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FROM THE EDITOR

There has always been a generation gap. Growing up, I never felt my parents understood me, my taste in music (Dad said it wasn’t classical), or my desire to dress like my friends instead of like a refugee from the Old Country.

I’m sure my children didn’t think I understood them. And Absalom probably didn’t think his father, King David, understood him (which psychiatrists no doubt would say led to Absalom’s rebellion).

Today it seems every ministry wants to attract the millennial generation, and every consumer market in America is trying to understand millennials and cater to them.

In June 2015, a New York Times piece titled “Oh, to Be Young, Millennial, and So Wanted by Marketers” began by describing how the makers of the candy Tic Tac invented a special flavor solely to attract millennials. “It’s yet another play in the millennial mania that is overtaking all manner of businesses, and seems to be getting more obsessive by the day,” wrote Hilary Stout. “Not since the baby boomers came of age has a generation been the target of such fixation.”

Who are the millennials? Are they so unlike the rest of us? After all, they are our children and grandchildren, our brothers and sisters, our nieces and nephews. They’re our family. So what makes them different?

The answer is lots of things. Society. Technology. The fact that they were raised by baby boomers who wanted to give their children everything, rather than by traditionalists who embraced the no-frills legacy of the Depression and World War II.

Every generation differs from the one that preceded it. To help us understand millennials and their views on life, church, and Israel, we’ve asked four of them to write for this issue. One is our own Chris Katulka, a Bible teacher and conference speaker for The Friends of Israel and host of our radio broadcast, “The Friends of Israel Today.” Chris holds a Master of Theology degree (ThM) from Dallas Theological Seminary. Another is JD Lemming, the graphic artist who designs this magazine, who also holds a ThM from Dallas. And Nate Hoff, who holds a ThM from Dallas and is a graduate teaching assistant and PhD candidate there.

And, for a woman’s perspective, we asked Bethany McIlrath. Her articles have appeared in many publications, including RELEVANT magazine (a favorite among millennials); and her mother-in-law is my dear friend Nancy, who led me to Christ. (You’ll have to read my book, The Search, for that story.)

So there you have it. To members of all generations, we hope you enjoy this issue!

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
On our spring Up to Jerusalem tour, we made a stop at the headquarters of The Jewish Agency for Israel in Jerusalem to deliver funds donated to help Jewish people in other parts of the world make Aliyah. "What is Aliyah?" you ask. In Hebrew, it means “to go up,” and it refers to the process of Jewish people returning to their ancestral Promised Land.

The Jewish Agency is the quasi-governmental organization that oversees the return and immersion of the Olim, the Jewish people who return to Israel. It is quite a process to integrate someone into the language, culture, and economy of a new country. Yet Israel receives these people with open arms and helps them adapt to their new homeland.

Danielle Mor, The Jewish Agency vice president of Israel and Global Philanthropy, hosted our group in Chaim Weizmann Hall, where Chaim Weizmann was sworn in as the first president of Israel in 1948. Yehuda Sharf, director of the Aliyah, Absorption and Special Operations Unit, spoke to our group; and then I presented the gift to Yehuda and Danielle.

They were extremely touched. “You are more than friends of Israel. You are family!” Yehuda told us, and then he gave me a big hug. It was a moving moment. Danielle then presented me with a beautiful framed plaque in recognition of the gift. It commended The Friends of Israel for its support, which facilitates the successful return of Jewish people to the land of Israel.

Included on the inscription of the plaque is a verse from Jeremiah 32:41: “I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.” Danielle pointed out that in all of the Hebrew Scriptures, this is the only place where God says He will perform something with all of His heart and soul.

In Deuteronomy we are commanded to love and serve the Lord our God with all of our hearts and souls (11:13; 30:6). It is natural that God instructs us to give all of ourselves—heart and soul—to loving and serving Him. God asks for our very best effort, and He doesn’t want us to give ourselves to any other god. As the Creator of this universe, He is right to expect nothing less. When we give our hearts and souls, we hold nothing back, demonstrating our total commitment to the Lord.

But what does it mean for God to say He will do something with all of His heart and soul? It indicates that He is committed to the task with everything He has. Such commitment reveals the importance God places on the promised event. It is a certainty that He will faithfully fulfill His promise.

In the context of Jeremiah 32:41, the Lord declares that He will gather the Jewish people from the places where He has scattered them and return them to the land of Israel. After returning them to the land, God promises to give them a new heart and an everlasting covenant, and He promises not to turn away from doing good for them. He will plant them in the land of Israel, never to be uprooted again.

God’s declaration that He will perform these tasks with all of His heart and all of His soul shows the importance He places on bringing the Jewish people back to the Promised Land and planting them there. He regards it as a work of highest priority.

I believe we are fortunate to be witnessing and supporting the gathering and return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. God has not rejected the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israel’s future is secure because the Lord has promised to make it secure, and He has done so with all of His heart.
GETTING BACK TO BASICS

I was sitting in the front row at the Embassy of Israel in Washington, DC, when Israeli Ambassador Ron Dermer made a statement that drew applause from the Christian leaders in the room. “The stronger the Christian identity, the stronger the support for Israel.”

Dermer said a Christian’s identity comes from the teachings of the Old and New Testaments; and the deeper Christians are rooted in God’s Word, the more likely they will support Israel.

Of course, without the right hermeneutic, even devout Christians go astray when it comes to Israel. But Ambassador Dermer’s statement has merit. When we read the Scriptures, we cannot escape the fact that, from Genesis to Revelation, God has a unique plan for the Jewish nation.

But what happens when Christians stop reading the Bible? What happens when we forget how David defeated Goliath or how Jesus fed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish? Or worse, we never learn of these events or teach them to our children?

According to LifeWay Research, this isn’t a hypothetical problem. The crisis of biblical illiteracy in America, including in the church, is real.

A survey taken this year reveals that almost 87 percent of American households own a Bible and 81 percent believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God; but for 53 percent of these Americans, that’s not enough reason to pick it up and read it. To make matters worse, only 3 percent of teenagers read the Bible daily.

Years ago, researchers George Gallup and Jim Castelli concluded, “Americans revere the Bible—but, by and large, they don’t read it. And because they don’t read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates.”

What happens when Christians don’t read the Bible? They lose God’s point of view and adopt a worldview of their own. Biblical illiteracy is profoundly affecting the church and the way it views the core tenets of the faith. The LifeWay Research survey discovered that one in five evangelical Christians believe there are multiple ways to get to heaven, even though Scripture clearly teaches the only way is through faith in Christ (Acts 16:31; Eph. 2:8–9).

Major doctrinal issues concerning salvation in Christ alone, the Trinity, and God’s plan for Israel become less substantive when the Bible becomes less important in a Christian’s life.

Another symptom of biblical illiteracy is the moral deterioration in both home and society. Of those surveyed, 81 percent believe America is in a steady moral decline. The Scriptures once anchored us to home and society. But as more and more people know less and less about God’s Word, the biblical worldview fades, supplanted by personal opinion. The result: the death of right and wrong.

It’s time to go back to square one. Wrote Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, “Churches must recover the centrality and urgency of biblical teaching and preaching, and refuse to sideline the teaching ministry of the preacher. Pastors and churches too busy—or too distracted—to make biblical knowledge a central aim of ministry will produce believers who simply do not know enough to be faithful disciples.”

At home, we need a resurgence of simple Bible reading. We need to introduce our children and grandchildren to the life-changing Scriptures and instill in them a love for and discipline in reading God’s Word.

It’s never too late to start. In fact, today is a great day to begin. After dinner, open the Bible and read a chapter to your family. Encourage your children or grandchildren to spend five minutes a day reading God’s Word and then pray with them. If we all take these small steps, perhaps we can ignite new generations whose Christian identities are found in the Scriptures and who have God’s point of view.

by Chris Katulka
IRANIAN THREAT GROWS

As the war in Syria enters its end-game, Iran is closer than ever to achieving its long-term, strategic objective of establishing a land corridor for direct and unimpeded access to the Mediterranean Sea.

The so-called Shiite Corridor—which would run from Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon—would give Tehran what it has coveted since the 1979 Islamic Revolution: a contiguous border with Israel from which to target the Jewish state.

In its quest for regional dominance, Iran has deftly exploited the Islamic State’s recent military setbacks. The Islamic State (ISIS) has lost more than two-thirds of the territory it seized from Iraq and Syria in 2014, when the “caliphate” reached the apex of its power and influence.

As ISIS has retreated, Tehran has aggressively moved to fill the ensuing power vacuum by consolidating control over vast swathes of territory in the Levant (the area encompassing Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq). It recently deployed the Revolutionary Guard, Iran’s most powerful security and military organization, as well as Shiite militias—including Hezbollah, a jihadist group committed to destroying Israel—near Syria’s southern borders with Israel and Jordan.

Iran has also projected power by launching missiles into Syria. Although the strikes were aimed at ISIS to retaliate for terrorist attacks in Iran in June, the Iranian military said they were also meant to send a warning to Israel.

Meanwhile, the decline of ISIS has strengthened the once-teetering regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who is being kept in power by Iran and Russia. Some observers worry that a newly emboldened Assad, with help from Tehran, may try to retake the strategic Golan Heights that Israel captured during the Six-Day War in June 1967.

In addition to its growing influence in Syria and Iraq, Iran is actively working to infiltrate and destabilize Jordan, as evidenced by the recent arrest there of an Iranian operative. If Iran were to gain a foothold in Jordan, it would have yet another border from which to target Israel. Amid the growing uncertainty, Israeli and Jordanian intelligence cooperation. Israel has supplied satellite photos of Iranian military activities along Jordan’s borders with Iraq and Syria.

Israel has also stepped up air strikes aimed at destroying Iranian weapons shipments to Hezbollah in Syria and Lebanon. Hezbollah’s leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has responded by threatening to strike the Dimona nuclear reactor in southern Israel. Hezbollah is believed to have more than 100,000 rockets and missiles aimed at Israel, including sophisticated long-range rockets. Israeli analysts have warned that Israel should react to any aggression from Hezbollah by striking infrastructure inside Iran.

In 2004, Jordan’s King Abdullah warned that Iran was attempting to create a “Shiite crescent” stretching from the Persian Gulf to Lebanon to expand Tehran’s influence in the heart of the Sunni-Arab world. This prediction, largely dismissed at the time, is now becoming a reality.

“The threat of Iranian dominance in the region is immediate,” the director general of the Israeli Intelligence Ministry, Chagai Tzuriel, recently told The Jerusalem Post. “Iran’s strengthening in Syria is an issue that must be addressed right now. . . . Having Iran on the Iraq-Syria border is a new chapter. . . . If Iran and Hezbollah manage to base themselves in Syria, it would be a permanent source of instability in the entire region.”

by Soeren Kern, a senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, a nonpartisan foreign-policy think tank based in New York City
“If loving and worshiping Christ is a crime, I am guilty as charged,” Egyptian believer Majed El Shafei told the judge. The Egyptian government had charged him with apostasy for leaving Islam, a crime punishable by death, according to Sharia (Islamic) law.

A lawyer trained in Alexandria, Egypt, El Shafei said Egypt’s persecution of its Christian minority moved him to examine the Bible. “You don’t torture or persecute somebody unless you are scared of the truth they carry. I started to read the Bible and believe in Christianity. I converted from Islam to Christianity.”

Upon hearing of his conversion and work to raise awareness of Egypt’s human-rights violations, authorities arrested El Shafei and tortured him for seven days. They shaved his head and hung him upside down, plunging his head in cold and hot water; beat him; tied him to a cross for two and a half days; cut his shoulder to the bone and put salt and lemon in the open wound; and released dogs to attack him.

Miraculously, the dogs refused to attack. “I prayed, and... the three dogs refused to attack me. They are trained to listen to their master, but it is in my opinion there is no higher master than Christ,” said El Shafei. His wounds landed him in the hospital, from which he escaped to Israel, the only neighboring non-Muslim country where he knew he would be safe.

El Shafei’s story is one of many featured in the Clarion Project’s new documentary, Faithkeepers. The film, which debuted in May in churches throughout the United States, chronicles the current humanitarian crisis and genocide affecting millions of Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East.

In an interview with Israel My Glory, human-rights lawyer and Faithkeepers’ producer Paula Kveskin described the film’s purpose: “It’s about the story behind the headlines of the persecuted—primarily Christians, but not exclusively—who are living in the Middle East, to give a voice to their struggles, to learn their individual stories, and to hopefully inspire and awaken people in the U.S. to stand up and make a difference.”

The film presents many chilling statistics: In 1915, Christians made up 20 percent of the Middle East. Today, they constitute a mere 4 percent. Since 1975, more than 3.5 million Christians have fled their homes in Muslim countries to escape beheadings, kidnappings, rape, bombings, and torture. In Iraq alone, 1 million have fled in the last 10 years. In the past five years, around 700,000 Christians have fled Syria. And since the 1980s, around 1 million have fled Egypt.

Unfortunately, genocide is nothing new, the film explains. The current slaughters mirror those of Armenians and Jews during the early 1900s. From around 1900 to 1932, Muslims cleansed the Middle East of Iraqi, Syrian, Yemenite, Egyptian, and Lebanese Jews; and from 1914 to 1922, the Ottoman Empire murdered more than 1.5 million Armenian Christians.

Assyrian-Christian activist Wisam Naoum commented, “The world many times over has vowed ‘never again’ and then another atrocity comes. . . . If we’re going to say ‘never again,’ then we should actually do something. This new wave of ISIS is not something new. It’s something that we’ve dealt with for a very long time.”

To find out where Faithkeepers is playing near you, host a screening, or become involved in helping persecuted Christians in the Middle East, visit Faithkeepersmovie.com.

by Jennifer Miles
The Gift That

Did you know it’s possible to give a one-time gift to The Friends of Israel—a gift annuity—that will reap spiritual fruit among God’s Chosen People? And that same gift can increase your income and reduce future tax payments.

If you want to invest in the Lord’s work yet need to make the most of your financial resources, then you may want to consider purchasing a gift annuity from The Friends of Israel.

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WE ARE HIS WITNESSES (ACTS 5:32)

Discerning the call into ministry can be difficult for young people, but YouthFEST is here to help. During this three-day conference, high-school-age students will benefit from an outstanding lineup of missionaries, music, and teaching that provide an up close and personal look into the experience of full-time ministry.
November 2 marks the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, a well-known watershed moment in the history of the establishment of the modern State of Israel. But the Balfour Declaration’s effectiveness for the Zionist cause could have been impaired had a lesser-known historical event—the Battle of Be’er Sheva—turned out differently.

On November 2, 1917, British Foreign Secretary Lord Arthur James Balfour wrote a letter to Lord Baron Lionel Walter Rothschild, assuring him the British government would work toward establishing a Jewish state in Israel’s ancient homeland. The letter, which became known as the Balfour Declaration, read,

*His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.*

The Declaration provided great hope to the Jewish people of World War I. They knew Britain’s support of Zionism was significant because Britain was a global leader and the empire that would soon assume post-war control of Palestine. (Roman Emperor Hadrian renamed Israel “Palestine” in AD 135 to spite the Jewish people.)

Though the dream of a modern Jewish state would not be realized until 1948, the Balfour Declaration played a crucial role in paving the way for subsequent legal promises: In 1922, the Council of the League of Nations—comprised of 51 countries—reaffirmed the Balfour Declaration in its Mandate for Palestine. And on November 29, 1947—70 years ago this year—the UN General Assembly declared its support for a Jewish state by passing Resolution 181, called The United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine.

**CHARGE OF THE 4TH LIGHT HORSE BRIGADE**

While many people know about the Balfour Declaration, few have heard of the historic Battle of Be’er Sheva, also known as The Charge of the 4th Light Horse Brigade. The charge took place in the desert town of Be’er Sheva on October 31, 1917—the day Britain’s war cabinet agreed to the Balfour Declaration, which became public two days later.

The battle pitted the Ottoman armies, made up of Turks and their German allies, against the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC). The Battle of Be’er Sheva figured significantly into the Ottoman Empire’s defeat and the Jewish people’s subsequent return to their ancient homeland.

On October 28, 1917, 800 ANZAC troops of the 4th Light Horse Brigade began a 30-mile trek through the Sinai’s sand dunes and mountains to Be’er Sheva. They prepared to charge 4,000 entrenched Turkish and German troops. Greatly outnumbered and armed merely with bayonets and rifles, the ANZAC soldiers faced a highly trained, heavily armed enemy.

Since the Australians were at a great disadvantage, they strategically positioned themselves to charge at dusk when the sun would be in the enemy’s eyes. At 4:30 p.m. on October 31, with just 20 minutes of daylight remaining, the men of the 4th Light Horse Brigade mounted up and began their 1.8-mile charge on the Ottoman troops.

The horses had been without water for more than 48 hours, which worked to the troops’ advantage. As soon
as the steeds smelled water from the Be’er Sheva wells, they bolted over the trenches—trampling the Turks and Germans and overturning their pillboxes and machine-gun nests. With the sun in their eyes, the panicked Ottomans fired their weapons but forgot to lower their gunsights, so the bullets soared over the horsemen’s heads.

Some riders jumped off their mounts and took 700 Turks as prisoners. The against-all-odds ANZAC victory became known as “the last great cavalry charge in history.” Their capture of Be’er Sheva helped to end 400 years of Turkish Ottoman rule and enabled British forces to advance into Israel and capture Jerusalem on December 9, 1917. Thirty-one ANZAC soldiers died, and 36 were wounded.

Sam Lipski, chief executive of the Pratt Foundation, an Australian philanthropic organization, called the ANZAC charge an “important strategic contribution to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, [British Field Marshal Edmund] Allenby’s conquest of Jerusalem some six weeks later, and the British Mandate in Palestine that followed.”

Had the Australian–New Zealand forces failed to push back the Ottoman Turks from Be’er Sheva that day, the remaining Turkish forces could have affected the Balfour Declaration. The ANZAC victory opened the route for British forces to reach Jerusalem and capture Palestine.

IT SHALL COME TO PASS

As some say, “World War I prepared the land for the People, and World War II prepared the People for the Land.” God chose to use the Balfour Declaration and the ANZAC forces to help prepare the land of Israel for the return of the Jewish people.

The prophet Isaiah foretold the day God would regather His people from the four corners of the earth and bring them back to their ancient homeland:

It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people who are left, from Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar, from Hamath and the islands of the sea. He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth (Isa. 11:11–12).

For almost 2,000 years, the Jewish people were exiled from Israel and scattered among the nations. But God is faithful, and He kept His promise to them. On May 14, 1948, Israel officially became a nation again. Jewish people from around the world—“the four corners of the earth”—have flocked to the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants as an eternal possession.

The upcoming centennial celebrations of the Battle of Be’er Sheva and the Balfour Declaration extol God’s faithfulness. God has fulfilled His promise to bring the Jewish people home, and we can count on Him to fulfill His future promises to return to Earth and defeat Israel’s enemies. Messiah Jesus said through the prophet Zechariah,

It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. 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 (Zech. 12:9–10).

The stage is being set for that final battle when Christ will return to Earth, defeat Israel’s enemies, set up His Messianic Kingdom in Jerusalem, and reign forever from King David’s throne (cf. Rev. 11:15).

So as we celebrate the 100th anniversaries of the Battle of Be’er Sheva and the Balfour Declaration, remembering God’s past faithfulness, we should look forward to the day the Lord returns to establish His everlasting Kingdom.

Chaim Weizmann (head of the table) of the Zionist Commission, 1917. The Zionist Commission was appointed by the British government to advise on the implementation of the Balfour Declaration.

Deane Woods
is a Bible teacher and conference speaker for The Friends of Israel in Australia.

Jennifer Miles
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MEET THE
MILLENIALS

BY CHRIS KATULKA

THEM TICK? AND WHAT MAKES YOUNG PEOPLE, WHO ARE THESE GENERATION. ANY PREVIOUS AT THEM THAN EPITHETS THROWN UNFLATTERING THEY’VE HAD MORE SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2017
Perhaps You’ve Heard a Story Like This One:

A teenager graduates from high school. His family thinks he has his head glued to his cellphone, and he’s never worked a day in his life. After four years of college, he earns a liberal-arts degree and has accumulated the equivalent of a mortgage in student debt.

Now ready to launch out into the world, the bright-eyed, bushy-tailed graduate finds himself jobless and living at home because his expectations for work are not being met. He thinks he deserves better pay and someone standing by his side, praising his work.

The scenario purports to describe a generation of young adults who are accused of being lazy, entitled, narcissistic, and noncommittal. Meet the millennials.

After that warm introduction, I’m somewhat hesitant (but unashamed) to admit I’m a millennial. I’m on the older end of the spectrum, with a few gray hairs to prove it (probably put there by my four children). But I fall within the time frame that defines my generation (see page 15). That said, my take on millennials is based on both the stereotypes and my experience as one who bears the name.

Their High-Tech World

The example of the entitled college graduate is a common one critics often use to oversimplify the members of Generation Y. It is true that, statistically, millennials are considered lazier, more entitled, and more narcissistic than the baby boomers and traditionalists who preceded them. However, many millennials would take umbrage with being associated with the entitled college graduate.

Simply put, we cannot define between 80 million and 92 million (estimates vary) young adults at different stages in life with one broad stroke. Some are still in high school while others, like me, have families and careers. When assessing millennials, there are certain variables we shouldn’t overlook. Yet there also are constants when it comes to how we were raised.

The millennial worldview is shaped primarily by the rapid rise of technology. It is—literally—the lens through which this generation views the world and a defining factor that determines much of what makes it distinct.

In the 1990s, while the baby boomers were struggling to figure out how to integrate the rapid development of personal computers into their everyday lives, millennials were the first generation to be nurtured on them.

Most young adults today don’t know life without a connected device. They use this technology to shop, learn, work, socialize, and even find spouses: It all starts at a computer. According to Goldman Sachs, “millennials have come of age during a time of technological change, globalization and economic disruption. That’s given them a different set of behaviors and experiences than their parents.”

Their Positive Affirmation

In addition, a string of social experiments has coddled them through their most formative years. Instead of molding them into men and women of character, they were told as adolescents they could be anything and do anything—and to settle for nothing less.

Psychologist Dr. Jean Twenge, author of Generation Me, blames America’s culture of self-esteem, “in which parents praise every child as ‘special,’ and feelings of self-worth are considered a prerequisite to success, rather than a result of it,” wrote Douglas Quenqua of The New York Times. Twenge argues the “Participation Trophy” generation was rewarded too easily and celebrated success without accomplishing anything worthy of praise. Now some millennials are waking up to the dangers of this type of upbringing.

Olivia Legaspi, a student at Haverford College, received national attention for her article, “What Working At McDonald’s Taught Me About Privilege.” “In everyday discourse here at Haverford,” she wrote, “we are taught to ask for help when we feel we need it, speak up when we feel uncomfortable, and prioritize our own well being over most other things. At McDonald’s, acting in this way could have cost me my job, a job I needed to afford college.”

Olivia is a perfect example of a maturing millennial whose experience working the cash register at McDonald’s imparted more wisdom than the rhetoric of her college; and there are more Olivias out there, waking up to the same realization.

Many got a jolt of reality in 2015 when they officially entered adulthood as the largest group in the U.S. workforce, outnumbering even the baby boomers who are now planning for retirement. They can’t be lazy anymore; they need to work. A recent poll found that members of this workforce are more likely than previous generations to sacrifice paid time off because they want to be seen as indispensable and because of the historically high student debt they carry after they graduate college.
In the New York Times article “Why Teenagers Today May Grow Up Conservative,” David Leonhardt wrote that many of the hippies of the 1960s, who enthusiastically promoted “flower power” (the philosophy “make love, not war”) and protested the Vietnam War, eventually voted for conservative presidential candidate Ronald Reagan 20 years later. How did young, liberal hippies change so much over two decades?

It’s simple. They grew up. The effects of growing up, starting a career, paying taxes, getting married, owning a home, and raising children can transform even the most ardent idealist into a realist.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Society has been extremely critical of millennials over the past decade. It’s as if they’ve been written off. However, millennials are only now beginning to leave their imprint on history. Many of them haven’t even had time to mature and allow the natural circumstances of life to change their impressions of the world.

As members of all generations do, millennials have their flaws. But we shouldn’t lose heart. They are still under construction. God is still working in and through them. He is the One who takes our weaknesses and transforms them into opportunities to reveal His glory.

It’s also important to remember that God’s steadfast love never skips a generation. He raises up those He calls for His purposes to communicate His message from generation to generation. As the psalmist reminds us, “For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations” (Ps. 100:5).

If our only understanding of millennials is through the negative press they’ve received, we need to stretch ourselves and get to know them on an individual level. Although they are known to esteem themselves highly, that doesn’t mean they don’t want to be discipled. Deep down, they long for sound counsel and wisdom.

We need to invest in the young adults in our families, churches, and businesses through biblical discipleship. And most important, we need to pray the Lord will raise up godly men and women from this unique generation to become strong spiritual leaders, ones eager to find ways to reach their successors, Generation Z, with the message of Christ.

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ENDNOTES

1 “Millenials: Coming of Age,” Goldman Sachs, <goo.gl/33zZeg>
3 Olivia Legaspi, “What Working at McDonald’s Taught Me About Privilege,” thedailyserveonline.com, December 28, 2015 <goo.gl/gZQ0Tq>

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Soon a generation known as the millennials (my generation) will take the reins of the evangelical church in America. Born roughly between 1982 and 2000, these individuals represent a larger, more diverse slice of the population than the baby boomer generation that sired it.¹

Demographers Neil Howe and William Strauss, widely credited with coining the term millennials, view the rise of these young adults optimistically:

As a group, Millennials are unlike any other youth generation in living memory. They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse. More important, they are beginning to manifest a wide array of positive social habits that older Americans no longer associate with youth, including a new focus on teamwork, achievement, modesty, and good conduct. . . . Over the next decade, the Millennial Generation will entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged—with potentially seismic consequences for America.²

Not everyone shares this optimism. Millennials have been the subject of much negative attention in recent years. Writing for Time magazine, author Joel Stein cited statistics describing the generation’s systemic narcissism and fame-obsession and referred to it as the “Me Me Me Generation.”³

In 2015, The Washington Post ran an article by Christopher Ingraham titled “Five really good reasons to hate millennials.” Ingraham took these young people to task for characteristics ranging from a lack of patriotism to a low tolerance for free speech.⁴ In other articles they have been called lazy, needy,
entitled, overindulged, selfish, shallow, and cynical.

Although these stereotypes have become all too common in today's America, dwelling on perceived negative characteristics does little to create bridges between the young people of this generation, poised to take over the church, and those who came before them.

If millennial believers are to be shaped and molded into the leaders the American church needs to face the challenges of the 21st century, older believers must do more than diagnose the positive and negative aspects of Generation Y. They must impart to these young men and women a distinctly Christian worldview rooted in orthodox theology.

A NEW PEDAGOGY

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Dt. 6:4–5). This prayer, called the Shema, played a central role in Israelite life and worship. In fact, in these two short sentences, the whole purpose of the Mosaic Law—the constitution of Yahweh's theocratic rule over Israel—found its consummate articulation. The success of every generation in Israel depended on internalizing the covenant stipulations so that, through them, each generation might learn to know and love Yahweh, Israel's great Sovereign.

Since the success of Israel's ministry as Yahweh's kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6) and its experience of blessing in the land depended on its covenant fidelity (Dt. 28), each generation was responsible to grow in its knowledge and love for the Law so that it might both embody the Shema and gift it to each subsequent generation.

In this way, Israel was to ensure the success and blessing of each generation and fulfill its divine calling to be a kingdom of priests and holy nation in the Land of Promise.

American evangelicals are not Israel, nor do they represent a covenant community. However, like Israel, believers in the church are to know and love the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture (Mt. 22:37; Jn. 17:3). The church's success and health in each generation depend on its fidelity to sound doctrine as the basis for life and faith during this age of grace.

Just as each Ismelite generation was responsible to train up the next generation in the ways of Yahweh's Law, the church needs to recognize its responsibility to train millennial believers to know and love God through a commitment to His Word.

Because young adults think differently than their parents and grandparents, churches may need to think differently if they are to reach them. Rather than communicating through dogmatism, which they tend to reject, we need to work through relationships. Millennials are more receptive than previous generations to learning that exists as a function of a meaningful relationship.

Although this shift in pedagogy may be uncomfortable for some, it holds the potential to help the church reclaim an aspect of a biblical epistemology that has frequently been marginalized when it comes to teaching Bible and theology.

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Timothy during his second Roman imprisonment in AD 67. Acquainted with Paul's suffering and possibly overwhelmed in his ministry, Timothy, Paul's son in the faith, may have considered abandoning his identification with Paul and the gospel message of which he was a steward (1:8). In writing this letter, Paul encouraged Timothy to remain steadfast, knowing that the present age was one of suffering for Christ, with reward to come in the future.

Interestingly, Paul did not begin his argument by rehearsing the factual validity of the gospel message. Nor did he recite a laundry list of empirical proofs. Rather, Paul reminded Timothy of his own relationship with him (v. 2), as well as the relationships Timothy shared with his grandmother and mother, whose faith had helped form him to be a minister of the gospel (v. 5).

Paul argued that these meaningful relationships in the faith validated the gospel message and its ministry and should encourage Timothy to remain steadfast: "But you [Timothy] must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (3:14–15; emphasis added).

The notion of knowing through relationships is not a millennial invention of the 21st century but, rather, an important aspect of theological learning taught in Scripture itself. Paul even told Timothy how to pass the torch to others: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men [doing so required a relationship] who will be able to teach others also" (2:2).

By reclaiming this important, relational, pedagogical tool, churches can effectively pass orthodox theology to the millennial generation and prepare it to lead the church in the 21st century using a distinctly Christian worldview. ●

ENDNOTES

1 "Millennials Outnumber Baby Boomers and Are Far More Diverse," Census Bureau Reports, United States Census Bureau, June 25, 2013 <goo.gl/1Srhg8>.

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Why They Care

Millennials are a highly justice-oriented generation. They empathize with the downtrodden, embrace social-justice causes, and have massive potential to do good.

But what is their motivation, and is it enough?

By JD Lemming
Millennials will surprise you. Sure, a plethora of social commentary, negative press, articles, and opinions portray this much-talked-about generation as lazy, self-absorbed, and entitled. (Weren’t we all in our 20s?) Yet my hope is that we would not be so quick to paint an unflattering stereotype of these young adults because, above all the noise, I believe they will surprise us.

Millennials (my generation) possess unprecedented potential, and a great many of them take hold of it to change their neighborhoods and cities.

They carry more technology in their pockets than any previous generation could have imagined. They are more connected globally; can plan, support, share, and execute causes of justice around the world while sitting in their downtown apartments (or parents’ basements); and can ferret out any bit of information they seek with merely a few taps on their smartphones. Nothing is withheld from them.

But this potential comes at a cost. Millennials also find themselves inundated with tragedy. Bad news fills their social-media feeds daily. One moment they’re ordering a latte, and the next their phones buzz, revealing yet another campus shooting or natural disaster. Some choose to ignore it. Others face it head on; and it is those who confront it who will surprise us because they are a highly empathetic, justice-oriented generation.

Top of the Pyramid

Why are millennials so justice-oriented? Why did 23,000 young adults apply to join the Peace Corps in 2015, the highest number since 1975? Why is the average volunteer’s age 28? Why do social-justice protests attract so many members of this generation? And why would a millennial turn down a higher-paying job for one that pays less but focuses on effecting change in the world?

No doubt the answer is multifaceted. We could talk about globalization through technology or the heightened awareness of ethical issues. We could talk about the millennials’ rejection of what previous generations valued or their revulsion at seeing individuals amass wealth while failing to use that wealth to help others. These are all good reasons. But I have another theory: American millennials are justice-oriented because they have the freedom and security to be that way.

I am not an advocate of Abraham Maslow. But his hierarchy of human needs offers some insight. Maslow was a 20th-century American psychologist who studied college students, seeking to discover what motivated people. His findings are depicted as a pyramid with five hierarchical levels. The most fundamental needs (bottom of the pyramid) are physiological, such as air, food, water, clothing, shelter, and sleep.

Next are safety needs like security, stability, and freedom from fear. Next are the needs of loving and belonging, which relate to friendship, intimacy, and acceptance. Level four contains esteem needs, such as achievement, independence, status, respect, and self-respect.

And finally, at the top of the pyramid is self-actualization. These are the needs of self-fulfillment, personal potential, and achieving full potential. Self-actualization manifests a strong ethical standard, with concern for the welfare of humanity. I believe the millennial generation sits on this level.

My Family and Me

I’d like to use my own family as an illustration. My grandparents belonged to the traditionalist generation (see page 15). They fit on the lower levels of Maslow’s hierarchy.

As children they endured the Great Depression, experiencing the concern for basic needs like food and shelter. As a young man, my grandfather fought for his life, family, and freedom—freedom for all of us—in World War II. It was a fight for the future and his safety.

When he arrived back in southern Georgia, an unsure world awaited. He worked two jobs and had small children. He grew into manhood during the 1950s and ’60s, a tense time of
my loss of freedom or felt the pangs of hunger. I’ve never had to fight for my basic needs. I found friendship and acceptance early in life and moved easily up the pyramid into status and self-respect because of what my parents built for me; they gave me freedom to explore self-actualization. I grew up with the luxury of being able to seek my personal potential and achieve it. My grandparents asked, “Will we survive?”

My parents asked, “What can we build?”

But I ask, “Who do I want to be?”

Could it be that my generation is highly justice-oriented because, more than previous generations, we have the freedom to be?

**Lens Readjustment?**

Even if we accept the premise that millennials pursue justice as an act of self-actualization, we are still left with a dilemma: Eventually, self-actualization as motivation will break down because it involves experiencing something in oneself. Biblical justice, on the other hand, can revolutionize the world.

Millennials are justice-first thinkers. The primary lenses through which they see the world are morality and justice. But they use their own definitions of morality. They evaluate based on what they deem is moral, what they think is fair. Most of them do not know God’s Word and do not evaluate justice based on His standards, which are the standards that count.

The best motivational framework for justice is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. If today’s young adults embraced a biblically robust view of justice, there would be no limit to what they could accomplish.

We know that justice is near to God’s heart. From the beginning of the Bible to the end, we see God is a God of justice (Isa. 1; 58; Jer. 22; Amos 5; Mic. 6:8). We see His compassion for the slave and sojourner (Lev. 19:9–15); His desire that His people act justly; and His concern for justice for widows, orphans, and the oppressed.

In the New Testament, we see the ultimate demonstration of love and sacrifice when Jesus, who is fully God, took the form of a bondservant (Phil. 2:7), became the God-Man, and gave His life a ransom for all (1 Tim. 2:6). God loved the world so deeply that He did not even withhold His own Son. He gave His Son as the final payment for our sin, and by His stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:5).

In our desperate need, God came and dwelt among us, not only to meet us in our plight but also to rescue us out of it. And this is the mindset the apostle Paul calls us to share. We are to think more highly of others than we think of ourselves (Phil. 2:3–5).

Humility, sacrifice, and love are central to biblical justice. And biblical justice can only be realized and fully honoring to God when accomplished in Jesus’ name by those who have the mind of Christ.

My hope is that my generation will love and serve Christ in ways that past generations could not have imagined. But this can only happen when Jesus’ love, rather than self-actualization, becomes our motivation. If we would sacrifice and love like Jesus, biblical justice would impact us all, especially the watching world.

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**Biblical justice, on the other hand, can revolutionize the world.**

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**Sexual revolution, God-is-dead rhetoric, and Civil Rights.**

When my father was born, he inherited the security and freedom his father had won for him. With those basic needs met, he was free to move up the hierarchy to explore the needs of loving and belonging, friendship and acceptance. He could explore his need of self-esteem and achievement and did indeed achieve independence, status, and self-respect by working hard his entire life to build something lasting.

Then I was born. I’ve never had to fear...
Coaching the ‘Participation Trophy’ Generation

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? (1 Cor. 9:24).

For many millennials entering adulthood, the truth that we all compete for a prize is a shock. Painted high on the concrete wall of my elementary school gym, next to a friendly cartoon character, were the words, *if you had fun, you won.* It was as simple as that. We received participation trophies whether we failed or succeeded, and trying was all that mattered. Participating became the closest thing to achieving.

In their zeal to teach us affirmation and fair treatment, our well-meaning baby-boomer parents and teachers nurtured us on unfounded self-esteem, squelching our natural inclination to pursue a goal and spawning a generation that dismisses both success and failure.

Consequently, we have grown into young adults starving for something we can more than just take part in. We are hungry for purpose.

We also want to be recognized as having individual value.

The result is a recognition frenzy that has turned many into collectors, rather than victors. We collect followers on social media, for example, and measure self-worth by the amount of attention we gain.

Time magazine’s Joel Stein dubs the result “the era of the quantified self.” Ralph Waldo Emerson’s philosophy that life is a journey, not a destination, has transformed into “life is all about the journey.” Unfortunately, with our eyes fixed on the journey, collecting participation badges as we wander, it’s hard to recognize the goal of faith.

A big opportunity

The church faces a tremendous opportunity as millennials seek an ultimate purpose. Many millennials approach church as if the aim of faith were relative or shifting, as everything else is made to appear in this postmodern world that rejects absolutes. But we seek purpose secured in something unchanging, something in which we can ground our faith.

What believing millennials need in a church is exactly what God has set forth: a goal. To have a prize in sight provides the
LOVE MATTERS

God’s unconditional, unfailing love is hard for millennials to grasp. Yet our generation is desperate to test it and find God’s love to be true.

Though eager to be loved, we need biblical models of love. Our idea of unconditional love is unconditional validation. We need to know what godly love looks like throughout the disciplined, specific pursuit of growing ever nearer to our Savior, our prize.

Unconditional love contains three principles I believe we need to see at work in the church to untangle the confusion of the “me generation.”

1. **Unconditional love esteems.** Regarding others more highly than ourselves (Phil. 2:3) simply because they are God’s creation is a foreign concept to many of us. Through the buzzword *self-esteem*, we learned that esteeming others is still all about us.

We received awards simply for doing what we ought to do. The incentive to be kind was not love for one another but, rather, the desire to collect yet another badge of goodness. Eventually, however, selfish incentives leave us feeling empty.

Godly love does not focus on utilitarian qualities, like performance or participation. Nor is it motivated by a useful return on relational investment. God’s love is undeserved and unconditional and expects nothing in return.

It seems to me the church needs to humbly demonstrate God’s sacrificial love to everyone and shift the focus of ministry from self-fulfillment to fulfilling God’s call for all who believe.

2. **Unconditional love values truth.** Millennials have grown up confused about the difference between tolerance and acceptance. The world values sameness. God values the uniqueness of all His creatures. Each one of us has been “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14). The Bible teaches us to conduct ourselves respectfully, but truthfully.

Part of authentic love involves speaking truth in a godly way. If the church wants to reach millennials, it must emphasize and train people to speak and receive the truth with humility, gentleness, self-control, and kindness. We need practical examples and advice about esteeming others while maintaining our biblical convictions.

3. **Unconditional love invests.** Millennials tend to church-hop due to a lack of investment in relationships and a lack of being invested in by others. With so many church programs being offered, we are often invited into leadership and service. Yet we are without personal, lasting connections within the body.

Many of us never witnessed genuine commitment growing up. Although we’re often considered needy, the truth is our generation struggles to believe relationships can be stable and enduring. Sometimes that perspective hinders the relational basis of faith.

When other believers commit to us personally, we see love within the body of Christ. That love makes a tangible difference to people who are largely lost among the many programs compartmentalizing the church.

What millennials need most from the church is to be directed to, grounded in, and lavished with the unconditional love of God. I believe that love will open a door the Holy Spirit will use to maturemillennial believers and use us to do great things for Him.

TEACH US TO RUN

Show us how to run with our eyes on the prize. The confusing, dismissive life-coaching our generation received isn’t working on the course set before us. We need to be retrained. Our coaches must teach us how to run purposefully and effectively.

The undertaking involves setting an example of perseverance, commitment, and godly living. It means training by example, as the apostle Paul did. Through biblical teaching and personal relationships, we learn to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus,” whose glory is our goal (Heb. 12:1–2).

Millennials are filled with potential. We need godly coaching so we can become Christians who say, “Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly” (1 Cor. 9:26, NIV). For many in my generation, that’s a prize in itself.

ENDNOTE


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If you love God’s Word and Israel, you won’t want to miss the Museum of the Bible’s grand opening in November in Washington, DC.

Located only three blocks from the United States Capitol Building and two blocks from the National Mall, the $500-million, 430,000-square-foot enterprise boasts the most technologically advanced, largest Bible museum in the world. Its high-tech, interactive exhibits will explore the Bible’s impact, history, and narrative in a way that’s never been done before, with special emphasis on the Scriptures’ Jewish context.

It takes nine eight-hour days to see everything. But thanks to new technology invented exclusively for the Museum of the Bible, you can visit again and again and pick up where you left off. That’s because you will receive a handheld, digital docent device. The iPhone-like guide will let you customize your tour by entering the topics you are most
interested in and the amount of time you are able to spend in the museum that day. Then it will store the information indefinitely, so you can resume your tour when you return.

Once the digital docent has customized your tour, its indoor GPS navigational system will guide you on a personalized journey through the museum. Its inner GPS capabilities also will allow families or groups to locate one another in the museum.

**Preserving the Bible's Jewish Roots**

To guarantee the museum’s authentic representation of the Bible’s Jewish history, Museum of the Bible President Cary Summers required all exhibit designers to visit Israel before they began working. "If they are going to be designing a museum about the Bible, then they need to visit and be familiar with the land of the Bible. Nothing enhances your understanding of the Bible like actually seeing the places it describes," said Summers.

The museum features more than 40,000 ancient, biblical artifacts from the Green Collection, the private collection of Hobby Lobby President Steve Green, the museum’s visionary leader and chairman of the board. Highlights from the Green Collection include the second-largest private collection of Dead Sea Scroll fragments; the world’s largest private collection of Torah scrolls; the world’s oldest known, complete Jewish prayer book; and some of the earliest known New Testament writings.

But the museum’s collection doesn’t stop there. In an effort to further accentuate the Bible’s Jewish roots, the Museum of the Bible joined forces with the Israel Antiquities Authority, Israel’s government-mandated archaeological organization, to display some of its 2 million artifacts in an exclusive, 4,000-square-foot, top-floor exhibit. "The rare opportunity to have a long-term exhibition in the U.S. capital of a large selection of archaeological treasures that were excavated in Israel and illuminate the story of the Bible is remarkable. We hope that the many expected visitors will enjoy the archaeological exhibits and learn about the periods and descriptions of the Bible and the rich and diverse history and the archaeology of the Holy Land," said Israel Hasson, director of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

**Take a Digital Flyboard Ride**

This museum is like no other. Its three main exhibit floors include the Impact, History, and Narrative floors. The Impact Floor explores the Bible’s influence on cultures and civilizations, music, film, fashion, science, education, government, America’s founding, pop culture, family, and even individual lives. "The Bible is the bestselling, most-translated book of all time and is arguably history’s most significant piece of literature," said Green. "It has had an unquestionable influence on science, education, democracy, arts, and society. This book has also profoundly impacted lives across the ages, including my own."

This floor also features a digital flyboard ride that can take you on a virtual tour through Washington, DC, to learn about the Bible’s impact on America’s founding and to see where Scripture is engraved on national monuments.

The History Floor takes visitors on a journey to see how a series of writings became the most widely read text in history. Using modern cinematic storytelling, multitouch interactive tables, and more than 500 artifacts, the exhibits present the story of the Bible’s preservation, translation, and transmission. Highlights include writings dating to the time of the Hebrew patriarch Abraham, some of the oldest known copies of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, first-edition Bibles, a 2,100-year-old Genesis fragment from the Dead Sea Scrolls, a Jewish prayer book from the ninth century, and the Torah Room.

The Torah Room houses the largest private collection of Torah scrolls in the world. Spanning more than 700 years, the collection includes scrolls from the Spanish Inquisition and scrolls seized by the Nazis during World War II. The collection will grow as a scribe writes a new scroll and donates it to the museum each year.

After your journey through the Bible’s history, you will step into the biblical narrative through riveting presentations and immersive, walk-through experiences. Comprised of 50,000 square feet, the Narrative Floor includes a 45-minute walk-through of the Jewish Bible, a re-creation of first-century Nazareth, and a New Testament theater.

After walking through the first half of the Bible, you will see and experience "The World of Jesus of Nazareth," a re-creation of Jesus’ hometown as it existed 2,000 years ago, put together in cooperation with Nazareth Village in Israel. People dressed in first-century garb will display authentic male and female fashion from the time, and you will be able to walk through a first-century Jewish home, synagogue, and carpenter’s shop. Visitors will experience what first-century Jewish worship was like in the synagogue and what it was like to live, cook, and sleep in a first-century home.


Other museum features include a children’s gallery, a state-of-the-art conference center with views of the Capitol, a ballroom modeled after the French Palace of Versailles, a 500-seat performing arts center, a rooftop biblical garden, and a restaurant that highlights foods of the Bible—including a kosher restaurant.

From the 40-foot bronze entrance doors flanked with the first page of Genesis to the thousands of ancient biblical artifacts and the museum’s interactive and immersive exhibits, the Museum of the Bible promises visitors an unforgettable experience centered on the Book that has changed countless lives throughout the ages.

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by Jennifer Miles, a writer and editor with The Friends of Israel
The New Testament and the Kinsmen of Jesus

Is the New Testament anti-Semitic? Unfortunately, many Gentiles have used it to vent their ingrained hatred and unholy wrath on the Jewish people. But if we read it the way God intended, we see the wonderful story of God’s love. This article originally ran in the December/January 1973–1974 issue of Israel My Glory.

BY VICTOR BUKSBAZEN

To millions of people, the New Testament reveals God’s love for all men. However, it has been attacked as responsible for Christian hostility toward the Jews, particularly when it comes to the narrative concerning Jesus’ crucifixion, which is said to cast the Jewish people in the role of “Christ killers,” thus fostering “Christian anti-Semitism.”

It should be remembered that the first disciples and followers of Jesus were all Jewish, most of them Galileans, a simple and patriotic people who often rebelled against their Roman oppressors. They shared the trials and tribulations of their Jewish countrymen and hoped, as their brethren did, for a speedy redemption from their oppressors and for the coming of the Messiah to deliver them.

The figure around whose life and message the New Testament is centered is Jesus, the Man from Galilee, an impoverished descendant of the house of David (cf. Mt. 1:1–25; Lk. 3:23–38). He lived a holy and blameless life and was the only Person in history who could challenge His opponents with the question, “Which of you convinceth [convicts] me of sin?” (Jn. 8:46, KJV).

Contrary to being anti-Semitic, this is a Book that breathes a spirit of love and compassion for all men and tender feelings for the Jewish people, the kinsmen of Jesus.

LIKE THE PROPHETS OF OLD

Like the prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus called His people to repent and...
return to God. He grieved over Israel’s disobedience to God and its unbelief. On one occasion Jesus wept over Jerusalem and lamented,

_O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate_ (Mt. 23:37–38, KJV).

Some 40 years later, His words came true. Jerusalem became desolate, and the Holy Temple was razed by the Romans.

Both Jesus’ love for Israel and His faith in His people’s high calling to be a light to the nations were beyond question. Speaking to a Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar (modern Nablus), Jesus pronounced these timeless words: “Salvation is of the Jews” (Jn. 4:22, KJV). His words of rebuke were of a similar character as that of a prophet, of a lover of His people, and not of an enemy. This is also true of the famous apostle Paul, who was once an ardent Pharisee and persecuted Jewish believers in Jesus. Paul gave us a glimpse into his own heart when he said, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved” (Rom. 10:1, KJV).

To this, Paul added this affirmation of Israel’s final redemption and glorious destiny: “And so all Israel shall be saved” (11:26, KJV).

All the apostles were loyal sons of Israel and, like the prophets of old, burned with a holy fire of indignation against their disobedience to God. They possessed an unquenchable desire that Israel may be saved.

Long before Jesus, we find that the Ismélites objected to the prophets because they did not like to listen to things that interfered with their selfish ways or made demands on their moral or spiritual lives. Isaiah accurately described the attitude of Ismél’s leaders: “Which say to the seers: See not, and to the prophets: Do not prophesy to us right things, speak to us flattering things, prophesy delusions” (Isa. 30:10, Buksbazen translation).

Was the prophet Isaiah an anti-Semite because He called the leaders of his time “rulers of Sodom” and his kinsmen “people of Gomorrah” (Isa. 1:10, KJV)? Of course not! The prophets were impelled by God and by their own overburdened hearts to speak the truth as they saw it. The same was true of Jesus and His apostles, who taught in the prophetic tradition. Their castigation had one purpose: to bring about repentance and spiritual rebirth.

This type of teaching has always provoked resentment.

The Gospel of John, which often refers to “the Jews,” was written after the AD 70 fall of Jerusalem, when the synagogue changed its liturgy to make it impossible for Jewish believers in Christ to stay inside the Jewish community. It was a time when the synagogue persecuted the young church in Jerusalem. John’s is the Gospel of an embattled and harassed minority—Jewish people persecuted by their own and torn between their love for their people and loyalty to Jesus, their Savior.

Later, Jewish hostility to the Gospels arose because of how the story of the crucifixion was abused by so-called Christians to accuse the Jews as “Christ killers,” an accusation that can only be labeled as grotesque and unfair.

**THE CRUCIFIXION: ITS TRUE MEANING—AND ITS PERVERSIONS**

Some people believe the crucifixion narrative singles out the Jewish people as a nation of “Christ killers.” The Gospels record how a Jerusalem mob, incited by the priests, demanded from Pontius Pilate that he free the criminal Barabbas and crucify Jesus (cf. Mt. 27:15–26; Mk. 15:7–15; Lk. 23:13–24). To prove the rightness of their demand, the mob shouted, “Let him be crucified” and “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Mt. 27:22, 25, KJV).

Many misguided Christians have argued that, with these words, the Jewish people called down God’s wrath upon themselves and all the generations that followed and consequently deserve to be punished.

What a perverted and preposterous idea, that God should act contrary to His own righteousness and to all the promises He made to Israel and that He should listen to a frenzied, howling mob and not to His beloved Son, Jesus, who prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34, KJV).

Did this mob really represent all the Jewish people who would ever live, including those who had no part or knowledge of the crucifixion? Of course not!

Should we condemn all the Greeks of every generation for the judicial murder of Socrates? Should we condemn every Russian for the bloody murders of Josef Stalin or every German for the heinous deeds of Adolf Hitler and his henchmen?

For every Jew who shouted “Crucify Him, crucify Him” there were many devout Jewish women who followed Jesus to the cross, weeping. There were also countless thousands of Jews who lived and died for Jesus during the past 19 [today, 20] centuries. Were these Jewish people
To indulge in blaming the Jewish people for the crucifixion is to distort the crucifixion’s meaning. The person who blames the Jews, rather than himself, has completely missed the significance of the cross.

not more truly representative of Israel in the eyes of God than the ignorant mob in Jerusalem?

It is unfortunately true that many Gentiles have used the wonderful story of God’s love to vent their ingrained hatred and unholy wrath on the Jews. These so-called Christians, who make Christ’s death an excuse to hate and persecute others, would have readily found some other reason to justify their wickedness.

The pagans of the pre-Christian era hated the Jewish people, persecuted them, and often resorted to pogroms centuries before Christ. They found other excuses for their wicked acts, such as calling the Jews atheists because they worshiped an invisible God or calling them lazy because they refused to work one day a week, on the Sabbath.

With memories of what a corrupt church in the Middle Ages did to the Jewish people, it is no wonder some Jews connect Jesus’ death with anti-Semitism. But this is not what the New Testament teaches.

The meaning of the cross is summed up by the apostle John: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16, KJV).

God has chosen that amazing land of the patriarchs, of Moses, and of the great prophets to reveal His holiness and justice, His love and His judgment upon all sin. And since this happened in the land of Israel, it was natural the Jewish people should play a major role. The Jews in the New Testament are representative of the human race—its saints and its sinners.

Furthermore, they were not the only participants in the drama of Calvary. The Jewish people lived under Rome, whose chief representative was Pontius Pilate, a vicious and corrupt man who, in spite of the washing of his hands, had much Jewish blood on his conscience. Jesus’ actual executioners were not Jews but brutal Roman soldiers who, in the course of history, also crucified thousands of Jewish people.

About His life and death Jesus said this: “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again” (10:18, KJV). Jesus went to the cross willingly to become the final blood sacrifice for sin, as prescribed in Leviticus 17:11.

The clearest New Testament evaluation of those who nailed Jesus to the cross was expressed by the apostle Peter when he told a large Jewish gathering in Jerusalem,

For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together . . . to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done (Acts 4:27–28, KJV).

Peter enumerated all the participants in the crucifixion. On the human side there was Herod, the half-Jewish puppet-ruler of Judea; Pontius Pilate, the bloodthirsty Roman governor of Palestine; the Gentiles, represented by the Roman soldiers; and finally, the people of Israel.

But the main actor was God Himself, who “anointed Jesus,” that is, made Him the Messiah, and by His predetermined will and purpose, brought about His death on the cross for the redemption of men and the forgiveness of sins.

The whole emphasis of the New Testament is not on people but, rather, on God Himself and His eternal purpose of reconciling the world to Himself through the sacrifice of His Son. To indulge in blaming the Jewish people for the crucifixion is to distort the crucifixion’s meaning. The person who blames the Jews, rather than himself, has completely missed the significance of the cross.

Far from being anti-Semitic, the New Testament breathes the spirit of God’s love for all mankind, Jews and Gentiles. *
A quarter of the millennials in the United States sympathize more with the Palestinians than with the Israelis. This signifies a big shift. How did it happen, and what can be done about it?

Millennials and Israel

By Bruce Scott
Two Israeli and two American flags stood side by side on the platform in the Pacific Ballroom at the University of California, Irvine (UCI), where 500 people waited for then Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren to speak. Following a glowing introduction by one of the students, Oren stepped to the microphone and began his lecture on U.S.-Israeli relations.

Suddenly, a young man jumped out of his seat in the back of the room and yelled, “Propagating murder is not an expression of free speech!” This was the opening salvo from pro-Palestinian protestors who disrupted Oren’s talk multiple times on February 8, 2010. At one point, Oren had to pause for 20 minutes until order was restored. Eleven Muslim students were arrested.

This was not an isolated event. Over the next seven years, AMCHA (Hebrew for “your people”) Initiative, a nonprofit organization battling anti-Semitism at institutions of higher education in America, documented 89 instances on college campuses of Jewish or pro-Israel assemblies being disrupted or speakers being shouted down.1

Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), founded in 2001, has more than 115 chapters at American universities. SJP and American Muslims for Palestine are on the frontlines of influencing the millennial generation to work toward Israel’s destruction.

Whereas older Americans tend to sympathize more with Israel, millennials are more likely to sympathize with the Palestinians, reports the Pew Research Center: “Millennials are the only generational cohort in which fewer than half (43%) sympathize more with Israel. And about a quarter of Millennials (27%) sympathize more with the Palestinians, the highest share of any generation.”2

Additionally, fully one-third of American college students surveyed believe the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel is justified and a legitimate form of pressuring Israel to relinquish “Palestinian land.”3
HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

MILLENNIALS PRIORITIZE IMAGE-BASED MEDIA.

Pete Cashmore, founder and CEO of Mashable.com, a global, multiplatform media and entertainment company, made this observation:

The connected generation loves images and videos. Articles with large imagery are shared more among this demographic than those without, and posts with videos also perform better on average than text. This is likely because we’re so bombarded by information these days: Visual mediums are faster to consume.4

Much of the reporting concerning the Middle East is fed to the Western media by Palestinian sources. These sources often exaggerate or fabricate facts to create a perception that evokes the most negative (and usually the most emotional) response possible.

For example, on June 9, 2011, the Facebook page “Freedom Will Come to Palestine” published a photo that purported to be an anguished Palestinian mother sitting on the ground, holding her infant while watching her other child, a little girl, being brutally stepped on by an Israeli soldier. The photo caption at the time was “Share this photo let the world see what is really happening in Palestine.”5

However, that was not what was really happening. In the photo, the rifle the so-called Israeli soldier was holding, as well as his uniform, was not standard Israeli issue. In fact, the rifle was the type often used by Palestinian militants. Upon closer inspection, the infant was nothing but a doll. And for someone being crushed by a military boot, the little girl seemed strangely calm.

The photo was faked. Later, when the real photo was revealed, it became clear the entire scenario had been manipulated and staged, most likely as part of a Palestinian street parade portraying so-called Israeli oppression.6 Yet many people saw the staged photo and believed it, posting such comments as, “Go to the endless hell, Israel,” and “I’m gonna do the same thing to the Zionist.”

When millennials see these types of videos and images, it is no wonder many of them would sympathize with the Palestinians. Unfortunately, they fail to probe the context and legitimacy of propaganda designed to portray Israel as a ruthless oppressor.

THEY PRIORITIZE COMMUNITY.

Being “connected” is extremely important to the young people of this generation. They seek the safety and comfort of a community of friends who are committed to one another, trust one another, and share things together. Social media can provide a sense of community, whether it is based in fact or not.

A danger when prioritizing community, however, is the tendency toward groupthink. According to Psychology Today, “Groupthink occurs when a group values harmony and coherence over accurate analysis and critical evaluation. It causes individual members of the group to unquestioningly follow the word of the leader and it strongly discourages any disagreement with the consensus.”7

Fear of losing the community’s acceptance can be a powerful motivator to fall in step with everyone else. Groupthink is rampant on college campuses and in social media in a form that is strongly anti-Israel. God’s Word warns against such a thing and the dangers of it: “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil” (Ex. 23:2).

THEY PRIORITIZE TOLERANCE.

To millennials, a safe community is inclusive and nonjudgmental. No room must be given for judging the rightness or wrongness of another’s behavior.

Being tolerant can be a positive trait. However, if tolerance trumps biblical truth, the result can be moral relativism, as seen in postmodernism. Consequently, millennials, who are children of postmodernism, might tend to be less critical and more tolerant of violent Palestinian “resistance,” such as homicide bombings. After all, they may think, who are we to judge who is right or wrong?

THEY PRIORITIZE SOCIAL JUSTICE.

This generation evidences a passion for social justice. According to one definition, “Social justice is the equal distribution of resources and opportunities, in which outside factors that categorize people are irrelevant.”8 So, for social justice to work, there must be complete uniformity in society, with no distinctions between people.

Many young adults erroneously see Israel as being unfair to the Palestinians. They perceive the Jewish state as an occupying power that denies the Palestinians vital resources and imposes Apartheid on them. In their eyes, the Israelis are the haves, while the Palestinians are the have-nots.
However, the facts tell a different story. Israel treats tens of thousands of Palestinian medical patients each year, supplies the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip with 125 megawatts of electricity and 2.6 billion gallons of water annually, allows all consumer goods and foodstuffs to enter the Gaza Strip from Israel, and continues to facilitate a massive reconstruction project in the Gaza Strip. It even treated the extremely ill granddaughter of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in 2013 and one of his daughters in 2014.

Furthermore, Israel is anything but Apartheid. Arab-Israeli citizens have the same rights and benefits as Jewish-Israeli citizens and have representation in government. In fact, Salim Jouibun, an Arab Israeli, has served as a justice on the Supreme Court of Israel since 2003.

Theologically, Israel’s biblical status as a nation chosen by God rankles this generation’s view of social justice. Having little Bible training, millennials see it as discriminatory, which may be one reason Christian millennials are increasingly adopting Replacement Theology: It strips Israel of God’s promises of future blessing and of its position in God’s economy as the “apple of His eye” (Zech. 2:8).

By unseating Israel from its place in God’s plan and denying Israel’s future, there supposedly is no discrimination. No distinctions. However, even though millennials may not make distinctions, God does (Ex. 33:16; Lev. 20:26). Though He is no respecter of persons when it comes to salvation (Acts 10:34–35), when it comes to His eternal, covenant promises to Israel, He most definitely is.

For Him to reject Israel, of whom He has said, “I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me” (Isa. 49:16) and “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3), would make God a liar, the further they will move from understanding God’s literal purpose and program for Israel. Consequently, the closer people will migrate toward cursing Israel instead of blessing it (Gen. 12:3).

**WHY WE NEED ORIGINS**

There is hope. Not all millennials fit the mold, and many want to break out of it. To do so, they need to learn what Israel is really like, and they need a higher level of sound Bible teaching (2 Tim. 4:2), particularly about God’s love and program for Israel.

We should never compromise our commitment to exegetical, expository Bible messages. Although some people may not be naturally attracted to this type of preaching, keeping the standard high helps Christians mature. In fact, some millennials have expressed concern that the older generation doesn’t give them enough credit and that they are able to rise to the occasion.

Also, because millennials like new group experiences, we can help them understand Israel and see for themselves what is really going on there by sending them to Israel, not merely for a tour, but for service. Since 2007, The Friends of Israel has taken more than 140 young-adult volunteers to Israel through our ORIGINS program. The vast majority have become friends of Israel for life.

It’s good to remember that God always keeps a contingent of watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem to testify of His promises to Israel (Isa. 62:6–7). We can be encouraged to know that the millennial generation will be different.

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**THEM PRIORITY SECULARISM.**

A 2014 Pew Research Center poll discovered a decrease in American religious beliefs and behavior. This was “largely attributable to the ‘nones’—the growing minority of Americans, particularly in the millennial generation, who say they do not belong to any organized faith.”

The millennials’ increasingly negative view toward Israel may well be linked to the fact that fewer Americans believe God’s Word is to be interpreted literally (only 22 percent in 2014, down from 40 percent in the late 1970s).

The furthest away people move from God’s Word and understanding it literally,

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**ENDNOTES**


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**THERE IS HOPE. NOT ALL MILLENNIALS FIT THE MOLD, AND MANY WANT TO BREAK OUT OF IT.**

Bruce Scott is the director of Program Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.
IJS-LITE WORKSHOPS

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HOW LONG IS WRONG?

Secularists and Bible critics often attack the Bible’s credibility due to its record of long lives before the Noahic flood. They claim such life spans are unrealistic and result from the incorporation of mythology into the biblical record. But we can defend the Bible’s reliability against such claims by appealing to archaeology. Archaeological discoveries and ancient literature reveal many ancient, secular cultures also reported long antediluvian (preflood) life spans.

We view longevity as 100 years, not 1,000. Yet we read in the antediluvian genealogy (Adam to Noah) that most life spans approached a millennium: Adam lived to 930, Seth to 912, Enosh to 905, Cainan to 910, Jared to 962, Methuselah to 969, and Noah to 950 (cf. Gen. 5:1–32; 9:29).

Such extreme longevity made it possible for the antediluvian generations to pass along an accurate record of human history to postdiluvian civilization. For example, Adam lived long enough to know Methuselah, and Methuselah lived long enough to know Noah.

However, after the flood, life spans decreased markedly, though gradually, to modern age limits. Archaeology provides an extrabiblical parallel to the Bible’s contrast of the antediluvian and postdiluvian life spans. An 18th-century BC clay prism, known as the Sumerian King List, records a directory of 10 foreign dynasties, which parallels the 10 nations (based on their family heads) recorded in Genesis. The Sumerians (c. 3500 BC) were one of the earliest postdiluvian civilizations; and in this account, they preserved the reigns of kings who had lived before and after the flood.

According to the cuneiform inscription, kingship was divinely bestowed (“lowered from heaven”), and the register of rulers’ names appears to legitimize their reigns. Like the table of 10 nations in Genesis, the Sumerian King List records the names of 10 Sumerian kings who ruled before the flood and gives their reigns in tens of thousands of years (the longest is 43,200 years).

While such exaggerated reigns might suggest a fictional account, most scholars accept the list as a historical record since archaeologists have found some of the names in other inscriptions. For example, the list mentions En-me-ba-rage-si of Kish (c. 2600 BC) who reigned 900 years and his successor, Aga, who reigned 625 years. Other ancient sources corroborate both their reigns. The Assyrian Epic of Gilgamesh, the account of a historical king of Uruk, mentions Aga.

Most scholars explain the extremely long reigns as epochs named after dynastic rulers or as intentional literary hyperbole to enhance the rulers’ prestige. But translators may be misinterpreting the reigns since we do not fully understand the Sumerian numbering system.

One scholar has suggested the Sumerian scribe who composed the original antediluvian list had a document containing numerical information on the earliest ruler’s life span, but mistakenly interpreted it as being written in the sexagesimal numerical system, an ancient Sumerian system based on the number 60. The mistake, he said, thus resulted in exaggerated durations for the antediluvian kings.¹

The significant take away from the Sumerian King List parallel to Genesis is that both record the same longevity pattern: longer antediluvian life spans and shorter postdiluvian ones, with the flood dividing the two periods. This indicates the Bible and the Sumerian King List shared a common historical source, made possible because extreme longevity allowed for the preservation of these historical facts.

ENDNOTE


Randall Price

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SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2017 35
PAUL’S ENCOURAGING WORD

1 THESSALONIANS 3:6–13

Greatly relieved by Timothy’s encouraging report that the young Thessalonian church was not wavering in its faith despite persecution, the apostle Paul penned this letter to the Thessalonians. In the remaining verses of chapter 3, he mentioned Timothy’s report and asked the Lord to undergird this committed church of new believers.

REPORT TO PAUL

First, Paul emphasized that Timothy wasted no time reporting to him: “But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you” (v. 6). Timothy knew Paul was waiting anxiously, and his glowing report inspired Paul to respond immediately.

Second, Paul told the Thessalonians that Timothy brought “good news” of their “faith and love.” Faith is mentioned first because it was Paul’s major concern. He wanted to know whether these new believers had become discouraged and left the faith or if they were still committed to Christ. The word love speaks of the Thessalonians’ attitude and their spiritual condition as a whole.

Timothy’s report “that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us [Paul and Silvanus]” revealed all Paul needed to know about their attitude toward him. Though enemies persecuted them and slandered Paul, the Thessalonians remained steadfast. They had loved the ministry team from the start, still felt great affection for Paul and Silvanus, and yearned to be reunited with them.

Paul responded in kind, “as we also to see you.” He understood the church was standing strong in faith and love; and he cherished its relationship with him and Silvanus, with whom he had ministered while in Thessalonica. The recognition, relationship, and respect that had developed between founders and followers bound them together and needed to remain in place as the church moved toward ministry and maturity in Christ.

RESPONSE FROM PAUL

Paul responded positively to the Thessalonian church: “Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord” (vv. 7–8).

The word therefore takes into consideration all the points in Timothy’s report. Then Paul revealed the impact the report made on him and Silvanus, addressing the Thessalonians as “brethren,” thus recognizing them as fellow believers in Christ.

When Timothy’s report arrived, Paul and Silvanus were under great “affliction and distress” because of persecution that dogged them wherever they went. Timothy’s report was a great comfort to them. The word for “comfort” conveys the idea of strengthening and encouraging. Thus many commentators believe Timothy’s report greatly bolstered Paul and Silvanus because, like the Thessalonians, they, too, faced constant affliction.

This is the fourth time the apostle mentioned “your faith” in chapter 3 (vv 2, 5–7). The repetition shows the focus of his concern for the Thessalonian church. The rest of Timothy’s report would have been meaningless if the Thessalonians had wavered in their faith or left it altogether.

Now Paul could say, “For now we live.” That is, Timothy’s news lifted Paul’s burden, breathed new life into his ministry, and affirmed that his proclamation of Christ in Thessalonica produced lasting fruit.

The word if (v. 8) does not question the Thessalonians’ steadfastness in Christ. In fact, it should be translated “since” and actually expresses Paul’s assurance that these Christians were standing firm. The phrase stand fast is a single word in the Greek text and speaks of one’s stability in remaining true to the Christian faith, both then and in the future. The Thessalonians were steadfastly anchored through faith “in the Lord,” which provided all they needed to overcome their enemies.

The Thessalonians’ faith moved Paul to break out in thanksgiving: “For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God?” (v. 9).

Paul’s rhetorical question reveals how deeply he longed to know the state of the Thessalonians’ faith. Suddenly, he blurted out a deeply emotional expression of gratitude to God for what He had done for and through them.

In other words, Paul was saying, “How can I repay or give anything back to God in exchange for the debt I owe Him?” He knew that God alone, in His overseeing grace, had provided the Thessalonian believers with the strength and stability they
IT IS CHRIST, THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHO CAUSES PEOPLE TO EXCEL, OVERFLOW, OR POSsess A SUPERABUNDANCE OF GOD’S LOVE FOR OTHERS.

needed to remain faithful through severe and constant persecution. He was not thanking the Thessalonians but, rather, offering thanksgiving to God for sustaining these young believers.

Expressing his love and compassion for the Thessalonians, he wrote, “night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith” (v. 10). The word exceedingly means Paul and his missionary team prayed earnestly, or abundantly, to God on behalf of the Thessalonian church. They prayed for two things:

1. “That we may see your face.” The team asked God to open a way to go to Thessalonica to experience again the joy of fellowshiping personally with the Thessalonians. This was an ongoing request.

2. That the team could “perfect what is lacking in your faith.” The verb perfect means “to complete, fit together, frame, repair” or “restore,” as in setting a bone or mending a net. The idea is not that their faith needed mending, but it needed to develop and mature in Christ. Nor does lacking mean their faith was malfunctioning, flawed, or deficient. Rather, it was incomplete. Paul and his team anxiously longed to return to finish what they had started. The church lacked scriptural knowledge and spiritual insight that would develop its faith. Nothing beats personal contact when mentoring new believers. Correspondence is simply not the same as being there.

REQUESTS BY PAUL

Paul closed chapter 3 by telling the Thessalonian church he would pray.

First, his prayer expressed his ambition—his earnest desire to return to Thessalonica: “May our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you” (v. 11). Paul acknowledged Christ’s deity and Lordship and prayed to Him as coequal with God the Father. He asked God to remove all the obstacles Satan was putting in his path, making it impossible for Silvanus and Paul to return to Thessalonica. They were utterly dependent on God to orchestrate their return.

Second, Paul appealed to the church in prayer: “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you” (v. 12). The word Lord refers to Jesus as the one who will help them “increase and abound in love.” Paul’s return, though helpful, would not produce spiritual growth in their lives. Such growth comes only through Jesus Christ. Paul’s specific prayer was that these believers might “increase and abound” in love. It is Christ, through the Holy Spirit, who causes people to excel, overflow, or possess a superabundance of God’s love for others (Mt. 5:44). Loving those who persecute you is possible only through the Holy Spirit’s enablement. During their brief stay in Thessalonica, Paul and Silvanus were role models; and the Thessalonians were imitating them.

Third, Paul’s aim in praying for the Thessalonians was that each one would possess inner maturity and spiritual stability at the time Christ returned: “So that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints” (1 Th. 3:13). Spiritual strength and stability prevent believers from succumbing to Satan’s onslaughts. They are obtained by being saturated in Scripture and prayer and by yielding to the Holy Spirit’s control. Only then can a believer’s “heart” (thoughts, feelings, and will) be established.

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to be “blameless in holiness” (v. 13). Walking in holiness demands separation from the practice of sin. It requires maintaining a pure and godly walk in Christ. Blameless means to be free from unjust accusations of immoral or inappropriate actions. Even though many charges would be leveled at the Thessalonian believers, none could be proven. Christians are to be blameless “before our God and Father.” God will be the final Judge of every Christian’s character and conduct at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10–17; 2 Cor. 5:9–10).

The final phrase, at [in] the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints (1 Th. 3:13), needs clarification. The word coming (Greek, parousia) means “presence,” as in other texts where it is used. When will Christians stand physically in the Lord’s presence? At the Rapture of the church, when Christ comes to take the church to heaven. At that time, all Christians will be in the presence of Christ and God the Father (cf. 2:19). Then “all His saints” will return to Earth with “our Lord Jesus Christ.” This event will take place at Christ’s Second Coming.

Paul provided the Thessalonian church with great words of encouragement and instruction that probably breathed new life and commitment into these believers. Hopefully, they will do the same for you.

by David M. Levy,
a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel and its director of Education and Ministry Relations
DO I HAVE TO?

Do I have to? Those four little words frequently crossed my mind and sometimes my lips in response to my parents’ directives during the formative years of my life. The inevitable consequences and pressure to conform usually caused me to obey, though not always in a timely manner.

The required duties were sometimes unpleasant but not overwhelming; I just didn’t want to do them. I eagerly looked forward to an adulthood without commands because I wanted to live freely in an “I want to,” rather than an “I have to,” world.

I immaturely had defined obedience as completing a task, without considering my attitude or motives. We can deceive ourselves about the nature of obedience at all stages of life. When we must submit to authority, a game of cat and mouse often ensues. Those in authority (the cats) vigilantly look for the slightest sign of disobedience, while those under authority (the mice) creatively try to hide their waywardness behind a facade of obedience.

Due to the Bible’s many commands, people often view their relationship with God like the cat-and-mouse illustration. But what does biblical obedience look like? Is it unquestioned compliance? Conformity to an accepted standard? Submission to authority?

In Luke 17:7–10, Jesus taught His disciples obedience goes further than simply doing what one is told, and He illustrated the point with a story about a servant who worked hard at his tasks; yet, Jesus said the servant should not expect praise because he simply “did the things that were commanded him” (v. 9).

AM I SUPPOSED TO OBEY?

Jesus applied the servant illustration in Luke 17 to His disciples: “So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’” (v. 10). In other words, “We have done only what we were supposed to do.”

According to Jesus, a servant is unprofitable if he merely fulfills his obligations. The word unprofitable does not mean “worthless” since both master and servant benefit from the work. But the word does imply that a servant does not merit additional praise or compensation merely because he did what was expected of him. “Supposed to” obedience, Jesus said, does not deserve a reward.

James 1:22 warns Christians not to be deceived regarding the true nature of their obedience: “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” The apostle Paul shared a similar concern when he told the Corinthian believers not to judge their own faithfulness since God alone knows the motives of the heart:

I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God (1 Cor. 4:3–5).
SHOULD I WANT TO OBEY?

Ephesians 6:5–6 defines obedience as something that springs from "sincerity of heart," even when no one is watching. So our motives determine true obedience, and love is the greatest motivator.

Love motivated God the Father to send His Son to die for our redemption (cf. Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Only love can motivate us to want to serve and obey God in sincerity of heart. The apostle John wrote, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). And Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (Jn. 14:15; cf. vvs. 23–24).

Loving God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength is the only foundation on which to build a life of faith, true obedience. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 Jn. 5:3). Burdensome means a difficult or heavy oppression. The ancient Greeks used the word to describe suffering under heavy taxation. Though God’s commands are not burdensome, they are not necessarily easy.

To be honest, sometimes following God’s commandments requires us to take up our crosses to follow Him, which necessitates hard work, sacrifice, and adversity. We will face trials and may need to make costly decisions.

Only love can motivate us to want to serve and obey God in sincerity of heart.

The scribes and Pharisees placed heavy burdens on the Jewish people by adding to the Law of Moses. So the early church council at Jerusalem determined not to place a similarly heavy yoke on Gentile believers since Jesus had fulfilled the Law’s requirements (Mt. 23:4; Acts 15:10, 28). Christ invited people, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Mt. 11:28–30).

For those who have placed their trust in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of eternal life, there is nothing you can do to make God love you more than He already does. And there is also nothing you can do to make Him love you less. Burdens are lifted at Calvary.

Imagine that someone you love has planned a special evening to celebrate your relationship. He or she gives you a meaningful greeting card and an extraordinary gift that is truly an expression of love. Stunned, you affirm how much you appreciate everything. It is a warm and loving moment.

How would you feel if your beloved then tells you, “I went through a lot of trouble to put it all together, but something had to be done to keep you happy”? Or, what if your beloved—delighted you noticed how much effort he or she put into the evening—said, “Now that you have enjoyed yourself and I have accomplished all the duties I had to complete, it’s your turn to return the favor”?

Now, envision a different scenario. The person you love provides you with that same lovely evening. When you express your thanks, he or she replies, “It was nothing but a small demonstration of my love and appreciation for you. If I could have, I would have made tonight a thousand times better.”

When you love someone with all of your heart, serving, obeying, and sacrificing for him or her is a joy, not a hassle. It is a pleasure, not a burden. When we truly love the Lord, obeying Him is not an oppressive yoke but a joyful path to freedom. Christ in us empowers us to obey, and He shows us grace and forgiveness when we fail.

Liberty sprouts from obedience. Freedom and blessing are gifts of grace that flood our lives when we love God and want to obey Him (Jas. 1:25). Obedience is a choice and an opportunity to joyously express our love for God. The last lines of the famous hymn “Trust and Obey” effectively convey the sentiments of true obedience: “What He says we will do, where He sends we will go. Never fear, only trust and obey.” The following are the first and third verses:

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,  What a glory He sheds on our way!  While we do His good will, He abides with us still,  And with all who will trust and obey.

But we never can prove the delights of His love  Until all on the altar we lay;  For the favor He shows, for the joy He bestows,  Are for them who will trust and obey.

By obeying freely from a sincere heart, we are free to live the life we were created to live—not as slaves to sin, but as new creations empowered by the Holy Spirit living within us (Rom. 8:1–11).

by Clarence John son,  a Bible teacher and director of The Friends of Israel Institute of Jewish Studies

For study aids and discussion questions regarding this article, go to http://fij.org.
A new, high-tech Bible curriculum has ignited a Bible revival in Israel’s public high schools. Developed by the Museum of the Bible, headquartered in Washington, DC, in partnership with the Israel-based technology company Compedia, the interactive curriculum uses augmented reality to teach the Bible to today's smartphone generation.

“What we are seeing in Israel is a Bible revival as a result of this curriculum,” Compedia CEO Gil Ilutowich said. Until the launch of the curriculum, Bible—a required subject for all Israeli public school students—had remained largely unpopular. Now it has become many students’ favorite class.

The curriculum’s pilot program, spearheaded by Ramat Gan’s Mayor Yisrael Zinger, began in 2015 among 1,500 ninth-grade students in the Ramat Gan school district. The following year, more than 6,000 students participated. Today, the curriculum is officially approved for use throughout Israel. Around 100,000 students use it.

The curriculum’s augmented-reality app connects the textbook to the tablet. It allows students to take pictures of textbook pages with their tablets, which then load digital, interactive learning material. For example, when learning about the Exodus, students can access GPS mapping of the ancient region and explore why the Israelites used certain routes over others.

“What we are doing is what we call blended learning. It’s books with iPads, with technology, with PowerPoint presentations, with songs. So every five or six minutes, there’s something new,” Ilutowich said. Students can flip through the pages of an ancient text, interact with Bible characters, view ancient artifacts in 3D, interact with Bible maps, take gamified quizzes, and listen to music clips. It especially appeals to visual learners and students with limited attention spans.

Such interaction with the text has made Bible learning more exciting, reported Ramat Gan teachers. “The curriculum has made Bible study more interesting, more relevant. The combination of ancient texts with modern technology has created a new learning experience that our students relate to,” said Ramat Gan high-school teacher Nadavi Noked.

The Museum of the Bible’s full curriculum consists of four volumes: Genesis to Ruth, Samuel through the Prophets, the Gospels, and Acts through Revelation. Israel uses the first two volumes, which teach the Hebrew Scriptures.

Each volume presents the Bible’s narrative, history, and impact. Narrative chapters teach the Bible’s major events, places, and people. History chapters include ancient biblical artifacts, ancient documents from surrounding cultures, and the history of the Bible’s transmission and translation. Impact chapters show the Bible’s influence on societies and cultures.

As the curriculum continues to expand in Israel, Museum of the Bible President Cary Summers hopes it becomes equally as popular beyond Israel’s borders. “Just as many centuries ago God’s Word emanated from ancient Israel, modern Israel now seems poised to play a major role in producing and spreading the high-tech version throughout the Holy Land, and then far beyond,” Summers wrote.

To learn how you can access the Museum of the Bible curriculum for personal use, private school, or homeschool use, visit curriculum.museumofthebible.org.

From news reports
IS ABBAS DRAGGING ISRAEL INTO WAR WITH HAMAS?

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas plans to halt all financial payments to Gaza, thus dragging Israel into war with Hamas, Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman said recently. “I have no intention of initiating any military activity, not in the summer and not in the fall, not in the south and not in the north. Our objective is to prevent war,” Lieberman said.

He blamed Abbas for creating a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, forcing 2 million residents to live on less than four hours of electricity a day. At Abbas’s request, Israel has reduced by 40 percent the amount of electricity it provides to Gaza after Abbas refused to pay 40 percent of the bill to the Israel Electricity Company, Gaza’s main electricity provider. Abbas is trying to weaken Hamas and regain control of the Gaza Strip.

Abbas has also stopped sending medicine to Gaza and has cut payments to government employees there. Lieberman said Abbas will continue to reduce payments for electricity and medicine until they cease altogether. He said Abbas took this step without consulting Israel, Egypt, or Jordan and is crippling Hamas in the hope that “he will drag Hamas into a conflict with Israel.”

SEARS STOPS SELLING ANTI-ISRAEL CLOTHES

Due to negative feedback, the Sears website will no longer sell clothes featuring the slogan “Free Palestine.” Spreadshirt Collection, a third-party seller, had marketed the anti-Israel items on Sears.com since October 26, 2016.

The clothing line featured clothing bearing a variety of pro-Palestinian designs, one of which labeled all of Israel as “Palestine” and called for its “liberation.”

PORESCHE INVESTS IN ISRAEL

German automaker Porsche has announced plans to invest tens of millions of euros in Israeli automotive start-ups, following a trend set by U.S. automakers like Ford and high-tech firms like Intel, which are investing in Israel’s emerging self-driving car market.

“Israel is a top market for IT experts and engineers. Per capita there are more start-ups there than in any other country in the world,” said Lutz Meschke, CEO of Porsche. The company plans to open a permanent office in Israel.

Israel is “one of the [world’s] major contributors to driverless automated car technology,” said Israeli Prof. Yoram Shifman, head of transportation research at Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa.

UNESCO DECLARES CAVE OF THE PATRIARCHS “PALESTINIAN”

UNESCO has once again denied Israel’s Jewish history in its recent ruling declaring the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron an “endangered Palestinian heritage site.” UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee passed the resolution 12-3, with six abstentions.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu slammed the vote as another “delirious” act by UNESCO. “Not a Jewish site? After all, who is buried there? Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca and Leah, our patriarchs and matriarchs,” Netanyahu said.

Although Arabs represent 20 percent of Israel’s population and enjoy equal rights with Jewish citizens, Palestinian Authority (PA) spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh reaffirmed recently that a future Palestinian state must be free of Jews. “The Palestinian people . . . are determined to establish their independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital that will be empty of settlers,” Rudeineh said.

His statement echoes that of PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, who told reporters in Cairo in 2013, “In a final resolution, we would not see the presence of a single Israeli—civilian or soldier—on our lands.” Even now, the PA forbids Jewish people to live inside PA-controlled territory, and the sale of land to Jews is punishable by death.

‘SMART’ HIKING TRAIL TO OPEN

A mobile app that integrates today’s landscape with historic sites to help hikers see Israel during the second Temple period will be a key feature of an innovative, 43.5-mile-long “smart” trail set to open in the spring. The new Sanhedrin Trail will span the Lower Galilee between Tiberias and Beit She’arim National Park. It is being built by the Israel Antiquities Authority and Israel’s National Religious Education Administration.
“Which is more important?
To read the Holy Bible
or to read the stories of the rabbis?”

by Zvi Kalisher

The Jews have so many holidays that if we were to compete with other countries to see which nation celebrates the most holidays, Israel would win first place. I recently visited an Israeli hospital during the time surrounding Yom Kippur, an extremely important holiday on the Jewish calendar.

Since it is a religious hospital, ultra-Orthodox men freely go there to speak to new immigrants who are sick, trying to lead them into their many rabbinical traditions. During my visit, I overheard them talking to new Jewish immigrants from Russia, and I could not stand by silently. It is our duty to be active for the Lord. So I entered the conversation.

The ultra-Orthodox men told me they were trying to help the immigrants celebrate Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. “How? With what will you teach them?” I asked. They pointed to a big stack of books and also said they might even buy them chickens to sacrifice.

Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the ultra-Orthodox have a custom called Kaporot (atonement). A person swings a live chicken over his head, and the chicken is killed as a substitutionary sacrifice.

“Where does the Bible say we must sacrifice a chicken?” I asked. Surprised at my question, they became silent and stood there, looking at me. I then explained to the immigrants that these teachers were blind and were trying to make others blind. I told them sacrificing a chicken will not bring them forgiveness of sins, and I opened my Bible to the prophet Isaiah to read about the One who became our final sacrifice for sin:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace...
was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:4–6).

Then I asked the immigrants, “Which is more important? To read the Holy Bible or to read the stories of the rabbis?” Even though they had little religious knowledge, they answered that the Bible is more important.

At that point, the ultra-Orthodox men became angry and started to shout, “He wants to make them Christians!” The hospital’s rabbi rushed over to see what all the commotion was about.

“What are you telling these people?” he asked me.

“These men come here and try to make other people blind with their fictitious stories,” I said. “I do not believe in all of those stories because they do not align with the Holy Bible. It is my duty, as one who believes in the living God, to show them the truth and warn them of their evil ways.”

When the rabbi asked how I came to such faith, I read to him Isaiah 53. He continued to ask me questions, and the Russians became even more interested in what I had to say.

Then I asked the rabbi, “Where does this chapter mention Christianity?” He remained as silent as a fish. The young ultra-Orthodox men were surprised to see that the rabbi they thought would silence me had no answers.

Thinking about Kaparot, I asked, “Was the sacrifice about which Isaiah wrote a chicken?”

One of the Russians responded, “We do not know much about the Bible, but it is clear as sunlight that a poor chicken cannot be our sacrifice, according to this passage.” The rabbi remained silent.

We had a long conversation. I pray this Yom Kippur they will come to know the One about whom the prophet Isaiah wrote—the One who sacrificed His life to pay for our sins once and for all.

—The Friends of Israel Archives, October 2003

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

CORRECTION

On page 27 of the May/June issue, we said Jewish pioneers in the 19th century returned to “British-ruled Palestine, which at that time was part of the Ottoman Empire.” The words British-ruled did not belong in the sentence. Palestine did not pass to the British until the end of World War I. We apologize for the error.
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