ISRAEL MY GLORY

OUT OF EGYPT

ISRAEL'S JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LAND:
HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

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A TRAIL OF CARCASSES

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FROM THE EDITOR

Every Wednesday, we have chapel at The Friends of Israel headquarters. It’s a wonderful time when we pray together, hear a brief message, and sometimes connect via Skype with one of our workers overseas who tells us what God is doing in that country.

A few weeks ago Mitch Triestman spoke. Mitch, who lives in Pennsylvania, is a longtime worker with The Friends of Israel. He began his devotional with a story about a trip he and his wife, Jackie (now with the Lord), took to South Carolina. Through a series of what seemed to be random, inconsequential decisions at the time, they ended up at a certain restaurant en route.

Before long, they learned the manager was a believer. When the manager learned Mitch was a preacher, he opened a banquet hall, went out to the parking lot, and began inviting people to hear Mitch speak. So Mitch preached, and Jackie signed up people to receive Israel My Glory.

Sometime later, Mitch was driving to a speaking engagement and had to stop for a train, a delay that frustrated him because he thought it might make him late.

His point? Why do we forget the great things God does for us? God had performed a marvelous miracle at the restaurant. Why would He not help Mitch get to the meeting on time? The same God is still in charge. And He is faithful.

I borrow Mitch’s illustration because it fits so well with this issue of Israel My Glory about the Israelites’ experiences recorded in the book of Numbers. They had witnessed many miracles en route to the Promised Land, including the parting of the Red Sea, so they could go through on dry land. Yet it seems that between miracles, they forgot God’s faithfulness and goodness to them, complained, and failed to trust in Him.

Unfortunately, we all have the tendency to forget what great things God has done for us, and we complain about the next hurdle to overcome. How wonderful it would be simply to rest in Him and trust Him fully with absolutely everything.

To quote my friend Dr. Richard Emmons, “Faith is taking God at His Word, regardless of the circumstances. Faith unlocks the door to the impossible.”

I hope this issue of Israel My Glory is an encouragement and reminds you that we serve a faithful God who delights in directing our paths and unlocking the door to the impossible, if we but learn not to lean on our own understanding and to trust Him wholly.

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief

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OFFICES
USA: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., P. O. Box 908
Belmar, NJ 07719 • 800-257-7843 or 856-853-5590

CANADA: FOI Gospel Ministry Inc., P. O. Box 428 STN A
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Have you ever noticed the world’s fascination with hating the Jewish people? It’s nothing new. Anti-Semitism has been around since the days of the Old Testament. However, its growth today is alarming, particularly in the United States and Europe.

This year began with numerous bomb threats against Jewish community centers, synagogues, and day schools. In Philadelphia, not far from our international headquarters, a Jewish cemetery was desecrated. Another was struck in Missouri. How cowardly to deface the graves of people who cannot defend themselves.

According to 2015 FBI crime statistics, 53 percent of the religious hate crimes in the United States were committed against Jewish people. The next largest percentage (21) was committed against Muslims. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency has reported that since the beginning of 2017 in New York City alone, anti-Jewish hate crimes have more than doubled. In Europe, nearly four out of 10 Jewish people fear to identify publicly as Jewish. In Sweden, it’s 60 percent.

A friend of mine who lives in Jerusalem recently told me that, when he checked into a hotel in Oslo, Norway, wearing his yarmulke (skullcap), he was advised to remove it because it was too dangerous in Oslo to be identified as Jewish.

I am sometimes asked why Jewish people are so hated and if things will ever change.

The answer lies in the Jewish people’s unique relationship with God. In Genesis 3, when Adam sinned and brought the curse on God’s creation, God promised to send a male child who would deliver a fatal blow to the serpent, Satan. This Son of promise is known in Scripture as the Messiah. God’s vow to crush Satan through the Messiah puts Satan at odds with God.

We learn in Genesis 12:1–3 that God made a covenant with Abraham, promising to create a great nation through him that would bless the world. Galatians 3:8 tells us God was preaching the gospel to Abraham when He made that promise. From that point forward, Abraham and his descendants through Jacob would be an integral part of God’s plan to redeem the world. The Messiah would be a son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Consequently, the Jewish people became Satan’s target because they are central to God’s redemptive plan. Think about it. If Satan could annihilate the Jewish people, then he would be able to thwart God’s plan and keep God from destroying him. No Jewish people translates into no fulfillment of God’s covenants with Israel and no completion of His plan of redemption. Anti-Semitism is one of the greatest proofs God is not finished with Israel because if He were, Satan would not waste his time persecuting the Jewish people.

In Psalm 83, Asaph cried out to God,

Do not be still, O God! For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head. They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more” (vv. 1–4).

God’s enemies sought to eliminate the Jewish people. However, Psalm 83 says Israel’s enemies are also God’s enemies.

Satan is God’s number one enemy and the author of anti-Semitism. Those who hate the Jewish people are doing Satan’s work and are at enmity with God. Anti-Semitism is rooted in Satan’s conflict with God, and it will continue until the day God judges Satan and ends the rebellion against Him.

What can we do? In Genesis 12:3, God says He will bless those who bless the Jewish people. An important way we can bless them is to stand with them against anti-Semitism. Write letters to the editor; contact your elected officials, both local and federal; attend pro-Israel rallies; speak up against anti-Semitism; and share an encouraging word of support with the Jewish people God places in your path. I guarantee they will appreciate it.

by Jim Showers, executive director of The Friends of Israel
THE ‘FAKE NEWS’ FRENZY

Based on the laws of supply and demand, truth has become a valuable commodity. If it were tea, its scarcity would make it extremely expensive. As we are inundated with the activist media’s half-truths and lies, which some call “fake news,” the real thing is in increasingly short supply.

The activist media have overtaken us. Journalists are writing biased, agenda-driven pieces devoid of facts or truth, and many have abandoned the art of fact-finding altogether to become social-justice mavens who espouse the old mantra, “The end justifies the means.” If omitting certain truths helps their agenda, then so be it.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the perfect topic for these people. They picture Israel as a bully, harassing helpless Palestinians. Major news outlets contort their headlines to blame Israel for just about everything, while journalists stifle the truth about human-rights abuses within Palestinian society because these facts disrupt the narrative they want to convey to their readers.

The New York Times (notorious for anti-Israel “news”) recently ran an op-ed by Palestinian prisoner Marwan Barghouti called “Why We Are on Hunger Strike in Israel’s Prisons.” From inside an Israeli prison, he explained why he and 1,000 other Palestinian prisoners were peacefully refusing to eat as an act of resistance against Israel.

Barghouti used his platform to proclaim his innocence. “As part of Israel’s effort to undermine the Palestinian struggle for freedom,” he declared, “an Israeli court sentenced me to five life sentences and 40 years in prison in a political show trial that was denounced by international observers.” The Times touted Barghouti as a “Palestinian leader and parliamentarian,” and he came across as an innocent Palestinian unjustly imprisoned by Israel for his political views.

What The New York Times neglected to mention is Marwan Barghouti is serving five consecutive life sentences for multiple counts of murder against innocent Israeli civilians and for several attempted terrorist attacks. Barghouti isn’t an innocent Palestinian political activist; he’s a convicted terrorist. But The Times conveniently left out this vital information.

To make matters worse, it printed his op-ed on Passover, when Jewish people could not respond. Israeli parliamentarian and former ambassador to the United States Michael Oren called the article “a journalistic terror attack.”

When organizations like The New York Times exist in the realm of such extremes that they would publish the one-sided ramblings of a Palestinian terrorist, the action reveals more about the people writing the news than those they’re writing about.

Disseminating half-truths and lies about Israel has reached such a frenzy within the news media that media watchdogs like Honest Reporting (honestreporting.com), The Middle East Media Research Institute (memri.org), Palestinian Media Watch (palwatch.org), and the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (camera.org) work around the clock to provide the facts the mainstream media neglect to publish and to correct the misinformation they do publish.

The good news is that, ultimately, truth will win out. King Solomon understood the power of truth when he wrote, “The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment” (Prov. 12:19).

We all believe in justice for all people. But justice without truth isn’t justice at all; it’s merely a lie. To stay properly informed, we must be vigilant to discern the difference between what is true and what is not and pray God will reveal the truth about Himself and Israel to a world being inundated with half-truths and lies.

by Chris Katulka
THE SAME OLD SAME OLD?

U.S. President Donald J. Trump has reversed himself on several important promises regarding Israel. On the campaign trail, he pledged to be a stalwart friend of the Jewish state, but some of his initial policies actually mirror those of former President Barack Obama.

Trump had vowed to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Less than a week after taking office, however, he reneged. U.S. policy officially states the embassy should be moved. In 1995, Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act, declaring Jerusalem to be Israel’s capital and requiring the relocation by May 31, 1999. The law, signed by President Bill Clinton, has never been implemented, apparently out of fear that the move would inflame Arab opinion.

Jordan’s King Abdullah has warned Trump against relocating the embassy because it could lead to violence and further complicate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since then, the Trump administration reportedly sent a message to the Palestinian Authority assuring it the embassy would remain in Tel Aviv.

Trump has also reversed his support for the expansion of Israeli “settlements” in the West Bank. Now he says such settlements could hurt the chances of brokering a peace agreement. “I am not somebody that believes that going forward with these settlements is a good thing for peace,” he said.

Even the composition of Trump’s national security team suggests his foreign policy toward Israel may end up being similar to Obama’s.

At the National Security Council (NSC), Trump retained Yael Lempert, a controversial Obama staffer. Lempert “is considered one of the harshest critics of Israel on the foreign policy far left,” according to Middle East Analyst Lee Smith, who quoted a former White House official: “From her position on the Obama NSC, she helped manufacture crisis after crisis in a relentless effort to portray Israel negatively and diminish the breadth and depth of our alliance. Most Democrats in town know better than to let her manage Middle East affairs. It looks like the Trump administration has no idea who she is or how hostile she is to the U.S.-Israel relationship.” Amid growing criticism, it remains unclear how long Lempert will remain at the NSC.

At the State Department, the role of Michael Ratney, a top advisor to former Secretary of State John Kerry, has been expanded to include Israeli-Palestinian issues. In July 2016, a Senate investigation disclosed that Ratney, who was the U.S. consul in Jerusalem between 2012 and 2015, oversaw $465,000 in U.S. grants to the OneVoice Movement, a left-wing group that waged a clandestine campaign to smear Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and remove him from office. Ratney admitted he deleted emails containing information about the Obama administration’s relationship with the nonprofit group.

Trump’s State Department recently invited Jibril Rajoub, a Palestinian official known for promoting the murder and kidnapping of Israelis, into the United States for high-level meetings. Rajoub was sentenced in 1970 to life in prison for attacking an Israeli army bus. He served 15 years but was released in a 1985 prisoner exchange. Since then, he has repeatedly praised Palestinian terrorists who kill Israeli civilians.

“The embrace of Rajoub raises profound questions as to whether President Donald Trump has a coherent policy toward Israel or, as seems more likely, disjointed policies are emerging,” said foreign affairs columnist Lawrence Haas.

Historian Daniel Pipes worries that Trump may follow Obama’s footsteps and ultimately turn against Israel. “[Trump] wouldn’t be surprised if [Trump] turned against Israel, seeing it as the intractable party because that is what often happens,” Pipes said. “Look at Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama: they make efforts and they get frustrated that the Israelis don’t give more because there is an enduring belief that if only the Israelis gave more, the Palestinians would relent and stop being rejectionists and everything would be fine. So, I am worried.”
**INDIA**—A Christian in Jharkhand state, India, recently succumbed to illnesses incurred when villagers immersed him and his wife in a cold pond because they had left their indigenous religion and refused to deny Christ.

Tribal residents bound and forced Bartu Urawn and his wife into frigid water up to their necks for 17 hours—from 5 p.m. to 10 a.m.—when temperatures often drop below freezing, reported their son, Beneswar Urawn.

“All throughout the night, they were in the cold water shivering, and I, along with 15 to 20 villagers, were witness to the brutality,” Beneswar told Global Christian News. “The villagers kept asking my father if he is ready to forsake Christ and return to the Sarna fold. He reiterated every time, ‘I will not deny Christ. . . . I will continue to believe until my last breath.’”

The torture came after villagers abused Urawn and his family for three years for leaving the practice of Sarna Dharam, or “Religion of the Holy Woods,” which requires blood sacrifices to a supreme god and ritual service to other gods.

Previous to the torture, villagers had forced Urawn to attend their worship, in which they sacrificed an animal. They forced a portion of the sacrifice down his throat and made him drink fermented liquor.

Besides assaulting Urawn and his wife, a village mob attacked Beneswar Urawn, his wife, and his younger brother, locking them inside their house for hours. They also polluted the family’s drinking water source, Beneswar said.

Bartu Urawn and his family had placed their faith in Christ 10 years ago, and when the villagers realized they would not renounce Christ after years of threats and assaults, they told Urawn that demons would not let him live. They tied the hands of Urawn and his wife behind their backs and put them into the pond.

After pulling them out the next morning, the villagers hit Urawn and his wife and again pressured them to renounce Christ, his son said. The couple fell seriously ill. Urawn’s wife recovered, but Urawn became paralyzed due to nerve damage and later died.

Initially, villagers refused to let Beneswar bury his father. They stood around Urawn’s body with wooden sticks, prepared to attack if he tried to recover it for burial. But the next day, he and four other Christians were able to carry the body six miles to government land for a funeral service.

Upon their return, villagers demanded the family prepare a meal for the village inhabitants in accordance with Sarna Dharam ritual. Beneswar refused, saying they would hold a prayer meeting instead, and the villagers threatened to kill him as they had killed his father, he said.

Relatives informed police, but officers called Urawn’s death a “natural death” and merely suggested villagers attend peace talks and cease attacks on the Christian family.

Beneswar and his family fled for a time, but they are now back in their village, where they face constant threats because of their faith.

India ranks 15th on Open Doors’ 2017 World Watch List of the 50 countries where Christians experience the worst persecution.

*by Morning Star News*

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FOI CANADA GOES UP TO JERUSALEM

BY STEVE HERZIG

A look at the first-ever FOI Canada Up to Jerusalem trip to Israel and some of the wonderful experiences God provided.

“It is eleven days’ journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea” (Dt. 1:2). Sounds simple enough. Forty years later, the children of Israel finally arrived in the Promised Land.

My Canadian colleague John Plantz and I covered a greater distance in a far shorter time recently when we led the first-ever Up to Jerusalem Canada trip to experience firsthand the land of the Bible. We departed from Toronto and landed 11 hours later in Tel Aviv with enough excited, happy Canadians to fill our tour bus.

FOI Canada organized the trip because it fits with our mission to teach biblical truth about Israel and the Messiah while fostering solidarity with the Jewish people. I think I can speak for everyone when I say the trip was a rousing success.

We traveled as far north as Mount Bental in the Golan Heights, where we looked down at the border of Syria. Mount Bental houses a memorial to the 1973 Yom Kippur War, where Israel suffered 2,688 casualties—the equivalent of 18,196 Canadians or 173,654 Americans, if you use ratios based on population that year. The loss to Israel was staggering.

There we gazed out at the Valley of Tears, where a meager 150 Israeli tanks had battled 1,000 Syrian tanks for three grueling days (October 6–9). Miraculously, on the fourth day, Syria withdrew. By then, Israel had only seven functioning tanks left.

We traveled as far south as the port and tourist city of Eilat and took a leisurely boat ride on the Red Sea, where we could see four countries—Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and Israel—all at the same time. We went as far west as the Mediterranean Sea and as far east as the Jordan Valley.

Israel is unique because the same spot you’re appreciating at the moment has significance in the ancient past and in the days to come. The Scriptures connect the land with the past, present, and future.

On Tel Megido we walked through the horse stalls of King Solomon; looked on the fertile Jezreel Valley, Israel’s breadbasket; and listened to a devotional from Revelation 19 that points to Christ’s return.

In Modi’in, a town located between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, we stood on a little hill commemorating the home of the Maccabees. In 165 BC, the Maccabees led an uprising against Seleucid King Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) and prevented him from destroying the Jewish people. Their victory, celebrated as Hanukkah, not only preserved the Jewish nation but also God’s promise of a future Jewish Messiah. Modi’in also was the site of several important Israeli victories during the 1948 War of Independence that succeeded in keeping the airport open, which was vital to the war effort.

At Neot Kedumim we strolled through the only biblical
landscape reserve in the world, where you can see and experience the land of the Bible as it was in the days of the Bible. Iris, our guide at Neot, helped us experience the same sights, sounds, and smells that Joshua and Jesus would have experienced.

As she led us through the reserve, Iris mentioned that Neot Kedumim operated as a summer day camp for Israeli children, which then reminded her of the 2014 Gaza War. Missiles launched from Gaza (not far from Neot) by the terrorist group Hamas flew over the camp. “It was frightening for us, especially for the children,” she said. “But when it stopped, we just moved on. Each day the children came back.”

Her words imparted a simple testimony about the Israeli spirit. Though the Israelis feared the missiles, they refuse to allow terrorism to win or fear to cripple them. Israelis move on. They focus on living. Am Yisrael Chai! “Israel Lives!”

We also had the privilege of visiting the grave of Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, at Kibbutz Sde Boker in the Negev. Being there helped us think of Israel’s “dry bones” coming together in fulfillment of Ezekiel 37. Ben-Gurion dreamed of a day when the Negev would bloom, and he spent the last 20 years of his life on the kibbutz (communal farm), working side by side with fellow kibbutzniks to help accomplish it. When we drove through the Arava Valley (part of the Negev), we stopped at Moshav Ein Yahav. There we saw acres of tomatoes and peppers growing out of the sand. Ben-Gurion would be proud.

We also were able to touch people’s lives in small but wonderful ways. We brought Israeli-Canadian-flag lapel pins to give as gifts, as we felt led. It was amazing to watch such a small gesture of love produce such wonderful, gracious responses. Someone from our tour would say something like, “I enjoyed meeting you. I would like to give you a little gift from a Canadian in appreciation of Israel and its people.” Each time, the pin was received with a smile and a sincere thank you. Some of the Israelis had relatives in Canada and were thrilled we were there.

It’s been my experience that every trip generates its own theme that surfaces for all to see. For us it was the glory of God. We sensed His glory while standing in the Valley of Elah where David slew Goliath (1 Sam. 17). We sensed His glory at Harod Spring, where Gideon’s army of 300 defeated 120,000 Midianites (Jud. 7). We sensed it walking through a life-sized tabernacle in the wilderness with an understanding of how God’s glory camped in the Holy of Holies. And we experienced God’s glory as we took communion at Gordon’s Calvary, the possible site of Jesus’ burial and resurrection (Mt. 27:33).

We look forward to the day when the glory of God in the Person of Jesus Christ will return to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, where He will rule (Zech. 14:4). Scripture says that in that day, 10 Gentiles will grab onto the clothing of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (8:23); and everyone will worship the Lord together in Jerusalem. That will be the best Up to Jerusalem trip of all. *
HOW COULD A JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LAND TURN INTO SUCH A DISASTER?

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS DETAILS THE ISRAELITES’ WANDERINGS IN THE DESERT—AND WHAT WENT WRONG.
CAMPED AT SINAI FOR 12 MONTHS, THE FLEDGLING NATION OF ISRAEL RECEIVED GOD’S LAW, CONSTRUCTED HIS TABERNACLE, AND ESTABLISHED THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD. IT HAD GREAT DREAMS AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS OF ENTERING A LAND THAT FLOWED “WITH MILK AND HONEY” AS IT SET OUT FROM SINAI TO THE TRIUMPHANT SOUND OF SILVER TRUMPETS.

Yet the Israelites of that generation experienced an average of 90 funerals a day (270 a month)—a far cry from what they had anticipated. The book of Numbers records their journey and the failure and demise of the Exodus generation as it wandered in the wilderness en route to the Promised Land.

An 11-day journey turned into 40 years of wilderness camping and high death tolls. The inspiring story of God’s grace and power, displayed when He delivered the Jewish people from Egypt, became a story of disappointment and discouragement. What went wrong? Bible scholar Paul House explained,

All these hopeful possibilities are obliterated due to the most fundamental sin of all, which is the human refusal to believe God’s word. In a crucial moment, faithlessness costs the Exodus generation their opportunity to possess the physical embodiment of Yahweh’s covenant with Abraham and with the nation as a whole. They lose their opportunity to live in Canaan, the promised land. Instead they conclude their earthly journey by journeying among hostile peoples in barren desert lands. God’s promise of land remains intact, though, so the next generation will conquer Canaan. But this triumph is deferred for nearly forty years due to the theological amnesia that results in national disaster.

OVERVIEW

Numbers is the fourth book in the Law of Moses, or Pentateuch (Greek for “five books”), and it describes the failure and demise of the Exodus generation. Jesus attributed the entire Law to Moses’ authorship (Lk. 24:44). Therefore, Numbers is a firsthand, eyewitness, Spirit-inspired record of the Israelites’ journey from Sinai to the border of the land God promised them, written by the very man who led the journey. Moses was highly educated and the greatest Old Testament prophet.

The book received its name because chapter 1 records the numbering of the able-bodied men of each tribe of the first generation of Israelites out of Egypt, and chapter 26 provides the numbering of those in the second generation.

Chapters 1—10 detail God’s mobilization of the nation for its journey. There were 603,550 able-bodied men, 20 years of age and older, from the 12 tribes of Israel (the Levites were not included in the number; 1:20–47). An equal number of women probably were present, which would bring the number of adults to approximately 1.25 million. An equal number of children (at least) would bring the total to 2.5 million.

The book details the tribes’ encampment around the Tabernacle, the duties of all of the Levites, and the Lord’s final regulations in preparation for the Israelites’ departure. Tribal leaders give dedication offerings to the Lord, and everyone celebrates the Passover. The priests sound the trumpets, and the nation breaks camp for the first time to follow the Ark of the Covenant to the Promised Land (10:13). Moses proclaims, “Rise up, O Lord! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You” (v. 35).

Chapters 11—25 describe the Israelites’ many complaints toward God and the consequences they suffered because of their lack of faith. They complain about the food, the lack of water, Moses’ wife, and the dangers of conquering the land. Ten of the 12 spies Moses sent to scout out Canaan complain that conquering the land would be too dangerous, and they lead the people to rebel against entering it (13:25—14:4).

God had provided ample evidence of His wise provision, omnipotent protection, and gracious provision. Yet the Israelites gripe. Their refusal to trust Him to bring them into the land is the last straw. Though He forgives them in response to Moses’ intercession, God declares He is finished with them in this most pivotal passage of Numbers:

How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me. Say to them, “As I live,” says the Lord, “just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered . . . Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection” (14:27–34).

The rest of this section records the sad story of 40 years of wandering and dying in the wilderness (including the deaths of Miriam and Aaron in the 40th year), all of which could have
been avoided had the Israelites exercised faith.

**Chapters 26—36** cover God’s instructions to the next generation concerning entering the land. The section begins with a census, which results in an almost identical number of able-bodied men as in the previous generation. God again uses Moses to prepare the people. Joshua becomes Moses’ successor, since Moses is not permitted to enter Canaan (20:12; Dt. 3:23–28).

God also provides instructions for occupying the land and for the cities of refuge. He permits two and one-half tribes to settle in what today is Jordan. The Israelites conquer Midian; and the book ends with Israel camped on the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho, poised to enter Canaan.

**LESSONS FROM NUMBERS**
The main message is that redeemed people must appropriate God’s plan for their lives by walking by faith. What happened to the first generation of Israelites that left Egypt should remind us to trust Him always and be thankful. We must let God develop our faith as He sees fit. More than 1,400 years later, the writer to the Hebrews wrote,

> By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (11:4–6).

Repeated disobedience (lack of faith) increases the seriousness of the consequences and may even lead to being removed from the forefront of God’s purposes for our lives. Repeated refusal to trust God can lead to spiritual immaturity. House wrote, ”Not even the chosen people may neglect Yahweh’s instruction and emerge unscathed. Numbers 20:1–13 proves that not even Moses himself can disobey God without paying a spiritual, physical and emotional price.”

It is possible for a believer to be put on a shelf. The writer of Hebrews addressed Jewish believers who were experiencing extremely painful trials, warning them about such danger (Heb. 3:7–4:13; 6:6–12; 10:32–39).

Trials should be expected but embraced with joy (Jas. 1:2–4). It is impossible to please God without faith, and it is impossible to have faith without trials. God uses trials to mature us spiritually. By His design, they are always hard but never impossible (1 Cor. 10:13).

Grumbling highly offends God because He has revealed to His children that He loves them (always seeks their highest good) and that nothing can ever separate them from His love (Rom. 8:28–39): “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (v. 31–32).

**REPEATED DISOBEDIENCE (LACK OF FAITH)**

REPEATED DISOBEDIENCE (LACK OF FAITH) INCREASES THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CONSEQUENCES AND MAY EVEN LEAD TO OUR BEING REMOVED FROM THE FOREFRONT OF GOD’S PURPOSES FOR OUR LIVES.

In Philippians 2:13–15, the apostle Paul wrote,

> It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

God is faithful to His covenant promises despite His children’s rebellion. Even in the midst of pronouncing judgment on the rebellious Exodus generation, He promised to take their children into the Promised Land. The trail of carcasses in the wilderness was the consequence of no faith. Yet God is faithful even when we are not. He will accomplish His purposes and fulfill His promises regardless of His people’s behavior. At issue is whether we will experience His blessings and enjoy His presence by trusting in Him.

**ENDNOTES**

2. Ibid., 160.

**Richard D. Emmons**

is professor emeritus in the School of Divinity at Cairn University in Langhorne, Pennsylvania. He is also senior pastor of GraceWay Bible Church in Hamilton Township, New Jersey.
THE FAC
GOD CALLED THE LEVITES TO MANAGE EVERYTHING CONCERNING THE TABERNACLE. FROM PRIESTS TO JANITORS, THEY DID IT ALL. AND WITHOUT THEM, ISRAELITE WORSHIP WOULD HAVE BEEN A VERY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE.

BY CHRIS KATULKA
In 2003, President George W. Bush surprised American troops stationed in Baghdad, Iraq, with a visit for Thanksgiving dinner. “I was just looking for a warm meal somewhere,” he joked. More than 600 soldiers from the 1st Armored and 82nd Airborne Divisions were shocked and grateful, as they enjoyed a Thanksgiving meal they would never forget.

Few knew about the undercover mission. Even the president’s own family expected him home for Thanksgiving. The trip required two jumbo jets, dozens of vehicles, a network of staff, highly qualified Secret Service agents, and a security detail on the ground—all working together with one goal in mind: to protect the president of the United States and serve the military. The mission proved a total success, and the troops’ morale was strengthened by the presence of their commander-in-chief.

Like the presidential staff, the Levites had a mission: to protect the holiness of God and serve the people of Israel. The book of Numbers explains how they ministered at the Tabernacle day in and day out, facilitating the relationship between God and His people, Israel.

Many often typecast the Levites as priests who were in charge of Israel’s sacrificial system. Though the association is not wrong, it doesn’t provide the full picture of the Levitical ministry. All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. The term Levites refers to the entire tribe of Levi, which God chose for His service. He made the Levites His own when He said, “The Levites shall be Mine” (Num. 3:12).

God called them to manage the Tabernacle’s ecosystem. From priests to janitors, the Levites did it all. Think of those in our offices or churches who lock the building at night, empty the trash, polish the furniture, and vacuum the carpets. Without them, these places would be in complete disarray—interfering with our ability to work and worship. Many of the Levites were the unsung heroes who made worship possible for the other tribes of Israel so their faith could be strengthened in the presence of their God.

Since God designed the Tabernacle to be a mobile sanctuary, the Levites had the responsibility of transporting, maintaining, and servicing it. The duties required a special team of people to break down each element properly, pack it according to God’s specific instructions, and transport it with care.

It’s easy to think these jobs were menial—that anyone could learn how to assemble and disassemble a tent. So why couldn’t any Israelite do them? Because God specifically chose the Levites to protect His holiness.

**PROTECTORS OF GOD’S HOLINESS**

The need for the Levites arose from one of the most profound moments in the Old Testament. At the end of the book of Exodus, God came down and dwelt among His people in the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:34–35). His presence inhabited the sanctuary, and His glory was so tangible Moses could not enter the structure.

This was the first time since the Garden of Eden that God dwelt with His people. But the way in which He dwelt with them in the Tabernacle versus the Garden of Eden was much different.

In the Garden, God walked side by side with Adam and Eve; nothing separated them. The Lord and His creation coexisted in a harmonious relationship, with no need of boundaries. But after the Fall, sin separated man from a holy God. Therefore, for God to dwell with Israel in the Tabernacle, spiritual and physical boundaries were necessary to protect God’s holiness from consuming His people.

Everything surrounding the Tabernacle was holy because God is holy. Therefore, anything that came near the Tabernacle (near God) had to be holy. In fact, God told Aaron to instruct the Levitical priests to teach the people how to differentiate between the holy and unholy (Lev. 10:8–11). God separated the Levites from the rest of the tribes to serve Him and guard His holiness.

God did not choose the Levites by mere happenstance; He chose them because of their devotion and dedication to His Name and mission.
After the golden calf episode when Israel sinned against God, Moses drew a line in the sand: “Whoever is on the Lord’s side—come to me!” (Ex. 32:26). The tribe of Levi wasted no time. The Levites were the first to show allegiance to the Lord by stepping over the line. Their risk to stand with God later became their reward.

It can be risky to stand on God’s side. But the Lord does not take our devotion lightly. He uses it for His glory by entrusting us with responsibilities that have eternal value. When we choose to step over the line, we may one day find ourselves preaching behind a pulpit, boarding a plane to a distant land to share the gospel, preparing coffee for a Bible study, or cleaning up after children in the church nursery. Whatever we do for the Lord positions us closer to Him.

SHEPHERDS OF WORSHIP

The Levites took a risk to stand on God’s side and, as a result, God told them to position their tents near the Tabernacle, next to His presence. They were the nearest to God’s presence in the morning and the nearest to it when the sun went down. The Lord said, “But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony” (Num. 1:53). They became the physical and spiritual boundary between God’s holiness and God’s people.

For those of us who live in light of our freedom in Christ, this boundary may seem more like an obstacle than an opportunity to worship the Lord. But the Levites were not positioned around God to prevent the Israelites from worshiping; they were there to ensure everyone could enjoy God’s holy presence despite sin.

When you are as close to God as the Levites were, your love and respect for His holiness grows. You begin to understand how His holiness embodies kindness, mercy, and grace and that it must be revered or it can destroy you. Like a vast ocean, God’s holiness is beautiful when viewed from the shore; but it can be dangerous if approached ignorantly and without respect.

The holiness of God is radiant, beautiful, and perfect in every way, but to approach God carelessly on one’s own terms can lead to devastation. The image of the Levites around the Tabernacle, shepherding the Israelites in worship, demonstrates God’s grace. Our God wants us to approach Him in a way that is pleasing to Him, so our faith can be strengthened in His presence. Thanks be to God that, through the work of Christ on the cross, we can freely enter His presence anytime; and it is pleasing to Him.

By the time news got out that President Bush had celebrated Thanksgiving in Iraq, he was already safely on his way home. When the newspapers came out the next day, there were no headlines about the pilots, drivers, or Secret Service agents who sacrificed Thanksgiving with their families to serve the military. Only the president received the glory. Likewise, no matter what job the Levites performed at the Tabernacle, they worked to serve for the glory of God.

Chris Katulka
is a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel and the host of “The Friends of Israel Today” radio program.
"IF ONLY WE HAD DIED IN THE LAND OF EGYPT!" THE ISRAELITES CRIED. THEIR LACK OF FAITH COST THEM DEARLY AND MADE THEM NOMADS FOR 40 YEARS.

by Ty Perry

After traveling through the desert from bondage in Egypt, the children of Israel embarked on the last leg of the journey to their new home: the land of Canaan—the land God had promised them.

With the end of the trek in sight, the nation’s leader, Moses, called for each of the tribes to supply a man “to spy out the land” (Num. 13:2). They were so close to being home at last, but the unbelief they soon demonstrated at Kadesh Barnea resulted in 40 years of wandering in the desert because God refused to allow that faithless generation to enter the Promised Land.

Among the spies chosen were Caleb and Hoshea (whom Moses later renamed Joshua)—two men who were destined to become heroes of the faith. Moses commissioned the 12 and instructed them to bring back the “fruit of the land.” So they set out on their journey north through the Negev and into the Canaanite hills.

After 40 days of reconnaissance, the spies returned to the camp—their arms filled with fruit. The land is a good land, they said, and indeed “flows with milk and honey” (v. 27). However, in the opinion of 10 of the spies, the occupants were “giants” (v. 33), and their cities unconquerable. They saw no way their ragtag band of Hebrew ex-slaves would be able to prevail.

Their report caused widespread lamentation to erupt in the camp: “If only we had died in the land of Egypt!” the Israelites cried. “Or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt? . . . Let us select a leader and return to Egypt” (14:2–4).

Faithlessness is a tragic condition. It blinds us to God’s power and the miracles He wants to do all around us, just as it blinded the Israelites.

In the midst of the wailing, Caleb’s and Joshua’s faith stood strong. Anguished at the unbelief of their brethren, they tore their clothes in mourning and exhorted the Israelites to trust in God:
The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, “a land which flows with milk and honey.” Only do not rebel against the LORD, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them, and the LORD is with us. Do not fear them (vv. 7–9).

Their words fell on deaf ears. Instead of heeding Caleb and Joshua, the children of Israel wanted to stone them. Then the “glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of meeting before all the children of Israel” (v. 10). God had had enough: “How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?” (v. 11). He told Moses He would strike the people with pestilence, disinherit them for their unbelief, and raise up a better people through Moses.

Although Moses knew the people deserved punishment, he pleaded for God’s mercy. He reminded God His name would be slandered among the Gentile nations, which would say, “Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness” (v. 16). Moses begged God, “Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now” (v. 19).

Often people don’t understand that God does not help us because we deserve His help; we deserve nothing. He helps us because He is merciful, and it should be our goal as believers to glorify His name.

God pardoned the Israelites, but He punished them: “Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection” (vv. 32, 34).

The generation that did not believe His word would die and never see the Promised Land. Only Joshua, Caleb, and those 19 years old and younger would enter it (vv. 29–31).

The LORD sent a plague to kill the 10 faithless spies (vv. 36–37); and the Amalekites attacked the rest of the nation, forcing Israel to retreat back into the wilderness, where it would remain until God fulfilled His promise to keep them there 40 years (v. 45).

The Israelites had a lot for which to be thankful. God had promised their ancestor Abrahahm great blessing, including the land of Canaan. He gave them Moses, one of the greatest leaders in history, to guide them from slavery to freedom. They had witnessed awesome demonstrations of God’s power in the 10 plagues God had poured out on Egypt, and they saw the waters of the Red Sea part—allowing them to walk across dry land. Surely they had no reason not to trust the Lord.

Yet they were a faithless generation—a case study of what happens to people who operate in the flesh, according to their own understanding. Long ago God had promised to lead them out of bondage (Ex. 3:17). Israel’s response, once free, was to seek a return to captivity (Num. 14:3).

But God blessed His faithful servants, Caleb and Joshua, and brought them into the land: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (2 Chr. 16:9).

As 21st-century believers, we may be tempted to scoff at Israel’s unbelief. How could these people, who had been witnesses to God’s power in the past, fail to trust Him with their futures? we wonder. But perhaps we should ask ourselves the same question.

God makes many promises to those who trust in Him, but we often fail to take Him at His Word. He tells us not to worry about the future (Mt. 6:25–34), but we fret and are filled with anxiety. He says He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5); yet, when faced with trials, we ask where He has gone. He tells us that He loves us; yet we wonder if He really loves us now, in the midst of our troubles.

Proverbs 3:5–6 admonishes us, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” In today’s turbulent times, when catastrophe and chaos abound, we must remember to look unto the Author and Finisher of our faith, that we might avoid a Kadesh Barnea fiasco of our own. *

**Ty Perry**
is a trainer for The Friends of Israel’s G’sherim program in Nevada.
It didn’t go well for Korah and crew when they complained against God. In fact, they ended up in what people today might call a giant sinkhole.

BY PETER COLÓN

Anyone who knows a little Yiddish probably knows the word kvetch. It means to complain and whine habitually. The children of Israel did a lot of kvetching during their sojourn in the desert (cf. Ex. 14:10–14; 15:22–27; 17:1–7). In fact, Moses became so frustrated with the complaining that he asked the Lord to kill him (Num. 11:14–15).

Numbers 16 records the rebellion of the Levite Korah, a classic kvetcher, who complained against Moses’ leadership and thus complained against God. Korah, whose name means “division” or “split,” conspired with two members of the tribe of Reuben and 250 respected members of Israel’s ruling council
to rebel against Moses and Aaron (vv. 11–12). Feeling overlooked in priestly honors and leadership, he became jealous and whipped up discord among the Israelites. Proverbs 29:22 teaches, "An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression." Korah did both.

First-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote,

"Korah, a Hebrew of principal account, both by his family and by his wealth, one that was also able to speak well, and one that could easily persuade the people by his speeches, saw that Moses was in an exceeding great dignity [authority], and was uneasy at it, and envied him on that account (he was of the same tribe with Moses, and of kin to him), was particularly grieved, because he thought he better deserved that honorable post on account of his great riches, and not inferior to him in his birth." 1

Korah and his men accused Moses and Aaron of arrogance and pride: "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (Num. 16:3). But in revolting against Moses and Aaron, they revolted against God because He sovereignly placed Moses as their leader and Aaron as their priest (Ex. 3:10; 28:1).

Their incitement against God’s order revealed their covetous, self-seeking hearts: “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (Jas. 3:14–16).

Unfortunately, many people seek leadership not because they wish to serve others but, rather, because they derive their self-worth from their positions and want to bolster their egos. They seek preeminence out of selfishness and pride. Moses, by contrast, begged God to relieve him of the pressure of leadership.

When Moses heard Korah’s complaints, he instructed the troublemakers to present themselves at the door of the Tabernacle, each carrying a censer with incense to burn before the Lord:

Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him. Do this: Take censers, Korah and all you company, put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the Lord chooses is the holy one (Num. 16:5–7).

The ancient Jewish sages called Korah the arch-detector of the Torah (Law). His action revealed his real intent: to modify God’s ordained form of worship. Such impudence led to his downfall. Proverbs 16:18 warns, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

When Korah, his men, Moses, and Aaron gathered at the entrance of the Tabernacle, Moses declared,

By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. If these men die naturally like all men . . . then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the Lord (Num. 16:28–30).

Before Moses even finished speaking, the earth opened up and swallowed Korah, his followers, their families, and all their possessions. “The earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly” (v. 33). Then the fire of the Lord consumed the 250 men who were offering incense.

Nineteenth-century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel wrote, “The one thing we learn from history is that we don’t learn from history.” As true followers of God’s Word, we should learn from Korah’s rebellion lest history repeat itself: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

God vindicated Moses and Aaron and severely punished the rebels. The core issue of Korah’s rebellion was his refusal to submit to God’s authority. Proverbs 17:19 says, “He who loves transgression loves strife, and he who exalts his gate seeks destruction.” Korah and his followers loved transgression and sought destruction. Their incitement against God’s order illustrated their lack of holiness and their bitter hearts.

Korah’s dispute emanated from evil motives and a desire to destroy. Though controversies and disagreements will abound until Christ returns, we must try to handle them in a godly manner. Korah and his followers did not. They were selfish, envious, and evil; and they rebelled against God and the leaders He had appointed. We should fear God and do everything for His glory. ★

ENDNOTE
1 Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 4.2.2.

Peter Colón
is the creative resource coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.
Many things happen behind the scenes that affect our lives and the history of nations. The Israelites fell prey to the enemy's devices, and it cost them dearly.

If you think you know everything going on around you, think again. Life is not always what it seems. Sometimes circumstances are orchestrated behind our backs, and how we react can make all the difference.

In the book of Numbers, a plot was hatched to hurt Israel, and Israel knew nothing about it. It came from Balak and Balaam. Balaam was a prophet for hire; and Balak, king of Moab, was the man who hired him.

After the Israelites left Egypt, they traveled near Moab, making Balak and his subjects “exceedingly afraid” (Num. 22:3). No doubt Balak had heard how this unique people had defeated King Sihon and the Amorites and King Og of Bashan. Terrified, he was convinced “this company will lick up everything around us” (v. 4).

Knowing he could not beat Israel militarily, Balak sent for Balaam. "Please come," he implored. "Curse this people for me, for they are too mighty... Whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed" (v. 6).

What type of man was Balaam? It seems he was a well-known prophet. Wrote Bible scholar Dr. Charles Ryrie, "Apparently Balaam enjoyed a considerable reputation as a successful prophet... [who] knew the true God." Balaam had a gift, but he used it for his own selfish gain.

Intrigued by the king's generous offer to "honor [him] greatly"—and seeing much profit in his future—Balaam wanted desperately to go to Balak (v. 17). But God commanded him,
“You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed” (v. 12). After asking God again for permission, Balaam finally got the go-ahead and set out for Moab.

But God was not pleased. He sent an angel to obstruct the path of Balaam’s donkey. Irritated and unable to see the angel, Balaam struck the donkey, and she spoke to him with a human voice. Balaam’s eyes were opened, and the Lord delivered a message to this covetous seer: “I have come out to stand against you, because your way is perverse before Me” (v. 32).

God knew why Balaam wanted to go to Moab: He wanted to curse Israel for the wealth promised him. Wrote Dr. Ryrie, “He yet hoped God would allow him to curse Israel.” Balaam knew the Jewish nation was blessed; but his greed, lust, and possibly his pride drove him forward.

As the apostle Peter wrote, he “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:15).

These godless qualities are great tools of the Devil, who is waging a covert war against God’s people today, just as he did then. And we need to be aware of his tactics.

When Balaam met with Balak, he tried to curse the Israelites three times. But each time he blessed them: “Blessed is he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you” (Num. 24:9). Despite his perverse way, the Holy Spirit came upon him and gave him three additional prophecies that revealed God’s future judgments on Edom, Assyria, and the Amalekites. Regarding Moab, Balaam declared, “A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab” (v. 17). Moab’s power and authority would be shattered and the Moabites judged. Then Balaam left.

But that is not the end of the story. Sometimes things take place behind the scenes, and we have no idea what is happening. Satan is stealthy, and we must be alert and stay true to God or we suffer the consequences: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).

We need God’s divine protection, leadership, and provision as we navigate the wilderness that is our 21st-century world because we often have no idea where the enemy lurks, trying to lead us astray. That is why the Christian life is likened to a war “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). Scripture tells us, “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (v. 13).

While the Israelites were in the wilderness, they were unaware Balaam was working against them. Just as they are today, they were under attack in Satan’s covert war to destroy them. After Balaam departed, Israel “began to commit harlotry [adultery] with women of Moab” (Num. 25:1). The event had been orchestrated by Balaam. When he could not curse Israel, he advised Balak to seduce the Jewish nation into sin, which he knew would bring God’s judgment. The nation failed to stay true to God, and 24,000 Israelites died as a result (v. 9).

In the spirit of unity, acceptance, and plurality, believers today sometimes join with people who diametrically oppose everything the Lord stands for. The situation can lead us to deception and sin, shipwrecking our faith and sometimes even removing us from ministry. Christians are called to be salt and light in a hostile world, just as Israel was called to represent the one true God to the surrounding pagan nations (1 Ki. 8:60).

Things have not changed much since the days of Israel’s wilderness wanderings. Satan’s tools then are still his tools today. But those of us who belong to Jesus have a great advantage over the ancient Israelites: We have the Holy Spirit of God indwelling us. We need to listen to His still small voice, obey it, and follow our Lord. Staying true to the Lord will spare us great heartache down the road.

ENDNOTES


Tom Simcox
is the Church Ministries training coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.
A lesson in what **not** to do—even though God is **always** faithful

**THE DESERT COMPLAINT DEPARTMENT**

**COMPLAINING** is a flaw of sinners. It is part of humanity’s sinful condition. We grumble about long lines, prices, people, the weather, and so much more. In the book of Numbers, the Israelites murmured and complained against God until they so exasperated Him that He threatened to destroy them. Yet He remained faithful to them, as He remains faithful to us, despite His judgment of their sin.

Seven times in six verses in Numbers, some form of the word **murmur** appears. It is derived from an ancient word that describes the sound people make when they complain—a constant, low rumble like you would hear if you put a conch shell to your ear or endured a sleepless night.

After all the miracles the children of Israel had seen God do in Egypt, including the parting of the Red Sea so that they could walk through on dry land, they still complained so bitterly that God heard a constant rumbling from their encampment in the wilderness.

They repeatedly complained about food and water (Num. 20:2–5; 21:5). When they had manna from heaven, they complained they had no meat (11:4–6). They grumbled and rebelled against Moses’ leadership (14:2–5; 16:1–3). Aaron and Miriam, Moses’ siblings, complained about Zipporah, Moses’ wife (12:1). The people even complained about God’s judgment that resulted from their complaints (16:41).

Shortly after they were freed from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites began to run low on food. They forgot the hardship they had endured and longed for the meats, fruits, and vegetables of Egypt. So God sent manna to satisfy their appetites (Ex. 16:1–4). Soon they grew tired of manna and grumbled about the lack of meat (Num. 11:4–6).

God was supplying all their needs. Even their clothes didn’t wear out (Dt. 8:4). But that wasn’t enough. How often do we stop to reflect on God’s
goodness to us in providing all we have, rather than complain to Him about what we don’t have? He promises to supply all our needs “according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19). Yet I’ve heard many Christians grumble like the Israelites.

Aaron and Miriam complained about Moses’ wife, Zipporah. Although their specific issue with her is not recorded, their gripe was directed against Moses—the only person with whom God spoke face-to-face. They questioned his decisions and even his leadership. Did they not fear God’s anger?

Apparently, they should have. Scripture says, “The Lord heard it” and was greatly pleased (Num. 12:2). God judged Miriam by afflicting her with leprosy (v. 10). To avoid a similar fate, Aaron immediately sought God’s mercy and forgiveness, and God graciously restored Miriam to health (v. 15).

According to James 4:1–3, dissatisfaction and grumbling result from not getting what we want or expect. But against whom do we ultimately complain and grumble? In reality, our complaint is against God. When the Israelites complained, Moses warned them they were murmuring “against the Lord” (Ex. 16:8). Moses and Aaron could not provide them with food, nor did they bring that enormous multitude out of Egypt (Jer. 32:21). Freedom and food came from God, and the lack thereof was under His control (Ps. 24:1).

Similarly, when we don’t get what we want, we tend to complain. Regardless of who or what we complain about, we complain against God because He is the one in control. He is the one who provides for us and gives us what He wants us to have. He is the one in charge of our circumstances and the one who tells us, “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:14–15).

God always has been patient with complainers. From Adam and Eve in the Garden (Gen. 3:12–13) to the Israelites to the early church (Acts 6:1) to this very day—complaining has characterized every society. And although murmuring bears consequences, God offers patience, mercy, and forgiveness to His children.

Although He confronted and judged the Israelites for their sin, He remained faithful to them. He forgave them and continued to meet their needs and guide them. It is wonderful to know we serve a patient, faithful God.

We can say with the psalmist, “For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations” (Ps. 100:5).

I often think of my maternal grandmother’s favorite story, which so clearly depicts humanity’s sinful, never-satisfied nature. She was a waitress for many years; and although the incident did not happen to her, it’s a reminder that to God, perhaps our complaints sound equally as ridiculous:

A certain disagreeable gentleman ate his breakfast in the same diner, day after day, year after year. The waitresses did their best to serve him, but he always complained about something: The eggs were overcooked or undercooked; the toast was too light or too dark; the coffee was too strong or too weak. No breakfast was ever quite right.

So one waitress, determined to please him, took extra-special care to make sure everything was perfect. His juice was exactly the right temperature and had just enough pulp. He ordered two eggs, one scrambled and one over easy. When she set the plate before him, he shook his head in disgust. What could be the problem? she wondered. “Is everything to your liking?” she asked. “Are the eggs okay?”

“No,” he complained. “You scrambled the wrong one.”

Robert Stahler
is the pastor of Great Commission Baptist Church in Cape May Court House, New Jersey.
The biblical doctrine of propitiation is under attack in our culture. Adherents of postmodernism and even some people within the church have rejected biblical teachings they perceive to be too harsh—such as judgment, hell, and the doctrine of propitiation.

Also called “penal substitutionary atonement,” propitiation refers to the fact that Jesus satisfied God’s wrath against sin by His death on the cross for the sins of the world. Propitiation is more than the mere idea of satisfaction; the word specifically denotes the satisfaction of God’s wrath. Those who have an aversion to the idea of God’s wrath strip away the doctrine of propitiation from the meaning of the cross of Christ. Some even refer to the doctrine as “divine child abuse.”

Rejection of propitiation is not something new. Even some Bible translators have avoided using the term. The Revised Standard Version, for example, uses the word expiation instead of propitiation in Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; and 1 John 2:2, 4:10. The difference is enormously significant.

Expiation, though important, is impersonal: Sin is expiated, not a person. Sin is covered or sent away. One standard Bible dictionary defines expiation as “atonement, purification, or removal of sin or its guilt.” Sin was certainly expiated when Jesus died on the cross, but propitiation also took place.

Propitiation is highly personal. God is propitiated. His wrath was satisfied by Christ’s death—the means by which sin is expiated. We must not confuse the concepts, nor accept one without the other. Both are vital aspects of the atonement. And we must not reject propitiation as the satisfaction of God’s wrath; Christ acted as our substitute, taking upon Himself the punishment for our sins.

It is impossible to overlook the many Bible references to God’s wrath. In the Old Testament, the entire sacrificial system implies Israel had to deal with it. The nation needed to offer animal sacrifices to God to receive temporary forgiveness for sins. The sacrifices pointed toward the final sacrifice for sin—the Messiah—as described by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53 clarifies the relationship between God’s wrath and our sin. The Messiah, or “Suffering Servant,” is not
only “despised and rejected by men” (v. 3) but also “smitten by God” (v. 4). Verse 5 describes the work of God: “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”

God made Christ an offering for sin (v. 10). Words like wounded, bruised, and chastisement point to God’s punishment poured on the Messiah. His death propitiated God’s wrath, just as the Mosaic sacrifices temporarily satisfied God’s anger before Christ’s final sacrifice. Thus Isaiah 53 provides the best picture of the notion of propitiation.

The New Testament also speaks of God’s wrath. In John 3:14–15, Jesus compared His future death on the cross to the bronze serpent Moses lifted up in the wilderness: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” Jesus was referring to the incident in Numbers 21 when God sent serpents into the Israelite camp to bite the people because of their sin. God instructed Moses to set a bronze snake on a pole so all those who looked at it by faith would be healed from their bites and live (vv. 4–9).

In the same way, all those who look to God’s Son will live and receive forgiveness of sins. The cross of Christ turns away God’s wrath, just as looking to the serpent turned it away. To interpret the passage differently makes no sense of Jesus’ analogy. John 3:36 states plainly the “wrath of God abides on” those who do not believe in the Son. They do not obtain the cure for sin, the penal substitutionary death of Christ. His sacrifice satisfies God’s anger.

Some New Testament passages specifically use the word propitiation relative to Christ’s death for our sins. In Romans 3:25, the Greek word for propitiation (hilastérion) appears in one of the Bible’s most comprehensive sections on the various aspects of Jesus’ work on the cross—such as righteousness, sin, faith, justification, redemption, propitiation, and Christ’s blood (vv. 21–26). The apostle Paul said, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood” (vv. 23–25). The passage clearly states propitiation is a work of God through the blood of Christ. The Father made His Son a propitiation to satisfy His wrath and save sinners who trust in Christ. That truth is the most powerful message in the Word of God.

First John also contains passages that mention propitiation. First John 2:2 says, “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” While many discussions about this passage focus on the extent of the atonement, we must also recognize the importance of the word propitiation. The idea of the satisfaction of God’s wrath is consistent with the context. In the previous verse, the apostle John described Jesus as the Advocate who defends believers before the Father. He also described Him as “righteous,” which makes Him qualified to be our propitiation, the satisfaction of God’s wrath.

First John 4:10 also recognizes the Son of God as the “propitiation for our sins.” The verse’s context indicates that the depth of God’s love found in Christ’s death on the cross and in His propitiation of God’s wrath should motivate Christians to love one another.

In addition, both Luke 18:9–14 and Hebrews 2:17 teach about God’s work in providing propitiation through Christ.

In Luke 18:9–14, a Pharisee and a tax collector were praying—the former in his pride, the latter in his humility. The tax collector prayed, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (v. 13). His statement could also be translated, “God, be propitious to me a sinner” or “God, count Your wrath upon my sin to be satisfied.”

Hebrews 2:17 states, “Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” This verse emphasizes the necessity of Christ becoming the incarnate God-Man so Jesus could make a human sacrifice. If He were not 100 percent God and 100 percent man, His sacrifice could not properly satisfy God’s wrath on human sin.

Through Scripture, the Bible clearly teaches the reality of God’s wrath and His intention to turn it away through Jesus. The divine plan sent Christ to the cross to die as a punitive substitute for our sin so God’s wrath would be satisfied. This is the concept of propitiation. It is required because God is just and holy. He must condemn and judge sin. But His provision of Jesus to make propitiation for sinners demonstrates the great love He has for all of us (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8).

ENDNOTES

Mike Stallard is the director of International Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.
WHAT SHALL WE EAT?

BY VICTOR BUUKSBAZEN
When the ancient Israelites arrived in the Promised Land, it was “flowing with milk and honey.” But when the Jewish pioneers arrived in the 19th and 20th centuries, it was as barren as a stone.

This article, written in 1953 when the State of Israel was 5 years old, provides a glimpse of the nation’s arduous journey from a struggling, startup country to the prosperity it enjoys today.
nothing aggravates people so much as lack of food. Israel’s Minister of Trade, Dr. Dov Joseph, is in charge of the country’s food supply. A tremendous responsibility. Like a housewife with a pitiful allowance, he is trying to provide a very large family not only with sufficient food, but with food that is palatable.

Dr. Joseph might plead like Moses, “Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people?” (Num. 11:13, KJV). He is the target of bitter complaints and the butt of barbed jokes.

**HOUSING PROBLEMS**
Recently thousands of inhabitants at four Jewish refugee camps held demonstrations to protest against the delay in the provision of permanent winter accommodations. Some 35,000 families still live in makeshift huts and tents. The government is trying hard to move them to more sheltered homes before the onset of the rainy season, with its cold and miseries.

This small country was not prepared to receive such an overflow of immigrants. Consequently, many live under primitive conditions—in tents, huts, and semipermanent small houses.

In the suburbs of the big cities, like Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem, there is an almost feverish tempo of building. Blocks of modern apartment houses are going up. Israel is being rapidly urbanized.

But close to the big cities are those wretched and depressive camps, giving insufficient shelter to the unfortunate families who are exposed to miseries of cold, rain, quagmires, undernourishment, and disease.

It is almost uncanny how prophecy in a thousand details is being fulfilled in Israel today. In Zephaniah 2:7 (KJV) we read,

> And the coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; they shall feed thereupon: in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the Lord their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.

Ancient Ashkelon has disappeared. But out of the dust and ashes of an ancient, ruined Ashkelon is blossoming forth a new, beautiful, modern Israeli city. And the children of Israel in these last days do “lie down” in the houses of modern Ashkelon.

**MEDICAL CARE**
Many of the immigrants arrived in poor physical condition caused by years of stark horror and untold misery. The government is making a valiant effort to give medical care to all the inhabitants free of charge or at a nominal fee. But there is a lack of doctors, nurses, hospitals, medicine, and drugs—especially in rural areas.

The region owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Christian missions, which have brought hygiene and medical care to the Holy Land. The first hospital in Jerusalem was founded by The Church Missions to Jews early in the 19th century. There, for more than 100 years, thousands of Jews and Arabs found practical compassion and help in times of sickness and trouble. Many Jews also found Christ as their own Messiah. Today this mission hospital has been taken over by the Israeli government and forms part of the Hadassah Hospital.

**EARLY AND LATE IMMIGRANTS**
For centuries, every pious Jew dreamed of ending his days in the land of his fathers and to be buried in its sacred soil. The believing Jew hoped that when the trumpet of the Messiah should resound, he might be among the first to rise from the dead and greet the Redeemer-Messiah.

The Zionist movement was born toward the end of the 19th century out of the ageless yearning of the Jewish people to return to their homeland and as a result of the grim persecution in Russia and other parts of Europe.

There is a basic difference between the earlier Zionist settlers and recent immigrants. The former were mostly young people who abandoned their old way of life and promising careers to come to Israel and give themselves to the country. However, a good many of the recent arrivals came because there was nowhere else to go. These unfortunate people arrived not only penniless, but often physically and morally incapable of shouldering the responsibilities of a pioneer life. Many have lived so long in camps, being pushed around, regimented, and told what to do and what not to do, that some have lost their independence and the willingness to take care of themselves. Remember the generation that left Egypt? It took many years before they could rid themselves of the scars slavery inflicted.

**ISRAEL’S ARMY**
Israel’s army plays a dual role. Besides defending the land
from hostile neighbors, it also has a constructive, educational role in the physical and moral reclamation of Israel’s citizens and land.

Military service in Israel is compulsory and lasts two years. Both men and women are subject to it. The first year of service is spent learning Hebrew and becoming physically acquainted with the length and breadth of the land, its history, and its traditions. They are also taught how to cultivate the land.

**E PLURIBUS UNUM (OUT OF MANY, ONE)**

The diversity of the people who arrive in Israel presents a serious situation fraught with many dangers. They are all Jews; yet they differ in speech, in education, in their way of thinking and way of life, and even in their physical character. Morally, spiritually, culturally, and politically, they are often worlds apart.

Israel’s populace is a veritable cloak of many colors, producing continuous ferment with currents and crosscurrents. Israel is a land and a people in the hand of God, a nation in the throes of birth.

Today, in the face of mounting economic difficulties in Israel, the tidal wave of immigration has subsided to a mere trickle. Yet the basic aspiration of the new state, the ingathering of the exiles, has been largely accomplished. The immigration camps of Germany, where hundreds of thousands of the pitiful survivors of Hitler’s massacres or of Stalin’s labor camps in Siberia lived huddled together, are now mostly empty of Jews.

There remains in the world now only two great reservoirs for possible immigration to Israel: Russia, with 2.5 million Jews, where Zionism is considered a crime punishable by death, and America, with more than 5 million Jews. The Russian Jews cannot emigrate. Few American Jews wish to.

**WILL ISRAEL SUCCEED?**

Most Jewish people and their friends say yes. Their foes say no. We believe Israel will succeed. A new generation is growing up in Israel, a generation born into freedom. These Jewish people are different from their fathers, who were heirs of the ghettos and survivors of the cruelest oppression in human history.

Yet, if we may say it with all reverence, the greatest of Israel’s assets is her God. “Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps. 121:4, KJV).

After all, Israel is God’s greatest experiment with any nation. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2, KJV). “Ye are my witnesses” (Isa. 43:10, KJV). God has a plan and a purpose for His people. Can He be frustrated or defeated? In the long run, He is bound to perform His blessed will toward Israel and mankind, that Israel may be a people to the glory of God.

The present turn of events in Israel is God’s latest move on the prophetic checkers board. Prophetic events have a disconcerting way of materializing in an imperceptible, unexpected, and yet most natural way, so people say, “Well that was natural. That was bound to come.” Then they proceed to rationalize and put forth political, economic, or other explanations of these events. Good ones too. Yet behind them all is God’s hand, shaping and forming the destiny of His people.

Israel is a bridgehead land joining three vast continents: Asia, Europe, and Africa. It is the world’s heartland. Thus the stage is set for a future thrust toward Israel. We do not know when it will be. But we can see already how such an invasion of the Holy Land and the Battle of Armageddon becomes possible, even probable.

But before that day comes—the Day of Armageddon, the Day of the Lord’s appearance to shield and protect His people, the day when Israel will repent and turn to the Lord nationally—other events must take place. Israel must first succeed economically and politically.

It will become a country well organized, with a sense of security, a country of unvalled cities, luscious fields, and fruit-laden orchards—the envy of her neighbors. These things are bound to come in their proper time. The Lord has ordained it. Who can say, "Nay, it shall not be"?

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**Victor Bukszpan (1903–1974)**

was the first executive director of The Friends of Israel and served in that capacity as well as editor-in-chief of *Israel My Glory* for 33 years. He was a Polish immigrant to the United States and a Hebrew Christian who was fluent in seven languages, including Hebrew. He held a ThD in theology.
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GOD’S GUARDIANS

Biblical cherubim are heavenly creatures that act as God’s guardians. Archaeologists have discovered in Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) iconography and architecture cherubim-like figures that mirror their biblical function and help us visualize what they may look like.

Genesis 3:24 contains the first mention of these creatures, whose name in Hebrew may come from the old Akkadian word Ḫaḫu, which means “to pray,” or “to bless.” If so, the word may imply their role as intercessors between God and His creation.

The verse describes the dramatic scene when God drove Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and placed cherubim, brandishing a flaming sword, to guard its entrance. The cherubim were stationed east of Eden to prevent invasion from outside (the place of exile), thus preserving the Garden’s sanctity and its Tree of Life.

Cherubim also guarded God’s Shekinah Glory in the Tabernacle and Temple. They were placed over the Ark of the Covenant, the footstool of the Lord, to guard the Shekinah Glory, which appeared as a fiery cloud above the mercy seat (Ex. 25:18–22; cf. 1 Ki. 6:23–28; 8:6–7; 2 Chr. 3:10–13). Cherubim imagery filled the Tabernacle and Temple: It adorned the Tabernacle’s curtains (Ex. 26:31); the Temple’s walls, doors, paneling, and lavers (1 Ki. 6:27–35; 7:29, 36); and the veils of both (Ex. 26:31; 2 Chr. 3:14).

Archaeological discoveries reveal pagan parallels to the cherubim’s guardian function. A pair of sphinxes guards the entrances to the Ain Dara Temple in Syria. Excavations in Samaria have produced ivory plaques that decorated the royal palace, with cherubim whose wings touched, protectively flanking a central figure in a shrine. These carved reliefs provide the closest geographical and chronological examples to the interior decorations of Solomon’s Temple, where a pair of 15-foot wooden cherubim flanked the Ark of the Covenant within the inner sanctuary (1 Ki. 6:23–28).

Archaeologists also have found images of winged creatures flanking the thrones of ancient kings: the relief of Ahiram, king of Byblos, seated on a cherub throne, and Pharaoh Tutankhamen’s golden throne chair, with arms made like winged lions, and his burial chamber surrounded on four sides by pairs of winged human figures.

What do cherubim look like? Based on the Israelite imagery in the Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple, it seems their appearance was once known. But by the first century AD, that knowledge likely had vanished. First-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus declared, “No one can tell what they [cherubim] were like.”

But the cherubim-like figures in ANE iconography on monumental architecture and in relief carvings and seals provide possible insights. The ANE architecture depicts cherubim as creatures that are part human, part animal. In Sumer, the figures are of winged humans; in Egypt, Syria, and Israel, they are either winged humans or composites of lions and humans (sphinxes); in Assyria and Babylon, they are composites of winged bulls and humans; and in Greece, composites of birds and humans (griffins).

The human part may suggest human intellect and emotion, while the winged-animal part may represent power and speed. Combined, the traits present a creature of an order above any earthly creation—the angelic.

Though it is difficult to determine to what degree ANE archaeology represents biblical cherubim (local pagan mythology likely influenced the images), it does convey two truths: God is holy, and cherubim help guard His holiness.

As God’s guardians, cherubim hovered over the Ark of the Covenant, making it possible for the high priest to represent sinful man before God. In this way, these mysterious angelic beings played a part in the covering of sin at the Tabernacle, which prefigured the great provision of atonement through Jesus the Messiah as our mercy seat (Rom. 3:25).

ENDNOTE

1 Flavius Josephus Antiquities of the Jews 8.3.3.
A MINISTER’S ENCOURAGEMENT

1 THESALONIANS 3:1–5

Birthing is not easy. That’s why it’s called labor. Paul felt personally responsible for the Thessalonian church, which he had birthed through his ministry. He cared for the babes in Christ there with the gentle love of a mother and firm love of a father—providing instruction, training, and discipline as to a family needing his care.

His purpose was to educate, edify, and exhort the Thessalonians on how to live, so they might “walk worthy [befitting or suitable] of God,” whom they served (1 Th. 2:12).

Persecution in Thessalonica had cut Paul’s ministry there short. For safety reasons, Paul and Silvanus escaped Thessalonica at night for Berea, 45 miles away. They knew it would be impossible to return, so they quickly made plans to establish and encourage the Thessalonian church.

First Thessalonians 3 opens with Paul bearing his pastor’s heart and his intention to send Timothy to Thessalonica to pastor in his place. Upon his arrival, Timothy explained why Paul was unable to return, and he told the church his purpose in coming.

PAUL’S ANNOUNCEMENT

In the previous chapter, Paul expressed sadness on being so swiftly separated from the Thessalonians. The phrase having been taken away from you (2:17) means to be torn from someone like a child becoming orphaned. Paul felt great remorse, anguish, misery, and loneliness after being snatched from these new believers so soon after their salvation.

Continuing his thought from chapter 2, he wrote, “Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone” (3:1). The word therefore builds on the previous paragraph (2:16–20) to explain why Paul could not return to Thessalonica and his reason for sending Timothy. He blamed Satan’s opposition for estranging him from Thessalonica. Therefore, the next best thing Paul could do was to send his associate Timothy.

Paul expressed his and his ministry team’s frustration, anguish, and loneliness due to separation from the church. Not knowing how the Thessalonian believers were doing under persecution disturbed them greatly. Some scholars believe the word we (3:1) is used editorially, expressing Paul’s feelings only. But most scholars believe it includes Silvanus and Timothy.

Once in Athens, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy decided Timothy should return immediately to see how the Thessalonians were faring. They also decided Silvanus should return to Philippi, which left Paul “alone” in Athens. The word alone literally means “forsaken” or “abandoned” and refers to how Paul felt after his team left him. It is understandable that he would feel alone, particularly since he was surrounded by the heathen Epicurean and Stoic philosophers of Athens who mocked Christianity.

Paul did not tell the Thessalonians why he was sending Timothy, but he described the young man as “our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ” (v. 2). Paul had witnessed Timothy’s knowledge, boldness, steadfastness, and perseverance under severe persecution. He knew Timothy to be a faithful, zealous associate and fully believed he possessed the ability and competence to oversee the Thessalonian church and lead it to maturity.

The purpose of Timothy’s ministry was twofold:

1. “To establish . . . and encourage” the Thessalonians in their faith (v. 2).

2. To ensure they were not “shaken by these afflictions” (v. 3).

The word establish means to “support, strengthen, or make firm or solid.” These new believers in Thessalonica needed Timothy’s teaching to strengthen them spiritually amid all the persecution they faced.

The word encourage is used in many different ways. It means to “comfort” or “console,” but more often in the New Testament it means to “beseech” or “exhort.” In other words, Paul commissioned Timothy to equip the Thessalonian believers to face persecution for their faith. Their survival as a church depended on it; they needed to be grounded in God’s Word. Paul and his team had led them to Christ and given them general teaching, but they did not have enough time to “establish” and instruct these new believers in their faith. So he sent Timothy to do it.

PAUL’S AFFLICTION

Timothy needed to ensure the Thessalonians would not be “shaken by these afflictions” (v. 3). The Greek word for “shaken” means “moved, disturbed, agitated,” or “shaken back and forth,” conveying the idea the individual has become unsettled in his faith because of doubt, deception, or affliction suffered for belief in Christ. Paul feared the Devil might use the Thessalonians’ pagan families or friends to plant doubts in their minds and persuade them to abandon their faith to
avoid persecution: "I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain" (v. 5).

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that all who live godly lives in Christ are “appointed,” or destined, to suffer for their faith: “For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this” (v. 3; cf. Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12). The same principle holds true today, as it did for Paul himself. Thus Paul assured them their afflictions were not by accident, but by divine appointment for a purpose. In fact, suffering for Christ provides evidence of one’s salvation and perseverance in the faith.

Paul and his ministry team had forewarned the Thessalonians that continual persecution awaited them if they accepted Christ: “For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation” (1 Th. 3:4; cf. 2 Cor. 4:8–11; 11:24–27). The Greek word for “tribulation” means “to be afflicted, troubled, oppressed, or pressured from all sides.” Tribulation is not a one-time event but, rather, a series of continuous events throughout a believer’s life.

Paul reminded the Thessalonians his prediction came true after they had accepted Christ: “Just as it happened, and you know” (1 Th. 3:4). He told them tribulation should encourage, rather than discourage them in their faith. Paul knew what he was talking about, since he had experienced every possible tribulation in his ministry.

**Paul’s Anticipation**

Knowing the Thessalonians’ tribulation, Paul anxiously yearned to hear about their spiritual state: “For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain” (v. 5).

The word I emphasizes Paul’s personal motivation to learn of their situation: He did not doubt they still had faith in Christ, but he wanted to send Timothy to receive firsthand information. He wanted assurance of their spiritual condition under tribulation so he could minister effectively to them.

Paul feared “the tempter had tempted” them to become despondent and feel discouraged, defeated, and depressed. The word *tempter* refers to Satan. He is the major adversary to Christ and the gospel (2:18). He is a liar, slanderer, deceiver, accuser, tempter, the prince of the power of the air, and the god of this age who comes disguised as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14; cf. 4:4). (Scripture uses the words the *tempter* only one other time—when it refers to Satan’s temptation of Jesus in the wilderness; Mt. 4:3–11).

The phrase had tempted you indicates Paul realized from past experiences that Satan had already tempted them, yet he did not know the outcome. Had they succumbed to Satan’s temptation, Paul believed his and Silvanus’s “labor might be in vain” (1 Th. 3:5). The word vain means “empty” or “useless.” In other words, Paul’s difficult labor, sacrifice, and persecution in Thessalonica would have been useless if the Thessalonians had given in to Satan’s temptation.

Paul’s anxiety and anticipation over the Thessalonians’ spiritual situation was relieved when Timothy returned with the good news that they had remained strong in their faith (v. 6).

Some might say Paul’s anxiety was unwarranted and showed a lack of faith in the Thessalonian believers. Not so! Paul knew how he himself had persecuted the church before his own salvation, and he had witnessed how persecution affected people who stood for the Lord. He knew Satan’s tactic to come as an angel of light to draw people away from faith in Christ. He also knew the Thessalonians were babes in Christ, so he feared some of them might not possess the strength to withstand Satan’s temptation.

Yet he had personally witnessed their faith and strength, even though he had only spent a short time with them. Hearing good news from Timothy relieved Paul’s anxiety and confirmed his original belief that these people were truly God’s elect (1:4).

Do we have the same commitment, care, and concern for young Christians as Paul? If not, we should!

**Paul Assured Them Their Afflictions Were Not by Accident, But by Divine Appointment for a Purpose.**

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by David M. Levy,
director of Worldwide Ministry Development and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel
FAITH FOR LIVING

Without faith is it impossible to please Him (Heb. 11:6).

HIDE-AND-SEEK

Have you ever played hide-and-seek? It’s a simple children’s game played around the world. The rules vary, and the name changes from place to place. But it always involves someone hiding and someone seeking to find the one hiding. Usually there is plenty of laughter and fun, even if you are “it”—the one doing the seeking.

I recently heard someone sarcastically compare man’s relationship to God to a cruel game of hide-and-seek where God supposedly hides slightly out of reach and demands to be found. Man is “it”—seeking the ever-elusive God but never able to find or please Him.

The analogy fascinated me because, in a way, there is an ongoing version of hide-and-seek between God and man. However, from the beginning, people have been hiding from God while He seeks them (Gen. 3:1–24). In God’s eyes, it is no game. It is a matter of life and death, and He has spared no cost in seeking a restored relationship with the ones He created and loves.

GOD’S REvelATION

God is not hiding. He seeks meaningful relationships with men and women and delights in revealing Himself to them, which He does through general and special revelation.

General revelation is the witness of the created world. Evidence of God’s existence is available for all to see through observation of the physical universe. The wonders of creation reveal His glory and handiwork (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20). History declares His faithfulness and sovereignty (Ezek. 36:22–24, 36; Dan. 4:31–37). And life’s circumstances and miracles point to His presence. Such divine encounters and glimpses can leave one speechless, bewildered, and longing for more.

But general revelation alone is not sufficient to provide the truths necessary to bring someone into a personal relationship with God. So God provided special revelation. He did not hide the truth but specifically revealed it in His written Word, the Bible (Ps. 119:1–176; 2Tim. 3:15–16).

The Scriptures provide the fullest divine revelation. They do not tell us everything about God, man, and the universe; but they do tell us everything we need to know for salvation and the Christian life.

Of course, knowing facts about God is not the same as knowing God. No one recognizes Him, understands His voice, or relates to Him unless God first reveals Himself (Lk. 10:21–22; Rom. 3:10–12). God does not require us to find Him but, rather, to believe and receive what He has revealed.

Divine revelation is not the result of human effort or observation. We do not discover God like an archaeologist digs up an ancient relic. God is alive and vibrant. He alone unveils hidden truth about Himself and His works—things we could never discover by ourselves.

MAN’S REJECTION

Years ago, I was invited to participate in an open discussion on the radio about God, the Bible, and religion. The broadcast included several face-to-face encounters with an extremely controversial talk-radio host whom I will never forget.

Widely known for his offensive style and uncanny ability to torment guests and callers alike, the host was mean and caustic, especially toward Christians. He twisted their words, overwhelmed them with obscure Bible verses, and delighted in enticing them to make outlandish spiritual proclamations. To him, the Bible was merely an ancient book filled with ridiculous miracles, oppressive rules for life, and unbelievable myths about a cruel god. He knew the Bible, quoted theology, tossed in details from church history, and recited the gospel. But regardless of how many facts he knew, he did not know God.

We sat in front of live microphones for two hours at a time in a small, dark studio filled with smoke. I felt uneasy, to say the least. The first hour was filled with the host’s unrelenting and well-researched questions.

Afterward, he opened the phone lines, and the onslaught against God and Christians intensified. Callers identified themselves as atheists; agnostics; and self-professed experts from various cults, religions, and denominations. Ignorance, foolishness, and falsehood demonstrated themselves in abundance.

Determined not to venture into this spiritual battlefield with
vain arguments, philosophies, or opinions, I chose to respond only with God's revealed truth about Himself, His gospel, and His love. God did not need me to defend His honor; He already had revealed all that was needed for anyone to have a redeemed relationship with Him.

To the best of my knowledge, the radio host never changed his mind. He continued to choose to reject God. The gospel was foolishness to him. As the Scripture says, "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). I only hope that, in some small way, God revealed a little bit about Jesus from that small studio.

**GOD'S WARNING**

Christians responded to the program in various ways: Some prayed, some criticized, and some thought I was wasting my time. We may easily write off the opinions of the non-Christian world. But a reflective glimpse of our hearts in the mirror of God's Word exposes the truth that foolishness and ignorance are not exclusive to those outside the church.

God clearly states who He is in His Word. Yet even Bible-believing Christians are often confused about what God is really like. Too many distractions cloud our vision of Him and dull our hearing of His Word.

Jesus confronted a religious system that searched the Scriptures but totally missed the point of who God was and what He was doing (Jn. 5:39). In fact, Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees they had invalidated God's Word with their long-standing traditions and practices (Mt. 15:6).

The early church dealt with people who wanted to customize the truth to their liking. They distorted the truth of Scripture with fables and myths they learned from their culture or heard in the local market (2 Tim. 4:3–4).

The writer of Hebrews warned people not to harden their hearts to God's voice or refuse to allow His Word to change them (Heb. 3:7–14). Jesus taught His disciples that if they responded appropriately to what they already heard, they would understand more truth (Mk. 4:24).

Is it possible that we, too, have become so attached to our religious practices that we nullify the Word's requirements that we change? Do we want truth to conform to our way of thinking? Has our ability to understand spiritual truth diminished because we have not properly responded to the truth we already know? We want more of God, but what will we do today with the knowledge we already possess about Him?

**MAN'S AWARENESS**

Revelational people—those who have personally responded to God's general and special revelation—are characterized by an awareness that God reveals Himself all around them. They expectantly listen to and read His Word to know more about Him. They believe what He says in the Scriptures, and they understand that Jesus is God revealed in the flesh; He is the living Word (Jn. 1:1–5).

A revelational outlook is not a skill that can be taught; rather, it proceeds from a heart that yearns to experience the revealed glory and grace of God. Revelational people do not simply affirm a theology; they have real, vibrant relationships with God. A revelational heart develops from a passion to love and hold fast to Jesus as the very sustenance of life.

Like sheep with a shepherd, revelational Christians are receptive to Jesus' call. They know His voice, and He knows them. They follow Him alone and flee from strange voices. They know, without a doubt, He is the only one who gives eternal life (Jn. 10:2–5, 27–28).

At times, God speaks in a still, small voice. Other times, He speaks through life's miraculous and tragic events. A revelational ear can hear Him in the laughter, tears, and difficult questions. He can be found in the emotional words of David the psalmist and behind the scenes in the book of Esther. God is the central character in every book of the Bible.

Take a close look. The point isn't what Moses did for God but what God did through Moses. It isn't how great King David was but, rather, how great God's grace is. We can stop hiding because the point is how much God did by giving His Son to seek and save us.

**GOD'S FINGERPRINTS**

The fingerprints of God can be found on each day of our lives and each page of Scripture. If we have a revelational heart, we recognize those fingerprints and grow in the knowledge of who He is and what He has done. It is a never-ending cycle: The more we see, hear, and know Him, the more we trust His daily plan for our lives. The more we trust Him, the more we see and hear Him.

[May] the God of our Lord Jesus Christ… give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power (Eph. 1:17–19).

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

**by Clarence Johnson**, a Bible teacher and director of The Friends of Israel Institute of Jewish Studies
Israeli App Could Save Your Life

If you’re a resident or tourist in Israel and have a life-threatening medical emergency, Magen David Adom’s revolutionary smartphone app may save your life.

Magen David Adom (MDA), Israel’s national emergency medical service (EMS) and a world-leading developer in emergency response technologies, has introduced a new app you can download to give emergency personnel immediate access to your medical information, location, and condition, thus reducing the time it takes to receive lifesaving treatment.

Invented by a team of more than 30 full-time MDA software developers, the “My MDA” app allows users to “call for help, provide their medical history (and their family’s), conduct a live text chat with an EMT, send their geolocation, as well as live stream photo images and video footage from the scene,” according to the American Friends of Magen David Adom.

The app’s geolocation technology allows dispatchers to locate callers within seconds—even in remote locations—and quickly send help. The user’s medical history, which he must update on the app in advance, immediately transfers to the dispatcher upon the call.

The app’s live video ability sets MDA apart from all other emergency organizations. “In the emergency dispatch centers all over the world, the call takers, the operators, they are blind. They work only with their hearing sense and the ability to talk and to ask the right questions. Magen David Adom is the first emergency organization in the world that has the ability to see the patient, to see the scene, and not to be blind anymore,” said Ido Rosenblat, MDA’s chief information officer.

Dispatchers can view the scene’s severity, decide what type of rescue vehicle to send, issue instructions until first responders arrive, and alert the hospital how to prepare.

“My MDA” already has saved many lives. According to a recent study conducted by MDA and Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem, the new technology has reduced the average time for stroke patients to receive hospital intervention by more than half—from 54 to 24 minutes.

MDA plans to share its technology with EMS organizations worldwide. “This protocol—and the technology we’re using—is already saving lives in Israel. If it can save lives somewhere else in the world, too, so much the better,” said Dr. Refael Strugo, MDA’s chief medical officer.

OFFICIALS REACT TO UNESCO’S NEW ANTI-ISRAEL VOTE

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu believes the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO’s) vote in May to deny all Jewish ties to Jerusalem has backfired since more countries abstained or voted against the resolution on “occupied Palestine” than supported it. The resolution, which claims Israel has no legal or historic rights anywhere in Jerusalem, passed 22 to 10, with 23 abstentions.

The United States, United Kingdom, Italy, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Greece, Paraguay, Ukraine, Togo, and Germany voted against the resolution. Those voting in favor of it included Brazil, China, Egypt, Iran, Russia, South Africa, and Sweden.

Israel’s ambassador to UNESCO, Carmel Shama-Hacohen, called the vote a “significant victory” for Israel since 32 countries supported Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem. “You might think you won today, but actually you lost again and continue to lose with every passing day . . . Here we are, and we are here to stay,” he told the Arab states.

Danny Danon, Israel’s UN ambassador, declared, “This biased and blatantly deceitful decision, and the attempts to dispute the connection between Israel and Jerusalem, will not change the simple fact that this city is the historic and eternal capital of the Jewish people.” He added, “Israel will not stand silently by in the face of this shameful resolution.”

From news reports
VERIZON: “WELCOME TO PALESTINE”

A customer of Verizon, America’s largest cell carrier, recently received a “Welcome to Palestine” text message from the carrier upon landing at Israel’s Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. “I did a double take,” said Mark Rosenblatt. “I was shocked that an American company was falling into some BDS [Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement] rhetoric.”

Verizon spokesman Scott Charlston deflected the charge, stating the airport “is close to the Israeli border and there are cell sites and wireless signals from different providers on both sides . . . When powering up or leaving airplane mode, the phone connects to the strongest signal available at the time.” But since there is no country named Palestine and the airport is clearly located in Israel, the message implies anti-Israel, pro-BDS sentiment.

ISRAELIS FAVOR ONE-STATE SOLUTION

Israeli public opinion no longer favors a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, according to a recent survey published by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Due to ongoing Arab terrorism, most Israelis now view a Palestinian state as unrealistic and undesirable.

The survey found that 79 percent of Jewish Israelis believe Israel should retain a unified Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty. A two-state plan calls to divide Jerusalem and make it the capital of both Israel and a Palestinian state.

The survey also revealed Jewish support for withdrawal from the West Bank has decreased from 60 percent in 2005 to 36 percent in 2017, and only 12 percent of Jewish Israelis believe a West Bank withdrawal would end the conflict.

ALLIES KNEW ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST EARLIER THAN THOUGHT

While countries today seek to shelter Syrian refugees, new documents reveal the Allies of World War II—the United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom—knew of the Holocaust two-and-a-half years earlier than commonly thought yet did nothing to stop the genocide or take in Jewish refugees.

The documents, hidden for more than 70 years, were released after former U.S. envoy to the UN, Samantha Power, lobbied for the archive to go public. It shows that a full year before the U.S. entered the war, the West knew the Third Reich had already massacred 2 million European Jews and was planning to eliminate 5 million more in concentration camps.

Anti-Semitism within the U.S. State Department, which wanted to preserve economic ties with Germany after the war, stopped efforts to help the Jewish victims.

ISIS UNINTENTIONALLY HELPS ARCHAEOLOGISTS

ISIS has unintentionally helped archaeologists find the ancient palace of King Sennacherib of Assyria, whose brutal, pagan reign the Bible describes in 2 Kings.

After Iraqi forces recaptured the Iraqi city of Mosul from ISIS, archaeologists discovered the more than 2,600-year-old palace as they dug through the debris of the prophet Jonah’s tomb, which ISIS desecrated in 2014. FoxNews.com reported, “[The palace] was partly destroyed during the sack of Nineveh in 612 B.C. Sennacherib’s invasion of the ancient kingdom of Judah is extensively documented in the Bible.”

Israel Today (israeltoday.co.il) called the discovery “one of the more exciting archaeological finds in recent years” and said it “provides yet further evidence that the biblical account of Middle East history is accurate.”

From news reports

ISRAELIS DEFEND NATION AGAINST APARTHEID CLAIMS

Two Israeli representatives from Israel’s Interdisciplinary Center research university recently traveled to Cape Town, South Africa, to counter anti-Zionist activists’ “apartheid” smear about Israel during “Israeli Apartheid Week” (IAW), an annual anti-Israel event at college campuses worldwide.

Wanana Abrams, a 28-year-old Israeli of Ethiopian origin, calls herself “just one of countless examples—along with thousands of other religious and ethnic minorities—of why the term ‘apartheid’ does not apply to the liberal, democratic Jewish state.” The IAW movement attempts to portray Israel as an institutionally racist country akin to South Africa’s 20th-century apartheid regime.

Cape Town’s demonstrations are known for being the most hostile of all IAW protests. Several protests devolved into outright anti-Semitic exhibitions that included Nazi salutes and waving flags with Hezbollah and Hamas insignias.

ISRAEL DISMANTLES SETTLEMENT; MEDIA IGNORES IT

Israel recently dismantled another Jewish settlement. The Israeli army evacuated Malachei Hashalom, an unauthorized encampment near Shiloh in Samaria. The community hadn’t displaced any Arabs, nor did it occupy private Arab land. It stood on the grounds of an abandoned army base. The news media largely failed to report Israel’s action.

Contrary to the media’s demonized depiction of “colonialist” Israel, Israel has torn down many such outposts in recent years—not to mention the dismantling of the Yamit communities in northern Sinai (1982), the destruction of four Jewish towns in northern Samaria (2005), and the expulsion of more than 8,000 Jews from Gaza (2005). The media ignores these stories but broadcasts any time Israel makes plans to build a handful of homes in Judea and Samaria.

JNS.org
I told them we must know on whom the Lord has laid our iniquity, as it is written in Isaiah 53:6.

by Zvi Kalisher

After many years of working hard to transform Israel's desert into a fruitful land, we now live in nice towns. The land's transformation has brought many new immigrants to Israel. They speak many languages and are highly educated, but they do not know the Bible.

The ultra-Orthodox organizations here take advantage of these immigrants and proselytize them. They are not persecuted for doing so. But we Jewish Christians are persecuted for sharing our faith, yet our congregation is growing.

Ultra-Orthodox men go from house to house, warning newcomers to avoid contact with people who believe in Christ. Since I live among many of the immigrants and speak their languages, we have many nice, long conversations about faith and the Bible. Often, we arrive at the subject of Christ.

Our conversations always remain friendly. I never approach anyone and say, "You must believe in Christ!" The ultra-Orthodox try to reach people in such a demanding way to persuade them to their way of thinking, but I merely show people what the Bible says.

Recently, I asked some of these immigrants, "Have you heard about the Bible?"

One answered, "Of course! It is the most important book of all time, especially for us Jewish people." We began talking about what is written in God's Holy Word.

Then one declared, "But we must be very careful to avoid those who try to make us Christians."

I try to be patient with people who are suspicious of Christians. As it is written in 2 Timothy 2:24, "A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient."

I handed them a Bible and said, "Read, and you will see with your own eyes that those who come to you trying to warn you about Christians are blind. They will
never come to you with the Holy Bible, which was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Instead, they come with fictitious stories written by men who consider themselves wise in the Law. Have any of them ever come to you with the Bible?"

“No, none of them,” one replied.

“That is because they have believed in their many teachers, who teach them error,” I said. “You are on your way to becoming their sheep—people who follow them. But now you have a chance to know the full truth, which you can find only in the Holy Scriptures.”

They earnestly began to ask me questions. One asked, “What is the most important part of the Bible to read?”

I told them we first must understand there is only one God, as it is written in Deuteronomy 6:4, a verse many Jewish people pray three times a day. Second, I told them we must know on whom the Lord has laid our iniquity, as it is written in Isaiah 53:6: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

As I quoted Isaiah, several passersby joined our conversation and accused me of spreading Christianity. Unlike the immigrants, they have lived in Israel a long time and studied in an Orthodox yeshiva. The immigrants did not know what to say concerning their accusations toward me.

I told my accusers, “Have a good look at this book, and tell me from which book I have read. Which book is more important—the Holy Bible, or one containing those old, traditional, rabbinical stories?”

Of course, all of them said the Bible is more important. Then they began to ask me many questions. One in particular I have heard many times before: “How can you speak about faith with no beard or special clothing?”

“You teachers wear camouflage, which is a diversionary tactic. The Lord wants us to come before Him not with camouflage, but with open hearts,” I said.

Pray these people will turn to the Word of God and give their hearts to the God of Israel.

—The Friends of Israel Archives, July 2004

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