

You're of no earthly value unless you're...

Heavenly Minded

Vol.2 Issue 6

*And as the
bridegroom
rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God
rejoice over you.*

War and Peace World News Selah Zion

Dear Friends,

Someone dear to me recently asked with deep conviction, "How long?" It was a question charged with a passionate desire for Christ. Perhaps you're wondering about that too. Why, even that venerable theological oracle, Time magazine, is admitting that more 'mainstream people' than 'fringe evangelical' Christians are asking this very question and are concerned about it's consequences.

You can't help but think that it won't be long. Like Hal Lindsey, I sense we're in the "last of the last days". Europe's political systems are ripening for take over by a powerful central figure; international terrorism has brought the "distress of nations" as never before; nuclear 'sword-rattling' is no longer confined to 'super-powers; fuel for WMD's is being stolen, sold, stockpiled and smuggled widely; the whole world is 'hand-wringing' over peace in the Middle East; scientists are becoming quite 'cocky' with the genetic code...on and on it's going.

I hope you're getting ready. The Apostle John wrote, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

God bless and keep you,
John

(Heavenly Minded is a free newsletter. To add a friend to our distribution list, contact us at jdickey77@yahoo.com . We are happy to consider providing additional copies for churches and home fellowships.

The Bible indicates that the generation which witnesses the rebirth of the nation of Israel will also witness all the events leading up to Christ's 2nd coming. It says that in the last days Jerusalem will be a "cup of trembling" – the focus of attention of the whole world. It predicts a massive war with Russia leading a league of nations including Iran, Iraq, Libya, and many others against Israel. It is thought by many Bible scholars that this war will either immediately precede or be immediately subsequent to the rapture of the Church as mentioned in I Cor 15, 1 Thes 5 and several other scriptures.

In addition, there is the prediction of revival of a major world power that arises out of the former Roman Empire. This coalition will exert a strong influence over Israel and in particular, Jerusalem. (Dan. 2) The leader of this coalition, a charismatic man, will be the ultimate false Messiah and lead the world to oppose Christ's return. He will insist upon a one world religion and ultimately exalt himself as god. Punishment for not following this religion will be, as with Islam, death. In addition, no man will be allowed to buy or sell without this leader's "mark" in his hand or forehead.

Also, Daniel the prophet predicted man's knowledge would dramatically increase in this time. Christ said there would be wars and rumors (news) of wars.

Without a doubt, we are living in exciting and sobering times.

As we consider these things in light of God's eternal Word, we can take heart that all is moving toward His conclusion. Just a few scriptures to review:

**Middle East -- Zech 12:2,3, Ez 37
Church -- 2Tim3:1-5, 1Tim4:1,2
Knowledge growth -- Dan 12:4**

**Final Generation -- Mk 13:28-30
One World Religion -- Revelation 13
Russia/Saudi Arabia/Iran -- Ez 38, 39**

War and Peace

What is it about Jerusalem that makes it so special, such an attention magnet for the whole world? It has no coastline, no harbor, no navigable river, no geographic reason for its global eminence. Economically, it's insignificant; from the standpoint of the arts - a 'yawn'. Natural resources? Nope. Startling beauty? Not exactly. But from its earliest mention in the scriptures, we observe its totally unique status in the eyes of God.

In Genesis chapter 14, we find its first mention - when Abraham returned from rescuing his nephew Lot, he stopped to present a tithe to Melchizedek, King of Salem, who many including myself consider a Christopheny, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Salem means "peace" and so in this fellow we see pictured Christ (or at the very least, a person who is a type of Christ (Hebrews 7:1-3) reigning as the King of Peace.

However, somewhere along the time line of history, that changed, for when Joshua and the hosts of Israel entered the promised land some 600 - 650 years later, Jerusalem was under an Amorite king who organized a large coalition of opposition and oppression. And although the children of Judah later took the city, it somehow again became or remained under the control of the Jebusites who were Amorites.

Next, King David, just four generations later, finally conquered "the stronghold of Zion", made it his

capital, and it became known as the city of David. However, in the following centuries, Jerusalem was conquered and/or ruled by the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Caliphs of Damascus and Baghdad, the Crusaders, the Mamluks, the Ottomans, the British and most recently, the Israelis. And this is the city whose name is Peace?!

Jerusalem is an enigma, a conundrum, a city named for peace that has been the worldwide focal point of war and conflict, a relatively 'backwater' locale yet revered by the billions of three major faiths, a place famous for religious fervor but which has slain all the prophets of God sent to her (Luke 13:33,34), the place where the Shekinah glory of God was manifested but which the Lord later referred to as a spiritual Sodom (1 Kings 8:10,11; Jer 23:14).

"What inconsistency! What incongruity!" you say. Yes, but let's look again - in scripture, this place was first governed by Christ, then somehow it fell into iniquity and was ruled by a king (Adonizedek) whose name basically implied 'My way, my lord is righteous'. Then, it was taken back by a man "after God's own heart" (David) but for many years afterward it goes through trial after trial after trial until finally it experiences true peace under Christ's rule - "Hey, that sounds like the saga of the redeemed!" you say.

Yes, and that's no accident! You see, the conflict over Jerusalem is indeed a picture of the war over the grand redemptive plan of God - over His chosen people, over

mankind and over creation. You see, just as this world and mankind were initially in direct fellowship with the Lord, the King of Righteousness and King of Peace, so was Jerusalem.

But mankind fell into iniquity and everyone went their own way (Isa 53:6) just as Salem became a tremendously iniquitous place ruled by Adonizedek ('my lord is righteous' i.e. 'I'll do my own thing').

But as David conquered the city, so the Son of David took possession of the fallen creation after paying for it on the cross of Calvary.

And as Christ is Lord for the believer yet doesn't force His Lordship on us, so it has been with Jerusalem -- a long period of ups and downs -- times of faithfulness in submitting to God's ways, times of discipline, times of anguish, times of joy, times of trial, times of celebration, times of rebellion, times of divine intervention.

God even included the backslider in the picture as we recall that Jerusalem rejected, for a time, her Savior. She had become so legalistic, so materialistic, that she ceased to recognize Him. But then we know that she will repent when she realizes her blindness (See Psa 22:16 and Zech 12:10). God never gives up on her just as He never gives up on us.

Here's the deal - He has chosen Jerusalem, to place His Name there (see 1 Kings 11:36, 2 Kings 21:7, 2 Kings 23:27, 2 Chron 6:6, 2 Chron 12:13, 2 Chron 33:7, Zech 3:2) just as Christ has chosen us (see John 15:16).

Of Jerusalem, the Lord says she will be called "sought out, a city not forsaken" (Psa 62:10-12). Of the believer, He says He will search out

the one who is lost (Luke 15) and that He will never forsake us (Heb 13:5).

Of Jerusalem, He says she was, at times, even in whoredoms, sinning grievously (Jer 13:27, Lam 1:8). In the New Testament, we find the great apostle Paul confessing toward the end of his ministry this realization, "I am the chief of sinners." (1 Tim 1:15) Of course, that's not to say Paul was grievously sinning but rather understanding the true depravity of his own sin nature as we all do as we grow in the Lord.

Of Jerusalem, we read that it will be "trodden underfoot of the Gentiles" until the times of the Gentiles are complete. And in like manner, Jesus warned us that, "...if the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." (John 15:18) and, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." (John 15:20) In addition, Paul wrote, "As it is written, 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." (Romans 8:36, 37) We are sometimes 'trodden underfoot' by unbelievers as well.

As Jerusalem was broken down, so the Lord, because He loves us, chastises us and breaks down our stubbornness and self-reliance. (Heb 12:6)

As Jerusalem has glorious promises to look forward to (God's personal presence, His comfort, her full redemption) so do we as believers in Christ.

As all nations in the end will gather around Jerusalem and defeat it, (Zech 14:2) so our bodies will, in the end, succumb to the effects of sin and die (unless we're raptured! Heb 9:27, Romans 6:23).

Just as Jerusalem is really two cities (Isaiah 64:10), so we are a composition of two natures – the flesh and the spirit (see Romans 7:15-25, Gal 5:16,17).

In many ways, Jerusalem, as depicted in scripture, can be thought of as analogous to the believer's flesh and Zion to the spirit. As a matter of fact, when David conquered this place, it says specifically that he took the "stronghold of Zion" rather than Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:7). In like manner, Jesus, when He conquered sin and death on the cross offered new life to our spirits while our flesh is still under sin. (Romans 8:6-11)

And this is wonderful – Jerusalem (and Salem) is mentioned 815 times in the Bible and in them we see an almost fleshly inconsistency in her relationship to the Lord. However, of the 160 mentions of Zion (and Sion), although we see an occasional negative effect stemming from the failures of Jerusalem, there's an overall blessed, special, consistent relationship with the Lord. It's very much like our 'inner man' so to speak.

David not only conquered the stronghold of Zion, but he also paid for it (see 1 Chron 21). Likewise, the Son of David, Jesus, conquered or overcame the stronghold or barriers of sin and death – that which separated Him from us. And in

doing so, He also paid the price for our redemption.

Just after David took the city, he moved the Ark of the Covenant with the Mercy Seat into Zion. This is where God met with man – above the Mercy Seat and as such, it represented the presence of God. Likewise, after Christ rose from the dead, He began moving His presence via His Holy Spirit into us when we are born anew by faith.

Just as we read in Revelation of a New Jerusalem coming down from God, we individually have new immortal bodies ready for us in heaven. To tie the linkage even tighter, we hear the New Jerusalem described by the Apostle John as appearing like a bride and to confirm it, the heavenly messenger with him says, "*I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife...and [he] showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem.*" (Rev 21:2,10)

'Wait, I thought we as believers were the bride of Christ!' We are – that's the point. Through Jerusalem, God is teaching us about His own character, His peace. In fact, the Hebrew for Jerusalem means just that, "teaching of peace".

Today, just as the world's attention is zeroing in on the struggle over Jerusalem and Zion (physically, the temple mount) so the whole population of the invisible eternal realm is zeroed in on the struggle over God's children, the redeemed. That's not vanity; it's simply because God is using us as His 'blackboard', His 'vis-aid', His 'lesson-plan' for all creation. "Class," He could say, "evil is doomed. Satan is a goner. Even

though it may look like the devil has won, even when it looks like I have let him have his evil way, My Son will come back." Yes, He's coming!

Finally, just as Jerusalem is the 'stumbling block' and 'a cup of trembling' (Zech 12:2,3) for the whole world so are you and I to the hoards of hell – they can't figure out God's love for us. Why would the Son of God care enough about a city that doesn't recognize Him to weep over it? (Luke 19:41,42) The same reason He cares so much about His children who often fail to recognize Him even now – love.

Consider Jerusalem. God's faithfulness to her is God's faithfulness to us; God's love for her is God's love for us. Her story is our own saga of war and peace with eternal consequences.

Through her, our Father is teaching that His peace is not dependent upon the circumstances of our own 'Jerusalem', that is our own outward state, whether we're celebrating or tribulating. Real peace is only dependent on the fact that Christ reigns in our hearts.

Through her, we learn that:

- *no matter the number or severity of our earthly trials*
- *regardless of whether our defenses have been torn down and rebuilt multiple times*
- *even though we may feel like we've failed at times to recognize our King and that as a consequence enemies surround us*
- *despite being 'trodden down by gentiles'*
- *although it seems like the glory of the Lord has departed...*

Hold on to this promise – the New Jerusalem is coming. And it's too

beautiful, too awesome to adequately describe. John tried – he wrote, "*...and [he] showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them... The construction of its wall was of jasper and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones... The twelve gates were twelve pearls...The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.*" (Rev 21:10-23)

However, Paul didn't even try. He wrote, "*...I know...a man – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*" (2 Cor 12:3,4)

And this speaks not only of the beauty of the heavenly city but of the spectacular transformation that will one day be ours! Too awesome to describe! "*O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, Behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones. All your children shall be taught by the Lord and great shall be the peace of your children.*" (Isa 54:11-13)

So hold fast to your faith, dear friend. Be at peace.

Quotes

"... I work the rope lines a lot, and people say, 'Mr. President, I pray for you and your family.' I turn to them, I look them in the eye, and say, that's the greatest gift you can give. That's the greatest gift you can give. I mean it with all sincerity. And so I want to thank you for your prayers. I want to thank you for what you do for our nation. I want to thank you for your good works. I want to thank you for helping change America one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time."

-- President George W. Bush

Excerpts from the President's remarks at the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast

World News

Middle East

Sharon May Agree to PA State

Arutz Sheva 5/7/02

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will inform U.S. President George Bush today that he agrees to the establishment of a Palestinian state as part of an interim agreement - but that its exact borders will be negotiated in the framework of a final-status agreement. Jordan's King Abdullah, negating the Oslo approach, made similar remarks yesterday. "I'm afraid that if we go step by step, like in the Oslo path, we'll get nowhere," he told CNN.

Arafat "pledges" to root out terrorists

The Guardian Wed May 8, 2002

Today, Yasser Arafat, pledged to root out terrorists planning attacks on Israeli citizens, but said the recent Israeli incursion in the West Bank had left his security services unable to carry out those orders.

Arafat's assurances came as another Palestinian bomber detonated his explosives this morning in Haifa. He failed to kill anyone, including himself, and his supposed target, a group of

Israeli soldiers, were unharmed.

Arafat said today that his police were in shambles after an extended Israeli military operation to round up Palestinian militants in the West Bank. He also condemned the Israeli "attack on Palestinian civilians" and he asked the international community to send a peacekeeping force to the region immediately.



Bus destroyed by car bomb – 16 dead

Arab League condemns U.S. talks proposal

CAIRO, May 9 (UPI) -- Arab League Secretary General Amr Musa on Thursday condemned a U.S. proposal for an international peace conference on the Middle East this summer calling it an attempt to weaken Arab countries and give Israel the upper hand in the region.

Speaking at the opening of a meeting of Arab unions, Musa charged that the destruction and killing of Palestinians was aimed at finding a politician who would sign a peace deal in accord with Israel's conditions and interests.

Likud Central Committee Rejects Palestinian State

Ha'aretz 5/13/02

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon suffered a painful political setback Sunday night at the hands of his rival, former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, when the Likud Central Committee adopted a

resolution completely rejecting the creation of a Palestinian state.

At a raucous meeting in Tel Aviv, Sharon and Netanyahu went head-to-head over whether the party should vote on the resolution calling for the complete rejection of a Palestinian state. A proposal by Sharon to postpone the vote was defeated in a secret ballot by 669 (59%) to 465 (41%) votes.

Sharon desperately tried to prevent the vote, arguing that it would precipitate international pressure on Israel and tie his hands diplomatically.

'Any decision taken today on the final [status] agreement is dangerous to the state of Israel and will only intensify the pressures on us,' Sharon told those gathered at the Mann Auditorium, prior to the vote. His proposal was met with a chorus of boos.



Arafat must rebuild the Palestinian Authority

Arafat prepared to accept Israeli state

CNN 5/13/02

RAMALLAH, West Bank (CNN) -- Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat said Sunday he is prepared to accept a Jewish state called Israel.

The Palestinian Authority president said the land of Israel and the Palestinian territories is "terra santa" -- Latin for holy land -- for Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. Any independent Palestinian state, he said, will have room for them all.

"We hope that we will have this independent Palestinian state side by side with Israeli Jewish state," he told CNN.

Asked whether he accepts the Jewish state of Israel, he replied, "Yes."

"A part of the Jews are Palestinians, and they are represented in our legislative council," Arafat said. "Till now, we don't call them Jews. Do you know what we call them? Our cousins."

Arafat Calls for Another Million Martyrs

Arutz Sheva 5/14/02

While CNN was repeatedly broadcasting Yasser Arafat yesterday saying that he wants peace with his Jewish "cousins" in Israel, at the same time he was calling for "one million martyrs" to march to Jerusalem. Arafat was speaking to a crowd while visiting PLO-controlled Shechem during his first foray outside of Ramallah in almost six months. Israel had confined Arafat to the city following a wave of PLO terrorism. During his Shechem visit Arafat also vowed to continue his battle towards the "liberation" of Jerusalem from Israeli control.

121 Suicide Bombers Since the Start of the Oslo War

Arutz Sheva 5/14/02

Since the start of the Oslo War on September 29, 2000, there have been 121 suicide bombers as compared to 35 during the decade preceding the war, government officials report.

'Greedy monsters' ruled church

WASHINGTON TIMES 5/15/02

BETHLEHEM, West Bank — The Palestinian gunmen holed up in the Church of the Nativity and later deported by Israel seized church stockpiles of food and "ate like greedy monsters" until the food ran out, while more than 150 civilians went hungry.

They also guzzled beer, wine and

Johnnie Walker scotch that they found in priests' quarters, undeterred by the Islamic ban on drinking alcohol.

The indulgence lasted for about two weeks into the 39-day siege, when the food and drink ran out, according to an account by four Greek Orthodox priests who were trapped inside for the entire ordeal that ended Friday.

A church helper, who gave his name as Milad, said the quantity of food consumed by the gunmen in the first 15 days should have lasted for six months.

Allies Eye Prospect of Advanced Base in Jordan (MENL) 5/16/02

Jordan has been presented with a British proposal for a forward military base along its frontier with Iraq for use in any campaign to topple President Saddam Hussein.

Arab diplomatic sources said U.S. and British military personnel have examined the frontier area for use as a forward base in an attack against Baghdad and to ensure that Iraq will be stopped in firing medium-range missiles from the western desert toward Israel. The sources said London and Washington have expressed interest in using existing Jordanian facilities to house special operations forces and aircraft to patrol western Iraq for Scud-class missile launches.

The sources said Washington has assessed that Iraq is preparing to install chemical warheads on its Scud arsenal in any war against the United States. The U.S. assessment is that Iraq would

fire its missiles toward Israel and Kuwait..."

Saudi paper: The U.S. 'will vanish' Columnist calls Bush administration 'the morons in Washington' WND 5/16/02

Dr. Mohammad T. Al-Rasheed, a columnist for the Saudi government

English daily The Saudi Gazette, has mocked President George W. Bush for calling on Arab leaders to cease calling suicide bombers "martyrs," saying that the U.S. will "vanish, but [Arabs] will remain."

"Yes, those being mowed down in Palestine are MARTYRES [sic] to their cause, their honor, their dignity, their land, and their religion – the morons in Washington notwithstanding," Al-Rasheed wrote. "We have had enough of double-dealing, double standards, double talk, and double acts on a lousy stage

"...You will vanish, but we will remain. ... The world will advance to oblivion, but our date palms and our olive trees will survive your nuclear bombs."

Attack Warning FBI Chief: Suicide Bombings 'Inevitable'; Terror Groups May Join Forces

ABC News 5/21/02

Leaders of al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden's terror network, met in a summit with leaders of two Middle Eastern militant groups, Hamas and Hezbollah,



Angry supporters of Osama ben Ladin

as well as a number of other groups linked to terrorism for the first time in late March.

At the Lebanon meeting, the three groups discussed tactics and the possibility of an unprecedented level of joint activity, U.S. officials said, including a possible new round of attacks against America, Great Britain, and other targets.

The March secret summit marks the first time bin Laden's group put aside rivalries to work with others terrorist organizations, officials said.

"It suggests a new departure which is very startling and dangerous because they have not worked together before," said Vince Cannistraro, an ABCNEWS expert and former CIA counterterrorism chief.

Pakistan's London representative: war with India 'very close'

Ha'Aretz 5/21/02

LONDON - Pakistan and India are "very close" to renewed warfare over the disputed territory of Kashmir, Pakistan's ambassador in London warned in an interview with the BBC on Tuesday.

The international community should be aware of the seriousness of the stand-off and exercise its influence to calm the situation, High Commissioner Abdul Kader Jaffer said. He laid the blame for the raised tension squarely on India.

Asked how close the two countries were to war, Jaffer said: "They are very close, and therefore it is necessary for all our friends to get together, bring sanity where there is total insanity.

"There is a one-million deployment of armed forces on Indian- occupied Kashmir."

Indian PM Tells Troops Time for 'Decisive Fight'

5/22/02

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Wednesday told Indian soldiers confronting Pakistani forces across their border in disputed Kashmir that the time had come for a decisive fight.

Although he did not spell out who the fight would be against, he said his visit to frontline troops at a time of high tension between the nuclear-armed foes should be seen as a signal. "Whether our neighbor understands this signal or not, whether the world takes account of it or not, history will be witness to this. We shall write a new chapter of victory," he told soldiers in Kupwara, northern Kashmir.

"Let's work for victory. Be prepared for sacrifices. But our aim should be victory. Because it's now time for a decisive fight."



Musharraf gives emotional speech

Temple Mount May Soon Become a Battleground **Arutz Sheva May 27,2002**

Following a recent recommendation by the GSS to re-open the site to Jewish worshipers, Jerusalem Police Chief Mickey Levy said this week that the police are preparing for an eventuality that it may become the battleground that they don't want.

In response, the head of the Moslem Waqf at the site, threatened that he would not allow non-Moslems to enter. "Only Palestinians will decide who will and who will not enter." he said. Jews have not been allowed to pray there for the past 20 months, since the beginning of the Oslo War.

Defiant Pakistan Threatens to Use Nuke

Yahoo News 5/30/02

Pakistan has threatened to use nuclear weapons even if India stuck to conventional arms in any conflict, asserting that it has never subscribed to 'no-first-use' of atomic weapons and that ruling out their use would give New Delhi a 'license to kill.'

'India should not have the license to kill with conventional weapons while Pakistan's hands are tied regarding other means to defend itself,' said its new ambassador to the United Nations Munir Akram.

The highly bellicose and provocative statements by Akram on the second day on the job yesterday surprised diplomats and officials at the United Nations who declined to make an immediate comment.

Pakistan, he said, has to rely on the 'means it possessed to deter Indian aggression' and would not 'neutralize' that deterrence by any doctrine of 'no-first-use.' ...



Border guard in Kashmir

Report: U.S. targets pipeline in plan for February attack on Iraq

WORLD TRIBUNE May 30, 2002

LONDON — U.S. officials last week toured countries that border Iraq to discuss their participation in a ground attack on the Saddam regime.

The countries included Iran, Jordan and Turkey. Jordan has been offered \$450 million in U.S. aid during fiscal 2003.

The London-based Al Hayat daily quoted sources as saying the Bush administration has decided to destroy the Saddam regime. The sources said

such an attack could take place by February 2003.

Al Hayat daily also reported Thursday that the U.S. military has determined that the Iraqi-Syrian pipeline would be a key target in any military campaign against Baghdad. The newspaper said this information was relayed to European officials during recent consultations with their U.S. counterparts.

Al Hayat said the United States could launch a missile strike to destroy the Iraqi-Syrian pipeline even prior to any military invasion of Iraq.

Washington has warned Syria several times that the operation of the pipeline is a violation of United Nations Security Council sanctions against Baghdad.

U.S. officials said the Iraqi-Syrian pipeline is used by Baghdad to generate up to \$500 million a

year to spend on its military programs. The officials said Syria has become a leading smuggling route for equipment ordered by Iraq for its military and weapons of mass destruction programs.

Musharraf fans flames with threat

The Advertiser 5/31/02

PAKISTAN President General Pervez Musharraf has warned he will unleash a "storm" if India encroaches even centimetres into his nation's territory.

"We will fight in the enemy's territory if the aggression is imposed on us, as we know victory comes through offensive strategy," General Musharraf told troops

yesterday near the frontier chanting "God is Great".

"We will unleash a storm and nobody will be able to stop it, if they impose aggression on us and move even one inch into the areas of Pakistan."



Bush and Putin at memorial ceremony

Palestinian hardline meets in Iran

BBC 6/2/02

A two-day conference has opened in the Iranian capital, Tehran, in support of the Palestinian uprising against the Israelis.

Held in commemoration of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, father of the Iranian revolution, it brought together many figures regarded by both Israel and the US as hardened terrorists - although Iran and many Arabs hail them as heroic strugglers for liberation. Among them were leaders from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas movements, and from the Lebanese Hezbollah.

The conference organiser, Ali-Akbar Mohtashemi - who as Iranian ambassador in Damascus was instrumental in setting up the Lebanese Hezbollah in the early 1980s - said that the Palestinian intifada, and especially the suicide bombings, had achieved more than all the Arab wars and peace talks with Israel.

He referred to Israel as "a cancerous tumour implanted in the heart of the Islamic world which must be uprooted before it takes over".

Russia/China

NATO, Russia Reach Historic Deal

5/14/02

REYKJAVIK, Iceland (AP) - Heralding the Cold War's funeral, NATO and Russia reached a historic agreement Tuesday to combat common security threats in the post-Sept. 11 era.

The deal establishing a NATO-Russia council to set policy on counter-terrorism and a range of other issues was reached by Secretary of State Colin Powell and other NATO foreign ministers after meeting in the Icelandic capital with their Russian counterpart.

"This is the last rites, the funeral of the Cold War," said British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. "Fifteen years ago, Russia was the enemy, now Russia becomes our friend and ally. There could be no bigger change."

Putin Puts Country on Alert

The Moscow Times 5/17/02

One week after a bomb shattered a World War II Victory Day celebration killing 42 people in Dagestan, President Vladimir Putin ordered the nation's defense and security organizations to be on "permanent high alert."

Putin, speaking from the Black Sea resort of Sochi, also appealed to Russians to help in the fight against crime and terrorism.

"If the public administration bodies do their job and society exercises solidarity in the fight against crime, things will be more quiet in the south of Russia," he said in televised remarks.

The May 9 explosion during a parade in the Caspian Sea port of Kaspiisk was just the latest in a series of attacks in the region bordering Chechnya.

"The defense and security structures should be on permanent high alert, as any negligence here can result in a lot of casualties," Putin said, Interfax reported.

ITALY GEARS UP SECURITY FOR SUMMIT, BERLUSCONI SAYS RUSSIA IN EU IS NEXT

[AP] 5/26/02

Italy will deploy 15,000 security forces, anti-aircraft missile batteries and will close airspace, roads and beaches around Rome for Tuesday's landmark NATO-Russia summit of 20 world leaders.

Premier Silvio Berlusconi said Friday such extreme measures, including those to guard against possible chemical and biological attack, were to protect such 'privileged targets' from terrorist attack.

Berlusconi said the NATO signing and an upcoming European Union - Russia summit were steps in a path that would result in Moscow's ultimate entry into the European Union.

'I believe that with Russia as a member of Europe, Europe will become the world's primary political center — with an alliance with the United States,' he said .."

Russia plans military overhaul

BBC 5/31/02

Russia's National Security Council has drafted a policy document on the future of the country's armed forces. The plan was unveiled at a meeting of the council - chaired by President Vladimir Putin - called after the country's armed forces were officially described as being "worse than critical".

The remark, by the Chief of the General Staff Anatoli Kvashnin, was one of the most dramatic official acknowledgments of the desperate condition of the once-mighty military, which has fallen into decay since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991.

But the crisis is worsening, and leading Western experts have warned that over

the next 10 years the Russian military must either reform or disintegrate.

European Union

EU Military Chief Calls for Merging EU and NATO

EU Observer May, 2002

The chairman of the Military Committee of the European Union, General Gustav Häggglund, has called for a new common security system for Europe and America, under which the EU and the European parts of NATO would be linked and deal with crises in Europe and nearby.

Mr Häggglund suggested that this new EU-NATO organization would also take part of long-term operations and humanitarian missions outside Europe, reports the Helsingin Sanomat. Under Mr. Häggglund's vision the US would have to guarantee the safety of North America, worldwide crisis management missions and deal with terrorism.

France and Britain Demand Powerful EU President

EU Observer May 16,2002

France and Britain joined forces on Wednesday to demand the creation of a powerful new president of the European Council who British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, believes will become the public face and driving force of Europe. **The goal is to give Europe a high-profile political leader, who would also serve as the European Union's face in international affairs and take a key role in developing defence and foreign policies.**

They believe the new president would give the European Union a sharper identity, providing much-needed leadership and accountability.

Under the new proposals, the council president would be elected by all European Union leaders for a five-year term to coincide with that of the Commission president.

The new system would replace the current six-month rotating European Union presidency, which has been blamed for failing to give strong leadership and political direction, which would become even more unsatisfactory with the admission of up to 10 new countries to the European Union in 2004.

UK to fight Prodi's plans to boost EU powers

Financial Times 5/21/02

Britain is preparing for a fierce battle against proposals for a radical extension of the powers of Brussels to be unveiled on Wednesday by Romano Prodi, European Commission president.

Mr Prodi will argue that a newly enlarged EU of 25 or more countries will grind to a halt without fundamental reform.

He wants the Commission to have a new role in driving forward EU policy on sensitive issues such as defence, foreign affairs and home affairs.

EU Presidency Urges Israel to Accept Saudi Peace Plan

[AP] May 21,2002

The European Union's presidency warned on Tuesday that the situation in the Middle East was still "very, very fragile," and urged Israel to accept a Saudi Arabian peace plan.

"After 35 years, the Arab world has accepted full normalization of relations with Israel. ... This has to be reciprocated by Israel," said Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Pique, whose country currently holds the rotating EU presidency.

The Saudi plan proposes the Arab world offer Israel full recognition and security in exchange for a complete Israeli withdrawal from Arab land held since 1967.

The end of the 39-day siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem by



Rumsfeld says al Qaeda network is still active

Israeli forces produced an opportunity that must be used, Pique said. "I believe the situation is very serious, extremely difficult and very, very fragile. There may be new suicide attacks and new retaliation from Israel," he said. "We believe a window of opportunity is opening up. It is very important to use this opportunity."

PRODI SEEKS POWERS TO GIVE EU GLOBAL CLOUT

The Guardian 5/24/02

Romano Prodi threw down a direct challenge to EU governments yesterday by demanding that the European commission be handed a bigger role in foreign policy to give the union a 'single voice' on the world stage.

In an ambitious bid for greater powers for the supranational body, the commission president also called for a formal role for euro zone finance ministers that would exclude Britain and other 'outs' such as Sweden and Denmark.

Calling for greater efforts to tackle immigration and asylum, he proposed an integrated European police force to fight terrorism and organized crime, an

EU-wide tax and harmonization of some aspects of criminal law.

NATO seen as Europe's top gun

The Telegraph 6/3/02

The United States is drafting plans for a NATO-run military unit to rival directly the European Union's much-criticized Rapid Reaction Force.

In a move that illustrates the Bush administration's distrust of EU military ambitions, the Pentagon is proposing that NATO set up small, highly mobile units to project the alliance's strength to trouble spots.

The new, multinational forces would be drawn primarily from NATO's European members but are likely to include U.S. troops. They would be sent on dangerous missions that the United States believes are unsuited to the so-called "European Army."

United States

'Safe Schools Campaign' a Trojan Horse for Homosexual Activists, Family Groups Warn

5/7/02

Washington (CNSNews.com) - Homosexual activism in schools now includes efforts to re-educate schoolchildren into accepting, advocating and experimenting in homosexual behavior, a coalition of family groups said at a Capitol Hill seminar Monday.

Robert Knight, director of the Culture and Family Institute, which sponsored "From Tolerance to Forced Acceptance," cited the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) - a national organization of more than 1,200 educators - as seeking to promote homosexuality in schools "under any guise that works."

Knight also criticized the National Education Association, a teachers' union of 2 million members, for adopting "an

openly pro-homosexual stance."

Citing Conflict, U.S. Tells Americans to Leave India

5/31/02

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The State Department on Friday urged Americans in India to leave and authorized the departure of nonemergency embassy staff, citing a risk of intensified conflict with between nuclear powers India and Pakistan.

"Tensions have risen to serious levels and the risk of intensified military hostilities between India and Pakistan cannot be ruled out," the department said in a statement.

"As a result of these concerns, the Department has authorized the departure of all U.S. Government personnel in non-emergency positions and family members in India," it said.

It added: "The Department of State urges American citizens currently in India to depart the country."

There are 60,000 Americans in India and a few thousand in Pakistan.

Religion

Pope Blesses the Internet to Spread the Gospel

NY Post May 13,2002

Pope John Paul II is putting his faith in the Internet. In his weekly address at St. Peter's Square yesterday, the 81-year-old pontiff said, "I've decided . . . to propose a big new theme for this year: 'The Internet - a new forum for proclaiming the Gospel.' "

"Recent progress in communications and information have presented the church with unheard-of possibilities for evangelism," he said.

"We shouldn't be afraid to put to sea in the vast ocean of information," he went on. "If we do so, the good news can reach the hearts of the men and women of the new millennium."

Saudis deport men for owning Bible 2 Filipinos also caught with Christian music CDs

WND 5/21/02

Saudi Arabian authorities have deported two Filipino Christians after the pair spent more than a month in prison for possession of a Bible and some Christian CDs, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide as reported by Assist News Service.

"A local court sentenced them to a month's imprisonment in April 2001, and a higher court increased their sentence to include 150 lashes in January 2002.

Vatican Denies That John Paul II Will Resign in August

Zenit Jun 4,2002

The Vatican denied that John Paul II intends to resign this August, on the occasion of his visit to Poland.

Reports of a resignation were published Monday by the Czech weekly newspaper Tyden, citing Church sources in Poland.

But in statements to the press, Joaquín Navarro-Valls, Vatican spokesman, said: "At present, [the Pope] has a full program for the next six months, which includes canonization ceremonies and different 'ad limina' visits" of national bishops.

Science

VERICHIP'S FIRST-EVER "CHIPPING" PROCEDURES ATTRACTING WORLDWIDE MEDIA ATTENTION

Business Wire 5/9/02

Applied Digital Solutions, Inc. (Nasdaq: ADSX), an advanced technology development company, announced today that it is expecting extensive, worldwide media coverage of the first-ever 'chipping' procedures scheduled for May 10, 2002.

As previously announced, the Jacobs family will be the first family in the world to 'get chipped' with VeriChip's personal verification microchip. The historic 'chipping' procedure will take place in the first Authorized VeriChip Center in Palm

Beach County, Florida, followed by a press conference and an invitation-only brunch for business partners and community leaders. During the press conference and the business brunch, Applied Digital executives will unveil more details about VeriChip's rollout plans...

ITALY CLONING GURU SAYS BABIES ON THEIR WAY

Reuters 5/9/02

The Italian fertility expert whose avowed aim is to create the first human clone, said Wednesday three women were pregnant with clones, but complained that the babies would be viewed as freaks by a hostile society. Severino Antinori called himself the 'cultural and scientific coordinator' of the top secret cloning projects, and said one of the pregnancies was in the 10th week, one in the seventh and one in the sixth.

'One thing is certain, in the country where these babies will be born, if the climate of persecution does not change ... at the first birth everyone will say 'This is a monster', the white-haired Antinori told a news conference.

He denied that he was specifically in charge of any of the three pregnancy cases and declined to say where the women were, indicating only that one of the trio lived in an Islamic nation. Never shy of courting controversy,

Antinori caused alarm in the scientific community, outrage in religious circles and confusion for law makers when he announced more than a year ago his desire to clone humans to help infertile couples...

Cosmic catastrophe 'a certainty'

BBC 5/8/02

Sooner or later, a catastrophe from space will wipe out almost all life on Earth.

The few who might survive will wish

they had died, they will struggle, forlornly, on a wrecked planet.

According to Dr Arnon Dar, of the Technion Space Research Institute, Israel, a particular type of exploding star going off anywhere in our region of the Universe would devastate our planet.

Using the latest statistics and calculations, he argues that a supermassive star collapsing at the end of its lifetime would form a black hole and send out a beam of destructive radiation and particles that would sterilise any planet in its path.

Supermassive stars, those with a mass substantially greater than our Sun, are scattered throughout the galaxy. It is thought that when they collapse at the end of their lives, they eject an intense beam of radiation, called gamma-rays, into space.

These gamma-rays and the energetic sub-atomic particles that follow in their wake are so powerful that they could have a major influence on life in our galaxy.

"If such a beam were to strike Earth, the effects would be totally devastating, unlike anything we could imagine," Dr Dar said.

It's kinda touch-and-go

New system lets Kroger shoppers pay with fingerprint

Houston Chronicle

COLLEGE STATION -- At Kroger stores here customers are getting their groceries without cash, check or credit card.

No, they're not using the five-finger discount. One finger will do.



NASA illustration of asteroid impact

They rely on a new little machine called SecureTouch-n-Pay which enables a finger to bring home the bacon and give cash back.

In the Bryan-College Station area, Kroger is trying out the new retail point-of-sale system in its three stores. Shoppers who enroll free of charge to use the finger image machine -- officially known as a biometric electronic financial transaction processing system -- simply walk up to a cashier, say, "I'm going to pay with my fingerprint" and *voilà*.

Many customers are initially leery. They associate fingerprinting with getting hauled to jail -- not picking up milk.

Selah!

(Think About It!)

Dateline: May, 445 BC

[Jerusalem] They surveyed the surrounding wreckage with weeping and a deep sense of hopelessness. The older men knew they didn't have enough strength any more to make a difference and the younger ones who were usually ready for anything just stared blankly. It was

Nothing was left standing; crumbled stone and brick was strewn everywhere in huge mounds. At the same time, their 'neighbors' hissed and mocked with surreal voices which rose and fell amid the din of the silent reality.

Dateline: May, 445 BC

[Shushan] It was beautiful day: The splendid courts of the palace were alive with brilliant colors -- dazzling gardens in full bloom, courtiers in festive gowns and everywhere paintings, tapestries and fountains dancing playfully with sparkling mist and bubbles. Melodious singing filled the air and laughter seemed to play in the breeze.

Here in the court, Nehemiah was a trusted servant of King Artaxerxes I who ruled the vast Medio-Persian empire. The beloved capital of his people, Jerusalem, had been in ruins for some 70 years when the first group of faithful Jews returned to the land and it was now about 92 years later. Having learned that the wall of the city was still broken down and its gates burned with fire, he wept and

mourned. In those days, a city without walls and gates was not governable -- it was an open prey to any and all who chose to abuse it.

Likewise, we as Christians need walls -- NOT walls between one another but walls of defense against the spiritual enemies we face. Without them, we too are easy prey -- the 'world' and/or our own sin nature then has too much freedom to bother, bully and oppress. This idea of physical wall building around a city is rather foreign to us because military weaponry has made it obsolete. However this isn't the case with the spiritual so let's consider the well known wall-building story in scripture to see what we can glean. (Read the book of Nehemiah.)

Now, Nehemiah, whose name means "Jehovah has comforted" has long been considered by Bible scholars as a type or picture, both in name and action, of the Holy Spirit. And although this picture is evident in many ways, we'll limit our consideration here to his main effort -- building the wall surrounding Jerusalem.

To begin, it's interesting to note that those who were oppressing the inhabitants of the area weren't concerned about them until someone arrived who wanted to help them (Neh 2:9, 10). That's how it is in the spirit as well -- you'll generally discover spiritual opposition when you demonstrate a desire to be separate from the world so to speak. As long as you blend in, the opposition isn't concerned.

Sanballat and Tobiah, who epitomize the opposition, are interesting pictures as well. They vociferously challenge the wall building knowing that it will end their corrupt domination. Sanballat's name means "sin (or the moon god) has given life". As such, he is clearly representative of the sinful world and the lusts thereof. Tobiah, on the other hand, means "goodness of Jehovah" and is a representation of the traitorous compromiser or compromising sin nature. Both these enemies – the ungodly world around us and our own sin-natures, are menaces to our wall building in the spirit.

In Nehemiah, chapters two through six, we see that their tactics are:

-- **Accusation** (Neh 2:29). Just as they accused Nehemiah of rebelling against the king, a tactic that had worked before (see Ezra 4), we are often reminded of our own sin and rebellious failings as we seek to 'build'.

-- **Mockery** (Neh 4:1,2). This is intended to belittle, to make us believe that we are not up to the task of building, to disbelieve the scripture that says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phi 4:13)

-- **Doubts and degrading** (Neh 4:3). This is used to set us up to believe that our work in obedience to the Lord is worthless and meaningless which is absolutely not true. (1 Cor 15:58)

-- **Anger, threatened attacks and confusion** (Neh 4:7,8). This is for intimidation. However, we must remember that there's a BIG

difference between what the enemies threaten or plan and what they can actually do. Our Father is on the throne. (Col 2:14,15)

-- **Fear** (Neh 4:10-12). When our faith fails, fear becomes an effective weapon. This is when we need to be reminded that, "*God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love and a strong mind.*" (1Tim 1:7) also, Jesus said, "*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" (Math 10:28)

-- **Distractions** (Neh 6:1-4). This is a powerful strategy – if our enemy can just get us in a dialog... whoa! Remember, that's what happened to Eve. (Eph 5:11)

-- **Lies and character assassination** (Neh 6:5-9, 10-13). These are saved until the end because they're the big guns so to speak. By this point, the work of wall building is nearly complete and this is used to focus attention upon the wall builder – to accuse him of self-righteousness, self-promotion – to get people to believe that the motive and thus the character of the wall builder is suspect. Our motives must always be LOVING OBEDIENCE to our Lord – never self-satisfaction or elevation.

However, in submission to Nehemiah's guidance, the people who built displayed:

-- **Courage** (Neh 4:14). "*Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.*" (1Cor 16:13,14)

-- **Guarding** (Neh 4:13). This is alertness. (2Tim 4:5, Eph 6:18)

-- **Readiness** (Neh 4:16-18). By laboring with weapons in hand, they were an example of diligence and preparedness. The Bible tells us that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual and that we are to be at the ready as well. (2Cor 10:4, Eph 6:11-13)

-- **Honesty and cooperation** (Neh 4:19,20). Truthfulness about our 'wall-building' especially in prayer is paramount. It can be a big task. As my pastor says, 'We're all 'projects.'" It doesn't help to pretend you're 'together' when you know you're not.

-- **A mind to work** (Neh 4:6). This pictures faith and perseverance.

-- **Clothed** (Neh 4:23). Clothed? Yes, that is putting full confidence in the robe of Christ's righteousness – wearing it and never putting it aside. As a consequence, the wall surrounding Jerusalem was completed in just 52 days. Now, this is radical, for that's the exact time between Christ's death on the cross and the outpouring of His Spirit on Pentecost. That is, it's the period between when the veil or barrier between God and man was torn open and the separation or barrier between the redeemed and the world was made obvious through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Selah!

Now, it's important to understand, as we're discussing wall-building that we aren't talking about erecting some fortress mentality – individually or corporately – with respect to evangelism or our call to be salt and light in this world. Rather, we're dealing with the real, pragmatic need for spiritual defenses and personal holiness.

So what do these walls represent? I'll suggest that they picture the strength or integrity of our mind or soul. You see, that's where the battles are really fought, aren't they? And the gates represent our reasoning, reckoning or judgments – entry points so to speak. In fact, the Hebrew word for gate is derived from the verb meaning to reason, think or reckon.

David, in Psalm 51, after confessing his sin with Bathsheba, the failing of his character, prays, "*Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion: build the walls of Jerusalem.*"

In Psalm 122, we read, "*Peace be within thy walls.*" and are reminded of the scripture, "*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee because he trusteth in Thee.*" (Isa 26:3)

So how then are my walls built? I know the Bible says to "*Gird up the loins of your mind.*" (1Pet 1:13) Practically, what does that mean? Hypnosis? Psycho-therapy? Primal scream?? No.

To answer that, let's look at who built the wall with Nehemiah. There are exactly 52 named individuals or groups who labored on the wall. Some commentators try to create some pretty exotic interpretations of this and others are almost cynical in countering that there's nothing symbolic to be derived. I'll tell what I believe and you can decide for yourself.

I've studied each individual and group and something consistent and powerful emerges – all of them have names that speak clearly of a condition or attitude of the redeemed. I won't cover them all –

you can as you have opportunity – but let's look at a representative few (See Neh 3):

- *Eliashib means 'God restores'*
- *Zaccur and the sons of Hassenaah combine to mean [He's] 'mindful [that we're] sons of thorny' that is, sons of Adam if you would.*
- *Jehoida means 'Jehovah knows'*
- *Meshullam means 'friend'*
- *Melatiah means 'Jehovah delivered'*
- *Jadon means 'thankful'*
- *Uzziel means 'my strength is God'*
- *Hannaniah means 'God has favored'*
- *Rephaiah means 'healed of Jehovah'*
- *Jedaiah means 'praised of Jehovah'*
- *Malchijah means 'my King is Jehovah'*
- *Hashabiah and Bevai combined to mean 'Jehovah has considered my goings'*
- *Azariah means 'Jehovah has ransomed'*
- *Zadok means 'righteous'*
- *Shemaiah means 'heard by Jehovah'*

On it goes. Each one amplifies the unified chorus of the redeemed and as such, I'll suggest that they pretty dramatically represent the attitudes that edify the saint individually and the church corporately. The scripture says, *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things."* (Phi 4:8)

So John, are you telling me that by adopting the attitude of the redeemed, by being heavenly minded, that I build my walls of spiritual defense, that I am sanctified

and I become a major threat to the enemy of my soul? Yep.

OK, but I feel like I'm in a continual building project! I get a wall up and then there's a breach to fill again. What's up?

Breaches are the consequences of sin. In this life, our walls crumble because they are made of 'stone or brick' so to speak – they're earthy and imperfect. However, we must rebuild them in faith – faith that believes the truths expressed in the names of Nehemiah's men and women.

And as long as we are here, we'll need to continue a maintenance schedule if you would – continue believing, really believing, that we're redeemed and forgiven. I don't mean believing because we prayed a specific prayer, said the right words, had the right attitude or read the right scriptures. That's all good, but we're not forgiven because Father God has to and therefore does so grudgingly. We're not forgiven because of some sort of legal technicality or loop-hole.

But the enemies of our souls want us to believe exactly that – if they can't convince us that we're lost, they want us to believe our sins are bad enough to diminish God's love toward us – that the cross may atone for them BUT...

Now, you may have carried some baggage around with you for quite some time believing just that – I did. You know your own 'earthiness', your own character flaws and failures. You know your own breaches and that you've been careless in guarding the 'gates' at times. Oh you know you're forgiven,

but you subtly doubt you're still ravishing in God's sight, still loved as passionately. You know you're accepted but doubt that you'll be welcomed in.

Listen. You're accepted and forgiven IN Christ because God loves you furiously, relentlessly, unabashedly, inexhaustibly – read Ephesians 1:3-6. Believe it! And although your present walls consist of 'stone and brick' (it's our present portion), God sees the end result, the walls of your New Jerusalem (Rev 21:12-21) – magnificent, clear, sparkling gems – they speak of your heavenly wall, your heavenly character (1Jn 3:2, 1Cor 13:12). Huge, perfect pearls – they portray the endless covering of your grit by His grace.

A final thought -- Isaiah prophesies that one day, *"... you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise."* Heavenly mindedness, Selah!

Zion

There is a remarkable witness to the spiritual qualities evoked in references to Zion. It lies in the interesting fact that the word "Zion" is used 153 times in the King James Version Old Testament. (Parenthetically, in the KJV, it is seen two additional times, spelled as "*Sion*." Once, in Deuteronomy 4:48, it is a different word, used as a designation for Mt. Hermon. On the other occasion, in Psalm 65:1, it is a designation for God in heaven.)

What makes the number 153 interesting is that it has long been

thought to have great spiritual significance. Perhaps its most significant appearance is in the last chapter of John's Gospel. There, he tells the extraordinary story of Jesus' post-resurrection meeting with the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The heart of the encounter is a miracle, in which professional fishermen are given a spiritual lesson about fishing.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed he himself. There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes. Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea. And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net

with fishes. As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught. Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, **an hundred and fifty and three:** and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken” (John 21:1-11).

From the earliest days of biblical commentary, thoughtful readers have been amazed at the simple and direct way that Jesus allows us to know His thoughts. But most especially, they have wondered at the mysterious nature of the catch – those one-hundred and fifty-three great fish. Why that number? Why 153?

At no time does the Bible ever include the slightest fragment of wasted information. Numbers, in particular are freighted with meaning. One is the Creator; two is division; three, the Godhead; four, the Kingdom; five is grace; six, the number of man; and seven, the statement of completion.

But 153? It must have great significance. E. W. Bullinger, in his groundbreaking 1894 book, *Number in Scripture*, commented upon Augustine’s idea about the mysterious number. “He and other commentators see in this number some connection with the saved, as being definite and particular down even to the last one, making up not a large round number, but a smaller and odd number, 153. They saw in this a proof of the fact that the number of the elect is fixed and pre-ordained.”

Bullinger comments further on the matter. “Jerome also sees there is some deeper meaning in the number, and says that there are 153 sorts of fish, i.e., all kinds of men enclosed in the Gospel net.”

He writes that many numerical schemes have been generated in a series of attempts to bring meaning to the divine number. In one example, Augustine took the sum of all the digits up to and including the number 17, beginning with 1+2+3, and so on up to 15+16+17=153. This curiosity emphasizes the number 17, but does nothing to explain the meaning of the number, itself.

But then, in an amazing burst of insight, Bullinger discovered that the Old Testament phrase, “*sons of God*” contains the same, mystical number. In Hebrew, each letter is also a number, so that words and expressions add up to meaningful numbers. In the case of “*sons of God*,” the letters of the Hebrew *b’nai ha’elohim* add up to exactly 153!

Bullinger reasoned that this expression is nothing less than, “the number of the Sons of God.” He quite rightly reckoned that since the redeemed are called, “*joint-heirs with Christ*” in Romans 8:17, they are also to be seen as the sons of God.

To further illustrate the point, Bullinger noted that “amongst the multitudes who received direct blessing from Christ there are recorded exactly 153 individual cases.” In his book, he goes on to mention them by name and Scripture verse.

It should also be noted that in the expression, the “stronghold of Zion”, which is the first of 153 mentions of Zion in the Old Testament (2 Sam 5), the Hebrew word for stronghold, though it is acceptably translated stronghold or fortress, literally means “net” and thus points to the picture of the 153 caught in the net in John 21. (John Dickey)

As we think about today’s Israel and the church under siege, we should always remember that this world, under the despotism of the nations, is not our home. We are aliens here; our true citizenship is yet to be realized in Zion, home of the redeemed. Wonderful things await the faithful.
Gary Stearman



O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest and not comforted, behold, I will lay your stones with colorful gems and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones. Isaiah 54: 11,12