



Drawing of a clay seal impression with the inscription “Belonging to Ahaz [son of] Yehotam king of Judah”. Traces of a fingerprint on its left edge may even belong to Ahaz himself.

that befell the kingdom of Judah during Micah’s ministry were directly attributable to the wickedness of this man: “For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD” (v. 19).

This is the historical background against which Micah delivered his prophecy. They were desperate times, and it may have seemed at times that God had forsaken His people altogether because of their wickedness. But this was not the case. As our studies progress we shall see that Micah’s prophecy also contains a wonderful message of hope, which is as relevant to us today as it was for the people to whom Micah spoke.

(To be continued)

A window on Israel today

Trevor Maher

Israel’s image abroad

AWARE THAT their country’s international image is suffering greatly at present, the Israeli government is embarking on a new strategy that it has been developing over the last six months. The Ministry for Public Diplomacy is hoping to draw in a wide range of people, not just politicians, to take part: retired soldiers, businessmen, celebrities, athletes and, especially, ordinary people.

The ministry’s commercials, which began airing in February, suggest that the world sees Israel as warlike, primitive and underdeveloped. The cover of a brochure that will be distributed at Ben Gurion Airport depicts a camel along with a quotation describing the animal as a popular mode of transportation in the country. This brochure will also be supported by a new website (masbirim.gov.il), and there will training workshops across the country. The brochures describe

Israel’s popular tourist sites, the treatment of its Arab minority, and facts about its history and democracy.

In addition to wars and the peace process, the history includes the Israeli invention of the Disk-on-key in 2000, its victory in the 1998 Eurovision Song Contest, the country’s first Nobel Prize in 1966, and Maccabi Tel Aviv’s victory in the 1977 Euroleague championship. Sadly, there is no mention of the Biblical

teaching concerning Israel and its relationship to God; rather it appears that they want to appear ‘like the nations around them’. There is, though, in the brochure the *tefilat hadereh*, the travellers’ prayer—an indication that, when it comes to improving Israel’s image abroad, the Jewish State hopes that its supporters will seek heavenly intervention!

The government also hopes to utilise more than three million Israelis who go abroad every year.

The camel is depicted on Israel’s masbirim website as a common animal in Israel, used by Israelis in many situations, including transporting merchandise, and by the Israeli cavalry.

Picture: Ivan Carter



A poll sponsored by the ministry found that ninety-one per cent of 495 Jewish Israelis surveyed believed that Israel had a bad or very bad image abroad. The same percentage said that Israel was seen as a country suffering from terror and wars; eighty per cent said that Israel was considered overly aggressive; thirty per cent said that the country had an unfriendly image; and twenty-six per cent thought the world saw Israel as undeveloped.

The minister, Yuli Edelsteins, said: "The Arab countries have vast sums of money available for propaganda, so we hope to take advantage of our human resources. We decided to give Israelis who go abroad tools and tips to help them deal with the attacks on Israel in their conversations with people, media appearances and lectures before wide audiences. I hope we succeed together in changing the picture and proving to the world that there is a different Israel".

We know from Scripture that the desire of the Israeli government to improve its image around the world will not be successful, and the majority of nations will turn against it. Only those allied to the king of the south will stand up for Israel in the latter days. However, Scripture also teaches us that the return of Christ and the defeat of the northern invader will lead to Israel becoming the head of all nations, and the situation described in Zechariah 8:23 will then exist:

"In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all the languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you".

Source: *Jerusalem Post*, 17 Feb. 2010.



Israeli President Binyamin Netanyahu meets US Middle East envoy Senator George Mitchell in January this year.

Picture: US Dept. of State

Jewish New Year of Trees

AT the end of January Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu completed a week-long campaign of 'tree planting', which was intended to reaffirm Israel's claim on major Jewish population centres in Judea and Samaria. He has planted a tree in the Jewish city of Ariel and declared the city 'the capital of Samaria'. He also planted trees at Gush Etzion south of Jerusalem, and Maaleh Adumim, located west of the capital and overlooking the Dead Sea.

The last tree was planted a few hours after his meeting with US Middle East envoy George Mitchell, who had been meeting with him and Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. These meetings were aimed at trying to restart talks for establishing a new Arab state within the territory occupied by Israel following the Six-Day War of 1967. The prime minister was making the point that these areas were part of the ancient Jewish kingdom and have existed since those days without a Jewish

state until the Six-Day War more than forty-two years ago.

American policy has concentrated on meeting demands for 'goodwill measures to the Palestinian Authority'. Binyamin Netanyahu made the point that "Everyone who sees the geography here understands how important Ariel and the surrounding areas are". The prime minister has consistently challenged efforts by the Obama Administration to ignore promises made in writing by former US President George W. Bush that major Jewish population centres would remain part of Israel in any future arrangement with the Palestinian Authority. Obama's administration tries to claim that the promises are not legally binding, an unprecedented diversion from accepted political and diplomatic protocol.

While the Palestinians refuse to concede "an inch of Judea and Samaria and East Jerusalem", and the present American Administration appears to support them, it is likely such attitudes will only increase the determination of this Israeli prime minister to maintain at least the present

status quo. We know from the prophet Joel that the determination of the nations to destroy Israel, described as "My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted My land", will bring God's judgement on them (3:1,2,16,17).

Source: A7 News, Israel,
31 Jan. 2010.

Israel's economy continues to grow

REPORTS indicate that Israel's economy grew at an annualised 4.4 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2009. While most parts of the world are still suffering from the 'economic crunch' that started back in 2008, the situation in Israel is very different. "Israel appears to be enjoying rapid growth without much inflation", says Daniel Hewitt, an economist at Barclay's Capital, compared with the relatively weak growth figures coming out of Europe.

Consumer spending rose by 4.4 per cent in the same period and, surprisingly in view of international antagonism towards Israel, exports surged by 33 per cent. A major contributor to the growing export business is IT component manufacturing. Intel Corp's Israeli subsidiary saw exports leap by 145% in 2009 to a record \$3.4 billion. The corporation invested \$3.5 billion in a new manufacturing plant in the south of Israel, which came into full production in 2009.

This plant is only the third in the world able to produce 45-nanometre-wide circuitry, and it is planned to increase its capabilities to include the smaller 22-nanometre chips. Billions of dollars are being invested in this industry in Israel to make it the world leader, and most of the major hi-tech companies around the

world look to the research and innovation coming out of Israel.

A picture is gradually emerging of the possible "spoil" the northern host will be seeking when these developments are put alongside recent oil and gas explorations. Indeed, Mr Putin expressed Russia's interest in the hi-tech developments in Israel when Binyamin Netanyahu visited Moscow in February 2010.

Source: Reuters, *Washington Post*,
12 Feb. 2010.

A fence to stop illegal migrants

HERE in the Western World we are used to news concerning the efforts to stop illegal migrants coming from the European mainland into Britain, and are familiar with information on the same problems the USA has on its border with Mexico. In Israel the building of a wall/fence around the West Bank was a security measure against terrorism, which, in the main, has been very successful.

However, during February the Israeli government was considering a proposal to build a border fence between Israel and Egypt at the cost of 1.5 billion shekels, approximately \$400 million. One of the main reasons was to stop or impede the infiltration of illegal migrants into Israel from Sinai. The efforts of the Egyptian government also to build a barrier along their border with the Gaza Strip to prevent Hamas importing weapons to attack Israel have been well covered in the news.

The fence being considered by the Israelis is in addition to the Egyptian measures. Apparently some 100-200 infiltrators get into Israel from Africa across this border every week. Some are looking for work, while others

are listed as criminal elements or refugees. In 2009 the police confiscated 1.3 tons of hashish and 130 kilograms of heroin that smugglers were trying to carry across this border.

A total of around 5,000 illegal migrants were caught trying to get across the border in 2009, but probably the same number got through. The Chairman of the Foreign Workers Committee in Israel has long been calling for such a fence or partition to stop illegal migrants from Sinai, and is quoted as saying that such migrants "gravely harm the social demographic balance in the country".

We look for that time when it is not criminal or refugee migrants who seek entry to Israel, a time when there will not be any barriers to prevent access. When the Lord's house is established on the top of the mountains, "all nations shall flow unto it. 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 . . ." (Isa. 2:1-3).

Source: A7 News, Israel,
14 Feb. 2010.

The desert will blossom

IN January 2010 the JNF, along with the Foreign Ministry Department of International Cooperation and the Ministry of Agriculture, organised a special seminar followed by a conference at Ben Gurion University for forestry experts from all over the world. The object was to share accumulated knowledge about the battle against desertification. Israel is seen as the world's professional authority on central ecological issues, of which the primary ones are



Tree planting in Israel. Israel is a world authority on forest development and combating desertification.

Picture: Eric Marshall

combating desertification and forest development.

Participants came from countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria and China. (Apparently, twenty-seven per cent of China's landmass is classed

as desert.) Time was spent in lectures and practical fieldwork. The outside work included managing open areas to establish forests, collecting and germinating seeds of suitable trees, and developing and managing nurseries. One interesting aspect was the utilisation of the forest for by-products that are not wood, such as honey, ecological tourism and wildlife.

Delegates from Ethiopia said they were amazed at the results achieved by Israel: "We thought that at least 600 mm of annual rainfall was the minimum needed for afforestation, yet here in Israel, in the Negev, forests are growing with only 200 mm of annual rainfall".

The Nigerians attended because the sand dunes of the Sahara Desert are encroaching on their northern border at a rate of fifteen metres a day, causing people to abandon land and villages. They plan to introduce a green belt of trees extending 1,500 kilometres along the Nigerian border to halt the march of

the sand. They look to Israel to supply the expertise and training.

All the participants remarked on how organised the Israelis were in linking the research work with government departments and the people who worked the land, so that the best results were obtained. History attests to how effective the Israelis have been in turning a once barren land into a green and fruitful country. Her skills in this area are now in demand in many countries, and people are coming to see for themselves what has been achieved.

This is but a foretaste of that great time that is coming when it will not be just the ability of God's people that will improve the land; the power and glory of the Kingdom age will transform it in a way never seen before. As the prophet Isaiah says, "the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose", when "in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (35:1-6).

Source: *Jerusalem Post*,
10 Jan. 2010.