Dear Friends,

Often, as time goes by, things need a little updating. We’ve updated the look of Israel My Glory several times during its 74 years, and we thought you might appreciate the effort if we gave it another go as the magazine nears the three-quarters-of-a-century mark.

So last year we hired talented graphic designer JD Lemming of Dallas, Texas, to help us. JD is a friend of ours who knows our ministry and understands our determination to keep the content the same while refreshing the appearance. If you receive our Friends of Israel Gift Catalog, you’re familiar with his work because he designed it.

"It was a privilege and an honor," JD told me recently, "to work on a magazine that is as good as Israel My Glory. We hope you’ll agree with us that Israel My Glory is now easier to read, which was one of our primary objectives. We’ve eliminated most (not all) of the colored backgrounds, changed the font and darkened it, added more white space, and brightened up our use of graphics.

It’s the same magazine we all love, but with a fresher look and more legible style.

We thought you might like to see how Israel My Glory’s appearance has changed over the years. So we’ve inserted photos of past magazine covers for a little trip down memory lane. Those of you who have been with us a long time probably remember some of these popular back issues.

God has truly blessed this ministry, taking the magazine from a small black-and-white pamphlet in the 1940s to a full-size, full-color magazine with a readership of more than half a million in more than 150 countries. We even have a German-language edition published in Germany called Israel Mein Erbe.

Although our look may change somewhat, one thing will never change: We will never stop delivering sound and vital Bible teaching concerning God, Israel, and prophecy—as you can see in this issue, “The Case for Israel: Romans 9—11.”

Today more than ever, many people fail to understand the importance of these chapters and how they fit into the apostle Paul’s teaching. In this key section, which author Mike Stallard calls “the crowning instruction of the lengthy doctrinal section of the book of Romans,” you’ll learn about the sovereignty of God, the blessedness of His grace, and the permanence of His promises.

You’ll also see clearly that Israel and the church are separate entities, and God loves them both.

As we move into 2016, we are extremely grateful to the Lord, who has shepherded this magazine for almost 75 years. And we pray He will be pleased to shepherd it, by His grace, until He returns to take His church home.

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
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ISRAEL MY GLORY

A Ministry of The Friends of Israel
Gospel Ministry, Inc. • Isaiah 46:13

Volume 74 • Number 1

MISSION STATEMENT

ISRAEL MY GLORY is the bimonthly publication of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., a worldwide Christian ministry communicating biblical truth about Israel and the Messiah, while fostering solidarity with the Jewish people.

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Digital only: $9.99 for 1 year, $16.99 for 2 years

To subscribe online, go to foi.org/magazine.

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Our mission statement reads, “The Friends of Israel is a worldwide Christian ministry communicating biblical truth about Israel and the Messiah, while fostering solidarity with the Jewish people.” We have two primary efforts: to teach God’s truth about Israel and Jesus and to act on our Zionist convictions.

Over the 78 years of The Friends of Israel’s existence, nothing has consistently done more to accomplish this goal than our flagship magazine, Israel My Glory. It was founded 74 years ago, in the midst of the Holocaust, to teach God’s Word about Israel and the Messiah.

Under the capable, gifted leadership of our first executive director, Dr. Victor Buksbazen, Israel My Glory became known for teaching Scripture. An accomplished Bible scholar who spoke seven languages fluently, Victor understood the importance of disseminating truth to the world.

In my travels as executive director, I continually meet people who tell me they look forward to each issue of the magazine. I’ve had pastors and Bible teachers tell me they use the articles in their sermons and lesson preparations and even file them for future reference.

Some people are longtime subscribers; others are recent. It’s not unusual to meet people who borrow the magazine from someone else. In fact, our studies reveal that each copy of Israel My Glory is usually read by three people. That puts our readership at more than half a million in more than 150 countries.

Nothing has done more over the years to connect individuals to The Friends of Israel than Israel My Glory. To have each issue reach so many people places a solemn responsibility on us to be faithful to teaching God’s Word.

It also leads us to ask, “How can we more effectively communicate God’s Word through Israel My Glory without compromising biblical truth?” We posed that question to ourselves awhile ago, and it led to updating the magazine’s appearance.

The goal was to freshen the look and make it easier to read. Publications, much like our wardrobes, tend to become dated over time and can use a little update.

With this issue, you will notice some significant changes. This issue marks the beginning of a new design, but not a change in content.

A great deal of prayer and testing went into developing the final design. We hope it will more effectively communicate biblical truth about Israel and the Messiah by removing obstacles that hinder reading.

However, we are committed never to change our teaching of scriptural truth or our statement of faith. Though the look of Israel My Glory has been updated, the content is the same, as are the writers and editors.

We want to continue to see Israel My Glory reach more readers and gain greater influence for the Lord, but never at the cost of compromising God’s Word. We are committed to holding fast to the convictions upon which this ministry was founded and has upheld for the past 78 years.

This issue may mark the beginning of a new design, but not a change in content. In a world that is constantly changing, The Friends of Israel is dedicated to the unchanging Word of God.

We have redesigned Israel My Glory several times in the past, and, if the Lord tarries, we probably will do so again someday. I hope you will find this new design more appealing and a joy to read.
TELLING THE TRUTH

When knife-wielding Arabs went on a killing spree last fall in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and other parts of Israel, they butchered innocent Israelis in the name of maintaining the Temple Mount status quo. The status quo prohibits anyone but Muslims from praying or reading their scriptures atop the Temple Mount, and the Muslims claimed Israel was trying to make a change.

Granted, Israelis see the intolerance and would prefer that all people be free to pray atop the Temple Mount—the holiest site in all of Judaism. But in no way has the status quo changed, nor are there plans to change it.

This is the same type of lie the Arabs spread in 1929 when the British ruled the area long before there was a State of Israel. When Palestinian Jews gathered at the Western Wall on August 15 that year to commemorate the destruction of their Temple, Arab mobs stoned them. They had been told the Jewish people were there to destroy the al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock. On August 23, 1929, more than 1,000 Arabs attacked the Jews in Jerusalem, killing 133 and wounding 339.

Lies against Israel are cheap, countless, and contagious. They cost nothing to manufacture and inflict bitter damage. Journalists and even state departments circle around them like satellites orbiting Earth. The news media publishes inaccurate, sometimes even fabricated, stories slandering Israel, while the Jewish state deals with terrorism. One might think the liars would face consequences, but no one is held responsible.

To counterbalance these lies, entire websites are dedicated to examining news about Israel and presenting the truth. One such site is HonestReporting.com. It scours the Internet to correct false reporting, distorted facts, bad conclusions, misleading terminology, and opinion pieces that are disguised as news. The lies against Israel are so abundant that HonestReporting.com has a full-time team working to challenge media bias in the hope of making journalists more accountable.

Unfortunately, lies against Israel are also contagious. Recently, a cell-phone video of an Arab boy shot by Israelis went viral on social media around the world. The news reported that the Israelis had executed him when, in fact, the boy (1) was alive and being treated at an Israeli hospital and (2) was apprehended because he had stabbed a young Jewish boy with a knife.

While Israel increases defensive measures against this newest wave of Arab terrorism, the Israeli people have been forced to engage in an international public-relations war. Although it is one of the most humane countries in the world, Israel is always in a battle to defend its reputation; and lately it has been the Jewish state against the world. Sometimes it seems Israel has a better chance of stamping out localized terrorism than it does maintaining its good name.

But let’s not lose hope! Truth is like a piercing light; it always finds a way to illuminate the darkness and reveal what is perverse. As Christians, we should guard against being deceived. We must do all we can to be people of light, armed with the truth of God’s Word about Israel and about what is really happening there and in the Middle East.

by Chris Katulka
I have set her [Jerusalem] in the midst of the nations . . . all around her (Ezek. 5:5).

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has revealed why he believes so many Israeli Jews are being stabbed, slashed, and shot by Arabs. It is due, he said, to Arab “frustration” and a “massive increase in [Israeli] settlements.” Really?

Kerry told a group at Harvard University in October, “Most people I talk to have a pretty . . . good sense of exactly what has to be done. . . . It’s a question of making the judgments and having courage to go there.” Unfortunately, Kerry has no sense of what to do, is wrong about the settlements, and has overlooked the key factor in the violence.

“Kerry does not know what he is talking about,” wrote Elliott Abrams, senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, DC. “There has been a steady growth in settlement population, though the bulk . . . is in the major blocs—such as Ma’ale Adumim—that Israel will clearly retain in any final agreement. . . . Does he mean there has been a massive increase in the number of settlements? That’s flatly false.”

Three months before the violence began in September, Palestinian Media Watch (PMW) released a 57-page report titled Palestinian Authority Education: A Recipe for Hate and Terror. PMW (palwatch.org) showed how the Palestinian Authority (PA) teaches its children to reject Israel’s right to exist, encourages them to view Jewish people as evil, and directs them to embrace murderers as role models.

The PA also uses textbooks and media to teach Arab children that Jews are “monkeys and pigs,” “enemies of Allah,” “most evil of creations,” and that “Zion is ‘Satan with a tail.’” In addition, the materials teach it is forbidden to forge peace between Arab and Israeli children.

This situation is not a recent phenomenon. In 2007, then U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton labeled the material “a clear example of child abuse” that “profoundly poisons the minds of these children.” She proclaimed, “We must stop the propaganda to which Palestinian children are being exposed.”

But the abuse continues; and today many Arab schoolchildren who were nurtured on these materials have grown into violent, hate-filled young adults who are now unleashing a wave of terror on Jews whose only crime is being Jewish.

Two weeks before the terror began, PA President Mahmoud Abbas encouraged his people to spill their blood to take Israel from the Jewish people. His message was quoted almost directly from the PA propaganda young people read in their textbooks and see on PA television.

He called Jewish people “filth” who defile Jerusalem and said, “We bless every drop of blood that has been spilled for Jerusalem. . . . Every martyr (Shahid) will reach Paradise, and everyone wounded will be rewarded.” Not exactly a foundation for peaceful coexistence.

Days after his speech, the British online newspaper DailyMail.com posted a video of a little Palestinian-Arab girl wielding a knife, saying, “I want to stab a Jew because they stole our land.” Her father, filming his daughter, replies, “Allah willing, my dear.”

This same Abbas told the UN General Assembly in September that Palestinian Arabs desire “righteousness, justice, and peace.”

As for John Kerry, said Abrams, he is blaming the violence on the Israeli victims. “We . . . see what Kerry really appears to think. He seems to believe that the real culprits, when Palestinians stab Israelis to death, are people who build a new housing unit in a settlement.”

Hillary Clinton at least recognized the root of the problem, although she did nothing about it. The current administration refuses even to recognize it.
What to do about bias on Israel and the Middle East in the mainstream media? Watchdog organizations have been on the case for years. But now seasoned investigative journalists Richard Behar and Gary Weiss have teamed up to launch a new online publication, The Mideast Reporter (mideastreporter.com).

The Mideast Reporter strives to become an oasis in the wasteland of Mideast journalism. A target audience is young readers who haven’t yet made up their minds about issues affecting the region and who seek the most informed and multi-faceted perspectives.

The nonprofit news operation’s founders explain that a vicious propaganda war is under way in the Middle East, and modern journalism has succumbed to lazy, prejudiced practices.

They describe a scene in which reporters from different news agencies “stay at the same hotels” and “engage in pack journalism [using] the same fixers, stringers, and the same agenda-pushing, inaccurate sources.” Above all, Behar and Weiss charge that there is “widespread ignorance of the background of the [Arab-Israeli] conflict and routine failure to perform rudimentary fact-checking.”

They say that a true investigative news desk, guided by the journalism profession’s most time-honored ethics, is necessary to hold correspondents accountable and to pursue truthful reporting. Otherwise, the public digests news in what Weiss labels an “echo chamber.” In this stagnant and polarized environment, each news brand presents superficial reports in agreement with their viewers’ preconceptions. Consequently, “the media is a tool of the combatants,” Weiss says.

“This might be the first modern conflict that is simultaneously a PR war, fought for the public opinion of the Western world as much as it is a war of knives and guns and suicide bombers,” Weiss suggests, reflecting on the reporting that characterized the 2014 Gaza conflict.

“Associated Mess,” an article Behar and Weiss coauthored, exposes how the Associated Press misled the public through its probe of civilian deaths in the Israel-Hamas war. Citing “posed photographs, intentionally inaccurate categorizations, buried corrections, one-sided sourcing and cherry-picked quotes,” the pair systematically dissect a piece of otherwise-acclaimed reporting, proving that the Associated Press posted a “just-plain-wrong conclusion about most Gaza casualties being civilians.”

Behar is an award-winning journalist with three decades of experience. He has covered everything from murderous Russian corruption to Chinese economic aggression in Africa, serving as a staff writer for Forbes, Time, and Fortune Magazine and contributing to the BBC, CNN, and Fox News.

Weiss, likewise, has a two-decades-long distinguished career behind him. He has covered everything from murderous Russian corruption to Chinese economic aggression in Africa, serving as a staff writer for Forbes, Time, and Fortune Magazine and contributing to the BBC, CNN, and Fox News.

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The new publication will monitor the establishment reporting coming out of the Middle East and expose propaganda and false accounts, hopefully before they can influence public discourse.

by Jeffrey F. Barken/JNS.org
Muslims fleeing the Islamic State (ISIS) hurled as many as 53 Christians overboard during a crossing from Libya last year. In another incident, witnesses said Muslims “went mad” when they saw a boy praying to Jehovah. They started screaming, “Allahu Akbar!” and began hurling Christians into the sea.

Unfortunately, Muslim persecution of Christians doesn’t stop even when both groups are fleeing a common enemy. In fact, it is spreading to the West. Below is an excerpt of a column by Raymond Ibrahim, an expert on Islam and Christian persecution. For the full report, titled “Christians Persecuted by Muslims Even in the West,” we encourage you to go to RaymondIbrahim.com.

Muslim refugees in the Swedish city of Kalmar forced Christian refugees out of public housing after harasing and threatening them. It gets worse. When the Christians finally make it to Western shores, they are attacked by Muslims, or fellow “refugees.”

In Germany, Muslim refugees are attacking and intimidating Christians fleeing Syria, Iraq, and Kurdistan and imposing Sharia Law in the refugee centers. Gottfried Martens, pastor of a south Berlin church, said, “Very religious Muslims are spreading the following idea throughout the refugee centers: Sharia Law rules wherever we are.” For Muslims who come to Christ, he said, “There is a 100 percent chance that these people will be attacked.”

In Sweden, two Christian refugee families were abused by approximately 80 Muslim refugees from Syria. The Christians, who thought they had escaped ISIS, left the Swedish asylum house, fearing for their lives.

In Denmark, according to a study, “Christian asylum seekers are repeatedly exposed to everything from harassment to threats and physical abuse by other refugees in the asylum centers, simply because they have converted from Islam to Christianity.” Said Niels Eriksen Nyman, who led the study, “We have a serious problem here.”

Unfortunately, such persecution is not limited to refugees. Christians of Mideast or Asian backgrounds who have lived in the West for years are also being targeted. In October 2015 in Gothenburg, Sweden, Markus Samuelsson found the walls of his restaurant covered with jihadi graffiti, including the messages “Convert or Die” and “The Caliphate is Here.” ISIS is known to mark Christian homes and businesses before attacks.

Just as they are hounded in Muslim-majority nations, Christian refugees and even longtime residents of Europe are persecuted by Muslims—people who are being allowed into Europe on the pretext that they are being persecuted.

[ISIS claims it has smuggled more than 4,000 terrorists into Europe by hiding them among the refugees—Ed.] In accordance with Islam’s Rule of Numbers—which holds that as Muslims grow in number, so does their “anti-infidel” hostility—all European nations with sizable Muslim populations are experiencing what it means to live side by side with Islam.

As millions more Muslims continue to flood the continent, they will behave as they do in the Islamic world; and native Christians themselves will be persecuted. That is, after all, exactly how the “Muslim world”—most of which rests on lands that were once Christian but were taken by the jihad—came into being.
Concrete dust flies as workers remove the Ten Commandments monument from its base on the grounds of the state Capitol in Oklahoma City (Sue Ogrocki/AP Photo).
Foremost on the agenda for 2016 is the clamor for change. Dominating America’s political landscape in this critical election year is the national mood to “throw the bums out” and hand the reins of state to outsiders who supposedly will set things right.

However, as has been aptly demonstrated, change undefined today can come as an unwelcome surprise tomorrow.

In October I read about the stealthy removal by night of the Ten Commandments monument from the grounds of the Oklahoma Capitol in Oklahoma City after the state’s Supreme Court ruled its presence there unconstitutional. Even a Baptist pastor wanted it gone, subscribing to the blasphemous notion that God is unwanted on public property in America.

As I viewed photos of men jackhammering the monument from its base, I thought about how misguided all these people are. Monuments are brick and stone; faith involves

FFRF atheists demanded the district quit addressing God at school functions. Students replied by taking to the field before a Friday-night game, kneeling—along with fans, referees, and members of the opposing team—and praying to the Almighty.
the heart and resides far beyond the reach of Christ’s adversaries, who try to thwart the God whom believers serve.

The Pew Research Center in 2010 produced a voluminous report on the state of the generation born after 1980—the “Millennials.” In what would appear to be a near-fatal trend for the future, these young people apparently exhibit a disdain for the faith of earlier generations:

They are the least overtly religious American generation in modern times. One-in-four are unaffiliated with any religion, far more than the share of older adults when they were ages 18 to 29. . . . Fully one-in-four adults under age 30 (25%) are unaffiliated, describing their religion as “atheist,” “agnostic” or “nothing in particular.”

Rather than believe radical minorities are succeeding in their throw-God-out campaign, we need to remember the liberal news media thrives on sensationalizing for profit. In addition, it is extremely biased, steeped in the politically correct ideology of self-appointed reformers, and quick to paint those on the other side of the transformation movement as out-of-touch malcontents worthy only of ridicule and repudiation.

Ignoring the God Factor
When ancient Israel faced one of its many critical decisions, God spoke to the prophet Samuel, defining the most fundamental matter for ages to come. At issue was Israel’s choice of a king. Saul, the nation’s first monarch, was chosen for his apparent physical attributes; but his reign was disastrous. As Israel was on the brink of making the same mistake again, God intervened:

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

David, the young and ruddy shepherd boy, was God’s choice. Against all odds, he used his sling to slay the lumbering giant, Goliath, and went on to become Israel’s greatest king. God’s words to Samuel should encourage us as we move into a new year filled with Goliath-like obstacles.

Despite what we hear in the news, God has people all around us with hearts for Him. In October, for example, public high-school students defied a threat from the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), which filed a complaint against the Ashdown (Arkansas) School District, claiming one student was offended by prayer at school events.

FFRF atheists demanded the district quit addressing God at school functions. Students replied by taking to the field before a Friday-night game, kneeling—along with fans, referees, and members of the opposing team—and praying to the Almighty.

In fact, a veritable legion of modern-day Davids refuse to abandon their right to life on the side of God. They worship, volunteer, help when called on, staff mission agencies, resist bullies, support the right-to-life of the unborn, participate in national affairs, and refuse to conform to generalized Millennial statistics. In short, they come up simply as Americans.

Outside, Inside
First Samuel 16:7 reveals the enormous difference between how God and fallen humanity evaluate issues. Humanity’s standard is superficial and group oriented: Polls, statistics, race, gender, social status, etc., are the factors people use, based on value systems developed by think tanks and social elitists. These elements all involve outward appearance.

God, on the other hand, evaluates based on what He alone can see: the transcendent condition of a human heart.

What a vast gulf there is between Sovereign and subject, Creator and created:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8–9).

Examples of this truth are found in the book of Judges, which chronicles early Israel’s fragmented stagger toward dissolution. The men whom God chose to deliver the nation from its social and spiritual quagmires would never have reached the personal-interview stage of

None of us can be certain about the course our beloved nation will take this year. But of one thing we can be sure: The Lord has not forsaken His own, nor will He.
any national search committee. In my book Not to the Strong, I examine the lives of four such men counted most worthy of mention in Hebrews 11, the “hall of heroes” section of the New Testament: “And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah” (Heb. 11:32).

Not one of these men appeared qualified as a hero of the faith. From a human standpoint, all of them had obvious deficiencies. However, the Lord saw in them what even they could not see in themselves, and He molded them from ordinary people into men of extraordinary abilities.

God’s unique capacity to see what we’re made of is infinitely separated from the mere human ability to chart a life course.

**Good News for the Whosoever**

A generation turning from God-centered order and moral propriety to a self-absorbed, radicalized society will, sooner or later, reap dire consequences for itself and its nation. The statement “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Ps. 33:12) is not the stuff of myth or fable. It is obvious fact, borne out by centuries of history and seen today in this country’s rapid slide into social chaos and politically correct pandering to a godless minority.

Nevertheless, God moves on a higher plane. He always has His Davids, who are ready to stand for truth in every generation of true believers—the whosoever of biblical decree.

Did you know that the most-quoted, most-memorized verse in the Bible has a “whosoever” in it? “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16, KJV).

Therefore, people have before them a gift of inestimable value, whether aware of it or not. They can unwrap an unmerited, unfathomable, unblemished, eternal treasure if they make a life-altering decision to receive Him: “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God” (Jn. 1:12).

Salvation is the Savior’s legacy, secured by His redeeming sacrifice on the cross: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9).

Somehow He chooses us, but somehow we still have a responsibility. It may seem like a contradiction to us, but it is all clear in the mind of God.

During my many decades of ministry, I’ve been in many countries and experienced a variety of cultures and social distinctives. Customs vary, and differences abound; but whether in mud huts, teeming cities, or quiet suburban neighborhoods, believers share a common thread. It was expressed to me in a taxi in Jamaica on the way to Kingston.

“What is your faith?” I asked.

The driver replied pleasantly, “Oh, sir, I am a worshiper.” It was his way of saying he was one of the whosoever who found new life in Christ.

Over the millennia, these whosoever have numbered in the billions. They have triumphed over pagan empires, degrading moral revolutions, genocidal despotism, wars of annihilation, and unspeakable barbaric persecutions. And they do it, not with guns, tanks, military juggernauts, terrorism, or beheadings, but with a commitment to demonstrate love and live out the peace that passes understanding found only in Christ.

None of us can be certain about the course our beloved nation will take this year. But of one thing we can be sure: The Lord has not forsaken His own, nor will He. Thus we should be encouraged to stand up and speak out for Christ to those around us who so desperately need the love and grace only He can provide.

### Endnote


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**Elwood McQuaid** is a former executive director of The Friends of Israel.
Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, probably felt compelled to assure the Jewish people in Rome that God still had a future for Israel, despite the fact that the majority of the nation rejected Christ.
THE HIGH-WATER MARK OF THE BIBLE may be the inspiring three chapters of Romans 9—11, located within one of the most profound and doctrinally significant books in the entire Word of God. These three chapters describe the permanence of God’s promises to Israel and the faithfulness of His righteous character.

Romans 9 explains that God specially chose Israel (vv. 1–5) but that the Jewish people failed to attain God’s righteousness because they sought it by the works of the Law, rather than by faith (vv. 30–33; cf. 10:1–3).

Chapter 10 highlights the fact that both Jews and Gentiles are saved through faith in Christ (vv. 4–17), and chapter 11 asserts that God loves Israel and has not cast away His people forever. In fact, one day “all Israel will be saved” (v. 26).

At first, one might be surprised the apostle Paul placed these chapters directly after the doctrinal pronouncements about the condemnation of all sinners (chaps. 1–3), justification by faith (chaps. 4–5), and sanctification of individual believers (chaps. 6–8). Some people maintain Romans 9—11 is a digression. However, as Bible scholar Thomas R. Schreiner noted, “The idea that these chapters disrupt the argument of the epistle has all but vanished today, and rightly so, for they form an integral part of the letter and have even been called the ‘climax’ of Paul’s argument.”

Chapters 9—11 do not form an interlude or parenthesis between the doctrinal portion of chapters 1—8 and the practical applications of chapters 12—16. Instead, they constitute the crowning instruction of the lengthy doctrinal section of the book of Romans.

Why did Paul begin an eloquent discourse on Israel at this juncture? Rather than seek a single, simplistic reason, it is best to see four streams of thought that converge:

First, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, probably felt compelled to assure the Jewish people in Rome that God still had a future for Israel, despite the fact that the majority of the nation rejected Christ. Scripture commentator Woodrow Kroll wrote, “Paul may have been accused of being so dedicated as the apostle to the Gentiles that he had completely forgotten about his Jewish kith and kin. He therefore addresses the question of Israel and its future before proceeding to the practical section of this epistle.”

Paul’s emotional opening in Romans 9 almost single-handedly snuffs out all doubt concerning Paul’s love for his own people: “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh” (vv. 1–3).

Second, Paul probably wanted to explain how his teaching on Israel’s future coincided with his assertion that “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek [Gentile]” (10:12). Commenting on the current setting aside of national Israel during the Church Age, theologian William Newell asked, “How [do we] reconcile all this with such a by faith ‘no difference’ message as
Paul has been preaching to us—in the first eight chapters?\(^3\)

Scripture teaches that, during this Church Age, all people everywhere—Jewish and Gentile—become God’s children through faith in the Messiah. But Israel as a nation has failed to recognize its Messiah and has been pushed to the side due to unbelief (Rom. 11:1, 13–15). Many in Rome at the time of Paul’s writing were concerned that Israel had been permanently discarded, even though the Roman armies had not yet destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. That event would happen 12 or 13 years later, in AD 70. Paul reassured them Israel’s blindness was merely temporary (v. 25).

Third, chapters 9—11 explain more thoroughly earlier themes in Romans. Bible scholar C. E. B. Cranfield correctly highlighted some of these themes: the scope of Paul’s apostleship (1:5), the idea of those who are called (v. 6) or elect (8:33), and the promises of God (4:1–25).\(^4\)

The main theme, however, of Paul’s entire epistle to the Romans is the gospel as humanity’s only means to righteousness (right standing before God by faith). Paul introduced this theme in Romans 1:16–17:

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”*

Paul applied this theme to his discussion about Israel. In Romans 9:30–32, he spoke of attaining righteousness by faith. In Romans 10:1–17, he continued this train of thought, showing that the Jewish people had sought righteousness by good deeds and not by faith. In Romans 11, he explained that mercy comes by belief, not by the works of the law.

The twin themes of grace and mercy dominate the discussion in Romans 9—11, much as they do in the earlier portions of Romans (cf. 3:21–26; 4:1–5, 13–16; 5:1–2, 18; etc.). Paul used Romans 9—11 as an exclamation point in the presentation of salvation.

The fourth and, perhaps, the strongest reason for these three chapters on Israel is that Paul needed to answer an important objection. At the end of Romans 8, he affirmed the believer’s great security in Christ through the Spirit of God. God has promised that what He has started in the Christian’s life, He will finish (vv. 28–39). Cranfield referred to verses 29–30 as the “golden chain”\(^5\):

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. . . . Whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. But what about Israel? The possible objection to such a promise involves the setting-aside of Israel.*

If Israel has been separated from God, how could Paul teach that nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 39)? If God’s purpose for Israel has been frustrated, then where is the unshakable basis for Christian hope?\(^6\)

In short, how can Christians have assurance of their security in God’s promises if God has cast away Israel and annulled similar promises He made to that nation in the Old Testament? Romans 9—11 answers these questions. God has not cast away Israel. He will remain faithful to His promises to that nation forever: “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (11:29).

As theologian Robert Haldane has said, “The nation of Israel cannot be deprived of what he [God] engaged to do for them.” God always keeps His promises because of the faithfulness of His righteous character.

ENDNOTES

5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., 447.
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Vessels of Clay

A look at election and the sovereignty of God: Romans 9:1–29

by Richard D. Emmons
FOUR THOUSAND YEARS AGO, God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees (southern Iraq) to the land of Canaan (Israel) and made him an awesome promise: “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2–3).

During the reigns of Kings David and Solomon, the promise seemed to reach its zenith. Then the nation spiraled downward and was in subjection to Rome when Jesus, its promised Messiah, appeared.

Yet, rather than ushering in the glorious Kingdom God had promised through the prophets, Jesus was crucified. Early on, many Jewish people accepted Him (Jewish men wrote all but two New Testament books), but the nation’s leaders overwhelmingly rejected Him. Though the gospel went to the Jewish people first, slowly it turned to the Gentiles, creating something entirely new: the church, composed of Jews and Gentiles.

So what happened to Israel? Were the Israelites not God’s Chosen People? Why were they being left behind? These are the questions the apostle Paul felt compelled to answer when he wrote Romans 9—11.

After elaborating in Romans 8 on God’s commitment to believers and their security in Christ, he began to answer questions sure to be on his readers’ minds: (1) Do you no longer care about Israel? (2) Weren’t all Israelites chosen by God? (3) How can God judge what He decreed?

Paul’s Broken Heart (vv. 1–5)
It may have seemed to some that Paul had turned his back on his own people. Apparently he had been accused of callously abandoning them. But Paul was brokenhearted over Israel. Three times in Romans 9:1 he emphasized his concern and passionately communicated the
“great sorrow and continual grief” he felt whenever he thought of his kinsmen (v. 2).
This grief was intensified by his concern that he “could wish” himself to be accursed from Christ for the sake of his brethren (v. 3).
“Could wish” is the translation of the Greek imperfect middle verb euchomai (“to pray” or “to wish”). The tense refers to repeated action in the past. A more literal translation might be, “I was wishing [praying] repeatedly for I myself to be accursed [anathema] from Christ for [the sake of, on behalf of] my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”
Paul’s prayer is reminiscent of Moses’ intercession for Israel in Exodus 32. Fearing God’s catastrophic judgment on the Israelites for the deliberate sin of worshiping the golden calf, Moses pleaded to the Lord for them:

Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, “Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written.”
And the Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin.” So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made (vv. 30–35).
In speaking to Moses, God stated His principle of judgment: “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book.” God’s judgment was severe because the Israelites’ blessings were many (see Romans 9:4–5). Paul was brokenhearted (much like Moses) over his people’s rejection of Jesus, and he realized they would be judged according to God’s righteousness. Also like Moses, he knew he must go forward with his God-given mission.

God’s Sovereign Choice (vv. 6–18)
In this section, Paul anticipated the objection that God’s Word must have failed because so many Jewish people rejected the gospel of Jesus. Paul’s explanation: Not every physical descendant of Abraham and Isaac is a spiritual descendant. He reasoned that God’s Word has not failed because God’s promise is not the issue; God’s sovereign choice is.
Many people, including great theologians, struggle with the doctrine of election. Indeed, finding the biblical balance between overemphasized divine sovereignty (fatalism) and overemphasized freedom (human determinism) is difficult.

Many people, including great theologians, struggle with the doctrine of election. Indeed, finding the biblical balance between overemphasized divine sovereignty (fatalism) and overemphasized freedom (human determinism) is difficult.
“By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9).

(2) **God has the sovereign right to show mercy or not.**

Even today, God chooses some Gentiles and Jews to be part of the church, but not others. To some, God shows mercy, while others (like Pharaoh) He hardens: “It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

Citing God’s statement that He raised up Pharaoh “that I may show My power in [him], and that My name may be declared in all the earth” (v. 17), Paul concluded, “Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens” (v. 18).

There have always been Jewish people, just as there have always been Gentiles, who have rejected God and His revelation. Only those of the promised line, whom God chose according to His sovereign purposes, have been incorporated into God’s family. Every child of God (in every age) should gratefully acknowledge His gracious calling, without which no one would be saved.

**God’s Right to Judge (vv. 19–29)**

Paul then anticipated that someone might ask, “How can God judge those who have not been chosen [called] according to His sovereign will?” He wrote, “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’” (v. 19).

Paul replied that God, as the Creator, has the authority to do whatever He wishes. The created one has no right to challenge his Creator any more than a clay vessel has the right to challenge the potter who made it. The potter has the prerogative to make from the same lump of clay both a valuable vessel and a common one.

Similarly, though God may want “to show His wrath and to make His power known,” He might choose to endure “with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (v. 22) so that “He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles” (vv. 23–24). God’s plan to manifest His glory extended far beyond what His people understood up to that time.

God has the right to do what He wants because He is God. Paul reasoned that God’s purpose was to endure the nonchosen, physical descendants of Abraham and Isaac as vessels of wrath, while choosing some of them as His children for His glory. All the while, He had a plan to call other vessels of mercy for His glory from among both Jews and Gentiles (but predominantly Gentiles) and form them into an entirely new entity called the church. Previously, this plan had not been revealed (see Ephesians 3:8–11).

Paul’s answer may have surprised his readers, many of whom probably thought of the Gentiles as vessels of wrath and the Jews as vessels of mercy. He said that God endured a significant number of Jewish people as vessels of wrath while He was preparing to call many Gentiles as vessels of mercy, and he cited Hosea’s prediction that God would “call them My people, who were not My people, and her beloved, who was not beloved. And it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ there they shall be called sons of the living God” (Rom. 9:25–26). Paul then quoted Isaiah to show that only a remnant of Israel will be preserved by God.

He then referred to Isaiah 10:22–23: “Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: ‘Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, the remnant will be saved’” (Rom. 9:27).

**So, What Happened to Israel?**

God is holy and must deal with sin. However, in His mercy, He calls people from among both Jews and Gentiles for His glory.

Paul’s defense underscores the security of church saints in their relationship with Jesus. What God has promised, He will do. Members of the body of Christ may rest assured in God’s election and sovereignty.

Yet the promises God made to Israel (land, seed, and blessing—spiritual and otherwise) still belong to Israel because they are eternal in nature. The fact that God had a plan all along to make millions of Gentiles vessels of mercy in no way invalidates His plan and promises for Israel.

A time is coming—the seven-year Tribulation, which the prophet Jeremiah called “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7)—when God will again predominantly choose the descendants of Jacob and usher in the glorious Kingdom of Messiah Jesus, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

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MISSION

Why the pursuit of righteousness through works is futile:
Romans 9:30—10:21

by Steve Herzig
On my first day of college many years ago, I met a Gentile who was “born again.” He presented Jesus Christ as Savior and the only way to heaven and told me I needed to accept Him.

Although no longer observant by then, I had been raised Orthodox and took his presentation as a personal attack on my people.

“I am Jewish!” I yelled at him. “We don’t believe in Jesus, nor do we need Him. Don’t even mention that name to me again!”

Yet I knew something was wrong. I was raised to pursue righteousness by keeping the commandments (Hebrew, mitzvot)—by keeping the Mosaic Law—and was zealous and proud of my Judaism. But sometime after my Bar Mitzvah at age 13, I realized I couldn’t keep the commandments 100 percent of the time. I knew I fell short of God’s standard and was unholy—not fit for heaven.

How was it, I wondered, that a Gentile could live a more righteous life than a Jew? The answer is found in the book of Romans: Righteousness comes only by faith.

With the exception of biblical Christianity, every religion in the world, including Judaism, teaches that one becomes righteous by doing good works. In Romans 9:30–10:21, the apostle Paul himself a Jew, explained that righteousness is unattainable through works and achieved solely by faith and that Israel, in its present condition, is blind to that concept. It is so focused on getting the Law right that it can’t see the promised Messiah, who offered God’s righteousness by becoming the final sacrifice for sin through His death and providing victory over sin through His resurrection.

In Romans 9:30–33, Paul made the case that Israel, God’s Chosen People, pursued righteousness through the Law and fell short (v. 31), while Gentiles who were not pursuing righteousness found it through faith (v. 30).

Unfortunately, it is entirely possible to pursue the Law without faith. That was God’s problem with the Israelites: Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me (Isa. 1:13; 29:13).

Faith comes from the heart, which is why God commanded Israel, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Dt. 6:5). “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Heb. 11:6).

Had Israel sought righteousness by faith, it would not have stumbled over the Messiah: “For they stumbled at that stumbling stone” (Rom. 9:32).

Quoting the great Jewish prophet Isaiah, Paul explained God’s sovereignty in placing a “stumbling stone and rock of offense” (v. 33; cf. Isa. 8:14; 28:16) before Israel and still saying, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame” (Rom. 9:33).

Paul’s message was motivated by a love and great burden for his people. In verse 3 he even said he would exchange his own salvation for theirs, if he could. His constant prayer was that Israel “may be saved” (10:1). Paul knew his people were zealous for God but lacked knowledge (v. 2) and were thus blind and lost. Instead of submitting to God’s righteousness by faith in Jesus, the One who “is the end of the law” (v. 4), they sought their own righteousness by following the Law.

Paul delineated the central issue: Which righteousness is acceptable to God? Works of righteousness through the Law or faith righteousness through Christ? Unmistakably, Israel had received great privileges as a result of being chosen, such as the sacrificial system, the priesthood, Temple services, the prophets, and the covenants (9:4–5). But those things pointed to the One who would come to offer Himself to them. He would redeem them and make them righteous. Instead, they rejected Him and worshiped the Law.

Paul strengthened his argument by calling on the Law written in the Torah (the Pentateuch): “You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them” (Lev. 18:5); and “the word is very near you, . . . to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways. . . . But if your heart turns away . . . you shall surely perish” (Dt. 30:14, 16–18).
While Moses taught that the Law was to be obeyed, he also taught it was to be in their hearts (6:4–9). Paul argued the Israelites did not have the Word in their hearts. He then explained that anyone who confesses with his mouth that Jesus is Lord and believes in his heart that God raised Him from the dead will be saved (Rom. 10:9). All people everywhere, Jewish and Gentile, obtain salvation the same way: by faith. “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’” (vv. 12–13).

Yet people must hear the message, or “how then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (v. 14). Unless righteousness by faith alone through the Person and work of Jesus is preached, how do people come to believe? They don’t. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (v. 17). Paul anticipated the question, “Have they not heard?” Should the Jewish people have received their Messiah when He came? If so, how did they hear? Paul used Psalm 19 as the answer: “Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world” (Rom. 10:18; cf. Ps. 19:4).

He was referring to creation, which is visible to people everywhere. The beginning of the psalm explains: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (v. 1). In addition, the Jewish people had the Law: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (v. 7). Israel has seen and heard through creation and the Bible.

Through Israel’s rejection, the message of salvation went to the Gentiles. Paul then quoted Moses and Isaiah, predicting the Gentiles’ role in God’s program. Here is the text directly from the Hebrew Scriptures:

I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation. I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, “Here I am, here I am,” to a nation that was not called by My name. I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts; a people who provoke Me to anger continually to My face (Dt. 32:21; Isa. 65:1–3).

Thus the Gentiles found the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even though they did not ask for nor seek Him (Rom. 10:19–20).

How grateful I am to God that He showed me the truth. Now I have been made righteous, not through works, but through faith in Jesus, “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we . . . might live for righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). In receiving Jesus as my Savior, I returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of my soul (v. 25); and someday, my people will too (Rom. 11:26–27).
ISRAEL

The Forever Nation

Three reasons why there will always be an Israel: Romans 11:1–10

by Charles E. McCracken
From a purely human perspective, the Jewish plight over the past 2,000 years might lead some to assume God has turned His back on His Chosen People. Key Bible passages, however, prove otherwise. In fact, there are at least three reasons why you can be certain God has not rejected Israel.

**Reason #1: The Covenants**

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul asked, “I say then, has God cast away His people?” (Rom. 11:1). He quickly answered his own question, “Certainly not!” The Greek expression implies the idea is so unthinkable and absurd it shouldn’t even enter your mind.

Paul’s affirmation was not idealistic or wishful. He understood the four unconditional, unilateral covenants God had made with Israel, in which God Himself was the sole guarantor.

- **The Abrahamic Covenant**
  It guarantees a seed, a land, and a blessing to Abraham and was reiterated to Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 12:1–3; 12:7; 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–21; 22:15–18). On his deathbed, Jacob, whose name God had changed to Israel (32:28), conferred the details of the covenant on his 12 sons, who become the 12 tribes of Israel (49:1–28). This covenant remains in effect, with its ultimate fulfillment in the Messianic, or Millennial, Kingdom; and it is the basis on which all the unilateral covenants rest.

- **The Land (Deuteronomic) Covenant**
  It guarantees Israel’s ownership of the land despite Israel’s failings and assures Israel’s (1) final restoration to the land, (2) repentance, and (3) regathering in the Messianic Kingdom (Dt. 30:1–10).

- **The Davidic Covenant**
  It guarantees an eternal dynasty, eternal Kingdom, eternal right to rule, and a descendant (the Messiah) who will rule from David’s throne forever (2 Sam. 7:8–16).

- **The New Covenant**
  This covenant is crucial to the fulfillment of all the unilateral covenants in the Messianic Kingdom. The
spiritual provisions include Israel’s national forgiveness of sin, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and regeneration on the basis of the Messiah’s work as the perfect substitutionary sacrifice for sin (Lev. 17:11; Jer. 31:31–37; Ezek. 36:24–28).

In addition to being unilateral, these four covenants are perpetual, with eternal implications that leave only one viable conclusion: God has not rejected Israel (Gen. 17:7–8; Jer. 7:7; 25:5; 31:35–36).

**Reason #2: The Remnant**
The Bible also teaches that, throughout history, Israel has always been composed of two groups: the hardened, blinded masses and the obedient, believing remnant.

In a passage often referred to as the “prophecy of Immanuel” because the name Immanuel, meaning “God with us,” is central to it, the prophet Isaiah contrasted the remnant with the masses (Isa. 7–12). The masses place their faith in their own might and resources, while the remnant demonstrates quiet confidence in Jehovah and the coming Messiah, who is Immanuel.

Immanuel is the point of distinction between the two groups. For the masses, Immanuel is a “stone of stumbling and a rock of offense” (Isa. 8:14). For the believing remnant, He is salvation (12:2) and a sanctuary (8:14).

It should come as no surprise that the obstinate and blind constitute the majority. (The same is true of Gentiles.) Yet God in His mercy maintains a consistent Jewish remnant comprised of individuals who demonstrate genuine faith. Paul himself was evidence that God had not cast Israel away: “For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom. 11:1). Paul, of course, was Jewish.

On that basis, he unequivocally declared, “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew” (v. 2). The fact that God chose Israel on the basis of His own sovereign mercy negates the possibility that He would then reject Israel on the basis of their actions.

God’s mercy was something Paul understood first-hand. On his way to Damascus to imprison and persecute Jewish followers of Jesus, Paul encountered the risen Christ—the very One he considered Israel’s enemy; and God changed him. Paul wasn’t looking for a life-changing experience with the Messiah, nor was he striving for it. It was an act of God’s mercy, and it changed his life.

Suddenly, the Hebrew Scriptures made sense. At that moment, Paul joined thousands of other Jewish people who recognized that Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection fulfilled the Messianic prophecies to the letter. Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and Paul’s faith in Him joined him to the remnant in Israel. Throughout Israel’s history, the remnant has consistently been the minority.

To illustrate this point in Romans, Paul turned to Elijah the prophet (vv. 2–3). Elijah won a spectacular victory at Mount Carmel against the prophets of Baal and expected sweeping national revival (1 Ki. 18:20–40). Instead, wicked Queen Jezebel sought to kill him (19:1–3). Fleeing for his life, Elijah collapsed from exhaustion under a juniper tree and begged God to end his life. There, Elijah was told to go to Mount Horeb. At Horeb, God confronted Elijah: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (v. 9).

Unlike Moses, who had interceded on behalf of the Israelites on Mount Horeb, Elijah angrily interceded against them.

He was convinced he alone followed God—that he was a remnant of one. He expected God to agree with Him in ending his life and disowning His Chosen People. However, God announced that He had 7,000 “whose knees have not bowed to Baal” (v. 18). It was a small number, but it demonstrated God’s faithfulness in preserving a remnant.

In other eras, the believing remnant included Daniel; Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego); Mordecai and Esther; Ezra and Nehemiah; and more. The Gospels identify a Jewish remnant represented by Simeon and Anna, who were just and devout and awaiting “the Consolation of Israel” (Lk. 2:25).

“Even so then, at this present time,” Paul wrote, “there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom.11:5).
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IT’S NOT OVER YET

How God’s redemptive plan for Israel affirms the security of the church: Romans 11:25–36

by Tom Simcox
“Can you believe the Jews want to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem?” the pastor scoffed from the pulpit. “Isn’t that ridiculous?” Then he proceeded to mock the Jewish people for failing to understand that Jesus was the final sacrifice for sin and declared that God was finished with them.

I’d like to think the man who delivered that message many years ago would preach it differently today because he not only failed to understand the prophecies of Ezekiel and Daniel, which speak of a third Temple, but he also missed the point of Romans 9—11, which reinforces his security in Christ based on Israel’s security with God.

Unfortunately, many people do not understand what the Bible teaches about Israel. God loves the Jewish people; and, according to Romans 11:25–36, His redemptive plan for them is not over yet.

The apostle Paul wrote, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion [estimation], that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (v. 25).

LIKE THE MAJORITY OF GENTILES TODAY, the Jewish people do not comprehend the fullness of the gospel of grace. The prophet Isaiah predicted this condition: Go, and tell this people: “Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed (Isa. 6:9–10).

Rather than mock the spiritually blind, Christians should let their lights shine to "prove them to jealousy [emulation]" (Rom. 11:11).

Paul cautioned believers not to be “wise in your own opinion” (v. 25). In other words, believers are not to think they are better than Israel simply because God has saved them. Israel’s temporary blindness has led to their salvation. Someday, when “the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (v. 25)—when the church is complete—the Lord will reach out to His ancient people; and “all Israel will be saved” (v. 26).

Verse 25 addresses the culmination of the future Tribulation, when the Messiah returns to Earth to deliver Israel physically and spiritually from the forces of the Antichrist.

The passage ties together Zechariah 13:8–9 and Revelation 7:2–4:

“And it shall come to pass 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, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘This is My people’; and each one will say, ‘The Lord is my God’” (Zech. 13:8–9).

The Revelation passage explains that, amid all the turmoil and divine judgments ravaging the earth during
Although the majority of Jewish people have failed so far to recognize their Messiah, God loves them nevertheless. . . . God sovereignly chose Jacob’s physical descendants . . . and that calling is “irrevocable.”

The Tribulation, 144,000 Jewish men from “all the tribes of the children of Israel” will be supernaturally “sealed” (Rev. 7:4)—12,000 from each tribe (vv. 5–8). These men are God’s guarantee that Israel will survive. Satan will do all he can to annihiliate the nation for good, but he will not prevail. Not a single tribe of Jacob will be lost.

At the end of this mayhem, after a major portion of the earth and its population have been destroyed, “the Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins” (Rom. 11:26–27). Here Paul referenced the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah:

"The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the Lord (Isa. 59:20).

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke. . . . But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Jer. 31:31–33, emphasis added).

Although the majority of Jewish people have failed so far to recognize their Messiah, God loves them nevertheless: “Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:28–29).

God sovereignly chose Abraham’s physical descendants through Jacob (Gen. 28:13–14; Ps. 105:7–12), promising them land, seed, and blessing; and that calling is “irrevocable.”

According to Bible commentator John Witmer, for God to bring the gospel to Gentiles, “He had to deal with Israel corporately as enemies. But in relation to God’s choice (election) of Abraham and His covenant with him and the patriarchs, Israel is beloved.”

OF COURSE, PRIOR TO BEING BORN AGAIN by God’s grace, we were all disobedient and enemies of God (Rom. 11:31–32). “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (5:10). Furthermore, we were “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1).

However, instead of criticizing those who have not yet responded to the gospel, we should rejoice in all the Lord has done and has promised to do. In awe of such a magnificent God who always keeps His promises, Paul declared,

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11:33–36).

These verses form a beautiful benediction to chapters 9—11. God will never forsake His people Israel, which should give Christians confidence that He will never forsake us either. As Paul wrote in Romans 8, nothing “shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 39).

Had God not given us Romans 9—11, we might find it difficult to trust in His promises, thinking, If He reneged on His promises to Israel, why would He also not renge on His promises to us?

These chapters teach that God is always faithful. He will never abandon Israel, nor will He abandon His church. Based on these chapters alone, we can count on Him and trust Him fully.

ENDNOTE


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THE IRAN DEAL: WHEEL OF MISFORTUNE

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES sets limitations regarding international treaties. It is a hallmark of the bizarre state of politics in Washington that such norms are so blatantly ignored. Article II, Section II, clause 2 reads, “[The President] shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur.”

Nevertheless, it is ominous how the Obama Administration has chosen to treat the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), otherwise known as the “Iran Deal,” as if it were not a treaty, thus giving the president the power to implement it without explicit congressional approval.

In fact, the administration claimed the JCPOA was not a treaty simply because officials feared they could not muster the necessary constitutional consent of the Senate to the terms of the deal, which supposedly limits Iran’s development of nuclear weapons.

That is exactly what Secretary of State John Kerry declared in a congressional hearing in July 2015. In response to a question asking why the White House had not treated the JCPOA as a treaty, Kerry testified unapologetically, “You can’t pass a treaty anymore. . . . It’s become impossible to pass.”

The blame for this constitutional desecration cannot be placed at the doorstep of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue alone. Congress shares responsibility. In September the U.S. Senate failed to block the deal, even though it knew the White House had refused to disclose to Congress all of its terms.

In an ironic twist of illogic, the Senate also agreed to capitulate on the constitutional mandate that it “consent” (and “concur”) to the JCPOA treaty, agreeing instead on a different procedure: If it did not mount a sufficient number of votes to object to the deal with Iran by the deadline in September, then the deal would go through. In the law, the difference between giving affirmative “consent” and merely failing to object can be substantial. But legal principles, logic, and the Constitution seem to hold little sway in Washington nowadays.

David Sullivan, a former CIA arms analyst and one-time staff member of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, wrote that the deal is “governed by the UN Security Council.” In a September 8 opinion piece in The Washington Times titled “A treaty or just a deal?” Sullivan wrote that the JCPOA “has arguably transcended the U.S. Constitution.” “It is,” he said, “a U.N. Security Council-sponsored, multilateral, International Atomic Energy Agency-U.N. Security Council-verified and-enforced international agreement.”

Russia, a friend of Iran, is a member of the Security Council and has veto power. Russia now holds the cards. Meanwhile, American hostages languish in Iranian dungeons, including U.S. Pastor Saeed Abedini. Their release apparently was never made a condition of the negotiations.

On the other hand, under this arms agreement, Iran has already won a rolling back of sanctions and will receive the benefit of billions of dollars that have, up to now, been frozen as punishment for its past international violations.

The ink was hardly dry on President Barack Obama’s victory in Congress when on October 11 Iran launched a test of its intercontinental ballistic missile system that blatantly broke a U.N. resolution. Members of Obama’s own party were outraged and penned a letter, complaining to Secretary of State Kerry.

But even that violation did not stop the JCPOA deal from becoming official on October 18. Meanwhile, Iran’s clerics continue to whip up demonstrators, chanting “death to America” and “death to Israel.”

In the Federalist Papers, our founders noted that “little dependence is to be placed on treaties,” which have no teeth, especially where one of the parties lacks “good faith.”

To see the debacle that will result from this ill-fated Iran deal, we need only look back to the wisdom of our Founding Fathers and how grossly it has been ignored.
A Plea From a Millennial

A few miles from my boyhood home, just off a dusty country road, sits a little orange brick church. The tattered curtains sway in and out of the openings where the windows used to be.
The front doors are streaked with rust, and birds dart in and out through the broken walls of what were once Sunday school rooms.

When my family helped establish the church in 1895, it was called the Novesta Free Will Baptist Church. Four generations of my family repented, worshiped, married, and were eulogized in that little building. So much history. Such deep roots.

Although the church closed before I was born, I feel an acute sense of melancholy whenever I stop to look at it. The decaying remains are all that’s left of a place that once overflowed with life—where tears of joy and sorrow were shed and where countless destinies were changed for eternity.

I can’t help but think that deteriorating building aptly reflects the brand of Christianity many Americans of my generation (the Millennials, roughly ages 15 to 35) subscribe to today. We want the church to change the world, but we are separating from our biblical foundation.

A recent YouTube video that went viral illustrates my point. Titled “I’m Christian, But I’m Not . . . ,” it features young adults making statements like “I’m Christian, but I’m not ignorant.” “I’m Christian, but I’m not conservative.” “I’m Christian, but I’m not judgmental.” “I am gay,” and “I think everybody’s in a different part of life and on their own path to wherever they’re trying to go.”

Although the video does not claim to represent all Millennial Christians, it certainly reveals where we are headed. We have become a generation that scoffs at convictions and celebrates conformity. We have made spiritual life less about rejoicing in and sharing truth and more about how we feel. We—the generation of self-expression and independent thinking—are adapting to the cultural climate of political correctness and forced neutrality instead of being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2).

So, in the words of the late Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer, “How should we then live?”

The book of Hebrews encourages us to remember we are surrounded by a great “cloud of witnesses” whose faithfulness and refusal to conform point us to “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:1–2). These witnesses should encourage us to stay faithful.

We need to emulate people like Amy Carmichael, an Irishwoman born in 1867, who, in her 20s, dedicated herself to full-time Christian service. She eventually moved to India, where she spent the rest of her life rescuing young women and children from pagan-temple prostitution, leading many of them to faith in Christ.

We need to follow the example of D. L. Moody, who, at 18, received Christ as his Savior while working at his uncle’s shoe store in Boston and became one of the greatest evangelists in history. He had neither a degree nor a title before his name, but he walked humbly with his God and took the gospel to an estimated 100 million people during his lifetime.

We need to become inspired by the life of the great 18th-century British statesman William Wilberforce, who was elected to Parliament at 21; became a believer in Jesus Christ in his mid-20s; and led a successful, lifelong fight to abolish slavery and promote godly living in the British Empire.

These people were not superhuman or endowed with exceptional gifts. They were ordinary believers who submitted themselves to the Lord and based their convictions and actions on the truths of Scripture. Consequently, they brought glory to God and helped change countless lives forever.

As our generation of evangelicals moves to the forefront of leadership, we must remember the little brick churches of the past. May we not scoff at their “antiquated” convictions but, rather, hear the echoes of truth once preached within their walls; look to those in the past as examples of faithfulness; engage the culture with truth; and stand firm for the tenets of God’s Word.

ENDNOTES

1 BuzzFeedYellow, “I’m Christian, But I’m Not . . . ,” Youtube.com, September 7, 2015 <youtube.com/watch?v=5bWHSpmXEJs>.

Confronting Church Conflict

3 John 5–14

In the first century, itinerant Bible teachers traveled from church to church teaching God’s Word. Many were poor, receiving little financial compensation for their service. Churches responded in one of three ways.

Some welcomed all teachers. Others made sure a teacher was doctrinally sound before welcoming him. Still others rejected all teachers.

These Bible teachers stayed in homes. Showing hospitality to such men not only is commanded in Scripture (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:8; Heb. 13:2) but commended, as well (Heb. 6:10).

Third John focuses on three men, two of whom—Gaius and Diotrephes—were church leaders. Gaius was a committed servant, full of love and truth, and given to hospitality and service. Diotrephes, however, barred outsiders and refused to receive traveling teachers.

He rejected the apostle John’s letters, refused to receive John’s emissaries, spread false accusations about him, and threatened to expel from the church anyone who sided with John or received those sent by him.

John’s purpose in penning this letter was to commend Gaius and condemn Diotrephes for his pride, selfishness, and brutal exercise of authority within the local church.

Commendation of Gaius

“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers” (3 Jn. 5).

This is the third time in five verses Gaius is called “beloved.” The word speaks of John’s deep affection for Gaius and reflects the respect others in the church felt toward him.

The word do is in the present tense, indicating Gaius’s hospitality was ongoing, extended continually to “brethren” and “strangers” whom John sent. Gaius exerted much effort in caring for these teachers, as indicated by the Greek words.

Upon their return, his guests gave glowing reports of Gaius’s ministry to them, “who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well” (v. 6). His ministry was motivated by love for Christ and a desire to meet the needs of his Christian brothers.

The reports were not given to John privately but to the entire church, probably in Ephesus where the apostle lived. Gaius’s ongoing hospitality was well known in churches throughout the area.

Gaius sent the Bible teachers on their journey in “a manner worthy of God” (in a godly sort). That is, he treated them as God would have treated them, opening both his heart and home, making his ministry “worthy of God” and His blessing.

John gave Gaius three reasons to support traveling teachers:

1. Because of the purpose of their ministry. “They went forth for His name’s [literally, “the Name”] sake” (v. 7). They wanted to glorify Christ.
2. Because of their personal needs. “They . . . [took] nothing from the Gentiles” (v. 7). They rejected financial support from the pagans to whom they ministered so that they would not be accused of profiting from their preaching, as many cultic religionists did. The gospel was provided freely for all to hear and receive.
3. Because it was good to partner with them in the ministry. “We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth” (v. 8). Since these men took no support from the pagan world, it was the church’s responsibility to help shoulder their expenses as they presented “the truth,” thereby making the church people “fellow workers” in the gospel.

Condemnation of Diotrephes

John told Gaius of Diotrephes’ opposition: “I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us” (v. 9).

It is not known whether Diotrephes was a bishop, elder, powerful deacon, or merely a church member who usurped authority.

The apostle said he wrote to the church, but Diotrephes refused to receive his letter or an emissary whom the apostle later sent to him (v. 9). Diotrephes refused to acknowledge John’s apostolic authority.

The word us means Diotrephes refused to accept anyone John sent. His reason is not stated. Perhaps Diotrephes did not want anyone challenging his authority.

John never accused Diotrephes of heresy but of loving “the preeminence” (v. 9). The word preeminence means “fond of being first.”
It describes Diotrephes’ opposition as ambitious, aggressive, assertive, and antagonistic; he challenged the apostle’s authority without accountability to anyone, and his self-seeking spirit revealed he was unworthy of church leadership.

Teacher A. T. Robertson illustrated this point. In his book Word Pictures in the New Testament, he said, “Some forty years ago I wrote an article on Diotrephes for a denominational paper. The editor told me that twenty-five deacons stopped the paper to show their resentment against being personally attacked.” In other words, many ungodly men like Diotrephes hold positions of authority within local churches.

The apostle told Gaius he would deal with Diotrephes personally: “Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does” (v. 10). The word if means he was unsure about the exact time of his trip. Upon his arrival, he would confront Diotrephes publicly because Diotrephes’ actions and accusations were public.

John revealed Diotrephes’ evil deeds:
(1) “Prating against us with malicious words” (v. 10). Diotrephes babbled like a fool, talking nonsense against John. His words were filled with intent to injure.

(2) “Not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren” (v. 10). Not satisfied with verbal accusations alone, Diotrephes refused to receive anyone from John’s church.

(3) “Forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church” (v. 10). If someone tried to circumvent Diotrephes, Diotrephes had that individual expelled from the church, thus displaying outright hostility against John.

Aruptly, John addressed Gaius with loving counsel concerning those who practice evil. “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God” (v. 11).

Although Gaius was not contemplating behaving like Diotrephes, John nevertheless issued the warning not only for Gaius, but for all who would read this letter. Gaius and others were to imitate godly leaders who were scriptural, spiritual, and scrupulous.

Someone who habitually practices evil “has not seen God” and lacks insight into His character (v. 11). Such a person’s speech and actions are contemptible, produced by a wicked heart.

Commitment of Demetrius
The bearer of this letter was Demetrius, whose Christian character John highly commended: “Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself” (v. 12). He was the opposite of Diotrephes.

There is no scriptural evidence that Demetrius was the silversmith who spurred the riots against Paul’s ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:23–41). All we know about him is the little that John revealed. His testimony for Christ was known and accepted by all believers in Ephesus.

Furthermore, his testimony was grounded in “the truth itself,” meaning the entire body of truth in the Lord and His gospel (Jn. 14:6); and the truth was personified in Demetrius’s character. Demetrius’s life reflected this truth and substantiated John’s commendation of him.

John confirmed his testimony: “And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true” (3 Jn. 12). The Ephesian church approved of Demetrius and bore witness to Gaius on his commitment. John’s recommendation gave Gaius assurance that John was sending Demetrius and expected Gaius to extend hospitality to him.

Conclusion of John
John concluded his letter by writing, “I had many things to write, but I do not wish to write to you with pen and ink; but I hope to see you shortly, and we shall speak face to face. Peace to you. Our friends greet you. Greet the friends by name” (vv. 13–14).

This letter ends much like 2 John, but there are differences. (See “Standing for the Truth” in the September/October 2015 issue.) Here John commented on the briefness of his letter, stated he planned a future visit, and asked Gaius to greet his friends as they greeted him.

John had a host of subjects he wanted to discuss with Gaius in person, “face to face [mouth to mouth].” Instead of closing with a farewell or note of grace, John used a Jewish conclusion: “Peace to you.” Jesus often used something similar (cf. Jn. 14:27; 20:19, 21, 26). John knew Gaius’s confrontation with Diotrephes might be unsettling, and he gave Gaius his blessing.

John established how church leaders should support and receive missionaries when they come to a local church for ministry. How well are we following his instructions today?

Editor’s Note: This concludes the series on John’s epistles, which began in the March/April 2013 issue with the First Epistle of John. In the next issue, David will begin a series on 1 Thessalonians.

by David M. Levy, the director of International Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel

John established how church leaders should support and receive missionaries when they come to a local church for ministry.
Christians should live according to God’s universal guidelines of conduct through the power of the Holy Spirit. Part one examined the first guideline. Here are three more.

Genuine Christians often differ concerning what is morally right or wrong. They also differ on how to fit into their culture.

Should Christians conform to or deviate from their cultures? The apostle Paul said, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

A Christian’s attitude toward society should be one of nonconformity. Wrote theologian John Murray,

In connection with the concrete and practical details of life there is no more searching question than that of the pattern of thought and action which we follow. To what standards do we conform? We know how disconcerting it is to break with the patterns of behavior that are common in the social environment in which we live... But there are patterns that must be adhered to.

This is the force of “be not fashioned according to this world.”

God demands nonconformity in areas where contemporary culture conflicts with His absolutes, but He does not demand it in other areas of life. The nonconformity God demands differs from the nonconformity stressed by our culture. Today’s society discourages one generation from conforming to the lifestyle of another generation, while unconsciously encouraging conformity to one’s own peer group.

But God commands Christians not to conform to any generation or group—even one’s own—if that group’s lifestyle conflicts with God’s moral absolutes. Refusing to conform to the standards of one’s peers requires courage. Christians must frequently stand alone against the practices of their closest friends and reprove the unbiblical ethics of their culture (Eph. 5:1–11).

They must choose either to reeducate their consciences to conform to God’s righteous absolutes or revolt against His standards and follow the culture, which is part of Satan’s world system. Because some Christians do the latter, the apostle John wrote,

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever (1 Jn. 2:15–17).

James likewise wrote, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4).

GUIDELINE NUMBER 2: Christians Have Liberty to Practice Whatever God’s Absolutes Do Not Forbid.

When properly applied, God’s moral absolutes relate to many areas of daily living. However, what must Christians do concerning practices unrelated to God’s moral absolutes?

According to God’s Word, believers may act according to their consciences (Gal. 2:4; 5:1). They should not judge other believers for doing things God’s absolutes do not forbid.

On the other hand, Christians who feel free to do things not forbidden in Scripture should not disdain others who abstain from those things (Rom. 14:1–12). Thus the second guideline for Christian conduct is that Christians have the liberty to practice or not to practice anything God’s moral absolutes do not prohibit.

Christian liberty is a gift from God for which Christians should be grateful. But because humanity innately tends to abuse and pervert all God’s gifts, Christians sometimes abuse this gift.

For example, Christians may falsely conclude they have the liberty to do the following:

(1) Allow their sinful dispositions to control them (Gal. 5:13).
Stifler wrote, “A man must be directed not by what he thinks, but by the thought his act will provoke in the mind of another.”

GUIDELINE NUMBER 3: Do Not Violate Your Conscience.
According to Romans 14:22–23, Christians must let their consciences dictate whether to practice something God’s absolutes do not forbid. In other words, if Scripture does not mention the practice, then your conscience should guide you. If you doubt the morality of something, abstain from it. Theologian James Stifler explained: “Conscience must have the benefit of every doubt, for in all matters in which the Bible is silent it has God’s authority. It may not usurp the function of his revealed will, but there are many things arising in daily life on which God’s mind has not been made known except in a general way. Here conscience must be heeded, or it utters its condemnation and the man passes under the dark cloud of God’s displeasure.”

Christians must never practice what their consciences condemn. Even if other Christians urge you, claiming the practice is right in God’s sight, you must never violate your own conscience. Theologian Charles Erdman said, “One is troubled by scruples, and doubts whether it is right for him to do what he sees other Christians doing, then weakly to comply with such others is to incur condemnation; for his act does not result from faith in Christ and from an intelligent knowledge of the freedom which true faith secures; he is doing what he thinks may be morally wrong; and anything which we do not believe to be morally right is sinful.”

However, many people live in this world, and all have unique concepts of right and wrong. Believers who feel free to do certain things should not do them if they offend someone else’s conscience (Rom. 14:13—15:3; 1 Cor. 8—10).

Stifler wrote, “A man must be directed not by what he thinks, but by the thought his act will provoke in the mind of another.” He continued, “To eat meat and to drink wine may please the palate, but the justified man doesn’t live to please himself, but to please his neighbor.”

Similarly, Erdman said that a Christian, even when doing things that are morally right, “must consider how his action in so doing will affect others, and must regulate his own liberty by regard for their good.”

Most Christians easily accept the first three guidelines, but the fourth prompts some to ask why they must curb their liberty for the sake of others (1 Cor. 10:29–30). Scripture provides clear reasons. Part three of this series will discuss why Christians ought to refrain from exercising their Christian liberty if doing so would offend weaker brothers and sisters in Christ.

ENDNOTES
3 F. F. Bruce, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 243.
6 Stifler, 243.
7 Ibid., 247.
8 Erdman, 79.
German, Israeli armies train

The German and Israeli armies recently collaborated to conduct joint exercises in urban warfare as part of the largest-ever cooperative training held between the two nations.

More than 100 German soldiers went to Israel for several weeks to train at the Tze’elim army base, bringing with them five heavy military vehicles. “We’ve had experience in that over the past 10 years—in Afghanistan and Kosovo. The Israeli army also has experience,” said German Brig. Gen. Ernst-Peter Horn, who accompanied the soldiers to Israel, according to Haaretz. The exercises were held despite the ongoing violence in Israel.

Training brought camaraderie between the two armies, as Israelis invited German soldiers to Friday night Shabbat dinners with their families. One German soldier commented, “I didn’t know what to expect, but it wasn’t different from my family back home.”

Israeli consulate opens in Munich

A new Israeli consulate opened in Munich, Germany, in close proximity to Adolf Hitler’s former office and the former headquarters of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party.

Israelis will now be able to apply for visas and renew their passports at the new consulate building, which was rented out to the State of Israel. “There is no place for xenophobia or anti-Semitism in this country,” Bavarian State Minister Horst Seehofer said at the opening ceremony, the German TV news channel Bayerischer Rundfunk reported.

Kuwait Airways rejects Israelis

The Arab airline Kuwait Airways has been discriminating against Israeli passengers. Recently the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has sought legal action to address the airline’s denial of a ticket to Israeli citizen Eldad Gatt from New York City’s John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) to London Heathrow Airport (LHR).

Kuwait Airways defended its position by arguing that Kuwaiti law prohibits the carrier from selling tickets to Israeli passport holders. DOT replied, “This is not a proper justification for the denial of transportation. . . . We know of no authority that would allow an airline to discriminate based simply on penalties that might be imposed under the foreign law that . . . mandated the discriminatory code.”

If Kuwait Airways continues its discriminatory policy, DOT will pursue further administrative and/or judicial action.

U.S. urges Europe to protect Jews

The U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed a resolution urging European nations to do more to protect Jewish communities amid a surge in anti-Semitism.

Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), who spearheaded the resolution, said, “The number of violent anti-Semitic attacks has increased from 100 to 400 percent in some European countries since 2013.”

House Resolution 354 urges the U.S. government to work with its European counterparts to “formally recognize and partner with Jewish community groups to strengthen crisis prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and responses related to anti-Semitic attacks.” Several leading Jewish organizations supported the resolution.

Archaeologists discover fortress

Archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) believe they have uncovered the location of the Acra fortress from the Maccabean Revolt against the Greeks in Jerusalem’s City of David.

The fortress, built by Seleucid Greek Emperor Antiochus Epiphanes, played a significant role in the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucids and was destroyed by Simon Maccabeus in 141 BC. Roman-Jewish historian Josephus wrote of its location, but archaeologists have been unable to find it for more than a century.

According to the excavation directors, this discovery will enable them “for the first time to reconstruct the layout of the settlement in the city, on the eve of the Maccabean uprising in 167 BC.”

Sound Ventures invest in Moovit

Moovit, an Israeli-based public transit application serving more than 700 cities worldwide, recently secured a new investment from Sound Ventures, a firm cofounded by U.S. celebrity Ashton Kutcher. Moovit offers real-time public transit information and GPS navigation for buses, trolleybuses, trams, trains, and ferries.

Moovit’s mission is to make transportation more ecofriendly by encouraging people to use public transportation. Moovit plans to use its new funds to accelerate its growth in India and China.

Israeli cofounder Nir Erez stated, “We’re extremely proud to have Sound Ventures behind us. . . . Investments like these help us to bring more public transit options to markets in need.”

Obama says no

The Obama administration will not accept Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s proposal for American recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, a senior White House official told Haaretz.

“I think that it was clear the U.S. is not going to change its position about the future of the Golan. We always said it has to be negotiated in line with [U.N. Security Council resolutions] 242 and 338. This has been and remains our position and it will not change,” a U.S. official stated.
UNESCO Rewrites History

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has adopted a resolution declaring the Jewish Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron a Muslim site.

It is the Cave of Machpelah that Abraham purchased from Ephron the Hittite for 400 shekels of silver (Gen. 23) and where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are buried. UNESCO also contends Rachel’s Tomb, where Jacob’s wife Rachel is buried outside Jerusalem, is also Muslim. Muslims didn’t claim that site until the 1990s.

“The Cave of the Patriarchs,” reported The Jerusalem Post, “is the most ancient Jewish shrine in the world and the second holiest site of pilgrimage in Judaism.”

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, supervisor of the Western Wall and holy places, condemned UNESCO. “Centuries of documented history,” he wrote, “prove not only the deep and strong connection between the Jewish nation and this tomb, . . . but also that there has never been a Muslim claim to the site. I find it hard to understand how a body like UNESCO, whose stated purpose is preservation of cultural and heritage values of the nations of the world, takes such a clear stand behind such an imaginary claim.”

The resolution initially sought to redefine the Western Wall as “the Buraq Plaza” and “an integral part of al-Aqsa Mosque/ al-Haram al-Sharif,” but the clause was withdrawn after objections by the United States and others, the Post reported.

No matter how small it may be, a remnant exists on the basis of God’s infinite mercy.

Today the remnant consists of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who have recognized their Messiah and trusted in His substitutionary sacrifice as the final and only sacrifice God will accept for sin—just as the Hebrew Scriptures prophesy. As long as there is a remnant, God will not reject Israel (vv. 23, 26; cf. Zech. 12:10).

Reason #3: The Future

Israel’s best days are still ahead. From the moment God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, the nation’s history has been building toward a magnificent climax. What God promised to and desired from Israel will finally become a reality in the Messianic Kingdom. Scripture is clear that a remnant of Israel will continue to exist through the remainder of this present age and through the seven years of tribulation, the Messianic Kingdom, and on into eternity.

God explicitly guarantees that, on a future day, Israel will “return to Me with their whole heart” (Jer. 24:7). Zechariah foresaw that time and prophesied, “In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1).

Isaiah also foresaw the beautiful scenario when the Messiah will lead the remnant of Israel into the city when He establishes His Kingdom in Jerusalem.

As a result, “Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation” (Isa. 45:17; cf. Rom. 11:26). With prophecy placing Israel’s greatest days ahead, God has no intention of ever rejecting Israel.

As I explained to my friend in the coffee shop, God’s covenants with Israel, Israel’s faithful remnant, and Israel’s glorious future all declare one inescapable truth: God has not rejected Israel, and He never will.

Charles E. McCracken is a former pastor and current Bible teacher, conference speaker, and Israel advocate.
A few years ago, I learned that a well-known rabbi was going to speak in one of Jerusalem’s big synagogues on the topic of life after death. Naturally, I was curious about his thoughts on the subject, so I decided to attend the meeting.

During the question-and-answer session, the rabbi and I got into a heated discussion because I told him, in front of several hundred people, that a person can have eternal life only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, he said to me, “I never want to see you at one of my meetings again!”

But I do not give up easily, and I replied, “When you come to speak here again, you will see my shadow.”

Recently, this rabbi returned to speak in the area, and I kept my word. What’s more, I sat on the front bench. He spoke for more than an hour before he realized I was there; but when he spotted me, he became tongue-tied and confused. The people in the audience were surprised at the change in his demeanor. He then ended his speech abruptly, without bringing his remarks to a proper conclusion.

Many people requested a question-and-answer session. But the rabbi said, “I am in a hurry. I will answer only one or two brief questions.”

I was the first person to stand up. I asked him, “How can you be so sure you will have life after death when you have ignored God’s commands?” The people were surprised to hear such a question asked of a rabbi, and they were interested to hear how he would reply.

The rabbi looked intently at me and asked, “Do you remember what I told you a few years ago?”

Some of the people in the audience asked, “What is going on here?” Then
the rabbi began to accuse me of idolatry.
I held up my Bible for everyone to see and said, “Here is the Holy Bible, and I worship the Lord according to it. Is this, as the rabbi says, idolatry?” I then asked the rabbi to show the audience the book he was using. Naturally, it was a commentary, not the Bible. I then asked the people, “Which book is more kosher? And who is practicing idolatry?”
I thank the Lord I was not afraid, even though I was standing in the lions’ den. As it is written, “When they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Lk. 12:11–12). These words help me to face whatever comes my way.
Slowly, I began to explain my position, and I could sense that the people were interested to hear more. I told them, “I believe, according to the Law, that we are the Chosen People of God. It is our duty to go to people and preach the gospel about the Lord. We are not to teach from commentaries but, rather, what is written in God’s Holy Word. You can see I have no other books with me. This great rabbi has come with fictitious stories. I encourage you all to go home and read the Bible. Read all the commands of God. Then you will know how to worship Him and how to obtain true eternal life.”
Then someone asked, “Who is your God?”
I replied, “He is not my God. He is our God. He is one God for all the world, and He is the Savior, Yeshua Hamashiach [Hebrew for “Jesus the Messiah”]. You can read about Him in the Bible.”
A few people asked to examine my Bible to see if it was the complete Hebrew Scriptures. I let them look at it as long as they wished. Then I asked, “What do you think? Have I come to you with fictitious stories or with facts about the Lord our God?”
By then the rabbi had had enough, and he left. I, however, stayed and had some good conversations about the Lord. I pray what they heard that night—not from the rabbi but from the Holy Word of God—will penetrate their minds and hearts and lead them to a true knowledge of the living Savior.
—The Friends of Israel Archives, 1996

Zvi Kalisher (1928–2014) was known for his unswerving faithfulness to the Lord and his bold witness in Jerusalem. He was with The Friends of Israel for more than 55 years.
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