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Our Cover: Beautiful irises growing in the wilderness of Samaria (Hanan Isachar/www.isachar-photography.com).
Not long ago I attended a first-ever conference titled “People of the Land: A Twenty-First Century Case for Christian Zionism” in Washington, DC. It was an evangelical response to the growing movement within Evangelicalism to turn away from supporting Israel.

Evangelical anti-Zionists maintain they don’t hate the Jewish people but believe Israel’s existence, which they oppose, stems from an overreaction to the Holocaust and is the primary cause of terrorism and violence in the Middle East. Absent in the discussion is God and His plan to redeem this sin-cursed world.

As Christian Zionists, we believe the Jewish people have a right—granted by God in an irrevocable covenant—to the Promised Land. We also believe they have the right to rule that land as a Jewish nation (Gen. 12; 15; 17; Ps. 105).

Certainly, God placed conditions on Israel’s ability to live in the land and enjoy it that were related to obedience to His Law. But an irrevocable covenant cannot be broken. Nowhere in Scripture does God ever promise this piece of real estate to any other people.

The conference speakers based their stance on a literal interpretation of God’s Word, particularly as it relates to His redemptive plan, and sought to make their case apart from any in-depth discussion of future prophecy. While I agree there is a strong case to be made for Israel based on God’s plan to redeem creation, the details of God’s eschatology (the study of things yet to come) cannot be ignored. The ultimate case for Israel’s present and future existence in the land rests on God’s future plans for this world and the role Israel plays in them.

More and more, we dispensationalists who hold to a biblically defined eschatology are being marginalized. Part of the blame, no doubt, is our own, as some dispensationalists who make speculative predictions about the future injure us. Adding to God’s Word is not prudent or advisable, as the apostle John warned at the end of the book of Revelation. Some among us predict events and call for signs that are not biblical. But a few sensationalists shouldn’t define an entire group.

Following the conference, The Christian Post ran an article about it titled “New Christian Zionists Seek Distance from ‘Wild, Crazy Popular Apocalypticism’.” After briefly referencing the presentations, the reporter focused on the “wild, crazy popular” dispensationalists who have dominated Christian Zionism in the past.

To say that Christian Zionism and Dispensationalism go hand in hand is correct. But to categorize us all as wild and crazy is wrong. We are not the problem, nor is prophecy. Throwing Dispensationalism under the bus to support Zionism is not necessary or wise. More beneficial would be a balanced discussion that considers both God’s redemptive plan and how He intends to unfold it in the days to come. We should not run from the details because a few people take liberty with the facts.

The real challenge to Christian Zionism today comes from those who fail to accept what God has revealed in His Word. The bigger battle here is a spiritual one. It is God who chose Abraham as the progenitor of a unique nation to fulfill His promise to defeat Satan. This same God transmitted His holy Word through that nation.

It is God who taught mankind through Israel to worship Him. It is God who sent His only begotten Son to the Jewish people to pay the redemption price for sin. It is God who chose to bring salvation to the Gentiles so that the entire world would be blessed. And it is God who will someday send His Son back to restore His Kingdom on Earth. Sitting on the throne of King David in Jerusalem, the Messiah will rule the universe, and Israel will be the nation of priests that will lead the world in worship of Him.

All these things are part of God’s plan, according to His will and infinite wisdom. Why support Zionism? Because it is God’s plan. Our responsibility before God is to bless the Jewish people and stand with Israel against those who oppose God, His plan, and His beloved nation.

James A. Showers is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
It’s the economy, stupid!” That was the phrase coined by James Carville, chief strategist for Bill Clinton’s 1992 presidential campaign, to help his team focus on the recession as a campaign tactic. As a result, U.S. President George H. W. Bush lost his bid for a second term.

Israeli political savants and media pundits adopted the phrase during Israel’s recent election. Yitzhak (Isaac) Herzog, leader of the Zionist Union party, focused his campaign on repairing the economy and fixing strained relationships with friends and neighbors. Herzog believed Israelis had “Bibi fatigue,” a glib phrase the news media coined to explain why Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was sure to lose.

All the final polls indicated Herzog’s tactic seemed to work. Then the election happened.

Instead of the Zionist Union party winning its projected six-seat advantage over Likud, Israelis gave Likud a six-seat advantage over Zionist Union. It was a blockbuster win. News outlets not even friendly to Israel’s right, such as the BBC, The Guardian, and The New York Times, declared, “Netanyahu’s Likud storms to victory,” “Netanyahu unexpected win,” and “Netanyahu emboldened with a clear mandate.” Even the Arab-language news network Al Jazeera called it a “surprise victory.”

What happened?

First, though Israel is not an economic utopia, it has a good economy. Admittedly, housing prices are extremely high, and there is strife between the government and labor unions. However, compared to the rest of the world, the Middle East in particular, Israel’s economy is fantastic.

Even The Forward, a left-leaning, American-Jewish newspaper, noted after the election, “Israelis are not in such bad shape. The economy weathered the global financial crisis with no burst housing bubble, no bailouts and barely a blip in its growth trajectory. Unemployment has fallen to record lows and the stock market is at a record high. Israel’s high tech industry is thriving.”

Second, Israelis are, in fact, extremely security-conscious. Likud took only 30 seats in the Knesset, well below the 61 needed for a majority. But most Israelis leaned right. As a result, it was relatively easy for Netanyahu to put together a new coalition government.

The coalition is called “the 67 government,” a reference to its 67 Knesset members. Not only is this a solid majority, but it does not include the political left, something unprecedented. Israeli voters gave Netanyahu the ability to stand strong against “a nuclear Iran, a radicalized Middle East and, most of all, a biased world that is ready to throw Israel under a bus,” according to Shmuel Rosner of the Jewish Journal.

Most, if not all, members of “the 67 government” view the vision of a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict as an illusion, based on the decades of failure to implement it.

Third, though Israelis love and appreciate America like no other nation in the world, the vote clearly sent a message to the White House. It is no secret the Obama administration sent a campaign team to Israel with the specific purpose of dislodging Netanyahu. It wanted a new Israeli government willing to give away more land and make more concessions for peace, no matter how fragile. Instead, Likud’s solid victory and the 67 government make it difficult for Obama to implement his Middle East strategy.

Another outcome of the election is that Europe and the United States will likely criticize Israel’s government. Nothing new there.

Other voices will support it. They will come from people who understand Genesis 12:3: “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you.” They will come from those who understand that the freest Muslims in the Middle East are those who are Israeli citizens. And they will come from those who understand that a strong Israel is a blessing to the world.
The Inextinguishable Church

The global campaign to eliminate Christianity and the followers of Jesus Christ is as diverse as it is unrelenting.

In the Middle East and Africa, ISIS Islamists have reverted to the savagery of the Dark Ages in their genocidal tactics, liquidating churches and believers in the most barbaric ways.

In the West, the war has more subtle overtones, though its “soldiers” are as determined as ISIS to beat the Christian faith into a state of dhimmitude and subordinate it to Christ-hating, secular revolutionaries. That they will not succeed in destroying Christ’s body of believers can be certified by a look at history over the last 2,000 years.

In China, the antagonistic aggressor is the government, officially the Communist Party of China (CPC). The CPC bows before the altar of atheism and would have citizens of the sprawling empire embrace the godless ideology of the post-Maoist Beijing rulers.

With the phenomenal growth of China’s churches has come a crackdown of epic proportions. China Aid recently reported a 300 percent increase in religious persecution of Christians since 2013. Among the victims were 17,884 believers, including 1,592 church leaders, according to the 2014 China Aid annual report, available at chinaaid.org:

The Chinese government has intensified its persecution against practitioners representing all religions in China. In the case of Christianity, both the government-sanctioned Three-Self church and the house church movement experienced unprecedented persecution. The Chinese government’s persecution campaign included forced demolition of churches and crosses, the detention and imprisonment of pastors and church members on criminal charges, forcing churches into bankruptcy by confiscating church property and imposing fines, and manipulating state-run media to label house churches as “cult” organizations.

The Three-Self church represents congregations registered with the government. House churches, much like those in the former Soviet Union, are unregistered and, therefore, not allowed to worship in church buildings. Consequently, meetings are held in homes.

According to China Aid, approximately 70 million people attend the Three-Self and house churches. The estimate is conservative, and the number is growing rapidly.

Persecution has intensified because government officials are alarmed by the tremendous increase in the number of Chinese converts to Christ. They see the church as a threat to their regime.

In an attempt to neutralize the transforming influence of the Christian gospel, the CPC has introduced a program dubbed sinicization in Three-Self churches. The China Aid report described it as follows:

The essence of Christian sinicization is to prioritize loyalty to the CPC over religious identity and transform Christianity into a socialist force that complies with the authority of the Chinese government. The process of the sinicization of Christianity has included Chinese churches abandoning relationships with the global church, dissolving the core of the Christian faith, and preventing Christianity from exercising its social and cultural influence to positively influence Chinese society. Therefore, the sinicization of Christianity amounts to de-Christianizing the church in China and eradicating the universal nature of Christianity under the appearance of constructing a “Christianity with Chinese characteristics,” and, in the name of prioritizing the interests of the Communist Party, usurping Christian doctrine that “Christ is the head of Church.”

Sinicization is reminiscent of Adolf Hitler’s national Reich church of 1936. There the swastika replaced the cross, and the Fuhrer’s Mein Kampf replaced the Bible. Only invited Nazis were allowed to preach.

In the eyes of tyrannical regimes, such devices are a must if they are to achieve their dream of totally annexing the governing system and the mind, soul, and body of every individual.

Although methods may differ, the objective is always the same: demean, discriminate, disenfranchise, criminalize, then destroy. And to every despot who lives that dream, Jesus Christ is always an obstacle to be removed.

Few have labored more diligently to eliminate God than the Communists—or, for that matter, liberal, secular progressives. Will success be theirs?

China is splendid affirmation why it will not. Wrote China Aid, “Dr. Yang Fenggang, a professor of religion and sociology at Purdue University, has estimated that by 2030, the number of Christians in China will exceed those in the United States, thus making China the largest Christian nation in the world.”

Through peace in Christ that passes all understanding, come “Chinese citizens who embrace rule of law, oppose totalitarian governance, and support the expansion of civil society,” said China Aid. And that type of freedom is something thugs with guns, torture rooms, and prison cells will never comprehend.

by Elwood McQuaid
Dear Friends,

As we all know, the Jewish people are no strangers to tragedy. They probably have endured more of it than any nationality on Earth. They even have what some call a Jewish “bad luck day”: the 9th of Av (this year it falls on July 26). On that date, both of their Temples were destroyed: the first in 586 B.C., the second in A.D. 70.

On the 9th of Av in 1290, the Jews were expelled from England and in 1492, from Spain. Unhappy that he could torture and murder only those Jews who had converted to Catholicism, the Spanish Inquisition’s grand inquisitor, Tomás de Torquemada, persuaded the monarchy to banish those who had not converted, dismembering the largest Jewish community in the world at the time.

Many left by boat, not knowing where they would go or if they would live to tell the tale. The Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria sailed past them in Seville harbor. According to historian Solomon Grayzel, Christopher Columbus noted the fact in his diary.

I used to tell myself things like that don’t happen anymore. Then in 2005, I witnessed a modern-day 9th of Av tragedy. You did too. The Israeli government expelled 8,600 of its own people from 21 thriving, beautiful communities known as Gush Katif in Gaza, where Jewish people had lived for almost 40 years. Some of you may remember the heartbreaking news photographs.

The Israelis of Gush Katif lost their homes, businesses, farms, synagogues, schools, parks, and way of life. Everything they had built they handed over to the Arabs in exchange for peace. Hamas repaid them by destroying much of it and trying to bomb Israel into extinction.

August marks the 10th anniversary of “disengagement.” In this issue of Israel My Glory, we are privileged to have well-known Israeli journalist Dr. Elliot Jager revisit the event for us. Before the expulsion, we sent Israeli photographer and friend, Hanan Isachar, into the Gaza Strip to take pictures. We’re running some of them for you—a nostalgic look at what used to be.

We’re also taking you to the so-called West Bank and the beautiful city of Ariel. Ariel is considered the capital of Samaria and a testimony to Israel’s hard work and profound desire to live in peace with its Arab neighbors.

We want to thank the American Friends of Ariel for helping us so we could take you on a little tour and provide the truth about what is happening in this part of Israel. Welcome to Samaria!

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
A charitable gift annuity is a wonderful way to support The Friends of Israel and, at the same time, create a stream of income for yourself and your spouse. Here’s how it works. If you are 60 or older, you may purchase a charitable gift annuity of $5,000 or more. The Friends of Israel then provides you with quarterly, semiannual, or annual payments. The percentage of interest is determined by your date of birth. You may purchase a single gift annuity for yourself or a joint gift annuity that typically includes your spouse. You may even purchase one for a friend or relative who could benefit from the income. The annuity rate is determined by the birth dates of the annuitants.

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INDIA—Church members have fled a village in northeast India after a vicious attack in April that seriously injured at least three Christians, including a 7-year-old girl.

A mob of about 100 Hindu extremists armed with swords, bamboo sticks, and stones attacked Christians who were eating after an 8 P.M. service in a village in Assam state, church leaders said. At least 15 Christians were injured.

“Right now there are no Christians in the village—all have fled,” said the Rev. David Boro of Guwahati. “The Christian families who were the main target of the attack are now in a safe-house after they were released from the hospital. The more critically injured are still in the hospital, and when they will be released, they too will join the others in the safe-house.”

The 7-year-old girl suffered serious chest injuries and clots in her brain due to the beating. The village is no longer safe, and the Christians’ homes have all been destroyed.

The Rev. Vijayesh Lal of the Evangelical Fellowship of India’s Religious Liberty Commission said the brutality of the incident was shocking. “The way children have been beaten up mercilessly shows the extent of hate created by external elements,” he said.

LIBYA—In an April video showing the execution of 28 Ethiopian Christians, the militant Sunni terrorist group Islamic State (ISIS) says persecution of Christians is fundamental to Islam and warns that if Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere refuse Islam, they will be slain.

An ISIS spokesman gives Christians three options: convert to Islam, submit to its rule and pay the Jizya (tribute), or be killed.

We say to Christians everywhere, the Islamic State will expand, with Allah’s permission. And it will reach you even if you are in fortified strongholds. So whoever enters Islam will have security, and whoever accepts the Dhimmah contract will have security. But whoever refuses will see nothing from us but the edge of a spear. The men will be killed and the children will be enslaved, and their wealth will be taken as booty. This is the judgment of Allah and His Messenger.

Church leaders say the attacks constitute a war “by Islam to eliminate Christianity” in Nigeria. Christians make up 51.3 percent of Nigeria’s population of 185.2 million. Muslims account for 45 percent and live mainly in the north. Previously, gunmen shouting “Allahu Akbar” attacked three villages in Plateau state, burning down a church and killing at least 10 Christians.

by Morning Star News
(morningstarnews.org)
Ariel: City of Visionaries

by Elwood McQuaid

(Hanan Isachar/www.isachar-photography.com)
When 40 families stood atop a craggy mountain overlooking the wilderness of Samaria in 1978 and scanned the barren wasteland that would become their home, it seemed as though they were reliving a scene from Israel’s past.

They were like the early Zionist pioneers whose vision, courage, and tenacity drove them to return to their ancient homeland to clear malaria-infested swamps that Arabs had happily sold to them for outrageous prices.

In this case, there were no swamps. But there was backcountry: 7,500 acres of lifeless land that was never registered as private during the Ottoman, British, or Jordanian occupations of Samaria, which spanned hundreds of years.

Looking at the beautiful city of Ariel today, with its cultural activities, schools, university, and population of 20,000, you would never know it began, as American Friends of Ariel put it, “with two tents dropped from helicopters onto the rocky, soilless ground the Arabs referred to as the ‘hill of death.’”

But the difficult terrain did not deter the 40 families who had a dream and a desire to tough it out in the land of their fathers. They wanted to create a better world for their people, marked by diversity and cooperation with their Arab neighbors.

**MOST OF THE WORLD** refers to Samaria as the “West Bank” (meaning the west bank of Jordan) and to Ariel as a “settlement.” Yet Samaria does not belong to Jordan, and the word *settlement* hardly fits Ariel’s size as a bustling city or takes into account its deep Jewish roots in the land God gave to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Jewish presence in and around the city dates back to biblical times. Joshua’s tomb rests in the nearby town of Kif Hares.

For centuries the land lay fallow, changing hands between the Roman, Muslim, Ottoman, and British empires. But in 1978, under the leadership of 36-year-old Ron Nachman, 40 families laid the framework for the city whose name means “lion of God.” They were pioneers, willing to withstand the rugged conditions of no roads, no running water, and no electricity. Water had to be brought in by tankers, and electricity had to be produced by generators.

Yet they believed Genesis 17:8: “I give to you and your descendants after you . . . all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” Perhaps they also knew Jeremiah 31:4–5:

*Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice. You shall yet plant vines on the mountains of Samaria.*

Born in Tel Aviv in 1942 when Israel was still under British control, Nachman understood the area’s strategic importance to a country surrounded by enemies. As Ariel grew, he carefully shepherded it as mayor for nearly three decades until succumbing to cancer in 2013.

In some ways, Ron Nachman was like a modern Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism. Herzl had articulated the Jewish people’s need to begin looking homeward in the 1800s when he saw anti-Semitism rising in Europe. For about 2,000 years, the Jews had been a migrant minority in countries that often shifted from tolerance to indignation when incited by politicians who needed scapegoats for cultural and economic failures.

Scoffers mocked Herzl when he declared, “If you will it, it is no dream.” Unlike him, they did not see the clouds gathering that would immerse civilization in the clutches of death and force the Jewish people into the center of the terror.

The early immigrants who bore the heat, sickness, and deprivation to tame the wilderness were not zealous...
adventurers. They were hard-working men and women, planting the flag in the sands of what would become, not simply a dream, but a central factor in the survival of the Jewish people.

Ron Nachman knew the importance of establishing a city on the high, craggy mountaintop in Samaria after the 1967 Six-Day War. When the Yesha Council in Israel paid tribute to him after his death, it declared,

Ron Nachman was . . . a Zionist settlement pioneer in his body and soul and an unstoppable builder of the Land of Israel. Ron Nachman’s huge enterprise, the city of Ariel, will forever remain, in his memory.

ARIEL IS LOCATED HALFWAY between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. It is considered the capital of Samaria, built alongside the ruins of an ancient Israelite city that dates back more than 3,000 years.

The Israeli government approved Ariel’s establishment upon state land near the village of Haris. The land had never been populated, so no Arabs were displaced.

Israel has always desired to live in peace with its neighbors, but the feeling has not been mutual. The Arabs devastated Hebron in 1929 when they slaughtered 64 Jewish people during the Arab riots of the 1920s. Hebron is where Abraham purchased a burial plot for his beloved wife, Sarah, making it the oldest Jewish community in the world (Gen. 23).

King David was anointed in Hebron and reigned from there for seven years before moving the nation’s capital to Jerusalem. The city retained a Jewish presence even through tempestuous times, until the massacre in 1929 during British rule. After that, the Jews were effectively locked out of Hebron, as well as other areas they cultivated and developed, until May 14, 1948, when the battered survivors of Hitler’s madness were granted statehood in the land of their fathers.

But the struggle to survive did not end when Israel received its independence from the international powers. The Arabs initiated a war of annihilation and occupied much of the land originally designated for a Jewish homeland until the war of liberation in 1967, which reunified Jerusalem and again gave the Jewish people access to their holiest sites.

However, what Israel’s enemies could not accomplish on the battlefield, they are trying to accomplish through politics. For decades they have been waging a vicious propaganda war to delegitimize the Jewish state. Today, despite Israel’s immense progress developing goods and services that benefit the entire world, left-wingers and others question the legality of its existence.

POST-ZIONISM HAS EMERGED. It is a movement within Israel, conceived mainly by academic elitists and intellectual, social reconstructionists, that repudiates what men like Ron Nachman and Theodor Herzl stood for.

Meyrav Wurmser, an Israeli-American scholar and cofounder of the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), succinctly described the core of the ideology in The Middle East Quarterly:

Post-Zionism undermines Israel’s soul and reduces its will for self-defense. No longer are Israelis regularly subjected to calls just from the outside world to regard surrender, cowardice, and flight in the face of threat as virtuous; now these appeals come also from within. In contrast, honor and defense are viewed as offensive nationalism.¹

In other words, Israel’s very existence is deemed unjustifiable. And unfortunately, many young Israelis are said to be warming to the idea.

While post-Zionists tear away at Israel from within, Israel’s enemies from without are planning a new holocaust. They make no apology for their intentions, announcing them almost daily.

Yet most Western leaders blithely pursue placation based on the fantasy that surrender is the path to peace. They do not seem to care that Arab Islamists refuse even to recognize Israel’s right to exist. In fact, the Arabs have not wavered on that point since the Jewish state was established: “No recognition, no negotiations, no peace” has been their mantra. And though Iran’s first priority is Israel’s destruction, Westerners prefer to believe the country can be talked into civility.

Strangely enough, Iran has found allies in America, another country it hopes to destroy. They belong to the anti-Semitic wing of the radical left. Some are Replacement Theology advocates; others belong to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS) in denominations and academic institutions that equate Israel with the old apartheid South Africa.

Ironically, BDSers preach the Arab-Muslim message of “no recognition, no negotiations, no peace” and sometimes get involved in attacking Jewish student centers on college campuses, smearing swastikas on synagogue walls, and assaulting Jewish people—all of which are reminiscent of the early days of Nazi Germany.

There is no such thing as national strength through weakness and surrender. It is a concept that creates mayhem and chaos on a number of fronts, particularly in the Middle East and Africa, and reaps a terrible harvest of victims, including Christians and Jews.

When Ron Nachman and the Ariel 40 stepped onto the rock-strewn barrenness that would become the metropolis of today, they were
not throwbacks to a bygone era. They discerned the times and reinvigorated the practical Zionism needed for national survival. In a very few years, Jewish people would be seeing the world through a different window. Their utopian dream of peace was not to be, and a grim reality was about to reemerge.

A massive invasion of Muslims, including wildly radical jihadists, is refashioning much of Europe and persuading many Jewish people that, again, it’s time to leave.

Jewish Agency head Natan Sharansky estimates 250,000 Jewish people will move to Israel from France alone in the next 20 years.²

In the Middle East, the heralded Arab Spring that began in 2010 faded into a winter of failed illusion. It produced destabilizing bloodbaths dedicated to ridding the region of Jews, Christians, and Israel.

Today an alarming turn in the American administration away from Israel further clouds the future. Instead of backing its only stable ally in the Middle East, America is pandering to the United Nations and attempting to make Israel an indefensible island imprisoned within the fragile armistice lines of 1948.

With anti-Semitism reemerging as a force to be reckoned with, the need is obvious for a stable Jewish homeland with secure borders, able to accommodate those who would end up displaced without it. Anti-Semitism is like a cancer that cannot be denied, wished away, or ignored. Europe tried all three 70 years ago, and the result was a malignancy of catastrophic proportions.

Ariel stands as a testimony to visionaries who saw the need and did something about it. The Jewish state’s existence is an absolute necessity. And Ron Nachman and the Ariel 40 endure as pioneers of a model that should be replicated many times over.

ENDNOTES

Elwood McQuaid is consulting editor for The Friends of Israel.
Ariel is an amazing success story. It is a story of struggle against all odds, of immigrant absorption, international outreach, and dynamic growth. As you travel through Ariel, it is difficult to believe the city’s skyline began with two tents dropped by helicopter onto a barren, soilless hill.

Ariel Industrial Park: Coexistence and Prosperity. At the western end of the city stands Ariel’s main industrial park, facing the region’s largest industrial area. Combined, they make up the second largest industrial site in Israel, providing jobs for Jewish people and more than 8,000 Arab families.
Ariel University. What began in two small trailers as the College of Judea and Samaria in 1982 is now Ariel University, Israel’s largest public college. It represents the full spectrum of Israeli society: Arabs and Jews, secular and observant. In 1994, it began granting academic degrees, and in 2012 it received full research-university status, making it Israel’s eighth research university and the first such institution to open in Israel in 40 years. With more than 15,000 students enrolled for the coming academic year, Ariel University spreads over two campuses and is particularly renowned in science and engineering.

Eshel Hashomron: A Great Place to Stay. As you enter Ariel, you immediately notice a lovely 98-room hotel, Eshel Hashomron. Shomron is Hebrew for Samaria. Only a handful of Israeli cities can boast facilities of this kind. As the only resort hotel in Judea and Samaria, Eshel Hashomron hosts countless tourists en route to exciting biblical sites.

The swimming pool at Hotel Eshel Hashomron. A few steps away is a biblical garden that takes you 3,000 years back in time.

Raising a Generation for Tomorrow. As you drive toward the main residential areas, a big white tent will catch your eye. It is part of the Ariel National Center for Leadership Development. Spread over several acres of forest, it is home to exciting extreme-challenge equipment that is part of an extensive program developed by the JH Ranch in northern California to instill biblical and family values and leadership qualities in young people. The center is not only available to Israeli youth, but also to youth groups and young adults from around the world by contacting Friends of Ariel.

Antenna Hill. On a hilltop above the leadership development center is the antenna that gave Antenna Hill its name and the pillbox that signifies the presence of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). For many years, there were no soldiers here. However, during the Arab aggressions in 2000, terrorists used the hill to fire into Ariel. So the outpost was set up to protect and defend the perimeters of Ariel and other Jewish communities in the area, as well as to patrol the roads. Today a small IDF presence remains on Antenna Hill.

Sheltered Workshop. Ariel absorbed thousands of new residents during the massive influx of Russian immigrants that began in 1989. Many were virtually unemployable due to developmental issues that
music, dance, and fine arts for the residents of Ariel and surrounding communities. It connects to the municipal community center and library, creating a true hub of culture and community activity.

Ariel Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Museum. Holocaust survivors Irena and Yaakov (Kuba) Wodislavsky moved to Ariel with a sense of mission: to buy a home and convert it into a Holocaust memorial and museum so the voices of the Jewish people who perished in World War II would forever be heard.

Prior to his passing in 2013, Kuba eloquently explained their goal:

My wife and I are aware of the responsibilities of our work. With every day that passes there will be fewer people who personally witnessed what happened [in the Holocaust]. We will never forget the memories, the faces of the people who called to those who would survive to avenge their . . . deaths. We know that, as survivors, we forever bear witness to what was done to our people. We realize that we were left alive in order to tell what happened.

With the help of Ariel and friends worldwide, Irena continues to preserve and enhance the couple’s life’s work. The Memorial House includes a sculpture gallery featuring emotive bronze sculptures by Shmuel Vilenberg, a survivor of Treblinka, that depict his travails, memories, and nightmares in the death camp; a photo gallery with rare photographs that chronicle the Holocaust; a personal belongings gallery that includes rare items, such as a prisoner’s jacket from Auschwitz; and a letters and postcards gallery featuring a rare and unique collection of more than 350 postcards and letters Jewish people mailed from the work camps and ghettos.

Ariel Regional Center for Performing Arts. The longtime dream to build a performing arts center in Ariel became urgent in 2000, when Arab violence on the roads throughout Samaria meant risking your life to attend a cultural performance elsewhere. Today the state-of-the-art Ariel Regional Center for Performing Arts provides convenient access to the best in Israeli theater, music, dance, and fine arts for the residents of Ariel and surrounding communities. It connects to the municipal community center and library, creating a true hub of culture and community activity.

Our Children, Our Future. Ariel is home to many preschools, four elementary schools, two junior high schools, and a high school. Ariel’s Department of Education has crafted a comprehensive educational strategy involving tracks from kindergarten through higher education, thereby developing specialized fields of study and giving students and families the opportunity to choose their study settings and curricula to

Educating children to celebrate the land of Israel.
maximize each student’s potential and individual talents. This strategy involves not only academic learning but also teaches morals and values and the importance of protecting human dignity.

Ariel Sports and Recreation Complex. Because the outbreak of Arab violence in September 2000 made traveling dangerous, residents felt isolated from other cities in Israel and all they had to offer. So a plan for the Ariel Sports and Recreation Complex began to take shape. With the help of generous friends around the world, the beautiful Ariel Sports and Recreation Complex opened in 2008. Facilities include tennis courts, an aquatic center, a full-service fitness center, and a wide range of activities for all ages. The center serves as a social hub for its 5,000 members, residents, and students.

Healthcare for All. Ariel is the regional hub for 20,000 local residents, 15,000 university students, and tens of thousands more living in neighboring communities. Yet the nearest hospital is 30 minutes away. So plans are afoot to build a medical center on the Ariel University campus to serve everyone in the area, Jewish and Muslim. The university currently provides clinical services. The medical center will house facilities for emergency medicine, dentistry, communication disorders and speech therapy, physical therapy and rehabilitation, occupational therapy, and psychological counseling. It will be part of the Health and Medical Sciences triplex that will also include a pre-med pavilion (future medical school) and health sciences pavilion.

And all of this began with two tents dropped from helicopters onto a barren, rocky hilltop less than 40 years ago.
Ariel University Helps Students Overcome Autism

Udi, a graduate of Ariel University, never dreamed he’d be able to address a crowd. When he was young, he was diagnosed with autism, a developmental disorder that affects an individual’s ability to interact socially and communicate with others.

At 24, in his third year at Ariel University, Udi surprised even himself by addressing visitors to the school, telling them with poise and confidence about the program that helped him discover his powers of communication.

“I never thought I’d get to go to university,” he said. Today, he works at the school on projects related to the environment.

Udi took part in Ariel University’s one-of-a-kind program that began in 2008 with only two students and is designed to integrate students with pervasive developmental disorders, such as autism and Asperger syndrome, into its academic departments so that they can earn university degrees and enter the workforce as productive, skilled members of society. The program is operated by the university’s Student Services Center under the auspices of the Department of Communication Disorders.

As part of the program, Udi was assigned a “buddy” named Sahar, who lived with him in the dormitory. The dormmate aspect gives autistic students a comfortable, welcoming opportunity to meet and interact with others and participate in campus life. Udi and Sahar maintained the dorm room together, cooked together, and hung out on the lawns of the university.

“T’m the one who got the most from this,” Sahar said of the experience. A student in the university’s physical therapy program, Sahar said he gained a true friend and a profound sense of satisfaction from raising awareness about autism on the college campus.

Today about 30 students on the autistic spectrum participate in the program. Their communication challenges usually decrease dramatically by the time they graduate, and some go on to pursue advanced degrees. Ariel University also helps these graduates get jobs.

According to The Jerusalem Post, the program at Ariel University is “the only program of its kind within an Israeli university that helps the autistic members of the student body to live with mentors in the dormitories, study with tutors and gain meaningful employment.”
Every morning, Ahbed, a Palestinian Arab, drives into the Barkan Industrial Park opposite the Ariel Industrial Park to manage the warehouse of the Lipski plastics factory. It produces a host of sanitary and plumbing products. He’s been with the company for decades, serving his employer with loyalty and dedication.

When visitors ask how he feels about working for an Israeli company in Samaria, he says politics don’t interest him. He earns a good living and works harmoniously with his Jewish coworkers.

Lipski is one of the many factories in and around Ariel that show how industry can unite Jews and Muslims, Arabs and Israelis, when given the chance.

This same harmony exists at Ariel University, whose enrollment of 15,000 is comparable to that of Yale, Duke, or the University of Vermont, for example. About 5 percent of Ariel’s graduates are Arab Israelis.

“It’s my country,” Muhammad Amara told a group of American university students last year, when speaking about Israel. Amara, a civil engineering student, is more concerned about building a career and eventually a family than he is about politics. Ariel University gives him the ability to achieve his goals.

Through education and industry, Ariel, the capital of Samaria, is enabling people in the region to build peace through human relationships and mutual goals. International attempts to boycott Israeli industries and educational institutions only harm those they are intended to help.

For example, the Palestinian Authority has boycotted products made in Israeli factories in Judea and Samaria, and anyone caught selling such products is subject to a fine and prison sentence. Yet almost every Arab household in the region relies on the industrial parks for subsistence. Loss of employment at these factories would cause severe instability and hurt the Palestinian economy.

Said Yehuda Cohen, CEO of the Lipski factory, “An industrial zone is a place of hope and shouldn’t be factored in any political negotiation.”
Remembering Gush Katif: 10 Years Later
On Wednesday morning, August 17, 2005, some 10,000 Israeli soldiers fanned out across 21 Jewish communities in the Gaza Strip. Their mission, following the Israeli army’s order eight days earlier, was to evacuate—forcibly, if need be—the remaining Israelis. Dr. Michael Goldstein stayed behind in Neve Dekalim to help tend any injured.

This summer will mark 10 years since Israel “disengaged” from Gaza, pulling out all military forces, dismantling its 21 communities—known collectively as Gush Katif—and uprooting the 8,600 civilians for whom Gaza had been home. Not trusting what the Palestinians would do with the 48 graves in the cemetery, the Jewish dead were reinterred elsewhere in Israel.

Laurence and Sylvain Baziz had already tearfully left Gadid. Anita and Stuart Tucker were holding out in Netzer Hazani, waiting to be pulled out. For Oreet and Eliezer Segal in Ganei Tal, it was already over. Their community was the first to be uprooted.

Their lives and those of thousands of others would never be the same.

THE 21 JEWISH TOWNS in Gush Katif once provided 10 percent of Israel’s agricultural output and 65 percent of its greenhouse vegetables. Yearly exports were valued at $25 million. What’s more, the Jewish communities were built mostly on vacant sand dunes. No Arabs were displaced by the Gush Katif settlements.

Settlers who earned their livelihoods within Gush Katif were especially hard hit by the expulsion. Eighty-five percent of them lost their source of income overnight. No group was left more shattered than the farmers. Many were already in their 50s when they lost their homes and farms. Starting all over was hardly an option. Only 20 percent returned to farming, according to Judy Lowy of JobKatif, an organization that helps settlers rebuild their lives.

It has taken the better part of 10 years, but Lowy said that most of those who can work have found employment. And 60 to 70 percent are, at last, in permanent homes in new communities. About 30 percent have yet to be permanently resettled.

Most of the evacuees remain in southern Israel, many in Nitzan, near Ashkelon, which has the highest concentration of Gush Katif evacuees who still live in trailer-like homes known as caravillas.

Lowy is convinced that as a group, the exiled settlers suffer disproportionately from illnesses and posttraumatic stress disorders.

The lives of the second generation—the children who had no farms or businesses to take over from their parents—were also turned upside down. JobKatif has helped retrain some of these younger people and assist them with university scholarships.

The failure of consecutive Israeli governments to efficiently relocate and rehabilitate the 8,600 Gaza settlers is one more reason why any deal with the Palestinians that would expel more than 350,000 Jews from their West Bank homes is unrealistic, say some Israelis. And that number doesn’t count another roughly 300,000 Jewish people who live in east Jerusalem.

LAURENCE BAZIZ IS DETERMINED not to be embittered by the scars disengagement left on her family.

She and her husband, Sylvain, moved to Israel from France in 1981. Laurence studied agriculture in college, and Sylvain had a bit of hands-on kibbutz farming experience through B’nei Akiva, the Orthodox Zionist youth movement. They did not consider themselves professional farmers.

In 1986, the 20-something couple moved to the Gush Katif farming community of Gadid, established in 1982. The Bazizes joined about two dozen families there, including three who were also French-speaking.

The Jewish Agency gave the Bazizes three-fourths of an acre to build greenhouses. They started out small, growing flowers and tomatoes. Then they added bell peppers and cherry tomatoes. Later came world-renowned, insect-free leafy vegetables.

By the summer of 2005, when the IDF came to evacuate Gadid, the couple had four children, three of whom were born in Gush Katif. Their greenhouses spanned more than 12 acres. They had, Laurence recalls, established “a meaningful Zionist life.”

On the eve of their expulsion, their oldest daughter was 20 and doing national service. One son was about to go into the army. Another was in high school. The youngest boy was in elementary school.

And then everything they had worked for was gone.
In disengagement’s wake, many Gadid families wanted to stay together and moved to caravillas in Nitzan. Now, 10 years later, many have relocated to Be’er Ganim, north of Ashkelon.

Be’er Ganim was set up in 2009 as a place for Gaza’s farming families to live, though no farming is actually done there. This new rural community of about 260 families is also home to evacuees from various other Gush Katif settlements, including Bdolach, Elei Sinai, Rafah Yam, Gan Or, Netzer Hazani, Nisanit, Neve Dekalim, and Morag.

A few years before disengagement, Sylvain and a group of partners had set up a produce-export business, brokering between farmers and buyers abroad. After the Baziz family was forced to leave Gadid, Sylvain decided to focus on his business interests rather than try to return to farming.

Some farmers found a way to hold on to their clients and continued to farm in greenhouses reestablished south of Ashkelon. Many, however, lost their clients and connections. Others were traumatized.

These days Laurence works for the Katif Heritage Center in Nitzan to preserve the memory of the uprooted communities.

In the aftermath of disengagement, the Baziz children felt hurt and angry. Laurence and Sylvain urged them not to give up on their Zionist principles or religious faith.

The couple refused to blame the Gaza pullout on the State of Israel or the Israel Defense Forces. They reluctantly accepted that disengagement was carried out “technically” in a democratic manner with the approval of the Israeli cabinet and a Knesset majority.

The couple encouraged their children to get on with their school and army lives. Over the past decade, their children have established families of their own, making Laurence and Sylvain proud grandparents.

Laurence is convinced that disengagement was a symptom of a problem plaguing Israeli society. Too many have forgotten that faith and land are at the core of Jewish peoplehood. Israelis need to strengthen their faith and intensify their love for Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel, she said.

Be’er Ganim is now putting the finishing touches on its new synagogue. The stained glass windows in the desolate Gadid synagogue had portrayed the 12 tribes of Israel. Those in Be’er Ganim will depict what the 8,600 Jews of Gush Katif accomplished before they were forced out.

ANITA TUCKER AND HER HUSBAND, STUART, moved to Israel from the United States in 1969. She was originally from Brooklyn and he from Cleveland. They arrived during the heyday of national optimism after the 1967 Six-Day War in which beleaguered Israel overcame Jordan, Egypt, and Syria to capture Judea and Samaria, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and Sinai.

The Tuckers could have moved to Tel Aviv or Jerusalem; but they preferred to be pioneers in Beersheba, “capital of the Negev,” Anita said.

In 1976 they took on a new challenge: They were among the founding families of Netzer Hazani, a farming community of modern Orthodox Jews in Gush Katif.

Stuart commuted to Dimona in the Negev, where he was a biology teacher. Anita left teaching altogether to become a fulltime farmer. The couple had five children.

A friendly Arab mukhtar (village chief) told the Tuckers and some of the other founders of Netzer Hazani, situated on Gaza sand dunes, that the last time anything grew there was when the patriarch Isaac lived nearby. “Nothing can grow here,” he told them. Israeli government agricultural experts weren’t much more encouraging.

The pessimists were wrong. The first crops were tomatoes. Later, after much experimentation, came greenhouse
Kibbutz Yesodot had once been a farming community. It was willing to sell its farmland to the reborn Netzer Hazani. But Gush Katif’s second generation found it difficult to put together enough money to buy the land from the government.

The Tuckers finally moved into their permanent house in Netzer Hazani in 2012. Today about 90 families live in Netzer Hazani, most of whom are connected to the original 40 families forced out of Netzer Hazani in Gush Katif. And most no longer work in agriculture.

Financial support to resettle the community in new homes came from Jewish people abroad who also helped defray the cost of rebuilding the community’s synagogue and community center.

The new synagogue, like the original, is named after Rabbi Yitzhak Arama, who was murdered by Arab terrorists in a 2002 shooting ambush as he drove with his family to a prewedding celebration.

The community center is named for 18-year-old Itamar Yefet of Netzer Hazani in Gush Katif, who was killed in 2000 by a Palestinian sniper.

Anita knows of scores of evacuees who still have not found permanent housing. For many of the evacuees, there remains a yearning for the place—and a way of life—that were taken from them, Anita said.

flowers and herbs. Anita took immense pride in her red tomatoes.

By August 18, 2005, Netzer Hazani was no more.

Anita recalled that as the disengagement deadline loomed, her family—married children, an army officer son included—came together to be expelled as one from Netzer Hazani.

A few days later, the Tuckers joined other evacuees crammed into a religious school near Jerusalem’s Western Wall. They stayed briefly at a motel paid for by the government. Then they found temporary lodging in the Golan Heights. But that meant Stuart, who worked way south in Dimona, could rejoin the family only once a week for Shabbat.

To be closer to their former homes in the south, the family took sanctuary in a ramshackle guesthouse at Ein Tzurim, an Orthodox kibbutz not far from Kiryat Malachi.

Anita recalls that they longed for a sense of place and to be productive and financially independent again. And they wanted—like most Gush Katif evacuees—to live nearby others from their old Gaza community.

There are 18 towns, from Eilat in the south to the Golan Heights in the north, where Gush Katif residents have resettled as a group. Some have even bunched together in improvised urban communities like the Jezreel Valley town of Afula, Anita said.

The dream of rebuilding their communal life began to materialize in 2010, when a new Netzer Hazani was founded not far from the city of Rehovot and near Yesodot, an ultra-Orthodox kibbutz.

OREET SEGAL FROM BROOKLYN and her husband, Eliezer, originally from Chicago, came to Ganei Tal in Gush Katif in 1993, along with their four children.

They wanted to be pioneers. Ganei Tal was affiliated with Hapoel Mizrachi, the settlement movement of what was then the National Religious Party.
Approximately 65 families lived in Ganei Tal, not far from the Mediterranean. Oreet and Eliezer became farmers, growing red bell peppers in hothouses.

Their settlement was the first to be expelled.

The soldiers found Oreet, Eliezer, and two of their children at home. Two other children were already serving in the IDF.

The family was taken to the guesthouse of Kibbutz Chafetz Chaim, a short drive from the Gaza Strip. There were not enough rooms, so they were separated from their children. Their youngest daughter, Adah, was about to start 10th grade.

“We had no work and were not sure where she would go to school,” Oreet said.

After three months in the guesthouse, they were assigned to a mobile home close by in Yad Binyamin. “The entire structure was more like a cardboard box than a home,” she recalled.

Five years later, most of the 65 families from Ganei Tal were still living in temporary housing in Yad Binyamin, joined there by other Gaza evacuees.

The Ganei Tal group wanted to stay together permanently. The bureaucratic wheels ground slowly. It took nearly seven years of political, legal, and bureaucratic wrangling until authorities were able to provide them with a permanent location in what were once the cornfields of Kibbutz Chafez Chaim. The settlers also won a battle to keep the Ganei Tal name.

Oreet has now been living in her permanent home for three and a half years.

At first, the family was denied government compensation. After hiring lawyers, they got what the law permitted; but that was hardly enough to rebuild their lives. The family had lost a 3,500-square-foot home and could barely build a house half that size. There were also permit fees and lawyer bills they needed to pay.

Evacuee farmers like Oreet and Eliezer were given money for their greenhouses, but at depreciated value, “pennies on the dollar,” she said, and in no way enough to start anew.

It made no difference if the evacuees had fully cooperated with authorities or resisted expulsion until the last minute. Almost all went through the same hassles in completing the compensation paperwork—like being asked to present elementary school report cards for children who were by then of army age or for hard copies of phone bills dating back 10 years, Oreet said.

She feels authorities made a serious mistake in handing over comparatively large payments to displaced Gush Katif residents. With no financial-planning help to go with the money, many families literally ate through their housing allowances just to keep food on the table.

Many Ganei Tal farmers who lost everything were in their mid to late 50s. Some stayed in agriculture, particularly if they had bigger operations or adult children interested in carrying on the business. A few with commitments from European produce buyers hit the ground running because they had rented hothouses outside Gaza before disengagement, she said.

Mainly younger people or second-generation farmers successfully made the transition. For most expelled settlers, farming would no longer be an option.

A short drive away, farming conditions (soil, humidity, temperature) were surprisingly different. In Gaza, farming was done in sand (which held the root ball of the plants) and was managed by sophisticated computers that infused the right amount of fertilizer, water, and nutrients. In the new Ganei Tal, farmers must grow crops directly in the earth.

The government’s efforts to retrain the evacuees were sometimes clumsy. Oreet considers herself fortunate. While health problems kept Eliezer on disability, she was able to take advantage of an all-expense-paid government training program to qualify her as a certified tour guide. There was even a modest living stipend.

The 2014 Gaza war kept many tourists away. Oreet loves her work and said she particularly enjoys guiding Christian visitors in the Holy Land.

“Whatever ill will and hurt there is has not been directed at the state but against the small group of politicians who thought up and implemented the disengagement,” she said.

The best news, Oreet made clear, is that 10 years later, almost all the original 65 families from Ganei Tal, and many of their children and their families, too, are now living together again as a community in permanent homes in the new Ganei Tal.

MICHAEL GOLDSTEIN WAS A FAMILY DOCTOR in Neve Dekalim’s medical clinic. He worked alongside his wife, Celia, a nurse. The community was founded in 1983, and many of its original members were evacuees from Jewish settlements in the Sinai Peninsula, which Israel ceded in April 1982 in return for peace with Anwar Sadat’s Egypt.
For seven months after disengagement, the London-born couple and their eight children were forced to live in a few crowded hotel rooms. Celia recalled that period as the most emotionally and physically challenging time of their lives.

Their friends and neighbors were scattered around Israel. Many eventually reassembled in Nitzan, where the Goldsteins have been living in a caravilla.

Celia knows families that have been torn apart by the experience of living for nearly 10 years without a permanent home. She knows of marriages that disintegrated, children who resent their parents for not somehow fighting harder against the expulsion, and neighbors who suffered trauma-related crises.

Unemployment also took a toll. Some evacuees were left in difficult financial straits and didn’t receive their rightful share of relocation aid. Many had to spend what they did receive on day-to-day living expenses, she said.

To add insult to injury, since the day they were forced out of Gush Katif, they have been within range of Palestinian rockets from Gaza. The heavy bombardments in the summer of 2014 repeatedly sent the Goldsteins to makeshift shelters because their temporary caravilla has no reinforced-concrete security room.

Though the painful memories persist, the sense of displacement is nearing an end.

Celia and Michael were expected to move into permanent housing in Nitzan soon. They are starting to take their belongings out of storage. There is sadness in discovering that so many of them are now ruined.

“Government officials told us to pack for 10 days, but it’s been 10 years,” Celia said.

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Origins of the Pullout

The concept of Israel leaving the Gaza Strip and receiving nothing in return was first floated unofficially by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in an address to an academic conference in Herzliya, Israel, on December 18, 2003. With the second Palestinian intifada (uprising) raging, Sharon said it was clear to him Palestinian Arabs had no interest in making peace. Israel needed to establish defensible boundaries that contained as few Palestinians as possible.

In April 2004, he formally unveiled his plan. Despite vehement political opposition and the loss of a referendum within his own Likud Party, Sharon persevered. He won several cabinet votes on disengagement (twice, incidentally, with the backing of Benjamin Netanyahu). The Knesset, Israel’s parliament, voted 59 to 40 on February 16, 2005, to give disengagement the green light.

Sharon won a final cabinet vote 17 to 5 on August 7, 2005. That day, Netanyahu joined four others in voting no. With disengagement practically under way, Netanyahu quit the Sharon cabinet, saying he had done all he could from within to stop it. Natan Sharansky had quit the cabinet in May.

To prevent the Arabs from smuggling arms into Israel, Sharon had originally considered retaining a narrow piece of territory that ran along the Gaza Strip’s boundary with Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. He changed his mind, and by August 23, 2005, not a single Israeli settler remained in Gaza. On September 12, an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldier locked the gate at the Kissufim crossing and ended Israel’s almost 40-year presence in Gaza.

Two days later, Palestinians fired several rockets at the Negev town of Sderot, while Arabs in Lebanon celebrated the IDF pullout by firing at the Galilee from the north.

Since Israel has withdrawn from Gaza, Palestinians have fired more than 11,000 rockets into the Jewish state, dug a network of arms-smuggling tunnels, and persistently tunneled into Israel to kill or capture Israelis.

A month after the pullout, U.S. President George W. Bush’s secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, criticized Sharon for threatening to block Hamas’s participation in proposed Palestinian elections. After Sharon’s massive stroke in January 2006, his successor, Ehud Olmert, agreed to Palestinian elections in the West Bank and Gaza and to Hamas participation.

On January 25, Hamas won 74 out of 132 seats in the Palestinian parliament. By June 2007, Hamas violently expelled Mahmoud Abbas and his Palestinian Authority from the Gaza Strip.

Since then, the Israeli army has had to reenter the area three times to stem Hamas aggression: in 2008, in Operation Cast Lead; in 2012, in Operation Pillar of Defense; and in the summer of 2014, in Operation Protective Edge.

by Elliot Jager

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**Answers from God’s Word**

**Question:** What does it mean to be “saved”?

**Answer:** “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

—Colossians 1:13–14
What Used to Be

This summer marks the 10th anniversary of Israel’s disengagement from its settlements in the Gaza Strip. Here is a look at what once was. Gush Katif’s farmers produced 95 percent of the bug-free lettuce and greens exported, 70 percent of the organic vegetables exported, and 60 percent of the geraniums exported to Europe. They sacrificed it all in a failed effort to make peace. All photos are by Israeli photographer Hanan Isachar, isachar-photography.com.
A Life-Changing Journey Through Samaria
Follow me on a life-changing journey to three of my favorite places in Samaria. And make sure you have your Bible, your camera, and a good pair of hiking boots!

**‘The Pass’—Where Two Men Routed an Army**

The Bible simply identifies the first stop on our journey as “the pass.” Most travelers know little about the site, but it is where King Saul’s son Jonathan and his armor bearer climbed from Gibeah toward Michmash, routing the entire Philistine army.

Two men defeating an entire army sounds almost impossible until you stand here and read the account. The Philistines camped at Michmash and sent raiding parties along the major roads to the east, north, and west. Steep cliffs and a narrow pass made the southern edge of their camp seem secure, so they only assigned a small force to guard “the pass” (1 Sam. 13:17–18, 23).

When Jonathan and his armor bearer shouted to the garrison from the valley below, the Philistines didn’t know there were only two men climbing up the face of the cliff. The garrison commander sent a panicked report back to the main base: The Israelites are launching an attack against our lightly guarded south flank! We’ve already lost 20 men!

Standing here and looking down at the pass, the story makes perfect sense. Jonathan and his armor bearer were indeed brave . . . and brazen. They chose to attack at the one spot where the Philistines never expected Israel to mount an assault. And God gave them a remarkable victory.

**Shiloh—An Object Lesson on Disobedience**

The next stop on the journey is Shiloh, where Joshua set up the Tabernacle after conquering the land. This low hill surrounded by mountains is tucked away in a remote part of Ephraim and offered security for Israel’s central place of worship.

Standing in a viewing tower on the site, we can see an ancient stone wall outlining the spot where the Tabernacle once stood. Inside that larger rectangle is an area where the Holy Place and Holy of Holies were located.

But wasn’t the Tabernacle a tent? Why does the site have stone walls?

After the Israelites entered the land, they must have replaced the portable sanctuary with a more permanent structure. In fact, the walls help explain a passage from the life of Samuel. When God appeared to Samuel, the Bible says the boy lay down until morning then “opened the doors of the house of the LORD” (1 Sam. 3:15, italics added). The tent in the wilderness didn’t have doors, but this more permanent structure at Shiloh did.

Gazing at the red anemones now covering the site, we think about those in the past who also walked this hallowed ground: Eli, the high priest in the days of Samuel; Hannah, Samuel’s godly mother; and Samuel himself. And we remember Shiloh’s sad end after Eli’s wicked sons carried the Ark of the Covenant into battle. They were killed, the Ark was captured, and Eli died when he heard the news.
Later the rest of the priests fled Shiloh, carrying away the remaining articles of furniture, as the Philistines came to destroy the town. The House of God became a heap of rubble.

Shiloh ceased being the center of worship for Israel. Centuries later, through the prophet Jeremiah, God used the ruins as an object lesson for His people: “But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel” (Jer. 7:12).

Shiloh is a beautiful spot, but its ruins remind us of the danger of disobeying God.

**Gerizim—Our Fathers Worshiped on This Mountain**

The last stop on today’s journey is Mount Gerizim. From here we have a magnificent view of Samaria. Immediately to our north is Mount Ebal. Joshua brought the children of Israel here to recite the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant. Half the tribes stood on Mount Gerizim; the others stood on Mount Ebal. Between these two mountains was the ancient city of Shechem, where Jacob dug a well 4,000 years ago.
Two thousand years later, it was the scene of one of the most amazing encounters in history, where Jesus met with the Samaritan woman at the well and told her He was the Messiah (Jn. 4:25–26).

The woman was from Sychar, on the slopes of Mount Ebal. She walked a long distance to get water, and she came in the middle of the day when others weren’t as likely to be around. But instead of being alone, she found herself in the presence of a Jewish man who actually spoke to her and asked for a drink of water.

In the conversation that followed, she discovered He was more than a mere man. She assumed He must be a prophet, and she asked Him an indirect question that had divided the Jews and Samaritans for centuries: “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship” (v. 20).

When the Samaritan woman said “this mountain,” she referred to where we’re now standing. Most of the remains around us are from a church built here in the fifth century, but there are also remnants of a temple the Samaritans built here nearly 1,000 years earlier. The Jewish people destroyed that temple more than a century before this woman’s encounter with Jesus—a reminder of the hatred that existed between the two groups.

Jesus answered the woman by explaining, “The hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father... The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (vv. 21, 23). Then Jesus revealed to her that He was the Messiah.

Mount Gerizim was originally the mount of blessing, but by Jesus’ day it had become a place of division, a symbol of the hatred that separated two groups who claimed the same spiritual heritage. Jesus’ message to the Samaritan woman was that God’s revelation to the Jewish people was the true Word from God and that the ultimate One to whom God had been pointing in His Word was Jesus Himself.

Well, it’s time to head home. What lessons can we take away from our journey through Samaria? For me, it’s the reminder that God’s fingerprints can be found throughout this amazing region. The tiniest details—from a place called “the pass” to “doors” on the Tabernacle to the ruins of a temple on Mount Gerizim—are all visible reminders that God’s Word is reliable and relevant for us today.

Charlie Dyer is professor-at-large of Bible at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois, and host of The Land and the Book radio program on Moody Radio. Over the past 30 years he has led more than 80 trips to Israel.
Imagine your physician tells you that you need an operation. You mentally prepare for everything surgery involves: pain, potential infection, a hospital stay, and recovery time. Then your surgeon says your operation will require no incision and leave no scar, and you can go home when it’s over. You’re probably thinking, Where do I sign up?

Well, you’d have to be in Israel to sign up. Thanks to InSightec, an Israeli company that specializes in focused ultrasound technology, there is now a surgical instrument called ExAblate that provides noninvasive treatment for some conditions that previously required traditional surgery.

A number of years ago, InSightec compiled a team primarily from the prestigious Technion, Israel’s world-renowned technology institute, to create ExAblate, which uses focused ultrasound technology and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to treat problems like uterine fibroids that reportedly affect one in four women.
According to InSightec, a hysterectomy requiring six to eight weeks of recovery was among the few treatments available for uterine fibroids. ExAblate not only eliminates the fibroids but also preserves fertility for women who want to have more children. ExAblate is also being used to treat bone cancer and bone pain commonly associated with cancer and is undergoing trials for treating prostate and breast cancer.

To people who know a lot about Israel, an Israeli innovation that makes life better probably comes as no surprise. They understand Israel is not an ordinary country.

When the early Jewish pioneers envisioned a future Jewish state, they didn’t want simply another nation on the map. They had a unique vision and purpose that would define Israel, setting it apart from the rest of the world.

Their purpose can be summed up in the words of the prophet Isaiah: “a light to the Gentiles [nations]” (Isa. 49:6). They believed they could fashion a state that looked outward, helping others in need, not merely themselves.

The vision of the early Zionists (those who believe Jewish people have a right to exist in their ancient homeland) has come to fruition in many ways. Modern Israel is a bright light when it comes to technology and medical innovation.

**Walking Again**

Robert Woo told CBS News, “I didn’t think I could be useful, and I wanted to die. And the worst thing is I couldn’t even pull the plug.” Woo was a 39-year-old architect working on the Goldman Sachs building in New York City in 2007 when he suddenly found himself buried under seven tons of steel that fell 30 stories onto his construction-site trailer. Doctors told him he would never walk again. Crushed again by the weight of the news, Woo thought, How could I put my family through this?

A few years later, Woo was researching online technologies to help him break free from his wheelchair when he came across ReWalk.

ReWalk is a robotic exoskeleton invented by Dr. Amit Goffer, an Israeli quadriplegic who believed there was a better, more natural way to move than with a wheelchair.

The ReWalk exoskeleton functions like a robot frame that is fitted to someone who has lost the ability to use his legs. Its motors provide movement in place of muscles, allowing a paraplegic to stand up and walk.

This new Israeli technology is not only changing the way some people with paralysis engage with the world around them, but it’s also giving them a new sense of purpose. Woo told CBS News, “To be able to stand up next to my wife and give her a hug for the first time. To be able to walk with my children to the park, these are things that we take for granted that I missed.”

The ReWalk also has additional health benefits. Often paralysis can lead to heart disease and diabetes. The ReWalk helps paraplegics exercise more, which lowers blood pressure and reduces fat.

Sadly, Dr. Goffer, who sought to make life better for others, cannot use his own technology. It works only for paraplegics, not quadriplegics. The ReWalk still requires the use of one’s arms.

Goffer told another interviewer, “Once I speak with the ReWalk users and their families, I mean the reward is so fantastic, I cannot be frustrated. But we are working on another device that will help people like me.”

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**Slowing the Effects of Alzheimer’s**

Alzheimer’s and dementia plague 35 million people globally. Chances are you know someone who suffers from this mind-altering disease. Although there is no cure, science is
making advances to help prevent dementia from taking over the mind completely.

Prof. Emeritus Marta Weinstock-Rosin of Hebrew University in Jerusalem is on the cutting edge of the fight against Alzheimer’s. A Holocaust survivor, she recently won the Israel Prize for Medicine for developing Exelon, a “blockbuster” drug that comes in the form of a pill or patch and helps slow dementia associated with diseases like Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s.7

The Times of Israel called Exelon “one of the most important drugs to have emerged from Israeli medical research labs in recent years.”8

It is currently helping millions of people worldwide enjoy better lives despite Alzheimer’s.

The True Light to the Nations

As Christians know, only God can take what is broken and fix it. The stain of sin has corrupted, damaged, and afflicted all of God’s creation. To heal us spiritually, God gave us His Son so that through faith in Him, we can have hope, help, and spiritual life.

When Isaiah prophesied of “a light to the Gentiles,” he had Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, in mind. Until He rules as King of kings in perfect righteousness from Jerusalem, we will continue to suffer from corruption and disease.

However, God is using the little country of Israel to improve the well-being of millions around the world with new and innovative medical advancements, allowing us to live longer, healthier lives.

ENDNOTES

1 “ExAblate OR—The operating room of the future” <insightec.com/ExAblate-Operation-Room-Future.html>.
3 Mary Tindall, “Paraplegics closer to regaining mobility with ReWalk Robotics,” fromthegrapevine.com, September 15, 2014 <tinyurl.com/mbv4g47>.
4 Jaslow.
7 Judy Siegel-Itzkovich, “Israel Prize for researcher who developed drug to slow dementia,” The Jerusalem Post, March 2, 2014 <tinyurl.com/mtk9dl>.
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Three Myths About Jihad

As the adage goes, “Ideas have consequences.” However, in these dangerous times of savage jihadism, bad ideas can have disastrous consequences. If they woo our Washington policy makers or the citizens who elect them, innocent blood will be spilled, and innocent lives lost.

Equally problematic, if we begin capitulating to this new form of totalitarianism, we will soon see the slow, oppressive loss of our freedoms.

To counter bad ideas, we first must recognize them. Here are three desperately wrong concepts about jihadism today:

**Myth #1. These new attacks in America and Europe are simply “lone wolf” assaults.**

In May, after the Garland, Texas, attempt to assassinate attendees at the Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest, many news outlets, including ABC and NBC, quickly resorted to the “lone wolf” label, implying the attacks were random, unconnected, and isolated. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The January shootings in Paris at the headquarters of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* were orchestrated by Muslims who shouted “Allahu Akbar” as they began their murderous rampage. Here in the United States, Islam-inspired jihadists murdered American military personnel at Fort Hood, Texas, in 2009; bombed the Boston Marathon in 2013; and attempted the murders in Garland, Texas.

Remember the Charles Manson “family” cult in California that gruesomely killed actress Sharon Tate and others in 1969? Manson was not at the scene, yet he was convicted because he had instigated the murders by influencing the minds of his followers.

In the same way, violent Islam is responsible for these jihadist attacks because it inspired them, whether or not a direct, official connection between ISIS and the assailants is shown.

**Myth #2. This is not a religious war.**

As former Muslim terrorist turned follower of Christ Walid Shoebat points out on his website, after the Garland attacks, ISIS boasted that jihadists will “inflict harm” on “the defenders of the cross” in America, meaning Christians. ISIS-affiliated terrorists have ruthlessly executed Coptic Christians in Libya, along with Salem Matty Georgis, a 43-year-old Christian in Iraq, whom they tortured then killed for refusing to convert to Islam.

Earlier this year, authorities in Italy charged Muslim extremists with planning an attack against the Vatican. Is this not religious jihad?

**Myth #3. Jihadists are not solely responsible for their heinous acts. Americans who speak against them with extreme language share the blame.**

This myth is perhaps the most bizarre. Yet media giants propagate it. For example, in the wake of the Garland shootings, a May 6 *New York Times* editorial, breathtaking in its illogic, slammed the conference as “an exercise in bigotry and hatred posing as a blow for freedom.” Then, outrageously, it declared, “The greater threat posed by the barbaric killers of the Islamic State or Al Qaeda cannot justify blatantly Islamophobic provocations like the Garland event.”

Though the editorial opened with the statement that offensive speech doesn’t justify murder—a point so obvious one wonders why it even needed to be made—it then revealed its true agenda: to brutalize people who harshly criticize Islam, a religion the liberal media has granted near sacred-cow status.

I do not condone needlessly incendiary language to make any point, for or against anything. However, when it comes to life and death or freedom and tyranny, we must take sides. We must declare where we stand.

It is irresponsible to make free speech a guilty coconspirator with savage jihadists. Politically correct liberals are quick to indict so-called conservative “hate speech” but will not condemn with equal vigor the barbarity of violent Islam.

We must reject these baseless myths and intellectual reconciliations if we are to stop the enemies of freedom and innocent life. When leaders in England discounted the true threat of Nazism and tried to compromise with Hitler in the 1930s, Winston Churchill issued a harsh warning—one we need to heed today:

*Do not suppose this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning. This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year unless by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigour, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time.*

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Living Truthfully

A major problem in the first-century church was the proliferation of false teachers. Under the inspiration and leading of the Holy Spirit, the apostle John penned his second and third epistles to address this issue head-on.

These epistles are extremely short, approximately 300 words each in the New King James Version. Second and Third John are more indicative of an informal letter of appreciation and warning, rather than an epistle.

The texts resemble each other in character, distinct appearance, grammar, vocabulary, theme, and arrangement of the letters. The themes of 2 and 3 John are living in truth and love, receiving one another in fellowship, and showing hospitality to true believers while rejecting people teaching error. The sameness of content indicates they were penned closely together, most likely around the same time as 1 John (A.D. 85–90).

In 2 John, the author reinforced three points addressed in 1 John:

1. Christians must have spiritual perception and understanding so they can identify truth from error when it is taught in their churches.
2. Christians must live according to the truth of Christ’s teaching, or they will be unable to testify of their love for Him. Only by living in Christ’s love and obeying God’s Word can Christians discern whether a teacher is true or false.
3. Christians must open their homes to other believers and show hospitality while rejecting false teachers who spread lies about hospitality but close their homes to other believers and show hospitality to true believers while rejecting people teaching error. The sameness of content indicates they were penned closely together, most likely around the same time as 1 John (A.D. 85–90).

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The message of this epistle is extremely relevant and especially needed today, as false doctrine and apostasy are inundating churches around the world.

The Author

The author identified himself not by name but simply as “The Elder” (2 Jn. 1). In the first-century church, an elder (Greek, presbuteros) was an overseer (equivalent of a bishop) and held a position of rank and authority.

There were two types of elders: (1) ruling elders and (2) those who labored in the Word of God and doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17). Elders are servants chosen by God to function as undershepherds for the Lord and stewards who administer the affairs of a local church.

The author is not identified in either 2 or 3 John. Consequently, many scholars throughout history have been reluctant to accept these books as Scripture. Not all agree John was the author. In analyzing the letters, however, it is evident they were written by the same individual, most likely the apostle John.

A number of church fathers in the first and second centuries recognized John as the author of 1 John, which probably makes him the author of 2 John as well because of its similarity in style, vocabulary, and message (more than half of the contents also appears in 1 John).

For example, Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150–215) and Irenaeus (A.D. 130–202) quoted from 2 John, indicating they accepted these epistles as being written by the apostle and considered them divinely inspired. Also, the author’s authority far exceeds that of an overseer in the first-century church.

Both internal and external evidence highly favor John as the author. Today most conservative biblical scholars maintain that John wrote 1, 2, and 3 John.

The Addressees

Second John is addressed to “the beloved Gaius” (v. 1). Commentators differ over the meaning of this phrase. Some believe it should be taken figuratively as referring to the church at large or a local church. Others believe John was addressing a specific woman and her household.

The latter view seems correct because nothing in the letter mentions a particular church, and the author also referred to the woman’s sister (v. 13). It was not unusual for women in the early church to be recognized for their commitment and service or for them to receive personal greetings, as when Paul greeted Priscilla, Phoebe, and Mary (Rom. 16:1–6).

Third John is addressed to “the elect lady and her children” (v. 1). John warned him to expose Diotrephes, who loved to have the preeminence, seized power in the church, and refused to receive the teachers or teachings Paul sent to the church. Gaius was encouraged to follow Demetrius’s example.

In other words, 2 John warns believers not to receive heretics into their homes or churches, while 3 John encourages Gaius to fellowship only with brothers in Christ who have a good testimony within the church.

The Author’s Adoration

The apostle John expressed great tenderness and care toward the “elect lady” and her children, “whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth, because of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever” (2 Jn. 1–2).

What do we know about this Christian woman to whom John
addressed his letter? One commentator wrote the following:

Clearly she was some well-known Christian lady, apparently a widow, known for her exemplary character and Christian hospitality. She was probably a lady of some means, having a house large enough to entertain traveling preachers. It is probable that her house was the meeting place for the church in her community, according to the custom of those days when as yet there were no separate church buildings. She had a family of grown children, at least some of whom John had learned to know as devout Christians. She had a sister, perhaps now deceased, with whose children John was personally acquainted; he was in contact with them at the time of the writing of this letter and includes their greetings to their aunt. Her place of residence is unknown, but apparently she lived not too far from Ephesus, and John had previously visited her home. Beyond this, Scripture is silent about her.

By addressing “her children,” John implied he knew them and was aware of their solid commitment to the Lord. He expressed strong feelings of endearment to them, “whom I love in truth.” John used the Greek word agapao, meaning a self-sacrificing love that goes far beyond friendship. His love was grounded in “the truth”—what is revealed in and by the incarnate Christ. Jesus had taught the elect lady and her family is something all believers possess through the indwelling Holy Spirit:

The indwelling Spirit of truth “will be with us [all believers] forever [eternally]” (2 Jn. 2). This fact gives great assurance and comfort to those who are born again and reveals their position and relationship to the triune God.

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Third, the indwelling Holy Spirit continually abides in Christians and makes God’s truth a reality in their lives and character. The unsaved world cannot see, know, or receive Him (cf. Jn. 14:16–17; 16:3).

This truth is all the teaching Christ presented about God the Father and Himself, as opposed to the lies of false teachers.

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Unlike other New Testament epistles that wish blessing on all believers in Christ, 2 John announces that those possessing God’s love and truth will experience His grace, mercy, and peace.

“Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love” (v. 3).

The phrase will be emphasizes that true believers in Christ will encounter God’s ongoing blessing, manifested in three ways:

1. Grace, God’s unmerited favor, is freely granted to unworthy humanity, but especially to believers in Christ.

2. Mercy speaks of God’s compassion and pity on people suffering through troubles, including physical or mental sorrow, anxiety, or pain.

3. Peace refers to a believer’s calm, tranquil, or undisturbed mental state, even in the midst of trials. Peace should flow naturally to someone who has experienced God’s grace and mercy.

These three blessings are bestowed on believers from both “God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” The word from establishes the Father and Son as separate persons within the Godhead, yet having the same essence and attributes (cf. Jn. 10:30). John further confirmed Jesus’ identity by calling Him “the Son of the Father” (2 Jn. 3).

Elsewhere Scripture identifies Jesus as the eternal Son of God, meaning He always existed in eternity past and now has been manifested in human flesh. Christ’s deity is inseparable from His eternality.

The blessings of “grace, mercy, and peace” can only function properly in “truth and love” (v. 3). This is the only time truth and love are mentioned together in the New Testament. Christians who have experienced these three blessings must manifest them to the unsaved world in truth and love, which play a major role in church unity and form a powerful testimony to the truth and love that emanate from the Father and Jesus Christ His Son.

John was impressed with the elect lady’s children: “I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father” (v. 4). The word some may mean that John only came in contact with a few of her children, or that not all were “walking in truth.”

The word truth (used five times in the first four verses) lacks the definite article, thus referring to the truthful character and habitual conduct practiced in a believer’s daily life.

Notice four truths about the elect lady and her children’s conduct:

1. They conformed to commands received from God the Father and Jesus Christ His incarnate Son; (2) they did not consider John’s teaching an option, but a divine commandment; (3) their lives manifested truth and love in total obedience to God’s commands; and (4) others, especially John, within the church witnessed their commitment.

Does your testimony bear the same witness of God’s truth and love for Christ? If not, it might be time to make some changes in your life.

ENDNOTE


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Humanity’s Rejection of God’s Moral Absolutes

Humanity’s refusal to accept God’s wisdom has led people to reject His moral absolutes. Consequently, individuals engage in practices that violate what God ordained for mankind. They commit fornication, adultery, incest, pedophilia, and bestiality, as addressed in previous articles.

This article addresses two additional violations and the consequences.

Rape. Rape is the act of forcefully violating someone sexually against his or her will.

Before God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel, Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, was raped by a young Hivite prince. Jacob’s sons were so grieved and angry because their sister had been defiled that two of them killed her rapist, his father, and all the men of the Hivite city (Gen. 34).

While the Mosaic Law was in effect in Israel, God required that rape be dealt with as follows:

- If a man raped a betrothed young woman in a rural area where her cries for help could not be heard, the rapist was to be executed (Dt. 22:25–27).
- If a man raped a young virgin who was not betrothed, he had to pay her father a betrothal price and marry her for life. He was not permitted to divorce her because he had humbled her through rape (vv. 28–29).

During the time of the judges, perverted men of the Benjamite city of Gibeah raped and ravished the concubine of a Levite all night until morning. The woman died from the abuse. In response to this lewd, outrageous deed, the other tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, demanding they turn over the rapists of Gibeah to them for execution, thereby removing this evil from Israel.

The Benjamite men refused. So a war broke out between the Benjamites and the other tribes. Many people died, and Gibeah and other Benjamite cities were destroyed (Jud. 19—20).

King David’s firstborn son, Amnon, raped his half sister, Tamar, despite her desperate pleas for him to stop. As a result, her brother, Absalom, hated Amnon and had him murdered (2 Sam. 13:1–29).

When the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C., they raped women in Jerusalem and other cities of Judah (Lam. 5:11).

The Israelites used the following terms to describe some of these instances of rape: disgraceful (Gen. 34:7; 2 Sam. 13:12), wicked deed (Jud. 20:3), lewdness and outrage (v. 6), vileness (v. 10), and evil (v. 13).

In addition, they emphasized that these rapes were committed “in Israel” (vv. 6, 10), that “no such thing should be done in Israel” (2 Sam. 13:12), and that they wanted to “remove the evil from Israel” (Jud. 20:13). Their conviction was that God regarded rape as immoral and contrary to what He had ordained for their nation.

Homosexuality. In Romans 1 the apostle Paul addressed the ultimate cause of the breakdown of morality and order in Gentile society in ancient times: the rebellion of people against the sovereign God who created the universe.

Paul indicated that God responded to this rebellion with wrathful judgment (Rom. 1:18). He emphasized that judgment by using the same Greek verb three times. In verses 24 and 26 it is translated “gave them up,” and in verse 28 “gave them over.” The Greek verb means “he abandoned them” and is used “of a God who punishes evil-doers.”

Abandonment to a Debased Mind

In conjunction with Paul’s third use of the verb (v. 28), he used a term related to testing, signifying that for a while, these rebels tested the knowledge of God they had received by observing His created universe (cf. vv. 19–21a). The test was to determine how they would respond to that knowledge.

They responded by concluding it was not fitting or suitable to have God in their knowledge system or worldview (v. 28; cf. v. 21). To expunge Him, they willfully suppressed the revelation of God’s existence and power that is displayed through the universe He created (vv. 18–20). They even claimed they were wise to do so (v. 22). Some fashioned images of animals and humans to worship in place of God (v. 23).
Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

Abandonment to Vile Passions

These rebels exchanged the reality of God’s existence for the lie that He does not exist. Therefore, God abandoned them to vile “passions of a sexual nature.” 11 In Romans 1:26 Paul described lesbianism, the female form of homosexuality: “For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.” The word translated “use” referred to “relations, function, especially of sexual intercourse.” Women exchanged the natural function of their sexuality (relations with a male) for what is contrary to nature (relations with a woman). 12

In verse 27 Paul described the male form of homosexuality. The male rebels abandoned the natural sexual relationship with women and “burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” The word translated “burned” indicates they were “inflamed” with sexual desire for other men. 13 The word translated “error” refers to a “wandering from the path of truth.” 14 Paul indicated the abuse their bodies received from their homosexual relationships was the necessary, divine penalty for willfully exchanging God’s truth for the lie.

Romans 1 is not the only passage in which Paul referred to homosexuality. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 he included “homosexuals” and “sodomites” in a list of the “unrighteous” who will not inherit the Kingdom of God. The word translated “homosexuals” means “soft, effeminate, especially of catamites, men and boys who allow themselves to be misused homosexually.” 15 The word translated “sodomites” refers to “a male homosexual.” 16 Paul used the same word again in 1 Timothy 1:10.

The apostle’s teaching in Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 6 indicates that unnatural, perverted sexual relationships are the result of people not paying God the honor He is due. Where men worship idols instead of God, human society deteriorates (Rom. 1:28); and misuse of the body is the divinely willed recompense for turning aside from the true knowledge and worship of God.

ENDNOTES

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., “chrasis,” 894.
13 Ibid., “epithumia,” 293.
14 Ibid., “plana,” 671.
15 Ibid., “malakos,” 489.

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Google ditches Israel

Reuven Rivlin was born on September 9, 1939, in Jerusalem. However, according to the Google search engine, Israel’s 10th president was born in “Palestine.”

The Mayor of Ra’anana, Ze’ev Bielski, made the shocking discovery while working on a speech. “I typed his name into Google in English, and then we were amazed to see that [it] says he was born in Jerusalem—in the Palestinian state,” Bielski told Yedioth Aharonot.

“At first I did not believe it,” he said. “But as we continued, we found that even when writing my name in, Google says that I was born in Palestine, as stated as well regarding the famous actress Natalie Portman—although she was [also] born in Jerusalem.”

Bielski also found that if you type the names of prominent Israelis in English, Google’s search engine will sometimes say they were born in the “state of Palestine.”

This is not the first time Google has labeled Israel as “Palestine.” When using Google Maps in Israeli cities in Judea-Samaria, for example, certain addresses will be provided in Arabic, despite the fact that several cities have few, or no, Arab residents.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

Helping Nepal

Israel has pledged to fully rebuild an entire village in Nepal following the devastating earthquakes there, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman announced recently.

“We decided to adopt a village in Nepal, to assist with its reconstruction and to do our utmost to help people who have really found themselves in a difficult situation,” Lieberman said in a briefing reported by The Times of Israel. The foreign ministry will work with the Nepalese government to select a village and help clear the area and rebuild the infrastructure and houses there.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

Israel buys four German warships

Israel has reached an agreement with Germany to purchase four warships for $480 million.

Germany will provide four advanced Sa’ar-class corvettes to the Israeli navy over the next five years and will subsidize approximately one-third of the cost. Once the ships arrive, Israeli defense firms will outfit them with their own technology and weapons systems. The deal is similar to the delivery of German-made Dolphin-class submarines to Israel in recent years.

“Israel is our biggest friend in the Middle East. We have 70 projects with you and there is not a country in the world we have such expansive security relations with like we do with Israel, both bilaterally and in cooperation between the militaries,” German official Ursula von der Leyen said, Yedioth Aharonoth reported.

On the day the deal was announced, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin arrived in Germany for a three-day visit.

R&D program

Israel and Ontario, Canada, have extended a 10-year collaboration for another five years, bringing the value of the program to $18 million, of which each side contributed half.

The companies generated by the program have gone on to raise an estimated $1 billion in revenue.

JNS.org

Churches aid anti-Israelis

A fringe, Israeli nongovernmental organization (NGO) hopes this year will be the last for the Jewish state. Zochrot, a tiny radical anti-Zionist group, with an agenda equivalent to calling for the abolishment of Israel, operates only through generous funding from foreign Christian-aid organizations.

The group’s founder, Eitan Bronstein, advocates for Jews to abandon Israel en masse. In April, with Palestinian NGO BADIL, Zochrot embarked on a speaking tour across the U.S.

Foreign funding for 2014 and the first quarter of 2015 totals about $740,000. Of that, about 93 percent comes from the following Christian charities: Bischoffliches Misereor (Germany), Broederlijk Delen (Belgium), Christian Aid (UK), Finn Church Aid (Finland), HEKS-EPER (Switzerland), ICCO (Netherlands), Trócaire (Ireland), the Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), and the United Church of Canada (Canada).

Zochrot, a tiny radical anti-Zionist group, with an agenda equivalent to calling for the abolishment of Israel, operates only through generous funding from foreign Christian-aid organizations.

The group’s founder, Eitan Bronstein, advocates for Jews to abandon Israel en masse. In April, with Palestinian NGO BADIL, Zochrot embarked on a speaking tour across the U.S.

Foreign funding for 2014 and the first quarter of 2015 totals about $740,000. Of that, about 93 percent comes from the following Christian charities: Bischoffliches Misereor (Germany), Broederlijk Delen (Belgium), Christian Aid (UK), Finn Church Aid (Finland), HEKS-EPER (Switzerland), ICCO (Netherlands), Trócaire (Ireland), the Mennonite Central Committee (Canada), and the United Church of Canada (Canada).

Yitz/hak Santis/JNS.org

Vatican recognizes ‘Palestine’

The Vatican officially recognized Palestine in May, and the pope called Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas an “angel of peace.” Pope Francis angered many Israelis who believe Abbas has links to terrorism.

A number of European parliaments, including those of the European Union, the UK, Spain, and France, have recently passed resolutions calling for Palestinian statehood recognition. Sweden has gone further by formally recognizing a Palestinian state.

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Canada wants BDS to be hate crime

The Canadian government wants to use hate-crime laws against organizations that support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel.

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About three years ago, Tirael Cohen posted a flyer at Ariel University seeking students to create a student village in Samaria. More than 150 students expressed interest—and it was all she needed to get started.

Today Cohen is the director of Kedma, which runs student villages in Judea and Samaria. On May 19 in Jerusalem, she accepted the “Spirit of Zion” Moskowitz Prize for making her Zionist idea a reality.

At only 22, Cohen, a journalism student at Tel Aviv University, has developed a new model for Jewish settlement. Wearing jeans and boots, she does not appear visibly Orthodox, although she observes Shabbat and kosher dietary laws. She grew up in Nof Ayalon near Modi’in, beyond the Green Line (1949 armistice line), in a family of French immigrants.

“We’re a very social project at its core,” Cohen told JNS.org in the lounge at the student village in Ma’ale Efraim. Ma’ale Efraim had hoped to become the capital of the Jordan Valley, much like Ariel has become the capital of Samaria: the hub of an area considered vital to Israel’s security. But after violence consumed Israel during the second intifada in the early 2000s, residents of Ma’ale Efraim started moving out. Educational and industrial facilities were left empty.

One such facility was the Jordan Valley Field School, where Cohen and about 25 other students live. Kedma operates about five student villages housing a total of 150 students. Local councils work with the young idealists to locate and reoutfit caravans or neglected structures for student living. Students pay about $116 a month in rent and volunteer six hours a week in neighboring communities, where they tutor children, run cultural and social activities, and assist seniors.

Today about 400 families live in Ma’ale Efraim, including many new immigrants who are social-welfare cases. “I believe in hityashvut (settling the land),” Cohen said. “There are people here. There are communities here. That’s a fact. They have needs here. That’s a fact. And their needs and demands are not getting met.”

The students come from diverse backgrounds—religious and secular—united by an alternate vision for student life, one that combines social action, community living, and a sense of mission.

by Orit Arfa/JNS.org
Recently I found work in a Jerusalem hospital as a handyman. The day after I started working, something happened that was a clear sign of the Lord’s guidance.

When I walked into one of the wards to repair a window, I saw a Polish Jewish man about 50 years old who had been in Israel for 35 years. He was in critical condition, and I felt led to witness to him so that he might receive Christ before he died.

The man told me the tragic story of how his family had been killed during the Arab pogrom in 1930 in Hebron.

“When my family perished,” he said, “I was left alone, a teenage boy. I soon got into bad company with a gang of Arabs who smuggled morphine across the border. It was risky work, but they paid me well. In a short time I became a victim of my own sordid trade. I became addicted to the dope I was smuggling and would do anything to get it. My companions took advantage of my condition and sent me on the most dangerous assignments, mostly to Egypt and Lebanon. One day the British police caught me, and I was put in prison for a year, desperately sick and craving morphine.

“After my release from prison, I had nowhere to go. So I returned to my old gang in Jaffa. The drug dealers received me gladly and assigned me a new job. They bought camels from Bedouins and instructed me to drive the animals across the border into Egypt. At first, I could not understand why they were doing this, but I soon learned the reason. They were inserting in each camel’s stomach 15 bottles of morphine worth about $4,500. The cost of a camel was only about $25 to $30. When I took the camels to Egypt, their Egyptian partner would pay the high price of the morphine and kill the poor animals right away, leaving their flesh to rot.

“Now I had enough money to indulge in my vice. But I was caught again and handed over to a British court in Jerusalem. The judge was Jewish. I confessed everything and told him about my partners in crime. He sentenced me to three years in prison. Altogether, I have spent 19 years of my life in prison.

“And now,” he said, finishing his tragic tale, “I am on my deathbed, and no one cares to speak even a word to me to relieve my anxious soul. You are the first person who was kind enough to listen to me.”
Then I told him that I believe in the living God, the Judge of the living and the dead, and that because He loves us, He sent His only Son to save sinners like us. I told him I, too, am a sinner. We all are sinners, but we can be forgiven and have eternal life if we place our faith in Jesus, who took our punishment.

I read to him the Gospel of Luke, the account of Zacchaeus, and about the Son of Man who came to seek and to save those who are lost.

I also read to him many passages of Scripture, along with Jesus’ promise that because He lives, we will also live (Jn. 14:19). I told him, “It is obvious that your time is short, and you cannot afford to waste any of it.”

All of a sudden he began crying and said, “I am unworthy of anyone telling me about God and His salvation.”

I told him, “Christ died for sinners, that they may have eternal life. It is up to you to receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior so that you may have that eternal life. This may be your last opportunity.”

The man then said, “Please pray for me,” which I did. Then he looked up at me and said, “Now I am ready to receive the Lord.”

He was extremely weak, but I was sure he truly believed. I asked, “Do you believe that Jesus is your Savior?”

In a soft voice, he answered, “Yes, and I am ready to be with the Lord Jesus. I am no longer afraid because I will go home to Him.” When I said goodbye, his last words to me were, “You saved my life.”

The next morning when I returned, I was told that during the night, my friend had gone to his eternal home.

—The Friends of Israel Archives, 1986

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