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by Elwood McQuaid
Throughout various times in history, Jewish people have had limited access to their holy city. “Bring back our captivity, O LORD,” they cried. And God performed a miracle, as you’ll see here.

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Our Cover: Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion overlooking the Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem (Hanan Isachar/ www.isachar-photography.com).

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Do you ever feel like you want to do something to help Israel in addition to praying? That was how we felt when we started the Israel Relief Fund many years ago. Over the years, we’ve seen it blossom so much that, in the past 30 months alone, people have contributed roughly a half-million dollars to it, which we distribute as humanitarian assistance through grants to organizations in Israel.

The fund’s success speaks loudly of your love and support for the Jewish people who live in the land of promise.

We created the fund based on God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: “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.”

Many people don’t realize Messiah Jesus brought the verse into even sharper focus when He spoke of His future judgment of the nations (Mt. 25:31–46). His test for separating the righteous “sheep” from the unrighteous “goats” will be the way they treat His brethren, the Jewish people:

Did they (1) feed His brethren when they were hungry, (2) give them a drink when they were thirsty, (3) provide shelter when they were strangers, (4) clothe them when they were naked, (5) visit them when they were sick, and (6) come to them in prison?

Jesus’ point is clear: The righteous will do these things, while the unrighteous will not. Although this judgment is future, it clearly reveals what God expects of us. When we give Israel humanitarian aid, we act righteously, blessing Israel.

These criteria give us direction to know how to allocate our limited Israel Relief funds to unlimited needs. Despite your generous giving, the needs far outweigh the resources.

In June, Bill Sutter, our former executive director, accompanied me to visit several of the organizations we support with grants. They include various charities that feed the hungry and thirsty, provide shelter and clothing for the needy, help those who are sick, and stand up for victims of injustice.

One such organization, Operation Lifeshield, places missile shelters in the Israeli communities near Gaza. The bell-shaped structures can accommodate more than 20 adults who need protection when the sirens sound, warning of incoming missiles.

While in Israel, Bill and I visited Rabbi Shmuel Bowman, executive director of Operation Lifeshield. He told us newer homes are built with safe rooms to provide shelter from an attack; but older homes, where most Israelis live, have nothing. Operation Lifeshield’s shelters are made of precast concrete that can withstand the blow of a missile.

They are delivered on flatbed trucks and take only a few minutes to set in place and become operable. They require no electrical service or hook-up.

When the sirens sound, Israelis in these communities have only seconds to find shelter from Arab rockets or missiles. Imagine living in one of these communities. You must be constantly aware of the location of the nearest shelter.

Lifeshield shelters cost $14,000 each, and The Friends of Israel has placed seven shelters in the past 30 months with grants from the Israel Relief Fund.

Whenever we place a shelter, we hear how extremely grateful the residents are. On the outside of each shelter, written in Hebrew and English, is a plaque that says, “Given to the People of Israel by your Christian friends at The Friends of Israel, Bellmawr, New Jersey, USA.”

Who are their Christian friends at The Friends of Israel? You are. You are a witness to them that Christians care for them. The shelters are a tangible expression of your love and concern for God’s Chosen People.

Through the Israel Relief Fund, you are partnering with us in ministry to bless Israel. If you’d like to learn more about the Israel Relief Fund, go to tinyurl.com/FOI-IsraelRelief.

James Showers is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
The UN Human Rights Council’s Commission of Inquiry in June released its 183-page investigative report into the 2014 Gaza war, blaming both Israel and Hamas for possible violations of international law, yet concluding, “The onus remains on Israel.”

The UN report differs sharply from another report that not only absolves Israel of wrongdoing but praises the Jewish state for its high standards.

Mary McGowan Davis, the former New York Supreme Court justice who led the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) commission, called that investigation “scrupulously objective.” Seventy-three Israelis died in the war, along with more than 2,200 Arabs. The UNHRC report calls on Israel to “break with its recent lamentable track record” and hold wrongdoers accountable and to provide details on its military decisions to determine their legality—even though doing so would pose a security risk.

It also concludes Israel “may not have done everything feasible to avoid or limit civilian casualties.”

The UNHRC report radically contradicts another report from the High Level International Military Group established by UN Watch, a nongovernmental organization based in Geneva, that investigated the same war and found Israel blameless.

Israel called the UNHRC committee a “kangaroo court” that failed to recognize the “profound difference” between “Israel’s moral behavior” and that of terrorist organizations like Hamas.

The UNHRC has been controversial ever since it was established in 2006. The George W. Bush administration refused to participate in it, saying it was loaded with repressive member-states that were irredeemably tipped toward serving the interests of human rights violators. The Obama administration reversed the policy.

In a 2009 Forbes magazine piece, Claudia Rosett cited UNHRC’s deplorable history of continually condemning Israel, while failing to investigate some of the world’s worst violators: “Excusing, glossing over or simply ignoring the violations of some of the worst abusers,” she wrote, “the Council, as noted by a Geneva-based non-governmental organization, UN Watch, has devoted more than 80% of its country resolutions to condemning Israel, while ‘eroding free speech protections in the name of Islamic sensitivities and steadily eliminating country investigations in places like Belarus, Congo, Cuba, Liberia and Sudan.’

In 2013 BBC News reported that five countries on the UNHRC (China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, and Algeria) actually “denied access to UN human rights monitors keen to investigate alleged abuses.” Member-states that control the UNHRC repress their populations and provide little if any rights to their citizens; yet they judge other nations whose track records are far better than their own.

The UNHRC passes more resolutions against Israel than all other countries in the world combined.

By contrast, the High Level International Military Group’s members consisted of former chiefs of staff, generals, senior officers, political leaders, and officials from the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Holland, Spain, Italy, Australia, and Colombia—countries whose citizens enjoy human rights.

General Klaus Naumann, former chief of staff of the German Armed Forces and chairman of the NATO Military Committee, declared, “A measure of the seriousness with which Israel took its moral duties and its responsibilities under the laws of armed conflict is that in some cases Israel’s scrupulous adherence to the laws of war cost Israeli soldiers’ and civilians’ lives.”

They noted Israel sought to avoid war and took unprecedented measures to warn and protect Gaza’s civilians.

The report declared, “Israel not only met a reasonable international standard of observance of the laws of armed conflict, but in many cases significantly exceeded that standard.” That group’s findings inevitably lead to the question of whether any UN body can ever be “scrupulously objective” when it comes to Israel.
Spawning a Genderless Wasteland

The June 26, 2015, U.S. Supreme Court Decision mandating all 50 states recognize same-sex marriage as a legal right marked a turning point for America.

The decision is another in a growing list of triumphs for radical minorities determined to deface America while paving the nation’s path to destruction.

Central to the “New World Order” fantasy is the bizarre notion that people are no longer born male or female and that everyone has the right to determine his or her own gender. That the stranger-than-fiction phenomenon is lauded as “courageous” and respectable is significant evidence a revolution is taking place on many fronts.

A central goal of the uncompromising militants is the destruction of the family. Gay marriage is paramount to dismantling the fundamental family unit that has been the bulwark of this nation since the country began.

Familial fragmentation is, in fact, taking its toll. Our cities teem with fatherless children who lack proper role models, guidance, and (in the majority of cases) homes that provide security and the essentials for a stable childhood and productive future. Not far behind is a generation inculcated with educational and social ideologies largely instilled by influences outside the home, many of which are hostile to traditional norms.

I have commented many times about the relentless war against Christianity being waged in our once Judeo/Christian-oriented country. Through legal proclamations, social discrimination, and militant minority agitation, the antagonists are winning. They believe we are now in a post-Christian era.

Furthermore, if we have learned anything from history, we should know there is an undeniable element of progression in an agenda-driven program for change. One victory or a succession of small triumphs is never enough; the objective is total conquest.

So we must conclude that the architects of America’s demise believe we have entered the final phase of the conflict: the destruction of the system and symbols related to the nation’s existence.

The politically correct establishment considers its opposition unprincipled bigots, racists, oppressors, and militaristic suppressors of the innocent and has declared all-out war on everything American—from the Founding Fathers to their monuments to places named after them. Even the American flag—which has stood as a sentinel of all America has represented, as a beacon of hope to masses of beleaguered, scorned, persecuted, and disenfranchised people the world over for more than 200 years—is being attacked.

Ironically, the majority of Americans do not support the irrational change sweeping the nation. Yet where is the outcry? The response to the shredding of our liberties is tepid at best.

Rod Dreher, senior editor of The American Conservative, noted, “A lot of Christians think of this as simply a matter of law and politics. It’s not. We have lost the culture. We conservatives, we Christians, did not compete at the cultural level, so culture comes first. Politics and law follow[sic] that.”

Furthermore, Dreher contended, “Orthodox Christians must understand that things are going to get much more difficult for us. We are going to have to learn to live as exiles in our own country.”

Can this dour assessment of life in our beloved republic be reversed?

The short answer is yes. But the cure requires a speedy turn away from complacency and acquiescing to cultural and political bullies. It is a huge mistake to underestimate the resilience of the American people in general and committed Christians in particular during times of severe testing.

Our available assets include these:

• **The ballot box:** Evangelical Christians who opt out of national elections cast a vote for exactly what they profess not to want.

• **The pulpit:** Freedom of religion is still a fact of life in this country. Standing up and telling it like it is, pleasant or not, is the mandate for ministers. They must speak to their people as the prophets did, articulating the problems and the remedies, rather than caving in to the culture.

• **A return to God and the Book:** Conceding to evil has never worked. Repentance, revival, and restoring God to His rightful place in our lives by displaying a vibrant faith before a lost generation can turn the tide.

One will often see stickers on rear windows of vehicles in church parking lots bearing the inscription *Not I, but Christ.* When that phrase becomes more than an emblem, perhaps things will begin to move in the right direction.

*by Elwood McQuaid*
Dear Friends,

A few months ago, the husband of one of my dearest friends died of a heart attack while eating lunch. One minute he was alive; the next, he wasn’t. My friend told me the ambulance arrived in only five minutes. While she waited, she administered CPR, but to no avail. He was gone.

He died two days before his 66th birthday. He had rarely been sick. He had no history of heart problems. He took no medicine. He was healthy. But when God decides your life on Earth is over, it’s over.

Perhaps that’s why the psalmist wrote, “What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your truth?” (Ps. 30:9). We must worship and praise God in the land of the living, while we still have breath.

The ancient Israelites turned to the psalms when they made their pilgrimage to the Temple three times a year. They sang Psalms 120 through 134, known as the Songs of Ascents. So we thought that it might be good to reflect on these Scriptures and the fact that Jehovah, the God we serve, is almighty; all knowing; and always worthy of our devotion, worship, and praise.

I asked Elwood McQuaid to write on Psalm 126 because I know it has a special significance for him that I believe you will appreciate. So look for his article on page 10, rather than in the lineup we’ve titled “Pilgrim Songs.”

We hope this issue will lift your spirits and help you focus on the One who loves you and “shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore” (Ps.121:8).

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
**The Friends of Israel**

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Mindanao, Philippines—Christians and others in the southern Philippines are extremely afraid that legislation creating an Islamic substate on Mindanao Island will exacerbate religious tensions, rather than resolve them. The Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), proposed by President Benigno Aquino III in 2014, has been approved by a House Ad Hoc Committee, with 50 members voting yes, 17 no, and one abstaining. The area, comprising five provinces with sizeable non-Muslim populations, already enjoys a measure of autonomy as the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), and the proposed BBL would give leaders sufficient independence to impose Islamic Sharia law.

“What President Aquino is doing is treasonous to Christian communities in Mindanao,” Rolly Pelinggon, national convener of Mindanaoans for Mindanao, told Morning Star News.

If Bangsamoro, or “Moro Country” with Moro being colloquial for “Muslim,” were ruled under Sharia, non-Muslims would become second-class citizens, with drastically reduced rights. Critics of the bill say it would render the federal government powerless to redress human rights abuses under Islamic law.

The government claimed the agreement would end Muslim rebel attacks in Mindanao, but in some areas violence has increased.

In Basilan Province of the ARMM, Muslim separatist groups raided the town of Maluso on June 1 and cut off the Water District Office, managed mostly by Christians. The municipality is now suffering from a water crisis that has destabilized the local economy, while security forces have engaged in a firefight with rebels that put more than 20,000 civilians in evacuation centers.

In Pikit, Cotabato Province, two men aboard a motorcycle in October 2014 threw a grenade at a United Church of Christ congregation at the height of worship, killing a nurse and a teacher. The blast injured another teacher and two other businessmen. Separatist rebels have been active in North Cotabato for the past 20 years.

In Zamboanga City, an anti-bomb squad of the Philippine Police detonated an improvised explosive device, also in October 2014. Zamboanga is home to more than 100,000 evangelical Christians and Ebenezer Bible College and Seminary, one of the first Protestant Bible schools in the Philippines.

Zamboanga City Mayor Maria Isabella Climaco announced in public that Zamboanga will never be part of the BBL and is one of the country’s staunchest critics of the legislation.

Tribal chiefs ruled Mindanao until the 1400s, when many of them embraced Islam after an Arab trader arrived on the island. In the 1900s, U.S. missionaries came to the Philippines and built a number of Christian schools in Mindanao. Many of the indigenous tribes embraced the evangelical Christian faith.

The fate of the BBL lies in the hands of the country’s 24 senators deliberating the bill. A March poll found that 44 percent of Filipinos opposed the bill, and 22 percent supported it. In Mindanao, 62 percent of those surveyed opposed the bill.

Some have also questioned the 75-billion-peso ($170 million) budget that would be allocated for the Bangsamoro government. Some critics believe the Muslim rebels could use this huge amount to buy more sophisticated firearms to expand its control. By comparison, the Philippine military has a budget of only 15 billion pesos annually (between 2012 and 2017), or $34 million.

The BBL measure was reportedly fast-tracked by bribes to lawmakers. The Philippine Daily Inquirer reported lawmakers accepted $10 million in bribes to endorse it to the Senate.

While Christian leaders fear abuses if the BBL is passed into law, some lawmakers also warned there would be war if it fails to pass. Rep. Tupay Loong of Sulu, a former member of the rebel Moro National Liberation Front, said in February that if the BBL is not passed, “the war will continue.”

by Morning Star News
(morningstarnews.org)
Psalm 126: O Jerusalem
On Wednesday, June 7, 1967, the wail of a ram’s horn blown at the base of the Western Wall in Jerusalem shook the world. Surrounded by young paratroopers with tear-stained faces, Rabbi Shlomo Goren raised the shofar to his lips and sounded the call that changed history and silenced those who said it could never be.

The sounding of the shofar was an affirmation, signaling the reunification of Jerusalem under Jewish sovereignty after more than 2,000 years. It seemed as though the psalmist’s words were coming to life:

When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad (Ps. 126:1–3).

Jewish people the world over sang, echoing the words Zionist poet Naphtali Herz Imber penned in 1877 that were destined to become the lyrics for “Hatikva,” Israel’s national anthem:

So long as still within our breasts
The Jewish heart beats true,
So long as still towards the east
To Zion looks the Jew.
So long our hopes are not yet lost—
Two thousand years we cherished them—
To live in freedom in the land of
Zion and Jerusalem.

Though the full scope of emotion cannot be captured in words alone, perhaps the unsurpassed importance of the moment was best expressed by Major General Uzi Narkiss, a commander for the Israel Defense Forces during the 1967 Six-Day War. General Narkiss was immediately surrounded by exultant paratroopers when he arrived at the wall. Throughout the night, he had mulled over what he would say if Israel succeeded in capturing the area. When the moment arrived, the loquacious commander found himself speechless.

“I was not,” he said later, “in any way prepared for this occasion. But as I stood there, I became suddenly conscious that in some inexpressible way, every Jew who had ever lived over the last 2,000 years seemed to be gathered at the wall with me.”

The Lord indeed had “done great things” for Israel, for the events of that June day brought a miraculous partial fulfillment of what God had promised to their progenitor, Abraham and what we see in these last days: “Then He [God] brought him 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’” (Gen. 15:5).

The promise was punctuated in Genesis 17:8: “Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan [Israel], as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.”

Much to the chagrin of liberal theological front liners, who would have us believe these verses are merely picturesque allegory better suited to bedtime storytelling, they dispense historical fact. This very hour, you can walk in the land, peruse the shops in the streets of a literal Jewish Jerusalem, and converse with the people who were promised to their progenitor, Abraham.

Living the Dream

One of the joys of flying on EL AL jumbo jets to Israel, as I’ve done about 50 times, is conversing with predominantly Jewish people making their first trip to the Holy Land. An elderly couple I once chatted with expressed the sentiment of millions of their kinsmen. “I’ve never been there before, and it’s like living the dream of a lifetime,” said the demure lady with a pleasing voice. “You say you have been there many times. Please tell us what we should see first.”

After we chatted for several minutes, the husband, who had been listening intently, told me, “This is something we have dreamed of all of our lives. But to be honest, I thought we’d never make it. But here we are, on our way to Jerusalem. Can you believe it?”

I did indeed; and as I returned to my seat, I was struck again with a phenomenon so difficult to put into words. The demeanors of the vast majority of Jewish pilgrims who journey to a place they’ve never seen are somewhat altered. Their eyes reflect what springs from their hearts.
Perhaps that is what happened to Abraham, whom God called from his dwelling in Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) to go to a place he had never seen in faraway Canaan. Abraham was going home, yet to somewhere that had never been home to him. It was the cord of faith that drew him to the place sanctified by Jehovah as the future home of the Jewish people.

Today the phrase Next Year in Jerusalem is a cord of hope for the future. Someday it will represent a home where peace and security are more than fodder for conversation or political electioneering—not only for a people at long last reconciled to their Messiah (Rom. 11:26–27), but for Jews and Gentiles, princes and kings, and men and women the world over.

The Ultimate Aliyah

One day, when the sounds of tribulation have been drowned by the blast of the last trump, the Lord, with His gathered band of saints, will descend to take the throne in Jerusalem as “King over all the earth” (Zech. 14:9). With His triumphant return, a full thousand years of millennial bliss will grace the planet, and the call will go out to summon His beloved children of Jacob home for the greatest homecoming in history.

Appropriately, as is laid out for us in Zechariah 14, an annual call will go out to the nations to come up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. The call will enliven memories of days gone by, of ancient Israel’s festive time of joy, when the nation reaped the bounty of harvest and the Temple courts showered the city with lights. The Israelites offered sacrifices in anticipation of the procession of the nations moving en masse to the eternal center of the earth: Jerusalem.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (v. 16).

Thus the 15 Psalms of Ascents remind us that all roads across the face of our planet lead to Jerusalem. In a time when many speak of a final Armageddon being near, which will end the chaos, brutality, and moral disintegration, we must remember the end is not yet here.

Rather, we are on a pilgrimage; and contrary to inhabiting a world careening toward a dead end, we live in a world controlled by God, who has mapped the final passage of the times and seasons. The course is up, and we’ll be meeting in Jerusalem for an appointment with the King.

Elwood McQuaid
is consulting editor for The Friends of Israel.
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Psalms 120 through 134 are referred to as the Songs of Ascents due to the superscription at the beginning of each psalm. The term ascent carries the notion of step or degree. The interpretation of this term and of the collection of psalms has engendered no small amount of debate.

Factors that emerge in the discussion include spiritual sanctification, musical notation, Temple worship, and historical significance. People not only analyze the 15 psalms individually but, as a result of the shared superscription, the collection as a whole.

Some believe the term ascent speaks of moving upward in spiritual growth. This is rather a mystical interpretation, not clearly tied to the texts except in a general sense. Augustine held this view.

He saw the ascension terminology as referring to the Christian’s upward growth. Any descent on the spiritual ladder was merely the spiritual Christian condescending to reach down to help others in the process of progressive sanctification.

Some believe the word ascent involves specific musical notation. John Calvin carefully reviewed different theories about the term and concluded the following:

This being a matter of small moment, I am not disposed to make it the subject of elaborate investigation; but the probable conjecture is, that this title was given to these Psalms, because they were sung on a higher key than others. The Hebrew word for degrees being derived from the verb . . . tsalah, to ascend or go up, I agree with those who are of opinion that it denotes the different musical notes rising in succession.¹

Numerous superscriptions within the psalms support Calvin’s view. For example, the superscription to Psalm 6 declares, “To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. On an eight-stringed harp.” The superscription to Psalm 22 reads, “To the Chief Musician. Set to ‘The Deer of the Dawn.’”

Although not clearly identifiable, these notations and many others in the Psalter show that Calvin’s idea is not far-fetched. However, most scholars do not subscribe to it. There simply is not enough evidence to affirm the position.

A third view is that the word ascent refers to the singing of these particular psalms on the 15 steps that led from the court of the women to the upper court in the Temple precincts. Wrote 19th-century Bible scholar Alfred Edersheim,

Fifteen steps led up to the Upper Court, which was bounded by a wall and where was the celebrated Nicamor Gate, covered with Corinthian brass. Here the Levites, who conducted the musical part of the service were placed. . . . Similarly, beyond the fifteen steps, there were repositories for the musical instruments.²

Edersheim followed a clear statement in the Jewish Mishnah: “Fifteen steps led up from within it [court of the women] to the Court of the Israelites, corresponding...
to the fifteen Songs of Ascents in the Psalms, and upon them the levites used to sing” (Middoth 2:5).

Presumably, each step represented one of the 15 psalms. The Levites would ascend the stairs as they sang, one step per psalm. The advantage of this view is that it has Jewish tradition from second Temple literature for support.

However, a fourth view is the most plausible: The songs were sung as pilgrims ascended up to Jerusalem for the various Jewish festivals. This understanding also allows for elements of the other views. For example, a spiritual dimension of growth should characterize the searching pilgrim making his way to the holy city, perhaps up the mountain path from Jericho to Jerusalem. Although harder to prove, the musical aspects could also symbolize the pilgrimage.

The chief idea of the Songs of Ascents appears to be that of pilgrimage, which is confirmed partially by the psalms themselves.

Although their content varies considerably, these psalms convey the idea of looking up to or going up to Zion. In Psalm 120, the allusion to Zion is implicit. The psalmist mourned that he dwelled in Meshech or the tents of Kedar (v. 5) as he cried to the Lord for help in his distress (v. 1). Zion is the Lord’s special dwelling and appears to be implied in the background.

In Psalm 121, the songwriter affirmed, “I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (vv. 1–2). Commentator Allen P. Ross noted, “The pilgrim, contemplating his journey through the hills to Jerusalem, found assurance that the Lord, the Keeper of Israel, would keep him at all times on his journey.”

The mountains surrounding Jerusalem also appear in Psalm 125. In verse 1 the psalmist compared those who trust in the Lord to Zion itself (the hill on which Jerusalem sits). In verse 2 he made a second comparison: “As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever.” Such a thought would comfort pilgrims making their way up to Jerusalem.

Psalm 122 gives perhaps the clearest picture of pilgrimage to Zion: “Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the Lord” (vv. 3–4).

The return from captivity or exile is alluded to in Psalm 126 as an historical example that could be considered a kind of pilgrimage home. However, this entire collection of psalms must be taken to be any pilgrimage in light of general statements like those found in Psalm 122.

Many other statements in the Songs of Ascents mention Zion; allude to the Lord as the Creator; and speak of the Lord’s work among the Israelites, their families, and their nation.

Although these songs were written for Israel, believers today can benefit from them and can certainly join in the
plea to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (122:6), a prayer that has validity even today.

ENDNOTES

4 Ross, 883.

by Mike Stallard

PSALM 120: OUR DELIVERER

Sung by ancient pilgrims making their way up to Jerusalem to observe the primary feasts of Israel, Psalm 120 is the first in a series known as the Psalms of Ascents. It begins with a cry for help. Although the author is unknown, the cause of his distress is all too familiar.

Sadly, the psalmist was the victim of cruel, unscrupulous enemies. His firsthand experience with scheming and unrelenting bullies, however, did not hinder his ability to communicate with Yahweh, the God of Israel: “In my distress I cried to the LORD, and He heard me” (v. 1).

What a powerful statement of assurance. His cry to the Lord was heard! The Hebrew word for “hear” conveys the expectation that the one hearing has the ability to respond. Unlike the inanimate gods of the surrounding nations that had no ability to hear anything, much less answer, the God of Israel listens attentively and acts on behalf of His Chosen People.

These verses assured the Israelites that God was aware of their situation and attentive to their needs.

Enemies plagued the nation when the author wrote the psalm. He characterized them as “lying lips” and “a deceitful tongue” (v. 2) because they were known for their lies. They lacked integrity and could not be trusted to keep their word.

In the midst of unbearable circumstances, the psalmist appealed to God: “Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!” (v. 5).

Meshech was a barbaric tribe that inhabited a region north of Israel between the Black Sea and the Taurus Mountains at the eastern edge of modern-day Turkey. The phrase tents of Kedar refers to the ruthless nomadic peoples roaming the deserts of northern Arabia and those south of Israel.

Metaphorically, the two groups epitomize cruelty and ruthlessness. It is almost certain the psalmist was referring to the groups of squatters who claimed the land as their own while the Israelites were exiled in Babylon (Ezra 4:9–10; Neh. 2:19). Later the returning exiles were forced to contend with these violent, unscrupulous intruders who illegally occupied the Jewish homeland.

Even worse, the trespassers were adamant in their defiance. The psalmist lamented, “I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war” (Ps. 120:7). Attempts at peaceful coexistence were met with an obstinate refusal to cooperate. The squatters were committed to hostility; and hope for a peaceful resolution was blocked by premeditated, continuous, and unrelenting aggression.

In many respects, Israel’s current enemies demonstrate the same belligerent characteristics described in the psalm.

The psalmist cried, “My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace” (v. 6). He was assured, however, that at the appropriate time, God will use “sharp arrows of the warrior, with coals of the broom tree” to deal decisively with those practicing such deception and violence (v. 4). The coals of the broom tree are particularly hot and slow burning, which is why it was the wood most often gathered and used for heat in the Middle East.

God warned the people who claimed the land of Israel as their own during the Babylonian Captivity that they would suffer the consequences of their actions. He declared through the prophet Ezekiel,
“Surely I have spoken in My burning jealousy against the rest of the nations and against all Edom, who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country. . . . Behold, I have spoken in My jealousy and My fury, because you have borne the shame of the nations.” Therefore thus says the Lord God: “I have raised My hand in an oath that surely the nations that are around you shall bear their own shame” (Ezek. 36:5–7).

The author was confident that God’s judgment would hit its mark like the sharp arrows of a warrior and with the intensity of a burning broom tree.

What a powerful way to begin the Psalms of Ascents. Psalm 120 provides a truthful perspective that is as appropriate today as when it was written. Despite the ruthless, barbaric nature of Israel’s unrelenting enemies, the Jewish nation can be sure God hears and acts.

by Charles E. McCracken

**PSALM 121:**
**Our Security**

Imagine a Jewish father singing to his children, “My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber” (Ps. 121:2–3). He wants his children to know God is their Protector. Psalm 121 is a song of security.

Such songs weave the basic tenets of faith into the fabric of everyday life. In merely two stanzas of four couplets each, this song teaches the powerful truth of God’s zealous protection.

In the first stanza, God is our ever-vigilant Creator who will help us when we’re in trouble. In the second stanza, He guards His people from unseen dangers.

Verse 1 reminds me of California, where I lived years ago: “I will lift up my eyes to the hills.” No matter where I looked, I could see the mountains. Israel is much the same. When trouble threatens, we are to look beyond ourselves to the mountains, which represent grandeur and strength, and remind ourselves that our help comes from the Lord, who made those hills—indeed, who made both heaven and Earth.

God is greater than the mountains, and He is our help. The word for “help” (Hebrew, ezer) connotes assistance and deliverance. Moses declared,

*There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places (Dt. 33:26, 29).*

Psalm 46:1 calls God “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

Psalm 121:3 personalizes our help: “He will not allow your foot to be moved.” God not only will guard our physical movements (see Satan’s use of Psalm 91 in Matthew 4:6), but He will also help us navigate through life’s trials.

The Lord never slumbers or sleeps (Ps. 121:4). He is always aware of our difficulties. In fact, He promises, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

The second stanza of Psalm 121 speaks of God protecting His children from trouble and unseen dangers: “The LORD is your keeper” (v. 5). The word for “keep” (Hebrew, shamar) means “to guard” or “preserve from.” It appears six times in the final five verses (translated “preserve” three times in verses 7–8) and indicates the Lord is the one who preserves you from trouble.

He is “your shade at your right hand” (v. 5), protecting you from the sun during the day and the cold at night. This imagery of the sometimes brutal extremes of desert temperatures depicts the Lord as shielding His children from many of the dangers of this world.

“The LORD shall preserve you from all evil” (v. 7). The phrase from all evil broadens the scope of protection to include preservation of the soul. The word for “evil” (Hebrew, ra) appears in various forms more than 400 times in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe calamity, injury, distress, and immorality. In this psalm, it means the disasters of life.
Yet, in the midst of such disasters, “The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore” (v. 8). We can depend on God.

by Richard D. Emmons

PSALM 122:
OUR JOY AND PEACE

Psalm 122 is the third of the 15 pilgrim songs known in Hebrew as Psalms of Aliyah, meaning “going up.” Traveling to Jerusalem, especially for the three annual Jewish festivals (Passover/Unleavened Bread, Pentecost [Shavuot], and the Feast of Tabernacles [Sukkot]), is viewed as a “going up,” or ascent, because the city is about 2,500 feet above sea level. Pilgrims regarded going up to Jerusalem as an exultant spiritual experience (cf. Isa. 2:2–3).

Psalm 122 speaks of Jerusalem’s future glory (vv. 1–5), while recognizing its future troubles (vv. 6–9).

Jerusalem is unique. God chose it and placed His name on it (Dt. 12:11, 14; 1 Ki. 11:36). An old rabbinic analogy says, “The world is like the oval of the eye. The white is the sea that surrounds the dry land. The pupil is the city of Jerusalem. And the face within it is the Holy Temple.”

God wanted the world to focus on Jerusalem: “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her’” (Ezek. 5:5).

by Peter Colón

Jerusalem is where God promised to meet with Israel and, ultimately, all peoples of the earth through the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 122 was composed by King David before the first Temple was built. Solomon, David’s son, built the Temple after David’s death. “The house of the LORD” (v. 1) refers to the early Tabernacle, which stood for God’s public honor, purpose, and plan for all people.

David, also a prophet, revealed in the first five verses that someday Jerusalem will be exceptionally blessed, as crowds come in joy and fellowship. It will be filled with praise and true justice (vv. 4–5).

What David saw was Jerusalem during the Messianic Kingdom. The ancient rabbis viewed the time as “the future days of the Messiah.” This expectancy has always been the great anticipation of Israel (cf. Isa. 2:1–3).

David also saw that Jerusalem would be exceptionally troubled (Ps. 122:6–9). Hundreds of years later, the prophet Jeremiah lamented, “All who pass by clap their hands at you; they hiss and shake their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem: ‘Is this the city that is called “the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth”?’” (Lam. 2:15).

Jerusalem means “City of Peace.” Yet it has not known much peace. Some historians estimate the city has been destroyed twice, besieged 26 times, attacked 52 times, razed to the ground 13 times, captured and recaptured 44 times. It is still plagued by wars and problems.

Therefore, God commanded, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Ps. 122:6), which involves praying for the city’s safety and the welfare of Israel and all its friends (vv. 7–8).

David loved the Lord deeply, a sentiment he expressed elsewhere in the Psalms: “One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple” (27:4).

It is incumbent on all who truly are grateful to Israel for the Scriptures, the Savior, and our salvation to pray earnestly for the peace of Jerusalem. This involves speaking out for Zion’s sake (Isa. 62:1) and serving as watchmen (vv. 6–7). Israel’s enemies would like to change Psalm 122:6 to say something like this: “Pray for a piece of Jerusalem.”

In spite of all the many peace proposals, no peace has come. But one day, Jesus will return as promised (Acts 1:11). And Jerusalem will finally know real peace through the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).
According to an old saying, “You can please some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you can’t please all of the people all of the time.” When it comes to Israel, it seems you can’t please any of the people any of the time.

Despite all of their accomplishments and contributions to humanity, the Jewish people always seem to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. They are unjustly blamed for almost everything. Perhaps that is why Psalm 123 encourages Israel to look to the Lord:

Unto You I lift up my eyes, O You who dwell in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us (vv. 1–2).

The world is a tough place. The psalmist urged Israel to look to God as servants look to their masters—or, today, employees to their employers—with respect. The apostle Peter wrote, “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh” (1 Pet. 2:18). The word fear implies respect. People should regard the Lord with reverence and give Him the honor due Him.

The psalmist begged, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us! For we are exceedingly filled with contempt. Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorn of those who are at ease, with the contempt of the proud” (Ps. 123:3–4).

The psalm is talking about the Israelites being filled up with the contempt that is being poured out on them by others. Wrote Bible scholar Charles Ryrie, “The psalmist expresses his confidence in God . . . and prays for the people’s deliverance from those who have contempt for them.”

Bible commentator Allen P. Ross said the Jewish pilgrims “were held in contempt, that is they had endured much ridicule from the . . . arrogant.”

This psalm sounds like it could have been written today. The two most scorned groups of people in the world are the Jewish people and Bible-believing Christians. Both groups should focus on the Lord, who gives strength, comfort, and peace, even amid ridicule and persecution.

The world system is dominated by Satan, the “prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). He hates the Jewish people because God loves them, chose them to bring the Messiah into the world, and has a major role for them in the future Millennial Kingdom. Satan hates Bible-believing Christians because they do not belong to him and they point people to the Bible, which provides the knowledge of how faith in Christ transfers individuals from Satan’s domain into God’s and from death to life (Jn. 5:24; Col. 1:13).

The Lord is the lifter of our heads and keeper of our souls. We need to stay focused on Him.

ENDNOTES

After a visit last spring with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, U.S. Speaker of the House John Boehner walked out of a Jerusalem hotel and declared, “The world is on fire.” Boehner was concerned about the dangers facing Israel and America.

Living in danger was nothing new to my late colleague Zvi Kalisher. He lived in Israel for nearly 70 years and witnessed countless dangers. He often described his situation as “living on an active volcano.” “Our Muslim neighbors are doing all they can to begin a new war,” Zvi would say. “They come at us like locusts, yet we are still here. So who is on our side?”

Zvi, of course, knew the answer and used it many times when speaking to Arabs. It is found in Psalm 124, beautifully written by King David: “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side . . . they would have swallowed us alive” (vv. 2–3). Psalm 124 describes God’s presence with and protection of His people and offers the praise due His holy name.

Twice, in fact, David said, “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side” (vv. 1–2). That is the Holy Spirit’s way of emphasizing the fact. He is indeed with them; and without Him, Israel would not exist.

God’s presence is what makes possible His protection. Throughout Jewish history, when men have tried to eliminate the Jewish people, God has protected them. Special days, such as Passover, Purim, and Hanukkah, are remembered with food and celebration because God preserved His people.

Obviously, Israel is not always right, nor do the Jewish people win every battle. Their right to the land, for example, is continually challenged. They have been removed from it twice. As strangers in other lands, they have been continually harassed and harangued. They have seen one third of their people murdered simply for being Jewish. Yet through the centuries, they survived it all, and their enemies failed to annihilate them.

The same God who protects Israel is the God who protects those of us who have placed our faith in God alone through Christ. He knows those who belong to Him and promises, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).

David wrote that his enemies would have swallowed Israel alive “when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the stream would have gone over our soul” (Ps. 124:3–4). But God did not allow it: “Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth” (v. 6).

The same promises God gave Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob filtered down through the ages to David and the Jewish people today. Jeremiah 31:35–36 details the Lord’s unconditional promise that the Jewish people will never be destroyed:

Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The Lord of hosts is His name): “If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.”

That reality of God’s presence and protection produces the response of praise: “Blessed be the Lord” (Ps. 124:6).

When Zvi spoke to his Arab neighbors who threatened his demise, he could speak confidently that, though they might come “like locusts,” the Lord was on Israel’s side. God does not make idle promises. He will accomplish His purposes every time.

Psalm 124 ends with this affirmation: “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (v. 8). Even if the world is on fire, the One who created
absolutely everything and has absolute power is the One who helps Israel and, as believers, helps us. You can’t beat that!

by Steve Herzig

**PSALM 125:**

**OUR PROTECTOR**

*Mayhem is everywhere.* This motto is used by one of America’s biggest insurance companies. The television commercial portrays “mayhem” in the form of a man running amok and destroying everything most people value, like our families, homes, and cars. If you want peace of mind and protection from “mayhem,” the ad says, then purchase its expensive insurance.

Mount Zion personifies someone who places his trust in the Lord. The psalmist chose Mount Zion because it is hedged between the beautiful mountains of Jerusalem that protect it from its enemies and the chaotic world around it. The Lord is a refuge and place of protection for those who trust in Him the same way the mountains shield Mount Zion.

Even though the psalmist wrote this song millennia ago, the locations he mentioned still bear witness to God’s powerful message. In fact, I have stood on Mount Zion, looking out over the mountains of Jerusalem, and taught about trusting the Lord from Psalm 125. God promises that those who trust in Him cannot be moved and will remain forever.

Certainly, the area has had its share of enemies throughout history. Some have even broken through to cause damage. Yet such trouble was not outside God’s plan. In fact, Israel’s enemies all had one thing in common: They hated what Mount Zion stood for, the covenant people who lived there, and the God who resided in the Temple. The residents knew that many wished to hurt them and take the land deeded to them by God. Yet the psalmist wrote, “For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous” (v. 3).

Mount Zion stands as a testimony to God’s ultimate protection of His people and His land, even though His people may be tempted to “reach out their hands to iniquity” (v. 3).

The psalm encourages us to stay strong in the Lord and know that trusting in Him is far better than being deceived by the enemy.

In a world of chaos and uncertainty, it is easy to give in to Satan, whom Jesus called the “ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31) and the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). When the enemy surrounds us, urging us to embrace his empty promises, we, like the psalmist, can plead to God: “Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts” (Ps. 125:4), that is, to those who follow the will of God.

Genuine safety and security are found only in the loving arms of the Lord through faith and trust in His promises. There we can experience true peace, even when the battle rages.

As Mount Zion has endured, so will those who place their trust in the Protector of Israel.

by Chris Katulka
PSALM 126:
SEE ‘O JERUSALEM’ ON PAGE 10.

PSALM 127:
OUR PROVIDER

Situated at the midpoint of the Psalms of Ascents, Psalm 127 is didactic, or instructional, and is attributed to King Solomon. Confronting the reality of daily existence, it motivates readers to set their priorities for a truly fulfilling life.

The psalm opens with three interconnected statements:

- “Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”
- “Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.”
- “It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows” (vv. 1–2).

Using the basic necessities of shelter, security, and work, Solomon figuratively described a life consumed with priorities that do not acknowledge God.

In the example of building a house, Solomon reminded his readers of the importance of planning in accordance with God’s will. Though providing shelter for oneself and one’s family is necessary, it alone does not bring fulfillment. Creating blueprints, securing funds, amassing materials, and exerting effort in the construction process can only be fulfilling if God is at the center of the activity.

The phrase unless the LORD guards the city refers to security. A safe city is essential for the well-being of the inhabitants, but watchful protection cannot contribute to fulfillment in life because no security system is impenetrable. There are too many variables over which human beings have no control. Those obsessed with maintaining security are trapped in a vicious cycle of trying to achieve the humanly unachievable. Ultimately, it is a vain exercise. People who are truly secure acknowledge God’s hand of protection as the source of their security.

Then Solomon used the figure of a driven man to describe unwillingness to trust God. The idiom “bread of sorrows” communicates the picture of someone obsessed with guaranteeing his family will never go without. A workaholic, he rises early and sits up late, haunted by fear that every moment not engaged in labor is a missed opportunity for increasing his wealth.

But a strong work ethic does not ensure freedom from want. Rather, this man’s compulsive obsession for work produces a life of tedious, unsatisfying labor. The only real guarantee against want is acknowledging God’s gracious provision.

Next, in contrast to vain activity, the psalm makes two important statements using seemingly unrelated examples: one about sleep and the other about children.

At the end of verse 2, Solomon declared, “For so He gives His beloved sleep.” The Hebrew word translated “for so He gives” conveys the idea that anxious care does not guarantee a good night’s rest; sleep is God’s gift to those who trust Him (Ps. 4:8). Unfortunately, sleep deprivation due to stress and anxiety plagues those who seek fulfillment in activity that is not at the center of God’s will.

In the next statement, Solomon observed, “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward” (127:3). In Hebrew, the repetition of a thought adds twice the emphasis; the priority of ordering one’s family life carries double significance. Children are a heritage because they assure posterity. Solomon likened them to a quiver of arrows available to an archer in battle. If a warrior has more arrows in his quiver, he has a greater chance for survival.

Children are also a reward. Nurturing and instructing children is an investment. The practical dividend is grown children who are able to assist and comfort their parents as they age.

As they sang this psalm, pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem to worship God at the Temple were reminded that ample shelter, high-level security, and frenetic work can never satisfy. Only by establishing priorities within the parameters of God’s will can we enjoy true and lasting fulfillment in life.

by Charles E. McCracken
A steady stream of families paraded across the stones and steps that marked the path to the Western Wall in Jerusalem’s Old City. I sat nearby as they carried canopies, banners, and balloons, while singing, dancing, and playing instruments. They were celebrating life—the Bar Mitzvahs of their sons.

As I watched, I wondered about the sights and sounds of this great city long ago, when faithful families came to celebrate the feasts and worship at the Temple. Young and old, rich and poor, they converged from all directions until they overflowed the rocky paths and dusty roads en route to Jerusalem. As they neared the glorious Temple, the multitude of individuals became one nation under God.

No doubt they talked, camped, and sang—their songs echoing feelings, blessings, and hope. The music did more than stir the silence; it prepared hearts for worship and taught the next generation about the Source of abundant life. They were on their way to meet with the Almighty.

Psalm 128 speaks of family, faith, and abundant blessings. The declarative opening sets the tone: “Blessed is every one who fears the LORD” (v. 1). This is humanity’s desire: to have an abundantly blessed life. But how? Life is hard, and circumstances difficult.

The remainder of the verse provides the answer: Walk “in His ways.” People who revere the Lord and remain on His path will experience showers of blessing.

With each stanza, this Song of Ascents becomes more personal as it switches from addressing “every one” (v. 1) to addressing “you” (v. 2):

- When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD (vv. 2–4).

What you have and what you eat come from the strength of your hands. Enjoy. God provides this strength and prospers your life.

This passage reminds the godly man that his fruitful wife and the children around his table are blessings (v. 3). With proper nurturing and care, his children may grow strong and bless others. His wife, a great blessing, is the very heart of the home, a loving and fitting partner.

The song also challenged ancient Jewish pilgrims to recognize God’s good hand in their lives (v. 4). With each step, they drew closer to the One who dwelt in the Holy of Holies in Zion.

Blessings cannot be hidden or hoarded. They overflow the cup of husband, wife, and family, extending to Jerusalem and all Israel (vv. 5–6). Thus the nation’s blessedness was directly related to the spiritual health of the men, women, boys, and girls whose closeness to the Lord impacted those around them.

People who fear the Lord and walk in His ways powerfully influence neighborhoods, schools, nations, and ultimately the next generation. They become like beacons, drawing others who also yearn for blessed, meaningful lives.

The blessings of obedience are available to all whose feet tread the path of God, and they last “all the days of your life” (v. 5). The legacy even extends beyond the next generation to impact one’s grandchildren, those tender “olive plants” that will gather around the tables of one’s children.

The psalm closes with a joyful shout, “Peace be upon Israel!” As the ancient pilgrims concluded their singing, Jerusalem was near; and their gracious God was waiting.

by Clarence Johnson
PSALM 129:
Our Guardian

From their sojourn in Egypt to their days in Europe during Hitler’s Third Reich to today, the Jewish people have been afflicted. Yet against all odds, this tiny group of people that makes up less than two tenths of 1 percent of the world’s population is still here and thriving as proof of the faithfulness of God.

In Psalm 129:1–2 the psalmist cried out, “Let Israel now say— ‘Many a time they have afflicted me from my youth; yet they have not prevailed against me.’” Wrapped up in these two verses is the central theme of the psalm.

Psalm 129 tunes into the grand composition of the abiding promise God made to Abraham like a conductor tunes into the majesty of a symphony. Each aspect is verified by God’s eternal vow, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

The preservation and perseverance of the Jewish people are proof that God’s Word is sure. Even though many have sought to destroy them, as the psalmist said, “They have not prevailed against me” (Ps. 129:2).

Nevertheless, Israel has had to fight many battles. God has promised to preserve the Jewish people, but He never said they would not suffer.

The same truth applies to those of us who believe in Jesus. While God has given us a bright future, He never promised heaven today. There is still suffering for those who follow Christ. In fact, Jesus told us, “You will be hated by all for My name’s sake” (Mt. 10:22).

The psalmist said, “The plowers plowed on my back; they made their furrows long” (Ps. 129:3). Israel’s enemies are pictured as oxen that plow with ease through a field. They have plowed through God’s Chosen People.

Israel’s enemies not only despise the Jews, but they also hate Zion, the fulcrum of the Jewish people and the nation of Israel. Though many attempt to separate anti-Semitism (hatred of the Jewish people) from anti-Zionism (abhorrence of the State of Israel), Psalm 129 teaches that hating the Jewish people’s desire to live in the land is the same as hating the Jewish people.

Those who attempt to destroy what God has surrounded and protected will wither like grass on a rooftop: “Let all those who hate Zion be put to shame and turned back. Let them be as the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up” (vv. 5–6).

Has God’s Word failed? Never! Instead, empires have withered and decayed, but Mount Zion remains because of God’s faithfulness.

The psalm ends with a reminder that anyone who hates Zion or harms it doesn’t take God or His covenant with Israel seriously. So God will deal with them accordingly, based on His promise to bless those who bless the Jewish people and curse those who curse them.

Centuries later, the apostle Paul reiterated the psalmist’s central idea. He was writing to his detractors in Corinth who questioned his apostolic authority: “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8–9).

Paul knew what it meant to suffer. He suffered at the hands of those outside the church as he persevered to make the gospel known in the world, and he also suffered from critics within the church who questioned whether he really was an apostle called by Jesus Christ.

But none prevailed against him because Paul knew that the power of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah was mightier than his suffering.

Perhaps you are being hard-pressed on every side as a follower of Christ. Perhaps people are persecuting you for your faith. Remember, though you may be afflicted and even die, they cannot prevail against you!

by Chris Katulka

PSALM 130:
Our Redeemer

If there is one thing we all share, it’s trouble. My Jewish friends often use the Yiddish word Isuris. I remember one day in 2010 that dumped a tremendous amount of Isuris on...
permanently removes their sin: “It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11).

Ultimately, God will deliver Israel physically from its worst enemy: Satan. Then He will deliver Israel spiritually: “And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn (Zech. 12:10).

I thank the Lord that, for the moment, He has delivered me from cancer. I thank Him more that He has delivered me once and for all “from the power of darkness” and transferred me into the “kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). Someday He will deliver me permanently; and, as King David said, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Ps. 23:6). And there will be no tsuris there!

by Tom Simcox

Psalm 131 is a song of humility. This Song of Ascents was composed by King David. Though one of the shortest psalms, it is also one of the most poignant.
David composed it while experiencing severe challenges and inner turmoil, perhaps when his son Absalom revolted against him. He sought to express one of the most important concepts in all of Scripture, humbling oneself before God: “LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty” (v. 1).

The central image is that of a “weaned child” (v. 2) who has been fully removed from the mother’s breast. Genesis 21:8 uses the same Hebrew word to describe Isaac: “So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.”

The term is also used for Samuel, with the added emphasis that he was young:

So Elkanah her husband said to her, “Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him [Samuel]. Only let the LORD establish His word.” Then the woman stayed and nursed her son until she had weaned him. Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh. And the child was young (1 Sam. 1:23–24).

Three concepts appear to revolve around this imagery of the weaned child: deliberate rejection of pride, subjection of self, and adoption of humility.

David refused to have a haughty heart or lofty eyes, expressing his deliberate rejection of pride (Ps. 131:1). It is not clear if he was fighting that tendency, which we all have at times, or if he was declaring his determination to avoid it.

He added that he was not going to try to comprehend things beyond his understanding: “Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me” (v. 1).

At times, we all want answers when there are none, just as Job sought to understand his suffering and Joseph his imprisonment. But some things are beyond our understanding. God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8–9).

David “calmed and quieted” his soul, subjecting himself to the Lord (Ps. 131:2). The verb tenses indicate he deliberately acted to change the effect his circumstances were having on his soul.

Scripture uses the same word for “quieted” to describe Aaron’s response when Moses commanded him to accept God’s chastening of his sons (Lev. 10:3).

It’s as though David were saying, “Though I am old enough to eat solid food and participate in life, I am young, unlearned, and unknowing in Your presence. I need Your comfort, protection, and nurturing.”

Humility is best defined as “seeing yourself as needing help.” It is the opposite of scorning (scorning). Solomon wrote, “Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble” (Prov. 3:34).

The New Testament restates this truth: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6). Pride is seeing yourself as not needing help (cf. Prov. 13:1).

Hence, David was teaching his people to humble themselves before the Lord. Jesus, the Son of David, taught the same thing: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk. 14:11).

David then exhorted Israel, “O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever” (Ps. 131:3).

“Hope” (Hebrew, yahal) is the expectation of the Lord’s lovingkindness and redemption, which are available to those who humble themselves before Him.

by Richard D. Emmons

Psalm 132 is the longest of all the Songs of Ascents and focuses on worship, which the nation of Israel modeled after the experience of its greatest king and worship
leader, David. Israel’s worship, like David’s, was intentional and purposeful.

This song tells of David’s (and Israel’s) relationship with God. The first stanza expresses David’s passion for the house of the Lord as an example for Israel to emulate:

LORD, remember David and all his afflictions; how he swore to the LORD, and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob: “Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob” (vv. 1–5).

The song commemorates David’s aggressive pursuit of a place for God to dwell. Perceiving that his own house was glorious and the Ark of the Covenant resided in a mere tent, David became determined to build a house for the Lord.

God forbade it and promised instead to build an enduring house (dynasty) for David. So overwhelmed was he by God’s promise that David set out to find the place, draw the plans, and secure the materials so that his son Solomon could build the Temple.

Having heard this story about David for generations throughout the land (from Ephrathah to Jaar), the Israelites determined to enter the Lord’s dwelling and worship at His footstool (v. 7). David’s love for the Lord stimulated their desire to travel up to Jerusalem. They would retell their intentions and implore God to meet them there, singing, “Arise, O LORD, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength” (v. 8).

These pilgrims anticipated obtaining the help of godly priests and hearing their fellow worshipers’ songs of joy. Their ascent to the Temple resembles our excitement of traveling to church on Sunday, knowing we will meet God and His people.

They anticipated meeting with the Lord because of their trust in His promise to David. The Lord promised David a posterity: If David’s sons remained faithful to God’s covenant with them, then His lovingkindness would not depart from them, and He would maintain their dynasty forever (v. 12).

Israel’s worshipers, as subjects of David, clung to this promise and worshiped boldly as “David’s sons.” This song encouraged them to enter God’s presence as extensions of David himself.

Perhaps this is similar to our bold approach to God as brothers and sisters of His Son (Heb. 2:10–11; 4:14–16).

The final stanza rejoices at having God’s earthly dwelling in the midst of the nation:

For the LORD has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling place: “This is My resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon Himself His crown shall flourish” (Ps. 132:13–14, 17–18).

The God of all the earth prefers to dwell in Zion. Furthermore, He promises David’s ultimate Son: the Messiah. Wrote Bible commentator Allen P. Ross:

God also promised the appearance and crowning of His Anointed One, the Messiah (vv. 17–18). . . . The burning lamp is a figure from the furnishings of the tabernacle. Here it signifies the continuation of the Davidic dynasty. . . . The “Anointed One,” first David, then his descendants, and eventually the Messiah (Christ) will be triumphant over His enemies.¹

Today we should likewise rejoice, for the God of the universe resides within those whom He has redeemed through His Spirit. He “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3) and endowed us with the power (Acts 1:8) and fruit (Gal. 5:22–23) of the Spirit, who will “guide [us] into all truth” (Jn. 16:13). What more could we ask for?


by Richard D. Emmons
You can almost hear the ancient pilgrims singing this Song of Ascents as they journeyed up to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the feasts of Jehovah at the Temple, as God had commanded: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses” (Dt. 16:16).

Psalm 133, written by King David, exalts and praises unity. The celebrants journeyed together to the House of the Lord, singing of the blessings of unity of heart and purpose.

It is also a blessing when Christians are united. Dr. James Montgomery Boice, the late pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, wrote, “Some things are good for us but not pleasant. Other things are pleasant but not good. But the unity we have as God’s people is both good and pleasant. It is even a bit of heaven now.”

David used two similes to extol the joy of unity. First, he compared it to oil running down the beard of Aaron, Israel’s first high priest: “It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments” (v. 2).

Today that comparison probably seems incomprehensible. But Jewish pilgrims would have thought of Leviticus 8:12: “And he [Moses] poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him, to consecrate him.”

As high priest, Aaron was the intercessor between God and the Israelites, once a year offering a blood sacrifice to atone for their sins. The oil Moses used to anoint Aaron was precious, scented with myrrh, cinnamon, cane, and cassia (Ex. 30:22–24), a recipe from God; and it separated Aaron and the Israelites, once a year offering a blood sacrifice to atone for their sins. The oil Moses used to anoint Aaron was precious, scented with myrrh, cinnamon, cane, and cassia (Ex. 30:22–24), a recipe from God; and it separated Aaron for service.

The oil represented God’s abundant blessing, cascading down from heaven. The fact that David described it as going from Aaron’s head to his beard and garments symbolizes God’s blessings overflowing.

David’s second simile involves the dew of Mount Hermon: “It [unity] is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion” (Ps. 133:3). Mt. Hermon is the highest peak in Israel, rising 9,000 feet above sea level. It can be seen 120 miles away. Two thirds of the year, it is covered with snow. But when the snow melts, the water feeds the Jordan River, which then feeds the Sea of Galilee and runs again into the Jordan River.

Because Hermon receives more moisture than Zion, it is more lush. Commentator Allen P. Ross said the dew symbolizes “what was freshening and invigorating . . . a fitting symbol of the Lord’s blessing on His people.”

Because Hermon’s dew descended on Zion, “there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forevermore” (v. 3). Zion is the place of God’s presence. It is where God wanted to meet with His people. They would come united in purpose to worship and fellowship with one another. God’s presence is the place of life everlasting.

This joyous song is still sung every Shabbat and is popular anywhere Jewish people are gathered, giving strength at special times.

A moving rendition occurs in a film depicting the Israeli raid to rescue 103 Jewish hostages from Entebbe, Uganda, in 1976. Israeli commandos flew 2,500 miles on this seemingly impossible mission, which was miraculously successful. As the joyful commandos flew back to Israel, they joined together to sing, “Hine ma tov u’mayim, shevet achim gam ya-chad.”

True and lasting unity can never be achieved apart from God. Wrote Dr. Boice, “Genuine community can only be established by Jesus through the power of his kingdom. This important fact makes Psalm 133 an appropriate psalm to follow the promise of blessing through the Messiah’s reign.”

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**ENDNOTES**


3 Boice, 1,159.

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**by Steve Herzog**

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**PSALM 134: Our Blessing**

Psalm 134 is the conclusion of the Songs of Ascents—the benediction of this beautiful portion of the songbook of Israel.

“Behold, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD” (v. 1). The word translated “bless” means to kneel as an act of adoration before something. It also conveys the idea of life and goodness.

When God blesses something, He bestows on it life and goodness. During creation, God only blessed living things; He did not bless the sun, moon, or stars. After He created Adam and Eve, “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply’” (Gen. 1:28).

He desired that all creation become fruitful and multiply. That was His blessing on His handiwork. We, in turn, bless Him by bending our knees in worship and adoration, thereby creating a cycle of blessing that should go on forever.

Psalm 134 reminded the Jewish priests, “who by night stand in the house of the LORD” (Ps. 134:1), that they should bless, honor, revere, and literally kneel—with hands lifted up—before God. These particular priests were like Israel’s rear guard, worshiping and praising God and seeking His protection as the nation slept.
Not only were the priests to bless the Lord, but the people were also: “Bless the **Lord**, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!” (Ps. 103:1). Everyone is commanded to bend the knee before the Almighty.

The apostle Paul, in fact, wrote to his spiritual son Timothy, “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands” (1 Tim. 2:8). Paul encouraged men in the church to emulate the priests and bless the Lord.

Perhaps he took his cue from King Solomon, who knelt before God with his hands lifted high at the dedication of the Temple: “And so it was, when Solomon had finished praying . . . that he arose from before the altar of the **Lord**, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven” (1 Ki. 8:54).

The verse that closes this entire collection of psalms declares, “The **Lord** who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion!” (Ps.134:3). When we worship God and humble ourselves before Him, He blesses us. If the Israelites had worshiped as they were instructed, God, in turn, would have blessed the nation, bestowing on it life and goodness.

This concept is still true today. If we love the Lord, we must worship Him “in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24). True worship is about humbling ourselves in gratitude before our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. When we do so, He opens the storehouses of heaven. Even during persecution and trouble, He will never leave us. As Paul wrote,

> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38–39).

Although the world moves farther away from the God of the Bible, He continues to bestow life and goodness on those who love Him. Jesus said, “He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (Jn. 5:24). And that is blessing indeed.

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Sukkah Šhalom: An Invitation

by Peter Colón
The most joyous season in ancient Israel was that of the Feast of Tabernacles. It fell during the time of year when hearts were naturally full of thankfulness, joy, and expectation.

“On the one hand,” wrote Bible scholar Alfred Edersheim, it reminded the Israelites “of their dwelling in booths in the wilderness, while, on the other hand, it pointed to the final harvest when Israel’s mission should be completed and all nations would be gathered unto the Lord.”

The Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot, in Hebrew) is among the holiest and greatest of all the observances. It celebrates the epic event God has promised: the Messianic Kingdom. Some synagogues read Zechariah 14 on the first day, which speaks of the Messiah’s arrival to rescue Israel during a future time of trouble (the Tribulation), crush its enemies, and set up His Kingdom.

This year the seven-day festival begins at sundown on September 27.

Sukkot has three main elements: booths, water, and light. They are shadows of things to come (cf. Col. 2:17). Their ultimate fulfillment will be in the Olam Ha Ba, Hebrew for “the world to come”—the Messianic Kingdom.

**BOOTHs.** Pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem would sing the Songs of Ascents (Ps. 120—134). These Psalms are hopeful and half of them celebrate the epic event God has promised: the Messianic Kingdom. Some synagogues read Zechariah 14 on the first day, which speaks of the Messiah’s arrival to rescue Israel during a future time of trouble (the Tribulation), crush its enemies, and set up His Kingdom.

This year the seven-day festival begins at sundown on September 27.

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LIVING WATERS. The ancient rabbis believed, “He who has not seen the rejoicing at the place of the water-drawing has never seen rejoicing in his life.”

In Jesus’ day, the Feast of Tabernacles included an elaborate water ritual. Each morning of the festival, a priest emerged from the Water Gate on the south side of the Temple, carrying a gold pitcher. He led a joyous procession to the Pool of Siloam in the Old City of David. Then he descended to the pool and drew water into the pitcher while everyone chanted, “Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isa. 12:3).

When he returned to the Temple about the time of the morning sacrifice, someone blew the shofar (ram’s horn). Then another priest, carrying the drink offering of wine, joined him. Together they ascended the ramp of the Great Altar and poured their libations into funnels.

The mixture flowed down to the Kidron Valley. Several other priests, holding willow branches, marched once around the altar, reciting, “Save now (Hoshanah), I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity” (Ps. 118:25). As the Levites played their musical instruments, the people sang the Hallel: Psalms 113 through 118.

When the ceremony and singing ended, a profound silence descended on the sanctuary. The benediction was said, and everyone returned home to reflect on the significance of what they had seen.

The water ritual was emblematic of the Holy Spirit. Israel’s leaders believed God would pour out the Holy Spirit on Israel and the nations during the Messianic Kingdom. “In that day,” when the Messiah comes with all His saints and His feet stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4), luminaries will dim (vv. 6–7) and “living waters shall flow from Jerusalem” (v. 8).

One year, on the final, climactic day of Sukkot, as the Jewish people were expecting the outpouring of God’s Spirit, Jesus stood up and shouted, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (Jn. 7:37). It was a genuine invitation to all who truly desired life and joy through the Holy Spirit, the true living water (4:10). His invitation still stands today to whosoever will.
GLORIOUS LIGHT. At the Temple’s court of the women, four huge oil lamps were lit each afternoon where pilgrims assembled. The Mishnah says,

Men of piety and good deeds used to dance before them with burning torches in their hands, singing songs and praises. And countless Levites [played] on harps, lyres, cymbals and trumpets and instruments of music, on the fifteen steps leading down from the Court of the Israelites to the Court of the Women, corresponding to the Fifteen Songs of Ascents in the Psalms (Sukkah 5:4).

The light emphasized the presence of the “glory of the Lord,” the Light of all lights (Ex. 40:34), and of the Messiah, the “great light” (Isa. 9:2). In the Kingdom Age, nations will come to the light: “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you” (60:1). The light of salvation is Israel’s Messiah (cf. Jn. 4:22).

It was during Sukkot that Jesus declared Himself the “light of the world” (Jn. 8:12). At His last meal with His disciples, He took a cup of wine and said, “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Lk. 22:18).

Jesus will return, but He will come as the Lion of the tribe of Judah; and all the earth will see His light of glory (Mt. 24:27, 30).

Since all things will be holy in the Kingdom (Zech. 14:21), the rabbis teach that entrance into Jerusalem in the world to come is by invitation only (Talmud Baba Bathra 75b; cf. Rev. 21:26–27).

The good news is that Jesus the Messiah issues this invitation:

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light (Mt. 11:28–30).

Editor’s Note: For more from Peter Colón on this subject, go to www.foi.org/imagextras, where you’ll find “The Feast of Tabernacles in the Days of Jesus” from our September/October 2001 issue.

ENDNOTES


2 The final two days, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, are actually separate holidays but are thought of as part of Sukkot.

Peter Colón is the creative resource coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.

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Seemingly lost in all the debate over U.S.-Israel relations is that Member of Knesset Michael Oren’s new book, *Ally: My Journey Across the American-Israeli Divide*, is a memoir—and the memoir covers more than the author’s four years as Israeli ambassador to the United States from 2009 to 2013.

“Very few people have actually read the book and seen what’s in the book, and the book is an American-Jewish Zionist story,” Oren said in a phone interview with JNS.org. “It’s about a young man who grows up in the post-Holocaust generation, whose father landed on Normandy and fought all throughout World War II. It’s a total American story. I grew up in this working-class neighborhood, and I was the only Jewish kid, and I experienced a lot of anti-Semitism as a kid.”

During his childhood, Oren—who was born in upstate New York and raised in New Jersey—also overcame learning disabilities and the need to wear a leg brace due to physical limitations.

“I had a lot of challenges,” he said. “So the thought that I would somehow get through this and fulfill my dreams—I wanted to be a writer, I wanted to move to Israel, I wanted to be a soldier—is a big part of the story, before I get to Washington. I think it’s a story that will resonate with a lot of American-Jewish readers and even with American-Jewish young people.”

Yet much media coverage and some American-Jewish communal reactions have focused not necessarily on the book, but instead on recent essays Oren wrote for *The Wall Street Journal* and *Foreign Policy* magazine around the time of his memoir’s release. For the *Journal*, Oren wrote that U.S. President Barack Obama abandoned “two core principles of Israel’s alliance with America”—that there must be both “no daylight” and “no surprises” between the allies. For *Foreign Policy*, Oren wrote that Obama’s ambition to harmonize relations between America and the Islamic world might partly be the result of his personal interactions with Muslims while he was growing up.

OREN SAID HE HAS “INTERVIEWED EXTENSIVELY IN THE CHRISTIAN PRESS” about the memoir and that his book contains “an important message for Christians, particularly in the section of the book that talks about my struggle with *60 Minutes*, which had a segment that tried to portray Israel as anti-Christian.”

In the 2012 segment, the CBS News program attempted to depict an allegedly shrinking Israeli-Christian population—what reporter Bob Simon called “the invisible people, squeezed...
between a growing Muslim majority and burgeoning Israeli settlements.” But while Christians are widely persecuted in the rest of the Middle East, Israel is actually home to “a growing Christian population, a flourishing Christian population,” noted Oren.

Before the segment aired, Oren confronted CBS News Chairman Jeff Fager about its expected content. Looking back on the controversy, he said it “was not easy” to take on a major news network and one of its flagship programs.

Also at the forefront of countering the 60 Minutes segment’s bias on Israel was the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) watchdog group.

“It was our impression that the Israeli officials knew very well that this program was in the works and that they were doing their best to provide information to the [television] networks. Sometimes there are inadvertent mistakes, and sometimes there is real bias,” Andrea Levin, executive director of CAMERA, told JNS.org.

“We can say that CBS has yet to fully correct very basic issues related to the segment on Christians,” Levin added, offering the example of “the absurd claim that Bethlehem was completely surrounded by a wall, making it something like an ‘open-air prison.’”

Oren explained that he perceived the 60 Minutes issue “not as a public relations problem, but as a strategic problem, because American Christian support for Israel is so crucial for us [in Israel].” Having served as former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s advisor on Christian affairs, Oren said, “I basically know every church in the Holy Land. I have a huge appreciation for Israel’s Christian community, and that Christian community has always felt that they have a good partner in me. I channeled that experience to defend Israel against the charges that somehow we were anti-Christian.”

Asked how he would respond to those in the American Jewish community who are skeptical of staunch evangelical Christian support for Israel—often stemming from suspicion of Messianic motives—Oren recounted his journey from being raised in what he called the “American liberal Jewish tradition” of Conservative and Reform synagogue communities to ultimately gaining deep respect for evangelical Christian Zionism.

“In my professional capacity, I worked extensively with evangelical Christians and came to appreciate, out of my liberal position, their unconditional love for Israel,” he said. “I never felt that they were trying to proselytize me, never once encountered any sort of end-of-days theology, or even Replacement Theology. It was just unconditional love.”

Despite some attempts to delegitimize his new book, Oren said his email inbox “is flooded with people saying thank you, and I draw a lot of strength from it.”

by Jacob Kamaras/JNS.org
A Word to the Church in Captivity

In June the U.S. Supreme Court issued its long-awaited opinion in Obergefell v. Hodges, in which gay rights activists won the constitutional right for same-sex marriage. Five of the nine justices granted that right, inventing it out of whole cloth.

These were the same five who struck down the federal Defense of Marriage Act two years ago, which had defined marriage as one-man/one-woman; and they did so in terms so harshly critical of Judeo-Christian values that, in his dissent, Justice Antonin Scalia said they had treated people of traditional faith like “enemies of the human race.”

Although Justice Anthony M. Kennedy used more temperate language when writing for the majority in Obergefell, I doubt that he and the four liberal justices have softened in their suspicions that traditional Christianity threatens their radical efforts at social engineering for our nation.

My chief concern now is not for the court’s stunning redefinition of marriage, which is only the beginning of mangled “marriage” reformulations. (Some people are already demanding that polygamy be recognized now.) No, my concern is for the church in the 21st century because it may soon be the church “in captivity.”

In fairness, the Kennedy majority opinion did, at the very end, make a minor gesture toward the religious-liberty rights of people holding traditional moral and religious views that oppose same-sex marriage. Justice Kennedy wrote that such believers may have First Amendment protection to “advocate” and “teach” their beliefs, even if contrary to the decision in Obergefell.

But as Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. noted in his dissent, it is highly troubling that this thin and insufficient reference to the supposed rights of religious people omitted the phrase free exercise of religion, the very phrase used by the founders who drafted the religion clauses of the First Amendment.

Justice Roberts probably suspects that the court’s left-leaning center has an anemic view of religious liberty, where Christians will be permitted to “advocate” and “teach” their views, but little else. Even then, such advocating and teaching could be restricted or outlawed if the tone or content of the message offends the diversity and tolerance enforcers or those who belong to this newly protected category of same-sex relationships.

Justice Clarence Thomas, in his dissent, noted that Justice Kennedy also failed to recognize the right of religious dissenters to actually act on their beliefs. These are ominous signs.

Of course, there will be more court cases and many years of litigation before we know the full extent of the damage the Supreme Court did to the freedom of religious conscience in America. I suggest we go to Scripture for guidance, encouragement, and impetus. If we become a church in captivity in a pagan culture, we should consider the Israelites.

In the book of Nehemiah, God enabled them to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, despite virulent opposition. And in Ezra, they rebuilt the Temple, even though violent protest was mounted against them.

Before the Babylonian Captivity, the Lord told the prophet Jeremiah how the Israelites should conduct themselves while in Babylon. Followers of Jesus would be well-advised to read Jeremiah 29, where God told His people to continue building their houses, families, and livelihoods; to avoid the corrosive effects of false religious teachers; and to “seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace” (v. 7).

We must not give up. It is not time to rush to the desert and hide or to cower in the church basement for fear that our hymn-singing might irritate our pagan neighbors. We must continue to influence decision-making, both in the culture and in the halls of government, as long as we have breath. If we actively seek America’s welfare and pray for it, perhaps we can find our welfare.

God’s promises are not up for review by a fractured and failing Supreme Court. They are everlasting. They are the rock-solid foundation for our courageous conduct in the future. We must always remember, “The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him” (Nah. 1:7).
Standing for the Truth

All Christians should obey biblical truth and manifest love, as taught by Jesus Christ. The “elect lady and her children,” whom the apostle John mentioned in his second epistle, lived observably according to these commandments. Consequently, she and her family left a lasting impression on John.

So thankful was he for having seen her children’s commitment that he expressed his approval and gratefulness. Then he urgently requested the lady to remain steadfast in the Lord. He added to his appeal a warning to her and all who read the epistle to guard against deceptive teachers who present themselves as followers of Christ but are actually antichrists. Knowing this woman offered hospitality to traveling teachers, John cautioned her against welcoming false teachers into her home.

He concluded by encouraging her and others to follow after truth, love, and the commandments taught by Christ and His apostles.

John’s Appeal

Using the phrase and now, John indicated he was embarking on something new he wanted to share:

*And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another* (2 Jn. 5).

The word *plead* means to “beseech, request, or entreat.” It was a polite way of appealing to this godly, respected woman.

Before instructing her to practice love, John reminded the elect lady this was not a “new commandment.” In fact, it was revealed at the church’s inception and has always been part of the apostolic message. Christ Himself taught it originally (cf. Jn. 13:34; 15:12, 17).

Jesus told the apostles and all Christians “to love one another.” Love is not an option but an obligation. The Greek word for “love” in the phrase *that we love one another* (2 Jn. 5) is in the present tense, meaning love is to be ongoing. Though the commandment to love is nothing new, Christians must continually be reminded to obey it.

Then John explained the practical application: “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it” (v. 6).

The Greek word for “love” is *agape*. This type of love is self-sacrificing and unique in both its nature and character when referring to God. God does not merely love; His entire nature is love. Such love transcends all human expression and is completely foreign to man’s nature. God the Father is the source of *agape* love. He freely bestows it on all believers and expects them to express it in their Christian walks.

To “walk according to His commandments” speaks of obedience. Love and obedience are strongly related.

True Christian liberty is found in loving God and obeying His commandments. Someone who loves God will want to please Him by keeping His commandments. The central command to love one another (v. 5) overrides all other commands for Christians. Believers who truly possess love for others will “walk” (order their daily conduct) in obedience to God’s commandments.

Bible commentator Glenn W. Barker said it well when he wrote the following:

*The test of love is obedience to God’s commands, and the test of obedience is whether one “walks in love.” The argument is intentionally circular. Love of God that does not result in obedience to the Word of God cannot be the love that is God’s gift in Jesus Christ. Jesus’ own love was manifested by his obedience even to death. Love of God can finally be expressed only in action and truth (1 John 3:18). Do we love our brother? Are we prepared to die for him? Obedience that does not lead to the life of love in which we love one another even to death is not obedience offered to God. Not to love means to remain in darkness (1 John 2:11) and in death (1 John 3:14). Hatred of one’s brother can never be defended as obedience to God. It is rather obedience and gratification of one’s own sin—one’s own evil nature (cf. 1 John 3:12).*

John’s Admonishment

“For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 Jn. 7).

The word *for* introduces the reason why mutual love and obedience to God’s commandments are of great and urgent importance. Only those who follow Christ faithfully will be able to detect and defend themselves against the “many
John's Anticipation

John concluded his epistle by explaining the brevity of this letter and his hope to visit the elect lady: “Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full” (v. 12).

The letter gives no hint as to the “many things” John wanted to share. Perhaps they were personal or too lengthy for a letter. Whatever the case, he decided to wait until he could discuss them face-to-face. He planned to visit the woman, but the details of the trip were not finalized.

It is usually better to communicate in person rather than by letter. Face-to-face contact is more intimate, language can be explained in detail, and facial expressions and voice tone can help transmit the message. Unfortunately, we will never know what John wanted to tell the lady.

The apostle expressed confidence that his visit would produce joy. The phrase that our joy may be full speaks of their Christian fellowship together being not only full, but also complete—a joy that would remain with the passing of time. Notice, John eagerly anticipated their fellowship would fully bless him as well.

He closed his letter with a word of endearment: “The children of your elect sister greet you. Amen” (v. 13). The sister’s children had asked John to greet their aunt. The sister was a chosen, godly woman herself. Since only the children are mentioned, the sister probably had died. The children and sister mentioned here provide evidence that the words elect lady do not refer to the church but to actual people.

This is a short epistle, but its lessons are important.

ENDNOTE

The Great Controversy: When Does Life Begin?

January 2016 will mark the 43rd anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion in America. Since then, women have aborted 57.7 million babies in the United States—more than twice the population of Australia.

The practice of killing unborn children has become so common that a New Jersey high school teacher recently presented it as an equally valid option to delivery. After administering fake pregnancy tests to girls in her early-childhood education class, she told them they could either abort their babies and do worksheet projects or keep them and care for “fake babies” (computerized infant simulators).

For more than four decades, abortion has been one of the most controversial and polarizing topics in American society, dividing the country into two camps: pro-life and pro-choice. Pro-lifers claim abortion destroys a human being and is morally wrong. Pro-choice advocates claim abortion merely destroys impersonal tissue and is not immoral.

At the heart of the controversy is the issue of when life begins. If the soul is present at conception, then abortion at any time is murder.

Although I have visited this topic in this column, it is so important that I want to take another look at what the Bible says about when life begins.

Origin of the Soul

Medical science has shed considerable light on the development of the human embryo from conception to birth. As far back as 1979, such research caused obstetrician-gynecologist Dr. Bernard N. Nathanson to reverse his pro-abortion stand.

A former atheist, Nathanson once owned America’s largest abortion clinic. He crusaded to legalize abortion and in 1969 cofounded what is now the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL Pro-Choice America). Yet in the December 11, 1979, issue of the Chicago Sun-Times, he repudiated abortion. “Science has disproved my pro-abortion views,” he wrote.

“Biology,” wrote Dr. Nathanson, “requires any civilized society to react with revulsion at the Supreme Court’s policy of abortion on request for any reason when the embryo or fetus is there—alive—an inescapable part of the human community.” He concluded, “Only a life—that of the mother—can justify the taking of another life.”

In addition to the findings of science, there is divine revelation. God has said that He created mankind in His image and has provided revelation concerning the origin of the human soul.

God created mankind in His image, meaning He made humans to be personal beings—possessing intellect, emotion, and will—and moral beings, responsible to God for their conduct.

These facts indicate two important truths: (1) People are different from and superior to animals and plants; and (2) it is wrong to murder a human being because a human soul resides within (Gen. 9:5–6).

If the soul is present at conception, then abortion at any time is murder.

Consequently, the real issue revolves around the question, “When does a person obtain a soul?” There are three major views: the preexistence theory, the creation theory, and the traducian theory.

The Preexistence Theory. Proponents of the preexistence theory claim a community of bodiless souls exists somewhere in the universe prior to each soul’s entering into a physical body. They claim that each soul leaves this community and enters a physical body either at conception or birth.

This theory is pagan. It has been advocated by Hinduism and other Eastern mystical philosophies and religions, by reincarnation proponents, and by some secular philosophers and psychologists.

Christians must reject the preexistence theory because it has no biblical support and contradicts the Bible’s teaching that all human beings sinned in Adam.

According to Romans 5:12–19, sin entered the world through the first man’s original sin. As a result, physical death came to all mankind. All people are condemned to die, not because of individual sins they commit after birth, but because all human beings sinned when Adam sinned. In Romans 5:12, the active voice of the verb translated “sinned” in the expression because all sinned indicates all of Adam’s descendants participated in his original sin. The same truth is indicated again in 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, which declares all human beings die “in Adam.”

Adam decided to sin against God in his soul, where his mind and will resided...
and functioned. In fact, all humanity’s decisions to sin are made in the realm of the human soul because decisions are functions of the mind and will.

Consequently, the only way all people could have sinned in Adam is if their souls were related to or derived from Adam. If, as the pre-existence theory asserts, individual human souls exist somewhere in the universe before the conception of each physical human body, then each human soul could not be related to or derived from Adam.

**The Creation Theory.** Proponents of the creation theory claim each human soul is created directly and individually by God at conception, birth, or sometime in between.

Several secular philosophers have proposed this theory. Since it claims that human souls come into being by creative acts of God, many fine Christians have advocated it.

However, the theory has several problems.

First, it does not fit with the biblical teaching that all human beings sinned in Adam. Since sin is related primarily to the realm of the human soul, how could all humans have participated in Adam’s original sin if God created their souls directly and individually sometime after that original sin?

Second, the creation theory does not fit with the sinful nature of all human beings from their conception. The Bible teaches that all people are sinful by nature (Rom. 3:9–18, 23; 5:19; Eph. 2:1–3) and are in a state of sin from conception (Ps. 51:5). Since sin is related to the soul, and since all people are in a state of sin from conception, all people must have sinful human souls at the time of conception.

But how could each soul be in a state of sin from its beginning if God created each soul individually and directly? The holy God does not create sinful souls. The source of mankind’s sinfulness is mankind, not God.

Third, the creation theory cannot explain how children often inherit their parents’ intellect and character. If God created each soul individually and directly, why do children often resemble their parents in these qualities, which belong to the realm of the soul, not the body?

**The Traducian Theory.** The traducian theory asserts that each human soul is transferred to offspring by parents through procreation. The individual soul comes into existence at the time of conception. Consequently, parents propagate entire human beings, not merely bodies.

Significant biblical evidence exists for this theory. For example, Genesis 46:26 states, “All the persons who went with Jacob to Egypt, who came from his body, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives, were sixty-six persons in all.” The Hebrew word translated “body” refers to Jacob’s “loins, as seat of procreative power.”

The word translated “persons” is the same word Genesis 35:18 and 1 Kings 17:21–22 use for the human soul. Genesis 35:18 states that Rachel’s “soul was departing (for she died).” 1 Kings 17:21 records that Elijah “cried out to the LORD and said, ‘O LORD my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him.’”

Thus Genesis 46:26 implies Jacob played a significant role in procreating total human beings—souls and bodies. Therefore, souls are procreated by parents.

Hebrews 7:9–10 implies the same concept: “Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak” (v. 9). Levi, Abraham’s great-grandson, paid tithes to Melchizedek through Abraham years before Levi was even conceived.

How could Levi pay tithes prior to his conception? “For he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him” (v. 10; Jewish people used the term father for any male ancestor). Levi was present in seminal form in Abraham’s loins when Abraham tithed to Melchizedek.

Since an impersonal body cannot pay tithes, Hebrews 7:10 implies that souls, as well as bodies, are seminally passed on from generation to generation until procreated by parents at conception.

The traducian theory is also the only theory that fits the biblical teaching that all human beings sinned in Adam:

> Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. By the one man’s offense many died. . . . The judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation. . . . By the one man’s offense death reigned through the one. . . . Through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation. . . . By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners (Rom. 5:12, 15–19).

The active voice of the verb translated “all sinned” (v. 12) indicates all human beings participated in Adam’s original sin and share in its guilt. King David declared, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity” (Ps. 51:5). Thus David indicated that at the time of his birth, he already bore the guilt of iniquity and deserved divine punishment.

Since sin is related primarily to the realm of the soul, the only way all humans could have sinned with Adam is if their souls are related to him. Each soul is related to Adam in the same way that Levi’s soul was related to Abraham; every human soul was present in seminal form in Adam’s loins when he sinned.

In conclusion, both science and divine revelation support the fact that human life begins at conception. Biology reveals the fetus is a human being; and biblical evidence, as explained in the traducian theory, maintains that the human soul comes into existence at conception. Therefore, abortion murders an innocent human life.

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**Endnotes**


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Renald E. Showers is an author and international conference speaker for The Friends of Israel.
100,000 Gazans in Israel?

Former U.S. State Department official David Makovsky has proposed that Israel increase the number of Gazans it admits each day to 100,000 from the current 5,000. Makovsky claims Israeli jobs would make the Arabs less hostile to Israel and undermine Hamas’s control of Gaza.

Makovsky and Ghaith Al-Omari, now senior fellows at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, see their proposal as a path to a more peaceful Middle East. Israeli officials see things differently. They see the number 100,000 as arbitrary—based neither on Israel’s security needs nor the number of available jobs.

These officials note that Israel’s security apparatus in the West Bank can effectively weed out workers with terrorist backgrounds, but Israel has no way to screen out such people from Gaza. They say a modest number of skilled construction workers from Gaza would benefit Israel, but only if they pose no security danger—and not in numbers anywhere near 100,000.

Rafael Medoff/JNS.org

COOP cancels Israel boycott

COOP, a national supermarket chain in Sweden, has backed out of a planned boycott of the sale of Israeli products. Israeli Ambassador to Sweden Isaac Bachman, along with the Israeli Foreign Ministry, convinced COOP to cancel the boycott.

“We didn’t talk about the righteousness of Israel; rather we spoke in the name of fair trade and avoiding discrimination of any state,” Bachman said.

Pro-Israel activists on Swedish social media urged the cancellation, while the country’s Israeli embassy published the contact information of the supermarket chain’s executives, encouraging people to contact them and voice their opposition. Thousands threatened to boycott COOP if it boycotted Israel.

Bachman said the supermarket’s executives “were shocked by the volume of messages they received,” which led them to cancel the boycott.

JNS.org

Waste to fuel

An Israeli government body that handles hazardous waste will soon operate a unique facility in Israel that recycles plastic and turns it into fuel.

The facility will derive 1,320 pounds of an oil-like substance from every ton of plastic waste it treats. Every day, Israelis dispose of some 1,500 metric tons of plastic waste from homes, agriculture, and industry. Most of it, 75.7 percent, is buried in landfills. The plant will melt and depolymerize the plastic until a fuel resembling oil is derived. Company CEO Dr. Gilad Golub told Israel Hayom, “The end product is an oil substitute that can be refined and replace the need to purchase oil.”

Israel Hayom/JNS.org

New ambassador to Israel

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has appointed Egypt’s first ambassador to Israel in three years, marking a possible sign of continued warming relations between the two Mideast powers. Hazem Khairat previously served as Egypt’s envoy to the Arab League and Chile. Egypt recalled its last envoy in Tel Aviv in 2012 under then president Mohammed Morsi—a leader of Hamas’s parent group, the Muslim Brotherhood—in protest of Israel’s Operation Pillar of Defense in Gaza that year.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu praised Egypt’s decision. “It strengthens the ties between our countries. It strengthens peace,” he said.

JNS.org

Israel makes MIT list

IDE Technologies, an Israeli water desalination company, has been named by the MIT Technology Review as one of the world’s 50 smartest companies for 2015. The magazine said IDE offers “more affordable water desalination at a scale never before achieved.”

IDE was ranked 18th. Topping the list was Tesla Motors. “To make the list, a company must have truly innovative technology and a business model that is both practical and ambitious, with the result that it has set the agenda in its field over the past 12 months,” the MIT Technology Review said.

Israel Hayom/JNS.org

Security fence near Jordan

The Israeli security cabinet has approved building an 18.64-mile fence along the Jewish state’s southern border with Jordan.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, “It joins the fence that we built along the length of our border with Sinai, which blocked the entry of illegal migrants into Israel and—of course—the various terrorist movements. This step also joins the fence that we built on our border on the Golan Heights.”

The new fence will be built completely within Israeli territory and was approved in coordination with the Jordanian government.

JNS.org

Israeli woman in space?

Israeli Science, Technology and Space Minister Danny Danon has asked the Israel Space Agency (ISA) to begin searching for the first female Israeli astronaut to be sent to space. Danon’s quest comes 12 years after the first Israeli astronaut, Ilan Ramon, tragically died aboard the space shuttle Columbia when it burned up upon re-entry into Earth’s atmosphere.

Danon spoke with America’s National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) about working together with Israel on future manned space flights.

Israel Hayom/JNS.org
ISRAEL MY GLORY

U.S. President Barack Obama blindsided Israel in January 2011, when he told Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas he would back a Palestinian state that pushed Israel back to the 1949 armistice lines, according to a new book by Michael Oren, former Israeli ambassador to the United States.

In Ally: My Journey Across the American-Israeli Divide, Oren wrote, “Israel was never consulted about this conversation nor even informed,” and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was “outraged.”

Ally apparently has stirred up controversy and is accused of being unflattering to both American Jews and the Obama administration.

In the Israeli daily Haaretz, Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie said Oren sees American Jews “as unreliable in their support of Israel, quick to criticize the Jewish state, and unable to appreciate Israel’s vulnerabilities.”

In the National Review, Matthew Continetti declared, “Reading Oren’s new memoir Ally, it’s clear that Israel has been on her own since the day Obama took office.”

Continetti said, “Oren is not a conservative looking to make a political issue of support for Israel… The author of a classic history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East and a sometime professor at Yale, Harvard, and Georgetown, Oren served for five years as a contributor to The New Republic, has contributed to The New York Review of Books, and supports what he calls a ‘two-state situation’ focused on institution-building and economic aid to the West Bank. He’s a member of the Knesset, but not of Netanyahu’s Likud Party. He joined the comparatively dovish Kulanu Party last December. Oren’s credentials and relationships make him hard to dismiss.”

Continetti said Oren told Israeli journalist David Horovitz in June, “The Obama administration was problematic because of its worldview: Unprecedented support for the Palestinians.”

In The Times of Israel, Horovitz wrote that Ally contains several revelations, including these: Former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has a “visceral dislike” of Netanyahu and advised President George H. W. Bush to ban him from the White House; Obama told Israel, “We could do much worse than have a bunch of Erdogan’s in the Middle East,” despite Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s pro-Hamas, anti-Israel stance; and Netanyahu feels so vilified by the Israeli press that he once told Oren, “If I walked on the Sea of Galilee, the Israeli papers would write, Bibi can’t swim.”

Compiled from news reports
Recently I was in Hebron where I met many Swedish tourists. Their guide was giving them false information that was unsympathetic to Israel, and many of them believed him.

Two of the tourists came up to me and asked if I was from Israel.

“Yes, I am,” I replied.

I told them I spoke Swedish, and one said, “Good. Would you please tell us about this place? We think something we have heard is wrong.”

I told them, “Not only something, but everything your guide said was wrong.”

“How do you know this?” one asked.

I answered, “Because here in Hebron God said to Abraham, ‘Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever’” (Gen. 13:14–16).

Then one asked, “Do you believe in God?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“We do also,” she said, “but we are Christians, not Jews.”

I said, “There is one Father, one God, and one Holy Spirit.”

“You speak like a Christian,” she exclaimed. She quickly told her friend, “He spoke about the Lord, and he is a Jew.”

“Why are you surprised?” I asked. “The first apostles were Jews and came from this nation.”

Then the guide came over to me and asked, “Are you trying to take my livelihood away from me?”

“No,” I answered. “I only want to clarify things for these tourists. You should not tell them false stories. You should know the Bible if you want to be a good guide here in Israel. This is the land of the Bible.”

“Not Hebron or Shechem,” he replied.

I then asked the group who Abraham was.

The guide answered, “He was Islamic.”

The tourists knew he was wrong. The guide then said, “Let us go now.” But the tourists did not leave. They wanted to hear more. So I spoke to them, as well as to many Arabs and Jewish people who passed by. I spoke first in Swedish, then in Arabic, and then in Hebrew so all could understand.

Some remarked that only the Jews are the Chosen People. I said, “This is true. However, God gave His Son to the whole world, as John 3:16 tells us. Romans 3:23 says all people are sinners. Jesus Christ ‘gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people’” (Tit. 2:14).

One Jewish person said, “Now you are going too far. Before you spoke from the Bible, but now you are talking about another subject.”

“This is the same subject,” I said. “The New Testament is a continuation of the Hebrew Scriptures.”
I then read Jeremiah 31:31–34, where God said, “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.”

Another Jewish person responded, “You can speak like this because you never had to fight for your country.”

Then I showed him my army book and all of my distinguished service awards.

I told him, “Even now I serve in the army, and my children also. I believe on the Lord and also serve my country. We who are believers are the only ones who can say we are really Jews. We have received the Lord as our Savior, for only in Him can we be saved.”

Another asked, “How can you speak about Christ in such a holy place as this?”

I said, “I can speak about Him in holy places because He is holy. The Lord has given each of you a choice—to accept or reject His Son. Ask Him, through prayer, to come into your heart. He is the One who loved the world so much He gave His Son for us all, so we should not perish but have everlasting life.”

The Swedish tourists were happy to hear all of this. The Arabs and Jewish people were not, but their attitudes changed. They did not attack me because of my stand for the Lord.

The guide asked me, “Where shall I take the group now?”

I replied, “Follow what is written in Psalm 48:12–14, ‘Walk about Zion, and go all around her. . . . For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death.’”

He was happy to hear this and invited me to his home. It is good to know visitors and Israeli citizens alike can have the opportunity to hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

—The Friends of Israel Archives, 1986

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

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