

As it happens, quite a number of Hebrew and Greek words and names are divisible by 5, such as 'Judah', both in Hebrew (30) and in Greek (685), 'Christ' and 'Daystar', but so also are 'dog', 'whoremonger' and 'murderer'.

Great care must be taken with gematria, though it is no doubt an inspired part of Scripture as surprising results do arise, such as the fact that in Revelation 22:15 the list of five kinds of evil beings who are "without" and who make a lie have a combined gematria of 5555. I have found that Bullinger (author of *The Companion Bible* notes) is not particularly accurate in his calculations of gematria, so all examples should be checked.

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Bullinger's justification for this is contained in his book Number in Scripture, where he states: "the gematria of η χάρις (grace) is 725, a multiple of the square of 5 (5² × 29)". That is, 8 + 600 + 1 + 100 + 10 + 6 = 725.—J.W.

The future of Israel

Brother Ian White's article, "The future of Israel"* was read with much interest because a number of brethren around the world have reached the same conclusion as he has. We share the belief that Israel faces defeat and terrible destruction at the hands of her enemies, and that another period of exile awaits many of her people. This understanding has been arrived at quite independently, without any collusion 'in dark corners'. Some additional Bible passages that appear to lend strong support to Brother White's premise are suggested in what follows.

Jeremiah 17:1-4 records a unique prophecy: "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron . . . And you, even yourself, shall let go of your heritage which I gave you".† The AV has "discontinue from" in place of "let go" as a translation of the Hebrew word *shamat*, which is only used eight times and has meanings such as 'to release' or 'to throw down' (Strong 8058).

Is there an historical precedent in which the Israelites have offered any of their land in exchange for peace? Silver, gold, king's wives and princes, yes, but land? Hence Jeremiah 17 appears to refer exclusively to the present negotiations between Israel and the PLO. If this is indeed the case, then the continuation of Jeremiah 17:4

is particularly pertinent: "And I will cause you to serve your enemies in the land which you do not know".

Have we overlooked in the past this prediction in Jeremiah because it is only now in the process of being fulfilled? No mention of it appears in Brother White's article, despite its obvious relevance and importance, and its omission further convinces me that we were never intended fully to comprehend prophecies before the event. Although we all know that "the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7), this does not imply that we ordinary folk (who are not prophets) will unravel their prophecies before they come to pass.

Other Bible passages also appear to describe a future defeat of the Israelis by their Arab neighbours, followed by their expulsion into Egypt (in ships) and into Assyria (Iraq), etc. In Zechariah 14:1,2 Jerusalem is clearly overthrown in an attack involving all (neighbouring?) nations, and captivity follows for many Israelis. A time gap seems necessary between verses 2 and 3 for any effective captivity to follow the overthrow of Jerusalem, and then the Lord conquers those invaders. Further, "the day of the LORD" in Bible texts (as in verse 1) is usually written in the Hebrew as "a day of the LORD". There has been more than one such day already.

Much of Isaiah 11 is a 'latter-day' prophecy in which two developments are foretold in verses 11,12. Firstly, "the LORD shall set His hand *again the second time* to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea". Note the double emphasis of two recoveries of God's people from Arab lands, etc. Perhaps the regathering we have witnessed in this century was only the first phase of this twofold process. Secondly, "He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth". A new relationship will then be established between Judah and Ephraim. This global recovery also remains unfulfilled.

* Published Aug. 2000, p. 298, with subsequent correspondence Oct. 2000, p. 379; Nov. 2000, p. 413 and [Jan. 2001, p. 21.](#)

† Quotations are from the NKJV.

It seems that there would be no need for a second recovery of the Israeli people from amongst the Arab nations if they were indeed dwelling "safely" following the initial regathering that was seen last century. Those "who are left" suggests a dreadful death toll in the events prior to this recovery.

Isaiah 11:15,16 then goes on to describe the dividing up of "the river" (Euphrates) into seven streams so that men can cross dry-shod. This is a literal drying up. A "highway" thereby opens between Assyria and Israel (and on into Egypt according to Isaiah 19:23) for "the remnant who are left" (ominous words), the Israeli captives who return to Israel from Assyria (Iraq).

Jerusalem's Temple Mount remains under Gentile (PLO) control today, and the daily violence in the Land begs the question of how the Israeli people can realistically be dwelling in safety. I suggest therefore that Ezekiel 38, 39 can only be fulfilled after the coming captivity has ended and the recovery of all exiles has been completed. In Zechariah 14:3-11 our glorious Lord Jesus Christ (termed "the LORD" because he is the Name-bearer) ends this exile and removes the threat posed by Israel's militant neighbours. At last the "times of the Gentiles [that is, Gentile dominion over Old Jerusalem] are fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24).

Whether the above is a correct interpretation or not (time will tell), we all need reminding that those disciples closest to our Lord Jesus Christ during his ministry could not grasp the meaning of the simplest of all New Testament prophecies, Jesus foretelling his approaching death and resurrection. Is there not a powerful lesson for us in their failure to discern his warning? Jesus was available to answer their questions, but perhaps they were too embarrassed to ask and so reveal their lack of understanding.

At least Jesus's mother Mary was wise enough to keep the unusual things that she heard about, and from, her Son, and to ponder them in her heart (Lk. 2:19,51). And Jacob "kept" Joseph's dreams in his mind too (Gen. 37:11), not understanding them until he went to meet Joseph, who had become lord of all Egypt.

In closing, Brother White's observation that Israel's punishment is a progressive one is very well made. A double portion of punishment (two exiles?) is due to apostate Jerusalem (Isa. 40:2), and to Babylon double destruction for her sins (Rev. 18:6). We should ponder this lest we become as hard of hearing as the people of Israel

have been for generations. Many Israelites continue faithfully to observe their traditions, but their studies of the Tanach (Old Testament) are confined almost exclusively to the Torah (Law). They mostly ignore the Writings and the Prophets, and thereby miss the gospel.

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Eternal life

I would like to make a few comments on the article by Brother Tony Benson, "In hope of eternal life" (May 2000, p. 220), in particular regarding the Greek word *aiōn*, commonly translated 'ever'.

Brother Thomas, under the heading "For ever and ever", comments in *Eureka* (Vol. 1, p. 125) on the erroneous translation of "*aiōns* of the *aiōns*" as "for ever and ever". When I first read *Eureka*, nearly sixty years ago, I did not appreciate the significance of his words and how basic they were for the understanding of God's purpose as revealed in the Scriptures.

Over the years my own studies and the disquisitions of others have led me to realise that the Bible tells us nothing of the Divine programme during the eternity that preceded Genesis 1, nor of the eternity that succeeds the close of the Millennium, and that it is a revelation of God's purpose during the course of the ages (*aiōns*) from the Creation recorded in Genesis 1 to the consummation of the *aiōns* at the close of the Millennium.

An *aiōn* is a period of time, whether long or short, but with a beginning and an end, so to translate it as 'ever' is totally misleading. If the noun *aiōn* has a meaning of limited duration then the adjective *aiōnos* cannot have a stronger meaning, so to render it 'eternal' or 'everlasting' is quite intolerable. I can understand a word having a different shade of meaning according to the context, but to translate the same word with a finite meaning in one verse and an infinite meaning in another is surely wrong.

Does this have any practical bearing on our understanding of the purpose of God? I believe so. In "From the Editor's postbag" in the August 2000 issue, Brother Tony Benson mentions the attempt of Saddam Hussein to rebuild Babylon, and says he thinks it will be in vain, obviously believing that people will never live there ("Babylon rebuilt?", p. 319). I would not be so bold. The