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FROM THE EDITOR

My husband is a huge Bing Crosby fan. I think he has every song Bing ever sang, including multiple versions of “White Christmas.” He’s also seen a few *Road* to films, strictly because they star Bing. One is called *Road to Utopia*. I’ll spare you the details, which I had to look up. Suffice it to say, the plot is all about trying to get rich. Apparently, for many people, Utopia is spelled m-o-n-e-y.

In India, an experiment in Utopia-making birthed the city of Auroville in 1968, during the hippie era. According to “Trouble in Utopia” on slate.com (a website I don’t recommend) by journalist Maddy Crowell, the township is a “venture in which Marxist-flavored socialism met anarchy. There is [supposedly] no money, no government, no religion, no skyscrapers or expressways, no newspapers with headlines of war, poverty, and genocide.”

However, Auroville has plenty of other things, like robbery, sexual harassment, rape, suicide, and murder—not to mention a bureaucracy. Crowell said “rivals that of India itself.” Definitely not the place Bing was looking for. The township receives more than $200,000 a year from the Indian government, and UNESCO has protected it since its inception.

Apparently, Auroville was intended to “realize human unity and establish an ideal society.” Its 2,500 residents even include an Israeli family. There’s a waiting list to get in, Crowell said, and once you’ve navigated the red tape and are admitted, you’re stuck there for two years and must work for free “as a contribution to the township.” “Where the money goes,” she wrote, “seems to be a central question.”

By now, you no doubt have the picture. Auroville is a far cry from Utopia. In fact, there will never be a Utopia apart from the Lord. He alone can create the ideal society—and He will when He returns to establish His Kingdom on Earth. And His Utopia will not be about money; it will be about righteousness.

When the southern kingdom of Judah was facing judgment (though the situation was of its own making), God gave the prophet Isaiah an uplifting message about His coming Kingdom. As today’s world grows older, it grows spiritually colder, and those of us who love the Lord can use a little encouragement. So this issue of *Israel My Glory* is devoted to God’s Utopia on Earth: the coming Messianic Kingdom as revealed in the book of Isaiah.

The prophet’s message is a reminder that we can take heart because the Lord, “He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Josh. 2:11); and He has everything under control.

Waiting for His Appearing,

*Lorna Simcox*

Editor-in-Chief

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A friend of mine asked me, "Is there any way to make sense of the Middle East today?" There is so much turmoil. The entire region seems ablaze in conflict; and Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt are constantly in the news.

For sure, Islam is a common denominator, as tens of thousands of people have died and millions have been displaced from their homes due to this strife. However, making sense of today's Middle East begins by going back in time.

For 400 years, from 1517 to 1917, the Middle East was a single, united Muslim region under the control of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Ottoman control ended when Great Britain and France conquered the region in World War I.

Many of the modern Middle Eastern countries, such as Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Jordan, did not exist until after WWI. At a conference in San Remo, Italy, in April 1920 that was attended by Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, the region was divided in accordance with the League of Nations mandate. Great Britain and France received control over various areas of the Middle East; and over time, they subdivided the region into the nation states we see on the map today.

So what does that have to do with what is happening now? Everything. The Muslims fighting for control of the Middle East all have a similar goal: to establish a caliphate, or Islamic state. They want to reunite the region under Islamic hegemony, similar to the way it was under the Ottoman Empire, and erase the national borders created by the colonial powers.

This fact is true of Iran, Turkey, ISIS (or ISIL: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), and many smaller Muslim groups. Iran is trying to take over and unite the Middle East through military strength and terrorism. Turkey dreams of reviving the Ottoman Turkish Empire and, through political alliances, becoming the Muslim nation to lead a regional Muslim Middle East.

ISIS, on the other hand, is a grassroots terrorist organization that uses social media to mobilize Muslims to unite the area through brute force. Its displays of beheadings and mass executions are intended to intimidate its opponents. What we are witnessing is a battle for control to bring about a united Muslim Middle East—and radical Islam is the tool.

A real transition is taking place that began with the so-called Arab Spring in 2010. With radical Islam's deposing of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, the Middle East is transitioning from dictatorial Islam to radical Islam. In Syria, radical Islam is trying to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad.

The rise of radical Islam began with the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Its success inspired numerous radical groups across the Middle East, and they are fueling the turmoil.

With so many radical Muslim groups clinging to the same dream, one must wonder whether God will permit any of them to win the day. Their vision is to conquer the Middle East for Islam; then to move on to Europe; and then to vanquish the "big Satan," meaning the United States.

Since the United States has withdrawn its influence in the Middle East over the past years, Russia has stepped into the void, spreading its tentacles across the region.

In Ezekiel 38–39, we read of a time when many nations will make war against Israel, led by the ruler of Russia. These nations include many of Israel's neighbors to the north and east and several from northern Africa. They come seeking to annihilate Israel and plunder its wealth.

What is unfolding in the Middle East may be a prelude to this coming conflict, referred to as the Battle of Gog and Magog. However, fret not for Israel, God says, because at the Battle of Gog and Magog, He will destroy the attacking armies in a single day. God is the one who watches over Israel, and He never slumbers nor sleeps (Ps. 121:4).
MR. TRUMP,
MOVE THAT EMBASSY!

On December 1, 2016, outgoing President Barack Obama signed his last presidential waiver prohibiting the relocation of the Embassy of the United States of America from Tel Aviv to Israel’s capital, Jerusalem.

Israel is the only country in the world where the U.S. Embassy is not situated in the capital, close to the center of governmental affairs. In fact, virtually all embassies are situated outside Jerusalem as a bold political statement that the countries they represent refuse to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish state. Well, it’s time for a change.

I was there when Donald Trump promised more than 15,000 people at an American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) policy conference in Washington, DC, last year that if elected president, he would take the executive action necessary to relocate the embassy to Jerusalem. He even insisted the move would be high on his priority list.

The current embassy complex in Tel Aviv opened in 1966. In 1995 U.S. Sen. Bob Dole (R-KS) swam against the tide of international public opinion by sponsoring the Jerusalem Embassy Act that both initiated and provided funds for moving the embassy to Jerusalem. The bill was well received by Democrats and Republicans alike and overwhelmingly passed through the House of Representatives and the Senate without opposition. Congress understood that relocating America’s diplomatic headquarters in Israel would signal the world that the United States acknowledged Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

It is surely no coincidence that congressional approval of the Jerusalem Embassy Act fell on the eve of the Israeli government officially declaring 1996 the “Trimillennium of Jerusalem, the City of David,” celebrating 3,000 years since King David established Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Congress acknowledged Jerusalem as Israel’s ancient capital and recognized the biblical and historical connection Jewish people have with their eternal, undivided city.

With the Jerusalem Embassy Act, the clock started ticking. The Act required the embassy to be moved by 1999. Today, 18 years later, the embassy still sits on HaYarkon Street in Tel Aviv. So what happened?

Believe it or not, the delay is not the fault of Congress. The blame falls squarely on the Executive branch.

Under the U.S. Constitution, the president has the authority to recognize foreign sovereignty over territory. Therefore, every six months for the past 18 years, both Democratic and Republican presidents have stood on the wrong side of history by endorsing a postponement waiver, pushing off enacting the Jerusalem Embassy Act by citing potential national security concerns.

It’s time for a change and for President Trump to fulfill the promise he made to the Jewish community. In 1948, almost the entire U.S. State Department advised President Harry Truman against recognizing the new State of Israel. But Truman disagreed. And he demonstrated leadership and courage by bestowing American recognition on the Jewish state 11 minutes after it declared statehood. We need such courage today in the White House.

Since the administration of Bill Clinton, presidents have dangled the elusive embassy-relocation carrot over the heads of Israelis as a bargaining chip for making peace with the Palestinians. That tactic has not worked. The Arabs have not embraced peace, even when Israel offered to give them eastern Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state. So far, peace remains an unattainable dream.

So President Trump, when the waiver comes across your desk, try something new for a change: Push it aside; and, once and for all, move the Embassy of the United States of America in Israel to its rightful place.

by Chris Katulka
ISRAEL SEEKS SPOT ON UN SECURITY COUNCIL

Israel is stepping up diplomatic efforts to win a rotating seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the 2019–2020 term. The move marks a proactive shift in longstanding Israeli policy: After years of spurning the UN because of its continued anti-Israel bias, Israeli leaders now want to try to effect change from within.

A successful bid would represent a significant victory for Israel, the only country in the Middle East that has never sat on the UNSC. It would confer Israel with international status, recognition, and respect at a time when the Palestinians and their supporters are working assiduously to delegitimize and isolate the Jewish state.

Both the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Security Council itself passed resolutions that deny a Jewish connection to Jerusalem. The resolutions are part of an ongoing anti-Israel propaganda war to rewrite history and promote the narrative that the Temple Mount and adjoining Western Wall are Muslim, not Jewish.

The Security Council, the most powerful organ of the United Nations, is composed of five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and 10 nonpermanent members elected for two-year terms.

The nonpermanent seats are divided among five regional blocs: one country from Eastern Europe, two from the Latin American and Caribbean Group, five from Africa and Asia, and two from the Western European and Others Group (WEOG)—which includes Israel.

To win a seat on the UNSC, a country needs at least a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly or support from approximately 130 countries. Elections will be held in 2018 for five nonpermanent seats on the council for two-year mandates that begin on January 1, 2019.

During a recent state visit to Kazakhstan, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev for help in getting Israel elected to the council. “We helped you get accepted as a member of the Security Council, and now we are asking you to help us be a member of the council, as well,” Netanyahu said at a joint press conference at the presidential palace in the Kazakh capital of Astana. Kazakhstan began its two-year term in January 2017.

Israel first announced its intention to pursue a seat in September 2005, a month after it unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip. But 2019 was the first year in which both WEOG slots were not already claimed by other countries.

As an interim step, and following tireless efforts by the Israeli delegation to the UN, Israel was elected in June 2016 to chair the UN’s legal committee, which plays an important role in shaping international law. It is the first time Israel has headed one of the UN’s six permanent committees since joining the organization in 1949.

If history is any indication, however, Israel’s efforts to obtain a seat on the UNSC will be opposed by Arab and Islamic countries, which form a powerful voting bloc that equals a quarter of the General Assembly’s 193 members.

Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon is undeterred: “Our intention to be on the Security Council is very important to us. It is another glass ceiling that we hope to shatter. This council is the UN’s most important institution, and it plays a key role in safeguarding international peace and security. Just as we insist that Israel must be treated equally throughout the UN, this is true as well for the Security Council.”

by Soeren Kern, a senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, a nonpartisan foreign-policy think tank based in New York City
EGYPT—A Muslim suicide bomber in Cairo recently carried out the deadliest church attack in modern history a week after the Egyptian government announced its plans to open 10 new mosques every week while remaining indifferent to the violent Islamic attacks against Christians and churches.

Islamist militant Mahmoud Shafiq Mohammed Mustafa, 22, entered St. Peter's Cathedral in Cairo during its Sunday service and set off a bomb, killing 27 and severely wounding 65, mostly women and children. St. Peter's is attached to and used by St. Mark's Cathedral, the seat of Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Christian church.

Responders found mutilated bodies strewn along the church's floor and pews. "I found bodies, many of them women, lying on the pews. It was a horrible scene," one witness said.

"I saw a headless woman being carried away," said Mariam Shenouda. "Everyone was in a state of shock... There were children. What have they done to deserve this? I wish I had died with them instead of seeing these scenes."

Witnesses said the state security was absent, and the police took an inordinate amount of time to arrive after the explosion.

In death toll and severity, the attack surpasses what was formerly considered the deadliest church attack in Egypt: a New Year's Day bombing of a church in Alexandria that killed 23 people in 2011. It is to President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's shame that the deadliest church attack in Egypt occurred on his watch. Yet it is also unsurprising considering how little has changed for Egypt's Christians since Sisi ousted former President Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013.

A week before the Cairo bombing, Sisi's government announced its plans to open 10 new mosques every week and renovate 3,200 closed mosques using public funds. But when the nation's more than 10 million Christians seek to build a church—and pay for it from their own pockets—they face legal hardships and public persecution.

Even the much-touted new law that purports to allow Christians to build churches has been criticized by Coptic clergy, activists, local human rights groups, and Christian members of parliament. They say it still continues to discriminate against Christians, including with security provisions that subject decisions on whether or not a church can be built to the whims of violent mobs.

Instances of angry Muslim mobs attacking and killing Christians on the mere rumor they are trying to build a church or are meeting to pray in a house church have risen significantly. Last summer in Minya—the same place where a 70-year-old Christian woman was stripped naked, savagely beaten, spat on, and paraded through the streets to jeers, whistles, and yells of "Allahu Akbar"—rioting Muslims burned down 80 Christian homes on the rumor that Christians were trying to build a church.

"No one did anything, and the police took no pre-emptive or security measures in anticipation of the attacks," said a spokesman for the group Muslims attack Christians "every two or three days;" he said, and the authorities always turn a blind eye, while sometimes even aiding and enabling the attacks.

by Raymond Ibrahim
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THE GREAT IN...
VALIDATION

A LOOK AT THE DAMAGE THE UNITED NATIONS HAS DONE BY VENTURING INTO WHAT BENJAMIN NETANYAHU HAS RIGHTLY CALLED “THE THEATER OF THE ABSURD”

BY STEVE HERZIG
As they have since the Jewish people were scattered around the world in AD 70, these words will ring out on the evening of April 10 at the close of Passover seders everywhere. Yet, if the United Nations has its way, Jewish people will instead say, “Next year in al-Quds.”

The fact was made clear by two important UN resolutions passed late in 2016 that condemn Israel and refer to it as an “occupying power.” The first was adopted by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in October; the second, Resolution 2334, by the UN Security Council in December.

Al-Quds is the Arabic name for Jerusalem. Both resolutions are deliberate attempts to emasculate the Jewish connection to Judaism’s holiest city. They refer to the Temple Mount (where the al-Aqsa mosque and golden Dome of the Rock reside) exclusively by its Arabic name, al-Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary).

Other Jewish sites, including the Western Wall, Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem, and the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, also are called only by their Arabic names. These actions are deliberate anti-Semitic attacks on Israel.

They are also attacks on me. As a young boy growing up in a Jewish home, I cherished the traditions associated with Passover. Though I had not yet travelled to the Promised Land, the seder linked me inextricably to the Jewish people and the Jewish state.

When I followed the Passover ritual as a youngster and opened the outside door of my grandparents’ home in hopes of inviting in Elijah the prophet to announce the Messiah’s arrival, I felt an expectancy and hope that the Messiah would come and take all Jewish people back to Israel to live in peace.

As my grandfather recited the liturgy from the Haggadah, I could feel the cold spring air of Cleveland, Ohio, rush past me. I thought, Maybe Elijah will come. Then I ran up the stairs to see if he had—and if he had sipped from the cup we set for him on the seder table. Of course, I was disappointed when I saw it was still full. But there was always hope. Maybe he will come next year. Maybe next year, all Jews will be in Jerusalem, I thought.

The United Nations is attempting to invalidate the memories, traditions, and history of millions of Jewish people like me.

INVALIDATING CHRISTIANITY
But I’m not the only one affected. I think back to another Passover, the final one the Lord Jesus celebrated in Jerusalem around AD 33—not far from the Temple Mount, where the second Jewish Temple stood at the time. Not far from the Mount of Olives.

Jesus the Messiah took matzoh (unleavened bread), blessed it, gave it to His disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body” (Mt. 26:26). He also took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (v. 28). At that moment, He created another remembrance. This one, cherished by believers around the world, is the church ordinance of communion.

By stripping Jerusalem of its Jewish identity, the UN also stripped away Christian history and practice. These despicable resolutions not only attack Israel and the Jewish people but also every Bible-believing Christian.

Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Germany’s propaganda minister, famously said, “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.” These lies involve rewriting history, and some people believe them. The UN is trying to rob the Jewish people of 4,000 years of their history and to erase 2,000 years of Christian history.

The narratives in the Gospels, written 600 years before the birth of Islam, focus on the Jewish God-Man, Jesus, who interacted with other Jewish people while visiting Jewish places and celebrating Jewish feasts. By eradicating Israel’s Jewish identity, this Muslim-dominated world body is trying to create the illusion that Islam is the only legitimate religion in the entire Middle East.

THEOLOGICAL CHUTZPAH
The UN resolutions also contribute to the worldwide campaign to delegitimize Israel. The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS) is growing on Western university campuses and in liberal churches and politically “progressive” groups. BDS is a concerted effort to cripple and delegitimize Israel, and it provides an incentive for Arabs to stay away from the negotiating table.

Interestingly, countries that embraced the UNESCO
resolution, such as Mexico, Brazil, Nicaragua, and Dominican Republic, have a majority of professing Christians. Even among the 26 countries that abstained (the UNESCO vote was 24-6, with 26 absences), some contain a majority of professing Christians.

How is that possible? One answer seems clear: Replacement Theology.

Replacement Theology teaches that God has removed ethnic Israel from its privileged place as His Chosen People and replaced it with the church. This theological chutzpah (Yiddish for “nerve”) provides an acceptable way to delegitimize the modern State of Israel. Adherents of Replacement Theology (also called Supersessionism) like to ignore the eternal nature of God’s promise, “I will bless those who bless you [the Jewish people], and I will curse him who curses you” (Gen. 12:3).

Israel’s reaction to UNESCO came first from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. “The UNESCO theater of the absurd continues... To say that Israel has no connection to the Temple Mount is like saying that China has no connection to the Great Wall of China or that Egypt has no connection to the pyramids. With this absurd decision, UNESCO has lost the modicum of legitimacy it had left.”

He suggested UNESCO members visit the arch of Titus in Rome (a good suggestion for the Security Council as well). “There,” he said, “engraved on the Arch of Titus, is the seven-branched menorah that is the symbol of the Jewish People and today is the symbol of the State of Israel.”

The prime minister is right. Jewish people revere the Temple Mount as the holiest site in their history. These resolutions are so outrageous they actually united some Israelis who differ politically. Yair Lapid, leader of the opposition Yesh Atid party, called backers Israel haters.

Isaac Herzog, of the Labor party, said UNESCO betrayed its mission and gave “a bad name to diplomacy and the international institutions. Whoever wants to rewrite history, to distort fact, and to completely invent the fantasy that the Western Wall and Temple Mount have no connection to the Jewish people, is telling a terrible lie that only serves to increase hatred.”

As our Jewish friends celebrate Passover and remember the Passover lamb this season, we should remember that these resolutions add to a long list of anti-Semitic actions perpetrated against Israel that God will someday judge. He will avenge His holy and righteous name and display His faithfulness to His people.

Next year in Jerusalem!

ENDNOTE

1 “PM Netanyahu statement following today’s UNESCO decision,” Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 13, 2016 <tinyurl.com/nympa5x>.

Steve Herzig
is the director of North American Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.
OF WHOM DOES THE PROPHET SPEAK?

Why did the rabbis abandon the clearly Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53? Dr. Buksbazen explains the reason in this excerpt from his outstanding commentary, The Prophet Isaiah, first published in 1971. All Isaiah quotations used here are from Dr. Buksbazen’s own translation of the Hebrew text. Other Scriptures are from the King James (KJV).

by Victor Buksbazen
THE BOOK OF THE
OPHET ISAIAH.

Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers, children that are corrupt; they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoke away backward.

Lord hath spoken, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." 3 "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.

Isaiah the son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, I will speak it, yet will I not'tele.

Give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken.

"Awake," saith the Lord; "and be not afraid of the people. "I am the Lord thy God, I will lift up thy horn, I will save thy base.

He who goeth up from the wilderness
of spices.
The prophecy of Isaiah 52:13—53:12 is the heart of the second part of the book of Isaiah. Here Messianic vision reaches its pinnacle.

For almost two millennia, Jewish and Christian scholars have debated the question whether the prophet was speaking of himself or of Israel who suffers innocently for the nations of the world. The Ethiopian eunuch touched upon the heart of this question when he asked Philip, an early disciple of Christ, “I pray thee, of whom speakesthe prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?” (Acts 8:34).

Generally, there is little difference between Jewish and Christian translations of this majestic passage of Isaiah, apart from a few words of secondary importance. However, there is a profound and basic difference in the interpretation of the text. Ancient Jewish tradition has for many centuries seen in Isaiah 53 the portrait of the suffering servant of God, the Messiah, a view which still is held to this day by most Orthodox Jews.

However, at the end of the 11th century AD, Jewish commentators began to assert that Isaiah had in mind Israel who suffers innocently for the sins of all nations.

On the other hand, Christians following Jewish tradition have, from the very beginning, maintained that Isaiah 53 is an amazing prophecy concerning Jesus, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29).

Going back to the oldest Jewish interpretations of this passage, we find that Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel (2nd century AD), an Aramaic paraphrase of the Bible, renders Isaiah 52:13 in this way: “Behold my servant Messiah shall prosper; he shall be high, and increase and be exceedingly strong.”

The Babylonian Talmud (codified in the 6th century) also applies Isaiah’s prophecy messianically: “The Messiah—what is his name? . . . The Rabbis say, ‘the leprous one’: Those of the house of Rabbi say, ‘the sick one,’ as it is said, ‘surely he hath borne our sickness”’ (San 98b).

Midrash Rabbah, referring to Ruth 2:14, explains:

He is speaking of the King Messiah: “Come hither draw near to the Throne; and eat the bread,” that is the bread of the kingdom: “and dip thy morsel in the vinegar” This refers to his chastisements, as it is said, “But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.”

In the Yalkut Shimon, a later Midrash (a rabbinical commentary), it is written:

“Who art thou, O great mountain?” (Zech. 4:7). This refers to the King Messiah. And why does he call him “the great mountain?” Because He is greater than the patriarchs. As it is said, “My servant shall be high and lifted up and lofty exceedingly.” He will be higher than Abraham, who says, “I raise high my hand unto the LORD” (Gen. 14:22). Lifted up above Moses, to whom it is said, “Lift it up into thy bosom” (Num. 11:12). Lifter than the ministering angels, of whom it is written, “Their wheels were lofty and terrible” (Ezek. 1:18).

These are only a few of many rabbinical comments relating to Isaiah 52:13—53:12, which, with one accord, apply it to the Messiah.

WHAT CAUSED THIS RADICAL CHANGE IN THE RABBINICAL POSITION?

Behind this change lies the tragic Jewish experience during the Crusades. During the First Crusade in AD 1096, when the Crusaders, in their misguided zeal, attempted to wrest the Holy Sepulchre from the Muslims, they became aware that the infidels were not only “the pagan Muslims” in faraway Palestine, but also “the Christ-killing Jews” who were living in their very midst, in so-called Christian Europe.
Encouraged by their fanatical leader and frequently incited by high-ranking clerics, the Crusaders committed massacres of the Jews, especially of those who lived in France, Italy, and Germany. Thousands were butchered, their synagogues burned, and their possessions pillaged.

This horrible experience, which lasted for almost two centuries, left a traumatic impact on the Jews comparable only to their later experience under Hitler. From that time on, their revulsion against everything the Christians believed or represented became more violent and hostile than ever before.

And since the Christians in their frequent disputes with the Jews used Isaiah 53 as one of their main arguments for the Messiahship of Jesus, the Jews felt compelled to reinterpret this prophecy in such a way as to blunt the Christian argument. Since that time, the question of Isaiah 53 took on a heated polemical and emotional character.

Another compelling reason for the abandonment of the Messianic interpretation of the controversial passage was the fact that many Jews themselves became convinced that there is a coherent and strong argument for the Christian position. In fact, many Jews actually converted to the Christian faith as a result of the Christian-Jewish disputations of the Middle Ages.

During that period the outstanding Jewish scholar Joseph Ben Kaspi (1280–1340) warned the rabbis that “those who expounded this section of the Messiah give occasion to the heretics [Christians] to interpret it of Jesus.” About this statement Rabbi Saadia ibn Danan observed, “May God forgive him for not having spoken the truth.”

In any case, since AD 1096 Jewish interpreters began to teach that Isaiah’s suffering servant was not the Messiah but persecuted and suffering Israel, “who was led to the slaughter like a sheep and opened not his mouth” (Isa. 53:7).

In the light of the Crusaders’ atrocities, this interpretation took on a semblance of verisimilitude and found much favor among the majority of Jews, but not among all of them. Still the original Messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 persisted and survived even to the present day. It is preserved in Jewish liturgy for the Day of Atonement in a prayer attributed to Eliezer Ha-Kallir (eighth century AD):

> We are shrunk up in our misery even until now! Our rock hath not come to us; Messiah, our righteousness, hath turned from us; we are in terror, and there is none to justify us! Our iniquities and the yoke of our transgressions he will bear, for he was wounded for our transgressions: he will carry our sins upon his shoulder that we may find forgiveness for our iniquities, and by his stripes we are healed. O eternal One, the time is come to make a new creation, from the vault of heaven bring him up, out of Seir draw him forth that he may make his voice heard to us in Lebanon, a second time by the hand of Yinnon. 2

From the prayer it is obvious that the Jews of that era believed the Messiah had already come and were praying that He may come “a second time.” Some of the medieval scholars who interpreted this passage in an individual sense applied it either to Jeremiah or to Isaiah, others to Hezekiah, and some to any righteous person who suffers innocently.

Many of the ancient rabbis were aware of the seemingly divergent elements in the Messianic prophecies. One stream of thought spoke of the suffering Messiah (Isa. 50:5–7 and 53). The other described a triumphant Messiah who will subdue the rebellious nations and establish His kingdom (Ps. 2 and 110). To resolve this problem the rabbis have resorted to the theory of the two Messiahs, the suffering one, called Messiah ben Joseph, who died in battle against Edom (Rome). He is followed by the triumphant Messiah, Messiah ben David, who establishes His kingdom of righteousness after defeating the Gentile nations. 3

Another attempt to resolve the seeming contradiction of a suffering and triumphant Messiah is mentioned in Pesikta Rabbati. According to this, the Messiah ben David suffers in every generation for the sins of each generation. Other rabbinical authorities sought to find a solution to this puzzle in various ingenious ways, which did not commend themselves to most Jewish people.

Some rabbinical authorities have postponed the solution of this and all other perplexing questions to the coming of the prophet Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah, who will make all things clear. 4

In the New Testament this problem is solved by the doctrine concerning the First Advent of the suffering Christ, followed by His triumphant Second Coming (Mt. 23:39; Jn. 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Th. 4:14–17, etc.).

**Endnotes**

1 S. R. Driver and Adolf Neubauer, The Suffering Servant of Isaiah, 203.
3 Sukkah 24a, Sonoma edition.
4 Baba Metzta 8.

**Victor Buksbazen** (1903–1974) was the first executive director of The Friends of Israel and served in that capacity and as editor-in-chief of Israel My Glory for 33 years. He was a Polish immigrant to the United States and a Hebrew Christian who was fluent in seven languages, including Hebrew. He held a ThD in theology.
ISAI AH 60

B L E S S I N G S
U P O N B L E S S I N G S

G OD T E L L S I S R A E L,
“ARISE, SHINE.”
WHAT HE HAS DECREED
IS MORE SPECTACULAR
THAN WE CAN IMAGINE.

B Y M I K E S TA LL A R D
20th-century preacher and theologian Harry Ironside long ago noted that the book of Isaiah evokes glad anticipation in the hearts of believers who cherish “the coming day when Immanuel, of whom this prophet speaks, will take His great power and reign.” Ironside was not speaking of the Messiah’s First Coming, though Isaiah prophesied of it notably in chapter 53.

Rather, he was referring to a large portion of the book of Isaiah, written in the eighth-century BC, that points to what Christians believe is the future Second Coming of Jesus. Isaiah 60, in fact, is a critical chapter in the final section of the prophet’s vision of the end-times when the Messiah comes to set up His earthly Kingdom.

To understand the context of Isaiah 60, we must begin with the end of the previous chapter: “The Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob” (59:20). The language is literal. Zion is the physical city of Jerusalem, and the word Jacob refers to the nation of Israel. The Redeemer-Messiah is literally coming to the nation to establish His covenant with Israel (v. 21).

The covenant involves the Holy Spirit coming upon the Jewish people, correlating to the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31 and Ezekiel 36:26–27. (The New Testament church does not fulfill this promise.)

The message of Isaiah 60 extends through chapter 66, weaving in predictions of end-times salvation and judgment, all in the context of a restored nation of Israel at the Lord’s coming. Consequently, chapter 60 speaks of Israel’s future and both its spiritual and national deliverance.

ARISE AND SHINE

The first section introduces and highlights the glory of God (60:1–3). The key wording is the glory of the LORD is risen upon you (v. 1). The word you refers to Israel. The prophecy contrasts the darkness that blankets the rest of the planet with the glory that will come on the people of Israel when the Kingdom comes to Earth (v. 2).

The word light occurs twice in this section (vv. 1, 3). The idea of shining also occurs twice, once describing the brightness of Israel’s ascent (v. 3) and once in the opening command to the Jewish people to arise and shine because the light has come (v. 1):

Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (vv. 1–3).

The concept of God’s glory and light refers to the Lord’s brightness, magnificence, and greatness. He is the boast of the nation. In turn, He will cause Israel to be the boast of the world. However, Israel’s central role is not merely for Israel’s sake. Its light, representing the light and purpose of God, is to draw the Gentiles and leaders of the world to the Lord (v. 3). There is no room for ungodly pride on Israel’s part.

MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL

The second section expands on the nation’s relationship to the Gentiles when God’s Kingdom comes (vv. 4–12). And it has generated much controversy. It starts by affirming the
nation will see its sons and daughters return from distant lands, to be nurtured in Israel (v. 4). Then it predicts the Jewish people’s great joy because “the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you” (v. 5). For example, a “multitude of camels” will arrive from Midian and Ephah (v. 6). Gold and incense will come from Sheba; flocks and rams from Kedar and Nebaioth, respectively (vv. 6–7).

In addition, ships from Tarshish will bring the sons of Israel back to the land, along with gold, and will do so quickly when the time comes (vv. 8–9). Verses 10–12 intensify the promise by noting that Gentiles will build the walls of Jerusalem and bring wealth into the city in the day of God’s coming Kingdom.

This section has generated much contention between those who believe national Israel has a future and those who reject this truth and allegorize these verses instead. They believe interpreting them literally is carnal. For example, the church
father Origen (c. AD 185–254) asserted that people who take such passages literally are “yielding rather in some measure to the indulgence of their own desires and lusts.” He said the literalist school understands “the divine Scriptures in a sort of Jewish sense, drawing from them nothing worthy of the divine promises.” In his opinion, spiritual benefits could not be found in material objects.

What Origen and interpreters like him fail to realize is that God provides both material and spiritual blessings for future Israel, as He did for ancient Israel under young King Solomon (1 Ki. 3). In Isaiah 60:9, the riches are not merely brought to Israel, but to the “Holy One of Israel,” who has sovereignly decided to glorify the nation.

**FULFILLMENT AND GLORIFICATION**

The third and final section of the chapter (vv. 13–22) continues to demonstrate Israel’s crucial role in God’s coming Kingdom, with both material and spiritual benefits. The famous wood of Lebanon helps to beautify the sanctuary (v. 13). Consequently, this aspect of Isaiah’s Kingdom message must be talking about the Millennium and not the eternal state because a rebuilt Temple is in view (cf. Rev. 21:22).

Israel’s former enemies will bow down to the Jewish people because history will be God-centered, not man-centered (Isa. 60:14). The ultimate focus is the One whom the Jewish people represent: the Holy One of Israel. The Lord wants Israel to know He is the Savior and Redeemer, “the Mighty One of Jacob” (vv. 15–16).

Material and spiritual dimensions of the Kingdom again are interwoven. Gold, silver, bronze, and iron will arrive as gifts to the people, and leaders of peace and righteousness will be established (v. 17). Instead of violence and destruction, there will be salvation and praise (v. 18).

Israel will inherit the Land forever, and God’s purpose in fulfilling this promise is the glorification of God Himself.

**ISRAEL’S FORMER ENEMIES WILL BOW DOWN TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE BECAUSE HISTORY WILL BE GOD-CENTERED, NOT MAN-CENTERED.**

(v. 21). It is the Lord who will end the nation’s mourning (v. 20). He will become its everlasting light and glory so that there will be no need of the sun and moon (vv. 19–20; cf. Rev. 21:23–24).

Isaiah’s fascinating portrait of the coming Kingdom displays the magnificence of God. It is God who is lifted up when the Kingdom comes. However, He has chosen to lift up with Him the people of Israel, whom He has chosen.

But Gentiles are not excluded. Their presence in the chapter shows they will enjoy the Lord’s presence as well. A similar promise is made to glorify future church saints in 2 Thessalonians 1:9–12. The redeemed of all ages will stand in the joyful, powerful presence of God in His real and material Kingdom on Earth, a Kingdom of righteousness that begins at the Second Advent of Christ.
You owe no taxes.
You’ve fulfilled all your graduation requirements.
Your biopsy was negative.

Good news comes in all shapes and sizes, and when it arrives—particularly in the midst of trying times—it is usually like the soothing balm of Gilead. The words of Isaiah 61 may have affected the Israelites of the prophet Isaiah’s day the same way.

After 39 chapters of condemnation and impending judgment, the remainder of the book of Isaiah presents good news, encouraging the Jewish people that their God will send them a Redeemer and exalt them, as He promised.

A commentator has titled these chapters Redemption Promised: Israel’s Deliverance (40—48), Redemption Provided: Israel’s Deliverer (49—57), and Redemption Realized: Israel’s Glorious Future (58—66). In the middle of this final section, Israel receives the good news of its glorious future: the good news of personal release, national redemption, and divine righteousness.

GOOD NEWS OF PERSONAL RELEASE
Claiming the anointing of the Lord, the prophet (see “Identity Check,” page 25) announced good news for Israel’s people, who were poor, brokenhearted captives and prisoners:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified (Isa. 61:1–3, KJV).

“The acceptable year of the Lord” (v. 2) will bring Israel good tidings, healing, and liberation—substituting “beauty for ashes” and “the oil of joy” for mourning (v. 3). The focus here is on the joy of personal release from chastening and affliction. Isaiah was delighted to announce this good news to his people, who were oppressed, afflicted, and discouraged.
because of their circumstances.

The news is coupled with “the day of vengeance of our God” (v. 2). This phrase is not explained but must be understood as a future day of reckoning, when Israel’s enemies will be judged. A great day of release is coming, brought about by the Lord Himself, when the Jewish people will be called “trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified” (v. 3).

Jesus read Isaiah 61:1–2a in the synagogue in Nazareth and declared that His ministry was also a fulfillment (Lk. 4:16–21). This prophecy is an example of the interpretive principle of double fulfillment, where the message applies to the people of the prophet’s day and will also apply to people in the future.1 Jesus, too, was proclaiming the joy of release for those who would accept it. Sadly, most did not, largely because of their familiarity with Him (vv. 22–24). So there remains a day still future, when the primary intent of Isaiah’s prophecy and the great message of personal release will be fulfilled for the people of Israel when their Messiah brings them into His Kingdom.

**GOOD NEWS OF NATIONAL RESTORATION**

Isaiah continued his prophecy, proclaiming a day when Israel will become the most prominent nation on Earth:

> And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations. Strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the foreigner shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But you shall be named the priests of the Lord, they shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs. “For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery for burnt offering. I will direct their work in truth, and will make with them an everlasting covenant. Their descendants shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people. All who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the posterity whom the Lord has blessed” (Isa. 61:4–9).

Everything destroyed (both then and in the future) will be restored. The Jewish people’s position as God’s servants will cause foreigners to serve them. It is God’s commitment to justice that prompts Him to fulfill this promise as part of His covenant. Instead of shame, the people of Israel will receive a double portion, possessing their land in great joy. God will make it clear to the nations that they are His people, His offspring, “the posterity whom the Lord has blessed” (v. 9).

**GOOD NEWS OF DIVINE RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Isaiah then used an analogy of wedding ornaments:

> I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations (vv. 10–11).

The prophet communicated his joy at the thought of what God is going to do. The section follows (and appears to be founded on) the declarations of personal release and national restoration. What God’s people will experience in the Kingdom of righteousness is the overwhelming joy of righteousness itself. This Kingdom will not merely know the absence of war and hate and crime; it will know God’s own righteousness, which will fill the earth through the presence of the Righteous One Himself.

In those days, His righteousness will “spring forth before all the nations” (v. 11) like a garden that causes things to grow. This is the wondrous Kingdom of Messiah, which will be characterized by righteousness, glory, and joy. Jesus will rule the nations with a righteous rod of iron (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 19:15), and “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14).

Israel’s hope and joy remain future, but the church’s hope and joy have already begun. The apostle Paul affirmed that believers in Christ have been clothed with Jesus’ righteousness:

> But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on [like clothing] the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:20–24).

The realization that those of us (both Jewish and Gentile) who have been born again have been released from various forms of bondage and have been invested with the very righteousness of God should give us great joy, regardless of the circumstances we may face. And that is good news indeed.

**ENDNOTES**

1 Isaiah Commentaries & Sermons <preceptaustin.org/isahal_commentaries>

2 Readily acknowledging that many fine commentators understand the Second Person of the Trinity to be this “anointed one” (see “Identity Check”), and recognizing that such an interpretation is indeed possible, I am convinced this message was originally intended for Israel in Isaiah’s day and, therefore, understand Isaiah to be the first anointed one and thus the speaker.

3 J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come (Grand Rapids: Mi: Zondervan, 1964), 46–47.

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IDENTITY CHECK

THE PROBLEM OF ISAIAH 61: ISAIAH OR JESUS SPEAKING?

Isaiah 61 begins with a problem. Who is the speaker?

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (vv. 1–2, KJV).

Ordinarily, readers would assume Isaiah is speaking, which is the position of Jewish scholars. Yet many Christian scholars say the speaker is Jesus. Earl Radmacher, late professor of systematic theology and general editor of Thomas Nelson’s NKJV Study Bible, spoke for many Christian theologians when he wrote,

The Me featured so prominently here is the same Servant as in [Isaiah] 42:1; 49:1; 50:4; 52:13. Several reasons point to this identification: (1) The Servant refers to God as His Master, the Lord (compare 50:4); (2) He has received the Lord’s Spirit (compare 42:1); (3) He brings a word of healing and liberation (compare vv. 1–3 with 42:7; 49:9; 50:4); (4) He proclaims the “year of the Lord” (compare v. 2 with 49:8); (5) He is associated with an everlasting covenant (compare v. 8 with 42:6; 49:8); (6) Jesus Christ inaugurated His ministry by identifying Himself as this Servant (Luke 4:17–21). The passage may also refer to Isaiah, but if so, he is only a pale shadow of Christ. The Lord has anointed. This phrase signifies that the Servant is more than a prophet, since only kings and high priests—with the exception of Elisha (1 Kin. 19:16)—were anointed (45:1). 1

However, unlike Isaiah 59:21, which reads, “As for Me, says the Lord,” Isaiah 61 contains no specific indication that the speaker is not the prophet; and Jesus’ use of verses 1–2 obscures the issue further:

And he [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears (Lk. 4:16–21, KJV).

Because Jesus declared that His ministry in Nazareth fulfilled this prophecy, many make Him the speaker in Isaiah 61, assigning the words to the Servant of the Lord, as in Isaiah 49:1–7. Unlike Isaiah 49, however, Isaiah 61 nowhere indicates that the Servant of the Lord is speaking (or referenced). Furthermore, Jesus’ ministry was rejected, and people in His hometown tried to throw Him off a cliff (Lk. 4:28–29).

Consequently, this prophecy seems to be an example of the interpretive principle of double fulfillment. Theologian J. Dwight Pentecost stated the principle this way: “Two events, widely separated as to the time of their fulfillment, may be brought together into the scope of one prophecy. This was done because the prophet had a message for his own day as well as for a future time… It was the purpose of God to give the near and far view so that the fulfillment of the one should be the assurance of the fulfillment of the other.” 2

It seems best to me to make Isaiah the speaker in Isaiah 61, proclaiming this great “good news” of future blessing for Isaiah’s people. More than 700 years later, Jesus attached another fulfillment that could not have been known apart from His statement in Luke 4.

by Richard D. Emmons

ENDNOTES

2 J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1956), 46–47.
SWEET BEULAH LAND
BY DAVID M. LEVY
Israel may be back in its land, but it must fight to stay there. Here is a look at God’s promises to the Jewish people and his settlement of the issue once and for all.

For centuries the Jewish people have waited for their Messiah to come and set up His Kingdom in Israel. At that time, Israel will receive the Land God promised them in perpetuity. That is when redeemed Israel will experience the fulfillment of all the promises in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1–7) and become the center of worldwide worship and learning.
Where in Scripture does God promise this wonderful existence for Israel? One place is in Isaiah 62, where Israel’s future glory is interwoven with the nation’s return from 70 years of captivity in Babylon in the sixth century BC. Like the preceding chapter, Isaiah 62 focuses on the restoration of Israel and the glory of Zion in the Millennial Kingdom. Verses 1-12 appeal to God to establish His Kingdom and to the Israelites to prepare for its arrival.

**Promised Restoration**

Verse 1 pulsates with emotion at the prediction of Israel’s restoration: “For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns.” Enthusiasm, excitement, and expectation reverberate at the good news that God will not “hold [His] peace” (keep quiet) or “rest” until His work in and for the nation is accomplished.

Based on the word I in verse 6, (“I have set watchmen on your walls”), the speaker is God the Father, who promises not to stop working or speaking on behalf of “Jerusalem” until her “righteousness” and “salvation” (v. 1) shine as a witness around the globe—that is, until Israel experiences personal blessing from God and becomes a blessing to the world.

That event will occur at the Second Coming when God will pour out the “Spirit of grace” on Jerusalem, and a remnant will receive the Messiah as Savior and become spiritually redeemed (Zech. 12:10). These people will repent of sin and be declared righteous because they will possess the imputed righteousness of God (Isa. 62:1). Then Israel’s salvation and righteousness will glow bright and bless the world like a flame of God’s glory.

Israel’s redemption and restoration will produce three divine responses, each beginning with “You shall . . . be”:

1) “You shall be called by a new name” (v. 2). New names appear in verses 4 and 12. They reflect Israel’s new, redeemed, righteous status and position in the Millennium. All the kings of the earth will recognize Zion’s new situation and glorify her (v. 2).

2) “You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God” (v. 3). Israel is not given a crown. Rather, it will be a crown. Jerusalem will be adorned with the glory, grandeur, and elegance of majesty as it manifests the Lord’s righteousness. How different God’s relationship will be with Jerusalem in that day, compared to when He turned His face from sinful Israel.

3) “You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married” (v. 4).

Names like Forsaken and Desolate, which highlight Israel’s sin, shame, humiliation, rejection, and abandonment, will be no more. Hephzibah means “my delight is in her” and describes God’s gratification and pleasure in His new love-relationship with Israel. Beulah means “married” and speaks of Israel’s repossession of the land. The reproach of God’s separation, or divorce, from Israel will be removed; and He again will care for and protect Israel, as a husband does a beloved wife.

In verse 5, Israel’s restoration and covenant relationship with God and the land during the future 1,000-year Millennium are compared to marriage: “For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” God will delight in Israel as a bridegroom delights in his new bride.

**Prosperity Assured**

Isaiah assured Israel that God is setting watchmen to guarantee its safety: “I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent” (v. 6). Speaking through the prophets in Judah, God promised Israel He will restore and redeem the nation when the Messiah comes.

The prophets functioned as watchmen, prayerfully requesting that God fulfill His promises. They were never to be silent or at ease but were to plead continually to God on Jerusalem’s behalf “till He establishes [Israel back in the land] and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (v. 7). There is no suggestion here that God will ever forget His promises to Israel. Rather, the verse emphasizes continual intercessory prayer to bring to fruition the vows He made to establish Jerusalem as His holy city.

Through an oath, Jehovah reassured Israel that its enemies will never degrade the nation again: “The Lord has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength: ‘Surely I will
no longer give your grain as food for your enemies; and the sons of the foreigner shall not drink your new wine, for which you have labored” (v. 8). A human being always vows by a greater power than himself. In this situation, God condescended to employ the custom of the day. He swore by the greatest authority in the universe—Himself—putting His own integrity, reputation, and honor on the line to guarantee His promises to Israel. God also backed up His oath “by His right hand and by the arm of His strength,” providing added assurance that His omnipotence guarantees the accomplishment of His will.

God promises never to give Israel’s “grain” and “new wine” to its enemies (such as Babylon, Persia, Edom, and others) after the nation has been redeemed and restored in the Millennium.

Verse 9 sounds an added note of assurance that whatever Israel sows will be multiplied, and Israel will gather its own harvest without other nations seizing it (cf. Amos 9:13–15), inspiring praise and worship to the Lord for His blessing. The Chosen People will eat this wonderful harvest as they worship God in the courts associated with the Millennial Temple.

PREPARATION FOR RESTORATION

Isaiah recorded God’s divine instructions for someone to prepare the way for Israel’s return to Jerusalem, although he did not name the individual(s): “Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway! Take out the stones, lift up a banner for the peoples!” (Isa. 62:10). Scholars have speculated these people might be the watchmen mentioned previously (v. 6) or people already living in Jerusalem.

A command is given for those in Jerusalem to go outside the gates to prepare the way for people returning to the city. Numerically, this return speaks of something greater than the return from Babylon. The words go through, used twice, convey the speaker’s urgency, eagerness, and zeal to accomplish the task because salvation is coming to Zion. (In other chapters, Isaiah used the concept of preparing a highway; but this verse should not be confused with those texts.)

For whom is this way being prepared? Some believe it is for the Messiah at His Second Coming. Others believe it is for redeemed Jewish people returning to Jerusalem at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom, with the aid of redeemed Gentiles worldwide. Still others believe it is for Gentiles (saved during the seven-year Tribulation) coming to Jerusalem to be taught Scripture by redeemed Jews and to worship God with them (cf. Zech. 8:20–23; 14:16). The context seems to refer to redeemed Jewish people returning to Jerusalem at the beginning of the Millennium.

Those preparing the way are to remove every stone that obstructs the road. Thus the way will be an elevated super-highway that is straight, smooth, and wide to expedite the return. The preparation includes lifting up “a banner for the peoples” traveling (Isa. 62:10). Banners were cloth pennants, flags, or streamers used as a rallying point. They identified a group or tribe’s possession of an area and were used to lead in festive worship or to indicate victory and triumph.

In verse 11, the Lord announces to the world the salvation of Israel: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Surely [behold] your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.’”

The word behold is used three times in the Hebrew text and is an interjection meaning “look” or “now.” It is used to express strong surprise, hope, expectation, or certainty. First, the world is to “behold” the Lord’s proclamation of Israel’s soon-coming salvation and tell the message to the nation. Second, Israel is to “behold” that its salvation is coming, but in the person of a Savior who is the Messiah. Third, Israel is to “behold” that “His [the Messiah’s] reward is with Him, and His work [recompense] before Him.” At His Second Coming, the Messiah will reward Israel with redemption and recompense—compensation for what the nation suffered as a victim of persecution.

Israel also will receive four new names that tell the world it has been redeemed (v. 12):

3. “Sought Out,” because Jerusalem will be the spiritual center of the world during the Millennium.
4. “A City Not Forsaken,” because Jerusalem will be the place of true worship, where all nations shall come to worship the Holy One of Israel.

The world has never seen the Jerusalem about which Isaiah prophesied. Today it is a city filled with strife. When Jesus returns, the city whose name means “city of peace” will finally know true peace. And it will know it forever.

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In an age when Jesus is marginalized and the Bible grows more despised each day, it’s remarkable that anyone would know the Lord’s Prayer. But know it they do. It’s recited frequently at funerals—even at those of unbelievers.

The prayer actually was Jesus’ instructions to His disciples, teaching them how to pray. It begins, “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:9–10, KJV). Unfortunately, most people have no idea what the Kingdom actually is.

The Kingdom is the real and wonderful future God has planned for Earth when the Savior returns. No more political corruption, racial strife, poverty, sickness, crime, or any of the problems that plague humanity today. The Jewish prophet Isaiah unveiled a remarkable portrait of this future Kingdom.

At its inception, a healing will take place that transforms the planet to the way it was before humanity rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden: “The former shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa. 65:17). After seven terrible years of tribulation that will wreak havoc on the landscape and destroy a vast amount of the world’s resources and population, the Lord will return physically to Earth. Those who repent and welcome Him will be redeemed and enter the Kingdom.

The planet will be in shambles. Yet Jesus will reform it in such a way that people will hardly remember the chaos. Even animals will be changed: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox” (v. 25). Since they are carnivores, wolves and lions would devour a lamb today. In the Kingdom they will be herbivorous, feeding only on plants and grass.

When Adam (the first human) defied God’s command, everything under his authority, including animals and plant life, was plunged into a lost and fallen condition. The Fall is why there are wild animals, weeds, thorns, and thistles. It is why we have natural disasters, disease, pain, suffering, and death. When the Lord returns to establish His rule on Earth, these afflictions will be forgotten.

“No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old” (v. 20). No more will a child have a rare and horrible disease. People will live hundreds of years and not suffer with the afflictions of old age. No one will battle cancer, heart disease, or painful conditions. The Kingdom will bring healing to the world.

A Dream Come True

For the Jewish people, who have spent thousands of years trying to return to their land and live there in peace, the Millennial (1,000-year) Kingdom will be their dream come true. The Lord promises they will “be glad and rejoice forever in what I [God] create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy” (v. 18).

Today Jerusalem—the eternal, God-given capital of the Jewish nation—is viewed as one of the world’s biggest problems. It seems to be anything but “a joy.” The nations seek to control it, disintegrate it, and sever it forever from Israel. Yet the Lord encourages His Chosen People, “I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying” (v. 19).
When Jesus, our great High Priest (Heb. 4:14), establishes His Kingdom on Earth, He will rule from Jerusalem, Israel: “Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying: ‘Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! Arab in the hopes of making peace, Israel removed its own citizens from their homes and forced them off lands, some of which they had purchased from the Arabs more than 40 years earlier. That land, which would not produce for the Arabs, had become a breadbasket for the Jewish nation.

When King Jesus rules, they will never be forced off their land again: “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat” (Isa. 65:21–22). They will flourish in the land God gave them: “For as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people, and My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain” (vv. 22–23).

The sin curse will be lifted, and Israel and the world finally will dwell in peace. Israel will enjoy the safety, security, and protection provided by its King-Messiah: “It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear” (v. 24). As God promises in His Word, “Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God” (Ezek. 37:23).

The Kingdom will last 1,000 literal years, after which all unbelievers will be purged from the earth: “For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment” (Isa. 51:6). Then eternity will begin, with a new heaven and new earth: “For behold,” God declared through Isaiah, “I create new heavens and a new earth” (65:17).

The apostle John corroborated Isaiah: “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Rev. 21:1). Bible commentator John A. Martin explained, “Most likely Isaiah did not distinguish between these two aspects of God’s rule [Millennium and eternal state]; he saw them together as one. After all, the Millennium, though 1,000 years in duration, will be a mere pinpoint of time compared with the eternal state.”

Though the immediate future may look bleak, the big picture is glorious. God is sovereign in His universe, and what He decrees will come to pass. What a day it will be when His Kingdom comes to Earth and His will is done on Earth, as it is in heaven.

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**The Kingdom is the real and wonderful future God has planned for Earth when the Savior returns. No more political corruption, racial strife, poverty, sickness, crime, or any of the problems that plague humanity today.**

From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the LORD; Yes, He shall ... sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne” (Zech. 6:12–13).

In 2005, as part of Israel’s “disengagement” plan to give the Gaza Strip to the

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**ENDNOTE**


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CONSTANTINE’S PRETEXT

The real reason behind the separation of Passover and Easter

BY BRUCE SCOTT
Since Jesus died and was resurrected during the Passover season, you would think the celebration of Passover and Easter would be inextricably linked. They might have been, if not for a disturbing decision rooted in church-sanctioned anti-Semitism.

The Jewish community celebrates Passover on the 14th day of the Jewish month Nisan (March/April; Lev. 23:5). Some early Christians, primarily in Asia Minor, celebrated Easter on Passover, regardless of the day of week on which Passover fell. (Passover is a single day, followed by seven days of Unleavened Bread. Most people today, however, refer to the entire eight days as Passover.)

Christians in Rome and Alexandria (Egypt), however, celebrated Easter on the Sunday following Passover. Three times in the second century, a controversy flared up between these two opinions. No general unanimity was achieved until AD 325 when Roman Emperor Constantine called for an official council of area bishops.

The final and official ruling of this Council of Nicaea declared that Easter would never be celebrated on the 14th of Nisan. Rather, it would be observed on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox.

Although the bishops at the council had come to an agreement, Constantine's challenge was to convince the bishops who had not attended. Appeal to simple unity would not be enough. There needed to be an ostensible reason for the ruling, a pretext that Constantine assumed all would understand and share. He found it in the anti-Semitic attitude that had crept into the official church by this time. In his letter to the bishops and churches, Constantine wrote the following:

It was declared to be particularly unworthy for this, the holiest of all festivals, to follow the custom of the Jews, who had sailed their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded. In rejecting their custom, we may transmit to our descendants the legitimate mode of celebrating Easter, which we have observed from the time of the Saviour's Passion to the present day. We ought not, therefore, to have anything in common with the Jews, for the Saviour has shewn us another way; our worship follows a more legitimate and more convenient course (the order of the days of the week); and consequently, in unanimously adopting this mode, we desire, dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews, for it is truly shameful for us to hear them boast that without their direction we could not keep this feast. . . . As, on the one hand, it is our duty not to have anything in common with the murderers of our Lord; and as, on the other, the custom now followed by the Churches of the West, of the South, and of the North, and by some of those of the East, is the most acceptable, it has appeared good to all. . . . You should consider not only that the number of churches in these provinces make a majority, but also that it is right to demand what our reason approves, and that we should have nothing in common with the Jews.

Some early Christians . . . celebrated Easter on Passover, regardless of the day of week on which Passover fell.

Despite the Council of Nicaea, the church has never found complete uniformity in determining the date of Easter. But sadly, generally and historically, one thing it has agreed on: Never have too much in common with the Jews.

It would be well to remember the words of the apostle Paul to Gentile Christians in Romans 11:18: "Do not boast against the branches [Israel]. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you."

END NOTE


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take a deeper look INTO THE BOOK OF ISAIAH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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CREATION CALLING

The people of Israel bequeathed to the world the revelation of God through the Bible. In this revelation, the creation account in Genesis takes center stage and is recorded as a matter of proto-history. It was an accepted fact until, in modern times, archaeological discoveries revealed that similar accounts of creation were recorded by other ancient Near Eastern civilizations.¹

The Sumerian account, the Enuma Elish (c. 1800–1600 BC), says a creator god made the world and appointed lesser gods to rule it. Its opening lines reflect the wording of the first verse of Genesis: “In those days, in the days when the heaven and earth were [created].”²

The Babylonian account, the Epic of Atrahasis (c. 1700 BC), explains mankind’s creation as a response to a revolt by lower gods who were forced to do heavy labor for higher gods and claims humanity was created by the blood of a slaughtered god, mixed with clay and divine spit.

These nonbiblical accounts have similarities to the biblical account. Both view creation as a divine act and teach that mankind was created from the ground and given the work of tending to the land as a representative of the Creator (Gen. 1:27–28). There are seven tablets in Enuma Elish and seven days in the Genesis account; and mankind’s creation is in the sixth tablet of the Babylonian account and on the sixth day in the Bible.

However, as striking as these similarities may be, the differences are pronounced: polytheism versus monotheism, a theogony (origin of the gods) versus a cosmogony (origin of the cosmos), gods identified with nature versus God distinct from nature, and a complex mythology versus a straightforward and simple history.

What these similarities reveal is that a single history was passed down after the Noahic Flood (Gen. 5—9) and remained in the common culture before being dispersed at Babel (11:1–9). Thereafter, humanity divided; and the core history became embedded in local mythologies, which adapted it to fit divergent religious worldviews, thus producing the differences.

This understanding counters modern views that argue the Bible borrowed from the worldview of the cultures in which its authors lived. Scholars who make this argument contend that Genesis 1—11 is not historical and that the author(s) intentionally created a theological story that simply adopted the myths of the day to make its point.³

However, it is evident that the Bible’s authors and Jesus Himself accepted these accounts as literal and historical.⁴ (Moses wrote Genesis through Deuteronomy.) As they interpreted Genesis 1—11 in their writing of Scripture, they understood its author intended the following:

- A literal, six-day creation (Ex. 20:11; 31:17; cf. Mk. 13:19; Rev. 4:11; 10:6).
- A historical Adam (Dt. 4:32; 1 Chr. 1:1; Job 31:33; Lk. 3:38; Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45; 1 Tim. 2:13; Jude 14; cf. Isa. 45:12; Mal. 2:10; Mt. 19:4).
- A new beginning for mankind as distinct nations (Dt. 32:8; Acts 17:26).

Therefore, though archaeology provides examples of the creation account from nonbiblical sources, the examples must be viewed in light of Scripture, which has the priority in comparative interpretation.

ENDNOTES


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MINISTERING WITH AFFECTION

1 Thessalonians 2:7–12

The church is a family. People enter it by being born into it spiritually. And, as in a family, all members have responsibilities; and their commitment to and love for one another are necessary to create an environment of spiritual growth. The goal is to nurture toward maturity, giving everyone a sense of security and productivity within God’s family.

Through His Word, the Lord provides pastoral leadership, which should be administered carefully and lovingly for the growth and health of the church—especially a newly established one filled with immature believers, like the one in Thessalonica.

In this section of 1 Thessalonians, the apostle Paul explained how a pastoral staff should function. Emphasizing the gentleness and affection of a mother and the strong, loving authority of a father, Paul taught that a minister must have moral integrity, a spotless character, and a devout commitment to God. He must be a role model whom others in the church can emulate.

PAUL’S CARE

Paul was extremely patient and sensitive to the Thessalonians’ needs: “But we [his missionary team] were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children” (v. 7).

The phrase we were gentle among you reveals the character of Paul’s ministry at Thessalonica. He used the word gentle when telling Timothy, his son in the faith, how church leaders should serve a congregation (2 Tim. 2:24).

The word cherish means “to warm.” The picture is of a mother bird warming and protecting her young by covering them with her wings. This is how tenderly and compassionately Paul and his team treated new, immature believers in the faith: “So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Th. 2:8). The word affectionately expresses the warmth and tenderness Paul felt for the Thessalonians. Although not in Thessalonica when he wrote this epistle, Paul still had the same nurturing love and care for the believers there.

This love was expressed in two ways: First, Paul’s team gave the Thessalonians the “gospel of God.” They gave them the Good News concerning salvation in Christ, which resulted in their redemption. Salvation is the most precious gift God can bestow on someone who repents because of its timeless and eternal benefit. It represents the apex of God’s genuine love.

Second, they imparted their “own lives [souls]” to them (v. 8). The word dear (Greek, agapē) is a form of agapē, referring to selfless, sacrificial love. That is the type of love Paul and his team felt for these Christians. They ministered to them as nursing mothers feeding their newborns. Paul nourished them on the milk of God’s Word with passion and tender affection.

PAUL’S CONDUCT

Paul exhorted the church to remember how he and the mission team conducted themselves: “For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God” (v. 9).

In other words, Paul and his team brought the “gospel of God” to them at great personal cost. He never put a price tag on his ministry and worked long hours at the trade of tentmaking to support himself (cf. Acts 18:2–3). Jewish fathers in the first century always taught their sons a trade.) Thus no one could accuse Paul of being in the ministry for financial gain.

Paul called his tentmaking “labor and toil” (1 Th. 2:9). It was difficult, wearisome work to the point of exhaustion; and he probably earned a low wage. He labored “night and day,” meaning he rose before dawn to work many hours in order to be free to minister later in the day.

Paul paid his way so he would not be a financial “burden” to the Thessalonian church. Many pastors today choose to work secular jobs while planting new churches or reviving established ones to avoid burdening the people to whom they minister.

Thus Paul could not be accused of being covetous, materialistic, or greedy; and no one could claim he preached for profit. His secular job afforded him the freedom to proclaim the gospel message boldly, without speaking to please men.

Paul pointedly said, “We preached to you the gospel of God” (v. 9). This was the entire focus of his ministry: to proclaim the life-changing message given to him by God. He spoke with urgency, seriousness, and divine authority. The gospel is to be proclaimed in the power of the Holy Spirit, convincing people to give undivided attention to the only message that can lead them to salvation.
PAUL'S CHARACTER
The church could attest to the conduct and character of Paul and his team: “You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe” (v. 10). Their works were untainted; transparent; authentic; and without reproach in morals, manners, and motives. The Thessalonian believers were eyewitnesses to the purity and integrity of Paul’s ministry and could silence any false accusations against it.

Paul called on the testimony of “God also” as his witness. The Lord Himself could vouch for him. Paul used three words that summarize how he and his fellow workers behaved: devoutly, justly, and blamelessly.

1) Devoutly speaks of the mental attitude in service to the Lord. Words like holy, pure, pious, and religious describe Paul’s devout commitment to fulfilling his commission before God.

2) Justly (or righteousness) describes the manner in which Paul performed his ministry. It speaks of his moral integrity and upright character before men. These attributes need to be manifested in all Christians.

Pattern these believers were expected to emulate among one another and before an unbelieving world.

Paul discharged his responsibility to them “as a father does his own children.” A father will deal with all his children collectively sometimes and individually other times, instructing, training, and disciplining them. There is a balance presented in this chapter between the loving, gentle care of a mother and the firm, stern role of a father.

The text clearly shows these Thessalonians were Paul’s spiritual children in the Lord. In calling them “children,” Paul acknowledged them as babes in Christ at this stage of their spiritual development. The fatherly image shows he envisioned the church as a family, corporately and individually, needing his paternal-like care and training.

Three words present Paul and his team’s approach to their pastoral oversight: exhorted, comforted, and charged.

1) Exhort means to come alongside someone for the purpose of consoling and strengthening that individual. The idea is that of fortifying Christians, especially during trouble or persecution. Exhortation is especially true of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who brings comfort, instruction, and guidance into a person’s life at such times.

2) Comfort means to bring encouragement. Paul encouraged these new believers to stay actively on course in their Christian walks.

3) Charge involves providing a personal witness from his own experience and insisting how they should order their lives, especially if they were wavering in their faith.

Paul’s goal was to educate, edify, and exhort his spiritual children on how to live so that they might “walk worthy [befitting, suitable, and deserving] of God” (v. 12), whom they served.

Abruptly, Paul switched from what believers should be doing for God to what God does for believers. The One believers serve, he said, is the One “who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (v. 12). God is always working in the lives of believers to conform them to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29)—something no believer can do on his or her own.

The goal of God’s call is for Christians ultimately to live with Christ and share in His earthly Kingdom. What a glorious hope awaits the Thessalonian believers—and all who will follow Jesus Christ.

THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS WERE EYEWITNESSES TO THE PURITY AND INTEGRITY OF PAUL’S MINISTRY AND COULD SILENCE ANY FALSE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST IT.

3) Blamelessly means these men practiced what they preached. Their walk matched their talk. From what Paul said, he and his team were finely scrutinized, probed with questions, and thoroughly investigated. And they were found “blameless,” or faultless, in the eyes of both the unbelieving public and new converts to Christ, despite the lies hurled against them. Paul and the team received complete approval from God and man because of their testimony of honesty and godliness.

Paul’s Charge

Paul and his team not only cared for the Thessalonians like mothers but also exhorted them like fathers: “As you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children” (v. 11).

Again, the phrase as you know reminded these new believers that they saw everything with their own eyes. The virtuous life and genuine love these missionaries evidenced was a pattern these believers were expected to emulate among one another and before an unbelieving world.

by David M. Levy, director of Worldwide Ministry Development and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel
Years ago, young people were always afraid of being picked last. The humiliation of standing alone while your peers pondered which team was going to be stuck with you was devastating. Even being picked second to last was a victory.

In the age of online social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat, the pain of being left out can now afflict millions more in far less time. Its modern name is FOMO, an acronym for the anxiety caused by the “Fear of Missing Out.”

To be honest, from time to time, I also grapple with the shadowy adversary of FOMO. I’m not overcome with it, but I am often concerned about what available blessings I may be missing in my personal relationship with the Lord. I’m not referring to salvation but, rather, the richness of unhindered fellowship with Jesus. He said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10).

Have you ever wondered what it was like for Adam and Eve to walk with God in the cool of the day, surrounded by perfection? From the beginning, God displayed a yearning for a close, personal relationship with those He created in His own image. Even after Adam and his wife sinned, covered themselves, and hid in the trees of the Garden of Eden, the all-knowing God called out in pursuit, “Where are you?” There were consequences for their disobedience, but God covered their shame and promised a Redeemer who would restore the shattered relationship between the Creator and the created (Gen. 3).

Thousands of years later, while a multitude of Israelites waited in expectation, Moses climbed Mount Sinai to meet with God, who declared His longing to “dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8). His desire was not to visit periodically but to stay permanently with them in a close relationship. He wanted to “meet” with them and “speak” with them (v. 22).

Although God cherished His Chosen People, light has no fellowship with darkness. The divine solution: a Tabernacle and atoning blood sacrifices that provided a temporary covering for their sins. Can you imagine what it would be like to pass through the brilliantly embroidered curtain inside the Tabernacle and walk into the very presence of God, who dwelt in the Tabernacle’s Holy of Holies?

**JESUS IS KNOCKING**

With the dust of this sin-ruined world clung to His feet, Jesus dwelt among the people He loved, the ones He came to seek and to save. He is Immanuel, “God with us.” And people beheld His glory (Jn. 1:14).

When His dusty journey on this planet was coming to a close, He spoke of the fellowship obtainable when He and true believers in Him were together. He promised to come again and receive them to Himself; and, if they genuinely loved Him, He and the Father would make their home with them. He prayed that they might be where He would be (14:3, 18–23; 17:24).

The disciples didn’t understand all Jesus said, of course. But I wonder what it must have been like for them to hear the heartfelt passion in His voice, as He was about to separate physically from those who were so dear to Him.

Many years following His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus—“the Faithful and True Witness”—described the ancient Laodicean church as lukewarm (Rev. 3:14–16). Yet in the midst of sternly rebuking those He loved, He issued a compassionate call to repentance and restored fellowship (vv. 15–19). He told the church at Laodicea, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (v. 20).

Though often used evangelistically, this mercy-filled invitation is more accurately applied to Christians within the church. It speaks of the intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ that is available to every believer. Jesus’ words vividly depict a closed door before which He is standing, waiting, knocking, and calling for access to the occupant’s life. The One who rightfully sits enthroned also stands patiently at the door of the wretched (vv. 17, 20–21).

Standing. Knocking. Calling. All are continuous expressions...
of His grace. He appeals to those inside who hear His voice to open the door and welcome Him in for a warm and cherished time of fellowship, as illustrated by the ancient tradition of sharing a meal. Words fail when it comes to explaining the banquet of heavenly blessings awaiting those who open the door. With this provision of fulfillment, security, and love, a life can move from spiritual leanness to overflowing satisfaction.

**FACING YOUR FEARS**

In looking at Jesus’ invitation to the Laodiceans, it’s easy to see the many fears that keep the door locked and prevent people from welcoming Him.

For example, sometimes we fear having our sin exposed. But Jesus knows all about us (v. 15). He is like a bright light shining in a dark room, disclosing all that is hidden. King David understood this fact when he wrote in Psalm 139, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; . . . see if there is any wicked way in me” (vv. 23–24). Just as Adam and Eve heard God’s voice and hid, we, too, fear having our sin made public. So we close the door of fellowship and hide instead of letting God search the hidden things in our hearts.

Sometimes we fear facing the truth about ourselves. We often compare ourselves to others. But when Jesus enters and we stand next to Him, we see we are spiritually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev. 3:17). It isn’t always latched closed to the Savior.

Furthermore, God’s sheep often wander. When I was a pastor, I sometimes literally had to knock on the doors of the Lord’s wayward lambs to call them back to Him. Sadly, many never opened their doors to me or to the Great Shepherd of the sheep out of fear of embarrassment, fear of consequences, or unwillingness to face the truth. Their fears blinded them to the fact that the knock was an offer of mercy and grace from God to walk intimately with them on the journey of restoration.

Jesus is knocking. He stands at the door of our hearts, requesting access to unite with us in a fellowship of eternal proportions. He wants to abide in us and live through us more and more each day until He calls us home and transforms us perfectly into His own image.

From time to time, my wife and I have the opportunity to be with our young grandchildren who are separated from us by quite a distance. Because we love them, it is difficult to say goodbye. Even though we receive digital photos and connect online, it’s not the same as being with them. We know we are missing out on so much.

Is a casual relationship with Christ sufficient for you? Does it satisfy your thirsty soul, or do you want more? Perhaps we all need a healthy dose of FOMO to entice us to read the Scriptures more, pray more, worship more, and spend priority time with Him each day.

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**From the beginning, God displayed a yearning for a close, personal relationship with those He created in His own image.**

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If you were asked how Jesus knocked at the door of your heart today, what would you say? Can you describe what it was like to feast on the blessings of His presence today? Nothing compares to a deep, personal, and satisfying relationship with Christ.

For study aids and discussion questions regarding this article, go to http://jfs.foi.org.

by Clarence Johnson,
a Bible teacher and director of The Friends of Israel Institute of Jewish Studies
UN Battle Over Jerusalem Intensifies

Following the UN Security Council’s vote condemning Israel’s presence in eastern Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu showed his resolve by going to the Western Wall to light the second candle of Hanukkah in December. Resolution 2334 claims the Wall is in occupied Palestinian territory.

“In light of the UN decision, I thought there was no better place to light the Hanukkah candle than right here, the Western Wall,” Netanyahu said. “According to the UN decision, the Maccabees did not liberate Jerusalem, they conquered Palestinian territory. According to the UN decision, their villages . . . were occupied Palestinian territory.”

The resolution passed 14–0, unopposed by the Obama administration, which failed to exercise its veto. Netanyahu’s spokesperson David Keyes told FOX News he believes President Obama was behind the anti-Israel resolution. “We have rather ironclad information from sources in both the Arab world and internationally that this was a deliberate push by the United States, and in fact they helped create the resolution in the first place,” Keyes said.

President-elect Donald Trump lambasted the Obama administration for failing to protect Israel. “We cannot continue to let Israel be treated with such total disdain and disrespect,” he said. Unfortunately, the Security Council is unlikely to reverse itself regardless of what President Trump does.

Israeli Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon declared, “We will overcome this evil decree.” Holding up a Bible and citing thousands of years of Jewish history in the Holy Land, he told the UN, “We have full confidence in the justice of our cause. . . . We will continue to be a Jewish state proudly reclaiming the land of our forefathers . . . where King David ruled from Jerusalem,” The Times of Israel reported.

From news reports

ARCHAEOLOGY CONFIRMS JERUSALEM’S JEWISH HISTORY

Archaeologists have uncovered three new pieces of evidence that further prove the Jewish people’s ancient connection to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount and contradict recent attempts by the United Nations and the Palestinian Authority to erase the city’s Jewish history. The discoveries include a 2,700-year-old Hebrew papyrus fragment, a 1,950-year-old Jerusalem coin, and a 10th-century Muslim inscription that confirms Jerusalem’s Jewish history.

The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) recovered the papyrus fragment, an ancient shipping invoice from the first Temple period, after antiquities thieves ransacked a cave in the Judean desert, according to JNS.org. The fragment provides “the earliest extra-biblical source to mention Jerusalem in Hebrew writing,” the IAA said. Israeli politician Miri Regev called the discovery “further tangible evidence that Jerusalem was and will remain the eternal capital of the Jewish people.”

Regev also unveiled an ancient coin from the second Temple period, which her advisers discovered in Jerusalem’s City of David. Bearing the inscription “Free Zion” on the front and “Two years to the Great Revolt” on the back, the coin was minted in AD 67, three years before the Romans destroyed the second Temple. “Exactly 1,900 years later, in 1967,” Regev said, “the paratroopers entered Jerusalem’s Old City and renewed its freedom.”

Even early Muslim sources confirm Jerusalem’s Jewish history. While excavating a mosque in the Arab-Palestinian village of Nuba, archaeologists recently discovered an inscription from the early Islamic period referring to today’s Dome of the Rock as “Bait al-Maqdess,” the Arabic version of the Hebrew name for the Temple.

According to Israeli archaeologists Asaf Avraham and Peretz Reuven, the inscription “further confirms that for centuries after the Islamic conquest, Muslims continued to link Jerusalem’s Temple Mount to the Jewish Temple of the Bible,” IsraelToday.com reported.

From news reports
PA: RETURN OUR DEAD SEA SCROLLS

The Palestinian Authority plans to demand the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) force Israel to “return” the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Arabs, a source told Eitan Klein, deputy director of the Israel Antiquities Authority. The Scrolls were found in caves in Israel between 1946 and 1956.

“This is another instance of provocation and the chutzpah of the Palestinians trying to rewrite history and erase our connection to our land,” said Israeli Ambassador to UNESCO Carmel Shama-Hacohen. Housed at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, the Scrolls date back to the second Temple period and include some of the earliest known copies of the Hebrew Bible, which precedes the Muslims’ Qur’an by more than 1,000 years.

BUFFETT INVESTS IN ISRAEL

U.S. billionaire Warren Buffett recently organized an event that raised $60 million in investments in Israeli bonds. Buffett hosted 43 investors who each made a minimum $1 million new investment in Israeli bonds, while Buffett himself invested $5 million.

“You can tell prospective investors that if you have taken a perpetual bond if you had offered one. I believe Israel is going to be around forever,” Buffett said.

“If you are looking for brains, energy, and dynamism in the Middle East, Israel is the only place you need to go.”

LONE SOLDIERS FIGHT BDS

Two Israeli organizations have launched a new initiative called the Gideon Project to enlist Israel Defense Forces lone soldiers to combat the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement on college campuses throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. The organizations, Reservists at the Front and the Lone Soldier Center, described the project as a “challenging and unique Zionist mission, on the front lines of the fight against hate organizations.”

Lone soldiers (people who immigrated to Israel with no family and serve in the military) will lecture on college campuses to underscore the human-rights violations of Arab leaders and show that supporting those leaders encourages oppression and retaliation against Arab civilians. “We have to take an active approach and work to persuade others through a conviction in the justness of our path,” said Amit Dori, chairman of Reservists at the Front.

ISRAELI RESEARCHERS REVERSE BONE LOSS

Researchers at the Israeli biotech company Bonus Biogroup have discovered a new way to successfully reverse human bone loss. In a recent study, the group injected semi-liquid bone graft into the jaws of 11 people to repair bone loss. The researchers grew the material from each patient’s own fat cells and then injected it into the problematic bones.

“In a few months, the material hardened and merged with the existing bone to complete the jaw, the firm said.

“For the first time worldwide, reconstruction of deficient or damaged bone tissue is achievable by growing viable human bone graft in a laboratory and transplanting it back to the patient in a minimally invasive surgery via injection,” said Bonus Biogroup’s Chief Executive Shai Meretzki. The group plans to conduct more clinical trials.

VATICAN PROMOTES TRIPS TO “PALESTINE”

The Vatican’s travel agency has released a new set of bus ads that advertise trips to “Palestine: The Holy Land.” The trip’s itinerary includes visits to sites in Jerusalem yet fails to mention Israel.

Morton Klein, head of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), demanded the Vatican end such promotion: “The ZOA regards this as a sinister reiteration of Catholic replacement theology, whereby Jews and Judaism are theologically dismissed from history. We urge the Vatican to cease organizing and promoting tours to Israel that do not name the country [and] do not refer to its Jewish history.”

Later, the ZOA retracted the story: “It now seems that the Vatican travel office does not organize tours of Christian sites; they are operated by private contractors.”

But some, probably relying on English speakers’ ignorance, misinformed the ZOA. The buses bear the yellow logo, “ORP,” which stands for Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi, the Vatican’s pilgrimage office and official travel organization—not a private contractor.

CONGRESSMEN FIGHT ISRAEL’S AID LIMIT

Democratic and Republican lawmakers have vowed to challenge a limit on U.S. defense aid for Israel that former President Barack Obama set during his final months in office. The Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Israeli guarantees Israel $38 billion in aid over 10 years; but it also states if Congress increases the aid, Israel must return the extra funds.

U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar (R-AZ), Randy Weber (R-TX), and Eliot Engel (D-NY) called the restriction “unconstitutional” because it interferes with Congress’s ability to act as a coequal branch of the federal government. Engel vowed to “fight every step of the way” to bring about the revocation of the aid limit.

U.S. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) said if Israel is attacked, Congress should be able to provide Israel with extra aid to defend itself.

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"You fled from us like terrified rabbits because you put your trust in large armies of unbelieving people. We put our trust in the Lord."

by Zvi Kalisher

The Lord said in 1 Kings 21:19, "Have you murdered and also taken possession?" People are still killing and trying to take Israel's land. The Arabs constantly seek to destroy us and demand that we compensate them for war damages. This is the highest impedance against heaven!

Since I speak Arabic, my Arab neighbors, who have known me for a long time, came over recently to complain about Israel. They said all of the land belongs to them and that peace will not come until Israel ceases to exist. So I opened my Bible and showed them what the Lord told Abraham:

Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you (Gen. 13:14–15, 17).

I then read to them what God said concerning Israel's borders: "And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the [Euphrates] River" (Ex. 23:31). They listened intently.

When I finished, one declared, "But that is not the Bible! The Jewish people wrote that."

Another said, "We are the largest people group on Earth! We have more people and more power than Israel." Soon more Arabs arrived and joined them. I could tell they began to feel empowered.

I showed them I was holding an English Bible, and I asked if they believed in the five books of Moses. Surprisingly, they said yes. I asked one of them who spoke English to read aloud Deuteronomy 7:17–18: "If you should say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?'—you shall
not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt.”

Since they had never heard the ways in which God delivered the Jewish people and hurled the Egyptian army into the sea, I read for them many other Scriptures (Ex. 14:14; 15:4, 22; Ps. 83:3–16; Isa. 41:8–15; Joel 3).

One of them asked, “Are you sure this is true? How can this be?”

I reminded them how the Arab armies far outnumbered the Israeli army in Israel’s War of Independence. “I fought in all of Israel’s wars,” I said. “In 1948, we had only a half million people, and you came against us like the mighty locusts—five Arab countries against tiny Israel. You were confident you would erase us from the map. You had the best weapons, and we had almost nothing. But the Word of the Lord is eternal. It stands firm in the heavens. As the Lord delivered us from Egypt, He delivered us from you. You fled from us like terrified rabbits because you put your trust in large armies of unbelieving people. We put our trust in the Lord.

“The Lord chose us—the tiniest nation in the world—to fulfill the biggest duty. He called us to be a light to the Gentiles and to bring His salvation to the ends of the earth [cf. Isa. 49:6].

One of them replied, “Are you going to tell us that what you say is also written in the Bible?”

I told him, “If you want, I will show you where it is written.” So I showed him Isaiah 49:6, and he read it aloud. “If this is so,” he asked, “then why is the world against you?”

I told him, “Those who read the Bible and believe what is written in it are not against us. They do not live by the sword, as you do.”

At the end of our long conversation, they told me they would come again. Even though they are our enemies, we must share with them the truth of God’s Word. If they trust in the Lord, we can become brothers.

—The Friends of Israel Archives, July 2005

**Zvi Kalisher** (1928–2014) was a Holocaust survivor who was known for his unwavering faithfulness to the Lord and his bold witness in Jerusalem. He was with The Friends of Israel for more than 55 years.
All seemed lost for the Jewish people. They were exiled to a foreign land, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Temple lay in ruins. Yet even in one of Israel’s darkest moments, God raised up a prophet—Daniel—to give His people hope and to model how a servant of the Lord can live righteously in a wicked world.

Our sovereign God never abandoned His people. He spoke through Daniel to comfort the Jewish people with the truth that one day He would restore Israel’s joy and establish an everlasting Kingdom with the one true King—the exalted Messiah Jesus. Join us as we study the book of Daniel and apply its truths to our lives.

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