Isaac and Jacob in spite of giants seeking its destruction. And though the Elah Valley may not be a booming tourist attraction today, it is a quiet reminder of God's ability to keep His covenant promises to His Chosen People—which is the only logical explanation for the existence of the modern state of Israel.

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Modern Miracles
in an Ancient Land

By Charles E. McCracken

Anyone traveling southwest of Jerusalem along Highway 38 can easily miss it. There is no monument, no shrine, not even a roadside marker. Yet, three thousand years ago on the broad plain in the Elah Valley near modern day Azekah Junction, a dramatic event in Israel's history took place.

On a recent trip to Israel, our guide deviated from the itinerary and made a stop at Tel Azekah. Climbing to the top, we had a bird's eye view of the Elah Valley where two ancient armies were poised for conflict around 1063 B.C.

For decades, the Philistines oppressed Israel and banned blacksmiths from the land forcing the Israelites to have iron tools fabricated and sharpened by their adversaries (1 Sam. 13:19-22). Effectively curtailing the manufacture of Israel's weaponry, the Philistines armed with iron chariots, armor, swords and spears routinely plundered towns and villages.

Reading the account in 1 Samuel 17, our guide pointed to key landmarks associated with the record. The Philistines moving toward the heart of Israel from Gath on the coastal plain were camped at the base of the foothills on the southwestern edge of the Elah Valley. On the hills to the northeast, the army of Israel blocked Philistine advancement toward population centers in the Judean highlands.

With customary battle lines established, the Philistines broke protocol by seeking to arrange representative combat rather than a full-fledged military conflict. Bawling out the terms of the challenge, a hulking giant named Goliath represented the Philistine army. The terms were simple:

Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us (1 Sam 17:8-9).

Although his 9'9" stature was in itself imposing, Goliath was armed for intimidation. He wore a brass helmet causing him to appear taller than his actual size. His body was encased in brass mail weighing in the neighborhood of 125 pounds, and he wore bronze leggings from the knees to the ankles (1 Sam. 17:5). The spear he lugged around had a tip of solid iron weighing 15 to 17 pounds.

Apparently, the intimidation factor worked because King Saul accepted the challenge without first securing a champion to fight the giant. Consequently, the armies of Israel huddled in fear as Goliath carried out his defiant bullying campaign every morning and evening for the next 40 days.

On day 41, David enters the narrative. Leaving early in the morning with provisions sent by his father, he made the 15 mile trek from Bethlehem

Elah Valley/Azekah Junction

and arrived at the Israelite encampment in time to witness Goliath's defiant challenge. The Bible tells us David was appalled; what galled him even more than the insolent Philistine bellowing verbal abuse was the cowering fear demonstrated by Saul's army. David exclaimed, *Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?* (1Sam. 17:26).

His indignation soon caught the attention of Saul who summoned David to his tent. We aren't privy to the details of their conversation, but we do know that David assured the king, *Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine* (1Sam. 17:32). Responding to Saul's objections, David clarified that his willingness to fight the giant was not the result of mere youthful idealism; he had experience. Tending his father's sheep, he was often confronted by lions and bears threatening the flock. God had given him victory over dangerous animals, and David was confident He would give victory over this foe as well.

Leaving Saul, David made his way to meet Goliath. At a waddi bordering the plain, he stooped to choose stones for his sling. With five stones in his arsenal and shepherd's staff in hand, David emerged from the Israelite camp onto the battlefield.

When Goliath saw David, he immediately resumed his intimidation campaign roaring, *Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks? Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!* (1Sam. 17:42-44).

Then Goliath sarcastically, cursed David by his gods (1Sam. 17:43). Unfortunately, he was ignorant of the Torah warning, *I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you* (Gen. 12:3). In cursing a descendent of Abraham, Goliath brought God's bitter curse against himself and unwittingly sealed his own fate.

David's response confirms,
You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. (1 Sam. 17:45-46).

Running toward his opponent, David loaded his sling. A split second later, the stone hit its mark, and within minutes, David was walking back to the Israelite encampment carrying the head of Goliath.

The battle was over. Goliath's braggadocio was not enough to assure a victory. Despite the size of the opposing army or Goliath's ability to intimidate, David understood what everyone else missed that day—the battle belonged to the Lord.

GOD'S UNCONDITI…
WITH I…

Four unconditional and non-transferable cov…
They are covenants between God and a literal people group—th…
They are unilateral covenants in which God Himself is the guaran…

Abrahamic Covenant	Land-Grant Covenant
■ Foundation for all of God's unilateral covenants with Israel *Gen. 12:2*.	■ Provides a permanent home for the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the nation of Israel) *Dt. 30:1-20*.
■ Includes a land, a seed and a blessing *Gen. 12:1-3; 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 22:15-18*.	■ Guarantees ownership of the land despite Israel's failings *Dt. 30:3*.
■ Reaffirmed to Isaac and Jacob *Gen. 26:2-5, 24; 28:13-15*.	■ Tied blessing in the land to Israel's obedience *Dt. 30:20*.
■ Passed to Jacob's sons, the 12 tribes of Israel *Gen. 49:1-28*.	■ Predicts Israel's temporary removal with subsequent return to the land *Dt. 30:3-5*.
■ Basis for Israel's deliverance from Egypt *Ex. 6:2-4, 8*.	■ Assures Israel's restoration and blessing during the Messianic Kingdom *Dt. 30:6-9*.
■ Confirmed the land-grant to Israel after the Exodus *Josh. 1:2*.	
■ No time limit; ultimate fulfillment in the Messianic Kingdom *Gen.7:7-8*.	

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, . . . I will cause you to dwell in th…

...ONAL COVENANTS
...ISRAEL

...venants define God's relationship with Israel.

...he descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob *Gen. 12:1-3.*

...tor; they are perpetual, eternal and not limited by time *Jer. 7:7, 25:5.*

Davidic Covenant	New Covenant
■ Promises an everlasting dynasty through the lineage of King David *2 Sam. 7:16.* ■ Assures an eternal kingdom and a descendant to reign on David's throne forever *2 Sam. 7:11-17.* ■ Confirms the Davidic dynasty through Solomon *1 Chr. 17:10-15.* ■ Guarantees fulfillment in the person of Messiah *Ps. 45:6-7.* ■ Ultimately fulfilled in the Messianic Kingdom *Jer. 23:5-6.*	■ Predicts Israel's forgiveness *Jer. 31:34.* ■ Guarantees Israel's regeneration, which is the basis for the Messianic Kingdom *Jer. 31:31-34; Isa. 55:3; 59:21; 61:8; Ezek. 16:60-62; 36:24-28; 37:26-27.* ■ Promises Israel's indwelling by the Holy Spirit during the Messianic Kingdom *Ezek. 36:26-27.* ■ Literally fulfilled to Israel in the Messianic Kingdom; Gentiles in the Church Age may experience regeneration through faith in Messiah *Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25.*

...his place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. *Jeremiah 7:3, 7*

Israel's War of Independence

Even in the short history of the modern state of Israel, this truth is unmistakably evident. From a practical standpoint, Israel is an inexplicable anomaly outside of divine intervention. On May 15, 1948, the day after the declaration of the establishment of the state of Israel, the armies of Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, Lebanon and Iraq immediately invaded Israel. Secretary-General of the Arab League Azzam Pasha bragged, "This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades."[1]

The next few days and weeks were critical to the survival of the fledgling nation facing armies with a pronounced military superiority in heavy equipment, arms, artillery and air power. To complicate matters, the state of Israel had no planes, no tanks, no heavy artillery or even an official army. It wasn't until two weeks later that the Israeli paramilitary groups Irgun and Lehi joined the Haganah to form the IDF (Israel Defense Force). A short ceasefire on June 11, 1948 allowed Israel to arm, organize and strategize. After tanks and airplanes purchased as scrap from the United States and Czechoslovakia were hastily reconstituted and deployed, Israel emerged to regain strategic territories and carry on an offensive war until the conflict ended. To the surprise of the entire world, Israel prevailed and her adversaries were obliged to sign armistice agreements early in 1949.

The Six Day War

In 1967, only 18 years later, hostile neighbors once again threatened to annihilate Israel. Abdul Nasser president of Egypt crowed, "We shall not complain any more to the UN about Israel. The sole method we shall apply against Israel is total war, which will result in the extermination of Zionist existence"[2] Iraqi President Abdur Rahman Aref verbalized similar sentiments announcing, "The existence of Israel is an error which must be rectified. This is our opportunity to wipe out the ignominy which has been with us since 1948. Our goal is clear -- to wipe Israel off the map."[3] In a war against the combined forces of Egypt, Syria and Jordon, Israel emerged victorious regaining the Golan Heights, the Negev and the city of Jerusalem including the Temple Mount.

A military correspondent for the *Haaretz* newspaper summarized the war saying, "Even a non-religious person must admit this war was fought with help from heaven."[4] And, God's intervention is poignantly illustrated in the capture of the stronghold of Sharm el-Sheikh. At the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, Sharm el-Sheikh was a strategic objective needed to secure the straits of Tiran for Israeli shipping. Israel's plan was to take Sharm el-Sheikh using a combined airborne and naval assault. The naval force arrived

before the other assault units and immediately reported, "There is no one here to fight!"[5] The night before, the Egyptian army gave orders to fall back to the Suez Canal and evacuate Sharm el-Sheikh. The stronghold was taken without a shot fired.

The Yom Kippur War

In 1973, on Yom Kippur, the most important holiday on the Jewish calendar, Egypt and Syria launched a coordinated attack against Israel in a joint strategy they had successfully kept secret. Only a few Egyptian officers were aware that the "exercises" in which they participated were actually a prelude to war. Despite the fact that world leaders predicted Israel's defeat as inevitable, the tiny country once again emerged as the victor with its borders intact, surviving yet another attempted war of annihilation.

The accounts of those on the battlefield graphically tell the story of God's protection. At the start of the Yom Kippur War, a seemingly unstoppable battalion of Syrian tanks bound for Tel Aviv

mysteriously came to a halt north of Tiberius and suddenly surrendered to the Israeli army without a fight. In another instance, a commander found that he and his men were in a minefield on a dark, moonless night. Crawling on hands and knees and using bayonets to locate the mines, the company was not only vulnerable, but also running out of time. After one soldier uttered an anguished prayer, a violent wind began blowing the sandy topsoil away exposing the location of thousands of landmines. Just as suddenly, the wind stopped allowing the unit to move forward to their objective in safety.[6]

Even at the highest level of government, God's preservation is evident. After an impassioned plea from Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, President Richard Nixon ordered the airlift of United States military supplies enabling Israel to continue its fight in the face of overwhelming odds. Interestingly, it has been reported that as Golda Meir was pleading for Nixon's help, he remembered a boyhood conversation with his mother who told him that he would one day be in a position of power and given the opportunity to save Israel. Despite the fact that he was dealing with the Watergate scandal at the time, Nixon arranged to get Meir the arms that were so desperately needed.[7]

Subsequent Conflicts

Many more accounts could be given of God's miraculous intervention, like those during the First Gulf War where 39 scud missiles from Iraq rained down on Israel, but only one person died as a result.[8] Or, how suddenly on the first day of the war, drenching rain and high winds from the southwest began and did not let up over the next six weeks. The weather was credited by U.S. military sources as helping convince the Iraqi's that the use of chemical weapons against Israel would be a mistake (the wind would have driven the chemical agents directly toward Iraq).[9]

Even during the Second Lebanon War of 2006, there were numerous accounts of miraculous events such as a platoon inadvertently discovering a Hamas map, "with booby-traps, landmines and sniper positions clearly spelled out", which allowed IDF forces to counter each intended target.[10] In another instance, a large platoon took shelter in an abandoned school. During the night, one of the soldiers discovered a well hidden trip wire. It was a miracle the soldiers had not triggered the improvised devises which were subsequently disarmed saving the lives of the whole platoon.[11] During the war, Hezbollah launched 3,970 missiles at Israel exposing nearly a third of Israel's population to imminent peril. Although many examples could be cited, in one incident, a missile was launched from Lebanon toward four apartment complexes in northern Israel. It miraculously dropped through an open manhole into the storm sewer where it exploded causing minimal damage to the apartments and no casualties among residents.[12]

Both the Bible and modern day history confirm that Israel can trust the God of Abraham,