entering the PA areas had to be escorted by the Israeli Defence Force. This ruling applied to what is known as Area A cities in the territory called the West Bank, in which Bethlehem and Jericho lie. (Places such as Shechem and Hebron are also Area A cities.)

The first groups to visit under this new arrangement were escorted by Palestinian officials, and two police vehicles and uniformed policemen were present at the places visited. Tourism Minister Stas Meseznikov said that this move is seen as “a way of helping Palestinian tourism. It will bring additional revenue to those areas, improve cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and, just as importantly, improve the international image of Israel and the Holy Land as a safe destination for tourists”.

It is hoped that the experiment will be successful and pass off without incident this year, and that it will eventually lead to the situation where one day there



Outline map of the West Bank. Black areas (Area A) represent territory under full Palestinian control. The rest is under Israeli or joint Israeli/Palestinian control.

will be no restrictions on Israeli citizens entering Palestinian-controlled areas. However, the Israel Tour Guides Association chairman has been critical of the move. He says that the tour guides were not covered by insurance nor protected from attacks, and the government was taking risks at their expense. He also said that his concern also focused on the fact that Palestinian guides might seek reciprocal arrangements to work in Israel. "I'm worried about Palestinian tour guides with their own ideology and their own historic narrative leading groups of tourists in Israel", he said.

In its search for peace, Israel has allowed the Land to become divided and is suffering the

consequences. The prophet Joel speaks of that time when God will act on behalf of His "heritage Israel", who have been scattered and the Land parted (3:2). The same chapter speaks of the results of Christ's intervention: "Jerusalem [shall] be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more" (v. 17). The prophets Isaiah, Micah and Zechariah all describe the time when the whole population of the earth will be invited to the Holy Land and to Jerusalem that they might be instructed in the ways of God. How different will be that experience compared with that of today's pilgrims (Isa. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:1-4; Zech. 14:16-21)!

Source: jPost.com, 22 Jun 2010.

A dry and thirsty land

RESIDENTS in Israel were facing dramatic increases in their water bills in July. They were already paying forty per cent more than they did a year ago, and there was scheduled to be a five-per-cent increase in July. This means that the average price per cubic metre is now four times what it was in 2008. Up to the middle of last year, Israelis had a 'drought levy' included in their water bills, but this was abolished and replaced by increased general charges.

The country's water shortage is the result of a decade of very low rainfall and governments' failure to react to the impending crisis. In 2001 the National Water Authority warned Ariel Sharon's government that by the end of the decade Israel would face a shortfall of 400 million cubic metres of water annually. To add to the problem, it is estimated that some 164 million cubic metres are lost annually because of sub-standard municipal equipment or leaks from corroded pipelines.

Although the government promises a three-year programme of building massive desalination plants, the obvious need for responsible conservation of water stocks and usage in what is an arid region of the world is plain to see. Times have changed since the early settlers caused the deserts to blossom, when the population was much smaller and industry not developed. Today Israel's greatly expanded population and its industrial resources require large amounts of water. Some 700 million cubic metres is needed for drinking water and 100 million cubic metres for industry. This, along with the 450 million cubic metres taken by agriculture, means that the total requirements are a staggering 1,250 million cubic metres.

As mentioned earlier, there is a large shortfall now, and in June the Israeli government approved plans for the construction of a massive water desalination plant in an area south of Tel Aviv, at Sorek. This plant, and others under construction, may be on-line by 2014 but even then will make up only the shortfall currently being experienced. Who knows what it will be in three years' time!

The Sorek plant will start producing 150 million cubic feet annually, a quarter of the shortfall, but it is planned to raise this to 300 million cubic metres eventually, making it one of the largest production units in the world. It is ironic that Israel successfully markets desalination plants worldwide and helps other nations cope with their increasing water shortages but has allowed its own national situation to get to this critical state.

There is opposition to the desalination programme from conservationists. The Palestinians



Seawater desalination plant.

claim that Israel deliberately keeps them short of water resources, and they seek control of some sources themselves. There is no easy solution to the problem. Though the country is looking forward to vast energy supplies that will make the nation self-sufficient and wealthy, such resources cannot be drunk and are no substitute for the staple ingredient necessary for life: water.

When Israel came out of Egypt, the psalmist tells us that God “clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers” (78:15,16). When the Kingdom comes, such power and ability will once more be available to provide for the needs of His people.

Source: *Jerusalem Post*, 26 Jun. 2010.

Improving the image

ISRAEL was recently accepted as a member of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Coop-

eration and Development). This year the organisation will hold its annual conference in Jerusalem instead of Paris. The eighty-sixth meeting of the OECD is planned to take place over three days during October 2010. The conference carries both prestige and special importance, given the decision by OECD leaders to deviate from tradition and not hold the meeting in Paris, and tourism ministers from thirty-one countries will attend.

Israel is giving the conference high priority, as can be seen from the fact that President Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer are all scheduled to attend, along with officials from the World Tourism Organisation. Given the increasing world hostility towards Israel as a consequence of the Gaza war and the latest incidents with the flotillas over the Gaza blockade, Israel is constantly seeking ways to improve its image and to counteract the negative stories that fill television reports and newspapers in other countries.

The theme of the conference centres on ‘green growth’ as derived from the OECD programme to develop and promote a green policy as a means to economic growth. Its is due to discuss ways in which tourism can contribute: developing the green tourism product, studying ecological effects on tourism and identifying green business opportunities.

Israel is, of course, well placed to host such a conference because the country has already generated a large number of the world’s leading clean-energy companies and spends more on research and development per unit of gross domestic product than any other country in the world. Israeli clean-tech companies are active across the whole spectrum of ‘green growth’ and renewable energy, particularly in the area of solar energy. A few years ago the Israeli company Solel built the world’s largest solar energy plant in California’s Mojave Desert and took on a contract worth \$890 million to build three solar collection plants in Spain.

Israel’s tourism minister was in no doubt of the benefit Israel’s membership of the OECD and hosting the conference would bring. He stated that “Israel joining the OECD is of great importance in terms of building a positive image for the country”. He went on to say that “The positive image gained will have an effect on the tourist’s choice to visit Israel, and it will attract foreign investors to the country, including, among others, investors in tourism. The committee’s decision to hold its annual meeting in Jerusalem and give it a festive and prestigious touch, together with the invitation to tourism ministers from member countries, is an important vote of confidence [in Israel], with

additional significance for promoting tourism and improving Israel's image around the world".

Such optimism may well be short lived because of the aggressive stance taken by Turkey, Syria, Iran and Hamas and the way they manipulate world opinion. At the end of the day, Israel's image in the world is of no importance; it is the nation's image with God that counts, and Bible prophecy leaves us in no doubt how that stands. The prophet Ezekiel tells us that judgement comes on Israel because of their "iniquity", their "trespasses", their "uncleanness" and their "transgressions". We see that when they dwelt in the Land safely (confidently) they trespassed against God. Ultimately, though, God will have mercy on them and will no longer "hide [His] face . . . from them" (39:23,24,29). The nations' view of Israel will be very different in that day.

Source: A7 News, 15 Jun. 2010.

The Dead Sea—a wonder of nature

STAYING with thoughts on tourism, it is quite obvious that the Israelis see tourism as a major item in moulding people's and ultimately nations' view of them. They never lose an opportunity to bang the drum for tourism, whether it be a sun-sand-sea type of holiday, pilgrimages to Biblical sites, living it up at musical festivals, or operatic presentations with celebrity international performers. Tel Aviv is billed as "the city that never sleeps", with a host of summer activities round the clock, its exceptional collection of Bauhaus architecture and its UNESCO designation as a World Heritage Site.

Now the Dead Sea is in the finals of the *New Seven Wonders*



Picture: Ivan Carter

The Dead Sea is one of Israel's most popular tourist destinations.

of the World competition. The Dead Sea is the lowest place on earth and one of Israel's most popular tourist destinations. There are twenty-eight finalists on the shortlist out of the 440 sites in 220 countries that originally entered.

During 2011 Israel's Tourism Ministry will lead the campaign for the Dead Sea to be one of the selected winners, through its fourteen representative offices around the world, and on its website in eleven languages, which will emphasise the unique attributes of the Dead Sea. Voting can take place on the competition website, and it is thought that as many as a billion people could vote.

Some of the other sites in the running include the Amazon, the Galápagos Islands, the Grand Canyon and the Maldives. At over 400 metres below sea level, the Dead Sea is known as the lowest and largest natural health spa in the world. It has a large number of luxury hotels and spa clubs, which offer tourists and health seekers black Dead Sea mud and hot springs, which it is

claimed ease muscular tensions, improve blood circulation and alleviate rheumatic pain.

The dry, pollution- and pollen-free air of the desert, which we are told is rich in oxygen, bromine and magnesium, offers relief to those suffering from asthma, lung and heart diseases. Even the all-year-round sunshine has its harmful UVB rays filtered through extra layers of atmosphere, enabling tourists to get a safer tan! (This author has noted that a recent addition to shopping centre malls in the UK, Australia and North America is stands promoting the sales of Dead Sea health and beauty products.)

Staying at the Dead Sea also enables the visitor to include the hilltop fortress of Masada, Qumran (where the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered) and Engedi. The Ministry of Tourism issued a statement which said, "It is hoped that the candidacy of the Dead Sea in the competition will promote tourism to the area and raise public awareness around the world of the problems facing the sea, which has lost about 1

metre in height every year for the last 30 years”.

It is interesting to consider that the Dead Sea probably came into existence in its present format because of God’s judgements on Sodom and Gomorrah, and is now promoted as a health resort. It is even more of a paradox when we read Scripture and see the transformation that will be effected in the Kingdom. The prophet Ezekiel speaks of the sea being healed because of the waters that issue forth from the temple. He speaks of multitudes, not of health tourists, but of fish, and of fishermen from En-gedi to En-eglaim (47:8-11). What was once a place of judgement will become a blessing. Such will be the beauty of the Kingdom.

Source: *News Israel*, Jul. 2010.

Israelis are being converted

SADLY, they are not being converted in a religious sense but in relation to the fuel their cars run on. More than 15,000

cars and trucks have recently been converted to operate on the less expensive, low emission, liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), according to reports in the press and on television. Israel has, of course, discovered vast gas resources in its territorial waters in the Mediterranean, which it believes will supply more than it needs for the next twenty-five to thirty-five years.

Such is the quantity thought to be available that Israel will almost certainly turn from being a consumer of gas to a supplier to other countries. Two years ago there were only fifteen LPG gas stations, compared with the fifty that exist now, and more are planned. The average cost is 2.80 shekels per litre, compared with 6.14 shekels per litre for 95-octane petrol. There is some concern that if there is a move to convert a large percentage of motor vehicles then the demand will ultimately push up the price. This would affect households because most people already use LPG for cooking at home.

We can be sure that the entrepreneurial and resourceful skills of the Israelis will seek to take advantage of the gas finds in every conceivable way to benefit commercial and domestic activities. It is interesting to note that a proposed Russian Gas Pipeline that was intended to run into Turkey, then round to Lebanon and into Israel, has now been amended by the Russians. They are saying that, in the light of the Israeli gas finds, it will go only as far as Turkey.

The powerful Russian energy company Gazprom has approached Israel to see if they can be involved in the extraction of gas from the Mediterranean, but Israel has turned their offer down. Perhaps we see here the beginning of the situation that leads to the question by the merchants of Tarshish, “Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company . . . to take a great spoil?” when the northern invader comes down (Ezek. 38:13).

Source: IsraelNews.com, Jun. 2010.