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Battle Weary Mid-East
At Christmas-time 1982

By Dan Martin

JERUSALEM (BP)--At Christmas 1982, the Middle East desperately needs the Prince of Peace.

Troubled, tense, war-torn, battered, fearful, battle weary, apprehensive, bel aguered--the terms all apply. From afar, they seem cliches; up close, they are inadequate.

Christmas 1982, finds Israeli soldiers on the outskirts of Beirut, apparently there for the winter. Facing them are Syrian troops. Between them they have more tanks than fought at El Alamein in a long-ago and almost forgotten war.

In Beirut, Southern Baptist representatives are apprehensive, fearful that the gun-barrel-to-gun-barrel situation will once again bring shrapnel and rockets crashing into the already devastated city.

In the snowy mountains around the damaged capital, Druze, Christian and Moslem troops occasionally spray automatic weapon fire at one another, leaving bloody bodies as reminders that the Prince of Peace is desperately needed.

The factions have been warring for centuries, often trading atrocity for atrocity. In a mountain village in Southern Lebanon, Maronite Christians show visitors their church, the site where 70 or more villagers were slain by Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) troops when the PLO captured the area in 1976.

The Phalangist--Christians--returned the act in kind, staging a massacre at the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Satilla in Beirut in September. The Israelis deny it, but residents of Sabra say Israelis fired flares and the killing continued, even at night.

In early December, in Sabra, two black flags waved over a muddy and torn field, the burial site, residents say, of 1,500 victims. The exact toll is unknown: Israelis officially claim only "at least 479" but residents say it will exceed 5,000.

In Sabra, an elderly woman, the last surviving member of an extended family, peers from rubble that once was her home, stepping out to tell visitors of the horrible nights of massacre, when she says perpetrators used bulldozers to topple houses onto entire families. She tells also of gunfire and explosions.

Downtown Beirut is ruined, not by the summer Israeli invasion, but by the virtual anarchy and civil war which has gripped the "the Switzerland of the Middle East" since 1976.

A blind evangelist tells of this summer when the six-story apartment building in which he lives was shelled. He does not know if the shells were fired by Israelis, Syrians, PLO or one of the militia groups; he only knows he trusted in God to preserve and protect him.

In Beirut, the reminders of war are everywhere: Italian, French, American and Lebanese soldiers--the peacekeeping forces--sit behind heavy machine guns in sandbagged emplacements, or stand near armored vehicles. In the mountains Israelis and Syrians do the same.

Reports circulate that PLO soldiers, sent away in the ceasefire which ended the active part of the war, are coming back, supposedly with Syrian blessing and aid.

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Nearer the border with Israel, travelers pass roadblocks and checkpoints manned by United Nations soldiers--Norwegian, French, Senegalese--Major Saad Haddad's Army of Free Lebanon, Israelis, Phalangists and others.

In Israel, green-clad soldiers carry Uzi or Galil machine guns with the ease American businessmen carry briefcases. To visitors, the sight is frightening, but Israelis scarcely give the soldiers a second glance. Even groups of school children are accompanied by parents and teachers carrying rifles. Israel has lived in war and tension since it began in 1948.

Opinion is divided in Israel about the war. Some residents refer to it as "Israel's Vietnam..." while others call the Peace of Galilee operation--as the invasion was called--an "infamy" or "Sharon's War" after Israel's Defense Minister Ariel Sharon.

Critics say Israel has ceased being "David" and has become "Goliath." Often the Israelis and their friends respond to such criticism by charging the critics with anti-semitism. One government official mentioned the Holocaust, when six million Jews were exterminated in Nazi Germany, three times in a 10-minute presentation on the Peace in Galilee operation.

The problems facing Israel are not all external. Differences over the occupied territories--Gaza and the West Bank--continue. Israelis are building settlements across the West Bank, villages surrounded by chainlink fence, concertina wire and armed guards.

A battle also rages over religion. Judaism is represented from the most orthodox to the most secular, almost as many "denominations" as exist in protestantism. Some commentators refer to the "Who is a Jew" question as being the "War of the Jews."

In Israel, there are 1.5 million Arabs, mostly residents of the occupied territories. Most are Moslem, although many are "traditional" Christians, almost an ethnic designation.

A small number are "believers," a term used to mean "born again." Some of the believers are Jews, although to most Israelis, a Jew ceases to be a Jew when he or she becomes a believer. "You can be an atheist or an agnostic--almost anything--and still be a Jew, but when you become a Christian, most Israelis think you have ceased to be a Jew," said one believer.

A larger number of believers are Arabs. Some are from Moslem backgrounds, although most are from the "traditional" Christian churches: Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic or one of the other orthodox faiths.

In the midst of war and strife, hatred and enmity, Southern Baptist representatives are at work. They minister to Jew and Arab, Moslem and Christian, Israeli and Lebanese, Palestinian and Druze.

The mountain of hatred, they find, has two sides: neither right, neither wrong.

War, strife, division, enmity, hatred, persecution, suspicion, distrust. All are present in the Middle East as Christmas 1982 draws near.

On the human level, it seems incredible that God chose the rock-littered, arid, hilly, seemingly-untenable section of the world for a special intrusion into human history. It seems equally incredible that the pocket-size area--insignificant in size, population and resources--should continue to occupy the center of human concern nearly 2000 years later.

Yet, in a cave-like manger on a hillside near Bethlehem, Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, the Son of God, the Hope of Man, was born.

In 1982, as never before, he is needed. Not only in the war-torn, troubled, tense, apprehensive, explosive Middle East; in the whole world and in the heart of every man.

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(Martin, news editor of Baptist Press, recently returned from a 17-day trip to Israel and Lebanon.)

(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Baptist Press

Women's Task Force
Recommends Program

By Duann Kier

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--A seven-member task force on women in Southern Baptist life, named by the Christian Life Commission, has made recommendations to the moral concerns agency to enhance the status and responsibilities of women in the 13.8 million member denomination.

Proposals include an informative service on women who are employed or who are seeking employment in church-related vocations, production of educational resource materials on issues related to women and an enlarged program to provide information on women's issues to state Baptist papers and denominational publications.

Members of the task force which met for two days were T.B. Maston, professor emeritus of Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas; Sarah Frances Anders, chairperson of the sociology department of Louisiana College in Pineville; James Flammig, pastor of First Baptist Church in Abilene, Texas, and Carolyn Weatherford, executive director of Woman's Missionary Union.

Other members included Darold Morgan, executive director of the Southern Baptist Annuity Board; Patsy Ayres, active layperson from Sewanee, Tenn., and David Matthews, pastor of First Baptist Church in Greenville, S.C., also chairman of the Christian Life Commission.

Other recommendations include requests for the commission to consider establishing regular lines of communication for women in ministry and also to consider taking the leadership in sponsoring national meetings for Southern Baptists who share these concerns.

Members of the task force encouraged the ethics agency to sensitize Southern Baptists to the discrepancies in employment positions and wages between women and men and also to point out that many local churches fail to include their female employees in Annuity Board retirement plans.

"Some of the most sinned against people are women employees of churches. Many if not most retire without a cent of retirement benefits," said Morgan who heads the SBC annuity agency. "Churches should include every full-time employee in their pension plan. It is the only fair and right thing to do."

During the meeting task force members recommended the commission produce and market as widely as possible a study guide and a series of pamphlets on issues related to women.

"I feel a really strong need for Bible study and theological study to help women know there is a place for them," said Weatherford, whose auxiliary serves more than one million Southern Baptist women.

Weatherford also pointed out the task force discussions had continually expressed concern for women in the home and for the family in general. "Women who are employed are also still women in the home. We are not anti-family."

Members of the task force highlighted the need to maintain current lists of women who are ordained or commissioned for full-time Christian service, churches which have ordained women deacons and women in professional church-related vocations who are not ordained. The task force also encouraged the commission to offer resources to support the seminaries in providing improved opportunities for women.

Anders, who as a sociologist has maintained an ongoing study of women in Southern Baptist life, said Southern Baptists should overcome their use of sexist language. The task force commended those local churches, state conventions and other agencies, particularly the Baptist Sunday School Board, which have shown special sensitivity to women's concerns and women's issues.

Task force members took note of the fact that more than one-half of foreign mission appointees are women.

"In foreign missions we are using more completely and fully the gifts of our women than at home," said Flamming, pastor of a 5,000 member congregation. Weatherford observed that many of these women serve in countries where Baptists are much more conservative and women are much less accepted than in our own country.

The task force also recommended the need for regional meetings to communicate with pastors regarding women's issues and the need for additional support services from the commission with regard to women.

According to Ronald D. Sisk, director of program development for the commission with a major assignment in the area of women's issues, the task force could not have been more positive.

"Members of the task force reflected theological insight, breadth of experience and depth of Christian maturity. These recommendations will enhance our Southern Baptist understanding of Christian freedom for women both in the traditional setting of the home and also in the larger setting of the church and work place."

"Our God is not a male chauvinist," said Foy Valentine, executive director of the commission. "The Bible is not a male chauvinist book. Our Baptist commitment to the priesthood of the believer cannot condone either male chauvinism or any other kind of prejudice toward persons made in God's image and for whom Christ died."

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New York Convention's
Executive Secretary Resigns

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SYRACUSE, N.Y. (BP)--Jack Lowndes, executive secretary of the Baptist Convention of New York since 1975, has resigned, effective March 1, 1983.

Lowndes plans to return to the pastorate or some other type of church-related work. "I wish God's blessings on this convention as the churches work to meet the great challenge in the Northeast," he said. "It is a good time for me to serve my Savior in another environment."

Wallace Williams, pastor of Madison Baptist Church in Madison, N.J., and chairman of the executive board of the BCNY, said the board granted Lowndes a leave of absence in January and February "for rest and to re-evaluate his ministry."

"Differences in management" caused the amicable parting, both men agreed.

Williams said the administrative committee of the executive board is hopeful of presenting a candidate for acting executive secretary to the board for approval soon.

Lowndes, 58, has led the convention for almost eight of the 12 years it has been in existence. When he came to the post in 1975 from the pastorate of Memorial Baptist Church in Arlington, Va., the convention had 101 churches, 16,976 members and an operating budget of \$760,850.

Current figures show 179 churches and another 100 church-type missions, 24,000 members and a budget of \$1,638,053. The convention covers all of New York state, the northern half of New Jersey and a small portion of Connecticut.

Lowndes has been president of the Home Mission Board's directors, vice chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Christian Life Commission and was chaplain for the U.S. House of Representatives, 1969-72.

Prior to his eight-year pastorate in Arlington he spent 17 years as pastor of Baptist churches in Tennessee, Kentucky and Georgia.

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Hospital Staff Aiding
Victims Of Yemen Quake

JIBLA, Y men (BP)--The staff of Baptist Hospital in Jibla received authorization to bring additional surgical personnel into Yemen to help treat victims of the worst earthquake to strike the country in 16 centuries.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board released \$15,000 in relief funds to Baptist representatives at the hospital on Dec. 15, the same day board personnel began trying to put together a team of two orthopedic surgeons, a scrub nurse and an aide.

The earthquake rolled across a mountainous region about 60 miles to the north of Jibla on Dec. 13. Early reports placed the number of confirmed dead at more than a thousand as the quake leveled at least 11 villages and heavily damaged more than 140 others.

Neither the hospital nor the safety of Baptist representatives was jeopardized by the quake.

Dwellings of sun-baked brick crumbled during the initial 40-second quake and thr e aftershocks. About 250 children died when their school collapsed on them, state radio reported.

The epicenter of the quake, which measured six on the Richter Scale, was believed to be in the ancient city of Maareb, the Biblical capital of the Queen of Sheba.

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Missionary, Brazilians
Robbed Of Christmas Funds

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RECIFE, Brazil (BP)--Southern Baptist missionary Clara Williams and two Brazilian co-workers were robbed Dec 6 of \$2,000 set aside for Christmas gifts of clothing for the poor.

The robbery occurred at a fast-food restaurant in Recife where Williams and her two companions had stopped for a meal after withdrawing the money from a nearby bank. Two men who apparently had observed the bank withdrawal entered the restaurant, snatched the briefcase containing the money and fled.

Williams chased the men, who jumped into the trunk of a waiting car. When she approached the car one of the men pointed a revolver at her. She darted behind a lamppost as the car roared away.

The money had been intended for purchase of clothing for poor families in a drought-stricken region of northern Brazil. Williams, a Tennessean, teaches at the Seminary for Christian Educators in Recife and coordinates several mission projects in rural areas.

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