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by Elwood McQuaid

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I started working for Elwood McQuaid in 1999. He was executive director of The Friends of Israel and always led our Up to Jerusalem tours. My mother-in-law, Vera Bowker, then FOI’s publications manager, was particularly excited about one of the tours because it was to be her first trip to Israel. I was in Elwood’s office when ABC News’s Nightline telephoned him, wanting to send a camera crew. When the segment aired, my husband and I saw Vera hobble down the steps at the Garden Tomb.

What we didn’t see was how Elwood took care of her. Her hip, due to be replaced, hurt so much she could barely walk. He often sat with her, carefully pointing out everything of significance, while our other leaders guided the rest of the tour.

When Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was flying home from one of his trips to the United States, Elwood and his wife were on the plane. When Sharon learned Elwood was on board, he dispatched a member of his security detail to deliver a pillow to Mrs. McQuaid.

Elwood has had casual friendships with four Israeli prime ministers, including Golda Meir, with whom he corresponded, and Benjamin Netanyahu. But one of his fondest friendships was with David Bar-Ilan, the concert pianist and editor-in-chief of The Jerusalem Post who became chief spokesman for the Israeli government under Netanyahu from 1996 to 1999. After David’s debilitating stroke, Elwood visited him at his home in Israel until Bar-Ilan’s death in 2003.

Elwood has associated with dignitaries too numerous to name, yet I once watched as he knelt in a puddle during a driving rain in Jerusalem to tie the shoes of an elderly woman on our tour.

This has been a difficult column for me to write. Elwood mentored me and gave me the vision, encouragement, and insight I needed to do this job. Now, after 27 years with The Friends of Israel, he is retiring. He is 86, and I can’t blame him. I also can’t think of a better issue of Israel My Glory in which to run his final article than this one, which focuses on the Lord he has loved and served most of his life—the One whose name is above all names and in whom rests the hope of mankind.

We wish Elwood God’s very best. He is working on a wonderful new book about his days in the pastorate, and I can’t wait to read it. “The humility, the wisdom he has,” my mother-in-law said. “He is a brilliant, godly man. And it was the greatest privilege of my life to have been able to work for him.” My sentiments exactly.

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
“This is the most important lesson you will learn today!” Rafi said as the Jeep came to a stop on a dirt road, about half a mile from the fence dividing Gaza from Israel. Rafi climbed out with a hand shovel in tow. “Come, follow me. I will show you the lesson.” To our right was a golden field of wheat. To our left were beautiful, green leafy plants that seemed to stretch to the horizon. Before I knew it, Rafi was on his knees, digging. What is he going to show us? I wondered. Is it an entrance to a terrorist tunnel from Gaza? He had told us earlier Israelis found several in the area. Rafi heads security for Sdot Negev, “The Fields of the Negev,” a region along the Gaza border made up of 16 agricultural communities that Hamas terrorists target with their missiles and tunnels. Yet there is a waiting list of Israelis who want to buy homes and settle here. This thriving agricultural area has blossomed in the wilderness because of an Israeli invention, drip irrigation. Today the land along the northern Gaza border is teeming with lush crops.

After a few minutes of digging in the dark soil, Rafi stood and held up a bundle of carrots. They were the biggest carrots I had ever seen. This is just another amazing way Israel is leading the world in innovation, I thought. Israel is helping to feed the world through new developments in agriculture.

“This is the lesson I have for you,” Rafi said. “The land on this side of the fence and the land on the other side of the fence is the same land. The difference is that in Israel we use the land for good, and in Gaza they use the land for evil to kill Israelis.” Then he added, “Please tell this to others when you go home!”

The prophet Isaiah said, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil” (Isa. 5:20). On the Gaza side of the fence, men plot evil against Israel and call it good. They divert critical humanitarian resources and use them for terrorism while letting their own people suffer.

Rafi told me Israel sends food, medical assistance, and aid to Arab Gaza. What does it receive in return? Gaza sends missiles and burrows tunnels into Israel to murder Jewish people. To make his point, Rafi retrieved part of a terrorist missile from the back of the Jeep to show me. “This missile was launched in Gaza and fell in a school yard,” he said. “Thankfully, it was on a Sabbath when the school is closed. We were able to clean up the damage before the children returned for school on Sunday.” I was in the area that day to visit the missile shelters The Friends of Israel has placed there through generous donations to our Israel Relief Fund. We work with an Israeli organization, Operation Lifeshield. Rabbi Shmuel Bowman, director of Operation Lifeshield, took Bill Sutter, our former executive director, and me to meet Rafi and visit the shelters we placed.

One was set at a drop-off zone for children at an elementary school that is so close to Gaza the children have only 10 seconds to find a shelter when they hear the sirens. Rafi said this shelter makes such a difference. It is a real comfort in time of need.

Rafi’s lesson is a good one to remember. Israel works to do good with its land, while the terrorists of Gaza work to do evil. There is no question where I stand. With Israel!
A CHANGE OF GUARD OR CHANGE OF HEART?

By the time this issue of *Israel My Glory* arrives in mailboxes, America’s democracy may be days away from the 2016 presidential election. Or the election finally will be over, and the local voting booth will have become every eligible American citizen’s soapbox to project his or her voice around the world.

Americans are ready for a change, yet many lack confidence in the options available. Polling data shows that 65 percent of the nation is dissatisfied with the direction of the country. Many people are discouraged with the way the economy is being managed, the apparent lack of leadership in thwarting international threats like ISIS and other radical Islamic terror groups, and the problems surrounding immigration. They shudder at the divisiveness that separates Americans based on political leanings, class, color, and faith.

Americans are ready for a change of guard because many believe that with change comes hope. They’re looking for a fresh outlook and a powerful response to whatever issues they believe are taking this country down the wrong path.

The United States of America will inaugurate a new president to lead it on January 20, 2017. But changing the chief executive may not fix our uneven economic system. A new face in the White House may not quell the global threat of ISIS or even patch the great divide among us. If people place their collective faith in this person to fix America, we will never have true course correction in this great country. We’ll merely have another person to blame.

What America really needs is a change of heart—a heart that turns to the things of God and chooses to follow His will. A true spiritual revival could correct much of what is wrong with the nation today. The Lord expounds in His Scriptures on the wisdom needed to handle many of our domestic and international problems, if we would just turn our hearts toward Him.

Like us, the ancient Israelites believed their country was headed in the wrong direction. In 1 Samuel 8, they looked for one person to manage their problems. And no one seemed confident about the options that were available. So the elders of Israel said to the prophet Samuel, “Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (v. 5). The Israelites wanted a sovereign who looked, sounded, and acted like every other king in the world.

The Lord told Samuel to give the people what they wanted. “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (v. 7). The Lord’s response to Samuel seems more pertinent than ever today. So many people have rejected the Lord, that He should not reign over them.

Both the Lord and Samuel knew a king would not fix Israel’s problems. The Israelites needed a change of heart to be able to see the freedom they could have if only they turned to God and let Him reign.

The change America needs today will not trickle down from Washington, DC. Policies can be altered and laws can be added and redacted. But the long-lasting type of change—the change for which we all hope—starts in the hearts of individuals. May we pray not only for the new leadership of America but for a global revival that turns hearts to the one true God who knows what is best for this world and whose mercies are new every morning.

by Chris Katulka
Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russia’s President Vladimir Putin are working to repair bilateral relations.

Long fraught with tension, ties between the geopolitical rivals reached a new low after Ankara shot down a Russian warplane near the Turkish-Syrian border in November 2015.

Erdogan recently traveled to Russia to make amends. He called Putin a “valuable friend,” and the Russian leader obliged. “This meeting has a very significant importance for the fate of the Russia-Turkey relationship. We should not simply return to the previous level but exceed it and go further,” Putin said.

Erdogan’s rapprochement with Moscow comes amid deteriorating relations between Ankara and its NATO allies in the West. Erdogan, who faces mounting international criticism for his crackdown on journalists and political opponents, has pushed Turkey in an anti-Western, Islamic direction. He has angrily accused the United States of supporting a coup to remove him from power and has unleashed a wave of anti-American propaganda on Turkish state television. At the same time, Erdogan’s relationship with the European Union (EU) has become increasingly acrimonious.

As Turkey drifts away from the West, Erdogan needs Putin as a hedge against international isolation. Some observers believe Erdogan’s desire to reset relations with Moscow is aimed at showing his NATO allies he has other friends on the international stage.

Turkey and Russia share many interests. Russia is one of Turkey’s most important export markets. After its warplane was shot down, Moscow imposed a series of economic sanctions, including a ban on the import of Turkish agricultural products, as well as restrictions on Russian tourists visiting Turkey.

Russia also suspended the planned construction of a strategic gas pipeline between the two countries. The $12 billion Turkish Stream project is designed to carry Russian gas to Turkey and other European countries. Turkey, the second-largest consumer of natural gas from Russia, is highly dependent upon Russia for its energy needs.

The normalization of Ankara-Moscow relations will reverse the restrictions on trade and tourism and will facilitate progress on energy infrastructure projects. Such projects include the gas pipeline and Turkey’s first nuclear power plant—a Russian-supported, $20 billion project.

In Syria, Turkey and Russia have both converging and competing interests. Both want to preserve the territorial integrity of the Syrian state. But Turkey and Russia diverge in their support of the Syrian regime. Erdogan has long sought the removal of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad; Putin wants him to remain in power. Erdogan may concede to Putin on this issue.

Both agree Iran will have a say in determining the future of Syria, and both fear Iran’s regional ambitions and the expansion of Shia Muslim influence in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

At the same time, Turkey and Russia both desire good relations with Israel. These interests have led to the emergence of two overlapping and competing tripartite axes, which possibly foreshadow Ezekiel 38—39: one comprising Turkey, Russia, and Iran; the other comprising Turkey, Russia, and Israel.

Turkey specialists Aykan Erdemir and Boris Zilberman report that Putin will exploit Erdogan’s drift into Russia’s orbit in order to rebuild an alliance based on defiance of the West: “Putin is keenly aware of Erdogan’s economic, political and psychological desperation. Having learned his lesson with the Turkish president, the Russian leader will undoubtedly proceed with caution. He will, however, also be keen to exploit the opportunity presented by an anxious Erdogan,” they wrote in politico.eu.

“Russia’s president knows that getting his Turkish counterpart to pivot to Moscow on geopolitics and economics will go a long way toward undermining the EU and NATO. Turkey, after all, can be of greater service to Putin as a rogue NATO ally than a Russian satellite,” they said.

by Soeren Kern, a senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, a nonpartisan foreign-policy think tank based in New York City
GERMANY—Thousands of Christians who fled to Germany from Islamic countries for safety and religious freedom now face violence, harassment, and death threats for their faith from Muslim refugees in Germany’s asylum camps.

Open Doors, an international Christian humanitarian organization that serves the persecuted church, recently documented 231 cases of Christian harassment. Of those surveyed, Breitbart’s Chris Tomlinson reported, “The most prevalent form of abuse was verbal insults, with 96 people saying that they had received abuse or threats. Eighty-six said they had been physically assaulted, and 73 said they had been subjected to death threats against themselves and family members. Three quarters of the migrants also said they had been victims of multiple attacks.”

However, these cases are only “the tip of the iceberg,” Open Doors member Markus Rode said. According to Action for Persecuted Christians (AVC), which helped with the survey, about 40,000 Christians in Germany’s refugee camps are persecuted for their faith, Breitbart reported.

A local pastor believes the reason for the persecution is the German government’s “misconceived tolerance” of Islam, Tomlinson reported. German politician Erika Steinbach said such crimes against Christians are “horrific attacks on our fundamental values and our Constitution,” and she called on the government to deport immigrants who persecute Christians, according to Breitbart.

Most of the Christians in the camps are converts from Islam who have escaped Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. They fled to Germany expecting to find safety and religious freedom. Instead, Tomlinson wrote, “they are finding more and more that they are in as much danger from radical Muslims in Europe as they were in their home countries.”

A Christian from Iran told reporters she must conduct her Bible studies in secret for fear of persecution in the German camp. “If they find out,” she said, “I will be fair game. Everyone will have the right to destroy me. Some Muslims even think it’s their obligation.” A young Iranian woman in the Bible study said Muslims ask her repeatedly why she does not wear a headscarf or fast during Ramadan, Breitbart reported.

Paul Kurt of the Central Council of Christians in Germany (ZOCD) commented, “These are not isolated cases. I do not know any accommodations from Garmisch to Hamburg where we did not come across such cases. I’ve seen families who have returned [to their home countries] voluntarily because of threats,” Breitbart reported.

Nearly half of those surveyed said even the security guards harass them for their faith, RT.com reported. According to German media, most of the guards in Germany’s asylum centers are Muslim.

Karl Hafen of the International Society for Human Rights in Frankfurt said women who have escaped ISIS in Syria meet their persecutors again in the German camps and remain in danger, RT.com reported. A Christian from Syria said he was “shocked” to find Muslim fundamentalists in the place where he expected to find refuge.

Several human rights organizations, including Open Doors and AVC, have encouraged the German government to house Christians in separate camps and hire more non-Muslim security guards. Steinbach also recently called on the government to implement marked change by next year, ensuring the safety of Christians in Germany, saying, “If we do nothing about it, we will lose our foundations in this country,” Breitbart reported.

For more information, go to Breitbart.com.

From news reports
HOPE
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Christians sing! And well we should because we have much to sing about. The Christmas season will soon be upon us, and everywhere—from the terraced vineyards of Bethlehem to churches the world over to carolers serenading on city streets and families gathered home in festive celebration—songs of the nativity will fill the air.

Their lyrics endure because they spring from a reality found first in Scripture as a promise spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

The promise became history centuries later when shepherds, tending their flocks outside little Bethlehem, were visited by an angelic emissary heralding the news that the promised Child had arrived:

And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (Lk. 2:9–10).

Isaiah’s “us” described Israel’s ultimate inheritance in the coming “Prince of Peace.” Through Luke’s Spirit-inspired Gospel, the “us” now extends universally: “I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (emphasis added).

Thus, when Bethlehem’s stable door swung open on that night of nights, an invitation was issued to every descendant of Adam to come and behold the wellspring of all hope, joy, and peace that God alone could deliver. The unmitigated wonder of that marvel of grace and confirmation of God’s love for us is beyond the scope of our finite powers of comprehension. And an honest appraisal of the human condition verifies the absolute necessity of God’s merciful intervention in Bethlehem some two millennia ago.

APOCALYPSE

It is not unrealistic to say our world is on a collision course with catastrophe. More and more we’re hearing about apocalyptic conclusions to humanity’s story, as radical degeneracy becomes the accepted standard and enforced lifestyle in Western societies.

The good news is that the nativity assures us a
loving God has exposed the final apostasy and introduced a higher hope immune to destruction. The road to the future, one might say, goes up or down. In Christ, the way is always up. But the road heads downward for those who reject the true and living God and influence nations to do likewise. In the end, their legacy will be nothing more than a footnote in history.

JOY TO THE WORLD
Over the weeks of celebration commemorating Jesus’ birth, we may be urged to remember “the reason for the season.” To some, the slogan may seem trite and superficial. In reality, it spreads a maxim all too often forgotten and too spectacular to trivialize. For it reminds us of a single event, unequalled since the creation: God sent His Son into the world. The mission was accomplished in a fashion no human mind could ever have devised. God, robed in flesh, stepped into time through the Person of His Son to offer a divine peace plan between Creator and created. This plan is so intensely personal it has to be experienced to be fully realized.

In other words, it is divinely supernatural. It cannot be rationally explained but can be seen through the redemptive, life-altering revolution that reshapes the lives of those who have accepted God’s gift of new life in Christ—a transaction duplicated billions of times over in the past 2,000 years. This transaction transcends social and political restrictions and all barriers of language, location, race, and culture to imbue, without bias, the qualities of love, joy, peace, hope, and personal assurance of eternal life. When the unregenerate witness the change in those who have become “born again,” they see attributes reflecting Christ.

My story mirrors that of countless others. Reared in a non-Christian environment, I had a life of ordinary activity—with something missing. Everything changed when the gospel and my need of a personal, new birth through Jesus Christ were explained to me. A key element on my road to redemption was a sermon by Jewish-Christian evangelist Dr. Hyman Appleman. His message was simple and crystal clear. He related my sinful position and God’s gracious provision and told me new life was available through Christ’s redeeming sacrifice on Calvary.

When I accepted the invitation to become a believer, everything changed in an instant. I had peace with God, joy that He had found me, and a never-before-known love for Christ. The new birth was literally a life-transforming experience. Today, some seven decades later, I can thank Him for His “love worth finding,” to borrow a phrase from my late friend, Adrian Rogers.

I’ve been asked countless times over the years about my love for the Jewish people and Israel—something totally unknown to me before my encounter with Christ. My answer is simple: “I met a Jew one day who changed my life. His name is Jesus. Since I met Him, I’ve never been the same, and I owe Him everything.”

I wanted to put that on the record in this my final regular piece in Israel My Glory, which has been so much a part of my life for so many years. I do so with joy, at this season in particular, when we commemorate Jesus’ birth and remember all He has done for us.

DIDN’T KNOW WHO YOU WERE
Of all the carols we cherish in our celebration of the nativity, one keeps coming to mind as the demonic crusade to obliterate Christ and Christianity intensifies. The plaintive words of a 1934 spiritual by Robert MacGimsey relate what once was and, should the current downward spiral continue, the haunting prospect of what may well be in the future:

Sweet little Jesus boy—
They made you be born in a manger.
Sweet little Holy Child—
Didn’t know who You was.
Didn’t know you’d come to save us all, Lord;
To take our sins away.
Our eyes were blind, we couldn’t see.
We didn’t know who you was.

The blindness in those days came from neglect. That is, those who knew the truth failed to fulfill their obligation to proclaim a clear gospel message to the masses. The blindness being foisted on us today is self-imposed. To know but to repudiate, conspire to criminalize, and prohibit the very mention of God or Christ are offenses destined to reap irreparable consequences.

In fact, an appropriate analogy can be drawn from the ancient David-versus-Goliath battle in the Valley of Elah (1 Sam. 17). Every advantage, including size, strength, and equipment, seemed to be on the Philistines’ side. But appearances often deceive. In reality, the lumbering giant was badly outmatched. For Bethlehem’s David, although little more than a boy, carried more than a sling and stones that day. As he declared to Goliath, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts” (v. 45). In His name is the power to move mountains.

And so it is in the valley of current conflict. That fateful night in Bethlehem Judah, a Child was born. To the world at large, He was just another baby boy—one more hungry mouth to feed. Little could people have envisioned what was transpiring in an inhospitable stable that night: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:11).

So we will come—some to Bethlehem, more to our churches, some to the homes of our friends in Christ—and we will sing. Simple words proclaiming His birth and universal power to save all who will come to Him. But more than the recitation of words long remembered, ours will be lyrics from the heart.

Merry Christmas.
GOD
IS...

Although we’ll never grasp God in His entirety, we can still learn about Him through three things in particular.

BY MIKE STALLARD
When I was a PhD candidate, I had to endure a comprehensive oral examination before four professors. The most surprising thing I was asked to do was “Define God.” I had not prepared for such a general, broad inquiry and had only heard that type of “question” from elementary-age children at my local church.

So I started listing the attributes of God: love, justice, omnipresence, etc. I asked the interrogating professor if that was what he wanted. His response floored me. “So far,” he replied, “you haven’t said anything that makes me think you are a Christian. A Muslim could say the same thing.” Obviously, I needed more precision to express what the Bible teaches about who God is.

No technical definition of God appears in His Word. God is incomprehensible. The prophet Isaiah said, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9). God in His entirety cannot be grasped by man intellectually.

However, God still wants us to know some truth about who He is and how He works in the world. Beyond that, He wants us to know Him personally. So the Bible uses narratives, poetry, prophecy, and epistles to lead us to a definition of God.

Perhaps the best way to outline the Bible’s overall presentation of God is to consider God’s attributes, His acts in history, and the fact that God is a trinity: three Persons in one Godhead.

**HIS ATTRIBUTES**

Instead of the word attributes, many Bible teachers prefer the term perfections because, as theologian Dr. Charles Ryrie explained, “All of the qualities or attributes of God are perfect.”

To glean how God is characterized, we study the Bible inductively from passage to passage. The resulting list of attributes includes eternity, freedom, immutability, infinity, holiness, love, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, righteousness, simplicity, sovereignty, truth, and unity. Some theologians organize these attributes into categories to help remember and teach them.

For example, theologian Louis Berkhof follows the popular categories of incommunicable and communicable. The incommunicable attributes belong to God alone, such as omnipresence. The communicable (such as love) God shares with people, although not to the degree that they exist in Him.

It is important to understand that God is perfectly balanced. Some Bible students make the mistake of emphasizing one attribute to the detriment of others. For example, some speak of God’s love so much they diminish His justice, and vice versa. On the one hand, God is not a harsh judge who delights in punishment. On the other hand, God is not a soft touch who overlooks sin. This balance applies to all of God’s characteristics. In fact, the attribute of simplicity actually affirms that God is not a composite of His perfections. Rather, His attributes all work together in all of His ways.

**HIS ACTIONS**

In addition, God must be understood through His actions. The Bible suggests that we love God for what He does, as well as who He is (Ps. 116:1–2). In fact, what He does expresses who He is. God’s two major actions in all of history are creation and redemption. They are highlighted in Revelation 4—5. God is the Creator who made all things by His will ex nihilo, out of nothing (4:11; Heb. 11:3). He is also the Lamb of God slain to provide the individual redemption of men and women (Heb. 5:9–10; Rev. 21:22; 22:12–16).

In addition to these basic truths, God’s actions in history extend in more directions. For example, He is...
actively preserving and sustaining the world (Ps. 104; Mt. 6:26–30). Not only does He take care of people, He also preserves plants, animals, and nature through the cycles of life. Moreover, God moves in history to raise up and tear down nations (Dan. 2:20–21). In the end-times, He will execute judgment on the nations (Joel 3; Mt. 25:31–46).

God also created two special institutions: the nation of Israel and the church. God took Abraham from among the nations and promised to create a nation through his son and grandson, Isaac and Jacob, respectively (Genesis). He also changed Jacob’s name to Israel (32:28).

Throughout history God preserved the Israelites despite oppression, slavery, and threats to their existence. Through Israel He brought Messiah Jesus into the world. One day He will restore Israel to national glory and spiritual ascendency when Jesus returns to establish His earthly Kingdom (Isa. 11; Zech. 14; Acts 3:19–21; Rom. 11:25–27).

God created the church on the day of Pentecost through the special ministry of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). The church has no national boundaries. Jews and Gentiles are brought together in this one institution for the chief purpose of spreading throughout the world the Good News of eternal life through faith in Christ. Christ, who is God, is actively involved in history as the Head of the church, which also will enjoy God’s coming Kingdom.

Two more of God’s special acts are (1) His giving of the inspired, inerrant Scriptures and (2) His incarnation. Over 16 centuries, 40 different men wrote the various books of the Bible, telling God’s story in history.

However, one of God’s greatest acts was the incarnation. In Christ Jesus, God became the permanent God-Man. He died on the cross to take the punishment we deserve for our sins and rose from the dead so that we could be declared righteous (Mt. 20:28; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:1–4).

The incarnation, more than any other act of God, shows both His holiness as He deals with sin and His profound love as He provides a way of salvation for sinners. This great salvation is available to all who put their faith in Christ alone for deliverance.

**His Nature**

God also must be understood in view of His trinitarian character. Judaism and Islam, the other great monotheistic faiths besides Christianity, do not understand this aspect of God.

God is one being, or essence, existing in three coequal, co-eternal Persons. The New Testament is clear that the Father, Son, and Spirit all are deity (Jn. 1:1; Acts 5:3–4; 1 Cor. 8:6). The Old Testament also teaches these truths (Prov. 30:1–4; Isa. 48:16; 63:16). Yet the Bible is also clear that God is one (Dt. 6:4; Mk. 12:29; 1 Tim. 2:5). This three-in-one nature of the Godhead adds to the uniqueness of the biblical understanding of God.

Perhaps the Trinity’s greatest contribution to our understanding of God is to show how extremely personal He is. He is not an unfeeling, absentee deity or an impersonal force. The highly personal nature of the triune God shows how available He is to having a deep relationship with each one of us.

Who is God? All people ask that question eventually. When the opportunity comes to answer it, we should remember His attributes and actions and His trinitarian nature. After all, He deserves our best efforts to understand who He is.

**Endnotes**

2. Ibid., 36–44.
God ... has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

PHILIPPIANS 2:9–11
During His incarnation, Christ was humiliated for our sake. Here are seven characteristics of Jesus that should make us love Him even more.

by David M. Levy
You are about to read one of the most enlightening passages in all of Scripture. In it, the apostle Paul disclosed the unfathomable truth and magnificence of Jesus Christ. Paul expounded on Christ’s deity; His equality with God the Father; and His eternality, incarnation, humanity, humility, servanthood, voluntary death on the cross, exaltation, victory over the supernatural forces of evil, ascension, and universal authority over all of creation.

Jesus’ incarnation is the greatest miracle revealed to mankind, and no one can fully comprehend it. At the name of Jesus, heaven and earth will eternally bow and confess Him as Lord, to the glory of God. All of these truths are divinely revealed in Philippians 2:5–11:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This Scripture is commonly called the kenosis (Christ’s emptying) passage, a theological term used to emphasize Christ’s humiliation during His incarnation. It begins with a command, not a suggestion: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (v. 5). Paul was telling Christians to pattern their lives on Christ’s humility—to be humble and selfless and to surrender completely to serving God. He then detailed the attitudes and character traits Jesus manifested while on Earth.

**CHRIST REVEALED**

**SUBSTANCE.** Jesus was “in the form of God” (v. 6). The word form speaks of His preexistence as deity in heaven before His incarnation on Earth as a Man. It refers to His essence, essential person, and divine nature (Jn. 1:1; 10:30).

**SOVEREIGNTY.** Christ “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God” (Phil. 2:6). Though Jesus already possessed equality with the Father, He did not cling to His privilege. Instead, He laid it aside at His incarnation.

**SURRENDER.** Christ surrendered His position and “made Himself of no reputation” (v. 7). The phrase literally means “to empty” or “to make empty” and refers to Jesus emptying Himself of what He possessed in His preexistent state with God the Father.

This concept has been misunderstood and misinterpreted for centuries. Some believe Christ emptied Himself of His deity, which cannot be true because Jesus is eternally God and cannot stop being God. Others believe He emptied Himself of His divine attributes or nature. But again, without the attributes of God, He would not be God. Still others believe He emptied Himself of the use and power of His divine attributes. This view, too, is incorrect. While on Earth, Jesus used the power of His divine attributes in performing miracles.

The incarnation did not strip Jesus of His essence, nature, or power as God. It simply added humanity to Him as the divine Son of God. So what happened when Christ emptied Himself? He willingly relinquished His rights as God and became subordinate to God the Father.

**SUBORDINATION.** Christ accepted a subordinate role in the Godhead. He took “the form of a bondservant, [when] coming in the likeness of men” (v. 7; cf. Mt. 20:28; Lk. 22:27; Jn. 5:19; 12:49–50). The word form is the same word used in Philippians 2:6 to describe the divine, preincarnate Christ. Here the incarnate Christ is as a bond slave in human form.

The phrase coming in the likeness of men (v. 7) means Christ entered a new state of being when He became flesh. He was not an apparition, phantom, spirit, copy, or illusion. He was a genuine Man, being both divine and human and possessing both a divine and human nature (Jn. 1:14), but without man’s sin nature.
In the incarnation, Christ stepped down from His sovereign position in heaven to become a submissive slave on Earth.

**SUBMISSION.** “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself” (Phil. 2:8). The word appearance is how men saw Him, without perceiving His inner nature and essence. Christ “humbled Himself,” meaning He made Himself low by leaving the glories of heaven to become a Man. Bible expositor Lehman Strauss put it well:

> He took upon Him a body like ours and faced a limited human existence on earth. The world has never witnessed a truer expression of self-renunciation. When we ponder the fact that God became Man, labored with His hands, faced life in every respect as Man, served, sorrowed, and suffered, we stand in holy awe and wonder at so great condescension. The Sovereign of all became the Servant of all.  

**SACRIFICE.** Christ “became obedient to the point of death” (v. 8). His death was not accidental, nor were the circumstances related to it out of His control. Rather, His crucifixion was thoroughly in God’s predestined, providential plan. The Lord Jesus was obedient to the Father in all things “to the point of death,” voluntarily and sacrificially giving His life (Jn. 10:17–18; Heb. 5:7–8; 10:9). All men are born to live, but Jesus came to die so people might experience salvation and eternal life.

**SUBSTITUTE.** Christ’s death, “even the death of the [a] cross,” was a substitutionary sacrifice (Phil. 2:8). The definite article the is not in the original Greek text, which reads, “death on a cross.” Jesus died as a common criminal via the form of capital punishment meted out by Roman law. He died a shameful, humiliating, embarrassing, disgraceful, degrading, and excruciatingly painful death. And He died as one who is cursed (Gal. 3:13).

Dying on the cross, Christ became a substitute, experiencing God’s wrath for mankind’s sin. He took the punishment all people deserve and reconciled mankind to God so that individuals can receive eternal redemption through faith. His death was foreknown, preordained, vicarious, substitutionary, and redemptive.

**CHRIST’S RULE**

Because Jesus willingly left His glorious position in heaven to suffer shame, humiliation, and the ignominy of crucifixion, God the Father “has highly exalted Him” (Phil. 2:9). The phrase highly exalted means to elevate to the highest position of veneration and worship possible in heaven. Christ was resurrected from the dead (Heb. 4:14), is enthroned “at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3), and serves as the believer’s advocate in heaven (7:25; 9:24).

He is also highly esteemed. The Father has “given Him the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). Notice, the text does not say Christ was given “a” name but, rather, “the” name. The word given means to grant, bestow, or give generously. It is the “name . . . above every name.”

Many people have opinions about this “name.” Some believe it is “Son” or “God.” Others say it is “Jesus.” Others believe it is “Lord” or “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:16). Some teach it will be “a name written that no one knew except Himself” (v. 12). Others believe the definite article that appears with the word name means Paul was speaking about Jesus’ office, rank, and dignity. Whatever the name turns out to be, it must sum up Jesus’ majesty, sovereignty, and supreme authority over everything in the universe.

All of creation will honor and worship Jesus: “Every knee should bow,” whether in “heaven,” “earth,” or in the abode of Satan and his demonic followers “under the earth” (Phil. 2:10). Every creature in creation with rational thought will acknowledge Christ, and “every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (v. 11). Believers and unbelievers alike, as well as the entire demonic realm, will declare, “Jesus Christ is Lord!”

Jesus Christ’s self-humiliation, substitution, sacrifice, substitutionary death on the cross, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation all fulfill God’s plan and purpose. Christ accomplished the work of redemption, making it possible for God to bestow grace, mercy, and salvation on sinful people who trust Him as Savior, thus bringing “glory . . . [to] God the Father” (v. 11). No wonder Paul calls believers to humble themselves and surrender completely to serving God. We should stand in awe and amazement at the majesty and unfathomable Person of Jesus the Christ and fall on our faces in worship at the magnificent plan and purpose of God.

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**ENDNOTE**

THE STORY OF GLORY
Bobby was exactly my age—only 28. The cause of death was a horrific car crash. His extended family was unchurched, and I was asked to pray with them and later conduct the funeral. As a young pastor back then, I was jolted by the difficulty of comforting people who did not know God.

Everyone was in deep shock. I longed for Bobby's relatives to know our all-wise, sovereign, and loving Savior. “At times like these,” I acknowledged, as I began the funeral message, “you can be tempted to doubt the love of God when actually, an assurance of how much God does love you is what you need to carry you through this time.”

I then preached on why a loving God would become a Man—a sermon suited for Christmas but delivered to grieving people in hopes of teaching them about a God they did not know.

Christmas wonderfully displays God’s character and plan. In the incarnation of Jesus, God became Man. If we could truly understand that magnificent feat, we could understand God.

John 17 displays that story of glory. To thoughtfully read this longest recorded prayer of Jesus is to enter the Holy of Holies and hear God talking to God—Son to Father. We stand in awe and see the reasons He so deserves our praise and obedience because of who He is.

HIS GLORY AS FATHER

The night before He went to the cross for us, Jesus prayed, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (Jn. 17:5). Homesick for His Father’s presence, the Son remembered the glory He had shared with the rest of the Godhead before creation.

The term glory means “weight, significance, or excellence.” The glory of God is the display of His excellence. What was God doing before He created the world? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were enjoying a loving relationship. They shared their perfect glory with one another in unimaginable joy. That eternal relationship, especially of the Father and Son, displays God’s character. Wrote theologian Michael Reeves,

The most foundational thing in God is not some abstract quality, but the fact that he is Father. . . . Since God is, before all things a
Father, . . . all his ways are beautifully fatherly. It is not that this God “does” being Father as a day job, only to kick back in the evenings as plain old “God.” It is not that he has a nice blob of fatherly icing on top. He is Father, all the way down. . . . He creates as a Father and he rules as a Father.\textsuperscript{1}

This view is far different from that of other religions, like Islam, that deny the Trinity. Such a solitary God could not be eternally loving, for there was no one to love. “Everything changes when it comes to Father, Son, and Spirit. Here is a God who is not essentially lonely, but who has been loving for all eternity as the Father has loved the Son in the Spirit. Loving others is not a strange or novel thing for this God at all; it is at the root of who he is.”\textsuperscript{2}

I love being a dad, though I am flawed, like every human father. When my two children were little and afraid, I enjoyed taking them in my arms and comforting them. It is a glorious thing to know that the eternal God in His essence is Father. And this lovingly triune God decided to create mankind in order to share that love.

\section*{THE GLORY OF GOD IS THE DISPLAY OF HIS EXCELLENCE.}

taking them in my arms and comforting them. It is a glorious thing to know that the eternal God in His essence is Father. And this lovingly triune God decided to create mankind in order to share that love.

\subsection*{HIS GLORY AS SON}

Jesus said, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (Jn. 17:4).

In the Hebrew Scriptures, God visibly displayed the excellence of His glory at times—in a burning bush, in thunder and lightning on Mount Sinai, in a pillar of fire or cloud, and when His glory entered the Tabernacle and later the Temple. His glory also departed from the Temple due to the Israelites’ disobedience (Ezek. 10:18–19; 11:22–23).

In the New Testament, God declares, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:1, 14). Within Jesus Christ, who is the living Word, the glory of God dwelt, or tabernacled, among us.

When the angels announced His birth to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem, “the glory of the Lord shone around them” (Lk. 2:9). When Jesus performed miracles, He “manifested His glory” (Jn. 2:11). On the Mount of Transfiguration, “His face shone like the sun” as His inner deity glowed through the veil of His human flesh (Mt. 17:2). Consequently, Christ told His followers, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9).

The greatest display of the Son’s love was when He “finished the work” His Father gave Him (17:4). This statement anticipated the next day on the cross, when He cried, “It is finished,” signaling that our sins were paid in full (19:30). Forevermore, we can look at the cross and be amazed at His love.

\subsection*{HIS GLORY THROUGH US}

Jesus not only prayed for Himself, but also for His apostles and then for those of us who would believe in Him because of their message (17:20). What He told His Father is almost inconceivable: “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them” (v. 22).

God’s display of glory through Christ’s followers would result in their unity and witness—that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (v. 23). The God who lived eternally in triune community comes to indwell believers and use them to display the glory of His love to others.

When God’s love shines through obedient Christian relationships—a Christian marriage, a loving church family, sacrificial acts of service for others—a watching world can see the glory of our God and be drawn to hear more about Him.

The story of glory will go on forever. Jesus expressed this longing: “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (v. 24).

One day we will personally behold the glory of our Savior, see the display of His excellence, and join firsthand the heavenly community of the family of God.

What we have to offer grieving people like Bobby’s family and everyone else, for that matter, is God Himself. The reality of God in the flesh that we celebrate at Christmas calls us to total commitment in obedience and praise (Rom. 12:1).

Whenever you are tempted to doubt God’s love, read John 17 slowly, listen to God talking to God, and thank Him for including you in the story of glory.

\section*{ENDNOTES}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Michael Reeves,\textit{ Delighting in the Trinity} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 23.
\item Ibid., 41.
\end{enumerate}

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Making a Will That Works

If your will is up to date, you enjoy a certain peace of mind. The fact that a plan is in place to care for your loved ones and favorite charities is a reason to sleep well. It’s comforting to know you have thoughtfully arranged your affairs before you go home to be with the Lord.

Let us help. We can put you in touch with a capable professional to work around the uncertainties of the times.

To learn more about wills, request our free, no-obligation brochure Making a Will That Works. Simply check the appropriate box on the envelope in this magazine, call Tom Geoghan at our office at 800-257-7843, or email us at advancement@foi.org.

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The Hiding Place
Beautifully restored, this is the inspiring, true story of Holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom and her family in wartime Holland. Watch as the Ten Boom family joins the underground resistance to help save persecuted Jewish families. $19.95.

Return to the Hiding Place
In World War II, Corrie ten Boom drafted a secret resistance army of untrained university students who navigated a deadly mission to save and transport almost 900 Jewish people in their panicked exodus from death. Disclaimer: This film is not appropriate for younger audiences – rated PG-13. $15.99.

See enclosed envelope for ordering details.
I am Charlie Perry’s great grandson. That fact may not mean much today, but in my small hometown many years ago, it meant plenty.

Charles H. Perry was a man of impeccable integrity. He was highly esteemed by everyone who knew him or did business with him, and his reputation as a godly Christian followed him everywhere. People knew him to be kind, friendly, scrupulously honest, and always willing to lend a helping hand.

And if you were blessed enough to be related to Charlie Perry, you reaped the benefits of being associated with his good name, as my mother will attest to even today.

A good name extols a person’s character. The more reputable the individual, the better his name. King Solomon wrote, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches” (Prov. 22:1). Why? Perhaps because a reputation lives even beyond the grave.

God has a “great name” (1 Sam. 12:22). Fifteen times the phrase For My name’s sake appears in the Bible (NKJV). God’s name extols His character. His integrity, reputation, holiness, and even His glory are all closely linked to His name. And often God acts to sanctify His name and prevent it from being disgraced.

A primary name of God is Elohim. According to Bible scholar Dr. William Allan Dean, “The name Elohim is made up of two Hebrew words. El means ‘the Strong One.’ . . . Combined with this word ‘el’ is the word ‘alah,’ meaning to swear or to pledge oneself.” So Elohim exalts God as the One who can make a promise and has the strength to back it up.

For example, when the Lord made a covenant with Abraham, promising to give to his descendants a specific land, seed, and blessing forever, He had the power to make the promise and to keep it. God’s holiness and integrity, in fact, require that He do so. Why? “For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; for how should My name be profaned?” (Isa. 48:11).

Many people seem to misunderstand God’s motives. God often acts to protect His holy name. He has promised to restore Israel’s kingdom, not due to any merit on Israel’s part but, rather, for His name’s sake. It brings glory to Him to keep His promises. If He ever failed to keep a promise, He would be a liar or a weakling. He is neither. “God is not a man, that He should lie” (Num. 23:19). “Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it” (Isa. 46:11).

God has concern for how His name is represented among the peoples of the earth. When Israel dishonored His name, God scattered them among the nations:

And they were dispersed throughout the countries; I judged them according to their ways and their deeds. When they came to the nations, wherever they went, they profaned My holy name—when they said of them, “These
are the people of the Lord, and yet they have gone out of His land.”
But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had
profaned among the nations wherever they went (Ezek. 36:19–21).
He was concerned because the Gentiles were supposed to learn about the true and living God by observing Israel’s righteous behavior. In fact, when King Solomon dedicated the first Temple, he announced Israel’s mission: “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God; there is no other” (1 Ki. 8:60).

Instead, Israel’s unrighteous, corrupt, immoral behavior produced a false picture of God and profaned His name, dishonoring His character.

God’s great name is linked to His glory. The word glory means “distinguished honor, praise, exalted reputation, something bringing praise, worshipful adoration, magnificence, splendor.” The apostle Paul instructed believers in Corinth, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Eating is not a spiritual activity, but even something so mundane should be done in a way that glorifies God. Nothing ever should be done to disgrace or discredit Him. Believers in Christ in particular should strive to maintain virtuous names because our reputations are linked to the Lord’s.

In 1870 Lydia Baxter penned the lyrics of the hymn “Precious Name.” The words resonate as strongly today as they did then: “Precious Name, O how sweet! Hope of earth and joy of Heaven.” God’s name is indeed the hope of Earth and joy of heaven. In this sorry world we live in, people desperately need to understand God’s character—His strength, faithfulness, amazing love, and gracious forgiveness. And the only way they see those qualities is through the people who bear His name.

Paul instructed the Christians at Corinth, “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). As believers in Jesus, we represent the name, character, integrity, morality, and heart of the Lord in a hostile world.

There was a time when I couldn’t go anywhere without people recognizing me as Charlie Perry’s great grandson. And I was glad. But I’m happier today if people recognize me as a child of the Most High who belongs to Jesus, the “Shepherd and Overseer” of my soul (1 Pet. 2:25).

**ENDNOTE**


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Names mean a lot to God. That’s why He specifically chose the Messiah’s name to reflect His mission on Earth.

“WHAT’S IN A NAME?” Juliet asks Romeo, adding, “That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Well, not exactly.

Names may not have meant much to Shakespeare, but they matter a great deal to God. A number of times He even told people what to name their children (Gen. 17:19; Isa. 8:3; Hos. 1:4, 6, 9).

Nestled in the pages of the Jewish Scriptures are names that commemorate an event or describe a person’s character.

Samuel (“asked of God” or “God has heard”) was the son Hannah conceived after she had prayed so fervently for a child.

Nabal (fool) was Abigail’s foolish husband.

David (beloved) was known as a man after God’s own heart.

Isaac means “laughter” because both Abraham and Sarah laughed when they were told they would become parents in their advanced age. God told Abraham, “You shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him” (Gen. 17:19).

What about the Hebrew name Yeshua—Jesus, as we know Him? What is the significance of His name? He was also named by God:

Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him [Joseph] in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus [Hebrew, Yeshua], for He will save [Hebrew, yoshea] His people from their sins” (Mt. 1:20–21).

The New Testament, of course, was written in Greek. And the name Yeshua appears as Iesous. In English, it is Jesus. Many people think of it as strictly a New Testament name. But that is not the case. According to Michael Brown, who holds a PhD in Near Eastern languages and literatures,

The original Hebrew-Aramaic name of Jesus is yeshu’a, which is short for yehôshu’a (Joshua), just as Mike is short for Michael. The name yeshu’a occurs 27 times in the Hebrew Scriptures, primarily referring to the high priest after the Babylonian exile, called both yehôshu’a (see, e.g., Zechariah 3:3) and, more frequently, yeshu’a (see, e.g., Ezra 3:2).

Yeshua, or Salvation, is the name God chose for His Messiah. So, before His birth, His mission was known:
He would be the Savior “and save His people from their sins.”

You would think this Yeshua would be welcomed with open arms. The prophet Isaiah foretold of Him. He would be the One who “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4), “was wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities” (v. 5), was “led as a lamb to the slaughter” (v. 7), and “bore the sin of many” (v. 12). Surely that sounds like a Savior.

When Yeshua was on Earth, He healed the sick, cleansed the leper, fed the hungry, and raised the dead. Unfortunately, rather than evoking comfort among the Jewish people, the name Jesus, along with His title, Christ (Hebrew, Messiah), often evokes bitterness and even fear.

The reason is simple. For nearly 2,000 years, organized Christendom has blamed the Jewish people for killing Jesus. Many mainline denominations believe the church has replaced the Jews as His Chosen People and the Jewish people are now cursed as “Christ killers.”

That is why the church was involved in three of history’s most horrific persecutions against the Jewish people: the Inquisition, the pogroms, and the Holocaust. All were carried out in the name of Jesus. And since most Jewish people do not know how to distinguish between true Christians and Gentiles, they blame Christianity for these tortures.

In his book Jewish Literacy, Rabbi Joseph Telushkin commented on the term Christ-Killer: “The belief that the Jews killed Jesus made the Jews seem not only hateful but terrifying. After all, only a people with superhuman powers could ‘murder’ God.”

It is no wonder that, to this day, some Jewish people refer to Jesus as Yeshu, an acronym for “May his name and memory be stricken out.”

I was one of those Jews. I knew my Jewish history, as well as my own family history of relatives murdered in the name of Jesus. Eventually, I came to realize that not all “Christians” hated Jews. In fact, I came to understand that many people who profess to be Christians are not Christians at all. Most true, Bible-believing Christians love the Jewish people. They understand the Bible was written by Jewish men and that Yeshua, the Jewish Messiah and Savior, saved them from the penalty of their sins, just as His name indicates.

In 1975, after attending a Friends of Israel Bible study, I embraced “Salvation”—Jesus—as my Savior and Lord.

Now I rejoice at the words of the great hymn writer Charles Wesley: “Jesus! the Name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease; ’tis music in the sinner’s ears, ’tis life and health and peace.”

What’s in a name? Salvation and peace, if it’s the name Yeshua.

ENDNOTES
THE JEWISHNESS OF HANDEL’S MESSIAH

A look at the interesting link between Israel’s holiest holidays and this world-renowned oratorio

by Peter Colón

My wife and I traveled to Great Britain in 2008. One of the highlights of our trip was our visit to London’s Westminster Abbey, which is described as “the parish church of the world.” Well-known for its burials and memorials, Westminster Abbey houses in its Poets’ Corner the burial place of the honored Baroque composer George Frederic Handel.

Handel made his career debut with the opera Almira in 1705. He became a successful composer—famous for his operas, oratorios, anthems, and organ concertos. But in 1741, at age 56, he grew miserably discouraged as competition from other opera companies increased and drove him into financial disaster. Harassed by poor health, such as rheumatism and a form of blindness, his prospects looked bleak.

Then he received a letter. It contained a libretto based on the life of Christ. A libretto is a text containing lyrics for a musical work, such as an opera or an oratorio. The words stirred Handel’s spirit. Coupled with his own reading of Scripture, he composed his dramatic oratorio called Messiah.

An oratorio is a large-scale musical composition for orchestra, choir, and soloists and is generally designed to educate people in the Bible. The word oratorio actually means “oratory or teaching by music.” Since Bibles were expensive, composers set the truths of Scripture to music for people to hear, sing, and learn.

At the premiere of Messiah, a friend called it a beautiful piece of entertainment. Handel replied, “Entertainment? It was written for education!” He recognized that God had given him his talent, and he desired to use it to teach
God’s Word. So no one misunderstood his commitment, he only accepted donations for performances of Messiah; he never charged a fee.

The Messiah’s Jewish connection is undeniable. The rabbis have a saying, “Coincidence is not a kosher word.” No Hebrew word for coincidence even exists because everything falls within God’s plan. People often associate Handel’s Messiah with Christmas and Easter. But Handel composed the work in the fall, near the three Jewish High Holy Days, and used themes associated with them. Furthermore, the oratorio is filled with passages from the Hebrew Scriptures.

**FEAST OF TRUMPETS**

According to historians, Handel began to compose on August 22, 1741, and worked on Messiah nonstop for 24 days, finishing it on September 14. He completed the first movement concerning Jesus’ birth on August 28, near the onset of the Jewish High Holy Days that begin with the Feast of Trumpets, or Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.

The Feast of Trumpets’ main feature is the blowing of the shofar (ram’s horn) or trumpet to “raise a noise.” The holiday’s Messianic significance involves the Messiah’s return to judge the earth (Zeph. 1:14–16) and establish the New Covenant He made with Israel (Jer. 31:31–33).

In this first movement, Handel focused on the idea of making a “joyful noise.” The oratorio opens with a male tenor solo singing the words of Isaiah 40:1–3 (KJV):

*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

Then a female alto voice sings the prophecy of the virgin birth: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel, God with us” (cf. Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:23). The entire choir follows, singing the joyful noise of Christmas: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6, KJV).

Other themes include the appearance of the angels to the shepherds (Lk. 2:8–15) and Christ’s miracles on Earth, such as bringing sight to the blind (Isa. 35:5–6). The section closes with an adaptation of Matthew 11:28–29: “Come unto Him, all ye that labour, come unto Him that are heavy laden, and He will give you rest. Take his yoke upon you, and learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

**YOM KIPPUR**

Handel completed the second movement—the longest scene of the oratorio—in nine days. It covers the Messiah’s suffering, burial, resurrection, and ascension and features the majestic
"Hallelujah Chorus."

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, has always been a solemn observance. In biblical times, it was when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies alone, with the blood of atonement for the people of Israel (Lev. 16:17). The blood foreshadowed the final sacrifice of Jesus—the Messiah and great High Priest. Jesus shed His blood on the cross, atoning for mankind’s sin and making eternal redemption possible for all who believe in Him (Heb. 9:12).

The movement begins with solemn alto voices singing, “Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!” (cf. Jn. 1:29, KJV). Selected portions from Isaiah 53 follow:

He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. . . . Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows! He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. And with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray (cf. Isa. 53:3–6, KJV).

The movement then describes Jesus’ death and resurrection: “He was cut off out of the land of the living” (Isa. 53:8, KJV). “But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption” (cf. Ps. 16:10).

The closing involves four truths: the ascension (Ps. 24), the preaching of the gospel (Ps. 19:4; Isa. 52:7), the rejection of the gospel (Ps. 2:1–4), and God’s power against His enemies (v. 9).

At Messiah’s London premier on March 23, 1743, it is said that King George II stood during the “Hallelujah Chorus,” which compelled everyone to stand. Some viewed his action as an indication he recognized Christ as King of kings. Since then, audiences customarily stand during the chorus.

FEAST OF TABERNACLES

Handel completed the third and final movement of Messiah in less than one week, on September 14, 1741, midway between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Five days after Yom Kippur is the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles. This movement focuses on the apostle Paul’s teaching and Jesus’ glorification in heaven. It opens with “I know that my Redeemer liveth” (Job 19:25, KJV).

Other lines include, “Behold, I tell you a mystery; . . . we shall all be changed in a moment” (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51); “O death, where is thy sting? . . . but thanks be to God” (vv. 55, 57, KJV); and “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31, KJV). Using Romans 8:31, 33–34, the movement also assures believers of their salvation through Jesus Christ.

In contrast to the tempo of the “Hallelujah Chorus,” the oratorio closes with a largo—a slow, solemn tempo. With full orchestra and choir, the magnificent work ends with a grand acknowledgment: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing” (cf. Rev. 5:12).

Handel’s Messiah has impacted countless people around the world. Among them was the great hymn writer Charles Wesley, who with his brother John, started the Methodist movement. Wesley befriended Handel during Handel’s last days and, perhaps inspired by Handel, composed two popular Christmas hymns: “Lo He Comes With Clouds Descending” and “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.”

Handel died on April 14, 1759, at age 74. He was buried in the south transept of Westminster Abbey. More than 3,000 people attended his funeral.

One would expect his epitaph to exalt him. After all, Handel composed one of the most popular sacred oratorios in history. Instead, the monument shows Handel holding a manuscript. Inscribed on it are the opening words of the third movement of Messiah: “I know that my Redeemer liveth.” They testify to Handel’s hope and the confident expectation of all who have trusted in Messiah Jesus.

People often associate Handel’s Messiah with Christmas and Easter, but Handel composed the work in the fall, near the three Jewish High Holy Days, and used themes associated with them.

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Peter Colón
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We were in the last room on our tour through the Corrie ten Boom Museum, the actual house where Corrie and her Christian family hid Jewish people from the Nazis during World War II. As my wife and I perused the rooms, the spiral staircases, and the actual “hiding place” that was built by members of the Dutch resistance, I tried to imagine how it felt for those who took refuge there and for the Ten Booms who risked their lives to shelter them.

Over and over in the Bible, God tells His people, “Remember.” The members of the Corrie ten Boom House Foundation in Haarlem, a suburb of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, know the value of remembering. They purchased the home Corrie sold after the war, restored it, and opened it as a memorial museum in 1988. Today they welcome 27,000 visitors annually, carefully retelling what happened within its walls while weaving in the gospel that had motivated this devout Christian family.

The story is so compelling that in 1975 it was made into a movie, The Hiding Place, by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

For generations the Ten Booms lived over their jewelry and watch shop at 19 Barteljorisstraat in an old Dutch downtown neighborhood. They knew their neighbors well, some of whom were Jewish. Their church was a block and a half down the street and is still a beautiful landmark today.

Corrie’s grandfather Willem started an unusual prayer fellowship in the house in 1844. He invited friends to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the Jewish people, in obedience...
to Psalm 122:6. This was an unusual practice for Christians at the time, particularly since the Jewish people were scattered around the world without a national identity, and Jerusalem was a city torn by centuries of conflict and controlled by the Ottoman Turks.

Still, this godly Christian taught his family to pray for God’s Chosen People. Corrie saw a connection between those prayers and the part her family played in using the same house to rescue Jews from the Nazis nearly 100 years later.1

A few feet from Corrie’s bedroom and the tiny entrance to the “hiding place” through a floor-board in a closet, a mural displays how many of Adolf Hitler’s 6 million Jewish victims came from each European country. The Nazis murdered 75 percent (105,000) of the Netherlands’ 140,000 Jews.

Also prominent nearby is a map of Europe with the locations of all 20 death camps where Jewish people and others faced torture, gas chambers, and crematoriums. Sixty-seven percent of Europe’s 8.86 million Jews perished under Hitler’s “final solution.”2

My wife and I were pleased to learn that two of the tour groups the day we visited were schoolchildren. The lessons of history need to be conveyed to every generation. One of them involves the reality of evil and the potential people have for unfathomable wickedness. We are all sinners in need of the Savior.

The Ten Booms were heroes who lived out their Christian faith in troubled times. After Germany attacked and occupied the Netherlands in 1940, Hitler’s forces subjected the Jewish people there to the same persecution they had in Germany. By 1942, the extermination had begun. Large numbers of Jews in the Netherlands were being systematically arrested and deported, first to work camps and then to concentration camps in Germany and Poland.

The Ten Booms’ faith in Christ compelled them to join the resistance. They hid Jewish people until arrangements could be made to get them out of the city and to safer houses in the countryside. With the help of their friends in the underground, they rescued approximately 800 people.

In her book, The Hiding Place, Corrie tells of asking a man, “Would you be willing to take a Jewish mother and her baby into your home?”

[Corrie’s grandfather] invited friends to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and the Jewish people, in obedience to Psalm 122:6.

Color drained from the man’s face. . . . “No. Definitely not. We could lose our lives for that Jewish child!”

Unseen by either of us, Father had appeared in the doorway. “Give the child to me, Corrie,” he said.

Father held the baby close, his white beard brushing its cheek, looking into the little face with eyes as blue and innocent as the baby’s . . . “You say we could lose our lives for this child. I would consider that the greatest honor that could come to my family.”3

After a year and a half of protecting Jewish people, the family was betrayed. The Nazis raided the house and deported the Ten Booms to concentration camps, where all but Corrie died. Amazingly, the six Jewish people in the “hiding place” were not found. Hours later, sympathizers sneaked into the house and led them to safety. In God’s providence, a clerical mistake was made that freed Corrie to live and share her story of love, forgiveness, and courage.

Corrie died in 1983, a true example of what it means to live for Christ. Today there is a commemorative plaque on the Avenue of the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust memorial and museum in Jerusalem. It reads, “CORRIE TEN BOOM & FATHER CASPER & SISTER ELISABETH. HOLLAND.”

God is always sovereign, regardless of circumstances. Corrie ten Boom believed Romans 8:28: “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” This faith sustained her.

The Ten Boom family believed God’s promise to bless those who bless the Jewish people (Gen. 12:3). As the storm clouds of persecution gather, we need to emulate the courage of the Ten Booms to remain faithful to God’s Word, live out the gospel, and show the love of Christ—even if we suffer for it.

ENDNOTES

1 Emily S. Smith, More Than a Hiding Place (Haarlem, the Netherlands: Corrie ten Boom House Foundation, 2015), 16.

2 “Responses to Common Holocaust-denial Claims,” Anti-Defamation League <tinyurl.com/ADLarchivePC>.


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A Gentile Christian’s Journey to Zionism

BY TY PERRY

I am not a Jew. I feel I should make that clear from the beginning. I don’t keep kosher. I don’t like gefilte fish. And the first time someone called me a “mensch,” I thought he was insulting me. No, I will never be mistaken for a Jewish man.

Surrounded by cornfields and Amish buggies, with a lone stoplight at its main intersection, the rural Midwestern town I grew up in was not exactly a melting pot of cultures. It was a place where the kids knew about pickup trucks and the price of wheat, how to dress a deer and drive a manual transmission. We could point out on a map where our grandfathers fought in the war; but ask us to find Israel and you would be met with blank stares.

Despite what seemed like vast differences between my Jewish peers and me growing up, however, we weren’t all that different. I, too, believed in the Ten Commandments and thrilled at the Bible’s accounts of great men and women like King David, Queen Esther, and Jonah. Sure, my Sunday school was held at the Baptist church, not the synagogue; but there, too, they taught about the God of Israel and the ancient Hebrews who would serve as my role models and examples during my formative years.

In fact, it was while sitting in the wooden pews of that little church that the early seeds of Zionism were planted in my heart. Throughout the years, the pastors would often speak about God’s special relationship with, and love for, the Jewish people. I heard countless sermons celebrating the miracle that is the modern State of Israel—the place where theology, politics, and tomorrow’s headlines converge. I was taught—and have subsequently come to believe for myself—the literalness and validity of God’s great declaration to Abraham: “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

In 2012, as a 21-year-old searching for my life’s work, I found myself on a plane bound for Tel Aviv. I was part of an energetic team of young evangelicals in a program called ORIGINS, an acronym for “Our Resolve Is Giving Israel Never-ending Support,” a ministry of The Friends of Israel.

We spent two weeks at a hospital in Rehovot where we worked alongside Arab and Jewish Israelis. We washed dishes, scrubbed toilets, did landscaping, and had a blast doing it. One of our primary goals was to give legs to our convictions about God’s love for the Jewish people and to demonstrate to them that, despite centuries of persecution at the hands of organized Christendom, there are, indeed, Christians who love and support Israel and the Jewish people unconditionally.

I was moved by the genuine warmth the Israelis showed...
us. They told me about their families; their hopes that their children and grandchildren would one day live in harmony with their Arab neighbors in the Middle East; and, of course, their opinions about current events and politics.

Late one evening, our team visited the Kotel—the Hebrew name for the Western Wall—that limestone monument to the arduously won dream of Zion. After looking at it for some time, I finally placed a kippah (skullcap) on my head for the first time ever and began making my way to the Wall. I raised my hand to the ancient stone, still warm from the rays of the Mediterranean sun, and began to pray. I prayed for the protection of the Jewish people. I prayed for the peace of Jerusalem.

As I returned to the outside courtyard overlooking the Kotel, I looked back to where I had just been, taking it all in—the sights, the sounds, and the smells of a summer night in Jerusalem. This was it. This scene of hundreds of Jewish people from all over the Diaspora—some with beards, some without beards; some whose skin was golden brown, others whose skin was European white like mine; young men, tall and lean; and others whose backs were hunched, their white heads bowed in reverent prayer. This was it. This was the reality of God's promise to His Covenant People: "I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel" (Ezek. 11:17).

As our plane made its ascent off the tarmac at Ben Gurion International Airport, I looked down at the Mediterranean, feeling that my heart had bonded to the nation and its people in a mysterious way. I had arrived a tourist and left a Zionist.

I have been to Israel once since that initial trip. And though I hope to return again one day, I feel that the greatest work I can do as a Christian and a Zionist is to be a voice at home. Jewish students at American universities are being targeted by anti-Semitic bigots who hide behind the politically correct banner of anti-Zionism. The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement seeks to beguile Christian churches into trying to cripple economically the God-ordained heirs of Eretz Yisrael. And a new generation is arising that sees the Holocaust merely as a dim event of the past. Its understanding of the truths of that atrocity is muddled by historical revisionism and moral relativism.

This is the world the Zionist dream faces. These are the cultural battles that must be won. But let it be known that Israel and the Jewish people are not alone in these trials. I am merely one of tens of thousands of evangelical Christians who stand in unfeigned solidarity with the Jewish state and the Jewish people and who daily take an active role in combating such attacks.

I am a Christian. I am an American. And, as unlikely as it is, from cornfields to Kotel, I am a Zionist. And I stand with Israel.

Ty Perry
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THE
THESSALONIANS’
TESTIMONY

1 THESALONIANS 1:9–10

When the Thessalonians received Jesus Christ as their Savior, they experienced a thrilling transformation. They were completely delivered from the darkness and depravity of paganism and anxiously anticipated Christ’s return. The final two verses of chapter 1 provide great insights into the strength of the Thessalonians’ faith, the hope they possessed in Christ, the promise of deliverance from God’s wrath, and the glorious return of Jesus for His church.

REDEEMED BY CHRIST

Instead of explaining what happened in Thessalonica, the apostle Paul allowed others to speak about the Thessalonians’ salvation: “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (v. 9).

The phrase for they themselves indicates why Paul and his missionary team did not need to spread the story about the Thessalonians’ salvation. It seems Paul, while in Corinth, had heard from traveling tradesmen that the Thessalonians were boldly sharing their new faith. Impacted by the testimony, the tradesmen were spreading what they had heard throughout all Macedonia and Achaia.

Paul agreed with the reports being circulated concerning the “manner of entry” the missionary team had received in Thessalonica. First, the Thessalonians’ faith in Christ was being reported accurately. Second, Paul said the Thessalonians had received Silvanus and him warmly. Third, they had responded immediately to the gospel.

Everyone saw the dramatic change in their lives: They had “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” Their transformation was deliberate and immediate. After repenting of their sin and receiving the Lord, they once-and-for-all forsook their idols and left pagan worship. Most of the Thessalonians who came to faith had been part of the city’s massive pagan population.

Paul stated the sequence of the salvation process when he said “to God from idols.” The Thessalonians did not decide to leave paganism and idol worship and then come to God. Rather, the opposite was true. After receiving Jesus Christ as God, they renounced idol worship. Their eyes were opened to the true God, and the demonic practice of idolatry repulsed them.

The Thessalonian believers made a total life commitment “to serve the living . . . God.” The word serve (Greek, douleuein) means to be a “bond-slave” to Christ. The Thessalonians left slavery to idols to become slaves of God. A bond-slave was someone who was completely and willingly committed to a master, having no rights of his or her own. This should be the attitude of all Christians. Notice the contrast: The Thessalonians served a “living” God, rather than a dead idol, and worshiped the “true God,” rather than a false god that does not exist.

RETURN OF CHRIST

Not only did these believers rejoice in their salvation and service to the Lord, but they also had great expectation and hope of seeing Christ return at any time: “And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (v. 10).

The words to wait imply the Thessalonians looked for the Lord’s return as one eagerly anticipates the arrival of a loved one. The verb is in the present tense and speaks of a continual expectancy, looking every day for the Lord to appear. Jesus Christ “His [God’s] Son” is the One whom they expected to appear personally at any moment. This statement makes it clear that Paul saw Jesus Christ as deity, the God-Man.

The Thessalonian believers knew that when Jesus Christ returns, He will come “from [out of] heaven.” Christ had ascended into heaven after His 40-day postresurrection ministry (cf. Acts 1:9–11), and He will return (cf. Phil. 3:20–21). Jesus had said as much to His disciples before being crucified (Jn. 14:1–4). His disciples had expected Him to return for them and preached that message. One of the major themes of 1 and 2 Thessalonians is the soon return of Jesus Christ from heaven for His church. All believers should wait patiently, but eagerly, for Christ’s appearance—even more so today as we watch worldwide events unfold.

The Thessalonians were looking for what is called “the blessed hope” (Ti. 2:13). In theological terms, this event is called the Rapture, and Paul addressed it later in this epistle (1 Th. 4:13–18). It is Jesus’ glorious appearing to take the church from Earth to heaven. The blessed hope should not be confused with Christ’s Second Coming, which occurs at
the end of the Great Tribulation. Paul believed the Rapture would occur in his lifetime, for he wrote, "we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together" (v. 17).

Sadly, many Christians never hear messages on the Rapture or Second Coming in their churches. If the Rapture is mentioned, it is only briefly, with few details. Some churches reject and even condemn the Rapture. Others spiritualize it, changing its true meaning. Consequently, people are ignorant or confused about the subject. Scripture clearly teaches that the Church Age will be consummated on Earth when Christ comes in the air to take His church to heaven—and the event is identified as the Rapture.

Jesus, the God-Man, whose return the Thessalonian church was anticipating, is the same Jesus “whom He [God the Father] raised from the dead” (1:10). Jesus died; was buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb; physically arose from the grave; and today sits at the right hand of God the Father in a human-looking, but glorified, body. Jesus mentioned His resurrection numerous times during His First Advent (cf. Mt. 16:21; Lk. 9:22; 18:33; 24:46). Jesus’ literal, bodily resurrection is a historical, trustworthy fact accomplished in the power of Almighty God (Eph. 1:19–23). Had Jesus not been raised from the dead, there would be no hope of human redemption or resurrection.

**RESCUED BY CHRIST**

Jesus is also called the One “who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Th. 1:10). The word wrath (Greek, orge) does not mean a quick burst of anger that passes away. Rather, it speaks of God’s settled, holy anger, which is controlled and passionate against evil. In other words, Scripture describes God’s wrath as the settled opposition of His nature against evil.

The wrath of God is a divine response to all evil, first manifested against Lucifer because of his rebellion against God (cf. Isa. 14:12–17; Ezek. 28:14–15) and then manifested against mankind after Adam and Eve sinned (Gen. 3:1–24). The Thessalonian believers clearly understood what Paul meant when he spoke to them about God’s wrath.

Unredeemed people are unable to understand God’s wrath because they are spiritually dead and, by nature, children of God’s wrath (Eph. 2:1–3). God’s wrath is holy and completely justified. Man’s wrath, on the other hand, is unholy and emanates from a sinful nature that craves revenge and harbors hatred. God’s wrath is just and a reaction to objective moral evil.

He manifests His wrath for two basic reasons: to maintain law within the world, which demands justice against moral wickedness, and to bring retribution on those who commit evil.

The word delivers means to “rescue” or save someone from a present danger that would destroy his or her life. Jesus Christ is the believer’s Deliverer who promises to rescue all true believers from God’s wrath. The word us refers to Paul, Silvanus, Timothy, and the Christians in Thessalonica—all of whom would be delivered from God’s coming wrath. It also applies to all believers throughout church history who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Deliverance for the church takes place at the Rapture, which will occur before the seven-year Tribulation, when God pours out His wrath on a world of evil.

Believers in Jesus Christ will never experience God’s wrath against sin. Why? Because Christ took that wrath upon Himself and became the propitiation for sin, satisfying the righteous demands of a holy God and making it possible for God the Father to forgive all who put their faith in Jesus (cf. Rom. 5:5–11).

Those who reject God’s love and redemption through Jesus Christ abide under God’s wrath: “He who believes in the Son [Jesus Christ] has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (Jn. 3:36).

Anyone who dies without accepting Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior will be separated from God forever, and God’s wrath will rest on that individual throughout eternity. People who die as unrepentant sinners go to hell. At a time determined by God, all the wicked dead will be resurrected from hell to stand before Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11–15). They will be judged guilty of eternal damnation and cast alive into the Lake of Fire to suffer throughout eternity. Nowhere does Scripture teach universal salvation, soul sleep, an intermediate state of purgatory, a second chance, or annihilation of the wicked.

Thus deliverance from the coming wrath is twofold: First, people who accept Christ are delivered from eternal damnation and will never face hell or the Lake of Fire. Second, they are delivered from God’s divine judgment that will afflict the earth during the Tribulation.

No believer will ever face God’s wrath: “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation [deliverance] through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Th. 5:9). That said, God, as a loving Father, does use chastening as an instrument of discipline to correct sin in a believer’s life; but He does not do so out of wrath.

Though Paul did not spend much time with the Thessalonians, he taught them well. They possessed knowledge about God, Christ’s death and resurrection, deliverance from sin, redemption, Christ’s promised return, and God’s wrath. And they were completely committed to Christ. What a testimony. Let us be as effective in heralding our testimony in Christ throughout the world as we await Christ’s return.
THE CONFLICT BEGINS

Have you ever asked yourself, *Why is the world the way it is? What’s going on here?* Most people have. Here is a brief explanation in an edited excerpt from Dr. Renald Showers’ extraordinary book *What on Earth Is God Doing?*

S

Satan worship, witchcraft, spiritism, and astrology. The present revival of the occult is merely one phase of the continuing war of the ages between God and Satan. Apart from knowledge of this war, it is impossible to understand what life is all about; and the only way to learn about this conflict is to study the philosophy of history presented by the Bible.

For centuries mankind has been wrestling with three major issues: Where have we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? The Bible deals with all three questions.

The Bible’s philosophy of history begins with the eternal, personal God who exists as three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. Prior to creation nothing existed but God.

In eternity past God decided to have a kingdom over which He would rule as sovereign King (1 Tim. 1:17). Since nothing existed to serve Him, He created subjects over which to rule. First, He created angels—spirit beings not possessing bodies of flesh and bone (Mt. 22:30; Heb. 1:13–14). But they did possess intellect (2 Sam. 14:20) and the ability to communicate (Gen. 19:1–2).

They also were more powerful than the other type of created beings (2 Pet. 2:11). Although made to dwell in the heavens, they were given access to Earth after its creation (Gen. 19:1; Mt. 24:36).

The second major type of personal subject God created was the human being. Inasmuch as God had created the earth to be part of His domain, He intended to have on it a subject who would administer His rule over everything else on the planet. Just as some kings divide their kingdoms into provinces, place a governor over each province, and hold each governor responsible to administer the province well on his behalf, so God created man, placed him as governor over the earth, and held him responsible to administer the earth well on behalf of God (Gen. 1:26, 28; Ps. 8:3–9). In other words, God intended Earth’s government to be a theocracy.

To govern the earth for God, it was essential that man understand his earthly, physical province. Therefore, God formed for him a physical body from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7). It also was necessary that he receive and understand God’s directions. Therefore, God created man in His own image (1:26–28) as a personal being with intellect and the ability to communicate.

With the creation of man, God’s work of bringing His kingdom into existence was completed. The universal kingdom of God was a reality, and everything in it was very good by God’s perfect standard of evaluation (v. 31).

THE REBELLION

After creation was completed, one of the highest angels became so proud of his intelligence and powers that he deceived himself into thinking he could overthrow God (Isa. 14:12–14; Ezek. 28:11–17; 1 Tim. 3:6). He hoped to make himself the king of the universe by establishing a kingdom of his own that would war against and destroy God’s kingdom. Because of this angel’s rebellion, his name was changed to Satan, which means “adversary.” He had become the great revolutionary, the enemy of God and of every member of God’s kingdom (Mt. 13:25, 28, 39; Lk. 10:18–19).

However, despite his proud plans, Satan will never be more than a creature of God’s. In this respect, the biblical philosophy of history differs radically from religious and philosophical systems that picture a struggle between two equal gods, one good and one evil. According to the Bible, there can be no doubt about God the Creator defeating Satan the creature. In fact, God could have crushed Satan’s rebellion instantly, but He chose not to do so. His reason will be seen later.

To establish his kingdom, Satan had to obtain subjects over which to rule. As a creature, he lacked ability to create beings. The only way he could obtain subjects was by persuading God’s other creatures to join him in his rebellion. If his kingdom were to rule over both heavenly and earthly spheres, he had to persuade both angels and humans.

A sizeable number of angels joined Satan’s rebellion.

Then Satan subtly entered man’s perfect earthly environment and baited him with the notion that, if he disobeyed God, he would become like God (Gen. 3:1–5) and could rule his own life.

So man disobeyed the directive of his divine King and joined the rebellion.

THE CONSEQUENCES

Man’s rebellion produced tragic consequences:

First, man died spiritually at the moment of his disobedience (2:16–17). A drastic change occurred in his nature. Man had been created with a favorable disposition toward God, so he fellowshipped with and served God in a proper way. When man rebelled, he lost that disposition and became confirmed in one of enmity against God (Rom. 8:7). Enmity so fully took control of man’s entire being that his nature suffered a perversion called total depravity. As a result, man’s relationship to God, the Source of life, was broken.

Second, man eventually died physically. When he rebelled, a process of decay began that made his body subject to disease,
deformity, and death (Gen. 3:19; 5:5; Rom. 5:12; 6:23; Heb. 9:27). He also became subject to death by hazards, accidents, and violence (Gen. 4:8; 9:5–6; Lk. 13:4).

Third, man’s ability to dominate the earth was changed. He lost ability to govern some things (Heb. 2:5–8), and the ability he did retain became perverted. As a result, he became doomed to abuse the earth and to exercise his dominion in a manner contrary to what God had intended.

Fourth, tragedy struck his domain. A province of a kingdom often suffers when its governor rebels against the king. In man’s domain, soil productivity was reduced greatly (Gen. 3:17), and for the first time the soil produced thorns and thistles (v. 18). Animal nature changed from tame and noncarnivorous (1:30) to wild and carnivorous. All of God’s earthly creation became subject to vanity and corruption (Rom. 8:19–22). And it continues to groan and travail in pain today. Through his own sin, man lost his perfect environment.

Fifth, man was transferred from God’s kingdom to Satan’s. This consequence had a tragic effect on the entire human race. Because the original parents of the race chose to rebel against God, and because humans reproduce after their kind, every person (except Christ) is born with a disposition of enmity toward God. Thus everyone is born spiritually dead and a member of Satan’s kingdom (Eph. 2:1). Unless individuals accept God’s way of salvation, they continue through life energized by Satan and living according to Satan’s ways (v. 2). They are blinded to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4), deceived into believing that error is truth (11:4–15), held in spiritual darkness in Satan’s power (Acts 26:17–18), and are children of Satan (Mt. 13:37–39; Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 3:8, 10) who are headed for the same place of judgment as he (Mt. 13:40–42; 25:41; Rev. 20:10, 15).

Every unsaved person belongs to Satan and his kingdom of darkness (2 Cor. 6:14–15). Satan uses unsaved people to do some of the work of his kingdom (Job 1:9–15, 17; Lk. 22:3–6; Jn. 8:37, 40, 44, 59; 2 Th. 2:9; 1 Jn. 3:12).

Sixth, because Adam, the governor of the earthly province of God’s universal kingdom, defected from God, the theocracy was lost and a satanocracy was established. For this reason Christ called Satan “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and Satan had authority to offer all the world’s kingdoms to Christ (Lk. 4:5–6). In fact, Satan dominates the present age so completely that the apostle Paul called him “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4, literal translation of Greek text).

Satan duped man into believing a lie (Jn. 8:44). Instead of bringing mankind freedom, rebellion against God’s authority brought man slavery to a sinful disposition (Rom. 6:6, 16–23), death (5:12; Heb. 9:27), and the continual fear of death (2:15). Instead of becoming his own sovereign, man was brought under the dominion of a new king. His original King was a loving, benevolent Ruler who offered life, peace, happiness, and fulfillment in return for willing obedience. His new king is a hard, selfish taskmaster who offers death, sickness, conflict, grief, and frustration in return for service to him.

Man’s rebellion confirmed him so strongly in his tragic predicament that he was rendered totally incapable of rescuing himself from it. Nothing short of supernatural, divine intervention would be able to save man from the predicament he had brought upon himself by his own choice (Isa. 43:11).

Man needed a Redeemer.

Since the Redeemer would be the key to God’s strategy, the key to Satan’s strategy would be to prevent the Redeemer from coming to Earth and to hinder His work.

Scripture reveals that Satan has two lines of attack: (1) try to destroy the members of God’s kingdom and (2) try to pervert the witness of God’s kingdom with apostasy. Both tactics will be observed repeatedly as the drama of the conflict unfolds.

Editor’s Note: With this article we conclude “The Foundations of Faith.” We are immensely grateful to God for the many wonderful years Rennie Showers has written for this magazine, and we wish both Rennie and his dear wife, Ellie, much peace and happiness in their retirement. We also encourage you to take advantage of our limited-time discount on What on Earth Is God Doing? It will help you make sense of what is happening in today’s world. Rennie’s newest book, The Sign of His Coming, is now available through The Friends of Israel.
7 THINGS I LEARNED ABOUT DEALING WITH OFFICIALS

I was fully prepared to breeze over a July 14 article in theguardian.com headlined “Ghostbusters in line for China ban due to supernatural theme.” But I read it, and I’m glad I did. It recounts how the Chinese government is prepared to ban the latest Ghostbusters film because of what it calls the promotion of “cults and superstitions.”

The film’s suppression in China, contrasted with the fanfare of its unfettered release in the United States, is a good jumping-off point to discuss an important subject: how today’s church in America should prepare to engage in a host of liberty-related issues.

I am no fan of Ghostbusters. But I am a fan of freedom. China’s government, of course, is repressive, guided by a Communist mentality of secular thought and idea control—an example of totalitarianism. In the United States, we have been blessed with the fundamental freedoms of religion, speech, and ideas. But there is no guarantee that—in the absence of vibrant citizen engagement, particularly from the Christian church—America could not continue to slide toward a government that seeks control over our thoughts, ideas, and beliefs.

For nearly three decades, I have worked in and around Washington on legal and policy issues, interacting with all three branches of federal government. And I’ve learned a few things (sometimes the hard way!). After representing the interests of many Christian-based organizations and working alongside dozens of others, I have some ideas about the role Jesus’ followers can play in shaping the government’s values and direction. Most of them go to strategy, rather than substance. But if you don’t know the combination of the lock, it matters little where the gold is stored.

So here are seven things I’ve learned that may help open some locks. I think they are applicable when dealing with any official, whether a local zoning officer or a U.S. senator:

1. Be sensitive to the setting for a meeting with leaders, honoring the positions they hold while keeping your eye on your mission. Note the way the apostle Paul, a “newbie” in the eyes of the Jerusalem church, handled his meeting with church leadership, making sure his strategy advanced his goal and didn’t hinder it (Gal. 2:2).

2. Do your homework. A “calling” to work for faith-and-freedom related causes doesn’t excuse sloppy, naïve thinking.

3. Pray constantly. Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, provides a perfect example of prayer-saturated strategy.

4. Discern between the “majors” and “minors,” and don’t major on the minors. Stick to the main agenda. If a house is on fire, the point at that moment is to save the inhabitants, not preach about fire prevention.

5. When looking to Scripture as a foundation for personal, substantive positions on issues, I remember the advice of the late Tim LaHaye, a great Bible teacher and a man I was honored to have as a friend and coauthor. He told me we can’t claim great clarity on an issue if God has not made it clear in His Word.

6. However, where Scripture speaks clearly, be prepared to make your point and to disagree graciously with people who profess to be believers but who take a disingenuous or compromising approach on moral or social issues. Though unity is always the goal when possible, courage and faithfulness will be much needed by the church in the years to come.

7. And here is my seventh lesson: Effective engagement in our disintegrating culture needs a relevant, inspired command. The apostle Paul left us one. It is a favorite of mine, as it seems perfectly suited to our times. I have found it to be a powerful encapsulation of effective engagement, especially with its emphasis on action, not passivity. I hope it inspires you as well: “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love” (1 Cor. 16:13–14).
World Vision Shuts Gaza Office After Worker Indicted for Diverting Millions to Hamas

World Vision, an American-based Christian charity, has shut down its Gaza office, laid off 120 Gaza employees, and canceled its projects in the region after Israel indicted its Gaza manager for allegedly funneling $7 million a year to Hamas, with $1.5 million a year going directly to combat units.

The Shin Bet, Israel’s security agency, said Mohammed El Halabi secretly transferred 60 percent of Gaza’s World Vision funds to the terrorist organization. It said El Halabi admitted his guilt under interrogation and revealed he has belonged to Hamas since his youth.

“According to El Halabi, he established and promoted fictitious humanitarian projects that acted as a cover for the transfer of peoples’ goodwill donations to Hamas,” the Embassy of Israel wrote in its official statement. The funds enabled Hamas to “build a base, expand its terror tunnel network, pay salaries to terrorists, and even purchase weapons,” Arutz-7 reported.

El Halabi’s lawyer, however, told Haaretz El Halabi claims innocence and denies any links to Hamas. Attorney Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, president of Israeli legal advocacy group Shurat HaDin, said she informed World Vision four years ago that its funds were being diverted to terrorists in Gaza. World Vision responded in 2012 by saying it “found no evidence substantiating the allegations.”

The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs also warned more than a year ago that World Vision was assisting Hamas: “World Vision is promoting an anti-Israel narrative in order to obscure the role of Hamas in creating a humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.”

The court case is to be held in secret, Agence France-Presse reported.

Priests Training for Third Temple

The Temple Institute in Jerusalem has opened a school to train men believed to be from the tribe of Levi as priests in preparation for service in a third Temple, Israel Today reported. “The prayer to establish the temple has no meaning if we don’t actually prepare for it,” said Rabbi Yehoshua Friedman, director of the school, reported usnews.com. Ten students are enrolled for twice-weekly lessons, but Friedman expects the school to train hundreds of priests, usnews.com said.

Friedman said the priests will also make use of modern technology in the new Temple. “Fruit and grain sacrifices . . . could now be mixed in a mixer. I wrote a suggestion to build an electric oven to roast the Passover sacrifice,” he said, reported usnews.com. To read more, visit tinyurl.com/hf9yw9o.

UN Aid Funds Hamas

One week after Israel’s indictment of World Vision’s Gaza worker for funneling funds to Hamas, Israeli police arrested UN worker Wahid Abdallah Borsh of Gaza for transferring UN aid money to Hamas, Arutz-7 reported. According to Israeli politician Avi Dichter, nearly all UN aid workers in Gaza are members of Hamas, The Times of Israel reported. Donors of Gaza aid live in a “naïve world,” he said, for believing their funds help the needy instead of terrorists.

Record-Breaking Number of Aid Trucks Enter Gaza

A whopping 88,800 trucks carrying humanitarian goods passed from Israel to the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip in the first half of 2016, breaking all records, The Algemeiner reported. This is due “partially to the thawing of relations between Israel and Turkey,” said The Algemeiner. Israel has been encouraging Turkish aid to Gaza. Turkey “recently transferred funds to Gaza for 11 different projects, among them the erection of mosques, orphanages and community centers,” the newspaper said. Despite Hamas’s attempts to smuggle in materials for terrorism, Israel imposed no restrictions on the number of trucks allowed to enter Gaza from Israel.
It is now the time of year when Christians celebrate the Lord’s birth and sing, “Joy to the world! The Lord is come.” In Israel, people are celebrating the feast of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. [Editor’s Note: Hanukkah 2016 begins on Christmas Eve.] I recently visited an ultra-Orthodox synagogue-school and talked with some of the young men about Christmas and Hanukkah.

One student said, “Hanukkah is a very holy feast.”

“Then why is it not mentioned in the Jewish Scriptures?” I asked. “Yet Christmas is mentioned several times. Hanukkah only lasts for eight days, and then the lights of the festival go out for another year. But those of us who celebrate Christmas have an everlasting light in our hearts. We celebrate the coming of the Lord, in whom there is no more darkness, no more sorrow.”

The students listened carefully, but when I finished, one of them said, “That is a nice story. Now show us where it is written in the Bible concerning this one about whom you speak.”

I told them, “I will be glad to show you, and then you must show me where the Bible speaks of Hanukkah.” They agreed.

I then turned to Isaiah 7:14 and read, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

They thought they had trapped me since this verse does not mention Bethlehem. But then I read Micah 5:2: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”

The passage made them uncomfortable. They tried to divert my attention by discussing every word of the passage.

Those of us who celebrate Christmas have an everlasting light in our hearts. We celebrate the coming of the Lord, in whom there is no more darkness, no more sorrow.

by Zvi Kalisher
Finally, I said, “I did not come here to compete with you, to see who knows more Scripture or who is smarter. I am showing you facts that you yourselves asked to see. Now you have seen them. The time has come for you to show me where the Bible speaks of Hanukkah.”

They were in an unpleasant position because they knew there is no reference to Hanukkah in the Hebrew Scriptures. So they again tried to challenge me. I was as one in a lion’s den. But I was not alone. The Lord was with me, and I knew He would strengthen me and not forsake me.

One said, “You act as if you own this synagogue.”

I responded, “If you call this a house of prayer, then it should be a place where all people can come to worship their heavenly Father. He is not merely your God or my God. He is our God.”

Finally, some of these young men began to show a little friendliness toward me. But it did not last. Soon a teacher entered, and one of the students told him what was happening. The teacher became angry with the students. He then asked me, “Who are you? Are you a teacher?”

“No,” I replied. “But if I were, I would want to be an honest teacher. You and your colleagues are not honest with your students. Many of them have spent most of their lives here, studying under your tutelage. But they do not worship God. Rather, they worship books of tradition and the men who wrote them. As one who believes in the true and living God, I must show them—and you—the right way to worship God according to the Bible.”

The teacher then asked, “How did you come to speak about Christ to these students? Do you know who He is?”

I replied, “The trouble here is in the language. I say ‘Christ,’ but you say in Hebrew, ‘Messiah.’ They are one and the same. If you like, we can continue in the Hebrew language only. Then we can speak freely about Yeshua—Jesus—Salvation. The things I am telling you are not taken from mere books but from the Holy Bible.” The teacher was visibly shaken before he excused himself, saying he had no more time to speak with me.

I was sad that, at this special time of year, this teacher and his students still live in deep darkness. Perhaps some day they, too, will be able to sing from their hearts, “Joy to the world! The Lord is come.”

—The Friends of Israel
Archives, 1996

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