

26th Holy Land Pilgrimage

sponsored by the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar, USA



The Grand Encampment of Knights Templar, USA, has now sponsored 26 Holy Land Pilgrimages since the first trip was held in 1982 — Because of the political situation in Israel, pilgrimages have not been held every year. While we were in Israel, five missiles were fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel, killing one Israeli. With this group, the Knights Templar have sent 1,650 Christian ministers on this pilgrimage. Normally two groups are sent each year. All expenses, including airfare, lodging, meals and fees to enter sites are paid by the Knights Templar. The fifty ministers, sixteen women and thirty-four men, were from at least twenty-two states. Only three ministers testified they were Masons; being a Mason was not a requirement to go on the pilgrimage, although each minister was selected by a Knights Templar, usually a member of the minister's church.

This photo was taken outside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The church is operated by the Roman Catholic Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Five Stations of the Cross are inside the church. A Muslim family has had control of the key to the church for seven centuries. The key is passed down from generation to generation. The door keeper was there to show us the key.

Celebrating the *Bar Mitzvah* at the Western or Wailing Wall in Jerusalem

Bar Mitzvah:

“one to whom the commandments apply”

The term "*Bar Mitzvah*" appears first in the Talmud, the codification of the Jewish oral Torah compiled in the early 1st millennium of the Christian era. The term is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures or Tanakh, the Christian Old Testament.

Once a boy is *bar mitzvah* (“one to whom the commandments apply”), he has the responsibilities of an adult Jew under Jewish law. These things include:

- He is morally responsible for his actions.
- He is eligible to be called to read from the Torah, and to participate in a Minyan (a quorum of ten or more adult Jews assembled for purposes of fulfilling a public religious obligation requiring a quorum. The term has also taken on the secondary meaning of referring to a prayer service).
- He can own what he possesses as personal property.
- He are old enough to be legally married according to Jewish law.
- He must follow the 613 laws of the Torah.



Boys waiting for their Bar Mitzvahs at the Western or Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Notice the women behind the fence. Men and women are kept separate at the Wailing Wall.



Carrying the Torah

In American synagogues and temples, including orthodox, girls celebrate *bat mitzvahs* at age 13, along with boys. However, Orthodox Jews in Israel reject *bat mitzvahs* as an “American invention.” One respected Orthodox rabbi, Moshe Feinstein (1896-1986) referred to the Bat Mitzvah as “nonsense.” American Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan held the first public celebration of a Bat Mitzvah in America for his daughter Judith on 18 March 1922 at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York City. In 1945 the Union of Orthodox Rabbis excommunicated Kaplan who it deemed to be the community's most heretical voice. Kaplan eventually become the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, which teaches that Jewish practice should be reconciled with modern thought.

In the Sephardic (Spanish-speaking) tradition, a boy may enter adulthood somewhat later, waiting until after his 14th birthday.

Among religious Jews, it is customary for a man who has reached the age of 83 to celebrate a second Bar Mitzvah, under the logic that a “normal” lifespan is 70 years, so that an 83-year-old can be considered 13 in a second lifetime.

All photos this page by Gary Leazer



One of the Ten Commandments tells Jews to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy (Deut. 5:12). Pharisees accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath when he healed a man with a withered hand (Matt. 12:9-14).

Orthodox Jews are careful not to violate the ban on working on the Sabbath, which includes driving, cooking and using any machines -- including computers, phones, Blackberries and televisions — and pushing elevator buttons. “One is to carry no burden outside of one’s (home) on the Sabbath day,” said one rabbi, referring to Jer. 17:22. Burdens include keys, food and even umbrellas. In Israeli hotels, Shabbat elevators stop on every floor and the door opens on every floor in case an orthodox Jew wishes to ride. Some orthodox Jews will not even ride a Shabbat elevator on the Sabbath.

Frank, a good friend who was raised conservative, but is now an orthodox Jew, moved to another house so he and his wife would not have to drive to the synagogue on the Sabbath; they walk. He will not carry an umbrella when it rains on the Sabbath, but wears a rain poncho to keep himself dry.

Orthodox Jewish Practices

Judaism in Israel is not divided as it is in America among the reform, conservative and orthodox branches. The three branches are found in Israel only among Jews who have emigrated to Israel from the West. Rather, Jews are divided between religious and secular Jews with 25 percent of Israeli Jews being considered religious and the remainder secular. Still, a visitor will notice that some Jews are more religious than other religious Jews.



Tephillin

An Orthodox Jew prays at the Wailing Wall. Although many people believe the Wailing Wall was a part of Herod's Temple, it is actually a part of huge retaining wall built by Herod surrounding the Temple Mount.

Notice the black box like phylactery on the man's forehead. The Hebrew word for the box is *tephillin*, from a Hebrew word meaning "prayer." *Tephillin* are worn on the forehead (in this photo) and on the inside of the upper arm close to the heart (for right-handed people, the *tephillin* goes on the left arm; left-handed people wear them on the right arm). The *tephillin* on the upper arm is often not seen because it is under the prayer shawl.

The *tephillin* is put on the arm before it is put on the forehead. A strap attached to the *tephillin* is wrapped seven times around the arm and then is wrapped around the middle finger before being wrapped around the palm of the hand and tied tightly. The *tephillin* on the forehead is then put on and tied at the back of the head.

The biblical text for this practice is Exodus 13:9, "And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thy hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in thy mouth; for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt."

Tephillin contain four handwritten sections of the Torah: "Sanctify to Me..." (Ex. 13:1-10), "When Ha-Shem brings you..." (Ex. 13:11-16), "Hear, O Israel..." (Deut. 6:4-9), and "If you listen..." (Deut. 11:13-21). The arm phylactery is

fastened to the left biceps (or the right biceps if the man is left handed) opposite and close to the heart, as it says "And these words shall be on your heart [...and you shall tie them on your arm as a sign]" (Deut. 6:6,8; compare 11:18 and Ex. 13:9,16).

There are many rules about wearing *tephillin*. They should be worn only in the daytime and especially during prayers; they are not worn on sabbaths or festivals. The man who wears them must keep his body covered and clean and must keep his mind on them constantly.

The *tephillin* is supposed to be worn by all males after their thirteenth birthday when they receive the *bar mitzvah*.

Notice the white pieces of paper stuffed into the cracks of the Wall. Jews write prayers on paper and stick them into the cracks. Twice a year, the paper is removed, but not destroyed or tossed away.



Tallit

The prayer shawl is generally called a *tallit* or *tallis*. In Numbers 15:37-40, the Israelites are commanded to put *tzitzit* ("fringes") on their garments in order to remind them of God's laws. But in Deuteronomy 22:12 we read that these fringes have to be placed on the four corners of the garment. The sole purpose of the *tallit* was in the *tzitzit*.

The numerical value of the word *tzitzit* is 600. Each of the fringes on the four corners contains 8 threads and 5 knots, making a total of 613. This number corresponds to the 613 commandments contained in the Torah.

According to the Midrash, wrapping oneself in the prayer shawl is to aid in

attaining a proper mood of reverence for God and a prayerful spirit during worship.

Before putting on a *tallit* it is customary to recite a blessing and kiss the *tzitzit* strings. The blessing ("Blessed art thou O Lord, our God, King of the Universe") is written on the part of the shawl which goes behind the neck when worn. The blessing is repeated after the shawl is placed around the neck or over one's head.

Orthodox men may wear the *tzitzit* around their waist. It may be visible hanging below the jacket, or may be worn underneath a man's clothing and not visible.



Peyot

Many ultra-orthodox — some orthodox Jews reject the phrase "orthodox" and prefer the term "observant Jew" — Jewish men wear a *peyot*, which is the religiously uncut portions of the hair in front of the ears. They find this teaching

(Continued on page 5, see Peyot)

Because the peyot is not easily seen in the photo of two ultra-orthodox men above, I have included an Internet photo below which shows the peyot more clearly. Notice the strap from his tephillin hanging down from behind his head.



Internet photo

Samaritans of Israel

Most of us know about the Samaritans from reading the New Testament. Jews accused Jesus of having a demon and being a Samaritan (John 8:48). For Jews, there was not much difference. Jesus tells the Twelve not to go to Samaritan cities (Matt. 10:5). The parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the best known (Luke 17:16). John records Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4).¹

In an Old Testament study, I learned that the Samaritans arose after the defeat of the Ten Northern Tribes by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. According to the records of the Assyrian king Sargon II, he took 27,290 Israelites — a relatively small number — to Assyria and introduced people from other areas into Israel. According to Baptist historian H. I. Hester, the Israelites remaining in the area and these outsiders eventually intermarried, and "Out of this group grew the Samaritan people and religion. Racially and religiously they were a mixture."² Support for this position is found in 2 Kings 17 and this is the generally held view today.

Samaritans, however, trace their roots to a much earlier date. They believe that in the Period of the Judges, the sanctuary with the Ark of the Covenant was at Mount Gerizim, and that the priest Eli took the Ark to Shiloh. From there, King Solomon brought it to Jerusalem and placed it in the Temple after it was built. The Samaritans claim that the schism between their own community and the Judaism of Jerusalem dates back to this period.

Mt. Gerizim is mentioned only four times in the Hebrew Scriptures: Deut. 11:29; 27:12; Josh 8:33; and Judg. 9:7. In Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in John 4, the name Gerizim is not mentioned, only "this mountain." It is surprising Gerizim is not mentioned more often because Abraham, Jacob and Joshua visited the area during which religious ceremonies held by each of these men (Gen. 12:6; 33:18-20; and Josh. 8:33). Perhaps it is not mentioned more often because the Jews in Jerusalem did not want to take attention away from David's city of Jerusalem. In other words, according to the Samaritans, Gerizim was intentionally not mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Samaritan version of the Torah states that Joshua built an altar at Gerizim, not Ebal as we read in Josh 8:30 in the Hebrew Scriptures.

In Joshua 24:1, we read that "Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem." Shechem is in the region known as Samaria, just a few miles northeast of Gerizim. It is here that Joshua challenged the Israelites to "choose for yourselves today whom you will serve . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Josh. 24:15).

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the Samaritans built a temple on Mt. Gerizim during the period of Alexander the Great, although it may have been built earlier. Archaeologists have found what they believe to be an altar built by Samaritans in the 5th or 6th century BC. Josephus states that the temple on Gerizim was similar to the temple in Jerusalem. The temple on Gerizim was destroyed by either the Jewish leader John Hyrcanus in the 2nd century BC (according to Josephus³) or by Simeon the Just (according to the Talmud), who was permitted to do so by Alexander the Great.

Samaritans believe it is on Mt. Gerizim, near the Palestinian town of Nablus (biblical Shechem), not Jerusalem, that God's holy temple will be built.

Basic beliefs of the Samaritans today:

1. The unity and oneness of God.
2. Moses is the only prophet; "Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses" (Deut. 34:10).
3. They accept only the Torah or Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) as authoritative, and have a slightly different text of these books. The Prophets and Writings are not recognized as divinely inspired.
4. Mt. Gerizim is the House of God. The twelve stones are still there (Deut. 27:4; the Hebrew Scriptures read "Ebal," the Samaritan Torah reads "Gerizim."); there the temple was erected, and there in the last days the Shekinah, "the Glory of God," will reappear.
5. A "Restorer" or Taheb will come to restore the true religion and destroy the followers of Ezra. He will live 110 years and then die.
6. A resurrection and judgment will take place after the death of the "Restorer." The righteous will go to the Garden of Eden; the wicked will be burned.
7. Samaritans, unlike their Jewish cousins, have retained the high priesthood. Sacrifices during Passover are still offered on Mt. Gerizim.
8. Samaritans believe God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Gerizim, not on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem.

Today, Samaritans are found in two locations in Israel; they are about extinct. Samaritans number only 701. Some say there are as many as 712 Samaritans, but in any case, there are not many. Approximately 350 live near Mt. Gerizim, the mountain Samaritans believe to be the holiest place in the world. A similar number — or perhaps a few more than an equal number, live in the southeast part of Holon (Jos. 21:15), a coastal city just south of Tel Aviv.

Samaritans have historically refused to marry outside their sect because they believe they must remain true to their interpretation of the Torah. The Samaritans' numbers have dwindled because of this ancient tradition of marrying only within the community, a strictly observed rule that led to a dwindling gene pool and a rising number of birth defects. The Samaritan community is filled with dark-haired young men and women with malformed limbs, twisted faces and speechless tongues. In a decision that is nothing short of a revolution, the sect's high priest, Elazar Ben Tzadaka, decreed

(Continued on page 6)

¹ During my Holy Land pilgrimage, I asked my Jewish guide if we could visit Jacob's well. He dismissed me by saying there was nothing to see. I wondered if he told the truth or if he did not want to take us to a Samaritan site. It is my nature to question authority.

² H. I. Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History: A Study of the Old Testament* (Liberty, Missouri: The Quality Press, Inc., 1962), p. 223.

³ *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1950), p. 396.

Learning Hebrew

All immigrants must learn Hebrew to get a job in Israel. Jewish Immigrants from the United States and Europe receive \$10,000 to open a checking account, while immigrants from places such as Ethiopia, who have a more difficult time adjusting to the culture, live free in a commune-like setting for one year as they learn the language and culture. If they do not learn the language and culture within a year, they must begin paying rent to continue living in the commune and to receive more education.

Many ultra ultra-Orthodox Jews speak Yiddish, a German-Jewish dialect. They refuse to speak Hebrew, Israel's official language, in daily conversations. They view it as a sacred tongue, to be used in prayer and learning only and not in everyday conversations. More moderate Orthodox Jews, however, will speak Hebrew.

Most road signs in Israel are in three languages: Hebrew, Arabic and English. This sign is near the Franciscan Wedding Church in Cana where Jesus performed His first miracle.



(Peyot — Continued from page 3)

in Lev. 19:27, "Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard." Many ultra-orthodox men who grow beards may trim them, but will not shave with any kind of blade. We read of curses on men who "cut the corners of their hair" in Jer. 25:23 and Jer. 49:32.

Orthodox women are required to hide their hair from men's eyes, so some cut their hair short or wear wigs under their bandanas. Separation of the sexes is required in many areas of life.

(Samaritans — Continued from page 5)

that generations of intermarrying had left the Samaritans with too small a gene pool to survive and the Samaritans can marry outside their sect. "Samaritans cannot challenge science. Science has proven that it is wrong to intermarry. We should not be strangers to the wider world," the high priest has said.

Marriages to outsiders - which once meant expulsion from the Samaritan faith - are now encouraged in an effort to reduce the birth defects that plague the community. The only condition the high priest set was that outsiders be made to spend six months living in the community before the marriage so that there would be no misunderstandings about what the newcomer was getting into.

Israeli Jews will not marry Samaritans because of the centuries of joint animosity. However, Russian Jewish immigrants have not been brought up with such dislike and are more open to marrying into the Samaritan sect. Two Slavic women, Alexandra from Ukraine, and Lena, an Israeli citizen born in Omsk, on the plains of faraway Siberia, have married Samaritan men. Russian Jewish immigrants also have a tough time making a living in their new homeland; this arrangement has helped at least two.

Why Do Orthodox Jews "Bob" while Praying?

As our El Al B747 flew east toward Tel Aviv and as the sun came up, six Orthodox Jews prayed at the back of the plane near the restrooms, complete with shawls, *tephillin*, and black hats. As they prayed the men bobbed their heads or lurched back and forth; some also sway side to side. Bobbing or swaying is not mandatory, but Orthodox Jews generally do so. The practice is at least as old as Rabbi Akiva (A.D. 50-135) who is said to have been the godfather of Rabbinical Judaism. I am not certain there is a biblical text which speaks of bobbing or swaying while one prays — called *shoklen* in Yiddish — unless it is a passage such as Psalm 66:13b-14a, "You shall find comfort in Jerusalem. You shall see and your heart shall rejoice" (JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh) where the bobbing or swaying is a form of rejoicing at this promise.

Orthodox or observant Jews pray at least three times a day, every day: at evening (when the day begins), in the morning, and in the afternoon. Daily prayers are collected in a book called a *siddur*, a word meaning "order," because the *siddur* shows the order of prayers. Because the prayers are in Hebrew and are spoken or chanted rapidly, it sounds like mumbling to those nearby.

An Orthodox Jew was removed from an Air Canada flight in 2006 because his praying in his seat before takeoff was said to bother other passengers.

As recently as 18 April 2008, an Orthodox Jew was removed from an United Airlines jet at JFK in New York City after he refused to be seated prior to the jet leaving the gate. He was standing at the back of the plane near the restrooms. Friends traveling with him explained that the man could not stop his prayers in the middle of them and that he would be finished in two minutes. The flight attendant, instead, called security who removed the man from the plane. Praying before takeoff is apparently a common practice for Orthodox Jews.



Two Russian Jewish immigrants play their violins in the hope of receiving shekels from tourists.

Scenes from Israel



The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. According to Roman Catholic tradition, this is the spot where Jesus was born.

In the 5th century, Jerome built a monastery next to this church and translated the Old Testament into Latin from the original Hebrew.

Bethlehem has been under Palestinian control since 1995. Jewish citizens of Israel are not permitted to cross into the Palestinian area. We had to change from our regular tour bus to a Palestinian tour bus, operated by Palestinian Christians.

The driver and guide, both Palestinian Christians, took us to their shop to purchase souvenirs before they took us to the church. Each of us were given a basket and were strongly encouraged to buy more to “help Palestinian Christians.” If we stopped to look at something, one of the shopkeepers would quickly put it in our baskets.



Carved olive wood is popular in Israeli tourist shops — and expensive. This manger scene in the shop in Bethlehem was on sale for \$15,000 — worldwide shipping included. The owner of the shop offered to drop the price by \$2,000 if any of us would buy it that day.



The Catholic Franciscan Church of the Beautitudes near Tabgha in Galilee (built in 1938) on the traditional site of the Sermon on the Mount, located not far from Capernaum. Ruins of a small late fourth century church have been found near this church.



A stone horse trough at the ruins of Megiddo. This was most likely the kind of manger into which Mary placed the baby Jesus. It was probably not made of wood which would have been very expensive to use with livestock.



Olive trees in the Garden of Gethsamene (the word means “oil press”). Some of these trees are said to be 2,000 years old.



Peter's house in Capernaum — a church sits over the site.



One of the most meaningful experiences for me was a boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. We prayed, read Scripture and sang during the 45-minute ride. But mostly, we sat quietly and remembered the events that took place on and round this largest body of fresh water in Israel.



The pool of Siloam where Jesus told the blind man to go and wash his eyes. Hezekiah tunnel, which a person can go through, empties into the pool of Siloam.

All photos by Gary Leazer

Scenes from Israel



This church is said to sit on the site where Jesus said to Peter, "Upon this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18).



"St. Peter's Fish," actually tilapia, before I ate it at the Pearl of Galilee Restaurant at a kibbutz named *ein gev* on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Golan Heights look down on this kibbutz which endured shelling from Syrian guns until Israel took the Golan Heights.

We ate at several kibbutz on our tour. The food was always good and plentiful.



This Orthodox Church is said to mark the place where Jesus fed the 5,000.



The cave where the first Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947 by a young Bedouin shepherd. By 1979, 1,000 scrolls were found in eleven caves near the ancient ruins of Qumran, about a mile from the northwestern corner of the Dead Sea. The scrolls were books of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as writings from the Essene Community who lived in Qumran at the time of Christ. Some scholars believe John the Baptist was a member of the community.

Found at the Qumran ruins were what appear to be ritual baths where people would immerse themselves several times a day prior to meals and prayers for ritual purification.



The round rock to cover the entrance is missing from the Garden Tomb. This tomb is located in Galilee.



Golgotha, "the place of the skull," or Gordon's Calvary. General Charles George Gordon was a British general who found himself assigned to Palestine in the late 1800s. Others believe the site of Jesus' crucifixion was on the site of what is now the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a site chosen by Queen Helena, mother of Constantine the Great. She is said to have "found" a number of sites where New Testament events occurred.

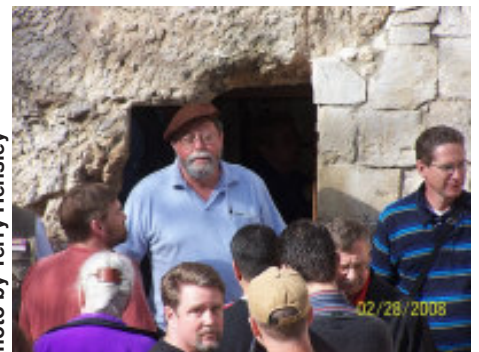
Like many biblical sites, we rely on tradition to place where events took place. It is common to find two or more sites where it is claimed an event occurred.

We visited two churches where Mary is said to be buried, one owned by the Roman Catholic Church and the other by an Christian Orthodox Church. I also visited a church in Ephesus in Turkey a couple of years ago where Mary is said to be buried.



The Muslim Dome of the Rock, not a mosque, but the place [rock] where Muslims believe Abraham was told to sacrifice Ishmael and from where Muhammad was taken for a visit to heaven. Jews believe this is Mt. Moriah where God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

This was almost certainly the location of King Solomon's and King Herod's temples.



Coming out of the Garden Tomb. Tradition says the Garden belonged to Nicodemus, who loaned his tomb for the burial of Jesus. The tomb was indeed empty. The Garden is only a few hundred feet from Golgotha. That's me wearing the light blue shirt and looking directly at the camera.

All photos, except one, on these two pages are by Gary Leazer

Photo by Terry Hensley

CIS Interfaith Report



A Publication of the Center for Interfaith Studies, Inc.

Vol. 9, No. 1 — March 2008

© 2008 Center for Interfaith Studies, Inc. All Rights Reserved

Gary Leazer, Ph. D., President, 3318 Mansfield Lane, Snellville, GA 30039-4631

cis@garyleazer.org — 770-851-0997

ISSN

1536-2337

**Shine your light
so the world can see!**



Photo by Gary Leazer

Congregation Mickve Israel, Savannah, Georgia

Third oldest Jewish congregation in America

Founded in 1733

Jews in America: A Long Long Road to Religious Freedom

The dispersion of the Jews or the Jewish Diaspora is said to have begun in the 8th century B.C. when Assyria conquered Israel or the ten northern tribes and took some 27,280 Israelite men, according to Sargon II, captive to Assyria. Other Jews were taken to Babylon in the 6th century by Babylonians after the destruction of Jerusalem. By the second century B.C., Jews were found in all of the major Mediterranean cities. By the time of the birth of Christ, one out of eight inhabitants in Egypt were Jews; Alexandria, Egypt, had a large Jewish population and could have been the city in Egypt where Joseph, Mary and Jesus fled when Herod sought to kill the child. The destruction of Herod's Temple in A. D. 70 forced more Jews out of Israel. Finally, the Jewish revolt in A. D. 135 resulted in Jews being forbidden to enter Jerusalem, under the penalty of death.

Some of these Jews went to Spain and Portugal as early as the 2nd century A.D. By the beginning of the 7th century A. D., Christians had taken control of Spain and Portugal and issued edicts requiring Christian baptism or death. The Christian era in Spain ended in A. D. 711 when North African nomadic tribes (Muslims or Moors) entered Spain, led by the Berber Tarik ibn Ziyad, who crossed into Spain at Tarik's Mountain (Jabel-al-Tarik, which has been corrupted to Gibraltar). The Muslims were stopped from conquering more of Europe by Charles Martell, grandfather of Charlemagne, at the Battle of Tours, France, in 732.

Jews enjoyed relative freedom and flourished in Spain under Moorish rule, although anti-Jewish activities increased in the mid-12th century. Moses Maimonides (his Greek name) (1135-1204) or Moses ben Maimon (his Hebrew name) was one of the greatest rabbis, physicians and philosophers of the Middle Ages. His family fled from Spain in 1148 in the face of growing demands for conversion to Islam or death. The family first settled in Fez, Morocco; then Acre, Palestine; and finally Cairo, Egypt. His *Mishnah Torah*, a compilation of Jewish law or legal opinions (*mishnah* means "teaching") and the *Thirteen Principles of the Faith*, are important Jewish documents even today.

Over the centuries, Christians again slowly regained control of Spain and this time "infidels" and "heretics," referring to Jews, Muslims and other non-Catholics, were forcibly converted, put to death or expelled from the country; their homes and money was confiscated by the Catholic Church – which may have been a driving force in the effort to convert all non-Catholics. Synagogues and mosques were destroyed or converted to churches. Many Spaniards used the term "*Marranos*" (pigs or swine), a term of derision, to refer to Jews who accepted (either voluntarily or forcibly) Christian baptism; others used the term "*Conversos*," for Jews who had converted to Christianity. Many Jews became practicing Christians and lost their Jewish identity; others only appeared to embrace Christianity while secretly remaining Jewish. They were called crypto-Jews.

In 1469, Isabella, then age 19, and Ferdinand, then age 18, married after meeting one another four days earlier. Strong Catholics, the two forced the Muslim stronghold of

Granada to surrender in 1491 and soon demanded the inhabitants convert or leave Spain. By then, the Inquisition against heretics to the Catholic faith was in full force. Heretics were burned at the stake; more of the well-off were burned than poor people, leading one person to say, "Don't be afraid of being burnt; they're only after the money." The Inquisitor-General of Castile and Aragon (Spain) advised Ferdinand and Isabella to expel all Jews in 1492. They were given 120 days to do so. About 150,000 Jews left Spain; 100,000 were baptized and remained in the country. By 1500, the Bishop of Toledo proudly announced that everyone in the city was a Christian. Jews also had to leave Sardinia and Sicily, both of which were under Spanish control. The Inquisition in Spain did not end until 1834, some 350 years after it began.

Jews leaving Spain settled in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Palestine, Turkey, India and the Netherlands, among other places. Many Jews settled in Poland, only to become the victims of the Holocaust nearly 500 years later. Portugal offered a safe haven for Jews, but after the marriage of the Portuguese king and the daughter of Isabella and Ferdinand in 1496, many Jews were forcibly baptized, killed, or put on ships and taken to Africa, where they were either sold into slavery to Muslims or died. All Jews were given ten months to leave the country.

The Netherlands, a Protestant country, was more welcoming of Jews and other minority religious groups, such as French Huguenots (Protestants). Jews gained Dutch citizenship by 1597 and became major shareholders in the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch West India Company. By 1700, there were close to 8,000 Jews in Amsterdam — Sephardi Jews (those who used a Spanish rite) from Spain and Portugal and Ashkenazi Jews (those who used a German rite) from Germany, Hungary and Poland.

Brazil was discovered in 1500 and some exiled Jews went to this "new land." Jews also went to Chile, Peru, Argentina and Mexico. The Inquisition followed, but it took a while. The Dutch took control of Recife, Brazil, in 1624 and many Brazilian Jews fled to Recife for religious freedom. By the 1640s, Jews in Recife numbered as many as 5,000. The first synagogue in the western hemisphere, Kahal Kadosh Zur Yisroel (Holy Congregation Rock of Israel) was established in Recife in 1642. The Portuguese attempted to regain control of Recife as early as 1645, finally taking the city in 1654. Again, the Jews were ordered to leave.

Many Jews moved to various Caribbean islands (Barbados in 1640, Jamaica in 1655, St. Eustatius in 1660); others went to England, which then was under the rule of Oliver Cromwell, a Protestant. (Jews had been expelled from England 360 years earlier.) A number of Jews settled in Surinam (Dutch Guiana) on the northern coast of South America. Twenty-three Jews moved from Recife to New Amsterdam (Manhattan Island) in 1654, which was then controlled by the Dutch, to become the first Jews in what would become the United States. Many Jews also settled

on the Caribbean island of Curacao, which had been captured by the Dutch in 1634. In 1750, with 1500 Jews, Curacao was the largest Jewish settlement in the Americas.¹

An Amsterdam rabbi, Mennaseh ben Israel, believed the Messiah would return in 1666 and encouraged Cromwell to allow Jews to enter England to “hasten the holy event.” Cromwell did not sign a formal document permitting Jews to enter England; he simply looked the other way.

The second synagogue in London – the first one was outgrown – was Kahal Kadosh Sharei Hashamayim (Holy Congregation of Heaven). It became better known as Bevis Marks synagogue. This synagogue still stands. Some members of this synagogue, including Joseph Salvador, the first director of the Dutch East India Company, funded one-way transportation to 34 Sephardic and 8 Ashkenazi Jews to the colony of Georgia. They landed at Savannah on 11 July 1733, just five months after General James Edward Oglethorpe established the colony. They built the third synagogue in North America and the first in Georgia, Congregation Mickve Israel.

The first Jewish congregation in the Colonies was Shearith Israel in New York City in 1654; the second was the Touro synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1695; Savannah had one in 1733. Philadelphia had one by 1739. Jews arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1749, and by 1773, had the most Jewish citizens of any North American city with 500. The American Colonies were slow to grant religious liberty to any but Protestants, meaning Puritans. Jews, Catholics, Baptists, Quakers and other minorities would find religious liberty a distant hope.

Most states had laws specifically excluding Catholics

and Jews from serving in state legislatures; New Hampshire was the last state to remove this ban in 1876. New Hampshire removed the requirement that a Christian oath was required for public office in 1868. Jews were targeted by “Blue Laws,” which prohibited many activities on Sundays; the holy day for Jews was, of course, Saturday; Sunday was a normal working day for Jews. South Carolina was the last state to repeal the Blue Laws in 1983.

But, still Jews came to the new nation seeking what they did not have in Catholic-controlled countries. Between 2,000 and 3,000 Jews called the United States home by 1800. By 1840, the number of Jews in America had reached 15,000 and by 1880, 250,000. By 1919, more Jews lived in the United States than any other country, including Israel. New York City, with 1,750,000 Jews, has the largest Jewish population of any city in the world, including Jerusalem. Nearly half of the Jews in the world live in the United States – approximately 5,800,000 out of a total of 13,000,000.²

¹ Although we speak of arrival of Jews in America in this paragraph, Columbus’ navigator and two or three other crewmen were believed to be Jews. At least one historian believes Columbus’ ancestors were Jews, although there is no doubt Columbus was a Christian.

Some Crypto-Jews are believed to have fought with Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez when he defeated the Aztec empire in 1519-1521.

² Sources included Joseph Heckelman, *The First Jews in the New World*. New York: Jay Street Publishers, 2004; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972.

Upcoming Jewish Holidays 5768/5769

- 19 April — Eve of Passover (Pesach)*
- 27 April — Eighth Day of Passover
- 02 May — Holocaust Remembrance Day
- 08 June — Eve of Feast of Weeks (Shavuot)
- 10 June — Second Day of Feast of Weeks
- 29 September — Eve of the New Year (Rosh Hashanah)
- 30 September — First Day of New Year 5769
- 08 October — Eve of Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)
- 13 October — Eve of Feast of Tabernacles (Succot)
- 04 October — Eighth Day of Feast of Tabernacle
- 21 December — Eve of Hannakuh (Chanakuh)

* Jewish days begin at sundown the previous day. See Gen. 1:5, 1:8, etc.

Focus of Upcoming Issues

June 2008: Eschatology: A look at the various views of the end of human history as taught in Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, The Unification Church, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and the several millennial theories of Christianity.

September 2008: Eastern Orthodoxy. A look at the various Eastern Orthodox churches and the differences in theology and practice between the Eastern and Western (Roman Catholic) churches.

Photo by Gary Leazer
Drizzling rain was falling when I took this photo.



The world headquarters of the Baha’i Faith is in Haifi, Israel. This faith arose in Iran in the mid-1800s when a Shi’a Muslim named Baha’u’llah claimed to be the retuning “hidden Imam.” Although severely persecuted by Iranian Muslims, the Baha’i Faith has spread around the world. Only about 700 Baha’is live in Israel, all in Haifi.

We will examine the Baha’i Faith in the next issue when we highlight eschatology.

Samaritans

We have learned most of what we know about Samaritans from four books in the New Testament: Matthew, Luke, John and Acts. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in John 4 and the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10 are familiar to all of us. But, there is more!

In biblical times, the word referred to the inhabitants of Samaria, the region between Judea to the south and Galilee to the north in the Holy Land. Today, the word refers to a small religious group living in the West Bank and Israel. Reaching their highest number of approximately 1.5 million in the fourth and five centuries A.D., centuries of conflict with Jews, Christians and Muslims, have reduced the number of Samaritans to between 701 and 712 today, with approximately half living in the West Bank town of Nablus (ancient Shechem) near Mount Gerizim and half living in the city of Holon, near Tel Aviv, on the Mediterranean coast. At the time of Christ, Samaritans are believed to have numbered several hundred thousand.

When Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, he required all Israeli men to work one month out of every three as "forced laborers" to complete the temple (1 Kings 5:13-18). In addition, Solomon raised taxes to pay for the temple. Upon his death, Solomon's son Rehoboam became king.

When he went to Shechem to be accepted as king of the northern tribes, they asked if he would "Lighten the yoke which your father put on us?" Rehoboam foolishly answered, "Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions" (1 Kings 12:11). Jeroboam, who had returned from Egypt after fleeing there when Solomon tried to kill him (1 Kings 11:40), and the people responded,

What portion do we have in David?
We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse;
To your tents, O Israel!
Now look after your own house, David!

Thus, began the northern kingdom of Israel.

After the division of the United Hebrew Kingdom, Omri, who reigned from about 876-869 B.C. as king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel,¹ built the city of Samaria as the capital of Israel.

Israel (and Judea) often found itself caught between two major powers. In the case of Israel in the 8th century B.C., the two powers were Assyria and Egypt. Concerned that Egypt might capture the Kingdom of Israel, Shalmaneser V, king of Assyria, decided to conquer Israel and use it as a buffer between him and the Egyptians. In 726 B.C., Shalmaneser V forced Hoshea, king of Israel, to pay a tribute and become his vassal. When Israel attempted to revolt, Shalmaneser V returned in 724 B.C. and laid siege to the city of Samaria. The city resisted for two years before it fell. At this time, Sargon II, who had succeeded Shalmaneser V after he was assassinated, deported 27,280² Israelites to other parts of his empire and brought immigrants

from other parts to live in Israel. According to Jews, the people remaining in Israel intermarried with the immigrants and adopted some of their pagan beliefs which made them less than pure Jews.

Samaritans, on the other hand, dismiss the Jewish position with scorn. Samaritans point out that only a small part of the inhabitants were deported, and that they were allowed to return fifty-five years later. Samaritans trace the split back to the time of the judge Eli who made Shiloh the sanctuary to worship Yahweh, rather than, Samaritans insist, Mount Gerizim, the "chosen place" prescribed in the Mosaic Law.³ The erection of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem added more fire to the division.

Samaritans insist they did not intermarry with the immigrants, but that the two groups simply lived next to each other. To support their positions, Samaritans claim their faith has remained steadfastly that which is taught in the Books of Moses. There is probably some truth in both the Jewish and the Samaritan positions. The principal dividing point seems to be the place where Yahweh should be worshipped: Mount Gerizim (elevation 2900 ft.) or Mount Zion (elevation 2500 ft.). Josephus mentions this when he writes, "while those of Jerusalem said that their temple was holy, and resolved to send their sacrifices thither; but the Samaritans were resolved be sent to Mount Gerizzim [sic]." Again, "the Jews saying that, according to the laws of Moses, the temple was to be built in Jerusalem; and the Samaritans saying that it should be built at Gerizzim [sic]."⁴

The division reached its culmination when the Samaritans built a temple, which Josephus describes as similar to the temple in Jerusalem, but "smaller and poorer."⁵

The high priest and prince of the Hasmonean (Maccabean) family John Hyrcanus, who reigned from 134 to 104 B.C. conquered the city of Samaria after a year's siege and completely destroyed the city and the temple on Mount Gerizim in 128 B.C.⁶

Although only archaeological ruins remain, Samaritans continue to celebrate Passover on Mt. Gerizim, including the ritual slaughtering of lambs. After the lambs are slaughtered the blood is collected; some is dabbed on faces; the rest of the blood is put into plastic bags to be spread over the doors of houses. The lambs are then dressed, roasted, and later eaten.

Samaritans also believe Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son Isaac occurred on Mount Gerizim, not on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. Samaritans accept on the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible; they do not recognize any later Jewish prophets. According to rabbinical sources, in order to convert to Judaism, a Samaritan must first and foremost renounce any belief in the sanctity of Mount Gerizim.

The Samaritans' numbers have dwindled because of an ancient tradition of marrying only within the community, a strictly observed rule that led to a dwindling gene pool and a rising number of birth defects. One Samaritan said, "Eighty per cent of the people are handicapped." Samaritan

(Continued on page 19, See Samaritans)

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Founder of Transcendental Meditation, Dies at Age 91

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of Transcendental Meditation, passed away Tuesday, 05 February 2008, at his international headquarters in Vlodrop, The Netherlands, where he had lived since 1990. Maharishi, according to most sources, was born Mahesh Prasad Varma in Jabalpur, India, on 12 January 1917. He earned a degree in physics at Allahabad University and became a disciple of Swami Brahmananda Saraswati of Jyotir Math, located in the Himalayas. In 1955, Maharishi launched the worldwide Transcendental Meditation Movement. He brought the technique to the United States in 1959. But the movement really took off after the Beatles attended one of his lectures in Wales in the summer of 1967. The Beatles and Maharishi later had a falling out.

Maharishi purchased the campus of Parsons College in Fairfield, Iowa,¹ in 1974 after the former Presbyterian college closed in 1973. Fairfield is a small Iowa county seat town (population 9,609, of whom as estimated 3,000 are TMers or meditators) surrounded by thousands of acres of rolling farmland.

He began the Maharishi International University (MIU); the name was changed to Maharishi University of Management (MUM) 27 July 1995. MUM is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Beginning in the late 1990s, MUM began destroying some of the existing campus buildings which did not conform to the principles of Vedic architecture as interpreted by Maharishi, a system of design derived from ancient Sanskrit texts; 43 of 70 original buildings have been demolished on the 272-acre campus. Seventy new buildings have been erected on the campus since 2000.

Total charges for 2008–09 academic year:

Tuition	\$24,000
Housing (single room) & meals	6,000
Fees	<u>430</u>
Total	\$30,430

Most students receive financial aid which covers most of their tuition, room and meals. All students must practice Transcendental Meditation. The fee to receive the “secret mantra” to practice TM correctly is reportedly \$2,500, although financing is available. Each mantra said to be unique to each practitioner so practitioners are cautioned to never reveal their mantra. However, only a few mantras are used and they are given based on age and sex, which are provided by the practitioner on the application. All 21-year-old females will have the same mantra; all 30-year-old males will have the same mantra.

Transcendental Meditation is practiced for fifteen to twenty minutes in the morning and evening by seating in a comfortable chair with the eyes closed and repeating the mantra silently.

Its benefits are said to include:

- Reducing stress in the mind and body. There may be some truth to this claim. However, relaxation techniques apart from TM and other Hindu religious philosophies can

lead to similar results.

- Achieving the full potential of one's life. Although TM claims to have a scientific basis with numerous studies to support that position, its ultimate goal is union of one's soul with Brahman.

- Reducing crime and establishing world peace. TM teaches that when the square root of one percent of the world's population, said to be around 8,000 people, meditate at the same time and place, the crime rate will fall and nations will move toward peaceful co-existence. In 1991, Maharishi invited the U. S. Government to move to Fairfield, which he said was the most peaceful place on Earth. However, he continued to live in The Netherlands.

Maharishi Vedic City, incorporated 21 July 2001 on 1,300 acres, is located two miles north-northwest of Fairfield. The name “Vedic” comes from the Sanskrit word “Veda,” which means “knowledge.” as a model of ideal city life. According to publicity, the city was “Founded to become a ‘lighthouse of peace’ for America and the world. The City is working to establish a permanent group of peace-creating experts whose daily practice of Maharishi's Transcendental Meditation™ and Yogic Flying techniques will promote coherent national and world consciousness and thereby prevent any negativity from arising in America or in the family of nations.” The city of 420 practitioners of TM, has designated Sanskrit, an ancient language of India, as its official language and adopted a new currency, the Raam, the development currency of the Global Country of World Peace. (You can still use dollars or your credit card.) The City is also planning to be the future home of Raam Bank. The leaders hope the city will grow to about 1,200 residents by the year 2010 and 3,100 by 2020.

The relationship between the new university and city and the citizens of Fairfield have been strained most of the time, although some say the meditators have been good for the city. In 2005, the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors unanimously rejected the city's request for help to get a \$132,000 grant from the state's Community Attractions and Tourism Fund to build a new visitors' center and make improvements to an astronomical observatory. In 2007, Maharishi Vedic City officials told farmer Bob Palm that they'd like to buy his 149-acre farm after they heard a few months earlier about Palm's plans to build a hog confinement operation on his farm. City Attorney Maureen Wynne, who is the wife of Mayor Bob Wynne, said, “It would be a very difficult situation for the city if a hog confinement is built on its boundaries,” She added, “a hog confinement operation would be a nuisance to the city that has declared itself all-organic and bans the sale of anything not grown organically.” An appraiser for the city valued Palm's land at \$2,675 per acre. Palm said he is not interested in selling his farm; city officials have mentioned seizing the farm by eminent domain “in the name of public improvement.” Palm said he was only thinking about opening a hog confinement facility, but has since dropped the idea. The County Board of Supervisors indicated they were opposed to any



expansion of Vedic City.

The Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment has an enrollment of about 350 children in grades kindergarten through 12. After age 10, they walk upstairs each day to meditate in the Hall of Bliss. I was once told² a person can begin in kindergarten and graduate with a Ph. D. and never leave the campus. Two identical 25,00-square foot Golden Domes – one for men and one for women – on the campus are used by advanced meditators twice twenty minutes a



Yogic flying is learned in one of two golden domes on the MUM campus — one dome is for males, the other for females. There are dozens of stations inside each dome where meditators listen to “something” — my guide would

day 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. The goal in the domes is “yogic flying,” in which advanced meditators can hopefully overcome the forces of gravity and “fly.” Foam mattresses cover the floor of the two domes in case a meditator has a crash landing. A few have reportedly reached the “hopping” stage, but none of flying; the Maharishi never reached that goal. Visitors cannot observe the actual meditation unless they’re trained in the technique.

(Endnotes)

¹ Fairfield is located about 30 miles from where I grew up on a farm in Iowa. Each July the Leazer family would hold a family reunion in the city park in Fairfield when I was younger.

² I spent a weekend on the MIU campus in 1984 as a guest of the university while on sabbatical at the University of Iowa. MUM has a visitors’ weekend each month.

Photos of one of the meditation domes at MUM by Tim Leazer



not tell me what. Mattresses cover the entire floor in each dome — for soft landing. Meditators are said to have reached the “hopping” stage.

Photo by Gary Leazer



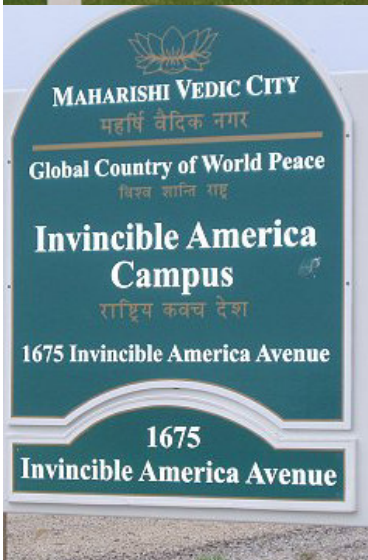
Congregation Mickve Israel, Savannah, Georgia

The Congregation Mickve Israel was the first synagogue established in the state of Georgia by forty-two Jewish settlers who arrived in Savannah from London on 11 July 1733, only a few months after the Colony of Georgia was established. The name "Mickve Israel" means "Hope of Israel."

On 01 March 1876, the cornerstone was laid for the present building; the building was dedicated 11 April 1878. The Congregation Mickve Israel is the only Gothic Jewish synagogue in America. The congregation is reform Judaism.

The synagogue is open daily for tours.

Vedic City, Iowa



All photos this page by Tim Leazer



Words on the front of this building read "Capital of the Global Country of World Peace."



Korean Bible Studies with Taekwondo

Ulli Schauen from Deutschlandfunk travelled to South Korea and Cambodia for BBC Radio 4's Crossing Continents —
27 March 2008

Editor: I do not normally reprint articles from the world press, but believe this article is of real importance. It is another indication that the center of world Christianity is moving from the West, namely the United States, to Africa and Asia. I first became acquainted with the commitment of Korean Christians during the 2006 Summer Olympics in Atlanta when I served as assistant director of religious activities in the Olympic Village and worshipped with more than 100 Korean athletes and other personnel every morning in the religious activities center.

About 16,000 South Koreans work in foreign countries as Christian missionaries. Only the US sends more people abroad to win converts to Christianity.

In the city of Sihanoukville, Southern Cambodia, I found Korean Protestant missionaries competing with one another, trying to convert locals to their own Protestant denomination.

But the missionaries don't just offer Christianity.

The Komponentsom Taekwondo Federation in Sihanoukville is sponsored by the Presbyterian Yangmoon Church in Taegu, South Korea.

It is run by retired military commander Kim Ka-Jung, who offers Taekwondo classes to young Cambodians. After class, the youngsters sing hymns and listen to a sermon.

The missionaries call this the "contact point" method of conversion. Potential converts are offered lessons or accommodation before being presented with the message of the gospel.

Bible school

Downstairs is the Komponentsom Bible Presbyterian Church run by Pastor Moses Hahn and his wife Grace.

Mr Hahn offers free English lessons, food and accommodation in his "Bible School", where he trains young non-Christian Cambodians to be pastors after only three years. He says they are usually baptised after six months.

A former factory worker who is now a third-year student, tells me she is happy to have been offered free food, lodging, and some education.

It is more than she could have expected from her job in the textile factory.

A few kilometres away, the first Christian University of Cambodia has been set up by another Korean missionary, Reverend David Gu.

From a huge building erected at the foot of the Buddhist Pagoda of Sihanoukville, he aims to educate "a new Christian leadership" for Cambodia.

David Gu says his Christian University of Cambodia has 600 students of all grades, from nursery to college.

At the Taekwondo Federation, 200 children attend the Sunday school. Downstairs in the Bible school, Pastor Moses Hahn boasts 60 students, as well as 50 graduates who are working as pastors around the country.

Camcorder Missions

These success stories are well received by congrega-

tions in South Korea, who are happy to keep providing money to keep the missionaries at work.

And many church members in South Korea go a step further, signing up for visits to Korean missions abroad - so-called "camcorder missions".

One such group was kidnapped in Afghanistan in 2007 by the Taleban. Two members of the group were killed.

Many of the Korean Protestants I have spoken to, consider them to be "martyrs" whose "blood" is good for the cause of Jesus in Afghanistan.

Every Christmas, hairdresser Lee Soo-Young travels from Seoul to Phnom Penh with her family, a pastor from her church and other church members, to visit the congregation they support.

The five-day trip costs about \$10,000 for a group of eight, but the group thinks the personal contact is worth the effort and expense.

When I ask them if they would travel to serve God's cause in a dangerous country like Afghanistan, all but two hands are raised.

Korean missionaries tell me that after decades of war, civil war and turmoil, Cambodia is open to evangelisation. Buddhism is seen as having been weakened by decades of war and the anti-religious regime of the Khmer Rouge.

The number of Korean Christian missionaries in Cambodia has risen in recent years to at least 400.

Key to prosperity

The missionaries claim that conversion is not only the key to a life according to God's will, but also to prosperity.

They cite South Korea as an example, where a rapid Christianization has accompanied rapid industrialization.

Moses Hahn, for example, has only one explanation for the huge disparity in wealth between North and South Korea.

"There is only one reason. They have no God, but we have God - true God," he says.

So Kom is a Cambodian pastor who graduated from Moses Hahn's bible school and was sent to a nearby village to "plant a church".

His modest wooden church building was built with funds from Korea. On a monthly budget of \$120 for himself and the church's operations, So Kom is expected to offer English lessons as well as spreading the gospel.

But it is now in competition with an English language school that was set up across the street. Unlike the church school, this one is authorized by the government to issue certificates of attainment.

Now church members are leaving for the rival school.

"My church is already dying," says So Kom.

It makes me wonder whether Chan Thuch, abbot of the Buddhist Pagoda in Sihanoukville, will be right after all. The head monk is still very confident about the future of Buddhism in Cambodia.

"It is the poor who convert to Protestantism," he says. "But once they are better off, they will return to Buddhism again."

The Druze

Early History

The Druze (or al-Duruz)¹ trace their roots back to Shi'a Islam, although neither they nor Muslims consider them Muslims today.

Shi'a Muslims, a majority in Iran (95 percent) and Iraq (60 percent), split from the Sunnis, the major Islamic sect, soon after the death of Muhammad over a disagreement about whether (or if) a caliphate [or successor] should be named after Muhammad's death. Shi'a Muslims opted for a hereditary caliphate through Muhammad's only surviving child, his daughter Fatima. These successors, called Imams, numbered twelve (according to most Shi'a Muslims). The twelfth and last Imam, a young child, died, was murdered, went "into a state of suspended animation" or "went into hiding"² sometime after A. D. 872.

Fatima's son, Ali, and grandson, Husayn, were both martyred, along with many followers near Karbala, Iraq, in A. D. 661.³ Ali and Husayn were virtually deified by their



A Druze village in the Galilee region of Israel. All Druze villages are built on the slopes of hills or mountains. The location of the villages is always close to Druze shrines and worship sites or meetings places, which are always on hill or mountain tops. There are 16 Druze villages in Israel.

followers and their graves in Karbala are pilgrimage sites for Shia Muslims. Many Imams, like Christ, were said to be able to perform miracles. Scenes of Shi'a Muslims' self-flagellation – striking themselves with bone imbedded whips – celebrate Ali and Husayn's deaths in A. D. 661.

Although most Shi'a Muslims, called "Twelvers," contend there were twelve Imams, some Shi'as believe there were only seven. This Shi'a sect, called the Sevener sect or Isma'ilis, insist Isma'il ibn Ja'far, the elder brother of the Seventh Imam, and his son, Muhammad ibn Isma'il, are both the "hidden" and final Imams. Isma'ilis are considered heretics by most Muslims, both Shi'a and Sunni.

In A. D. 969, Isma'ili Muslims conquered Egypt and began what is called the Fatimid caliphate (A. D. 969-1174). Druzism grew out of disillusionment with Isma'ili Islam who failed to deliver on promises of political change in Egypt in about A. D. 1010. A number of Isma'ili Muslims in Egypt decided that al-Hakim, who ruled from A. D. 996 to A. D.

1021, was the promised deliverer. Al-Hakim is said to have been a megalomaniac who dreamed of uniting the Muslim world and destroying Christianity. In A. D. 1009, al-Hakim's army completely destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, along with other churches. He is said to have ordered the deaths of 20,000 Christians. When he walked by, it is said that everyone had to fall to the ground to prostrate themselves before him. Druze today stress al-Hakim's social reforms. One story holds that al-Hakim simply disappeared or was "translated" and his soul went to China from where he will someday return; another story holds that his own sister ordered his murder. Another story holds al-Hakim became a Christian monk – his mother was



Photos by Gary Leazer

A view of some of the houses in the Druze village to the left. Notice the satellite dishes on the houses.

an Orthodox Christian; and yet another story holds Druze killed him to advance their belief in a hidden Imam.

At the end of the Fatimid caliphate in A. D. 1174, Druze were persecuted by Sunni Muslims and driven out of Egypt. Before long, most Druze were found only in Lebanon and Syria.

The religious teachings (*tawhid*) of Druzism, composed by al-Hakim, and two other Druze leaders, Hamza and Baha' al-Din (almost a "trinity"), were collected and arranged in

Estimate of Druze Numbers Worldwide

No accurate census of Druze is available in most countries. In some countries the population is enumerated as Muslim, Jewish and Christian; Druze are counted with Muslims. One estimate of Druze in various countries or regions is as follows:

420,000 in Syria,

390,000 in Lebanon,

75,000 in Israel (including the West Bank and the Golan Heights); some twelve thousand Druze lived in four villages in the Golan Heights when Israel annexed the region overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

15,000 in Jordan,

and about 80,000 scattered around the rest of the world, mostly in North America, Australia, and West Africa.

The American Druze Society estimates the number of Druze in the United States at between 15,000 and 20,000.

Kemal Amin "Casey" Kasem, who is a Druze, was born 27 April 1932, in Detroit, Michigan. He founded the popular American Top 40 franchise in 1970, hosting it from 1970 to 1988 and then from 1998 to 2004. Between 1989 to 1998, he was the host of Casey's Top 40, Casey's Hot 20, and Casey's Countdown. He is known by his signature sign-off: "Keep your feet on the ground and keep reaching for the stars." He has also done commercials and many voices for television shows such as Sesame Street and Scooby-Doo.

six books, the so-called Druze Canon, or *al-Hikmat al-Sharifa* (the Noble Knowledge). Hamza was also said to have gone into hiding in China, and together with al-Hakim, sent mystic meditations to Baha' al-Din. Beginning in A. D. 1042, when the last of the religious teachings were collected together, no new adherents were accepted into the Druze faith. Growth of the Druze faith since then has come from procreation only; conversion is not accepted.

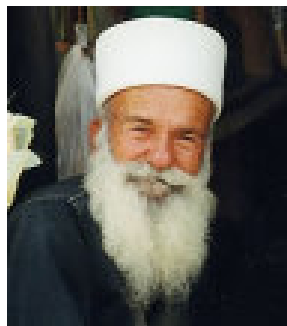
The first Druze immigrants came to the United States in the late 19th century. The first American Druze organization was established in Seattle, Washington, in 1907.

Major Teachings

Although Druzism came out of Isma'ili Islam, Druzism is not considered a part of Islam. Druze insist they are not Arabs; many scholars believe they are ethnically related to Kurds or Persians. Some Druze in the Galilee region are fair-haired with blue eyes, which suggests a European ancestry, perhaps the Crusaders or Napoleon's soldiers.

Druzism holds to a strict and uncompromising belief in the oneness or unity of God; as with Islam. They sometimes refer to themselves as "unitarians." Yet, Druzism has borrowed ideas from the Qur'an, the Old and New Testament, Gnosticism, and Greek philosophy. Druzism borrow the idea of "periodical manifestation of the Universal Intelligence" as taught in Neoplatonic philosophy. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) Jesus and Muhammad each manifested the Universal Intelligence more fully. Their largest annual celebration is held at the tomb of Jethro, who Druze believe is buried near Tiberias next to the Sea of Galilee. Al-Hakim is the final manifestation of Universal Intelligence. This belief, that Muhammad is not the last and greatest prophet, is the major reason Islam considers Druzism heretical.

Druze will not discuss their beliefs with outsiders and not even with all Druze; strict secrecy is required. Only a small number of Druze, both men and women, are believed to be "enlightened" and to have access to the Druze Canon and the inner secrets of the faith. The majority of Druze are ignorant or uninitiated into the secrets of the faith; no more than



Internet Photo

twenty percent of Druze are "enlightened." Once a Druze becomes "enlightened," he or she begins to wear a white turban and black robe, and abstains from bright colors, swearing or other obscene language, alcohol and smoking. The "ignorant" follow a simplified version of the faith. The "ignorant" usually have little if any contact with non-Druze, even those living in or near their villages.

An allegorical interpretation of the Druze Canon prevents non-Druze and the "ignorant" from learning the secrets of the Druze faith. They accept the Qur'an as sacred, but believe an "inner, esoteric meaning" must be found behind the written words. Their religious texts are known collectively as "Kitab Al Hikma," the Book of Noble Wisdom, actually a collection of books, of which the first six are most commonly used.

Reincarnation or transmigration of the soul is accepted. Druze believe the number of souls was fixed and limited at Creation. When a Druze dies, another Druze is born. The soul of the deceased instantly enters another fetus.

Heaven is not a place as in Islam or Christianity, but is a vision of God. Hell is the failure to achieve this goal.

Circumcision is not required, although quite common. Itinerant circumcisers visiting a village often cause uncircumcised boys to hide in the hills until he leaves, just in case parents want to engage his services.

Polygamy is forbidden to Druze. Concubinage and temporary marriages, both found in Islam, are also forbidden to Druze. Divorce is not easy for Druze men as it is for Muslim men. Druze women can initiate divorce and has the right to own and dispose of property.

Druze are permitted to outwardly deny their faith.

The faith places no emphasis on martyrdom as is found in Islam.

It is popular among Druze to say that at judgment non-Druze deserve special punishment: "the Shi'a deserve fifty curses, the Sunnis forty, the Christians thirty and the Jews twenty." In one catechism, punishment is spelled out. "In

American Druze Society to Hold 62nd Annual Convention in Ft. Lauderdale

The American Druze Society (ADS) will hold its 62nd Annual Convention at the Marriott Harbor Beach Resort & Spa in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, from 29 June to 06 July 2008. The theme is "Our Children . . . Out Future!!!"

Activities for children and youth ages 3 and up are planned each day. In addition, lectures, seminars and workshops will be held on two days. Exhibitions and book fairs will be held. Optional trips to the Everglades and a sea cruise are available. Druze dance classes will be offered on one afternoon, with an evening dinner dance and live entertainment the following day.

Costs for members of the ADS range from \$113 for children between the ages of 3 and 12 years and \$450 for couples (husband and wife). Costs for non-ADS members are higher.

The ADS national office is in Davie, in Broward County, just north of Miami-Dade County in Florida.

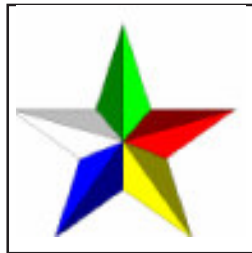
the ears of everyone of them [non-Druze] shall be fastened ear rings of a black substance which in summer shall burn them like fire, and in winter shall freeze them like snow. Their covering shall be a cap made of the skin of the hog, and they shall toil under our yoke."⁴

Druze do not follow the Muslim practice of praying five times a day.

Druze conduct simple worship services on Thursday evenings⁵ in a "place of retreat" or "meeting place," a simple hall without furniture, except for small lecterns for books.

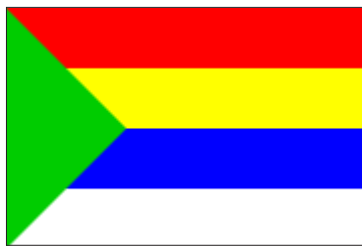
Religious elders in each community decide matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance.

The symbol most associated with Druzism is the star with five colors (green, red, yellow, blue and white), although the colors can appear in other forms, such as five colors painted in equal stripes. Each color pertains to a symbol defining its principles: green for "the Universal Mind," red for "the Universal Soul," yellow for "the Truth/Word," blue for "the Antagonist/Cause" and white "the Protagonist/Effect."



As with any group that attempts to keep its teachings and practices a secret, rumors of immorality and paganism abound. One is the belief that Druze worship a golden calf, which they vehemently deny.⁶

Meat is not a major part of the Druze diet as it is with Americans. Lamb is the favored meat, followed by chicken and beef. Pork is frowned upon, but is sometimes eaten by the "enlightened."



A Druze flag

Druze do not have a problem using Christian or Muslim names for their children.

A popular myth among Druze is the belief that many Druze are found in China; some even believe Paradise is found in China. However, despite the widespread belief in this myth, Druze religious leaders strongly insist it is not true.

In Israel, all Jews (both men and women, but not ultra-Orthodox Jews) must serve in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF).⁷ Muslims and Christians are exempt from this requirement, but may volunteer. Druze, of their own choice, have made themselves available for service in the IDF in 1957. Typically, more than 75 percent of young Druze men willingly serve in the IDF. Still, some Druze are sympathetic to Syria and pro-Palestinian elements.

Weddings are usually small events because guests expect extravagant meals, including wine, which is served unless a high-ranking religious leader visits and disapproves. Fortunately for those guests who want wine; there may be only one or a few such high-ranking religious leaders in any country. Weddings are popular with young people as it gives them opportunity to socialize with the opposite sex.

Funerals are usually larger events with persons coming from throughout the area, especially if the deceased was well-known.

Women have long enjoyed equal religious status with men, but certain social behavior is required. Women are expected to be virgins until marriage, although that requirement is not as strict for men. It is not unheard of for a woman found not to be a virgin when married to be murdered by her nearest male relative. For the most conservative Druze, even going to a male doctor, a cinema or shopping is considered to dishonor a woman. Marriage of all women is expected; education may be limited to six years. Marriage partners are almost always chosen from within the village; marriage between relatives, including first cousins, is common. The marriage of a Druze woman to a non-Druze man is almost unheard of. Most Druze marriages are arranged by parents from someone within the village.

Sons are preferred and divorce is not infrequent if no sons are born to a woman. In some marriages, women will continue to have babies until a son is born. In 1993, the average birthrate in Israel among Druze was 3.5, among Muslims 4.07; among Christians 1.64 and among Jews 1.47.⁸

Some younger Druze are leaving their villages to further their education or seek jobs in major cities, such as Tel Aviv, Beirut, etc.

(Endnotes)

¹ Most scholars believe the name "Druze" comes from Muhammad al-Darazi, who is credited with establishing Druzism in southern Lebanon.

One fanciful belief is that the name comes from a French Crusader by the name of Comte de Dreux, who disappeared in Lebanon in A.D. 1291 after his defeat by the Muslim, Saladin. Others believe the name comes from the Arabic word "durs," which is translated as "clever, industrious." Still others believe it comes from the Arabic word "turs" or "shield."

² This gave rise to the belief among Shia Muslims that the twelfth and last Imam would return at the end of time as al-Mahdi to purify Islam and destroy all non-Muslims, particularly Jews and Christians, in the Day of Judgment. This belief is behind Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's speech on 25 October 2005 at a conference in Tehran, where he said that "Israel must be wiped off of the map." Some believe Ahmadinejad sees himself as a kind of John the Baptist who will usher in the return of the al-Mahdi.

A belief in the return of the twelfth Imam has long been a belief among Shi'a Muslims. The Baha'i Faith arose in the mid-1800s out of this belief. An article about the Baha'i Faith will appear in the next issue of the *Report*.

³ Saddam Hussein, the Sunni president of Iraq would not allow Shia Muslims to go on pilgrimages to Karbala, when he was in power. His overthrow brought joy to the Shia Muslims for this and many other reasons.

⁴ Quoted in Robert Brenton Betts, *The Druze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp.20-21, from which much of this article is taken.

(Continued on page 19)

Ismaili Leader Aga Khan Visits Atlanta

The Aga Khan IV, born Karim al-Hussaini (b. 1937) and head of the world's 15 million Ismaili Muslims, who is on a tour of the United States, visited Atlanta in April 2008, to celebrate his 50th anniversary as the leader of this moderate Muslim group.

He is said to be the 49th Ismaili Imam descended from Muhammad. Aga Khan is a title of nobility. He has a degree in Islamic history from Harvard (1959). He has established a \$58 million endowment at Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology to promote Islamic architecture. He lives in France and has British citizenship. He was given the title "His Highness" by Queen Elizabeth II in 1957.

For Ismailis, the Aga Khan's word is law. He is said to know the esoteric meaning of the Qur'an — probably an influence from Gnosticism, which has influenced a number of Islamic sects.

Ismailis split from Shi'a Islam in A. D. 765 over differences concerning the Seventh Imam in the Shi'a faith. For Ismailis, the Imam line has continued to this day. The Aga Khan is not only a religious leader, but also a wealthy businessman. The Aga Khan Development Networks employs more than 30,000 people with annual revenues of \$1.5 billion.

The sect operates nine hospitals and 190 clinics in 30 countries. The U. S. Aga Khan Foundation held \$115 million in assets in 2005, and is active in more than two dozen Asian countries, as well as Russia, France, England, Canada, and the United States..

While in Atlanta, the Aga Khan dined at the Governor's Mansion with Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue and invited guests. He also visited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, gave a lecture at North Atlanta High School and met privately with Ismailis from the Southeastern states.

Ismailis are said to number 5,000 in Georgia. The U. S. headquarters is in Washington, D. C.

May I refer my readers to a two-page article on the Ismaili Muslims in the *CIS Interfaith Report*, November 2004 (Vol. 8, No. 2).

(Continued from page 18)

⁵ The day begins at sundown or evening according to Jews and Muslims. See Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, etc.

⁶ Several years ago Ismaili Muslims held an athletic event at a park near my home in Snellville. I attended and was warmly received. However, when I asked to attend a prayer meeting at their local mosque (in Decatur, Georgia), I was told that would not be possible as no outsider may attend.

⁷ At age 18, all Jews are drafted into the IDF. Women serve two years and then are placed in the reserves to age 29. Men serve three years and then are placed in the reserves to age 45. They serve one month each year while in the reserves. Men are exempted from the reserves if they have ten children. Pay for men and women on active duty in the IDF is \$100 per month.

⁸ Betts, *The Druze*, p. 47.

See also Anis Obeid, *The Druze and Their Faith in Tawhid*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006.

(Samaritans, continued from page 11)

high priest, Elazar Ben Tzadaka, who rose to power in 2002, is allowing Samaritan men to marry outside the faith in an attempt to overcome the rising number of birth defects and to increase the number of Samaritans. The only condition the high priest set was that outsiders had to spend six months living in the community before marriage so that outsiders would understand the Samaritan faith and lifestyle. As in all Samaritan homes, a woman who is menstruating is considered impure and cannot come into contact with anyone for seven days. Any woman who has a miscarriage, must sit only in her chair and drink from a special plastic cup for a 40-day stretch, as defined by Samaritan laws.

Since 2002, two Slavic women, Alexandra from Ukraine, and Lena, an Israeli citizen born in Omsk in Siberia, have married Samaritan men. In 2006, Lena gave birth to a healthy son, who was named Adam. Not everyone is pleased that the men married outsiders, but all are happy about the birth of a new and healthy Samaritan boy.⁷

(Endnotes)

¹ The exact length of Omri's reign is uncertain. 1 Kings 16:23 gives twelve years as the length of his reign, so the writer of 1 Kings is probably counting four years of civil war as part of Omri's reign. Watson E. Mills, gen. ed., "Omri," *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1990), p. 632.

² "I besieged and occupied the town of Samaria, and took 27,280 of its inhabitants captive. I took from them 50 chariots, but left them the rest of their belongings. I placed my Lieutenants over them." Julius Oppert, tr., "The Annals of Sargon" *Records of the Past*, vol. 9 (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1877), pp. 3-20, par. 7.

³ "And it shall come about, when the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim " (Deut. 11:29). Jerusalem was not captured by King David until 200 or more years later.

⁴ *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston, Company, n.d. [1950]), p p. 347. 381. Being a Jew, it is not surprising that Josephus refers to Samaritans as "apostates of the Jewish nation" (p. 345). He also refers to Samaritans as "being evil and enviously disposed to the Jews" (p. 329).

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 380.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 396

⁷ Mark Mackinnon, "Samaritans bring in new blood to save their sect," *Globe and Mail*, 15 October 2007

You should read this magazine?

Every Christian should read this magazine! *Mission Frontiers* is published by The U. S. Center for World Mission, 1605 East Elizabeth Street, Pasadena, CA 91104. Tel. 626-797-1111. Website: www.missionfrontiers.org.

There is no subscription cost; donations are requested to cover the cost of printing and mailing the periodical six times a year.

Mission Frontiers will make you aware of cutting edge missions. Request a subscription for your library.