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FROM THE EDITOR

King Solomon wrote, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven" (Eccl. 3:1). This is a season of change at Israel My Glory.

With the retirement last year of Elwood McQuaid and Rennie Showers, we said goodbye to two men whom God used to shape this magazine and communicate biblical truth to millions of people around the world through The Friends of Israel for almost 30 years.

We also say goodbye to Craig Parshall, an extremely busy attorney and New York Times bestselling author whose column, "A More Perfect Union," has kept us abreast of how government decisions affect Bible-believing Christians in America. To watch a brief and encouraging clip of Craig discussing his newest novel, The Occupied, go to craigparshallauthor.com. You won’t be disappointed. I’ve read many of Craig’s books and recommend them highly.

So what does God have in store for us in this new season? I believe He has many good things on the horizon. First, we’ve added a new columnist, someone you’re all familiar with: Randall Price. Dr. Price has championed this ministry since he and Elwood became friends in the 1970s, and we are privileged that he is making time for us in his busy schedule. The founder and president of World of the Bible Ministries (worldofthebible.com), Randall is a renowned archaeologist, university professor, author of 30 books, and producer of five films. He also has taken more than 100 trips to Israel. His column, “Unearthing Truth With Randall Price,” is sure to become a blessing to you.

We’ve also added Clarence Johnson to our regular roster, with a feature titled “Faith for Living.” Clarence is the director of The Friends of Israel Institute of Jewish Studies (IJS) and is planning to make study helps for his articles available to you free of charge on the IJS website. Go to foi.org, scroll to the bottom, and click on “Institute of Jewish Studies.”

You’re also in for a special treat. This year marks the 75th anniversary of Israel My Glory, and we plan to run vintage articles by Victor Buksbazen, the first editor of the magazine and first executive director of The Friends of Israel. You’ll read his beautiful piece on Jacob in this issue, which focuses on the life journey of the patriarch whom God renamed Israel.

Dr. Buksbazen’s articles will transport you to another era and, hopefully, encourage you to give thanks for all the Lord has done through Israel My Glory and the ministry of The Friends of Israel. May the Lord bless you in this season of life and strengthen you to serve Him in 2017.

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
Sitting around a table in Warsaw, Poland, last summer, I listened as our Friends of Israel staff shared how God worked in their lives to bring them to faith in Christ and eventually into Jewish ministry.

We have five active workers in Poland. They also reach out to Eastern Europe, particularly Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. I find it amazing that Poland, where 3 million Jewish people were killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust of World War II, has the largest number of Friends of Israel workers outside the United States.

Our ministry has a rich Polish legacy. Victor Buksbazen, our first executive director, was from Warsaw. He immigrated to London, England, before the war, and eventually moved to the United States, where he served with us.

As I listened to our workers’ testimonies of God’s grace, one name came up repeatedly: Halina. Halina Ostik was like a golden thread that God purposefully wove into each of their lives. Without her, none of these servants of the Lord would have been at the table. She had a part in bringing each one to The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

Halina is our sixth staff member in Poland. But at age 97, she is no longer able to serve actively, as she did for so many years. Yet the others were there because she had poured her life into theirs.

Some she taught how to minister to people. Others she encouraged and prayed for, allowing time for the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. One of our staff is a second-generation worker who is following in the footsteps of his father, who served with us until his unexpected death at age 40. Without Halina, it is likely there would be no Friends of Israel staff in Poland.

If you knew Halina’s story, you would think her unlikely to have been used by the Lord to raise up such a significant group. She was 20 when World War II reached Poland, and she soon found herself helping the Polish Resistance by providing first aid to those who fought against Germany. Raised by her parents with a love and appreciation for the Jewish people, she knew it was wrong to oppress them.

After the war ended, Halina and her husband fled to Argentina to avoid the Communists who had taken over Poland and were eliminating anyone connected with the Resistance. Victor Buksbazen had met Halina when they were both children, and he never lost touch with her. It was Victor who invited her to join The Friends of Israel after she lost her husband to cancer at a young age. God placed on her heart a burden to minister to Jewish people; and with Victor’s encouragement, she returned to Poland.

Even though she was living under Communism, she understood the importance of teaching others to minister. She began working with young people, inviting them to go with her on the streets to witness. She taught them the importance of prayer and encouraged them to obtain a good education in Bible. Each of our workers attended our one-year Institute of Jewish Studies.

We are indebted to our former executive director, Eiwood McQuaid, who wrote Halina’s biography, Halina: Faith in the Fire, several years ago. It is a remarkable account of God’s grace at work in the life of a woman who was determined to serve the Lord in the face of great adversity. If you haven’t read it, I highly recommend you purchase it. You can buy it from The Friends of Israel through our online store at foi.org or by calling 800-345-8461.

Hearing Halina’s name mentioned so many times that day reminded me how much God can use us to teach others to serve Him when we are faithful.

*Halina in 1990.*

Raised by her parents with a love and appreciation for the Jewish people, she knew it was wrong to oppress them.
THE END OF AN ERA

U.S. President James Madison served alongside Presidents George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson and signed the Declaration of Independence. He was known as the “Father of the Constitution,” and his death in 1836 marked the end of a unique generation of men who built the foundations of the United States of America, defended its values, and dreamed of a bright future for the republic.

As the last living Founding Father, Madison embodied the heart, spirit, and vision of America in its purest form. He and the other founders risked everything, even their lives, for the freedom so often taken for granted today.

Israel recently experienced its own Madison moment. History will remember September 28, 2016, as the day the Jewish state lost its last Founding Father. His death means the end of an era of unique Israeli men and women who built, defended, and dreamed into existence the State of Israel.

Born in Belarus, Shimon Peres immigrated to British-controlled Palestine from Poland in 1934. Even at a young age, he embodied the values of Zionism, fully aware of how important it was for the Jewish people to have a homeland of their own in their God-given Promised Land. His passion for a future Jewish state was so evident that David Ben-Gurion, who became Israel’s first prime minister, sought to make Peres his protégé.

Peres served Israel during the 1948 War of Independence both diplomatically and militarily. As director general, he oversaw the first of Israel’s arms deals with America under President John F. Kennedy’s administration and was influential in creating Israel’s nuclear weapons program.

He signed the strategic peace pact with Jordan in 1994 and won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work as Israel’s foreign minister during the Oslo peace accords. He also served as Israel’s prime minister and stood in as interim prime minister after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin—one of Israel’s darkest moments. Peres’s final position in the Israeli government was as its ninth president.

One of the things that made Peres great was his ability to see past the worst in Israel’s enemies and see the best in Israel’s people—even when they were under intense pressure. Peres tapped into his nation’s potential, calling on Israelis to rise above their circumstances in the Middle East and to invest their energy in innovation and peace.

He was an optimistic leader and dreamer who saw peace even in the midst of turmoil. In 1996 The Peres Center for Peace opened its doors with the focus on furthering Peres’s vision of peace in the Middle East through economic cooperation and development. He believed people-to-people interaction, intertwined with purpose, tore down the walls of animosity.

Peres’s passing, at 93 years of age, marks a monumental transition in Israel’s history—a shift from those who struggled to birth the Jewish state to a generation of Israelis who have no direct connection to Israel’s founding. For several years Shimon Peres was the link between then and now for the Israeli people. Although Israelis won’t have Peres’s physical presence with them any longer, they will have his lasting legacy of advocating for a Zionism that sees beyond the borders of Israel.

Peres leaves behind a type of optimistic Zionism that looks toward tomorrow without being chained by the events of yesterday. We mourn the loss of such a titan in Israel’s history but are confident that the people of Israel embody many of his greatest strengths. He sincerely wanted peace. “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: ‘May they prosper who love you’” (Ps. 122:6).

by Chris Katulka
UNESCO’S PROPAGANDA WAR ON ISRAEL

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has approved a resolution that denies a Jewish connection to Jerusalem. Advanced by the Palestinian Authority (PA), with the help of Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, and Sudan, the resolution passed by a vote of 24 to 6, with 26 abstentions.

Although it concedes that Jerusalem is holy to three monotheistic faiths, the section dealing with the Temple Mount specifically asserts the site is sacred exclusively to Muslims. It refers to it only by its Muslim names (Haram al-Sharif and al-Aqsa Mosque) and does not use the Hebrew term Har HaBayit or its English equivalent, the Temple Mount.

The UNESCO resolution is part of an ongoing propaganda war to delegitimize the State of Israel by rewriting history in order to downplay Jewish links to Jerusalem. In a concerted effort to promote the narrative that the Temple Mount and adjoining Western Wall are Muslim, the PA has worked relentlessly to change the language UNESCO uses to refer to the sites.

The UN organization is now firmly planted in the Amb camp. In April 2016, UNESCO approved a resolution that refers to the Temple Mount by its Muslim names and to the Western Wall as al-Buraq Plaza, a term created by the Arabs in the 1920s. In October 2015, UNESCO designated the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron and Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem (the second and third holiest sites in Judaism, respectively) as Muslim holy sites.

That same month, Mahmoud al-Habbash, a senior PA official, said on PA television, “The al-Aqsa Mosque, which includes its plaza, all the gates, all the walls, all the facilities with and without a roof, and all the walls, including the al-Buraq Wall (i.e., the Western Wall) which is an Islamic wall, an Islamic Waqf—a property of the Muslims—no one can deprive them of this ownership. . . . No one except the Palestinians and Muslims is entitled to even a millimeter of it, not even a single grain of sand. . . . This property belongs to me and all Muslims.”

In September 2015, PA President Mahmoud Abbas declared, “Al-Aqsa is ours and so is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. They [the Jews] have no right to desecrate them with their filthy feet.”

The Temple Mount—identified in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as Mount Moriah, the site where King Solomon built the first Temple—is the holiest site in Judaism. The first Jewish Temple was dedicated around 950 BC, more than 1,500 years before the emergence of Islam.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has condemned the UNESCO resolution: “Today UNESCO adopted its second decision this year denying the Jewish people’s connection to the Temple Mount, our holiest site for more than 3,000 years. To say that Israel has no connection to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall is like saying that China has no connection to the Great Wall of China or that Egypt has no connection to the pyramids.”

Netanyahu encouraged UNESCO members to visit the Arch of Titus in Rome. “On it one can see what the Romans brought back to Rome after they destroyed and looted the second Temple on the Temple Mount 2,000 years ago.” He said, “There, engraved on the Arch of Titus, is the seven-branched menorah that is the symbol of the Jewish people, and I remind you, is also the symbol of the Jewish state today. Soon, UNESCO will say that the Emperor Titus engaged in Zionist propaganda.”

by Soeren Kern, a senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, a nonpartisan foreign-policy think tank based in New York City
RUSSIA—Christians in Russia now must choose between obeying the law and obeying God because of a new set of Stalinesque “anti-terrorism” laws passed recently that severely restrict evangelism and set the stage for a mass persecution of Russian believers in Christ.

The amendments—considered the country’s most repressive since the collapse of the Soviet Union—prohibit all missionary activity, even in private homes and online. Sergei Ryakhovsky, leader of Protestant Churches of Russia, called the law “the most draconian anti-religion bill to be proposed in Russia since Nikita Khrushchev promised to eliminate Christianity in the Soviet Union.”

ChristianityToday.com reported that a group of lawyers has begun preparing an appeal to Russia’s Constitutional Court, claiming the new law contradicts religious rights guaranteed in the guidelines of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, of which Russia is a participating country.

The Slavic Center for Law and Justice (SCLJ), a nonprofit organization that seeks to protect religious rights in Russia, also has begun reviewing the law in hopes of ensuring the religious liberties of Christians and foreign missionaries there, the Christian Post reported.

The set of amendments, called the “Yarovaya package,” forbids parents to teach their children about the Lord in their homes, allows government surveillance of all online activity, prohibits believers from inviting friends to church, and outlaws all house churches. Individual violators may be fined up to $780, organizations up to $15,000, and foreign violators deported.

The law appears to target Russian Protestant minorities, defining missionary activity as “religious practices to spread a faith beyond its members,” according to ChristianityToday.com. Such a definition excludes the Russian Orthodox Church since it remains an integral aspect of Russian nationalism.

“The Russian Orthodox Church is part of a bulwark of Russian nationalism stirred up by Vladimir Putin. Everything that undermines that action is a real threat, whether that’s evangelical Protestant missionaries or anything else,” foreign affairs expert David Aikman told Christianity Today.

The new amendments set the stage for a mass persecution of Russian evangelical believers. In a letter to Putin, Ryakhovsky wrote, “[The law] creates the basis for mass persecution of believers for violating these provisions. Soviet history shows us how many people of different faiths have been persecuted for spreading the Word of God. This law brings us back to a shameful past.”

Since the legislation went into effect on July 20, many have been arrested for sharing their faith. Russian officials charged seven Christians within the first month alone, The Washington Post reported. One of the seven included a Baptist preacher from the United States who was accused of holding church services in his home and promoting the meetings on public bulletin boards, the Post said.

Mission Eurasia President Sergey Rakhuba encouraged Russian believers to continue sharing their faith despite the threat of government persecution: “Believers . . . need to make a very important choice: whether to obey God or these new Russian laws.” He told Christianity Today, “The Great Commission isn’t just for a time of freedom.”

Compiled from news reports
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Still Dreaming

By Steve Herzig

Few people today see the relevance of theology. But more things are wrought by theology than this world dreams of, including aspects of the current civil rights movement.

To some, it may have seemed like an odd pairing. But not to Natan Sharansky. As he sat with Martin Luther King III on a Sunday morning in Jerusalem, he felt like they were colleagues sharing the same goals. Being with King in Israel, said Sharansky, felt like coming “full circle.”

Sharansky would know. Today he is chairman of the Jewish Agency. But from 1977 to 1986 he was imprisoned in a draconian Soviet labor camp where he became an international symbol of resistance and the fight for freedom. King is the eldest son of legendary American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who led more than 200,000 people in the March on Washington in 1963. It was then Dr. King delivered his famous “I Have a Dream” speech that envisioned equality and freedom for everyone regardless of color or religion.

Sharansky and King met last spring when King presented three people with awards from the Drum Major Institute for their work on behalf of Israel’s Ethiopian Jewish immigrants. In 1961 King’s father and his Jewish advisor, Harry Wachtel, established the institute; and today King is president.

“Israel can be very proud,” Sharansky posted on his Facebook page, “that we are the only country in the world that took a hundred thousand people from Africa and brought them here not as slaves, not as foreign workers, not as refugees, but as full and equal citizens.”

That being the case, you would think the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement would support Israel, or at least its right to exist. But BLM’s theology differs vastly from that of Dr. Martin Luther King, and it is pulling the movement in a completely different direction.

The Way Things Were

Dr. King quoted Bible prophets like Amos and Isaiah: “We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream” (cf. Amos 5:24). He declared,

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together (cf. Isa. 40:4–5).

Dr. King also supported Israel. In 1967 he wrote a letter to Adolf Hied of the Jewish Labor Committee: “I could not have supported any resolution at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference calling for black separatism or calling for a condemnation of Israel and an unqualified endorsement of the policy of the Arab powers.” He added, “Israel’s right to exist as a state is incontestable.”

Less than a year later, weeks before James Earl Ray shot Dr. King to death on April 4, 1968, at a motel in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. King addressed the annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly:

Peace for Israel means security, and we must stand with all our might to protect her right to exist, its territorial integrity and the right to use whatever sea lanes it needs. Israel is one of the great outposts of democracy in the world, and a marvelous example of what can be done, how desert land can be transformed into an oasis of brotherhood and democracy. Peace for Israel means security, and that security must be a reality.

For many, Black Lives Matter reminds them of the days of the civil rights movement, which drew so many Jewish people to Washington in 1963.

“My father was rabbi of Beth Jacob in Baltimore at the time,” recalled Batya Miller, daughter of Rabbi Uri Miller who gave the opening prayer at the March on Washington. “For years before the march, he had been giving sermons on civil rights to his congregants who were not always sympathetic. . . . His participation in the march as president of the Synagogue Council of America was . . . the best way possible to personally contribute to the advancement of racial justice.”

Part of Jewish theology, in fact, involves pursuing social justice. Social justice motivated Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney (two Jews and an African American, all in their 20s) to go to Mississippi to register
estinian people."12 The platform unbiblically views Israel as an occupier of Arab land.

It is not surprising BLM’s theology sees no future for Israel in God’s prophetic program: It embraces Replacement Theology. Fortunately, a number of black, conservative church leaders reject that position and call the platform a “vitiolic attack against Israel laced with misinformation and anti-Semitism and an agenda that is not embraced by the broader African-American community.”13

THEOLOGY MATTERS

The book of judges shows what happens when defective theology reigns. After Joshua died and Israel had settled the land, most of the people rejected God’s Law and turned to idols. Thus a generation arose that “did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel” (Jud. 2:10). People turned away from God, and “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (21:25). They did their own thing, and it brought them trouble.

Theology at its core is the study of God and His relationship to the world. Some people consider it divisive and complex—something best forgotten. But theology determines a person’s worldview and behavior and affects societies and nations. It influenced the writing of America’s Declaration of Independence, and it influenced the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in his fight for justice against racism.

God gave us His Word so that we can know Him and understand His program for the world. That program includes Israel. As for Dr. King’s wonderful dream, theology demands we understand that it will only be realized when Jesus the Messiah finally returns to Earth.

THE ANTI-ISRAEL SHIFT

Unfortunately, BLM’s theology is not like Dr. King’s. BLM rejects the traditional black church and, according to its website, “is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement.”17

BLM also rejects the literal-historical-grammatical method of biblical interpretation, along with “any conservative theology about keeping the peace, praying copiously, or turning the other cheek.” BLM sees Jesus as a “revolutionary,” a “Palestinian Jew” who “lived under occupation and was ultimately lynched for speaking truth to power.”1810

Its members want to reimagine the gospel. Pastors are called “Movement Pastors,” and BLM says they are “radically transforming the idea of what the 21st-century black church should be.” Whereas the church of Dr. King’s day held Israel sacrosanct, BLM churches favor the Arabs.

This view of Israel was revealed in August when Movement for Black Lives (MBL), a coalition of more than 50 organizations associated with BLM, smeared Israel in its platform, calling it an “apartheid state” guilty of “genocide . . . against the Pal-

African Americans to vote. They were murdered there by the Ku Klux Klan in June 1964.

END NOTES

3. Ibid. 9.
5. “BlackJewish Relations: Martin Luther King and Israel,” Jewish Virtual Library <tinyurl.com/3p0k8smx>.
8. “11 Major Misconceptions About the Black Lives Matter Movement,” blacklivesmatter <tinyurl.com/3p0g48g>.
9. Ibid.
11. Ibid.

Steve Herzig
is the director of North American Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.
Editor’s Note: We praise God that He has kept this publication strong for more than seven decades. As we begin our 75th year, we thought you might like to read an excerpt from the lead article that ran in the first issue we ever published. The date was December 1942, and the world was at war, fighting the satanic evil of Adolf Hitler. We introduced our supporters to the new name of our ministry and to our new magazine, Israel My Glory.

THE BIRTH OF ISRAEL MY GLORY

The Friends of Israel Refugee Relief Committee, Inc., greets you with this first issue of a pamphlet or magazine which we are naming “Israel My Glory.” We have found that by printing a pamphlet issued quarterly we can give our membership and friends [important information] more economically than in any other way. Letters to individuals are more direct and more personal but more expensive also and your committee desires to reduce operating expenses. We ask our friends, to whom this quarterly comes, to accept it as a personal message from your committee.

We are naming the periodical “Israel My Glory” to call attention to the fact that God is not through with the Jewish People. He has promised that one day He will endow Israel with spiritual power and zeal and use this nation as powerful preachers when Christ comes to earth to establish His Kingdom. . . . In naming our quarterly “Israel My Glory,” we desire to remind ourselves of God’s irrevocable promises to Israel and of His benevolent purpose in choosing them to be the human Channel through which Christ should come and the Channel also of future blessing to the world.

CHANGING OUR NAME

For about four years we have operated as The Friends of Israel Refugee Relief Committee, Inc. We are changing the name of our organization to “The Friends of Israel Missionary and Relief Society, Inc.”

Emigration from any of the oppressed and conquered nations is now impossible except as the Nazis forcibly deport men from their native lands to work in Germany’s factories and mines. Immigration to the “lands of the free” has ceased and those who have succeeded in escaping from their oppressor are now known as “newcomers.” The word “refugee” is therefore practically outmoded and obsolete.

A CALL FOR HELP

As we face the future and attempt to visualize the conditions that will surely prevail after the war is over, we can be certain that the sorrows and needs of the Jewish Christians [Editor: Jewish people who have placed their faith in Jesus as their Savior] will be intensified and pitiable in the extreme. Hitler’s plan is to rid Europe of all Jews—and Jewish Christians are regarded as Jews in his sadistic program.

Professional and business Jews and Jewish Christians have been forcibly ejected from their homes and businesses and Nazi tradesmen have taken possession. These usurpers and robbers are living in stolen homes and are reaping the profits from business built up by the skill and careful work of others through the years. After the war is over, whoever conquer, it will be impossible for the Jew or Jewish Christian ever to recover his lost estate. The “Nordics” will hold on to all confiscated property and ill-gotten gains. The Jews and the Jewish Christian will still be without a country and without home or business.

If the condition of the persecuted children of Israel is tragic now, what will it be when Europe is further decimated and destroyed by war, famine and pestilence? . . . The Friends of Israel Missionary and Relief Society, Inc., today has contacts and friends over a large part of the earth and our substantial help has been sent to many. We rejoice in what God has permitted our Committee to do through the cooperation of our many friends, but we believe that God is calling us to a more intensive interest in the persecuted members of His Church. We therefore publish this quarterly, change the name of our organization and appeal for increased support.

In the article which the Reverend Paul L. Berman, our corresponding secretary, has written and which comprises the interesting contents of this issue of “Israel My Glory” there are statistics, extracts from letters, word pictures of persecutions and stories of Christian heroism which both horrify and thrill us. Again and again in letters received from persons assisted we have this or equivalent sentences: “I have no other help.” “You alone of all the people on earth can help me.”

Thus many true Christians of Jewish origin appeal to us. And your help has been the means of reviving courage, renewing faith, satisfying hunger and saving souls.

by Joseph Taylor Britan, secretary of The Friends of Israel Missionary and Relief Society, Inc.
A LITTLE MATH HELPS A LOT

BY LORNA SIMCOX

**ABRAHAM IS 100 WHEN ISAAC IS BORN. (21:5)**

**ABRAHAM DIES AT 175.**
Therefore, Isaac is 75 (175-100) when Abraham dies. (25:7)

**ISAAC IS 60 WHEN JACOB AND ESAU ARE BORN.**
Therefore, Jacob and Esau are 15 (75-60) when their grandfather Abraham dies. They probably knew him, and he probably told them firsthand what God had done in his life and how God had made an unconditional covenant with him, promising him land, seed, and blessing. If Esau received this information directly from Abraham, his eagerness to sell his birthright for food appears all the more contemptuous and displays a lack of faith in God. (25:26)

**ISAAC DIES AT 180.**
Therefore, Jacob and Esau are 120 (180-60) when Isaac dies. (35:28)

**JOSEPH IS 17 WHEN HIS BROTHERS SELL HIM INTO SLAVERY. (37:2)**

**JOSEPH IS 30 WHEN HE IS MADE RULER IN EGYPT.**
Therefore, Joseph is in Egypt 13 years (30-17), gaining administrative experience by managing Potiphar’s household and then overseeing the prison, before God elevates him to power as the manager of the affairs of a nation. (41:46)

**9 MORE YEARS PASS BEFORE JOSEPH REVEALS HIMSELF TO HIS BROTHERS.**
Therefore, Joseph is 39 (30+9) when he reveals himself. (45:1)

**JACOB IS 130 WHEN HE GOES TO LIVE IN EGYPT.**

**JOSEPH IS 39.**
Therefore, Jacob is 91 (130-39) when Joseph is born. Joseph is sold into slavery at age 17, making Jacob 108 (91+17) at the time. This means Isaac is still alive at age 168 (108+60). Isaac dies 12 years later (180-168), one year before Joseph becomes governor of Egypt. Isaac may have died thinking his grandson had been eaten by a wild animal. So in selling Joseph into slavery, Joseph’s brothers not only hurt and deceived their father, but they may have done so to their grandfather as well. (47:9)

**JACOB SERVES LABAN 20 YEARS.**
14 years for Laban’s daughters and 6 years for Laban’s flocks. Then he returns to the Promised Land. (31:41)

**JOSEPH IS BORN AFTER JACOB SERVES LABAN 14 YEARS AND AGREES TO SERVE ANOTHER SIX.**
Therefore, when Jacob finally leaves Laban, he is 97 (91+6). And since he serves Laban 20 years, Jacob is 77 (97-20) when he deceives his father into believing he is Esau and flees to Padan Aram. Also, Isaac is 137 (77+60) when he is deceived. Isaac thinks he is dying, but he lives another 43 years (180-137). (30:25)

**JOSEPH IS 6 (20–14) WHEN JACOB LEAVES LABAN.**
Jacob wants to leave Laban after Joseph’s birth but agrees to stay six more years. Therefore, Benjamin is at least six years younger than Joseph because he is not yet born when Jacob leaves Laban. Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob’s 12 sons, after Jacob leaves Padan Aram. So Benjamin is 33 (39-6) or younger when he goes to Egypt. (35:16–18)

**JACOB DIES AT 147.**
Therefore, Joseph is 56 (147-91) when his father dies. Since all of Joseph’s older brothers are born during the 14 years Jacob served for Laban’s daughters, none of his brothers are older than 70 (56+14) when Jacob dies. (47:28)
he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplant me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!” Esau said (Gen. 27:36).

Struggle defined Jacob and Esau’s relationship. It began in the womb (25:21–26), continued when Esau sold his birthright to Jacob (vv. 29–34), and culminated when Jacob stole Esau’s blessing (27:1—28:5). Though they were twins, the men were as different as night and day, and they became the fathers of very different nations.

In the womb they struggled so much their mother, Rebekah, asked, “If all is well, why am I like this?” (25:22). Perplexed, Rebekah prayed to God for an answer.

The Lord told her, “Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger” (v. 23).

To their credit, Isaac and Rebekah did what faith requires during difficult times: They sought the Lord—Rebekah during her difficult pregnancy and her husband on her behalf when she was barren (v. 21). In faith, they did as the psalmist had: “In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears” (Ps. 18:6).

The Lord heard their cries, and Rebekah gave birth to Jacob and Esau:

So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over, so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them (Gen. 25:24–26).

Esau means “hairy one.” An ancient Jewish commentary exaggerates Esau’s appearance, claiming he was born with hair on his head, a beard, and even hair between his teeth.
Though they were twins, the men were as different as night and day, and they became the fathers of very different nations.

Though they were twins, the men were as different as night and day, and they became the fathers of very different nations.

Rebekah overheard Isaac's conversation with Esau and devised a plot to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob instead. When Esau returned, Isaac realized he had been deceived and trembled uncontrollably. Esau mourned, raged, and swore to kill his brother after their father's death. So Jacob fled for his life and became an exile in a hostile world.

Many were at fault for this tumult of events: Isaac failed to obey God, Rebekah resorted to trickery, Esau was profane, and Jacob distrusted God to work on his behalf. Sin has consequences: Jacob would later be deceived by his father-in-law as he had deceived his father (see Genesis 29–31). Galatians 6:7 says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

After nearly 20 years apart, Jacob returned home and had to face his brother. The night before the meeting, he anxiously stood alone by the Jabbok River. An angelic man met him there, and Jacob wrestled with him until daybreak (Gen. 32:22–31). The man put Jacob's hip out of joint and renamed him Israel.

The name Israel in this context literally means "Prince with God." The "man" was the preincarnate Messiah Jesus, who is referred to in the Old Testament as "the Angel of the Lord" (cf. Ex. 3:1–6). Jacob named the place Peniel, which means "Face of God." "For I have seen God face to face," he said, "and my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:30). Jacob had received his father Isaac's blessing through deceit, but he obtained God the Father's blessing rightfully (v. 29).

Jacob learned the hard way to trust and depend on God. Some have said that when the Lord touched Jacob's hip, he became a broken man and a new man at the same moment. Over the course of his life, he developed a strong, worshipful faith in God. Hebrews 11:21 says, "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff."

The limp Jacob received from wrestling with the Lord probably caused him to lean on a staff to walk for the rest of his life—a great reminder for him (and for us) to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5–6).

**TROUBLE OVER THE BIRTHRIGHT**

As the boys grew, Esau became a skillful hunter, "a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:27–28).

Jacob and Esau were complete opposites. Isaac favored Esau because of his hunting skills; and Rebekah favored Jacob, who was the more passive and spiritual of the two. Some people even try to depict him as a "mama's boy."

One day, exhausted and starving, Esau returned from the field to find Jacob cooking red stew (lentils). Esau literally demanded, "Let me gulp it down!" Jacob took advantage of his brother's hunger by demanding Esau sell his birthright for the food (vv. 29–33).

A birthright made one the chief of the tribe and head of the family (27:29). In this family, the birthright determined who would inherit the Abrahamic Covenant. Jacob should not have exploited Esau's weakness, particularly because he must have known that God had already decreed, "the older shall serve the younger" (25:23).

However, the sale of the birthright was legitimate. Esau freely chose to sell it, showing he "despised" it (v. 34). Scripture makes it clear that Esau sold his birthright because he was immoral and irreverent (Heb. 12:16).

**TROUBLE OVER THE BLESSING**

When Isaac was old and growing blind, he asked his favorite son, Esau, to hunt wild game and prepare a meal for him. Isaac told Esau he would then give him the blessing due the firstborn (Gen. 27:1–4). Many years later under the Mosaic Law, a father was obliged to acknowledge his firstborn son as his principal heir and grant him a double portion of the estate (Dt. 21:15–17).
TAPESTRY of GRACE

A look at how God sovereignly wove suffering and trials into the lives of Jacob and Joseph to create a beautiful display of His grace

BY MARK JOHNSON
“Why did so many people in the Bible do such bad things? Was it okay that God’s people had multiple wives?” a newly saved young mom asked me. I told her the Bible portrays humanity’s sinfulness honestly, but its record of such behavior does not indicate God’s approval of it.

Hebrews 11, the so-called Hall of Faith, praises Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph as role models for trusting God. Yet, though men of faith, they were also sinners who displayed such moral failures as polygamy, dishonesty, and dysfunction in family life. That’s why the real hero on every page of Scripture is God—not man. The story of Jacob and Joseph shows how a gracious, loving God brings glory to Himself through imperfect people who are rich in faith.

GOD’S CHASTENING
Jacob loved Joseph more than his other children because he was the child of his old age and the firstborn son of his beloved wife Rachel. When Rachel died, Jacob lavished Joseph with favor, giving him the famous “tunic of many colors” (Gen. 37:3). Consequently, Joseph’s brothers hated him. Their hatred grew even worse when Joseph told them about his dreams, which implied they would someday bow down to him (vv. 5–11).

One day Jacob, perhaps unwisely, sent the 17-year-old to check on his older brothers and their flocks (v. 14). Despising Joseph and showing no concern for their aged father’s feelings, they sold their brother into slavery (v. 28), soaked his tunic in goat’s blood (v. 31), and deceived Jacob into assuming a wild beast had killed the boy (v. 32).

As Jacob held the bloodstained tunic, he wailed, “A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces. I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning” (vv. 33, 35).

Surely God was chastening Jacob. Hebrews 12:6 says, “For whom the Lord loves He chastens.” God had begun a good work in Jacob (cf. Phil. 1:6) and was refining him and his family for God’s glory and Jacob’s good. When God disciplines us, He does so out of love, not cruelty.

GOD’S SILENCE
Jacob heard nothing more about Joseph for 22 years. As far as Jacob knew, his favorite son was dead; and he would have to carry on without him.
Joseph was sold as a slave to Potiphar, a key military leader in Egypt. But God was with Joseph, and Potiphar promoted him to chief steward of his estate (Gen. 39:5). Potiphar’s wife then tried to seduce the young Israelite. When Joseph rejected her advances because of His love for God, she lied to Potiphar and said Joseph had tried to sleep with her (vv. 7–14).

Potiphar believed his wife and sent Joseph to prison. But God was also with Joseph in prison and had him promoted to a position of authority (vv. 21–22). There he met Pharaoh’s butler and baker and interpreted their dreams. Joseph remained in prison two more years until Pharaoh had a disturbing dream and sought an interpreter. Then the butler told Pharaoh about Joseph. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream and gave full credit to God.

“God has shown Pharaoh what He is about to do,” Joseph said (41:28). Egypt would enjoy seven years of plenty followed by seven years of severe famine. After working for 13 years in household and prison management, Joseph was quickly able to outline a life-saving famine-relief program. “And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?’” (v. 38). Pharaoh immediately promoted Joseph to second in command over Egypt.

Nine more years passed. The famine had struck as Joseph predicted. It grew so severe Jacob sent his older sons to Egypt to buy grain. Little did he know that, through the difficulty, God was about to bless him.

Do you ever feel forgotten by God or wonder why He keeps you in His waiting room? He always has a purpose. God’s silence is not inactivity.

GOD’S HIDDENNESS
When Jacob’s sons returned from Egypt with food,
they brought bad news. The Lord of the land (Joseph, whom they did not recognize) had accused them of being spies. To prove they were merely 12 brothers who had a father and their youngest brother back home, Joseph demanded they not return without the youngest brother (Benjamin); and he imprisoned their brother Simeon until then.

Benjamin was the only other child of Jacob’s wife Rachel, and Jacob did not want to lose him as he had lost Joseph. Jacob refused to send Benjamin: “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him . . . you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave” (42:38). But hunger finally drove Jacob to acquiesce when his son Judah guaranteed Benjamin’s safe return. So they traveled to Egypt again.

Joseph’s strange treatment of his brothers seems harsh until one realizes he concealed his identity until they saw they had changed. He orchestrated a plan in which Benjamin faced imprisonment. Amazingly, Judah offered to be enslaved in Benjamin’s place.

Then Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. He never rebuked them for what they had done to him 22 years earlier. Instead, he told them God had been at work all along: “God sent me before you . . . to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God” (45:7–8).

When they returned to Jacob, they told him Joseph was alive and governed all of Egypt. Jacob’s heart “stood still, because he did not believe them” (v. 26). But when he saw the provisions and carts Joseph had sent to bring him to Egypt, Jacob declared, “It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die” (v. 28).

God’s ways may seem strange to us, but they are always perfect because He is perfect. His hiddenness is not inability, and His timing is flawless.

**GOD’S PROMISES**

God had told Abraham his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land for generations before returning to the land they were promised (15:13–16). He fulfilled this promise by bringing Jacob’s family to Egypt.

Reunited with his son in Egypt, Jacob showed great faith during his final 17 years (47:28). He made Joseph promise to bury him at the family grave, demonstrating his belief that God would return his family to the Promised Land (v. 30). His blessing of Joseph’s sons conveyed his faith in the Abrahamic Covenant (48:15–16). And his prophecies about his sons revealed his certainty that God had a definite plan for all of the children of Israel (49:1–28).

Someone once said we often don’t get answers to our why questions but that, as believers, we live not by answers but by God’s promises. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Jacob learned that God’s promises are dependable.

**GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY**

After Jacob’s death, Joseph’s brothers worried he would finally seek revenge. Joseph’s powerful response could be called the Romans 8:28 of the Old Testament: “Do not be afraid, for I am in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen. 50:19–20).

Joseph remained faithful throughout exile and suffering because he believed in God’s sovereign plan. What a God! We can trust Him even when we don’t understand because God’s sovereignty brings certainty.

During World War II the Ten Boom family exemplified such trust in God’s sovereignty. After their beloved Holland was overrun by Nazis, the Ten Booms rescued an estimated 800 Jewish people in 18 months. The Nazis eventually arrested the Ten Booms and sent them to concentration camps. Corrie ten Boom alone lived to tell about it. She endured unspeakable suffering and watched her sister Betsie die.

After the war, she traveled the world speaking about her experiences and how the gospel enables us to forgive our enemies. Corrie often used the example of a tapestry to demonstrate God’s sovereignty in our lives. The underside may appear like a knotted mess. But the front reveals a beautiful design. One day we will see from God’s perspective what He was making of our lives.

Corrie, like Jacob and Joseph, lived with certainty because she believed in God’s sovereignty. God’s work in our lives may involve chastening and times when He seems silent and hidden. But because of His promises, we can rest in His sovereignty and appropriate His matchless grace.

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A look at Jacob’s time with Laban and God’s boundless grace

BY CHRIS KATULKA

God uses all types of circumstances to shape people. Sometimes they are favorable; other times they involve trouble, heartache, and grief. In the case of the patriarch Jacob, the Lord used 20 difficult years in Padan Aram, when Jacob worked for Laban, to mold Jacob’s character and draw him closer to God.

Jacob was 77 when he left Beer-sheba and went to his mother’s family in Padan Aram. Yet his journey with God had just begun. For the next two decades, Jacob lived in Laban’s world. Previously, others served him. Now he served Laban. He learned to navigate life on his own, apart from his mother’s favoritism, and he matured into a man of God as he appropriated the blessings of the rich and unconditional covenant God made with his grandfather Abraham; reiterated to his father, Isaac; and then reiterated to Jacob himself.

MEETING HIS MATCH
When Jacob first arrived in Padan Aram, he immediately fell in love with Laban’s younger daughter, Rachel. Jacob offered to serve
Laban seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage, and the years "seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her" (Gen. 29:20).

However, on the evening of the wedding, Laban stealthily switched Rachel for Leah, Rachel's older sister. When Jacob awoke the next morning and saw he had married Leah, he ran out to Laban: "What is this you have done to me?" he asked. "Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?" (v. 25). All of a sudden, Jacob's world came crashing down.

Laban's deception came straight from Jacob's playbook. Seven years earlier, Jacob had deceived his father by pretending to be his brother, Esau, in order to extract the blessing his father had wanted to give to his other son. Jacob essentially condemned his own deception against Esau when he asked Laban, "Why then have you deceived me?" God used Laban to show Jacob how deceptive and dishonest he was. Jacob may have seen himself in his father-in-law's duplicistic actions, and the revelation may have sparked the steady spiritual change he desperately needed.

Jacob married Rachel the next week, but not before he promised to serve Laban another seven years.

CONFLICT IN JACOB'S FAMILY
It seems that conflict for Jacob was never far away. And after marrying sisters, it was even closer. Leah, who felt unloved, was blessed by God and gave Jacob his first four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Rachel, unable to conceive for 13 years, was jealous of her sister and demanded of Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!" (30:1). Jacob demonstrated his faith when he angrily replied, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (v. 2).

The sisters' competition for children escalated quickly when Rachel gave her servant Bilhah to Jacob. Bilhah had two boys with him: Dan and Naphtali. Leah then sent her servant Zilpah to Jacob. Zilpah gave birth to Gad and Asher. Leah herself would bear two more sons and a daughter: Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah. Meanwhile, Rachel remained childless.

The conflict pitted the sisters against each other, and family members began alienating themselves from the Lord, which is evident by the impersonal way they used God's name. Yet God remained gracious. Eventually, He blessed Rachel, and she gave birth to a son she named Joseph, using the personal name of God when she said, "The Lord shall add to me another son" (v. 24).

JACOB RETURNS TO THE LAND
Joseph's birth became a transitional moment in the life of Jacob in exile. He clung to the promise God made to him in Bethel, that He would bring him back to the land of his father. So Jacob turned to Laban, requesting to leave his father-in-law's house in order to start his own household.

Laban stopped short of outright refusing to let Jacob go and admitted that Jacob's time serving him greatly increased Laban's wealth. Laban knew if Jacob left, his wealth was sure to follow him.

Jacob fashioned a plan that appeared to benefit Laban but ultimately favored Jacob. Jacob promised to work for Laban if he could have all the multi-colored lambs and goats, which were an abnormal breed in a sea of single-colored animals. To Laban, this seemed like a win-win situation because Jacob was willing to remain in Padan Amm and work for practically nothing.

Over time, however, the Lord blessed Jacob and multiplied his flocks while Laban's flocks continued to diminish. Seeing their wealth disappear, Laban and his sons grew hostile toward Jacob, confirming it was time for Jacob to pack up his large family and return to the Promised Land (31:1–21).

DIVINE CONSEQUENCES AND GOD'S GRACE
The two decades Jacob spent in exile serving Laban left a lasting impression on Jacob's life. The deceiver was humbled by deception that came from within his own family, and he had to deal with the consequences of his sins. The fact that he was the inheritor of God's promise didn't make him immune to the divine repercussions of his wrongdoing. Jacob did not stand above or apart from God's judgment. His experience with Laban changed his life; and through all of his trials, he knew that God was leading and guiding him.

Jacob's 20 years with Laban reveal that God's grace has no parameters. Nothing can sequester God's lovingkindness and mercy, not even our own sins. Though Jacob's family was in complete disarray, God still used him to push forward His plan of redemption.

God moves even in chaos. His plan does not stop because we are imperfect or because our family situation is dysfunctional. God's plan marches right along, which is an element of His matchless grace.

Even Leah, who was unloved by Jacob, eventually stopped trying to please him and found her worth in the Lord. When she gave birth to her fourth son, she named him Judah, meaning, "Now I will praise the Lord" (29:35). This same Judah would become the father of the tribe from which the Ruler of Israel would come, Jesus the Messiah. God took the hurt and pain of Leah's relationship with Jacob and turned it into something beautiful.

Jacob went to Padan Aram with a divine promise. He left 20 years later as a husband, father, and prosperous man ready to appropriate the promise with which God had blessed him.

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FROM
BETHEL
TO
BETHEL
by Tom Simcox
How God bestowed the Abrahamic Covenant on Jacob and his descendants forever
Many people struggle through life. Every day brings them something new to worry about. Some have illnesses. Others have grief. The list of troubles that shape a person is endless. The patriarch Jacob knew all about trouble, yet his struggles became God’s instruments to transform him from a supplanter to a servant.

After working in Padan Aram for his father-in-law, Laban, for 20 years, Jacob knew it was time to go home: “Then the Lord said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you’” (Gen. 31:3). Returning to Canaan would not be easy because of the circumstances under which he had left. Jacob had stolen the blessing of the firstborn from his brother, Esau; and Esau wanted to kill him. Earlier, Esau had willingly given Jacob the birthright of the firstborn in exchange for a meal, showing how little he valued it. The brothers never communicated the entire time Jacob was gone, and Jacob was terrified of Esau.

Meanwhile, Laban and his sons also were angry with Jacob, believing he had become rich at their expense. As Jacob’s flocks increased, Laban’s decreased until God had shifted all of Laban’s wealth to Jacob. As Jacob prepared to take his two wives (Leah and Rachel), their children, and a multitude of livestock back to the Promised Land, he struggled tremendously. He knew he had cheated Esau and would have to face him. He couldn’t remain with Laban, yet he was afraid of his brother. He couldn’t go backward, and he was afraid to go forward. He had nowhere to go but to God.

Twenty years earlier, as he fled Canaan, he had a divine encounter with God. He had a dream, “and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” (28:12). As if that weren’t enough, “the Lord stood above it [the ladder]” (v. 13). There God bestowed on Jacob the everlasting Abrahamic Covenant—the promise He had made to Abraham and Isaac:

I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed (vv. 13–14).

He also assured Jacob, “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you” (v. 15). Jacob “called the name of that place Bethel” (v. 19), meaning “house of God.”
Now, 20 years later, Jacob was returning with a large family and great wealth—a testimony to God’s faithfulness. He was on the road when he heard Esau was coming with 400 men (32:6). So he lifted his heart to God in earnest supplication.

O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said to me, "Return to your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you": I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies. Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, "I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude" (vv. 9–12).

That night Jacob sent his entire family over the ford of Jabbok and remained alone. Then a “Man” wrestled with him until dawn (v. 24). “When He [the Man] saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob’s hip was out of joint” (v. 25). Yet Jacob continued to wrestle. Jacob's determination was so great he told the Man, “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” (v. 26). This is not the action of a weakling but, rather, of a man who recognized his hope lay only with the Lord: “And in his strength he [Jacob] struggled with God. Yes, he [Jacob] struggled with the Angel and prevailed” (Hos. 12:3–4).

“What is your name?” the Man asked (Gen. 32:27). When the patriarch replied, “Jacob,” it was an admission of how his life had been before this defining moment. It had been one of trickery, deceit, and living by his wits. His name meant “heel catcher,” “trickster,” or “supplanter.” It seems that this desperate struggle with the Lord was changing Jacob and altering the direction of his life.

The supplanter was becoming Israel, which means “he fights or persists with God” or “prince with God.” As the King James Version states, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (v. 28).

Ultimately, Israel understood with whom he had been wrestling because he named the place Peniel: “For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (v. 30). The Man was the Angel of the Lord—a preincarnate appearance of Jesus.

As Jacob had changed, so had Esau. When Jacob crossed the Jabbok River, he met his brother, who also had become wealthy and harbored no resentment against him. God not only had protected His servant from his enemy, but He enabled both brothers to dwell in their lands in peace.

Later, God sent Jacob back to Bethel, where He had first appeared to him more than 20 years earlier and had conferred the Abrahamic Covenant on him (35:1). When Jacob arrived, God appeared to him again. He reconfirmed his name was Israel and reconfirmed His covenant: “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you. . . . The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land” (vv. 11–12). From here the promise would go to the entire house of Israel, and it resides with them to this day.

Five times in Scripture God refers to Israel as “Jacob my servant.” The final reference is in Ezekiel. It speaks of the days after the terrible “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), when God will gather the remnant that is left and bring them home: “Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever” (Ezek. 37:25).

Neither time nor trouble diminishes God’s faithfulness. He uses them both to shape lives and nations and, ultimately, to bring glory to Himself.

**ENDNOTES**

2. Ibid., 60 n Gen. 32:25–28.

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Tom Simcox

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JACOB’S

A LOOK AT ISRAEL’S FINAL DAYS AND HIS PROPHECIES CONCERNING HIS SONS, WHO WOULD BECOME THE NATION OF ISRAEL
People often approach their so-called golden years with an unrealistic view of the future. They envision themselves healthy and enjoying carefree living and financial security. Often, however, the opposite is true. And they are unprepared for the changes and limitations they soon will face.

Jacob's life was somewhat different. He faced trouble earlier but experienced many blessings with his family in the latter years of his life.

**JACOB'S PLIGHT**

Jacob's early life was filled with scandal, intrigue, danger, suspense, family division, difficulty, and heartache—including the supposed death of his favorite son, Joseph, at the tender age of 17. But at 130 years old, Jacob was reunited with Joseph, who had become the most powerful man in Egypt next to Pharaoh.

So at Joseph's request and with God's blessing, Jacob gathered all his possessions and family of 70 people and made the final pilgrimage of his life, leaving Canaan to live in Egypt. He took a great step of faith, trusting in God's promise to forge his family into a great nation there (Gen. 46:2–4).

Joseph arranged a historic meeting with Pharaoh, five of
his brothers, and his father. When Pharaoh questioned Jacob about his age and life, the patriarch replied, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life” (47:9). Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and left his presence (v. 10).

Although Jacob and his sons were shepherds (a profession the Egyptians despised), Pharaoh nevertheless gave them the fertile delta region of Goshen. It was excellent land for grazing flocks and growing crops (46:28–34; 47:11), and Jacob (renamed Israel by God, 32:28) and his family went from being strangers in a foreign country to residents in the fertile region of Egypt for 430 years (Ex. 12:40). In Goshen, God blessed Israel abundantly and forged his family into a nation of 2.5 million to 3 million people. Jacob was blessed in Egypt for the next 17 years until his death.

JACOB’S PROPHECY
Eventually, Jacob’s health began to fail. He became ill, bedridden, and almost blind. Knowing he was dying, Jacob wanted to review his life with his sons and leave them with words of warning and blessing. His final remarks on his deathbed are of great importance, which is why they are recorded in such detail.

Joseph brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to their grandfather’s bedside. When Jacob heard of Joseph’s arrival, he mustered the strength to sit on the edge of his bed. Immediately, he began to talk about his pilgrimage in Canaan and the blessing he received, and then he wasted no time blessing Joseph’s sons.

But he did more than bless them. He adopted them, elevating them to equal status with their uncles. Joseph “brought them from beside his knees” (Gen. 48:12) and placed his elder son, Manasseh, on Jacob’s right side and his younger son, Ephraim, on Jacob’s left—making it easy for Jacob to lay his hands of blessing on them. But the Lord guided Jacob to cross his hands and lay his right hand on Ephraim, giving the younger son preeminence over the elder. Joseph tried to remove his father’s right hand from Ephraim, but Jacob refused to budge, revealing this was the Lord’s will (vv. 17–20).

Jacob then gathered his other sons to his bedside for a final word to each. What he said was more a prophetic utterance about their lives and destinies than a blessing and is of great significance concerning Israel’s history.

REUBEN (GEN. 49:3–4)
The firstborn son was entitled to the rights of primogeniture, meaning he stood to inherit more than the other sons. But this was not to be Reuben’s lot because of his gross sin. He had slept with Bilhah, his father’s concubine (35:22). He was unstable as water and would not excel. Reuben settled east of the Jordan River (modern-day Jordan) and would decline over time, producing no judges, prophets, or rulers.

SIMEON AND LEVI (GEN. 49:5–7)
Jacob cursed them for killing Shechem, who had raped their sister, Dinah, as well as for slaughtering all the men of that city and confiscating its wealth and families (chap. 34). The two brothers would be scattered throughout Israel. Simeon was absorbed into the tribe of Judah, and Levi was scattered throughout 48 cities in Israel, destined never to own any land but later to become priests (Ex. 32:26–29).

JUDAH (GEN. 49:8–12)
Judah was highly esteemed in Jacob’s eyes. It was Judah who saved Joseph’s life when his brothers tried to kill him (37:26–27). Judah also offered himself as security to Jacob for taking Jacob’s youngest son, Benjamin, to Egypt as Joseph had requested before anyone realized who Joseph was (43:8–9). It was Judah whom Jacob sent ahead to prepare for his travel to Egypt (46:28). Judah would emerge as leader of the tribes, from which the royal line of Israel’s kings would come. Jacob compared Judah to a lion that is courageous, mighty in conquering its prey, and king of beasts (49:8–9). But above all, Judah is the tribe from which the Messiah would come. “The scepter shall not depart from Judah . . . until Shiloh comes” (v. 10). The word Shiloh means “whose it is” or “whose right it is.” Both ancient rabbinical and Gentile scholars agreed this is a Messianic prophecy. Thus the ruling staff and scepter (right to rule in Judah) will not depart from Judah until He (Messiah) comes whose right it is to rule; and then He will receive the scepter forever. The idea is that there will be no need for any successor to rule in Judah once the Messiah comes, and the royal power to rule remains forever invested in Him. This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus and will be fully realized after His Second Coming during the Millennium. The prophecies of verses 11–12 look forward to the Messiah’s Millennial rule when Israel will experience peace, prosperity, and plenty on Earth.

ZEBULUN (GEN. 49:13)
Zebulun received land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee in the north. The tribe did well
commercially because of its location on trade routes in the Jezreel Valley.

ISSACHAR (GEN. 49:14–15)
A retiring spirit characterized Issachar. He was not aggressive, like some of Israel’s other sons. The people of Issachar were described as a “strong donkey” (v. 14), meaning they were hardworking and content with their station in life, though they lacked notable achievements. The tribe was susceptible to surrounding invaders and subservient to them. It was said of the men of Issachar that they “had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chr. 12:32).

DAN (GEN. 49:16–18)
This tribe is compared to a serpent for craftiness and deception. It was constantly at war with its neighbors. It is pictured as a deceitful, treacherous, subtle, unwise enemy that strikes without notice. Dan conquered Laish (also called Leshem) and acquired more land than originally allotted (Josh. 19:40–48). Dan was the first tribe to bring idolatry into Israel (Jud. 18:30–31), and King Jeroboam introduced calf worship through Dan (1 Ki. 12:2–30). After uttering this prophecy, Jacob suddenly blurted out, “I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!” (Gen. 49:18). The word wait means to look eagerly with expectation, steadfast endurance, and faith. Jacob had a confident hope that God would bring about salvation for both him and his son.

GAD (GEN. 49:19)
Gad, like Reuben, chose land east of the Jordan River. The tribe continually faced war with Gentiles and eventually triumphed over them. Elijah the prophet was from Gad.

ASHER (GEN. 49:20)
Asher was told he “shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties.” His inheritance was fertile land in the Carmel valley along the Mediterranean coastal area. The tribe thrived agriculturally and grew wealthy. Moses called Asher “most blessed” and “favored” and said he would “dip his foot in oil” (Dt. 33:24). Its produce was a favorite of kings.

NAPHTALI (GEN. 49:21)
Naphtali is described as “a deer let loose; he uses beautiful words.” The verse describes Naphtali as loving freedom, living without restraints, and not wanting to be governed by regulations. The men of Naphtali moved quickly and gracefully like deer in the hill country where they resided, and they spoke eloquently.

JOSEPH (GEN. 49:22–26)
Jacob waxed eloquent in his blessing of Joseph as a godly man. He called Joseph a “fruitful bough,” speaking of his work in Egypt and of Joseph’s two sons, who would become major tribes in Israel. Joseph’s foes were like “archers,” shooting verbal arrows to destroy him. But Joseph’s “bow remained in strength,” speaking of his favor with and faith in God through all his trials. Jacob’s final words to Joseph overflowed with blessing. In fact, the word blessing appears six times, but not once did Jacob use the word bless in connection with his other sons.

BENJAMIN (GEN. 49:27)
Benjamin is compared to a “ravenous wolf” devouring his prey. Men such as Saul, Abner, Sheba, and Shimei from the tribe were fierce in battle.

JACOB’S PASSING
After prophesying over his sons, Jacob gave instructions to them concerning his funeral. He made them promise to carry his body back to Canaan and bury him in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were buried. Then he lay back in bed, took his last breath, and passed into the presence of the Lord—a beautiful picture of dying grace (vv. 29–33). He was 147 years old (47:28).

Joseph “fell on his father’s face and wept over him, and kissed him” (50:1). He had his own private physicians embalm Israel, which took 40 days. The Egyptians wept over Israel’s passing for 70 days. Then Israel was given a royal funeral made up of Pharaoh’s servants and elders, along with the households of Joseph and his brothers. The mourners traveled to Machpelah, where they lamented seven days at the threshing floor of Atad, then returned to Egypt (vv. 2–14).

Jacob had a difficult life, but he finished well. His pilgrimage could be characterized by plight, preservation, providence, promises, and personal direction by God. His history will live in perpetuity. And though he was far from perfect, he was a paradigm of faith.

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CRITICS OFTEN EMPHASIZE JACOB’S MORAL FAILURES. BUT DESPITE HIS HUMAN FRAILTY, HE GREW INTO A MAN OF CHARACTER, DEEP AFFECTION, AND DEVOTION TO GOD.

BY VICTOR BUKSBAZEN
There is no other biblical personality that has been made more the butt of harsh and unfair criticism than that of the patriarch Jacob, one of the ancestors of the Jewish race. He is depicted as the cunning supplanter and schemer who takes advantage of his guileless and trusting brother, Esau, and robs him twice of his birthright and parental blessing.

Jacob is also accused of having acquired sheep and cattle by dubious means in his dealing with Laban, his father-in-law. Having painted him as a black character, his accusers thereupon proceed to point out that the Jews should have all the deplorable characteristics and moral ineptitudes of their ancestor. For centuries Jacob has been a strong weapon in the hands of the anti-Semites against the Jews.

It is true that Jacob, perhaps more than anybody else, personified his descendants the Jewish people. Yet after a close scrutiny of his biblical record, we reach the conclusion that the Jewish people have cause to look back with a sense of pride rather than shame upon their patriarchal prototype.

It is to the eternal glory of the Bible and a strong proof of its reliability and trustworthiness that the characters described in that Book are true to life. No attempt is made to gloss over their failures or sins or to make them appear as saints without blame and blemish. The ancient pagan classics always made of their heroes supermen and half-gods.

Jacob's character, full of human frailties and failings, is real and near to us. The Word of God does not portray him as a plaster saint, but as a very human kind of being, sinful and wayward. The story of Jacob is the story of the power of God working upon the human heart, which seeks to break the shackles of self and sin and longs to dwell in the nearness of God. The greatness of Jacob is in his pathetic struggle against the earthly bonds and his striving to attain the things of God. In Jacob we see a sinner with the makings of a saint and of a great man of God.

TWO BROTHERS—TWO WORLDS

Compared with his twin brother, Esau, the character of Jacob stands out in bold relief. The two are as different as are the flesh and the spirit, as differs the mind of this world from the mind of God. Born from one womb, the brothers belong to two different and essentially hostile worlds. Their incompatibility is indicated in the Word of God even before their birth:
And the children struggled together within her [Rebekah]; . . . And she went to enquire of the Lord. And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels (Gen. 25:22–23, KJV).

And they were separated forever. A further indication as to the difference of the two brothers we have in the following words of the Scriptures: "And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents" (v. 27, KJV).

Esau represents the natural man with earthly needs and cravings. His chief interest is in hunting and in the satisfying of his physical appetites. But concerning Jacob we read that he was "a plain man." The Hebrew idiom for "plain" (tam) conveys more than the English plain. It points to a steady, persevering character, one who is likely to press forward through suffering or prosperity, exile or return, bereavement or consolation.

Esau the hunter, the child of nature, is impulsive and prompted by his natural instincts. Jacob the tentmaker is contemplative, spiritually minded, and hungry after the things of God.

When Esau is hungry, food is above everything. The bowl of red pottage is more highly regarded than his birthright. Jacob, however, desires this one thing above all else, to obtain the birthright and the divine promises and blessings incidental to it, the chief one amongst them being the promise of a Redeemer (12:3). To Esau, these things are of little value and meaning: "Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright" (25:34, KJV).

This is the divine verdict concerning Esau, that he despised the gift of God and held it as of little value.

Perhaps therein lies the explanation of the seemingly arbitrary and harsh words of God: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13, KJV). Their Creator knew better than anybody else what was in each one of them. Jacob may at times seem crafty and subtle and in comparison with the natural and simple-minded Esau even appear unfavorably. Yet with all this Esau was an earthbound being, where the Spirit of God finds no entrance. Only Jacob could dream of angels and God, for his deepest waking yearnings were spiritual.

Jacob is affectionate, his love for Rachel tender and constant. He is a devoted son. In his love for his children, especially for Joseph and Benjamin, there is pathos and passion, causing him, as he expressed himself, to go down "with sorrow to the grave" (Gen. 42:38). Such a character is not to be scoffed at. Its tragic complexity commands our sincere respect. Like in all profound characters, there seem to be in him irreconcilable contradictions. His twofold name, Jacob-Israel, is in itself indicative of that. Through toil and suffering, Jacob, the supplanter, is gradually transformed into "Israel—the prince with God." With the passing of the years, the cruder features of youth become softened and purified, and his character crowned with the grace of humility expressed in that lovely passage of Jacob's confession before God: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant" (32:10, KJV).

When considering the relationship between Jacob and Laban, we must bear in mind the fact that it was Laban in the first place who took advantage of and exploited his son-in-law. Jacob only matched the unscrupulous cunning of Laban with a little guile of his own. Hard as the bargain was, Jacob adhered strictly to the terms of the contract. It was Laban who proved himself to be the crafty and unscrupulous employer, causing Jacob to complain bitterly: "Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times" (31:41, KJV).

Jacob's experience with Laban seems to be prophetic of the experiences of his children the Jews. They too
often were given an unfair and raw deal. They were often forced into a position in which their only weapons against injustice and brute force were shrewdness and an ability to outwit those who would rob them, if they were to survive at all in a hostile world. Yet when treated with equity and fairness, they are as honorable and straightforward as any people in the world.

In the seemingly mercenary and self-seeking Jacob there is the dormant Israel, which means “a prince with God.” The world does not see it or realize it, yet Christ did. Zacchaeus, in the eyes of his contemporaries, was just a little, mean, sordid publican; but Christ, who could look into the soul of the man, discerned in him a hunger after righteousness, in whom there was the making of a great disciple (Lk. 19:9–10).

The magic of love in conjunction with the magic of faith performed a miracle of grace. These miracles still happen today, and the tribe of the Zacchaeuses is more numerous than ever.

THE WRESTLING JACOB
The early part of Jacob’s life was that of a hardheaded, successful businessman. Yet it was hardly a peaceful and happy life. From without, there was conflict and persecution. From within, a constant striving and struggling. Through the years of exile, he gained wealth and increased in numbers, but the returning Jacob meets on the threshold of his homeland his unreconciled brother, Esau, still mindful of the wrong endured. It was fear, grim and paralyzing fear for himself and his loved ones, that caused him to seek divine help in solitude and in prayer.

But at the ford of the swift brook of Jabbok, he suddenly discovered that his contention was not against flesh and blood but against a far more formidable antagonist. He wrestled with a man who later revealed Himself as God. The God who promised him for his inheritance the land to which he was now returning did not wish him to come as the old Jacob, clever and worldly successful, but contrite, conscious of his sins and regenerated: “And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Gen. 32:28, KJV).

The God-Man who wrestled with Jacob was the same God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who wrestles forever with each one of us, seeking to smite in us that which is sinful and selfish so that from dust and darkness may rise at dawn a new man with a new name, not Jacob but Israel—a prince with God and man.

Jacob’s defeat is also his victory. Smitten by God, he rose up more than a conqueror. At dusk there was a fearful, apprehensive man by the name of Jacob, a man haunted by his past—at dawn after a memorable vigil, there arose a new man, knighted by God and given a new name—Israel. Truly we have no reason to be ashamed of the fact that the God of Abraham and Isaac is also the God of Jacob.

THE PROPHET JACOB
The life of Jacob is so rich in spiritual qualities and so full of wonderful experiences that it is impossible even to outline its contours in a brief article. Yet we must not leave unmentioned this grand feature in his character, namely, “The Blessed Hope” that was in him. Our Lord said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (Jn. 8:56, KJV).

These words of our Savior apply with equal force to Jacob. On his deathbed Jacob blessed Judah, of whom he knew that the Messiah would come, and said, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10, KJV).

And with his dying breath, the weary and worn servant of God whispered, “I have waited for thy salvation, O Lorp” (v. 18, KJV). This was the hope which Jacob left as a heritage to his children, and even to the present day it is still in the family. This was the hope that gave wings to the words of David the king and to the prophets. This was the hope which filled the breast of the aged Simeon with heavenly joy when he held the Child Jesus in his arms and said, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation” (Lk. 2:29–30, KJV).

Even though “blindness in part” has happened to the Jews today (Rom. 11:25), this is still their hope, for are they not the children of Israel?
For most people, the world of the Bible is an unfamiliar, alien realm. But for Bible-believing Christians, it is like the pleasant home of well-known friends. Beginning where the Bible begins, with the book of Genesis, I’d like to take you on an adventure into the past to unearth the truth of God’s Word for today.

Where did the worship of God begin? Some scholars suggest the Garden of Eden was the first sanctuary, seeing the imagery in the unique Hebrew terms used in Genesis 2—3 (elsewhere appearing only in Leviticus in connection with the Tabernacle and priests). The terms describe the approach of the divine Presence, the position of the sacred tree in the Garden, the Garden’s east-west orientation, Adam’s priestly position and duties, and the presence and purpose of the cherubim (a particular group of angels). These scholars see the Tabernacle as a reproduction of this first sanctuary that was lost in the fall of humanity but restored at Mt. Sinai, and they see the priesthood as fulfilling the mediatorial role necessary for fallen man to approach a holy God.

The need for substitutionary sacrifice first appeared in worship when Cain and Abel brought their offerings to the Lord (4:3–4). Since Scripture gives no explanation for this apparently established practice, we can only assume it was modeled after the divine action involved in killing animals to clothe the first couple (3:21). The next recorded worship is after Noah and his family exited the ark into their new post-flood world, built an altar, and sacrificed animals to the Lord (8:20).

Now archaeologists have uncovered what may be one of the world’s oldest worship sites after the flood. Known as Göbekli Tepe (Potbelly Hill), it is located in southeastern Turkey in a field in the center of the Haran Plain, where later Terah and his son Abram settled for a time (11:31; 12:1–5). Göbekli Tepe was created between 6000 and 7000 BC and reveals a lifestyle of agriculture, hunting, and gathering—which agrees with the biblical depiction of Noah and his descendants after the flood (9:20; 10:8–9). Though the area today is barren, archaeologists say it originally was a paradise.

Excavations at Göbekli Tepe have uncovered eight separate rings of megalithic standing pillars; and a geomagnetic survey revealed the presence of at least 20 more buried on the 22-acre site. It is remarkable that Göbekli Tepe, 6,000 years older than Stonehenge in England, was intentionally buried to preserve it because of its unique status in the ancient world.

These standing T-shaped pillars (the largest are 18 feet tall and weigh 16 tons) are adorned with engraved images of wolves, pigs, storks, foxes, fawns, scorpions, snakes, and unknown animals. In addition, some have images of headless people with hands outstretched, arms or hands reaching toward their loincloth-draped bodies. The archaeologists who excavated the site believe these depict priests. They also found a life-sized human statue, as well as pieces of others, that they identify as “guardians” of the Göbekli Tepe Sanctuary, which they call the world’s first temple.

The site’s location, 425 miles from Mt. Ararat where Noah’s ark came to rest, and the ubiquitous depictions of animals certainly recall the menagerie that left the ark and spread throughout the nearby lands.

The site’s ritual and ceremonial aspects imply that religious motivation helped develop civilization (rather than resulting from it as a need to maintain order) by drawing people together to construct such a worship center. That level of cooperation requires hierarchical organization, and certain features on the sculpted human figures suggest a patriarchal social system. Because of the bones at the site, some people also believe animal sacrifice and ritual feasts took place there.

Göbekli Tepe stands as evidence of worship in the new world and reminds us that our journey to the beginning of the Bible is on familiar ground.

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MINISTERING WITH INTEGRITY

1 THESSALONIANS 2:1–6

The apostle Paul’s abrupt departure from Thessalonica brought accusations that he was a religious charlatan preaching for financial gain and personal honor. If the accusations went unanswered, they could have destroyed the Thessalonian church or severely stunted its growth. Thus Paul wasted no time reminding the Thessalonians of his ministry to them and encouraging them as they faced severe persecution and privation for their commitment to Christ.

In this section of the epistle, Paul reviewed his motive, message, and ministry in Thessalonica. First, he presented the facts of what took place in his ministry in order to refute the false charges against him. Then he asked the Thessalonian believers to verify his report to silence, once and for all, the vicious charges against him.

PAUL’S PREACHING

Appealing to the Thessalonians’ personal knowledge, Paul reviewed the circumstances of his ministry among them:

“For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain” (1 Th. 2:1).

The word for reaches back to 1:2–10 and connects it to what Paul was about to say. They “know” (with absolute certainty) Paul was speaking truth because they personally experienced his ministry from its inception. He addressed them as “brethren,” expressing his deep affection for them and emphasizing their relationship as fellow believers in Christ.

Paul reminded them that their team ministry in Thessalonica “was not in vain” (2:1). Their ministry was face-to-face. It was not concealed, clandestine, or conducted with crafty motive for personal gain. Second, it was not “vain.” That is, the character of their ministry was not empty, hollow, useless, ineffective, futile, or inconsequential. To the contrary, it was extremely fruitful, producing ongoing results, which the Thessalonians could verify.

PAUL’S PLIGHT

After denying any negative purpose for his visit, Paul provided an emphatically positive purpose concerning the character of his ministry among them: “But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict” (v. 2). The word but indicates Paul was presenting a strong contrast to what he said in the preceding verse.

Paul and Silvanus had suffered severely while delivering the gospel on their second missionary journey. They were “spitefully [cruelly and shamefully] treated” (v. 2) at Philippi (cf. Acts 16:23–24) and had gross indignities heaped upon them. They were falsely arrested, charged, imprisoned, disrobed, put in stocks with the worst of criminals, beaten, and publicly humiliated. Throughout the epistle, Paul spoke of how he suffered while preaching the gospel. He was a Roman citizen who was treated unjustly, according to Roman law.

Hurt and weak from the horrific and cruel treatment they endured, he and Silvanus nevertheless made their painful way to Thessalonica to preach boldly in the synagogue there. In saying “as you know,” Paul again emphasized the Thessalonians knew of his condition (1 Th. 2:2). They were eyewitnesses to Paul’s physical condition and thus could vouch for his statements. Such firsthand knowledge should silence Paul’s accusers.

Again Paul emphasized the focus of his ministry at Thessalonica: “We were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict” (v. 2). The word bold carries the idea of Paul’s increasing determination to speak with greater fearlessness. What he suffered for the gospel in Philippi did not make him shrink back in fear; it actually gave him more courage to herald the gospel.

Yet this courage was not produced by pure determination. Rather, it was “in our God.” Paul’s boldness was the supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit, motivating him to speak courageously. Only the Holy Spirit could have given Paul and Silvanus such strength, courage, and freedom of speech, especially after the opposition, persecution, and “much conflict” (v. 2) they experienced in Philippi. Paul and Silvanus understood they would always face suffering and the possibility of death in preaching the gospel for Jesus’ sake (2 Cor. 4:11).

If they had been preaching for personal fame or financial gain, they would not have gone so soon to Thessalonica to face the same harsh treatment they had received in Philippi.

It took extraordinary courage for Paul and Silvanus to keep going from city to city to proclaim the gospel. Lesser
men would have turned back. Only someone committed to his divine calling and commission would press on to finish the task.

**PAUL’S PURITY**

Paul stated the motive behind their proclamation of God’s Word: “For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit” (1 Th. 2: 3). They did not preach using flowery words, clever phrases of logic and wisdom, or human philosophy. Because their motives were pure, they received strength to speak boldly in the face of persecution. Paul gave three defenses to prove his motives were pure.

First, his “exhortation did not come from error” (v. 3). He did not go to them with trickery. The word error implies leading people astray by false teaching, as one uses bait to catch fish. Paul categorically denied that he used deception or manipulation to ensnare people to believe through his preaching.

Second, Paul did not use “uncleanness” (v. 3) to get a hearing. Some scholars teach that uncleanness refers to sexual impurity or immorality. It is absurd to think that a man of Paul’s character and integrity would ever use such means to promote his beliefs. Others hold that the word doesn’t refer to sexual depravity but, rather, to a lust to gain riches and fame from his preaching. Excellent Bible scholars hold various views, but the former view seems to be what the context teaches.

Third, Paul strongly denied using “deceit,” meaning schemes, craftiness, or tricks to persuade people.

Paul proved neither he nor his missionary team ever used dishonest, depraved, or deceptive means to persuade the Thessalonians. “But as we were approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts” (v. 4).

Paul’s call and commission, as well as that of other team members, came directly from the Lord. These men were not novices but servants who were “approved by God” through trial and testing. They were worthy to be entrusted with the gospel. The phrase have been approved is in the Greek perfect tense, meaning having been once approved by God, their approval continued throughout their ministry. Therefore, Paul said, “we speak.” Obediently, they spread the gospel wherever they went.

The apostle added, “not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts” (v. 4). The word pleasing connotes the idea of tailoring one’s message to the opinions, desires, or interests of one’s audience to elicit a favorable response. Paul’s motive was only to please God and speak the gospel with boldness. These men realized God was judging the inner motives of their spiritual lives.

Paul reminded the Thessalonians of the character of his ministry before God and them. His words and works had come under close scrutiny. “For neither at any time did we use flattering words” (v. 5). Flattery means more than using praise to make the hearer feel good. It has the idea of gaining influence over the hearer for selfish ends.

Nor did Paul wear a “cloak of covetousness” (v. 5). The word cloak means “pretext” and has the idea of masking one’s true motive of greed. In other words, Paul was not using his apostleship as a selfish cover for enriching himself. “Covetousness” speaks of a greedy desire to acquire more at the expense of others. The apostle made it clear he never coveted anyone’s silver, gold, or apparel but worked with his own hands to provide for his needs (cf. Acts 20:33–34). False teachers, however, preached to enrich themselves. Paul fortified his statement by saying, “God is witness” (1 Th. 2:5), a phrase he used often (cf. Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20).

Only God knows the true motives of a person’s heart. People guilty of preaching the gospel for material gain or with wrong motives eventually will be unmasked, found guilty, and judged by Christ.

Paul added, “Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ” (1 Th. 2:6). As servants of Christ, Paul and Silvanus were not seeking personal “glory,” praise, or applause from people. They sought God’s approval alone.

Paul said he and Silvanus “might have made demands as apostles of Christ” (v. 6). He had authority and power among the Thessalonians and could have demanded they give him and his team glory and praise, but he did not. The missionaries came as servants, without reservation or thought for their own needs. They desired only to minister to others. Their one passion was to please God. Is that your passion too?

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*by David M. Levy, director of Worldwide Ministry Development and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel*
GOD IS UP TO SOMETHING!

The scattered stones and ruins of the ancient city of Philippi silently lay in the bright Grecian sun. Standing there, as I scanned the landscape around me, the organized rubble seemed to shout, “This is the place! This is the place where the Good News of redemption first stirred the people of Europe.”

The gospel was not a quiet visitor to that Roman city. It entered with thunderous impact. Lives were changed, dark forces were rebuked, crowds were incited, and persecution was openly brutal. Lying on their wounded backs in the filth of a Roman prison, the apostle Paul and Silas sang—aloud. They prayed aloud. And God broadcast the power of His gospel by shaking the foundations of the mountain around which Philippi was built. Before the visiting messengers of redemption went on their way, people proclaimed their faith, town leaders were humbled, and the brethren were encouraged. God was up to something, and He was willing to literally move mountains to accomplish His purposes in people’s lives (Acts 16).

Ancient times were difficult for Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire. Ten years after his remarkable entry into Europe, the imprisoned Paul sent a message from God to the developing band of believers at Philippi. In that letter, his personal expression of appreciation and camaraderie with His brethren was followed by a powerful message to encourage their walk of faith: “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

Simply stated, God is up to something! He is at work—in you—and it is good!

This message was proclaimed to every Christian in Philippi: young and old, weak and strong, beginners and veterans in the faith. No one in Christ, then or now, was or is excluded from the promise that God is up to something in his or her life. Looking in the mirror, it is hard to grasp the life-infusing truth that the omnipotent God is zealously expending His creative and redemptive energy on our behalf, that “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:10).

(4:22). A simple reading of the psalms bears witness that saints throughout the ages often doubted and questioned God’s presence and promises when they encountered the harsh realities of living as pilgrims outside the Garden of Eden. We were never created to live in the land of Satan, the usurper prince.

Like Job, our sin-scared hearts doubt and challenge the divine definition of the good. Yet, the life-worn apostle Paul affirmed his unwavering confidence in the beneficial nature of the celestial Potter’s hands, regardless of the rugged hardships one faces in this alien world: “It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

This guarantee was not novel to the imprisoned bondservant of Jesus Christ. Sometime in the past, Paul was convinced of the reality of this work of grace in the life of every believer. From that day forward, his conviction regarding “this very thing” (1:6) was firmly established, not on the depth of commitment or the spiritual ability of the saint, but in the character and faithfulness of the Master Craftsman. God alone initiates the lifelong process of redemptive sanctification. He continues it, and only He can complete it.

Stories abound of confident adventurers who, while trusting in their training and ability, ventured out onto a frozen lake only to end up lost forever in the dark waters beneath. Their cold demise was not due to their lack of confidence but, rather, to the weakness of the very thing they trusted with their lives: the ice!

Like those adventurers, Paul learned the painful lesson of placing his confidence in wrong things. He had much to brag about in his blameless pursuit of righteousness. Yet, looking back, he confessed that all he was really doing before serving
Christ was building a bigger pile of garbage as a monument to self. It was in a blinding encounter on a dusty road where the Master Craftsman initiated His work in this former zealot. And the work in Paul’s life was ongoing. His new journey pressed forward toward the call of God in Christ Jesus. The only bridge capable of holding his weight as he journeyed across the dark abyss of sin was the clear, undeniable grace of God enjoyed by faith. Only through grace was he redeemed from the rushing current of the fatal wages earned when trusting in self (Phil. 3:3–14).

If living was Christ and death was gain (1:21), how could Paul say the work in his life wasn’t finished?

We live in a world where there are tolerances and margins of error for everything. Paint colors vary, buildings are out of square, recipes fluctuate, and highway speed traps “may” give you a mile or two to compensate for the margin of error on the radar equipment. We expect this and often take advantage of it. But there are no divine margins of error. The work continues until it is complete. The redemptive and sanctifying process only finds its consummation in 100 percent conformity to Jesus Christ. Nothing less is successful. Nothing less is acceptable. Nothing more is possible.

The finish line is just beyond the horizon of every day, any day. “Until the day of Jesus Christ” (v. 6), the work of God continues as promised with a guaranteed and fast-approaching consummation. In the meantime, “we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (3:20–21). While waiting expectantly, all who bear the divinely bestowed title “child of God” are challenged to follow the apostle’s example and live like citizens of heaven “in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (2:15).

The push and pull between these two worlds was familiar to those who walked the marble streets of the Macedonian city long before it toppled and was buried by catastrophic events and the passage of time. Empires crumble and are forgotten, but divine truths and promises never succumb to time or culture.

In unsettled times of oppression, illness, impoverishment, loss, and more, we rightfully plead for intervention from on high. I’ve walked those painful paths with others, and I’ve climbed those darkened trails myself. But there is a deeper reality that is easy to miss. When we yield control to the Master Craftsman, peace that transcends common sense, along with contentment that appears abnormal, appears in life’s hurricanes.

The Philippian letter repeatedly documents the real-life, ongoing, creative construction of Christlikeness in Paul’s life. Chains are unable to restrain it, poverty stimulates it, and death only accelerates it. God’s overriding work is also evident in Christ’s obedient death and the exaltation that follows. That same power is driving the practical work of regeneration in all who name the name above all names (vv. 5–11).

To Paul, the promised work of God was not merely a sweet-sounding cliché. He witnessed the promise in the lives of others. From its life-giving genesis, he daily lived it and experienced its fullness in his own life. When God rattled the mountains in Philippi, the gospel messengers were not freed in order to escape. They were set free to confront, challenge, and infect the world around them for His glory. His purposes have remained the same throughout the centuries. We, too, are set free from the bars and chains that bind our hearts to a false reality outside the Garden, contrived by the enemy of our souls. When our eyes were opened, we stepped through the shattered shackles, free to live out a new reality as those who are redeemed. Freed from a prison where the penalty is death. We inherited life: real life, abundant and eternal. Free to be salt, light, and an ambassador for the glory of the Almighty. Free to live like Christ, but more so, to become like Christ.

The work of God in Paul’s life and the Philippian brethren’s lives is the same work God began in your life the day you met the Savior. The circumstances differ and the journey traverses different paths, but the work of redemption is identical in all of us who belong to Him by faith. The invitation to redemption’s grace still stands for all who come through faith, but how will they know unless someone tells them?

God is up to something! He is at work in you—and it is good. Christ is the blueprint, and we are destined to be totally transformed into His likeness. This is no ordinary life. With the utmost confidence of the apostle, you can wake up every morning and lie down every night with absolute assurance that the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God is up to something good in your life today. Embrace it, join it, and revel in it.

**Note:** For study aids and discussion questions regarding this article, go to [http://jjs.foi.org](http://jjs.foi.org).

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**When we yield control to the Master Craftsman, peace that transcends common sense, along with contentment that appears abnormal, appears in life’s hurricanes.**

_by Clarence Johnson,_

a Bible teacher and director of The Friends of Israel Institute of Jewish Studies
Trump, Pence: ‘We Stand With Israel’

Donald Trump will be the most pro-Israel president in the history of the United States, a Trump advisor told The Jerusalem Post. “The level of friendship between the U.S. and Israel is going to grow like never before, and it will be better than ever, even [better than] the way it was under Republican administrations in the past,” David Friedman said.

Trump and his running mate, Mike Pence, declared their unwavering support for Israel via video at an October 2016 Trump rally in Jerusalem. “I love Israel and honor and respect the Jewish faith and tradition,” Trump said. “My administration will stand side by side with the Jewish people and Israel’s leaders to continue strengthening the bridges that connect ... Americans and Israelis. Together, we will stand up to the enemies like Iran bent on destroying Israel and her people.”

Pence stated, “We stand with Israel because her cause is just, because her values are our values, and because her fate is our fate. Israel is not just our strongest ally in the region. ... Israel is our most cherished ally in the world.” He added, “Let the word go forth from Jerusalem—the eternal, undivided capital of the Jewish people and the Jewish state—that Donald Trump and I are proud to stand with Israel.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called Trump a “true friend of the state of Israel” and said he looks forward to working with Trump “to advance security, prosperity, and peace,” Arutz-7 reported. “I am confident that President-elect Trump and I will continue to strengthen the unique alliance between our two countries and bring it to ever greater heights,” Netanyahu said on Twitter.

Trump’s first step toward fulfilling his campaign promises concerning Israel will be to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, Friedman said.

From news reports

ITALIAN NEWSPAPER LEADS PROTEST AGAINST UNESCO

The popular, pro-Israel Italian newspaper Il Foglio organized an unprecedented protest at the Rome headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recently to stand against UNESCO’s vote denying the Jewish people’s 3,000-year connection to their holy sites in Jerusalem. The paper also expressed its anger at Italy’s abstention in that vote.

Italy, it said, should have voted against the decision, as did the United States, Great Britain, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Germany, and Estonia. Il Foglio displayed an Israeli flag over its entire centerfold, in solidarity with the Jewish state. UNESCO’s move does not simply deny Jewish history, said the newspaper’s writers; it is a re-creation of Nazi ideology.

Italy’s Prime Minister Matteo Renzi has since publicly admitted Italy should have voted against the resolution, and he promised to stand with Israel. “It is incomprehensible and unacceptable, it was a mistake,” Renzi told Italian radio. “Suggesting that Jerusalem and Judaism have no connection is like suggesting the sun causes darkness. If we have to break with European unity on the subject, so be it.”

Three hundred people attended the protest, including the paper’s staff, left- and right-wing members of Parliament, the head of Rome’s Jewish community, and both Jewish and Gentile Italians who said they were fed up with politicians who sacrifice truth and principles for power and money.

At the protest, readers’ letters were pasted together to resemble the Western Wall. Il Foglio’s editor said since UNESCO eliminated the Wall from Jewish history, “we turned the UNESCO branch in Rome into our own Western Wall for one day.”

Arutz-7
APOLIGIST: ISRAEL PROVES GOD’S EXISTENCE

“God’s argument for God” is the modern nation of Israel, Christian apologist Kurt Wise explained at a recent apologetics conference in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Wise said the revival of the Hebrew language; the birth of the modern nation of Israel; and the land’s transformation from a barren wasteland into a green, fruit-producing nation provide merely a few examples of fulfilled prophecy and bear witness to the veracity of the one true God—the God of Israel. (See Zephaniah 3:9 and Ezekiel 36:6-9, 23-25.) “If Israel is not restored to the blessing of God in the Land of Israel,” Wise stated, “then Yahweh is not God, and the Bible is not His Word.”

Wise is the pastor of Alvin Bible Church in Alvin, Texas, and a graduate of Southern Evangelical Seminary (SES), where he received his master’s degree in apologetics. The conference, sponsored by SES, was held at Calvary Church.

JLM

ANCIENT SCROLL CONTAINS LEVITICUS

Scientists have discovered that a 1,700-year-old Hebrew scroll found in the ancient Jewish community of En-Gedi in Israel contains verses from Leviticus, The Christian Post reported. Michael Segal, a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, called the En-Gedi Leviticus scroll “the most extensive and significant biblical text from antiquity” since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Though found by archaeologists in 1970, it remained illegible until recently when researchers from the University of Kentucky used a complex digital analysis called “virtual unwrapping” to decipher the disintegrated text, according to LiveScience.com.

From news reports

NETANYAHU TO RECEIVE PRIVATE PLANE

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will receive an Israeli version of Air Force One this year, The Times of Israel reported. The private plane will consist of special defense systems and advanced communications that will allow the prime minister to communicate with those on the ground at all times.

“The budget for purchasing and outfitting the plane was a reported $70 million—enough to purchase an advanced aircraft and install the necessary specialized equipment. Versions of the aircraft are capable of flying nonstop from Israel to North America,” the Times reported.

Israel’s prime ministers have always flown on rented planes or commercial airliners.

From news reports

YOUTUBE RESTRICTS PRO-ISRAEL VIDEOS

YouTube has restricted a video of former Harvard Law School professor Alan Dershowitz giving a five-minute lecture on the history of Israel, The Boston Globe reported.

The video was published on the YouTube channel called Prager University. According to Prager University’s president, conservative talk show host Dennis Prager, YouTube has been blocking many of the channel’s educational talks by well-known intellectuals and media personalities. “Given no rational response for the restrictions, there seems to be little reason to suspect anything other than suppression of conservative thought,” Prager said.

If a viewer sets YouTube to “restricted mode,” the Dershowitz video cannot be seen. “Restricted mode” is a setting that categorizes videos as having offensive, inappropriate, and objectionable adult and sexual content.

From news reports

PA: VISITING JEWS IS UNACCEPTABLE

The Palestinian Authority (PA) detained four Arab-Palestinians from the village of Wadi al-Nis for drinking coffee with Jews in a sukkah (a booth built for the holiday of Tabernacles) in Gush Etzion, Judea. “All Palestinians condemn the [visit], and visiting settlers is completely unacceptable,” PA Deputy Governor of Bethlehem Muhammad Taha said.

Israeli Oded Revivi had invited 30 Palestinians to his sukkah as a goodwill gesture. “It’s quite pathetic to be arrested for having a cup of coffee with your neighbors,” said Revivi, who works to build bridges with the Arab villages around his settlement. He said he believes peace comes from person-to-person contact. Among the guests were representatives from the Israel Defense Forces and the Border Police. Taha condemned the Palestinians who attended and said the government will hold them accountable.

From news reports

CONGRESSMEN SAY JUDEA, SAMARIA BELONG TO ISRAEL

U.S. Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ) recently told an Israeli delegation in Washington, DC, “I want to say to all the people of Samaria that they are beloved by the American people, and we believe that Judea and Samaria are not the ‘West Bank’ but part of the state of Israel.” Israeli Yossi Dagan met with more than a dozen Republican and Democratic legislators to discuss U.S. support for Israel’s presence in Judea and Samaria. “There are people in the U.S. Congress who, no matter what, will continue to work on behalf of Judea and Samaria, who will continue to do whatever they can to fight on behalf of Israel,” Franks said.

From news reports
You believe the Messiah will come, but I believe He will return.

by Zvi Kalisher

Here in Israel, most people know the Hebrew song “Ani Ma’amin,” or “I Believe.” In English, the lyrics read, “I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah. I believe.” Recently I visited an ultra-Orthodox synagogue in Jerusalem, where people were singing this song with great joy. As soon as they noticed me and saw I was not wearing traditional clothing and did not have a beard, they began to ask me questions. They live by the adage, “Respect him and suspect him.”

“Are you happy?” one of the men asked.
“I am,” I answered, “because it is written, ‘Whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he’ (Prov. 16:20).
“Do you believe in the coming of the Messiah?” another asked.
“There is a small difference between us concerning that question,” I replied. “You believe the Messiah will come, but I believe He will return.”
Then they really became suspicious and called for reinforcements. Soon their rabbi arrived. He began to drill me with questions: “From which dirty book have you read this crazy news that the Messiah will return? Who has brainwashed you? We have never heard such idiocy.”
His reaction was not new to me. “There is always a first time to hear news,” I said. They continued with such comments and questions, but I waited patiently for God to show me the right time to share my faith.
The rabbi continued, “Who brainwashed you to believe this? Now is your time to show us from whom you received this false information!”
I opened my Bible to Leviticus and read, “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit” (26:3–4).

I asked them, “Is anything more important than water? We must obey all of the Lord’s commands. Do you agree?”

“Yes,” one responded. “We must obey. And we do.”

“Then why do you boycott the Word of God?” I asked.

This comment made them angry. “How are you not ashamed to say something like that?” one demanded.

Quickly I opened my Bible to the chapter they never want to read, Isaiah 53:

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (vv. 5–6).

“I have not read to you from fictitious stories, but from the Holy Bible, which we must obey,” I said.

“How did you find this chapter?” the rabbi asked.

I told him, “It is clearly written in Isaiah 53: ‘The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.’ Upon whom did the Lord lay our iniquity? Read the full chapter, and you will know. The Word of the Lord is eternal. You cannot say this is not truth.”

“Why did you come here?” one asked.

“Because I believe what is written in the Bible,” I said, “and I try to obey the Lord’s commands. It is written in Psalm 96:2–3, ‘Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations.’ I want to declare His glory among the nations; that is why I am here today, telling you of His salvation.”

They continued to ask many questions, and we talked for about three hours. Before I left, I asked them, “After our discussion, are you still against what you have heard from Isaiah 53? After all, this is from the Hebrew Bible.”

They were quiet. No one said a word. “I will come here again,” I told them. “When will you make your decision if you are for the Lord or against Him?”

They did not reply. Finally, one man said, “Our conversation was very interesting.” They have far to go before they can say from their hearts, “Ani Ma’amin.”

—The Friends of Israel Archives, February 2005

Zvi Kalisher (1928–2014) was a Holocaust survivor who 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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