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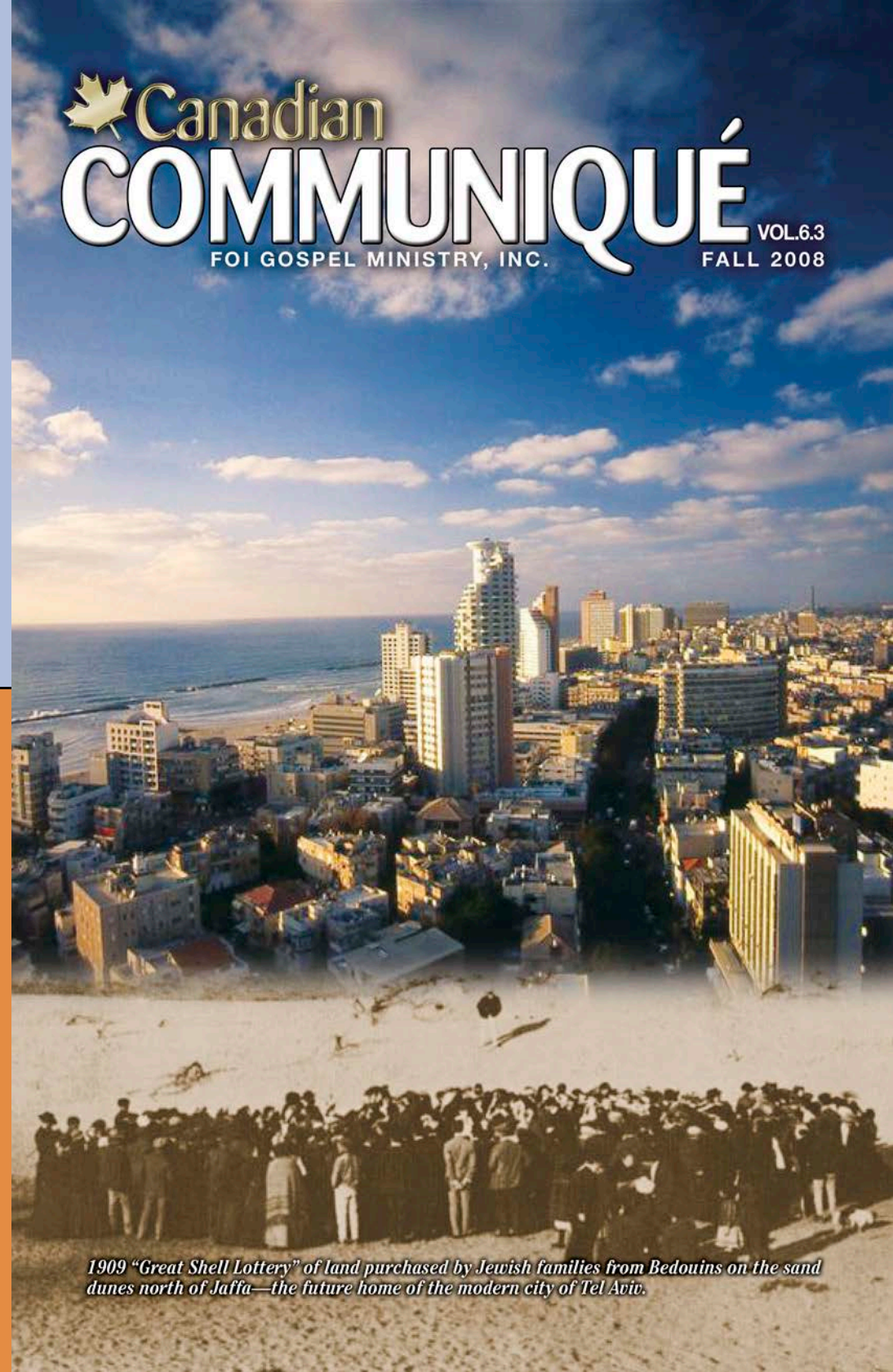
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1909 "Great Shell Lottery" of land purchased by Jewish families from Bedouins on the sand dunes north of Jaffa—the future home of the modern city of Tel Aviv.



# Forever and Ever

## *Olam V'ad Olam*

By Charles McCracken

Hostile neighbors chant the mantra for her annihilation. Religious organizations amplify the clamor pressing for financial divestment against her, while liberal universities disseminate the same malevolent chorus. These are not new developments; they echo the voices of Pharaoh, Amalek and Haman. What will be the outcome? Many wonder how long Israel can exist in such an environment.

In the face of vociferous negative world opinion and after a mere sixty years following a miraculous rebirth, the tiny nation of Israel continues to astonish with growth and vitality. Despite the reality of a flourishing existence, however, men continue to declare that Israel's history ended with the birth of Christ and there is nothing in God's program to suggest any reason for her survival or future.

Their position, commonly referred to as Replacement Theology, is encapsulated in the statement, "The church, then, as the people of the New Covenant has taken the place of Israel, and national Israel is nothing other than the empty shell from which the pearl has been removed".<sup>1</sup> A vocal proponent of Replacement Theology mendaciously rants, "God willed that after the institution of the New Covenant there should no longer be any Jewish people in the world - yet there they are! That is a fact - a very sad fact, brought about by their wicked rebellion against God."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, bad theology does not always go away just because it contradicts God's Word



*Knesset and the menorah illuminated at night, Jerusalem*

or concrete evidence to the contrary. According to the Bible, Israel's future is anything but bleak—it is spectacular beyond everything experienced in 3,500 years of history.

## Guaranteed Preservation

In Romans chapter 11, the Apostle Paul asks, *has God cast away His people?* The emphatic answer to his rhetorical question is, *Certainly not!* (Rm. 11:1) God promised Abraham, *I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you and their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also, I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land*

*of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God* (Gen. 17:7-8).

God's covenant with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is eternal and the Promised Land is, "an everlasting possession".

The Hebrew word *olam* translated "everlasting" in Genesis 17:8 literally means "world" and conveys continued existence to the end of this world. The phrase, *olam v'ad olam*, usually translated "everlasting to everlasting" or "for ever and ever" literally means "from this world to the next" and always describes the concept of eternity. Interestingly, twice in the prophecy of Jeremiah, the Land is described specifically as the possession, *I [God] gave to your fathers forever and ever [olam v'ad olam]* (Jer. 7:7; 25:5).<sup>3</sup>

Plainly stated, God promises the Land to Israel as a possession not only for all time as reckoned on earth, but for eternity. Jeremiah records:

*Thus says the Lord, Who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The Lord of Hosts is His name); "If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel*



*Ein Gedi date groves*

*shall also cease from being a nation from before Me forever."* (Jer. 31:35-36).

Since planet earth has not experienced the cataclysmic affects of solar implosion or the

radical disintegration of the universe, it is obvious national Israel has not experienced God's rejection. The last book of the Bible also validates the viability of the descendants of Abraham describing 144,000 Jewish people living at a time just prior to the Second Coming of Messiah (Rev. 7:4-8).

At Mount Sinai God reassured Israel that removal from the Land did not mean permanent rejection. He emphasized even, *in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God* (Lev. 26:44). God firmly establishes Israel's permanence as a people group throughout the remaining periods of history and guarantees Israel's return to the Land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

## Guaranteed Return

The Bible predicts three major dispersions resulting in Israel's removal from and subsequent return to the Land:

- after delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt (Gen. 15:13-16; 18-21; cf. Josh. 1:2-4),
- after Israel's 70 years of forced exile in Babylon (Jer. 25:11-12; Ezra 1:2-4),
- after Israel's current worldwide Diaspora at the end of the age (Deut. 30:1-5).

Moses accurately predicted the current Diaspora. Unlike the previous two in which Israel suffered exile in a particular country, Jewish people are now scattered throughout the nations. In this context Moses assured, *God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you* (Deut. 30:3). The consistent and compelling precedent of history underscores the faithfulness of God's promises to return Israel to her own land.

Every prophetic book of the Old Testament except Jonah speaks of a permanent return to the



Land of Israel after this third and final dispersion at the end of the age that will be so spectacular, *it shall no more be said, the Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, but, the Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them. For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers*" (Jer.16:14-15).



Birket Ram Lake and orchards, Golan Heights

Israel's return is certain with the prophets suggesting a homecoming in incremental stages. The impetus stirring the initial phase of the final return to the Land will according to Jeremiah, come from outside influences (Jer.16:16). In part, the riots and pillaging of Jewish homes in Heidelberg and Frankfurt in 1819, followed by the Damascus affair, the Pale of Settlement, May Laws, Russian pogroms and ultimately the atrocities of the Holocaust were the, "baying hounds of anti-Semitism", that added urgency to the modern Zionist movement.<sup>4</sup>

Ezekiel records, *Thus says the Lord God, I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel* (Ezek. 11:17).

Jeremiah echoes, *For behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah, says the Lord. And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it* (Jer. 30:3).

Although the words were spoken at the beginning of the Babylonian captivity, the context of the prophecy indicates that fulfillment goes beyond the return from Babylon to a final return from, *all nations where I have scattered you... in the latter days* (Jer. 30:11, 24).

The familiar account of the valley of dry bones graphically illustrates God's program to return Israel to her own Land. Speaking to Ezekiel, God asks, *O mortal, can these bones live again?* (Ezek. 37:3 NJPS Tanakh). Before the prophet's own eyes, the bones reconnected, *bone to bone...the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them* (Ezek. 37:7, 8). Bible scholars recognize significance in the fact that "there was no breath in them" as indicative of an initial restoration in unbelief.

As Ezekiel obeys God's command to proph-



Tel Aviv fruit market

esy over the now flesh-covered bones, *breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army* (Ezek.

37:10). God clarifies saying, *O mortal, these bones are the whole House of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed* (Ezek 37:11 NJPS). Projecting forward to a day when the world is convinced that national Israel is dead and without a future, God promises, *I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land* (v. 14). God reiterates,

*Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations. Wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel...Then shall they dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where their fathers dwelt* (Ezek. 37:21, 22, 25).

Reaffirming the promise, Isaiah informs Israel that after an initial and partial regathering of her people to their homeland in unbelief, God will, *set His hand again the second time to...assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth* (Isa. 11:11-12). The modern state of Israel is only a preview of that final regathering when Messiah returns in power to rule the earth from Jerusalem.

## Guaranteed Blessing

From the moment God called Abram from Ur of the Chaldees, the history of his descendents through Isaac and Jacob has been building toward a magnificent climax. What God promised to and desired from Israel will finally be a reality in the Messianic Kingdom, which is the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. The New Covenant, however, provides the foundation for the blessing of the Messianic Kingdom—regeneration (Jer. 31:31-34).

In the New Covenant God assures, *I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people* (Jer. 31:33).

Through Ezekiel, God promises to, *take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people and I will be their God* (Ezek. 11:19-20).

God clearly states this transformation will take place when Israel returns, *to Me with their whole heart* (Jer.24:7). Zechariah foresees the day Israel recognizes Messiah and elab-



The government building in downtown Haifa

orates, *in that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness* (Zech. 13:1). As a result, *Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation* (Isa. 45:17).

While some confine this scenario to Old Testament teaching, which they erroneously assert is no longer in effect, the Apostle Paul's





Glass art works by Dale Chihuly in the Tower of David Museum, Jerusalem

teaching in the New Testament plainly communicates Israel's continued viability. Paul's intent cannot be misconstrued:

*And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins (Rom. 11:26-27).*

Cleansed as a nation and with Messiah ruling from Jerusalem, Israel will enjoy unprecedented blessing and prosperity. Under the rule of Messiah, Israel will for the first time in her history realize the full borders of the Land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Isa. 27:12; cf. Gen. 15:18-21). The prophet Amos emphasizes that once this final return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel at the end of the age has taken place, *no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them, says the Lord your God (Amos 9:15)*. God's Word declares, *they shall inherit the land forever (Isa. 60:21)*.

Their enemies will no longer harass them and the land will yield its fruit as God intended. Ezekiel speaks for God denouncing nations that,

*gave my land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country...I have raised My hand in an oath that surely the nations that are around you shall bear their own shame (Ezek. 36:5,7).*

Conversely, Israel will experience the ultimate blessing of life in the Land specifically designed to be most productive under the care and conservation of the Jewish people. Amos describes those incredible days saying, *the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seeds; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with it (Amos 9:13)*.

Isaiah speaks of an abundance of rain watering the Land. Ezekiel describes a river of water flowing from the right side of the Temple all the way to the Dead Sea. Water issuing from the Temple will bring healing to the Dead Sea and cause trees growing on either side of the river to bear fruit every month! The fruit will be nourishing, while leaves will serve a medicinal purpose (Ezek. 47:8,12). With no further elaboration, the Bible matter-of-factly declares the wealth of the nations will flow to Israel (Isa. 60:1-22).

In addition to material blessings associated with living in the Land of Israel during the Millennial Kingdom, spiritual blessings are also associated with Messiah's residence in Jerusalem.

*[T]he Lord will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain (Joel 3:16-17).*

Jerusalem will not only be the center of Jewish life as it has for more than 3,000 years, it will be the center of worship for the whole world (Isa. 2:2-4). The Bible unequivocally highlights Israel's centrality in the Messianic Kingdom emphasizing,

*instead of shame you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they*



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*shall rejoice in their portion...in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs (Isa. 60:7).*

The modern state of Israel is here to stay! The Bible leaves no doubt concerning the validity of her present existence or the certainty of her glorious future. You would think that the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948 would have been the first warning of a serious theological flaw for those claiming that Israel, replaced by the church, was gone for good. The subsequent productivity and vitality of the reborn state ought to have silenced those promoting the idea that Israel no longer has a future and caused them to recognize what God's Word makes abundantly clear. Israel is not doomed to fall through the cracks of civilization into oblivion; in point of fact, the exact opposite is true!

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Barry E. Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007) xx.
- <sup>2</sup> Barry Horner, 37.
- <sup>3</sup> J. Randall Price, *Is the Modern State of Israel Prophetically Significant?*, <<http://www.raptureready.com/featured/price/16rp.pdf>>.
- <sup>4</sup> Barbara Tuchman, *Bible and Sword*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1956) 226-227.



Cover image: Background, Tel Aviv; Inset, historical Tel Aviv site image; Page 2-Top, NASA, ESA, and The Hubble Heritage Team (STScI); Pages 2 bottom, 3-6, courtesy Israel Ministry of Tourism; Above, Walter Homan/ FOI Canada Archive.

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