Life of Abraham:
Abraham’s three Cs—17
Sarah and Abraham—18
The long arm of grace—31

Plus:
Life in a land of many gods—10
Newsweek vs. the Bible—32
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Life in a Land of Many Gods
by Elwood McQuaid...
Ancient Athens was covered with statues of pagan gods. America has been different. But a big change may be just around the corner.

Two Boys, Two Mountains, Two Covenants
by Marshall Wicks...
Ishmael and Isaac shared a father: Abraham. But that is where the similarity ended—in more ways than one.

Abraham’s Three Cs
by Steve Herzig...
Abraham was a man of great faith. Though human and imperfect, his life revealed three things about him that we all should have today.

Sarah and Abraham
by Cortiss Johnson...
He was 100 and she was 90 when she gave birth to a son. The story of Sarah and Abraham transcends the ages to reveal what the God of the impossible can do.

The Far-Reaching Abrahamic Covenant
by Richard D. Emmons...
Many people fail to understand the Abrahamic Covenant, which undergirds God’s plan for the ages. If you want knowledge, you’ll want to read this clear, outstanding article.
As this issue of *Israel My Glory* goes to press, I’m excited to report we have just launched our new radio ministry, “The Friends of Israel Today.” Since our previous program host retired last summer, we have been off the air.

So we took advantage of the hiatus to pray, evaluate, and ask ourselves, “Why do we have a radio ministry?” The self-examination led us to reflect on the rich tradition of our programming over the years and the steps God wants us to take for the future.

Elwood McQuaid launched The Friends of Israel radio ministry in 1991 on six stations when he was our executive director. Under his keen leadership, it grew quickly and was picked up by dozens and then hundreds of Christian radio stations around the country. The daily broadcast was known for its insightful Bible teaching, timely interviews with key people, commentary on current events, and answers to commonly asked questions.

When Elwood retired as host and Bible teacher in 2008, we decided to maintain only our two-minute, weekday spot that reported news in Israel. Then in July 2014, we plainly identified the primary reason we had a radio ministry. It comes from our mission statement: “to communicate biblical truth about Israel and the Messiah, while fostering solidarity with the Jewish people.” God gave us clear direction, and we began redeveloping our programming.

On April 18 we launched our new 30-minute weekend program, “The Friends of Israel Today.” It utilizes a dynamic magazine format to teach biblical truth, answer questions from our listeners, and provide timely interviews and commentary on current events. And each program concludes with a dramatic reading of a report by Zvi Kalisher from *Israel My Glory*.

Zvi’s column has blessed and encouraged people around the world for more than 55 years. It is the most popular feature in *Israel My Glory*. Reprising his testimonies in a segment called “Apples of Gold” carries on the legacy of our dear brother, now with his Messiah in heaven.

We praise God He has assembled a radio team with great experience. Steve Conover, our vice president and executive producer, was hired by Elwood McQuaid in 1995 after graduating from our Institute of Biblical Studies (IBS). The previous year he had completed a program at the Broadcasters Training Center with legendary broadcaster Bill Singer. A familiar voice to our listeners, Steve also cohosts the program.

Our associate producer and engineer, Tom Gallione, joined The Friends of Israel in 2000. Tom is also a graduate of IBS and Philadelphia Biblical University (PBU). Combined, they have more than 35 years of radio ministry experience.

Our host and Bible teacher, Chris Katulka, is a native of New Jersey and graduated from our Institute of Jewish Studies in 2001. Chris holds a bachelor’s degree in Bible from PBU and a master’s in theology from Dallas Theological Seminary. He is an effective Bible teacher who communicates across generations and has a deep and lasting love for the Jewish people.

While some aspects of our broadcast may be new to you, our historic commitment to teach biblical truth and support Israel remains unchanged. “The Friends of Israel Today” teaches biblical truth for changing times.

You can find “The Friends of Israel Today” by going to our website (www.foi.org) and clicking on the radio link or by going directly to our radio program page at www.foiradio.org, where a station finder will locate the station nearest you and time of the broadcast.

And you can always listen to our program on our website, subscribe to our podcasts, or download an MP3 file and listen whenever it’s convenient. Past programs are also available there for listening and downloading.

I trust you will be as excited as I am to hear the new “Friends of Israel Today” radio broadcast. Please spread the word that we’re back on the air. And pray with me that God will use the program to minister to people’s hearts and bring many to saving faith in the Messiah.

---

James A. Showers is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
French and German leaders have criticized Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for saying Europe is no longer safe for Jews and encouraging them to move to Israel. Was Netanyahu wrong?

On January 9, jihadi gunman Amedy Coulibaly killed a policewoman and four Jews taken hostage at a kosher supermarket in Paris. He told a French journalist he had deliberately targeted Jews. A stunned Parisian Jewish community was forced to close the Grand Synagogue’s Shabbat service, a first since World War II.

In February, police shot and killed a 22-year-old, Danish-born jihadist who killed a young Jewish man at a Copenhagen synagogue and a film director at an event promoting free speech.

These are not isolated events. In 2006 Ilan Halimi, a young Frenchman, was kidnapped, tortured, and killed because, said his captors, “He was a Jew.”

In 2012 Mohammed Merah killed seven people, including three children and a rabbi, outside their Jewish school in Toulouse, France. In 2014 at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels, radical Islamist Mehdi Nemmouche shot and killed four people, two of them Israelis.

Last year during the Gaza War, eight French synagogues were attacked, including one that was firebombed by a mob of 400. A kosher supermarket and pharmacy were smashed and looted as crowds chanted “Death to Jews!” and “Slit Jews’ throats!”

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who declared, “To attack a Jew because he is a Jew is to attack France,” was accused by a former French foreign minister of being under the influence of his Jewish wife.

In Germany, Molotov cocktails were lobbed into Bergische Synagogue in Wuppertal, with cries of “Destroy the Zionist Jews… Count them and kill them to the very last one.” Dieter Graumann, former president of Germany’s Central Council of Jews, said, “These are the worst times since the Nazi era.”

Apparently, however, U.S. President Barack Obama disagrees. When 3.7 million people, including 40 world leaders, rallied in Paris in January to protest against terrorists, Obama was conspicuously absent.

Vox.com’s Matthew Yglesias asked him, “Do you think the media sometimes overstates the level of alarm people should have about terrorism?”

The President replied, “If it bleeds, it leads, right? You show crime stories and you show fires because that’s what folks watch.”

For Obama, the Paris murders were merely violent crime, not worthy of his attention. “It is entirely legitimate for the American people to be deeply concerned when you’ve got a bunch of violent, vicious zealots who behead people,” he said, “or randomly shoot a bunch of folks in a deli in Paris.”

Random? The deli attack was anything but random. Amedy Coulibaly was an al-Qaeda terrorist who specifically wanted to kill Jews.

Obama’s administration consistently refuses to acknowledge the threat of radical Islamists. In 2011, as secretary of state, Hillary Clinton refused to place Boko Haram on a list of terrorist organizations. Yet the jihadist organization targets and murders thousands of Christians in Nigeria.

CNN’s Jeremy Diamond quoted the president as being mindful of the “terrible cost of terrorism” and believing terror groups aren’t an “existential threat to the United States or the world order.”

Like the sons of Issachar in 1 Chronicles 12:32, Netanyahu understands the times and knows what to do. Speaking at a memorial service in Paris following the rally, he said,

“Here’s the truth: Radical Islam is an enemy to us all. This enemy has many names—Islamic State, Hamas, Boko Haram, al-Qaeda, al-Nusra, al-Shabaab, Hezbollah—but they’re all branches of the same poisonous tree. . . . They all want to impose a dark tyranny on the world, to take humanity 1,000 years back. . . . Their greatest hatred is for Western culture that reveres freedom.

Today an option exists that did not exist for Jews in Nazi Europe. As Netanyahu said, they have “the right to join their Jewish brothers in our historic homeland—the land of Israel.” Clearly, he is being criticized for telling the truth.
In some places the situation is so volatile that more instability and violence seem inevitable. Here in America, we are binding ourselves up with virtual gag orders that forbid any reference to Islam or use of the word Islamic when Islamic terrorists commit violence. Identifying the criminals as “Islamic,” we are told, implies we are at war with all Muslims everywhere. How absurd. There is indeed a war being waged—bloody, violent, and unrelenting. It is a conflict in which Christians, Jews, and Muslims who disagree with the fanatics are being slaughtered in ways not seen since the dark ages. And, yes, these extremists are committing unspeakable atrocities in the name of their religion. To think you are protecting innocent Muslims by denying what is happening is erroneous and juvenile. Even Jordanian Muslims, Iraqi Muslims, Saudi Arabian Muslims, Egyptian Muslims, and a host of others don’t buy into such reasoning.

Until the rise of murderous Islamist revolutionaries, America’s Muslims, Jews, Christians, and those of other persuasions lived together in relative peace and prosperity. In a very real sense, the war now being waged against our way of life threatens us all. If successful, none of us will escape. If they appreciate anything American, moderate Muslims must speak up and stand against the radical forces intent on destroying everything all immigrants have gained in the free world. Although there are exceptions, intimidation seems to have silenced the majority.

As for Christians, much the same can be said. Christians are being slaughtered by the thousands in Muslim countries. Yet few Westerners protest, and little action is taken to rescue our brethren who are paying a terrible price for their allegiance to Jesus Christ. The attacks against Christians by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in Africa and ISIS have become almost daily affairs. As awful as inaction is, it sometimes spawns an even greater tragedy: a complacency that produces a dangerous, learn-to-live-with-it state of mind.

The absorbing question is this: “What type of America do we choose to live in?” Is it one of freedom, strength, unity, and resolve? If not, the alternative will be apocalyptic.

by Elwood McQuaid
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Many years ago I had a wonderful friend who truly loved
Jewish people. She was a devout Christian who had come to
Christ later in life from a Greek Orthodox background and
loved the Lord so much she cried when telling people how He
had saved her—and she told them regularly.

She always handed out tracts and shared her faith, particularly
with Jewish people because she cared so much about them.
I think she believed most Christians loved Jews the way she
did. After all, she was going to heaven because she had placed
her faith in the Jewish Messiah. That fact alone gave her tremen-
dous love for God’s Chosen People.

So whenever she would meet someone Jewish, she would
explain how blessed he or she was to be Jewish—which I agreed
with. Then she would say she was a “spiritual Jew” through
Abraham because she had placed her faith in Jesus. Oy vey!

“She’s,” I told her, “you can’t say that. Being a Christian
does not make you Jewish, spiritual or otherwise. The only
people who are Jewish are the physical descendants of Jacob.”

But she was having none of it. She knew she was like a wild
olive branch grafted into a Jewish tree because of faith (Rom.
11:16–17), and she wanted to be Jewish badly because she loved
the Jewish people deeply.

Theresa is with the Lord now, and I miss her. I wish God
would give this evil, anti-Semitic world millions more like her.
And I can understand her mistake. Abraham is considered
the father of those who have placed their faith in God alone.
If you trust in your good deeds to expunge your sins, you are
trusting in yourself, not in God. The prophet Isaiah called good
deeds “filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

It’s not that God doesn’t want us to do good; He just
doesn’t want us to think doing good deeds will make us
righteous. They didn’t make Abraham righteous, and they
won’t make us righteous either.

You could spend every day of your life for 100 years serv-
ing in a religious capacity and still end up in the Lake of
Fire. Salvation is divinely bestowed and involves a personal
relationship with God as a result of faith. If you have that
relationship, you are a spiritual child of Abraham—whether
you’re Jewish or Gentile.

This issue of Israel My Glory is devoted to Abraham, the
patriarch of Jews and Christians alike because of his great faith
in Almighty God. Enjoy!

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
We’re back on the air!

The Friends of Israel Today follows 25 years of broadcast history that featured Friends of Israel radio pioneer, Elwood McQuaid. The new program is a weekly half-hour broadcast that teaches biblical truth for changing times. Features include in-depth Bible teaching; Ask FOI—where we answer your questions about the Bible, Israel, and the future; interviews with special guests; analysis of Israeli news of the day; and dramatic monologues from the life of Holocaust survivor Zvi Kalisher, read by none other than hall of fame broadcaster Mike Kellogg.

Our new host, Chris Katulka, has served with The Friends of Israel since 2004. He is a graduate of The Institute of Jewish Studies and holds a B.S. in Bible from Cairn University in Pennsylvania and Masters of Theology in Old Testament from Dallas Theological Seminary. You can read Chris on our blog and in Israel My Glory magazine.

“The Friends of Israel Today” relaunched in April. To find a station near you, visit FOIRadio.org. You can also listen online anytime by visiting our website, FOIRadio.org or subscribing to “The Friends of Israel Today” podcast. It’s as easy as click, play, listen.
NAIROBI, Kenya—A 12-year-old girl is still traumatized after her father, an imam, beat her and killed her 15-year-old sister for converting to Christ.

Naigaga Saidah’s father, Imam Abudalah Ali, reportedly beat to death Namugonya Jamirah in December after the sisters put their trust in Christ at a five-day evangelistic event that ended that day. Beaten unconscious, Naigaga did not learn of her sister’s death until a pastor had transferred her to safety in another town in January, sources said.

“Saidah needs prayers, trauma counseling and medication for the left side of her hip that was injured by the father,” a source whose name is withheld for security reasons told Morning Star News.

After the evangelistic campaign, a neighbor told Ali his daughters had become Christians.

“Their father got the information that his daughters have converted, and he organized a small group of fellow Muslims, about 17 people, to go and attack the Christians,” a source said. “He found the campaign had finished but went back to his home and waited for the daughters. When they went back home, the father picked up the club and started beating them badly till one called Jamirah died.”

Saidah managed to escape when her father went inside the house to look for water to splash her back to consciousness, the source said. She arrived at a pastor’s house limping, her clothes stained with blood.

The following day the pastor and another Christian leader went to Ali’s home, learned that Jamirah was dead, and reported it to police. Officers arrested Ali and charged him with murder; but he denied it, claiming Jamirah died from a motorcycle accident.

His wife and two sons supported his statement, and Ali was released on bail.

Saidah described her ordeal to Morning Star News by phone:

“My father took us to the house and then locked the house,” she said. “He questioned us why we attended a Christian meeting and started beating us up with a club. My sister was hit on the forehead and fell down. I tried to hide myself in the bed, but he got me out and began beating me up as my sister lay down bleeding.”

Saidah began shouting for help, but her father covered her mouth with such force that she nearly suffocated, she said. She fell down, unconscious.

“Later on I realized that my clothes were soaked with water as I regained my consciousness, and my father had left,” she said. “I got up and went to the pastor’s house, which is about 30 minutes’ walk. I arrived there at 7 P.M.”

The pastor took her to a medical clinic, where she was treated for two weeks, while her father began organizing area Muslims to kill her, sources said. The pastor sent her to a Christian leader in another undisclosed town. When Saidah learned her sister had died, she fainted and remained another two days in a nearby hospital.

“The police were later bribed and accepted the words of Ali, and he was released on bail,” one source said. “When he came home he went to the [local] chairman and said that he had disowned Saidah, and that if she tries to go back that she will be killed just like her sister, and that he is leaving Saidah in the hands of born-again Christians.”

The chairman summoned the Christian leaders and informed them of what Ali had told him. They told Ali to put his decision to disown her in writing.

“Saidah has been traumatized, is still limping, and she is in a need of prayers, counseling, medical support, and school fees because she is going to primary seventh grade this year,” he said.

by Morning Star News
(morningstarnews.org)
Life in a Land of Many Gods
ome 2,000 years ago, the apostle Paul strolled through the marketplace in ancient Athens where a plethora of altars dedicated to manmade gods offered Athenians a smorgasbord of pagan religions and lifestyles.

In their eagerness to show tolerance for everything, the Athenians even had an altar “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23).

As Paul addressed the philosopher-inquisitors grilling him, he told them about the God, unknown to them, who was the One and only Supreme Being “who made the world and everything in it” (v. 24).

His announcement was soon clarified by direction. That is, Christianity spread west and transformed the course of history. From a quagmire of religious superstitions emerged a unifying faith unparalleled in history. The validity of Christianity would be evidenced in the transformation of individual lives through faith in Jesus Christ and the establishment of national norms drawn from biblical, Judeo-Christian standards.

For more than 200 years, those standards prevailed in America, stabilizing our Constitution and our culture. We shared an inherent sense of patriotism and loyalty for a way of life that had delivered so much.

The New Athenians

For anyone who took notice, things began to change when America began to lose its appeal with so-called liberal progressives. Led by repentant radicals left over from the 1960s and academic elitists who communicated their deep disdain for the country to their students, the rudder began to come off the ship of state.

In what was a stunning reversal of moral, social, political, and judicial norms, stridently aggressive subculture minorities were refashioning the country. To effect a full transformation, Judeo-Christian values had to be dismantled. Christianity went from being the unifying standard to public enemy number one. Instead of clinging to truth and the message of liberation, peace, and life that comes from the God “who made the world and everything in it,” we are morphing into a 21st-century version of ancient Athens.

In 2009 President Obama articulated the progressive design for a new America: “Although . . . we have a very large Christian population, we do not consider ourselves a Christian nation or a Jewish nation or a Muslim nation; we consider ourselves a nation of citizens who are bound by ideals and a set of values.”

Unanswered is the question, “If the Judeo-Christian foundation for values and governance is scrapped, what ‘ideals and . . . set of values’ will we use?” It isn’t enough to declare independence from the things of the past without revealing what will take their place. A culture by committee can only ensure the country’s eventual collapse.

Post-Christian Revisionism

The ongoing verbal assault on Christianity, coupled with expulsions from the public sector of anything Christian, is a means to an end. In the 2008 political campaign, candidate Obama promised to “fundamentally transform America.” The thought was not original but, rather, an expression of a reformation long in the making among liberal elitists.

The particulars of this fundamentally transformed America were deliberately undefined. A few years ago, few public figures, including rabid secularists, would have jeopardized their careers by questioning the moral values and Judeo-Christian ethical norms woven into the fabric of America. But today cultural revolutionaries are eviscerating Christianity in favor of directionless, anti-God tribalism that has many voices but no unifying substance. This ideology’s stock-in-trade is to ridicule and marginalize dissenters until it destroys their credibility.

Therefore, in the proposed new scheme of things, Christianity is scripted to become a minor player. The God of the Bible is reduced to one among many, and thus emerges the post-Christian era that revisionist ideologues so deeply covet.

Anti-Zionism Prologue to the Future

The denigration of our traditional Christian heritage is, of course, nothing new. It is the recurring theme of religious, political, and social engineers who want to remake the world in their image.

Yet they create carnage everywhere. Consider the post-Zionist, post-Judaism struggle taking place in Israel. Anti-Zionist forces are waging a cultural war against the early Zionist movement that resurrected the Jewish state. They claim Zionism was invalid from the beginning and even question the moral basis for Judaism. Anti-Zionists don’t want to improve or refine the Zionist idea; they want to destroy it. Yet they offer nothing constructive in its place.

Given the extreme hatred for Jewish people in Europe and the Middle East and the fact anti-Semitism is increasing in North America, this ideology would consign Jews to their tormentors.

An article by Spanish author Sebastian Vilar Rodriguez depicts the consequences of stateless Jewry after the Nazis:

I walked down the street in Barcelona, and suddenly discovered a terrible truth—Europe died in Auschwitz. . . . In Auschwitz we burned a culture, thought, creativity, talent. We destroyed the chosen people, truly chosen, because they produced great and wonderful people who changed the world.

The contribution of this people is felt in all areas of life: science, art, international trade, and above all, as the conscience of the world. These are the people we burned. . . .

And thus, in our misery, we have exchanged culture for fanatical hatred, creative skill for destructive skill, intelligence for backwardness and superstition. We have exchanged the pursuit of peace of the Jews of Europe and their talent for a better future for their children, their determined clinging to life because life is holy, for those who use death, for people consumed by the desire for death for themselves and others, for our children and theirs.2
Some say Christians need a gentle wake-up call. Now it appears they need a resurrection of awareness. And it may be coming soon. If you listen, you can hear the thunder on the horizon. Reality may only be one bomb blast away.

America is not like the Athens of ancient days, and a return to the thinking and practices of failed pagan systems is not the golden road to the future. The apostle Paul, the Christian gospel, and our Founding Fathers took us in a different direction. Turning back is not an option. America has experienced four spiritual great awakenings, when throngs of people turned back to the God of the Bible. Pray there will be a fifth and that it will come soon.

Elwood McQuaid is consulting editor for The Friends of Israel.

The situation today in Europe is an omen of evil and a philosophy that would again turn Jews into homeless wanderers seeking refuge in ghettos in the midst of hostile environments.

**The Rip Van Winkle Syndrome**

What is at stake for Christianity in America has nothing to do with partisan politics or disagreements over semantics. The war on Christianity is real and central to the future. Our world is awash in the blood of Christian martyrs. I prepared this piece a few days after ISIS beheaded 21 Coptic Christians in Libya.

I’ve received heart-wrenching photos of ISIS slaughtering children in the most grotesque fashion. Not since the barbarism of ancient pagan hordes and Adolf Hitler’s Nazi butchers has there been such a reign of terror.

Yet, though the evidence is overwhelming, it appears most Americans are in denial. Perhaps we believe what is happening elsewhere cannot happen here.

Even more disturbing is the silence of the vast majority of Christians, including a large swath of professing evangelicals.

Franklin Graham, president and CEO of Samaritan’s Purse, knows firsthand the threat of radical Islam and its unabashed intention to vanquish Christianity, destroy Western democracies, and establish a worldwide Islamic caliphate. Graham wonders why there is not a universal outcry against Islamist tyranny, and he has warned the West that a storm of Islamic persecution is coming.³

³ "Joint Press Availability With President Obama and President Gul of Turkey," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, Ankara, Turkey, April 6, 2009 <tinyurl.com/dxrt93>.


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**Does Anti-Semitism Really Have Roots in Replacement Theology?**

Dig deep into the history of Replacement Theology and its effects on how Israel is seen and treated in our churches and, in turn, our society. Dr. Renald Showers will take you on a journey to the beginning of its popular teaching and how it will usher in a fulfillment of prophecy.

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12 May/June 2015
What Terrorists Want

In November, four Israelis—three of them Americans—were slaughtered in a synagogue in Jerusalem when Palestinians armed with guns, knives, and axes burst in during prayer and began their killing spree.

What do jihadist terrorists want? Clearly, they want innocent people to die; and Jews seem to be among their favorite targets. But they also have another agenda: They want to destroy freedom of speech.

The French news outlet Agence France-Presse has reported that shortly after the January attack on the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris, France, that killed 11 people, an al Qaeda-linked leader claimed the murders “taught” a “limit of the freedom of expression.” The magazine was known for publishing cartoons critical of Islam.

In the last decade or two, Islamic terrorists have been bent on destroying free speech. A cartoonist in The Netherlands who used the pen name Gregorius Nekshot was arrested and nearly murdered. He reportedly lives in hiding because he satirized Islam. Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was assassinated for criticizing Islam, and Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard was the victim of an ax attack for the same reason. Fortunately, he survived. The beheadings of American and British journalists by ISIS are more evidence of this trend.

If Islamic terrorists want to stifle criticism of their religion using such tactics, the next question, of course, is “How ought we to respond?”

In a January 29 blog in The Washington Post online, Aaron Blake pointed out interesting statistics on how Americans view religiously controversial and sometimes outright blasphemous cartoons. In a 2006 USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll, 61 percent of those polled considered it irresponsible to depict Muhammad in ways that would offend Muslims.

However, after the Charlie Hebdo killings, a Pew Research Center poll found the numbers had virtually reversed: 60 percent felt such cartoons were okay to publish. Perhaps the outrage against the ISIS-type slayings sparked the change. Or perhaps the responders realize their freedom of speech is at stake.

It is certainly a paradox for Christians to find themselves on the same side of an issue as radical cartoonists and anti-religious blasphemers. So the impulse might be to abstain from the debate. But I don’t think that is either wise or biblical.

In drafting the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, our Founding Fathers leaned on the ideas of John Milton, the 17th-century English poet of biblical and Christian-themed works like Paradise Lost. Milton argued that in a free and open marketplace of ideas, good ideas eventually will rise, and bad ones will fall. Of course, radicals and blasphemers will have their day. But then, so will evangelists, pastors, and Christian apologists.

And in an open marketplace, I trust the clear truth and inspired power of the gospel to prevail. After all, the gospel of Christ is the “power” of God to salvation for everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

But the gospel requires messengers empowered by the Holy Spirit to teach it, preach it, and share it (10:14). That presumes an environment where preaching can take place.

The occult books that new followers of Jesus publicly burned in Acts 19:19 were not confiscated from neighbors but were their own books of pagan magic. They did it as a public witness of their newfound allegiance to Christ and their abandonment of the works of darkness. The first-century Christians were not censoring the opinions of others but exercising their own right of religious expression, even in the midst of the despotic culture of their day.

In the wake of the Paris shootings, free-speech rallies and marches sprung up in Europe. Marchers held up giant pencils to show solidarity with the slain Paris writers and cartoonists and profess their support for free speech. When a similar peaceful march was planned in Dresden, Germany, the government shut it down, fearing retaliation by terrorists. Elsewhere lawmakers pondered whether controversial speech should be prohibited altogether.

There is no excuse for Christians to encourage or participate in expressions of hate. Our message is about the love of Christ, who willingly sacrificed Himself for us because He loves us and wants to deliver us from the “power of darkness” (Col. 1:13).

But we should beware of those who, out of fear, would negotiate away the freedoms for which our founders gave their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. If that disastrous bargain succeeds, not only will the terrorists have secured the censorship they desire, but the ability of Christians to proclaim the message of Christ openly will have been traded away as well.

Craig Parshall is a Washington, DC, advisor; special counsel to the American Center for Law and Justice; and a best-selling novelist. Like him on Facebook at Craig Parshall Author and on Twitter @CPAuthor101.
Two Boys, Two Mountains, Two Covenants
In our modern or postmodern world, the narratives of the Old Testament frequently slip from a vibrant canvas of deep theological truth into shallow “stories” from which believers draw immediate and sometimes superficial applications. We see the trees but miss the forest.

Obviously, there are historical events and consequences related to Abraham’s sons Ishmael and Isaac, but those are more side effects than the heart of Moses’ message. At the core of the Ishmael-Isaac accounts is the most concise and detailed teaching in the Old Testament about man and his relationship to God. In the book of Genesis, God unpacks for the first time the faith dynamic in written form.

The apostle Paul understood this narrative to be the most crucial and foundational teaching about faith living. In Galatians 4:22–30, he called the two sons “symbolic” (v. 24). The New American Standard Bible living. In Galatians 4:22–30, he called the two sons the most crucial and foundational teaching about faith for the first time the faith dynamic in written form. At the core of the Ishmael-Isaac accounts is the most concise and detailed teaching in the Old Testament about man and his relationship to God. In the book of Genesis, God unpacks for the first time the faith dynamic in written form.

Understanding the difference between the Abrahamic Covenant, which is unconditional and illustrates our salvation, and the Mosaic Covenant, which is conditional and deals with our worship, is the starting place for understanding our dual responsibilities toward God (salvation) and man (worship).

In the first 11 chapters of Genesis, Moses—who wrote the first five books of the Bible—strategically identified key “righteous” men, such as Enoch and Noah, but did not say how these men attained that status in God’s eyes. What kind of righteousness did they possess, and how did they acquire it?

It is not until Genesis 15:6 that we see men are declared righteous by faith alone: “And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him [Abraham] for righteousness.” That passage is anchored in a narrative that begins in chapter 12, where God introduces the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant:

Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (vv. 1–3).

At the core of the covenant is God’s continuing promise of a “seed” that will crush the head of the serpent, Satan (3:15).

The births and lives of Ishmael and Isaac are intricately and inseparably intertwined in the process of unpacking the nature of the Abrahamic Covenant.

As the narrative unfolds, these sons of Abraham, through no fault or doing of their own, come to epitomize two distinct and totally incompatible approaches to pleasing God. Paul was clear in Romans 4 that Abraham was a man of unfailing faith. He believed God, but in the early going he was a little confused about his role. Childless, he believed God would deliver a seed; but, like many believers today, he struggled to identify exactly how he was to participate in the process. He probably had told his family and servants about the amazing promise God had given him.

Abraham’s first attempt to help God produce a seed centered on his servant Eliezer. Uncertain he would obtain an heir since his wife was barren, Abraham took some small liberties. He had made Eliezer his heir.

God’s response was swift and clear. He demonstrated via a unilateral sacrifice (Gen. 15:12–21) that He alone was responsible for fulfilling this promise. When He reaffirmed the covenant, He revealed the Israelites would spend 400 years in captivity under a Gentile power (Egypt). That fact corresponds nicely with the fact that Eliezer was technically a Gentile and not a part of the nation Abraham would father.

More years passed, and the elderly Sarah encouraged her husband to find this “seed” through her handmaiden Hagar. The plan seemed to work when Ishmael was conceived; but this method, too, was unacceptable to God.

When God reaffirmed the covenant, He included the rite of circumcision. This scarring of the flesh was meant to be a constant reminder to Abraham and all his descendants that God’s promises cannot be accomplished through human effort. Thus Ishmael comes to represent the futility of works as a way of accessing or advancing God’s promises. All of Abraham’s well-intentioned efforts only complicated his life and the lives of his descendants.

Isaac was the seed of promise. He was born well after the usual age for women to conceive. But God was not finished with Abraham yet. While Isaac was still young, God commanded Abraham to take this special, one-of-a-kind child whom he loved so dearly to Mount Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering. Scripture is clear that this child was the one through whom all nations would be blessed.

One would think Abraham would immediately conclude God was punishing him or asking for the unbearable. Yet Abraham did not. He understood. God prepared him for this challenge by reaffirming Isaac’s status; and Abraham demonstrated himself to be a living, breathing man of faith. He counted it all joy that God would count him worthy to participate in such a test. There was no wavering in his faith. He knew Isaac would father a nation and that his descendants would be as numerous as the sands of the sea.

The text says Abraham “rose early in the morning” (22:3). The Hebrew connotes anticipation, not fear.
Abraham did not know how God would work out His plan, but he was looking forward to the experience.

There are many men of faith in the Old Testament, as recounted for us in Hebrews 11; but whenever New Testament writers reached for a foundational example for believers to follow, they often pointed to Abraham.

The lives of Ishmael and Isaac are not so much about outcomes as they are about process. At first Abraham thought achieving the goal (a child) was the important thing. But he learned that the path was the goal. For grace to remain grace, unconditional covenants must remain untainted by human effort. This was the lesson Moses was trying to communicate to the generation that journeyed from Mount Sinai.

The Mosaic Covenant, represented by Mount Sinai, was a different type of covenant. It was designed for worship (loving God) and fellowship (loving our neighbor). It was a covenant of blessings and cursings. But it was the land of promise that loomed before them.

The task ahead may have looked as impossible to the Israelites as the idea of having a son seemed to Abraham. The choice was between trusting God and trusting their own ingenuity.

Times have changed, but the journey has not. Each day is filled with opportunity, and each day we need to make the choice to trust God.

Mount Sinai’s conditionality shows us our weakness. Mount Moriah’s unconditionality offers us God’s strength. Faith in the unconditional promises of God is the victory that overcomes all human shortcomings.

ENDNOTE

1 Paul used the Greek word allegoreo in this passage. Though the English word allegory is derived from it, the Greek word has a broader semantic range. Philo and other first-century writers used it to refer to the lesson or primary teaching in a given passage. Paul was not asserting that this was a secondary meaning. Rather, he was claiming the teaching about covenants was primary.
Abraham’s Three Cs

The great American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

From the time God called him (Gen. 12:1–4), Abraham faced many challenges and controversies. He assessed himself well when he said, “I . . . am but dust and ashes” (18:27). Yet by God’s grace, his life counted for eternity.

A broad, deep, and inerrant biblical perspective of Abraham can be found in Genesis, the first book in the Torah (Pentateuch). It reveals a fundamental truth about this Jewish patriarch: Abraham “believed in the Lord” (15:6). He was a man of deep faith.

Continued on page 21
Sarah and Abraham

by Cortiss Johnson

(Background: iStock by Getty Images Background Photograph. Digital enhancement: Thomas E. Williams)
As a child, I had a favorite teacher who skillfully arranged biblical characters on colorful backdrops of desert sand, tents, or a palm-covered oasis. Drawing our attention to the Bible, she seemed to make the figures come alive.

It was enough for me, a 10-year old, that Sarai’s name meant “princess” and that she wore pretty sandals. I was not mature enough to understand the hardships and challenges she and her husband, Abram, faced in their walk of faith together.

As an adult, I am still captivated by their story. Now the emotional and spiritual dimensions of their lives interest me, challenging me to “see life from God’s perspective” (my husband’s definition of wisdom).

**GENESIS, THE BIBLICAL BOOK OF BEGINNINGS,** provides the family history of Abram and Sarai. In Genesis 11, we meet Terah, their father. Abram later clarified that Sarai was his half-sister, his father’s daughter. Bible teacher John MacArthur explained, “Scripture made no prohibition against consanguine marriages (matrimony between close relatives) until well after Abraham’s time.”

Following God’s command to Abram to leave Ur of the Chaldeans, the family began its journey with loss and sadness. Abram’s brother, Haran, died in their native land (v. 28); and Sarai’s life was characterized simply as “barren [childless]” (v. 30).

After a stay in Haran, Abram again set out for Canaan, leaving his father behind. God led them from sorrow to hope, as they remembered His covenant promises to them: “I will show you. . . . I will make you a great nation. . . . I will bless you” (12:1–3).

God brought them out of a pagan culture to separate them to Himself. With many possessions, they journeyed for several months.

The Bible does not reveal Sarai’s conversations with her husband concerning their travel and relocation. However, as with most 65-year-old women, “wander” probably was not at the top of her priority list.

Yet wander she did. Though we do not know what Sarai thought or said, we know she partnered with Abram on this life adventure. God had spoken, and they listened.

After arriving at Shechem in Canaan, Abram built an altar to worship the Lord. When they arrived in Bethel, he built another and called on the Lord’s name. Certainly, through their dependence on the living God, they learned He was unlike anything associated with the moon god of Ur.

**WHAT HAPPENED NEXT** revealed the challenge in their relationship to each other and to the Lord. A severe famine in Canaan tested Abram, and he chose to go to Egypt for security. Realizing he might encounter trouble if the Egyptians desired to take his extremely beautiful wife, he asked Sarai to identify herself only as his sister. He was securing his own safety, but not Sarai’s.

Sarai did as she was told. But God sent disease on Pharaoh for taking Sarai; and Pharaoh returned her unharmed, along with gifts (12:17–20). The episode clearly displayed God’s unconditional grace.

However, when the identical danger presented itself again in Gerar, the realm of King Abimelech, her husband did the same thing (20:2). Abimelech was vindicated, Sarai was restored to Abram, and God faithfully brought them out.

Sarai rightfully could have refused to lie. Undoubtedly, she also wanted protection from the strange, powerful kings. Yet she loved Abram and listened to him; and I believe she was learning to trust God’s unconditional promises.

Another challenge for Abram and Sarai was the overwhelming heartache of being childless. Sarai no doubt was full of possessions because Abram was extremely wealthy. But she was empty without her own child to love.

Her husband considered his servant Eliezer to be the heir of his household (15:2). The Lord encouraged Abram in a vision, specifically promising him the heir would be his own offspring. The sky may have looked more beautiful than ever that night as Abram counted the stars, believing God’s promise for innumerable descendants (vv. 4–5) and the land (vv. 18–21).

As Abram counted stars, God counted Abram’s trust in Him as righteousness (v. 6).

**TIME, AGE, AND THE INABILITY** to conceive a child were not on Sarai’s side; but God was. Nevertheless, as time passed, she adopted the culture of the day by giving her servant Hagar to Abram so that the child born would be considered Sarai’s.

Wrote Israeli Bible teacher Meno Kalisher, “This was the accepted practice in their day, but such a step was contrary to the will of God.” This desperate decision produced more heartache, as well as long-term consequences for Sarai and her household.

Continuing to encourage them about the son of promise, God Almighty—El Shaddai—renamed them Abraham (“father of many nations,” 17:5) and Sarah (v. 15), assuring them kings and nations would come from them (v. 16). It is fascinating that, as God revealed specific facts about their promised son (time of birth, name, etc.), they still needed assurance; and He provided it, not abandoning them to fear and doubt. He commends their response to Him in Hebrews 11, naming them as people of great faith.

Part of the work El Shaddai was doing in Sarah’s and Abraham’s hearts was to draw them to Himself, the
Abraham was buying the field not only to bury Sarah but to express his confidence in God’s promises. He had lived for sixty years in the land as a nomad, but before he himself died, he mingled the dust of his love with that of the land of promise as a sign of his expectation that God would fulfill the promises to his seed.\(^3\)

By faith, Abraham and Sarah stepped into the unknown, trusting their God to deliver on His promises. As their sons and daughters by faith, so can we.


Abraham’s Three Cs from page 17

Yet there was much more to his character. The beauty of his life is depicted honestly in the Bible, which reveals his blemishes as well as his blessings. Though imperfect, Abraham’s life of faith was marked with courage, compassion, and credibility.

When he followed God’s command to leave Ur of the Chaldeans, his family, and his father’s house to go to a land God would show him, Abraham became fully vested in his new life and new country.

His Courage

Abraham must have known of the trouble brewing near him in the Valley of Siddim (Gen. 14:3). It was, in fact, the first war recorded in the Bible. Four eastern kings representing city-states (nations) formed an alliance to rebel against five Jordan Valley kings and their city-states (vv. 1–5). The conflict was not Abraham’s business until the four kings took Lot (v. 12), Abraham’s nephew.

Without hesitation, Abraham organized a surprise attack, assembled 318 of his servants, overtook the army, rescued Lot, and brought him back with all the goods that had been taken (vv. 13–16). Abraham displayed great courage by doing the right thing at the right time, completely disregarding his own welfare.

Most believers won’t fight in a physical war like Abraham. But when they face overwhelming circumstances, they can display the courage that comes from a life yielded to Christ, who empowers them.

His Compassion

While Abraham’s relationship with God was growing, Sodom’s evil population was rebelling against Him. Punishment was coming because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah was great and the cities’ sins were extremely grave (18:20).

The Lord Himself appeared to Abraham to deliver His message of judgment (v. 1), soon to be carried out by two angels who had accompanied Him (v. 2).

God did not withhold His plan because He wanted Abraham’s household to “keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice” (v. 19). Abraham knew Lot lived in Sodom. He also knew God was justified in destroying the sinful city and that he was “but dust and ashes” compared to God (v. 27).

Yet, motivated by compassion, Abraham boldly intervened. He asked the Lord two major questions: “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” (v. 23) and “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (v. 25).

Abraham had compassion for Lot and his family, as well as for other righteous people who may have lived in Sodom. In true Middle Eastern form, he demonstrated chutzpah (Yiddish for “audacity”) by negotiating with God. He started the bargaining by asking Him to spare Sodom if there were 50 righteous souls in the city. God agreed.

He continued to barter, asking on behalf of 45, 40, 30, 20, and finally 10 righteous souls (vv. 24–32). God agreed to spare Sodom if it had 10 righteous souls. But there was only one: Lot. God was willing to spare Lot’s entire family; but in the end, only Lot and his two daughters survived.

Abraham was not blind to God’s righteousness and holiness. Yet he displayed great boldness by pleading with the Lord. Believers should stand boldly before the Lord in prayer and plead to Him on behalf of others. Like Abraham, we should have compassion for people and act on it.

His Credibility

Though Abraham was a “foreigner and a visitor” among the Canaanites, a pilgrim in the Promised Land to which God called him (23:4), his neighbors recognized his strong character and credibility. He had left behind his comfortable life in Ur to follow the Lord many years earlier. There was no better way to show that Canaan had become his home than by burying his dead there.

When his wife, Sarah, died in Hebron, Abraham had to find a place to bury her (v. 2). His neighbors were not believers in the one true God. Yet they recognized Abraham’s leadership and integrity, calling him “mighty prince” (literally, “a prince with God”) and offered him “the choicest” of their burial places (v. 6).

Abraham wanted a cave at Machpelah, owned by Ephron the Hittite, and was willing to pay full price for it (v. 9). Ephron was interested in selling but wanted Abraham to buy the whole field. Again, in true Middle Eastern form, bargaining ensued. Transactions like this were accomplished at the city gate (v. 10), allowing the public to hear and observe the specifics of the deal.

Abraham maintained his testimony, which was put on full review, purchasing the field and the cave for 400 silver shekels. Sarah was buried there and later, Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah (49:29–31).

Abraham knew people were watching him, and he consistently demonstrated his upright character. As believers, we should do likewise.

Abraham lived out Martin Luther King Jr.’s words long before Dr. King articulated them. In times of challenge and controversy, his courage, compassion, and credibility ruled the day.

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Imagine, if you can, an “appearance” by the God of glory to an idol worshiper named Abram living in Mesopotamia. He gave Abram a command and an extraordinary promise, commonly referred to as the Abrahamic Covenant:

Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:1–3).

Fundamental

The Abrahamic Covenant is fundamental to understanding God’s revelation to mankind. Genesis consists of two main sections. According to God’s “calendar,” chapters 1 through 11 cover approximately 2,000 years. Genesis 12 through 50 focus on the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The Old Testament story of Israel concludes with the book of Malachi in approximately 400 B.C.

Therefore, Old Testament history is divided into two 2,000-year periods: (1) creation to Abraham and (2) Abraham to the birth of Jesus.

During the first 2,000 years, God deals with the entire human race in broad brushstrokes (and sketchy details), as seen in the list of godly men in Genesis 5.

During the second 2,000 years, God deals primarily with the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The rest of the nations (Hebrew, goyim) are included only as they intersect and interact with God’s Chosen People.

God’s relationship with Abraham is fundamental, then, to a proper understanding of the bulk of the Hebrew Scriptures (38 and one half books). Major themes like election, grace, accountability, and judgment are all presented, expounded on, and/or clarified, as one comprehends the origin, scope, and design of this completely unsolicited covenant with Abraham.

God’s redemption of Israel from Egypt, His expectation of Israel’s holiness, and His blessings and chastenings are all rooted in this initial covenant.

This covenant establishes Israel’s centrality in God’s redemptive and eschatological programs, extending beyond the pages of the Old Testament. The universality of the future ministry of Israel’s Messiah is also clearly rooted in this promise from God to His chosen subject.

Indeed, all of God’s subsequent relationships with humanity would be governed by the Abrahamic Covenant.
exceedingly clear that He gave the land to Abraham and his descendants forever.

Later, when Abraham asked for reassurance after he refused to claim the conquered land for himself in Genesis 15:8, God responded by amplifying the land promise, which goes from Isaac to Jacob to Jacob’s descendants. (See also Genesis 17:8; 26:2–3; 28:13–15; 35:9–15.)

Ultimately, the promise is elaborated on for the nation through the blessings and curses of Moses in Deuteronomy 28—29, who intended “that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess” (30:16). The rest of the Old Testament records God’s dealing with Israel in light of these blessings and curses.

SEED. The promise of “seed” (descendants) is the second component of the Abrahamic Covenant. God told Abraham “I will make you a great nation” when Abraham was 75 and childless. When He reiterated the covenant after Abraham gave Lot the land Lot wanted, God promised to “make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered” (Gen 13:16).

Close to 80 and still childless, Abraham told God, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” (15:3).

Foundational

It follows then, that this covenant is foundational to understanding God’s relationship with Israel. It provides the groundwork for the various aspects of God’s program for His people, beginning with God blessing Abraham and concluding with the Messiah’s redeeming and ruling work.

The three major components of the covenant—land, seed, and blessing—embody the heart and soul of what God proposes to do through the selection of this people for Himself.

LAND. The promise of the land (“to a land that I will show you”) is repeated and expanded numerous times in the Hebrew Scriptures, beginning in Genesis 13:14–17:

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you.”

This chapter provides the first major expansion of the original covenant. God’s reiteration of the land promise makes it exceedingly clear that He gave the land to Abraham and his descendants forever.

Later, when Abraham asked for reassurance after he refused to claim the conquered land for himself in Genesis 15:8, God responded by amplifying the land promise, which goes from Isaac to Jacob to Jacob’s descendants. (See also Genesis 17:8; 26:2–3; 28:13–15; 35:9–15.)

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Close to 80 and still childless, Abraham told God, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” (15:3).
God replied, “[Eliezer] shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir” (v. 4). Then God brought Abraham outside and said,

“Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (vv. 5–6).

When Abraham and Sarah tried through Sarah’s handmaid Hagar to fulfill God’s promise for a son, God allowed them to live with the consequences for 13 years. Then He clarified that, though Hagar and Abraham’s son, Ishmael, would be blessed, the promised seed was to come through Sarah, who would produce a son named Isaac: “But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year” (17:21). Isaac would also learn that the womb was opened and closed by God.

Ultimately, the seed promise is extended through the Davidic Covenant when King David is promised that one of his descendants will sit on the throne of Israel forever:

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16).

BLESSING. The promise of blessing is the third component of the Abrahamic Covenant. God told Abraham, “I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2–3).

The blessing is material to be sure, as indicated by God’s generous treatment of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even when they were disobedient. But the spiritual nature of the blessing is indicated by the extent of the promise. God wanted to bless Abraham and his descendants through their obedience to Him and also bless the rest of mankind through them.

His plan was to grant them redemption, draw them to Himself in holiness, and (through them) lead the nations of the earth into knowledge of Him. Their blessing would make them a light to the nations. To that end, God worked to develop His relationship with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob’s descendants. They were to reflect the glory of the Most High God to the nations around them.

An amplified form of the blessing came with the Mosaic Covenant, instituted at Mount Sinai. In Exodus 19, God told Moses,

Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above
all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel (vv. 3–6).

The Mosaic Covenant was intended as the vehicle through which the Jewish people would experience the riches of God’s blessing. Never intended to be the means of their salvation, it was designed to be the guide for their stewardship as children and subjects of the Most High God, so that He might bless them.

Psalms 1 and 19, for example, extol the blessings of keeping the Law. The godly couple Zacharias and Elizabeth (Lk. 1:6) are examples of what God expected. Instead, the Israelites stumbled over the Law, either rejecting it and living according to their own desires, or attempting to use it to produce their own righteousness (cf. Rom. 9:30–33).

The prophet Jeremiah announced that this covenant would be replaced by a new one that would produce the blessing because it would be written on the hearts of God’s people, rather than on stone tablets (Jer. 31:31–34). God then promised that Israel will always be a nation before Him (vv. 35–37).

Graciously, the Messiah instituted this New Covenant by His death (Mt. 26:28); and it will be the basis of God’s blessing of Israel (and the nations) forever.

**Forever**

In addition to being fundamental to God’s revelation and foundational to God’s program of history, the Abrahamic Covenant is forever. Its unconditional nature argues that it is eternally binding.

Abraham neither sought the covenant nor had an active role in ratifying it. God instituted His covenant with an unsuspecting, pagan idol-worshiper from Mesopotamia, as a work of His grace alone. Genesis 15:6 states that Abraham was declared righteous when He believed God would fulfill His promises.

God states numerous times that the features of this covenant are eternal:

- Israel is promised the land forever (13:15).
- David is promised a son on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:16).
- God promises the blessings of the New Covenant forever (Jer. 31:35–37).

Even after the fall of the southern, Davidic kingdom of Judah, God promised the prophet Daniel, “The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever” (Dan. 7:18). Israel (as a nation) has not yet entered into the fullness of these promises.

The day will come when, in conjunction with its reception of the New Covenant that has been provided by its Messiah, Israel will begin to experience the abundant provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant. The apostle Paul wrote, *For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”* Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Rom. 11:25–29).

Until that day, individual Jewish people can accept God’s provision of those blessings through the church, which the Messiah is building. They can become part of the remnant to which Paul referred in Romans 11:1–10 and share in those provisions with the Gentiles, whom God had planned to include all along (9:24–29).

Meanwhile, it behooves Gentile believers to maintain a humble gratitude to God and to the Jewish people. Paul cautioned us,

*And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fruits of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you* (11:17–18).

**ENDNOTE**

1 Adding the numbers in Genesis 5 and 11 reveals Abraham was born approximately 1,948 years after creation and entered Canaan at age 75, approximately 2,023 years after creation. Comparing these numbers with the rest of the Old Testament dates creation at approximately 4000 B.C.

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**Friends of Israel Leaders Speak on Genesis**

Interviews with Dr. Jim Showers, executive director of The Friends of Israel, and the Rev. Bill Sutter, former FOI executive director, are included in a new, non-Christian documentary, Roadmap Genesis, released in January.

Produced by Nolan Lebovitz, a filmmaker and rabbi-in-training, the film draws from Judaism and a broad spectrum of Christian denominations to make the case that the book of Genesis is a roadmap on how to live a productive, fruitful life that will benefit society.

Other evangelicals interviewed include Mike Huckabee, popular television host and former governor of Arkansas, and Ken Ham, president and CEO of Answers in Genesis.

To learn more, go to RoadmapGenesis.com or facebook.com/roadmapgenesis.
Abraham’s Faith

(by Getty Images. Digital enhancement, Thomas E. Williams)
God tested Abraham’s faith at least 12 times. These tests paint a picture of how Abraham exercised faith in God’s promises and reveal that his trust in God was genuine.

**STEP OF FAITH**

Abraham’s journey to a new land was a major step of faith: *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country (Heb. 11:8–9).*

When God called him, Abraham immediately left Ur of the Chaldeans, where he had been born and reared, for a foreign country where he knew no one. He was a nomad, living in tents throughout the lands of Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and Beersheba. The only land he ever owned in Canaan was the plot he purchased at Machpelah to bury his wife, Sarah (Gen. 23:1–20).

His eyes were not fixed on an earthly, temporal city but on a heavenly, eternal one—the New Jerusalem, whose architect and maker was God (Heb. 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14; Rev. 21:1—22:5). Consequently, he could wait obediently, with patient endurance, until God’s promises to him would be fulfilled.
Abraham’s faith was great indeed. He not only trusted God for the route he would take from Ur and then from Haran, but he went with no promise of property because God only told him of the land inheritance after he reached Shechem (Gen. 12:6–7). Though Abraham was pledged the land by divine decree, he never took possession of it during his lifetime.

SON OF FAITH

God had promised Abraham a son in his old age and gave him strength to impregnate Sarah. Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah 90 when their son Isaac was born (17:17). God worked a miracle (Heb. 11:12).

A number of wonderful applications can be made:

• Every Jewish person ever born was conceived because Abraham exercised faith and trust in God’s promise.
• God was willing and able to provide the promised son (Isaac), but He acted on the basis of Abraham’s faith.
• Abraham did not waver at God’s promise but, by faith, claimed the impossible.
• God honored Abraham’s faith and gave him a vast multitude of descendants.

The key to the impossible is faith in God.

STEADFAST FAITH

Abraham and his descendants clung to the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (v. 13).

Although they could only view the promises from a distance, their steadfast faith gave them the assurance and conviction that God someday would deliver what He promised.

If Abraham had yearned to return to Ur, he could have done so:

And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them (vv. 15–16).

The word desire means to “stretch out, yearn and strive after.” Abraham and his posterity had a continual, consuming desire while on Earth for a homeland in heaven where they would be with God because that is what He promised them.

SACRIFICING FAITH

Abraham’s character and faith were tested to the ultimate degree when he was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (11:17–19; cf. Gen. 22:1–19).

God told Abraham to take Isaac to Mount Moriah and sacrifice him as a burnt offering. Although Ishmael (born to Hagar) was Abraham’s firstborn son, Isaac was unique and irreplaceable because he was the only son of promise. He alone would inherit the covenant promises passed down from Abraham.

The words offered up (Heb. 11:17) appear twice, first in the perfect tense and then in the imperfect tense. Even though God prevented Abraham from actually sacrificing Isaac, He considered the deed completed and had already accepted it before Abraham had placed Isaac on the altar.

Abraham’s obedience was a great act of faith. He knew God had promised him many descendants through Isaac and must have struggled trying to reconcile God’s command to kill Isaac on the altar. However, neither Genesis nor Hebrews addresses this issue. It seems Abraham left the problem with God (Rom. 4:20–21).

So convinced was he that God could do what He promised that Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19). In fact, Abraham had told his servant, “The lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you” (Gen. 22:5).

Abraham must have been convinced that, if God could birth Isaac through two reproductively dead bodies, He could resurrect Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:12, 19). The phrase also received him in a figurative sense (v. 19) means Abraham received Isaac from the dead, not literally but symbolically.

Abraham is so cherished by the Jewish people that during times of persecution, his example of faith and endurance gave them hope and encouraged them never to renounce their faith in God.

Throughout the ages, Abraham would become the father of faith for believing people worldwide. New Testament writers quote Genesis 15:6 in relationship to salvation. The apostle Paul, for instance, showed that Abraham acquired salvation through faith alone, not by the works of the Law (Rom. 4:3, 9, 22), and quoted Genesis 15:6 to show God accepted Abraham solely because of Abraham’s faith and imputed righteousness to him apart from any meritorious work on Abraham’s part.

James also quoted Genesis 15:6 to show that Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac demonstrated his complete faith in God, proving he was justified (declared righteous) by faith alone (cf. Jas. 2:21–23).
A Rock on Which to Build the World

Thomas Cahill, an American scholar and writer, wrote in his book *The Gifts of the Jews* about the call of Abraham:

If we had lived in the second millennium BC, the millennium of Abraham, and could have canvassed all the nations of the earth, what would they have said of Abraham’s journey? In most of Africa and Europe, they would have laughed at Abraham’s madness and pointed to the heavens, where the life of earth had been plotted from all eternity . . . a man cannot escape his fate. The Egyptians would have shaken their heads in disbelief. The early Greeks might have told Abraham the story of Prometheus . . . Do not overreach, they would advise; come to resignation. In India, he would be told that time is black, irrational and merciless. Do not set yourself the task of accomplishing something in time, which is only the dominion of suffering. On every continent, in every society, Abraham would have been given the same advice . . . do not journey but sit; compose yourself by the river of life, meditate on its ceaseless and meaningless flow.¹

Abraham is the only person in the Old Testament called the “friend” of God (Isa. 41:8; Jas. 2:23). In the New Testament, he is listed as an ancestor of Jesus Christ (Mt. 1:1) and the spiritual father of all who receive the free gift of salvation through faith (Gal. 3:6–7).

While information on Abraham’s early life is scant, the Bible does show how his life of obedience and faith was a work in progress. Rabbis have also created many fables to try to fill in Abraham’s forgotten early years.

**His Forgotten Years**

Abraham probably was born in the city of Ur in Southern Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq). His father was Terah, and his brothers were Nahor and Haran. Abraham’s wife was his barren half-sister Sarai, later called Sarah. Haran died in Ur, leaving behind three children: Lot, Milcah, and Iscah (Gen. 11:27–29). The family then moved to Haran (v. 31).

When Abraham was 75, he left his 145-year-old father behind in Haran and set out for Canaan in obedience to God (12:1–4). Terah lived 60 years longer and died in Haran (11:32).

Abraham’s journey to the Promised Land included a personal journey to know the true God, since Terah’s family apparently was polytheistic:
“Thus says the Lord God of Israel: ‘Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods’” (Josh. 24:2).

**Folklore.** During the Jewish dispersion after A.D. 70, rabbis developed a large folklore collection for Abraham’s early, forgotten years. These tales are called in Yiddish Bubba Misehs, meaning exaggerated “grandma stories” (old wives’ tales) that have dubious origins.

One classic tale regarding Abraham’s early life makes Terah a builder and seller of idols. One day Terah leaves young Abram (later called Abraham) in charge of the store. A man walks in, wanting to buy an idol. Abram asks him how old he is. The man replies, “Fifty years.” Abram then says, “You are fifty years old and would worship a day-old statue!” The man leaves the shop ashamed.

Later, a woman walks in to make an offering of flour to the idols. So Abram takes a stick, smashes the idols, and places the stick in the hand of the largest idol. When Terah returns, he asks Abram what happened to all the idols.

Abram tells him a woman came in to make an offering, but the idols began to argue over which one should eat the offering first. Then the large idol took the stick and smashed the other idols.

Terah is furious and tells Abram the idols are merely statues, having no life or power. Abram responds by illustrating the foolishness of worshipping idols: “Have they then any knowledge? Should not your ears listen to what your mouth is saying? You deny their life and power, yet you make and worship them!” (Midrash Rabba, Genesis 38.13).

**His Fruitless Years**

A long time elapsed between God’s call of Abraham to leave his father’s house and Abraham’s actual journey. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, alluded to this fact in his defense before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court: “Brethren and fathers, listen: Our father Abraham was called by God to go from his native land and his relatives, and to the land which God had promised to his ancestors.” Stephen clearly said Abraham received God’s call before he journeyed. Therefore, Abraham’s settling in Haran with his family indicates he failed to obey God’s command fully.

The Bible does not say why they stayed at Haran. But a popular medieval French rabbi named Rashi (1040–1105) wishfully proposed that Abraham must have been developing a circle of disciples in the worship of the one true God.

Perhaps Terah was the cause of Abraham’s fruitless years in Haran. His father’s name in Hebrew means “to delay.” Conceivably, Terah’s company delayed Abraham from following God’s call.

If so, Terah typifies obstacles that delay one from fulfilling the Lord’s will.

**His Faithful Years**

The writer of Hebrews wrote the following about Abraham’s faith and obedience to God:

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called,” concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense (Heb. 11:8–10, 17–19).*

During his faithful years, Abraham willingly obeyed God’s call. He left Haran and his old way of life. Though the only land he owned in Canaan was his wife’s grave site (Gen. 23:17–20), he was a faithful sojourner who believed in God’s promises.

Abraham’s complete trust in God’s sovereign word is also evident in the Akedah, Hebrew for the “binding” of Isaac. When God told Abraham to offer his only son, he was willing to obey (chap. 22). This passage is solemnly read each morning in some synagogues and on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. Since God had promised Abraham that through Isaac he would father a great nation, Abraham believed that even if Isaac died, the sovereign God who keeps His word would be “able to raise him up, even from the dead” (Heb. 11:17–19).

Abraham finally saw the Lord’s promise fulfilled. During the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), a triumphant celebration of anticipation of the Messianic King and Kingdom, Jesus responded to His critics: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad” (Jn. 8:56). Perhaps Abraham saw the culmination of the promised seed through Isaac—Christ the King on His throne in Jerusalem!

A Talmudic passage on Isaiah 51:1 once opined, “When the Holy One contemplated the generations of Enosh and the Flood, He said, How can I build a world with such wicked material? But when He envisioned Abraham, He said, I have found a rock [petra] on which to build the world!”

Imagine, when God told Abraham, “Lekh lekha” (Hebrew for “Go forth,” Gen. 12:1), He set in motion the creation of Israel, from which the Savior of the world would come—Jesus, the Son of Abraham.

ENDNOTES


Jewish scholars throughout the ages have wrestled with the patriarchs’ moral choices and behaviors. We are left scratching our heads at their sinful situations. Looking for textual loopholes to explain them away or stretching the texts to find excuses will not suffice if we want to maintain biblical integrity.

There is an answer to the dilemma, however; and it lies not with Abraham but with God.

FROM THE BEGINNING, the Lord reveals Abraham’s difficulty walking the thin line of faith. Comparing the accounts of Genesis 11:31—12:2 and Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7:2–4, we discover Abraham’s response to God’s call was not instantaneous. Stephen told of a call that came before the family moved to Haran. Genesis 12 speaks of a second call after they had settled in Haran.

It takes great faith to leave your family and follow God without knowing where you are going. Familial commitment is commendable, and honoring one’s father is godly; but Abraham was called to follow God and leave his family, not to go to a land his earthly father chose. We are left to wonder what blessings may have been missed or challenges avoided if Abraham’s obedience had been immediate.

With a second heavenly nudge, Abraham finally arrived in the land God would give to him. From the divine perspective, it was the land of promise. Surrounded by Canaanites in an area struggling under the weight of severe famine, the chosen patriarch took a step not based on faith, but on sight. He decided to go to Egypt, which held the promise of life. Circumstances became his counselor, rather than the voice of God.

Before he had even entered Egypt, Abraham became concerned for his safety. He informed his beautiful wife, Sarah, that the Egyptians might kill him in order to take her for themselves. So he told her, “Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you” (12:13). These words seem prophetic because that is exactly what happened. Pharaoh took Sarah, but God protected her from violation and rescued her. After being rebuked by the pagan monarch, Abraham was ushered out of Egypt by a military escort.

We might look at him differently if his choice to save his own neck at Sarah’s expense were a one-time failure. But Genesis 20 says that while traveling in Gerar, Abraham again sought to save his life in the same manner. King Abimelech took Sarah, but the ever-watchful Almighty visited the king and threatened to kill him if he touched her. When the king rebuked Abraham, Abraham made excuses and revealed he had told Sarah (to paraphrase his words), “If you love me, you will save me by doing this” (20:13).

Abraham was no weakling. When Lot was captured, he gathered a large fighting force, brazenly attacked the armies of the foreign kings, and saved his nephew. We are left asking ourselves, If he rescued Lot, why would he abandon his wife? How could God use a man who not only allowed but planned for his wife to be abused immorally for his own well-being?

GOD OFTEN REPEATED HIS PROMISES to Abraham regarding the land and nation. Well beyond the childbearing years of life, Abraham and Sarah were promised a son.

In light of biological realities and the passing of time, God’s voice may have started to fade, and Sarah’s voice may have grown more prominent: “Go in to my maid,” she told Abraham. “Perhaps I shall obtain children by her” (16:2).

Continued on page 35
The first time I viewed the GEICO insurance ad on television, I chuckled. It flashes back to medieval times, where an elderly mentor peers into a big book of tricks then addresses his young student: “Trick number one—Lookest over there,” and he points. The student turns to look, thus falling for “the oldest trick in the book.”

When a national magazine like Newsweek hires Kurt Eichenwald to pen an article for publication on the day before Christmas Eve 2014 (“The Bible: So Misunderstood It’s a Sin”) that viciously savages the entire Bible and conservative believers in particular, it forces one to look for the magic tricks. They are not hard to find.

The article focuses on misleading information, trying to make people mistrust the way evangelicals view the Bible. It is intellectually manipulative—a sad, frayed bag of magic tricks and long-discredited arguments by liberals who love to condemn conservative Christians and denounce any approach to biblical doctrine that takes Scripture seriously.

Evangelical seminary professor Dr. Michael Brown admirably refuted Eichenwald in a January 15 Newsweek opinion piece the magazine prefaced with, “We stand by our story.” So I won’t address all of Eichenwald’s arguments and tactics. Instead, I’d like to concentrate on two.

**FIRST, MR. EICHENWALD MANIFESTS** an intense loathing of conservative evangelicals. His vitriol is stunning. In the second paragraph of his 14-page cover story, he describes conservative, Bible-believing Christians this way: “They are God’s frauds, cafeteria Christians who pick and choose which Bible verses they heed with less care than they exercise in selecting side orders for lunch. They are joined by religious rationalizers—fundamentalists who, unable to find Scripture supporting their biases and beliefs, twist phrases and modify [Bible] translations to prove they are honoring the Bible’s words.”

Early on, Eichenwald discloses his real thesis: Any Bible that contradicts the left’s politically correct social mantra cannot possibly be worthy of belief. To prove his thesis, he works backward from his conclusion, cherry-picking liberal “scholarship” along the way for support. Eichenwald’s reasoning looks like this: Only those with a liberal social agenda can understand the New Testament. Conservative Christians do not have a liberal
social agenda. Therefore, conservative Christians cannot understand the New Testament.

He rails against the supposed hypocrisy of believers who support conservative political candidates like Michele Bachmann and Sarah Palin, claiming 1 Timothy requires “Bachman [and every other female politician] should shut up and sit down.” He sees the epistle as “virulently anti-woman,” teaching “the shortcomings of women” and forbidding them from ever occupying positions of authority over men.3

However, he hopelessly misses the context. First Timothy 2:9–12 concerns men and women in the church. Verse 8 begins with the duties of men in the church and then explains the spiritual duties of women. Nowhere does it tell Christian women never to enter politics.

A dozen verses earlier, the apostle Paul explained the duty of believers toward government, instructing that prayer and Thanksgiving be “made for all men,” including “kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (vv. 1–2).

In fact, Christians are perfectly in tune with Scripture in praying for a government that refrains from unreasonable interference with their religious liberties, spiritual values, and home life—quite the opposite of the agenda empowering Mr. Eichenwald’s diatribe.

EICHENWALD ALSO ATTACKS Pat Robertson. He says the Christian Broadcasting Network founder “should prepare himself for an eternity in hell” for telling his 700 Club audience, “We need to do something, to pray to be delivered from this president” (meaning Barack Obama).4

But asking believers to pray for a new president who would institute more biblical values does not violate Romans 13:1–3 and is not the same as advocating insurrection or civil disobedience.

Nor does Scripture say Christians should never oppose government, illegal though it may be. John the Baptist not only denounced Herod for breaking the Law by marrying his own brother’s wife, but also rebuked him “for all the evils which Herod had done” (Lk. 3:19).

Paul conducted the first-century equivalent of a sit-down strike to protest his illegal arrest as a Roman citizen in Philippi (Acts 16:35–40).

Eichenwald also goes after conservative, Christianity-professing, former Texas Governor Rick Perry; claims Christians worship “at the base of granite monuments to the Ten Commandments while demanding prayer in school”; and complains Christians oppose “mostly Democrats”—as if opposing a party that embraces abortion on demand, same-sex marriage, and a left-leaning view of the Constitution violates the Bible.

He ends by concluding the New Testament cannot be reconciled with “calls for impeaching judges,” another slam against conservatives. Like a bad magician, Eichenwald reveals the mechanism behind his tricks, yet still expects applause.

SECOND, MR. EICHENWALD ATTACKS the credibility of the New Testament. Here is where he does the most damage.

Most people probably do not realize that a mass of responsible Bible scholarship, accumulated over centuries, makes the Bible the most trusted and verified of ancient books, giving us excellent cause to believe it.

Eichenwald implies today’s New Testament barely resembles what the original authors wrote and that Scripture is, in effect, a literary mirage.

His take on 1 John 5:7 is a study in obfuscation, if not outright trickery.

Implying Christians have been duped into believing in the Trinity, he points out verse 7 is absent from early Greek manuscripts. Verse 7 reads, “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.”5

Actually, most translations either omit the verse or include it with explanation. Some versions even give detailed explanations. The NET Bible® devotes an entire page to the history of this verse (known as the Comma Johanneum) and the reason for its omission in that translation.6

Such is the profound desire for accuracy and transparency in the Bible translation process.

Mr. Eichenwald would have you believe millions of Christians, like minions in a cult, have been shielded from the truth about this verse. However, I know of no conservative Bible scholars who rely on 1 John 5:7 as a linchpin for the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact, some of the best conservative scholars do not cite that verse at all. First John 5:5–12 refers to “God,” the Holy “Spirit,” and to “Jesus” or “Jesus Christ” as the “Son of God.” So all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned anyway.

Eichenwald tries to undermine the Trinity elsewhere as well. He asks, “So where does the clear declaration of God and Jesus as part of a triumvirate appear in the Greek manuscripts?” His answer: “Nowhere.” The doctrine, he concludes, is a “deception” of catastrophic importance.

However, the triunity of God runs throughout the New Testament (Matthew 28:19 is a good example) and even appears in the Old Testament, particularly in Isaiah 48:16. (See “Can Three Be One?” in the November/December 2014 issue of Israel My Glory.)

Eichenwald tries to conflate a 1,500-year-old debate about whether the early church considered Jesus part of the Godhead. Yet the New Testament clearly asserts Christ’s divinity:

• John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
• John 10:30 records that Jesus declared, “I and My Father are one.”
• John 17:5 records Jesus saying, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”
• Philippians 2:6 says, “although He [Jesus] existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped” (NASB).
• Colossians 1:15 calls Jesus “the image of the invisible God.”
• Colossians 2:9 says, “For in Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”
Though God, Jesus humbled Himself by appearing in the physical weakness of human flesh to provide a once-for-all sacrifice for sin.

The tactic of plucking verses out of context to wage war against Christian orthodoxy is an old trick. Clement of Alexandria, a church father who defended the faith in the second century, knew it well:

Those who follow heresies . . . will not make use of all the Scriptures, and they will not quote from them entirely. . . . Instead, selecting ambiguous expressions, they wrest them to their own opinions. . . . They do not look to the sense of the words but simply make use of the words themselves. . . . However, the truth is not found by changing the meanings—for so people subvert all true teaching.”

None of us, claims Eichenwald, has “ever read the Bible.” Rather, we read bad translations based on botched copies of the originals. It is as if he thinks the first New Testament documents were written with invisible ink.

First he argues the copies are unreliable because “400 years passed between the writing of the first Christian manuscripts and their compilation into the New Testament.” Then he questions the accuracy of the copying techniques.

BUT WHAT IF THE NEW TESTAMENT ORIGINALS were written close to the actual events of Christ’s life by reliable eyewitnesses or people who spoke to those eyewitnesses? And what if evidence shows that the technique for copying the original autographs was disciplined and reliable? Then Eichenwald’s thesis, not the Bible, evaporates—which is, in fact, the case.

The New Testament is a historical record of events based on eyewitness accounts. The Gospel of Luke explains, “Those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses . . . delivered them to us” (Lk. 1:2). The events were written down only after the author “investigated everything carefully from the beginning” (v. 3, NASB).

Matthew, Mark, and John (the other Gospel writers) were Jesus’ companions, as was Peter, who also emphasized the apostles “were eyewitnesses” (2 Pet. 1:16).

Peter also categorized Paul’s writings in his lifetime as “Scripture” (3:15–16).

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church, he recited the core of the Christian doctrine, which he said he “also received,” namely, “that Christ died for our sins . . . was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

Then Paul said Christ appeared to Peter and other disciples and to more than 500 witnesses, “of whom the greater part remain to the present” (v. 6). Lastly, Christ appeared to Paul himself (v. 8).

Even radical religious scholars admit the authenticity of those verses. John Dominic Crossan, for example, a founder of the ultraliberal Jesus Seminar that questions the credibility of Jesus’ miracles, wrote, “The passion-resurrection account in 1 Corinthians 15 point[s], therefore, to the earliest Jerusalem community” of Jesus’ followers.

How “early,” exactly, would that place the Christian narrative about Jesus’ sacrificial, redemptive death; His burial and miraculous resurrection; and His bodily appearance to hundreds of witnesses? Even Crossan said, “The apostle Paul wrote his letters twenty years after the death of Jesus.”

That means no later than two decades, and possibly as early as immediately, after the resurrection, the “earliest” Christian church in Jerusalem was retelling the events of 1 Corinthians 15.

According to Crossan, the Gospels were written only 20 to 40 years later. They contain more detailed accounts and are in exact symmetry with Paul’s summary in 1 Corinthians 15.

So even to scholarly skeptics, the core of the Christian message contained in today’s New Testament is exactly what the “earliest” Christian community was communicating about Jesus Christ after His crucifixion and resurrection.

With such powerful evidence supporting the reliability of the New Testament’s message, the burden of proof to discredit it rests entirely on Mr. Eichenwald. So far he has failed miserably to make his case.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY of scribal errors? First, Crossan, the skeptical scholar, tells us the early church began using the “codex” version of the Gospels “almost instantly,” compared to other non-Christian literature of that age. A codex was much like a bound book of today, rather than a scroll. Crossan believes codices were used as “the handbooks, as it were, for the Christian community.”

Today we have manuscript versions of these codices, said Crossan, dating back to the second century. That means two centuries earlier than when Mr. Eichenwald says the “professional” copyists starting working, Christians were already reading and passing around bound books containing the Gospels. The codex approach and its wide distribution would have made it easy to notice抄ist errors and correct them.

Second, Eichenwald fails to understand the religious community’s dedication to accuracy. Christians literally risked death every day because of their faith in the words of the New Testament. We can hardly believe they would have been careless about copying the Scriptures they used to guide every aspect of their lives.
Third, we have evidence of the accuracy of religious copyists long before the fourth century. Hundreds of years before Christ’s birth, copies of the Old Testament, now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, were generated by a Jewish sect at Qumran. Some fragments date back to 250 B.C. and are the oldest versions of the Old Testament on record.

They illustrate the impeccable accuracy of the scribes and copyists who painstakingly duplicated the Scriptures for future generations. Our Old Testament today is virtually a replica of the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls.

Even the powerful, prophetic Messianic Scriptures of Isaiah 53:5–6 read like our Bibles today:

- But he was wounded for our transgressions, and he was crushed for our iniquities, and the punishment that made us whole was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, each of us, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.¹⁶

Like a piercing voice ringing through the halls of history, writings that span millennia remind us the Bible we read today is a reliable record of God’s dealings with the human race as recorded by His inspired authors and preserved throughout the ages so that, if we are willing, we may come to know Him.

No magic trick, no skeptic’s ploy, can erase what God has caused to be written. The only question is whether we are willing to clear away the clutter of false arguments, ignore the din from the rabble-rousers, and give a clear head and an open heart to what the Scriptures say about Jesus Christ.

ENDNOTES

³ Ibid., 36.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ The NET Bible® (Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 1999), 759, n 1 John 5:7.
⁶ Eichenwald, 36.
⁸ Eichenwald, 27.
⁹ Ibid.
¹² Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid., 130.
¹⁵ Ibid., 127.

The Long Arm of Grace from page 31

Abraham’s decision to abandon the path of faith for a path of human reasoning created consequences that reverberate even today. Abraham’s relations with Sarah’s maid produced Ishmael. But he was not the son God had promised.

So God reiterated his covenant and promise to give Abraham a son through Abraham’s aged, barren wife, Sarah (17:16). Though Abraham asked God to bless their human blueprint for Ishmael to be the heir (v. 18), God said no. He would not allow His redemptive plan to be thwarted. The promise would be fulfilled through Sarah, whose son, Isaac, would be the covenant bearer: “My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year” (v. 21).

And so it happened, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah 90, Sarah gave birth to Isaac.

ABRAHAM WAS FAR FROM PERFECT, but God used him greatly. He sinned and he fell, but God’s mighty hand of grace was there to catch and save him.

By God’s sovereign design, Abraham became a central figure in the Almighty’s plan to preserve the Jewish people and bring salvation to the world through His Messiah. Abraham’s pedigree of faith in Hebrews 11 is legendary, an example to all who would believe.

Abraham was not chosen for what he could do for God, but for what God could do through Abraham. Just as God chose and used Abraham despite his faults and failures, God is able to choose and use us as well.

By openly revealing the sinful, faithless imperfections in Abraham’s life, God declares that the biblical narrative is not about Abraham. It is about God and how His redemptive plan is being played out in an imperfect world.

Abraham learned that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works that any man should boast: “And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He [the LORD] accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6).

Perfect righteousness will never be found in the heart of any man or woman because everyone is stained with sin. The divine record of sinful choices in the life of Abraham, an ordinary man, testifies to the truth that a personal relationship with God is not something you can earn. Our righteousness and good deeds are but filthy rags in comparison to His holiness (Isa. 64:6).

Abraham’s faith in God was so profound he believed God could bring life from death (Heb. 11:19), and he became an example of God’s power to give life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins.

Most people today believe they will go to heaven based on their own good deeds. But that is not what the Hebrew Scriptures or Abraham’s life teach.

Righteousness is a gift of grace, apart from human works; and God declares us righteous when we place our faith in Him alone.

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Confidence in God

Some Christians lack assurance that they are truly born again. Certainty about one's salvation comes through knowing what God's Word teaches. The apostle John's major focus in this epistle was to build confidence within believers so that they would know what they believed and understand that it was true.

In 1 John 5:13–21, the final section of this letter, John used the same Greek word for “know” six times (vv. 13, 15, 18, 19, 20). Know does not mean knowledge gained through experience but, rather, an inner certainty acquired from studying God’s Word.

He concluded his letter by reviewing and reinforcing the principles of truth that God the Father revealed through the incarnate Christ so that Christians might live out their faith, confident in what they believe.

The Christian’s Position

The apostle began with assurance of salvation: “These things I have written to you who believe in [into] the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (v. 13).

John was not merely referring to what he wrote in verses 1 through 12 but to the entire epistle. Many scholars consider verse 13 a summary of the letter. At the beginning of the epistle he used the present tense: “we write to you” (1:4). In 5:13 he stated, “I have written to you, ” looking back at having completed his writing.

His purpose was “that you may know that you have eternal life.” That is, an inner assurance of salvation that is grounded and anchored in Scripture, rather than based on feelings.

The preposition translated “in” means “into” in the Greek. It speaks not only of believing there was a historical Jesus, but also of accepting Him by faith as the divine Son of God—which contradicted the heretical teachers in John’s day who denied Christ’s deity.

The Christian’s Prayer

John addressed the issue of Christians praying with confidence to God:

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him (vv. 14–15).

The word confidence assures believers they can come to God in prayer frankly and without hesitancy, based on the union and intimate relationship they have with the Father through Jesus Christ (cf. 1:3).

A believer has freedom to ask God at any time for “anything” that is “according to His will” and purpose and can be sure He hears the “petitions.” God’s answers might come immediately or after days or years. Sometimes they come after the believer is with the Lord. But God will answer. Petitions must glorify Him, be scriptural, and seek God’s will.

John abruptly changed the subject from praying for oneself to praying for a sinning brother in Christ:

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that (5:16).

The word if refers to a hypothetical situation. The verse reveals nothing about the one praying or the sinner and his sin (only that the sin does not lead to death). John emphasized the importance and obligation of praying for a Christian who sins.

As a result of praying, “he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death” (v. 16). Here is a wonderful illustration of God working through prayer that is in accordance with His will. It is expected that the one interceding will pray that His fellow Christian sees the error of his ways and confesses his sin to God.

Such praying activates God to answer. God responds by giving “life” to the sinner. The word life does not refer to regeneration because the sinner did not lose his salvation. Rather, it refers to spiritual restoration (revival of spiritual life) and a renewed commitment to live for Christ.

Three times John spoke of “a sin which does not lead to death” (vv. 16–17), and he referred once to a “sin leading to death” (v. 16). What is the “sin leading to death”?

Some scholars teach this sin is punished through immediate physical death, as with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11). Death is also associated with incest (1 Cor. 5:5) and profaning the Lord’s Supper (11:30).
Other scholars believe the “sin leading to death” applies to false teachers who reject Christ and separate from the church, cutting themselves off from any possibility of forgiveness of sin. Thus they will die in their sin without hope of salvation.

Unfortunately, John did not identify the sin leading to death. It may be a particular sin or a state of sin. It most likely is a sin committed continually until it culminates in the sinner’s death.

The apostle did not prohibit prayer for someone committing a sin leading to death, but there is no obligation to pray for one in this circumstance: “I do not say that he should pray about that” (1 Jn. 5:16).

The subject of prayer concludes with the statement, “All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death” (v. 17). All departures from God’s standard of righteousness are sinful and have consequences. Believers should pray for a sinning Christian who is willing to be restored, whose sin does not lead to death.

The Christian’s Privilege

John concluded this epistle by reminding readers of four certainties they possess as Christians. All begin with the phrase we know (vv. 18–20), referring to knowledge acquired through Scripture.

(1) The Christian’s Practice. “We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him” (v. 18). This verse does not mean a born-again person never sins.

Rather, it means Christians do not habitually live in sin. Christ gives them power through the indwelling Holy Spirit to forsake habitual sin. Surviving Satan’s onslaughts does not depend on one’s self-effort alone. God enables Christians to be victorious over the Devil. Though he continually attacks, Christians are secure in Christ.

(2) The Christian’s Protection. “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (v. 19). John stressed that his confidence was not in himself but in God, who provides an inner witness through both the Holy Spirit and new birth. Believers know they belong to God, who protects and delivers them from the penalty of sin, the power of Satan, and this world’s evil system.

In contrast, “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one [Satan].” The world’s unsaved people are in Satan’s grip, without the assistance to resist him. Satan tyrannically controls the unsaved in this world. He orchestrates all the evil expressed in and through them, especially their rebellion and hatred of God.

(3) The Christian’s Perception. “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding” (v. 20). Again, John reminded believers that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God who appeared in history as the incarnate God-Man. Though He is not physically present in bodily form today, He is spiritually present in ministry.

Christians possess an abiding mental and spiritual ability to understand the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and the advocacy of the Lord through the Holy Spirit who indwells them. The purpose for this revelation is to provide experiential and personal knowledge of “Him who is true,” (v. 20) that is, real and genuine truth concerning Jesus Christ (cf. Jn. 14:6). Knowing Christ, believers can discern the error of false teachers and know how to refute and reject their lies.

(4) The Christian’s Priority. “That we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:20). A Christian’s knowledge is a result of his union with the Lord because “we are in Him” (God the Father and Jesus Christ). No one can know God and be in Him without a personal, born-again relationship with Jesus Christ.

If Jesus is not God as the Father is God, then John’s entire epistle about Christ’s redemptive work is futile, and our belief is in vain. However, such is not the case; and this truth is the thesis of John’s epistle. In Christ is both deity and “eternal life.” They are inseparably tied together.

Like an affectionate pastor caring for his flock, John concluded his letter with a warning in the form of a command: “Little children keep yourselves from idols. Amen” (v. 21). Believers are to be alert and vigilant so that they do not commit idolatry when attacked by Satan. God will do His part to keep His children from idols; but they must exercise effort, too, like an armed guard. Victory is won by being filled with the Holy Spirit and walking moment by moment under His controlling power.

To what type of idolatry did John refer? Some scholars say literal idols were prevalent in paganism during John’s day. Others teach the word idols should be interpreted more broadly, referring to anything that takes the place of God in one’s life. It well could be that John had false doctrines and false teachers in mind because he cautioned against them throughout the epistle.

It is my prayer you will study John’s epistle frequently and apply to your life the truths you have received in these articles on 1 John.

Editor’s Note: This concludes the series on the First Epistle of John, which began in the March/April 2013 issue. In our next issue, David Levy will begin a series on the Second Epistle of John.

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THE FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH

Humanity's Rejection of Genuine Wisdom

The foundation, or beginning, of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Ps. 111:10). Unfortunately, large segments of humanity do not fear the Lord and have no true wisdom. Instead, they violate God’s moral absolutes through sexual perversions, as we saw in the previous article. This article will continue that discussion.

The word translated beginning refers to “the beginning of a process with a definite end or goal.” For born-again Christians, the goal should be to have such reverence, worship, and obedience to God that they reflect God’s holy nature.

The Bible reveals that God is a moral being, and He created people in His image as moral beings. He revealed moral absolutes to humanity and forbids violations.

God appointed mankind to administer His rule over this earthly province of His universal kingdom in accordance with those moral absolutes. Consequently, God holds people morally accountable. But humanity rejected God’s rule and asserted its own self-rule, violating and perverting God’s fixed order of moral law.

Sexual Violations and Perversions

A significant way in which humanity began to violate God’s moral absolutes was through perverting human sexuality. God instituted marriage because He created human beings with male and female sexuality (Gen. 1:27). Thus God alone has the authority to define marriage and determine the proper use of sexuality.

He intends all human sexual relationships to take place exclusively within the bonds of male-female marriage, a life-long union of a man and a woman. Any deviation from that system violates God’s intended order.

The Bible addresses several types of sexual violations and perversions. The previous article addressed fornication and adultery. This article will expound on adultery, as well as address incest, pedophilia, and bestiality.

Adultery

Adultery is “sexual unfaithfulness of a married person; voluntary sexual intercourse of a married man with another than his wife or by a married woman with another than her husband.”

God regards adultery as a grievous sin. This point was illustrated through God’s response when Abraham and Sarah misled Abimelech, king of Gerar. They hid the fact they were husband and wife, so Abimelech innocently took Sarah for himself (20:1–2, 5). Before he touched her, God told him to restore Sarah to Abraham, her husband, or all the people of his household would die (v. 7).

So Sarah was restored to Abraham. God’s response revealed (1) adultery is a sin, not only against a spouse, but also against God; and (2) adultery can cause serious consequences.

Adultery Under the Mosaic Law. In the Law that God gave to Israel through Moses, He commanded, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14; Dt. 5:18). He told Moses to tell the Israelites the consequences of their obedience or disobedience. If they would obey His commandments, they would be blessed more than any other nation (Dt. 28:1–14). The world would recognize Israel’s blessing was the result of its obedient relationship with God (v. 10).

But if Israel disobeyed His commandments, the nation would be cursed severely (vv. 15–68). It would be “an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword” among the nations (v. 37). God’s twofold way of dealing with Israel indicates adultery has dire consequences for a nation.

In Leviticus, God revealed that adultery defiles a person (Lev. 18:20). Ancient nations that became characterized by adultery and other immoral practices defiled their land and were removed from it in judgment (vv. 24–28).

When God administered His rule over Israel through the Mosaic Law, He required the death penalty for both parties involved in an adulterous relationship (20:10). He indicated that this was His means of removing evil from the nation (Dt. 22:22–24).

God devised a means to expose the adulterous relationship of a woman who had kept it hidden from her husband and to confirm the innocence of a woman whose husband wrongly suspected her of adultery (Num. 5:12–31).

Proverbs 6:32 asserts that any person who commits adultery “acks understanding” and “destroys his own soul.”

In the time of the prophet Jeremiah, many Israelite men committed adultery with harlots and pursued their neighbors’ wives. God threatened to punish them and avenge Himself on the adulterous nation (Jer. 5:7–9).

Adultery According to Paul. The apostle Paul called adultery a lustful work of the flesh that is divorced from the controlling power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:19). He said adulterers are unrighteous and will not inherit the Kingdom of God, but he also hastened to indicate they can be washed, sanctified, and justified and thereby escape that judgment by trusting Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin (1 Cor. 6:9–11). God will forgive them of their violation and perversions of His established moral order for human sexuality.

Adultery According to Peter. The apostle Peter declared that false teachers who had “eyes full of adultery” and could not “cease from sin” would “utterly perish in their own corruption” (2 Pet. 2:12, 14).

Adultery According to Jesus Christ. Jesus said adultery proceeds from a person’s “heart,” the inner control center where the issues of life are determined (Mk. 7:20–21). He asserted that...
adultery defies a person and is evil (v. 23). Christ said He would throw a false prophetess “into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation” if they would not “repent of their deeds” (Rev. 2:20–22).

Jesus also stated, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt. 5:27–28).

Thus adultery can be committed in thought as well as in deed. This fact relates significantly to His declaration that adultery proceeds from a person’s heart.

In line with this truth, Webster’s New International Dictionary signifies that in the Bible, adultery is “lewdness or unchastity of thought as well as of act.”

Other Sexual Violations

Incest. Incest is “the crime of sexual intercourse between persons related by blood or marriage within the degrees in which marriage is prohibited.”

Before God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel, Jacob’s firstborn son, Reuben, had sexual relations with Bilhah, his father’s concubine (Gen. 35:22). Years later, when Jacob was on his deathbed, he did not bless Reuben. Instead, he rebuked him for defiling his father’s bed (49:4).

Through the Mosaic Law, God forbade an Israelite man from having sexual relationships with any woman who was “near of kin to him” (Lev. 18:6). This included his mother, stepmother, half-sisters, granddaughters, sisters by adoption, aunts, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, his wife’s daughters and granddaughters, and his wife’s sisters while his wife was still living (18:7–18; 20:17, 19–21; Dt. 22:30).

When the Law was in effect in Israel, God required the death penalty for all people involved in the following violations: sexual intercourse between a man and his stepmother or a man and his daughter-in-law, and the marriage of a man to both a woman and her mother. Such violations perverted what God had ordained, and He characterized them as “wickedness” (Lev. 20:11–12, 14).

Pedophilia. Pedophilia is the “erotic desire of an adult for a child.” The term includes sexual activity of an adult with a child, including all forms of sexual abuse and the production and distribution of child pornography. Those involved in pedophilia would be wise to heed Jesus Christ’s warning:

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven (Mt. 18:6–7, 10).

Bestiality. Bestiality is “unnatural sexual relations with an animal; sodomy.” The Bible declares that if a man or woman mates with an animal, that man or woman shall surely be put to death, and the animal should be killed (Lev. 20:15–16).

ENDNOTES

2 Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd ed., unabridged (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1939), 37, s.v. “adultery.”
3 Ibid.
5 Webster’s, 1803, s.v. “pedophilia.”
6 The American College Dictionary, 116, s.v. “bestiality.”

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**Arab oversaw Israeli election**

The world accuses Israel of being an apartheid state, but it was Arab-Christian Israeli Supreme Court Justice Salim Jubran who oversaw the recent elections in Israel.

Jubran is the same justice who has publicly refused to sing “Hatikva,” Israel’s national anthem, and was supported by fellow Justice Elyakim Rubinstein, who wrote that non-Jewish citizens should not feel obligated to sing words that do not speak to their hearts.

Eventually, even Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he did not expect an Arab-Israeli to sing “Hatikva,” which includes the words a Jewish soul yearns.

It was Justice Jubran who decided to halt funding for a pre-election right-wing rally in Tel Aviv. Now, what kind of democracy gives a minority Christian Arab authority to prevent government support for an all-Jewish, settlement-supporting political party? Only in Israel.

*Israel Today (israeltoday.co.il)*

**U.S. betrays Israel’s secret**

The Pentagon has declassified a top-secret 1987 document detailing Israel’s nuclear program, which every American government until now has kept silent about.

The timing came as tensions spiraled out of control between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and U.S. President Barack Obama before Netanyahu addressed Congress on March 3, warning against the dangers of Iran’s nuclear program.

Though the Pentagon betrayed Israel, it kept sections on Italy, France, West Germany and other NATO countries classified by blocking them out.

The 386-page report, “Critical Technological Assessment in Israel and NATO Nations,” details how Israel advanced its military technology and developed its nuclear infrastructure and research in the 1970s and 1980s.

*Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)*

**Israel helps rebuild Gaza**

Consuls general from Britain, Italy, France, Spain and Germany met recently with senior Israeli Foreign Ministry official Alon Ushpiz to tell him they approve of Israel’s work in rebuilding Gaza. They complimented Israel’s cooperation with the UN reconstruction apparatus, the fact that Israel has doubled its water supply to Gaza, and Israel’s recent easing of export restrictions from Gaza.

Meanwhile, Hamas, which runs Gaza, continues to brag that it has successfully rebuilt military bases and is ready for war with Israel again.

*Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)*

**Gas troubles**

The Palestine Power Generation Company has pulled out of a 20-year, $1.2 billion deal to buy natural gas from Israel’s Leviathan field off the coast of Haifa, according to *The Times of Israel.*

*The Times* said the Palestinians were concerned about “the failure of Leviathan’s owners to obtain approvals from the Israel Antitrust Authority for production, as well as other development holdups.”

*The Times* reported that an even bigger deal with Jordan collapsed after the Antitrust Authority voided an agreement that allowed Houston, Texas-based Noble Energy and Israel’s Delek Group “to develop the Leviathan and Tamar gas sites in the Mediterranean on grounds that the arrangement constituted a cartel.”

According to *The Algemeiner,* however, Egypt is considering importing natural gas from Israel. “The Israeli company Delek Drilling has estimated that if an agreement is signed, gas can begin flowing from Israel to Egypt in 2017.”

Meanwhile, *The Jerusalem Post* has reported that subsidiaries of Delek and Noble Energy “are suing the state for some $15 million, claiming the government has collected more royalties than permissible on natural gas sales.”

The firms submitted a complaint to the Jerusalem District Court, according to reports filed with the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange.

Noble has invested $6 billion in developing Israel’s oil and gas sector, with full approval of the government, the *Post* reported.

*Compiled from news reports*

**Knreset gets solar panels**

Advancing the Knreset’s mission to become the greenest parliament in the world, the installation of photovoltaic panels on the house of the legislature’s roof got under way in March after a ship filled with 1,406 solar panels arrived in Israel from China.

Integrating and connecting the solar roof is the epicenter of a comprehensive program launched in January 2014 that aims to overhaul the parliament into a sustainable building.

Combined with other energy efficient measures that have been integrated since the project’s beginning, the solar roof is expected to reduce the Knesset’s electricity bills by one-third by the end of 2015 and provide 10 percent of the building’s electricity needs.

*The Jerusalem Post (jpost.com)*

**Israeli-Ugandan cooperation**

Knreset Speaker Yuli Edelstein and Uganda Parliament Speaker Rebecca Alitwala Kadaga have signed a cooperation agreement. The two parliaments will share their experiences and knowledge in areas of legislation, gender equality, women’s empowerment and advancement, science and technology, health, education, the economy, and energy.

The agreement also promises that both will act to promote mutual interests within international events, such as assemblies and parliaments.

Others that have recently signed such cooperation agreements with the Knreset include Ethiopia, Kenya, Romania, and Albania.

*Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)*
Welcome to Europe

Filmed by a hidden camera, Jewish journalist Zvika Klein silently walked the streets of Paris, France, in February, wearing a yarmulke and visible fringes from a prayer shawl. His goal was to see what life is really like there for Jews. He was spat on, called a dog, and threatened.

So Jewish reporter Jonathan Kalmus decided to walk in England wearing a yarmulke. His experience was even worse, the UK’s Daily Mail reported in March. “It took me just one minute . . . in Manchester before abuse was flung at me,” Kalmus said.

“Fight the Jewish scum” was among the threats hurled at him. “No one could accuse me of targeting Muslim neighborhoods to provoke a reaction. This was the center of an ordinary English city and I was minding my own business,” he added. He wore a hidden camera.

Both videos are available on YouTube. Klein also wrote an article for the Israeli website nrg.co.il where he said, “Soldiers are walking every street that houses a Jewish institution, and . . . keffiyeh-wearing men and veiled women speak Arabic on every street corner. Walking down one Parisian suburb, I was asked what I was doing there. In modern-day Paris, you see, Jews are barred from entering certain areas.”

Klein decided to take the walk after the January 9 attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris where four people were murdered simply for being Jewish.

He said the tourist areas were relatively calm; but the Muslim neighborhoods were like “downtown Ramallah.”

An estimated 15 percent of Paris’s population is now Muslim. France has the largest concentration of Muslims in Western Europe: an estimated 6.5 million, constituting 10 percent of the country. France also has the largest Jewish population in Europe: 550,000.

There was one bright spot on Kalmus’s walk at the Bradford City Park’s branch of Starbucks, wrote the Daily Mail: “Kalmus said as soon as he walked into the shop, a man, who was ‘sporting traditional Islamic dress and a heavy black beard, raised his eyes from his drink, . . . stood up, raised his hand and said “Shalom, Shalom.’”

“Whatever was the reason for this man’s gesture and insistence that I shake his hand, it was warm and hopeful,” Kalmus said.

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Welcome to Europe

Zvika Klein walking in Paris (screenshot).
was recently asked to visit an elderly man whose son is my friend. When I arrived at his home, I could see he was extremely sick and that I had arrived in the last hours of his life. He had refused to talk to anyone, even his children; but when I entered his room he seemed happy, although I am sure he knew this would be his last day.

He told me he had been a drunk all of his life. “Now that I have reached the end of my life,” he told me, “I realize I have never known satisfaction—not from things, people, or even my children. And now I will be lost forever. I know you do not believe as I do, but the Talmud says, ‘A man does not tell lies on his deathbed.’ It is my own fault I will be forever lost because I have been very bad and drank far too much. I never even thought about my family. And now God will not hear my voice if I call upon Him.”

I told him, “No, my friend, that is not so. Every cloud has a silver lining; and you can have a silver lining because even now, at the end of your life, you can be saved.”

He asked, “Can I be saved after everything I have done in my life?”

“Yes,” I answered. “The Lord, our Savior, came and gave Himself for us all. So we never have to die but can live forever. We can have everlasting life.”

He asked if this was really true. I told him it was indeed true, and I read 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.” I then said, “This passage, from our own Hebrew Scriptures, is meant for everyone who comes to the Lord, even if that happens at the end of a person’s life. All you must do is trust in Him. John 3:16 says, ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.’”

Surprisingly, this man became peaceful and quiet. When his son came into the room, he could not believe what he saw and asked, “What have you done to my father that he is so quiet and says he is happy?”

I replied, “You must ask your father.”

When his father related to him everything he had heard and said he believed it, the son was displeased. I told him, “It is my duty, and the duty of every believer, to tell others...”
the truth in their time of need. We are responsible for each other.”

“How can you be responsible for my father?” he asked. “You are not a member of this family.”

I replied, “We have one Father in heaven. As members of His family, we have a responsibility to one another. The Lord said, ‘When I say to the wicked, “O wicked man, you shall surely die!” and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand’ [Ezek. 33:8]. Do you think it is against the law for me to speak as I did to your father? Are you against your father having such peace from the Lord in his last hours?”

“No,” the son replied, “but I am against you because you spoke with my father about a faith he never heard about all through his life.”

“That is just the point,” I said. “Even though he has not heard before how to have true faith in the Lord, the Lord will still receive him; and your father is happy because he is no longer lost. You will all have to stand before the Lord one day, just as your father will do soon. He has heard the truth about Jesus Christ and has gladly received Him. He is now happy in the Lord, and you and your family can share his last moments with him in happiness.”

This was a thrilling day because this man accepted the Lord as his Savior, but it was also a sad day because his family rejected the Lord. I pray they will accept the Lord soon, before they reach their deathbeds in a lost and hopeless condition.

—The Friends of Israel Archives, 1986
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