

Israel's Escape to Petra, the Mountain Stronghold

Prof. Johan Malan,

Petra, meaning "Rock" in Greek, is a deserted city south of the Dead Sea in Jordan. In antiquity it was known as Seir, metropolis of the Edomites. In later times, the Nabateans settled in the mountain stronghold of the dislodged Edomites and called their capital Petra. The city is situated in a rift valley which extends from the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem through the Dead Sea and further south. Indications are that an earthquake and volcanic activity occurred here, forming a big canyon with rocky ravines and steep cliffs. The remains of the spectacular city consist of temples, tombs and dwellings carved out of the sandstone cliffs. The only entrance to the city is through a narrow gorge almost two kilometres in length, which can easily be guarded and even blocked if necessary, thus rendering Petra a very safe refuge.

An impressive scene greets the traveller when the multi-coloured sandstone formations of the most famous ghost town in the world looms up before him. Added to this is the mystery of the city's history as well as the expectation that, according to Revelation 12:6, it might serve as a refuge to a remnant in Israel when the Antichrist will order the worldwide genocide of Jews, lasting for the last 3½ years of the tribulation period. Despite the absolute desolation of Petra its role in history is not yet past.

South of the narrow gorge that offers access to Petra is a valley of between 1½ and 5 kilometres wide. About 3 kilometres south of the entrance to Petra is the Fountain of Moses (Ain Musa). During their journey through the wilderness Moses led the Israelites along this valley to the gates of Petra. From that point, they intended passing through Edom's territory on their way to the Promised Land, but the hostile Edomites twice refused their request.

Jacob and Esau

The intense hostility between Israel and Edom originated in the history of Jacob and Esau, as Esau was the founding father of the Edomites. In Genesis 25, we read about the twins to whom Rebecca gave birth: "And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. Afterwards his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob... So the boys grew. And Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents... Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary. Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, Sell me your birthright as of this day. And Esau said, Look, I am about to die; so what profit shall this birthright be to me... So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright" (Gen. 25:25-34).

Esau had a reddish appearance and he also sold his birthright for a stew of red lentils; consequently, they called him *Edom*, which means *Red*. With the help of his mother Jacob obtained the blessing of the firstborn from Isaac, which Esau already sold to him. Esau was nevertheless furious about the situation and asked his father to bless him also. Isaac said to him: "By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; and it shall come to pass, when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck" (Gen. 27:40). In the next verse we read: "So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob."

"So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. Esau is Edom. And this is the genealogy of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir" (Gen. 36:8-9). Esau indeed lived by his sword as Isaac had told him. He moved from Hebron to Seir, which was later called Petra, and also took possession of the whole region that was to become known as Edom. He first had to conquer the giants who lived there: "The Emim had dwelt there in times past, people as great and numerous and tall as the Anakim. They were also regarded as giants, like the Anakim, but the Moabites call them Emim. The Horites formerly dwelt in Seir, but the descendants of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their place" (Deut. 2:10-12).

The only thing that we read to Esau's credit in Genesis 32 and 33 is that he received Jacob and his followers friendly and allowed them safe passage to Canaan. But Esau is not mentioned among the Old Testament's heroes of faith. Instead, we are warned against his profane conduct: "...looking diligently lest anyone should fall short of the grace of God... lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterwards, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears" (Heb. 12:15-17). Esau had exchanged his eternal inheritance for temporal gain and his life ended in wickedness.

Esau was called "Edom" and Jacob "Israel." They both became founders of great nations.

Hostility of the Edomites

The wicked and aggressive nature of Esau became the most prominent characteristics of the Edomites, who are described as follows in the Bible:

The Edomites were warlike, preferring to fight their neighbours rather than living in peace (Gen. 27:40; Deut. 2:12).

The Edomites were idolatrous (2 Chron. 25:14). Esau had a shallow faith and neither by precept or example did he lead his people to believe in God and seek His will. As a consequence, the Edomites forsook the God of Esau's father, Isaac, and worshipped other gods. On the high places in Petra, the sacrificial altars are still preserved. The Edomite priests would take young virgins, burn them on the altars, and then scatter their ashes from the cliffs over the city.

The Edomites were proud and arrogant. Because of this, God would cast them down from their mountain fortress and make it as desolate place: "Your fierceness has deceived you, the pride of your heart, o you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill! Though you make your nest as high as the eagle, I will bring you down from there, says the Lord. Edom also shall be an astonishment; everyone who goes by it will be astonished and will hiss at all its plagues. As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbouring cities, says the Lord, no one shall abide there, nor shall a son of man dwell in it" (Jer. 49:16-18).

The Edomites were vindictive and never missed an opportunity to torment Israel when they were unable to defend themselves. "Thus says the Lord God: Because of what Edom did against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has greatly offended by avenging itself on them... I will lay my vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel, that they may do in Edom according to My anger and according to My fury" (Ezek. 25:12,14).

There is a long history of severe hostility between Esau's descendants and Israel. During Israel's journey through the wilderness they wished to pass through Edom's territory: "Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. Thus says your brother Israel... now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards... we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory. Then Edom said to him, You shall not pass through my land, lest I came out against you with the sword... Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory" (Num. 20:14-21).

The Edomites continued to plague Israel. Four hundred years later, the Edomites were still fighting Israel. According to 1 Samuel 14, Saul led Israel against Moab, Ammon and Edom, and overcame them. After another two hundred years, during the reign of Jehoshaphat of Judah, the Moabites, Ammonites and the Edomites again joined forces in an effort to utterly destroy every Jew in the land. The combined armies, led by a force from Petra, camped on Mount Olivet with the intention of crossing over the Kidron Valley the next day and attacking Jerusalem.

The name "Jehoshaphat" in Hebrew means "God judged." A Levite by the name of Jehaziel informed Jehoshaphat that because he had turned to God for help, the armies of Edom, Ammon and Moab would be destroyed in the Kidron Valley without the loss of a single man to Israel (2 Chron. 20:15-17). The enemy forces were seized with terror, panic-stricken from the Lord, and killed one another: "The people of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir to utterly kill and destroy them. And when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir,

they helped to destroy one another” (2 Chron. 20:23).

“When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take away their spoil, they found among them an abundance of valuables on the dead bodies, and precious jewellery, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away; and they were three days gathering the spoil because there was so much” (2 Chron. 20:25).

The prophet Joel referred to the destruction of the enemies of Israel under the leadership of the Edomites from Petra during the reign of Jehoshaphat as a type, or example, of what will happen at the battle of Armageddon: “Let the nations be awakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations... Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision” (Joel 3:12,14).

Again, the enemy forces will kill one another: “And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet... It shall come to pass in that day that a great panic from the Lord will be among them. Everyone will seize the hand of his neighbour, and raise his hand against his neighbour’s hand; Judah also will fight at Jerusalem. And the wealth of all the surrounding nations shall be gathered together: gold, silver, and apparel in great abundance” (Zech. 14:12-14).

After their defeat in the time of Jehoshaphat, the Edomites recovered again and continued with their hostilities against Israel. According to Psalm 137, the inhabitants of Petra and Edom aided Babylon in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and even begged the Babylonians to level Jerusalem to its foundations so that it would never rise again. The psalmist says: “Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation!” (Ps. 137:7). During the Babylonian captivity, the Edomites continued to attack and rob the Jews who remained in Jerusalem and Judea.

The Edomites were later driven from Seir. The Nabateans then occupied Seir and called it Petra. During the time of the Greek Empire they survived two attacks against them, but during the Roman Empire they were conquered and became dispersed in the surrounding Arab world. Petra then became a deserted place that was, from generation to generation, not inhabited by people, but only by owls, crows and wild animals (Is. 34:5,10-15). This situation prevailed for many centuries, and the Edomites themselves never occupied Petra again.

The Idumeans and the Herodian family

Just prior to and during New Testament times, the Edomites still played a very subversive role in Israel.” Idumea” is the Greek version of the Hebrew name “Edom.” Since that time, the Edomites were also referred to as Idumeans. In 125 BC, the Idumeans were conquered by the Jews and many of them forced to be circumcised, thereby accepting the Jewish religion and becoming proselytes. Among them there were willing minions of the Roman Empire, who were prepared to assist the Romans in oppressing the Jews. The most prominent Idumean family was that of Herod the Great.

Herod became king over the Jewish territories after his father, Antipater, was killed in 43 BC. The Romans authorised his installation as king. Herod was a cruel man who even ordered the murder of some of his wives and children. In order to win the favour of the Jews he built the temple in Jerusalem, which was known as the temple of Herod. This wicked Edomite, Herod, ordered the death of all Jewish boys under the age of two years in an effort to kill Jesus. Matthew 2 relates the incident of the wise men from the east coming to pay tribute to the King of the Jews who would be born during those days. Herod was greatly disturbed by this news as he saw the birth of such a person as a threat to his own kingdom. That gave rise to his insane fury that was unleashed against the young Jewish boys in order to destroy their new king.

Herod Antipas, one of the successors of Herod the Great, had John the Baptist beheaded in prison. Pontius Pilate sent Jesus to Herod to take jurisdiction over the case in which Jesus was accused by the Jews. It was within this Edomite’s power to set Jesus free, but we read in Luke 23:11-12: “Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for before that day they had been at enmity between themselves.” Their

friendship was based on their common betrayal of Jesus. Herod displayed the typical Edomitic spirit which induced many people to walk the way of sin and the despising of Israel and their God – the Holy One of Israel.

Choosing and rejection

God's choosing of Jacob and His rejection of Esau had nothing to do with predestination, but was based on His foreknowledge of what their descendants would do. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness." Esau and his people have decided for themselves not to serve the Lord.

In spite of the destiny of Edom and Israel as distinct peoples, individual members of these two nations still had the choice whether they would serve God or the devil. As for the chosen people, Israel, the Bible says: "But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness" (1 Cor. 10:5). During the time of the Messiah, most of the Jews betrayed and rejected Him to their own spiritual downfall and eternal ruin. In contrast with their reaction, there were quite a number of Edomites among the followers of Jesus as God shows no partiality: "But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan" (Mk. 3:7-8). Individuals are not accepted or rejected because of the decisions and deeds of their forefathers, but on the basis of their own faith in or rejection of the Lord Jesus. But the destiny of nations is to a great extent determined by the religious convictions, policies and actions of their leaders and governments. In cases of national apostasy, the faithful minority often suffers at the hands of the unfaithful majority and may even be persecuted by them.

Jacob, the lineage from which Jesus was born, obtained Esau's birthright when he despised it. Among Esau's descendants there were many vindictive enemies of Israel, and specifically also of Jesus Himself. Because of this, the Edomites brought the anger of God upon themselves. Many of them intermarried with the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son with an Egyptian maid, and thus became assimilated among the other enemies of Israel. Today they are, as members of various Arab nations who descended from Esau and Ishmael, still engaged in wars and a relentless campaign of hatred against Israel.

God acted in righteousness when He gave the birthright of the unfaithful Esau to Jacob. Righteousness will also be done by using Edom's deserted mountain fortress as a safe refuge for the fugitive Jews during the great tribulation. God destroyed Edom as an independent nation because of their idolatry and rebellion against Him. That is the reason why their safe fortress in the mountains became a ghost town. It is quite probable that here, in the deserted Negev desert close to modern Israel's border, God will protect a remnant of Israel against the attacks of the Antichrist and his anti-Israeli forces.

End-time trouble for Israel

Israel's expected flight to Petra during the second half of the tribulation period should be understood in the light of the fact that, in the end-time, great distress because of worldwide persecution will befall Israel and enfold them like a dark cloud. Daniel says: "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered... It shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished... And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be 1290 days. Blessed is he who waits and comes to the 1335 days" (Dan. 12:1,7,11,12).

The Living Bible renders Daniel 12:1 as follows: "At that time Michael, the mighty angelic prince who stands guard over your nation, will stand up and fight for you in heaven against satanic forces, and there will be a time of anguish for the Jews greater than any previous suffering in Jewish history. And yet every one of your people whose names are written in the Book will endure it." From this Scripture it is evident that the attacks against Israel, throughout the centuries, were

satanically inspired. Now, in the end-time, the situation is no different – it is Satan himself who instigates the enemies of Israel to drive this nation from their land and even to completely destroy them. However, in doing so they actually challenge God, because He gave the following promise to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you, and will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8-14).

The prophet Daniel describes the last 70 year-weeks (490 prophetic years of 360 days each) that will pass in the history of Israel before they enter the time of everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24-27). Of this period, 69 year-weeks (483 years) have passed between the decree by Artaxerxes in the year 445 BC that Jerusalem was to be rebuilt (Neh. 2:1-8), and the death of Jesus on the cross in AD 32. Then the clock stopped ticking for Israel as a nation in the divine plan of God, and the time for the evangelisation of the non-Jewish world began. That meant that Israel would *temporarily* lose its position as a unique people and representative of God, and that all people on earth, including the dispersed Israelites, would be given the chance to accept the Lord Jesus as Messiah and enter the church and kingdom of God.

At the start of the 70th year-week of seven years, Israel will enter into a covenant with the false messiah (Antichrist). Daniel 9:27 reads: “Then he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week.” The false messiah will be endowed with all of Satan’s powers of deception (Rev. 12:9; 13:2), and will use these powers to perform astounding “signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9) to deceive Israel and the nations into concluding a covenant with him.

Halfway through the seven year period, Israel and the whole world will be shocked out of the false sense of peace that they have enjoyed for three and a half years: ...and in the midst of the week he shall cause *the* sacrifice and offering to cease [for the remaining three and one-half years]; and upon the wing of abominations *shall come* one who makes desolate; until the full determined end is poured out on the desolator (Dan. 9:27; Amplified Bible). “And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily *sacrifices*, and place *there* the abomination of desolation” (Dan. 11:31). The true Messiah described this time of terror in His prophetic discourse:

“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoever readeth, let him understand): then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains: let him who is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him who is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe to those who are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved” (Mt. 24:15-22; KJV).

This is very clearly a prophecy that applies to Israel as it is aimed at protecting a remnant of this nation from annihilation by Satan and the Antichrist during the dark days of the great tribulation – that is the last 3½ years of the tribulation period. The Sabbath laws are anyway only enforced in Israel, when only a short journey of about one kilometre may be undertaken – according to Acts 1:12, that is the distance between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives – in which case the forces of the Antichrist will catch up with them and kill them. The Jews should pray that their journey will not be retarded by winter cold, expectant mothers or those with small babies since they would also not get away quickly enough.

This flight is also described in Revelation 12, where Israel is likened to a married woman with child. This metaphor is different to that used for the church, which is portrayed as a betrothed virgin in 2 Corinthians 11:2, who will be the bride of Christ. Israel is described as a woman who was chosen by God and through whom His Son, Jesus Christ, was born in the flesh. In Isaiah 54:5, God says about her: “For your Maker is your Husband, the Lord of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel.” Within this perspective, the following Scripture from Revelation 12 should be quite clear:

“Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars... And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns... And the dragon stood before the

woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born [Herod was used by Satan for this purpose when he ordered the killing of Jewish boys under the age of two – Mt. 2:16]. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and to His throne [The Ascension]. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there 1260 days [the future flight to Petra]” (Rev. 12:1-6).

“And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven: Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down... Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (Rev. 12:7-12).

“Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time [3½ years], from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth” (Rev. 12:13-16).

This Scripture should be read with Daniel 12, in which reference is also made to the archangel, Michael, who will wage war in heaven on behalf of Israel. As a result of this war, Satan and his fallen angels will be cast down from heavenly places and barred from any further access to the throne of God where he accused the believers. After this further humiliation, the powers of darkness will confine all their attention to events on earth. Satan will be utterly vengeful and from that moment do everything within his power to destroy God’s people and His creation by attempting to make the world uninhabitable, committing genocide against the Jews, and instigating the summary execution of all who confess allegiance to the Lord. That will also be the time when the Antichrist will declare himself as God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, demand the forced worship of his image, rule by way of military decrees, and will not hesitate to use maximum power to subdue and eliminate his adversaries.

These ominous events will occur during the last 3½ years of the tribulation period, described as the great tribulation. This second part of the tribulation will last for 1260 days, constituting 42 prophetic months of 30 days each. It is also described as time, times and a half time, alluding to seasonal years, hence referring to a year, two years and half a year. That is exactly the same as 42 months or 1260 days. At the start of this period, Israel will withdraw from the Antichrist’s new world order because they will refuse to worship him as God.

In consequence, the Antichrist will try to annihilate all Jews, thereby necessitating their sudden flight from Jerusalem and surrounding Jewish territories. By divine intervention Israel will be protected from being overtaken and annihilated by the Antichrist and his satanic forces. An earthquake may occur in which a large crevasse is formed which will swallow or stop the pursuing ground forces of the Antichrist, which could be a parallel with the destruction of Pharaoh’s forces during Israel’s exodus from Egypt.

Zechariah refers to this time of great tribulation among the Jews, in which two-thirds of them will die and only a third will manage to escape to a safe refuge in the mountains – most likely Petra: “And it shall come to pass that in all the land, says the Lord, that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined... They will call on my Name and I will answer them. I will say, This is My people” (Zech. 13:8-9). During World War II, 60% of the Jews in Europe died, but in the coming great tribulation the death toll will even be higher. The coming tribulation will, therefore be the worst in all history – not only for Israel, but also for the unbelieving nations.

Why to Petra?

Although the Bible does not explicitly state that a remnant in Israel will escape to Petra, this possibility is strongly implied by historical events, circumstantial evidence, and a prophecy about Jordan's position in the tribulation period. Jews who would flee by foot from Jerusalem to the mountains will, in the interest of their own safety, not go in the direction of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria or the Mediterranean Sea. The invading forces of the Antichrist will come from these directions, and be easily able to encompass and destroy fugitive Jews who might venture into these regions. They will also refrain from going east in the direction of Amman in Jordan, as this area has good access roads on which enemy forces will be able to move quickly in pursuit of the "rebels." The only reasonably safe area to move into would be the mountains along the shores of the Dead Sea – the highest and most inaccessible mountains being south of the Dead Sea at Petra.

According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, groups of Jews fled to Edom and Petra during the Babylonian invasion of Judah in the sixth century BC, when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. When the Romans destroyed the city and the temple in 70 AD, many Jews fled to the mountains along the Dead Sea. A number of them made a futile last stand on a mountaintop at Masada. Others moved further to Bozrah and Petra south of the Dead Sea.

In the middle of the tribulation period when the Antichrist will declare himself to be God in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, the Jews in Israel will be in a weakened position. According to Daniel 9:27 and John 5:43, they will have concluded a covenant with the false messiah at the beginning of this seven year-period. In terms of this agreement they will either be disarmed or be asked to transfer their military forces and weapons to an international peacekeeping force. Furthermore, they will be persuaded to make room for the Palestinians by dividing their land. In exchange for these concessions, their safety will be guaranteed by the false messiah (Antichrist), and they will also be allowed to build their temple in Jerusalem. Being initially under the false impression that the Antichrist is the true Messiah, they will not hesitate to transfer all governmental control to him.

When Israel commit treason against the Antichrist as the self-declared God of this world in the middle of the tribulation period, they will have no military, humanitarian or logistical support of any nature. They will have to flee by foot, without food and other provisions for the journey, and with only the clothes on their bodies. Given these particular circumstances, it is evident that their destination could not be very far. Petra is about 220 kilometres southeast of Jerusalem. Although it will be a difficult journey, it is not too far for pedestrians. It should further be taken into account that the Lord will cleave the earth behind them, thus preventing the progress of the false messiah's forces. This flight reminds strongly of Israel's exodus from Egypt, when the forces of Pharaoh were cut off and destroyed at the Red Sea by the Lord. He then cared for His liberated people in the wilderness, which means that He will also fulfil the end-time fugitives' needs of food and water. It is clearly stated that a remnant in Israel will be "nourished for a time and times and half a time" (Rev. 12:14).

The command to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (the core of the Jewish nation) is clear: "Flee to the mountains!" (Mt. 24:16). The mountains in Israel are not very high, the highest ones being about 1200 metres. Also, they do not offer safe refuge to a large group of people. At Petra, however, the mountains are about 1500 metres high, being the highest in Jordan. They are of the most rugged and inaccessible mountain ranges in the world. It will be very difficult for the enemy forces to reach the Jewish exiles here. In terms of the following prophecy in Daniel 11:41 the Jews will certainly know that Jordan will be a relatively safe refuge as this country will not be directly controlled by the Antichrist: "He shall also enter the Glorious Land [Israel], and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon." The territories of these three ancient peoples coincide with the present Jordan. In the light of biblical prophecy it would, therefore, be very wise to flee to the deserted mountain fortress of the Edomites in Jordan. It is also significant that Petra has been declared a world heritage site that may not be attacked, bombarded or in any way damaged during times of war. This is another factor which renders Petra a safe place of refuge during future wars in the Middle East.

It is quite possible that the end-time Jewish fugitives will pray the prayer of Psalm 60:9-12, "Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me to Edom? Is it not You, O God, who cast us

off?... Give us help from trouble, for vain is the help of man. Through God we will do valiantly, for it is He who shall tread down our enemies.”

The Battle of Armageddon

When the true Messiah, Jesus Christ, returns at the end of the great tribulation, the battle of Armageddon will reach its peak. The Antichrist, the false prophet, the kings of the earth and their armies will be gathered together to make war against Jesus Christ and His heavenly army (Rev. 19:19). The antichristian armies will be deployed in various places in a concerted effort to obliterate the remaining Jews, and also to fight against their coming Messiah. According to Zechariah 12 and 14, many of them will be positioned in and around Jerusalem, as they will know that Jesus will set foot on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4). Joel 3 says that there will be a large concentration of troops in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, which is the Kidron Valley between the Old City and the Mount of Olives. Revelation 16:16 states that there will also be a great mustering of multi-national forces in the Valley of Megiddo in Northern Israel. Isaiah 63 says that the southern flank of the troops will reach Bozrah, south of the Dead Sea, before they will be stopped in their tracks. Bozrah is 40 kilometres southeast of the Dead Sea, about halfway between the Dead Sea and Petra. The southern divisions of the Antichrist's forces will probably be on their way to destroy the remnant of Israel in their mountain fortress in Petra.

In Isaiah 63 we read the following about the second coming of the Messiah, when He will save the remnant of His people and take revenge on the enemies of His kingdom: “Who is this who comes from Edom, with died garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength? – I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Why is your apparel red, and your garments like one who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the people no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold; therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; and My own fury, it sustained Me. I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, made them drunk in My fury, and brought down their strength to the earth.”

The remnant of Israel will be hated and utterly forsaken by all their former friends and allies, with the result that nobody will come to their rescue when the false messiah and his world powers will set out to destroy them. Their Messiah, Jesus Christ, will come to their salvation on the critical moment, and destroy their enemies. The southern vanguard of the enemy forces will be stopped only 40 kilometres from Petra. The enemies of God and of Israel will be killed with the sword that proceeds from the mouth of Him who sits on the horse. And all the birds will be filled with their flesh (Rev. 19:21). The Mount of Olives, where Jesus will first set foot, will cleave into two halves. This mountain will also offer a place of refuge to Jews who are pursued by their enemies: “Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, the king of Judah. Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You” (Zech. 14:5).

Immediately after the coming of the Messiah there will be a period of extended mourning in Israel, in which they will confess and forsake their sins with tears of true repentance. “In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem... And the land shall mourn, every family by itself... In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. It shall be in that day, says the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered” (Zech. 12:11–13:2). The period of national mourning will probably last for 30 days, as was customary in Israel after the death of great leaders such Moses and Aaron (Num. 20:29; Deut. 34:8).

In his schedule of end-time events, Daniel also made provision for Israel's mourning of 30 days after the coming of the Messiah at the end of the great tribulation, by adding it to the 1260 days of the second half of the tribulation period: “And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be 1290 days. Blessed is he who waits, and comes to 1335 days” (Dan. 12:11-12).

The following sequence of events is evident from this scripture: From the time when the false

messiah abolishes the sacrificial service and profanes the sanctuary by placing an image of himself in the Holy of holies, 1 260 days will elapse until the coming of the Messiah on the Mount of Olives (Dan. 9:27; Rev 13:5). During this time, a remnant in Israel will have fled to Petra. After a further thirty days of mourning, the spiritual reconciliation between the Messiah and the remnant of Israel will be completed. By then, 1 290 days will have elapsed since the false messiah's self-deification in the temple.

Another 45 days will be taken up by the marriage feast of the Lamb, the restoration of the throne of David and the judgement of the nations (Rev. 19:7-9, Acts 15:16-17, Mt. 25:31-32). By then, 1 335 very dramatic days will have elapsed since that very evil day when the false messiah declared himself as God in the temple and instituted his satanic reign of terror. After 1 335 days, the Son of the living God will have crushed the evil powers and established His kingdom of peace. Jews who survive this terrible onslaught will, after 1 260 days of great tribulation, see the Messiah return. After 1 290 days they will be spiritually restored, and after 1 335 days they will enter the promised kingdom of the Messiah. Everlasting righteousness will prevail while the Messiah rules the world from Jerusalem (Jer. 3:17; Is. 2:2-4; Zech. 8:21-22).

Sources

Hutchings, N.W. 1983 : *Petra in History and Prophecy*. Oklahoma City: The Southwest Radio Church.

Malan J.S. 2002 : *The Day of the Lord*. Pietersburg, RSA: Trumpet Publications.

Malan J.S. 2004 : *Israel*. Pietersburg, RSA: Trumpet Publications.