Quartet Special Envoy to the Middle East, Tony Blair, has said that he believes a peace deal is *"* *definitely possible* *"* by the end of this year, despite the worsening security situation in the Gaza Strip. In an interview published in the Times Newspaper, Blair stated in regard to the Middle East conflict, that *"there is nothing more important to world peace than resolving this question"* . The former British Prime Minister also said that American involvement in the peace process had dramatically improved over the last couple of months, and that it was in Israel's best interest to negotiate a peace agreement with the Palestinian Authority before his term ends in January 2009.

Quote: *""I am unworried by the fact that it is President Bush's last year in office," he said. "Firstly, President Bush is immensely popular in Israel. Secondly, I did the Northern Ireland deal the month before I left." The Quartet envoy also told The Times that a key issue was the creating of circumstances whereby Israelis "get confidence that their security concerns are being met and the Palestinians get confidence that the occupation will eventually be lifted."*

Following his resignation as British Prime Minister, Tony Blair had hoped to become directly involved in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, after his appointment to the post of Quartet Special Envoy. But Javier Solana, the High Representative for the European Common, Foreign and Security Policy, felt that this role would conflict with European efforts in the Middle East through EuroMed, and that Blair's mandate should be limited to that of building the economy and establishing institutions that will ensure the viability of any future Palestinian state. There are rumours circulating that Blair is unhappy at not being able to play a mediating role in the Middle East, and that he may now be seeking a more prominent position in world politics, possibly as EU President.

Quote: *"Some Blair allies also say that he now recognises that as envoy in the Middle East he is not going to be allowed to become the key player in furthering Israeli-Palestinian talks this year, and will be reduced to a role of supporting political development in Palestine and boosting its economy.*

But the security situation in Gaza may make a peace agreement with the Palestinians much harder to reach by the end of this year. And so some Israeli ministers are urging the government to go back to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's convergence plan , whereby Israel would
disengage
to permanent borders regardless of whether there is a peace agreement with the Palestinians or not. But the Bible seems to indicate that some sort of agreement will be made before Israel disengages from Judea and east Jerusalem.

A number of Christians have emailed me wondering whether we are now living in the last year before the tribulation period could begin. The reasoning behind this is, this year in Israel is a ' shmita
' year - the sabbatical year in which the Jews are commanded by God to let the land rest from producing fruit. In the Autumn of 2008, the Feast of Trumpets will mark the beginning of another cycle of seven years for the Jewish people. The covenant between Israel and the surrounding nations is also strengthened by the Antichrist for a period of seven years (Daniel 9:27), so the thought is that this agreement could fall into one of these seven year cycles on the Jewish calendar. The fact that the international community is aiming for a peace agreement by the end of 2008 is therefore quite significant.

The book of Daniel states that the actual time of Jacob's trouble will begin after the agreement is broken by the Antichrist, and will run for a period of three and a half years (Daniel 12:7), or 42 months (Revelation 11:2), or 1260 days. Daniel also mentions another figure, 1335 days (Daniel 12:12).

Revelation 11:2
But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

Daniel 7:25
And he (Antichrist) shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time (3.5 years).

For a moment let's say that the tribulation period does begin at the end of this year. There are two or three Jewish feast days that have not yet found their fulfilment in the person of Jesus

Christ. They are Rosh Hashanah (the Feast of Trumpets) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), and possibly Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles). The Bible seems to indicate that the Day of Atonement will find its fulfilment upon the return of Christ to this earth. The Day of Atonement is a day of national repentance for Israel, the holiest day of the year, in which Jews are commanded by God to afflict their souls for the sins of the past year (Leviticus 23:27). The prophecy of Zechariah indicates that the Jewish nation will be in mourning for the One they crucified after He returns to defeat the Antichrist and his armies (Zechariah 12:10). So let's say that this is the day on which Christ returns to earth at the end of the tribulation period. From the prophecy of Daniel we know that the Great Tribulation period will last exactly 1260 days, or three and a half years. If we count back 1260 days from the 23rd of September 2015 (Day of Atonement), we reach the 11th of April 2012. This date happens to fall right in the middle of the Feast of Passover, which was fulfilled at Christ's first coming to earth. This date is also in the middle of the seven year tribulation period, and would be the day on which the Antichrist turns his back on the peace agreement, and begins his persecution of the Jewish people. It is interesting to note that many Christians feel that the Antichrist will counterfeit some of the events in the life of Jesus Christ. According to Zechariah 11:17 and Revelation 13:3, the Antichrist will receive a deadly wound, but he will be miraculously healed, and this 'resurrection' will cause the whole world to worship him as God. The fact that this date falls on Passover is most intriguing, considering this was the time of year when Jesus Christ was crucified and was miraculously raised from the dead (John 13:1). If we count back 1290 days from this date, we reach the 29th of September 2008, which happens to be the Feast of Trumpets. It is possible that the Feast of Trumpets could be the date on which the Rapture of the Church occurs. For further study on this, see the Rapture article. We take 1290 days from this date and not 1260, because of the way the Jewish calendar is constructed, with an extra month being inserted in seven years over a nineteen year cycle. Remember that other figure of 1335 days? If we count 1335 days from 11th of April 2012 (the middle of the seven year period), we reach the 7th of December 2015. According to the prophecy of Daniel, all who live to see this date will be blessed (Daniel 12:12). This date happens to fall on Chanukah, the celebration of the Maccabbees victory over Antiochus Epiphanes and the subsequent rededication of the Temple.

As we can see, the prophecy of Daniel is 100% accurate. With current events pointing towards the division of the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem, which will occur in the middle of the seven year period, there is no doubt we are nearing the time when this prophecy will be fulfilled. The question is not if these events will occur, but when they will occur. We still can't be certain whether this coming seven years will see the fulfilment of these prophecies, or whether the prophecy is for another seven years yet to come. If Christ came today, would you be caught up to meet Him in the air, or would you be caught out, still in your sins, having no hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12)? Come to Christ for salvation today. He will not turn you away (John 6:37).

Source Haaretz , Guardian , Reuters , YNet News , Jewish Feasts and Holy Days