

for him, and was content. He set his sights on the Kingdom of God and showed us how to get our priorities right. For Jesus it was always a struggle with the flesh, as it is for us; but the sober reminder of the writer to the Hebrews sets the contrast between our Saviour and ourselves: "consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children" (12:3-5).

'Compare yourselves with Jesus,' he says, 'who shed his blood even to death in his struggle against sin. You have not had to go through an experience like that!' The exhortation is derived from Solomon's words in Proverbs 3:11,12: "My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of His correction: for whom the LORD loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth". But do we notice the difference? Hebrews 12:6 says that whom the

Lord loves He chastens, *and scourges* every son whom He receives. Under inspiration the author has added the word "scourgeth" to the text of Proverbs 3:12. It is the same Greek word used for the flogging that Jesus suffered at the hands of the soldiers of Pilate (Jno. 19:1). Our attention is being drawn to our Saviour's sufferings before the cross. If the difficulties of our lives are severe and hard to bear, let us remember that Christ went through much worse. Our heavenly Father's hand is there, and our scourging is light compared with His beloved Son's.

As we remember him, let us be so very thankful to our heavenly Father for His mercy, His restraint with us, for the great love He has shown us in Jesus. And let us be quietly content indeed with the provision He makes for us day by day, and pray for help in facing the trials of our lives; that, though grievous at the time, they will yield "the peaceable fruit of righteousness", and that we may gain a crown of righteousness at the Lord's coming.

A window on Israel today

Trevor Maher

Rebuilding the temple

IN OUR LAST edition of "A window on Israel today" we wrote of the Tisha b'Av festival, which commemorates the destruction of the two previous temples in Jerusalem by the Babylonians and then the Romans. It is a public holiday in Israel kept by the religious Jews, who fast and mourn and read the Book of Lamentations, but they are in a minority in what is an increasingly secular society.

However, a survey recently carried out in Israel indicated that two thirds of Israelis supported the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. Of those interviewed, ninety-seven per cent knew the meaning of the fast of Tisha b'Av, and only two per cent said they did not. Even more surpris-

ing was the fact that sixty-four per cent of those interviewed said they would like to see the temple rebuilt, and included in this figure were those secular Jews interviewed, of whom just under half—forty-seven per cent—responded favourably to the rebuilding of the temple.

The survey was carried out for the news organisation Ynet and the Geshar Organisation. The director general of the Geshar Organisation is reported as saying, "We are a nation with a remarkable historic affinity. The temple was destroyed 1,942 years ago and almost two thirds of the population want to see it rebuilt".

He then went on to say that "I don't think this is a practical proposal but it seems that Tisha b'Av really does constitute a day

of meaningful memory to most people".

The words of Isaiah 2:1-4 will one day be more than just a 'meaningful memory', not only for the Jews but also for the whole population of the earth: "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways . . ." (v. 3).

Source: *Jerusalem News*, Jul. 2009.

Training priests for temple service

WHEREAS for some in Israel the temples of the past might be just a 'meaningful memory', in November this year Jews in the town of Mitzpe Yericho were taking very positive

steps to prepare for the rebuilding of the temple. They have opened a school where descendants of priests and Levites will learn exactly how to conduct the daily temple service and offer the required sacrifices. The school will include an exact replica of the temple.

The timing of the opening of the school was seen as being particularly appropriate due to the recent Muslim riots against Jewish visits to the Temple Mount. The organiser of the school, Levi Chazan, said at the opening ceremony, "Today is really a historical event for Jewish people . . . It is the beginning of the work for the Third Temple".

Source: israelnationalnews.com,
Nov. 2009.

Israel finds natural gas deposits

ONE of the most exciting developments this year has been the discovery of large natural-gas deposits off the coast of Israel, both at the southern end of the country and at the northern end. The southern field is estimated to have thirty billion cubic metres, and this was reported in the first quarter of the year. The northern field, though, has an estimated supply of some three trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Such is the size of the find that Israeli sources are saying that Israel will have enough gas in these current finds to make the country self-sufficient in energy for over twenty years, and that Israel will become an exporter of gas to other countries in the Middle East and Europe.

It is believed that there could be even more fields to be brought on stream. Gas has also been found recently in the Dead Sea area, and it is thought that where there is gas there may also be

oil (and vice versa), so a number of companies are drilling, both onshore and offshore.

This supply of energy resources will undoubtedly change the present economic and industrial patterns in Europe and the Middle East. Gazprom, the giant Russian conglomerate—which, with Germany's assistance in distribution, seeks to control the markets—will now need to cast its eyes to the south. These new finds may well affect Israel's relationship with Egypt, as they buy large quantities of gas from Egypt at present.

An interesting point came to light in one of the reports concerning the search for oil currently being carried out in Israel. One of the companies involved is Zion Oil & Gas. Its founder and chairman, John Brown, went to Israel because of his conviction that the Bible contained clear references to oil in Israel. Whether he is correct in his interpretation remains to be seen, but there is no doubt that this development will have a major impact on future events, both in Israel itself and on Israel's relationship with other nations.

We expect to be returning to this theme regularly while our Lord remains away. The words of Ezekiel 38:12,13 may take on a resonance we had not realised: ". . . to take a spoil, and to take a prey . . . Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey?" The increasing dominance of Israel in the high-tech industries and major developments in this field, coupled with energy supplies, may lead the nation to trust in its own strength and to come to the situation described by the prophet: "and they shall dwell safely [confidently] all of them" (v. 8).

Source: jpost.com (Business)

Jerusalem is not the Jewish capital

ISRAEL'S Labour party, led by Ehud Barak, has vetoed a bill in the Knesset which described Jerusalem as the Jewish capital. The Labour party says that, while Jerusalem should be asserted as the capital of Israel, "a move to make it a religious capital would be misinterpreted by the rest of the world as a potential act of aggression". They are also on record as saying, "This law would not serve the interests of Jerusalem and the State of Israel".

If any party in the Knesset uses its power of veto then the government is unable to support the bill that the veto is directed against. The bill was brought forward by the Habayit Hayehudi (Our Jewish Home) party in order to state clearly that a "United Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish people". The veto by Labour caused Mr Zevulun Orlev of Habayit Hayehudi to say that "this is a betrayal by the Labour party, and they are turning their back on Zionist values and the path of Ben-Gurion, who established Jerusalem as the country's capital in opposition to the opinion of the countries of the world".

It is interesting to note that the Association for Civil Rights in Israel are also opposed to the proposed bill, which they describe as a "draconian initiative" that restricts freedom of speech. At the present time the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians are stalled, and one of the reasons is the refusal of the Israeli Government to put East Jerusalem on the agenda for discussion as the capital of a Palestinian state. Jordan's foreign minister recently said that without East Jerusalem being included in the talks it would



The disputed city of Jerusalem, with the Temple Mount and the Old City in the centre of the picture.

be a total waste of time holding them.

It would seem that Jerusalem is to be a “burdensome stone” not only to the nations of the world but also for Israel itself, as they argue amongst themselves concerning it. We know the day is coming, as prophesied by Zechariah, when “all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it” (12:3), and, as a consequence of God’s judgements poured out through Christ, “many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to pray before the LORD” (8:22).

Source: jerusalempost.com, 28 Oct. 2009.

Archaeologists discover coins from Joseph era

ABROTHER who had been on holiday in the Nile area recently passed me a copy of the *Egyptian Gazette* dated the 28 September 2009, which carried the story, tucked away on one of its inside pages along with an illustration of Joseph appearing

before Pharaoh, of archaeologists and historians finding these coins amongst unsorted artefacts at the Museum of Egypt. There was not a great deal of information, so I went online to see if I could glean more.

I found that the *Jerusalem Post* had recently run a story about archaeologists and historians in Cairo discovering these coins in the Museum of Egypt. Again, there was not a lot of information, just seventeen lines, and the news did not seem to arouse

great interest or excitement. The interest amongst those working with the coins was that this was scientific evidence that the ancient Egyptians traded not just through barter, as previously claimed, but with coins as well.

A Dr Sa’id Muhammad Thabat led the team that made the discovery, and reported that his studies of coins relate to the Third Dynasty. An Egyptian coin of that time was called a *deben* and was worth one-fourth of a gram of gold, and many coins were found relating to various eras before, during and after Joseph. One such coin bore the effigy of Joseph as the minister of the treasury in the Egyptian Pharaoh’s court.

The importance of this material had not been realised because many of what are now known to be coins resemble charms or trinkets. The report states that “Joseph’s name appears twice on this coin, written in hieroglyphs: once the original name, Joseph, and once his Egyptian name, Saba Sabani, which was given to him by Pharaoh when he became treasurer. There is also an image of Joseph, who was



The Western Wall, part of the retaining wall of the Temple Mount, where Jews today mourn the destruction of their temples.



Irrigating in Galilee. Agriculture uses a large proportion of Israel's water resources.

part of the Egyptian administration at the time".

For the Bible student this is great news if it is true, for it shows the truth and accuracy of the Old Testament scriptures. While the world sees these coins as evidence of a monetary system, the real value is that it shows the truth of God's Word. Israel's reaction is strangely subdued, and one wonders why. They recall the Holocaust and the various destructions of the Temple, and here is evidence of their deliverance from famine and death through the hand of God and Joseph.

The Egyptians may want to forget the plagues that came on Egypt and the ultimate destruction of Pharaoh and his army brought about because of Joseph's descendants, but Israel has every reason to commemorate such deliverance, which will one day soon be repeated.

Israel's water reserve greatly depleted

THE past few years have seen just seventy per cent of the average amount of rainfall in Israel, and Lake Kinneret is now five metres below the top red line. There is a National Investi-

gation Committee Regarding the Water Crisis in place to deal with this serious problem.

Israel is starting out this winter with water levels at least a metre lower than last year, and has water-usage restrictions in place. Even if they get through this winter, reserves will have been used up and the reservoirs will be dangerously low, so that other sources of water will need to be found. There are plans for a further three desalination plants to supplement the existing two that are under construction to meet Israel's need, but it will be at least 2013 before they are all

up and running and providing the 600 million cubic metres of water a year that are required.

Israel had been talking to Turkey about shipping water across the Mediterranean Sea for nearly ten years, but had decided not to go ahead as it would be more costly than building desalination plants. These talks restarted as the crisis over the water shortage grew, but the dramatic breakdown in the political relationship between Turkey and Israel at the beginning of November may mean an end to those talks. With Turkey joining up with Syria and Iran, Israel faces a real problem over water sources.

Just as Israel thinks it has energy independence with its gas finds, so the hand of God reveals the nation's dependence on 'rain from heaven'. One reflects on how God dealt with Israel in the time of Ahab and Elijah, and we look forward to the time spoken of by the prophet Isaiah: "in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water" (35:6,7).

Source: *News from Jerusalem*, Oct. 2009; *Jerusalem Post*, Oct. 2009.



The western shore of the Sea of Galilee, showing the low level of the water.