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Recent discoveries: A luxurious Roman-Byzantine-period public bathhouse was recently discovered near Beersheba. While the excavation is important for adding to the knowledge of society at that time, the site also has additional value. For the first time in Beersheba, remnants of buildings from the First Temple period (dating more than a thousand years before the bathhouse) were found beneath and next to the Byzantine building.

The monument known as Absalom's tomb in the Kidron Valley, just outside the eastern wall of the Old City, is probably not the burial site of Absalom, who died several hundred years before the monument was built. Recently discovered inscriptions on the monument indicate that it is instead the tomb of both Zacharias, the father of John the

Baptist, and Simon the Just, who recognized the baby Jesus as the Messiah. The inscription referring to Simon quotes the fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus version of Luke 2:25 and is undisputed. The site may also have been the tomb of James, Jesus' brother. The authenticity of an inscription on an ossuary claiming it to contain the bones of Jesus' brother is still being disputed.

The discovery of remains buried in a Second Temple period tomb was announced at a Hebrew University lecture for medical reporters. The family tomb is located at the western edge of the Hinnom Valley. Microscopy techniques and DNA analysis revealed that the remains found in a closed niche were possibly those of a *kohen*. The man suffered from leprosy, but died of tuberculosis. The findings have been published in *Atikot*, the

Antiquities Authority's journal.

Knesset-Christian cooperation: Members of the Knesset have created a parliamentary caucus to strengthen ties with pro-Israel Christian groups. The caucus will promote contact and is intended to help Christians in Israel. It will also be a contact for Christian groups wanting to visit Israel.

Temple Mount concern: For some time, concern has been expressed over the bulge appearing on the southern wall of the Temple Mount. Jordanian engineers have been carrying out repair work in that area and the threat of its collapse has been allayed. The leader of the Jordanian team doing the repair work said that while work on the bulge had been completed, additional restoration work on the southern wall was still to be done.

Natan Sharansky, who is responsible for Jerusalem and Diaspora affairs, believes, however, that the repair work is not finished. Fears of sparking even more Muslim violence have prevented Israel's Antiquities Authority from adequately supervising activities on the Mount. Concern has now arisen over the effects of February's earthquake. The earthquake damaged the eastern wall to such an extent that some sections may collapse onto the area known as Solomon's Stables. The director

of the Wakf (Islamic Trust), which is responsible for maintenance of the Mount, denied that there is a problem.

Knesset against mixed marriages: Two bills that would have allowed marriages between Jewish and non-Jewish partners were defeated in the Knesset in March. Some 300,000 citizens are unable to marry according to current legislation. Alternatives available to them are for either partner to convert to Judaism or Christianity so they are of the same religion,

or to marry in Cyprus (which is the most common destination for couples in this situation) and have their marriages recognized when they return to Israel. Conservative Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of the Forum for Freedom of Choice in Marriage, criticized the rabbinate's opposition to civil marriage and marriages performed by Reform and Conservative rabbis.

“On the Sabbath day, let the world be experienced as whole and perfect, so that all people—free and slave alike—are released from commerce and work to focus on relationships and love. On this day, let the weeklong slave rest like a free person; let the animal be unyoked. On this day, let the hungry be provided with abundant food so that a prayer of thanksgiving and pure ecstasy of relationship can go up from mortals to the Immortal Source. Then let the Sabbath day be extended steadily into the six days that follow, until the entire work week is transformed into a time of perpetual peace and wholeness, or, at least, into a time when labor is exclusively chosen, creative and dignified, and not undertaken out of the coercion of economic necessity.”

*(Irving Greenberg, For the Sake of Heaven and Earth:
The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity
[Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004], 61.)*