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“I’ve rarely felt such fellowship and trust among Christians and Jews.” That’s how Jewish author Dr. Stephen Spector reflected on a remarkable event held recently at Ohev Shalom in Richboro, Pennsylvania. Cosponsored by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) of Philadelphia/Southern New Jersey and the Bucks County (PA) Christian Coalition (BCCC), the program “Evangelicals, Jews, and Israel: Separating Fact From Fiction” packed the synagogue. Hundreds of Jews and Christians participated in almost equal numbers.

The event represented a giant step forward following years of meetings between members of two organizations that would not ordinarily be connected. The groundbreaking, even historic, work of the AJC under the leadership of Executive Director Ilana Wilensik and the BCCC under Gail Pedrick and Terry Noble yielded an extraordinary evening that touched the hearts of everyone who attended.

Many Jewish guests heard for the first time what makes Christians of biblical faith substantively different from “Christians” who historically persecuted the Jewish people through threats, intimidation, segregation, pogroms, violence, and murder.

As a speaker, I was privileged to explain the debt Bible-believing Christians owe to the Jewish people. We are grateful to them for our Bible, God’s revelation, provided through Jewish writers; for our Savior, Jesus, who was born of a Jewish mother and who worshiped in the synagogue; and for a host of physical, material blessings in many fields of human endeavor that benefit people everywhere. The audience heard about the millions of Christians who reject Replacement Theology and embrace God’s promises to the children of Jacob.

Dr. Spector, a professor of English at Stony Brook University (NY), shared content and conclusions from his prize-winning book, Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism. He explained how Christians of biblical faith believe Israel is both God’s prophetic clock and irrefutable proof that prophecy is true and coming to pass in our lifetime. Spector also discussed other vital reasons for evangelical support for Israel, including God’s promises to the Jewish people, God’s blessings through the Jewish people, and Christian appreciation to Jews for establishing the great foundations of Christianity. He noted that the real reasons Christian Zionists support Israel are often surprisingly different from those attributed to them.

Special guest Daniel Kutner, consul general of Israel for the American Mid-Atlantic region, explained why he treasures Israel’s Christian supporters. His comments, obviously from the heart, were truly touching. Here are excerpts:

“...I love our Christian friends of Israel because Christians do not only speak about their love for Israel, they show their love in both word and deed. I love our Christian supporters of Israel because you stand with us in our times of need. For example, after 9/11, when the world was afraid to travel, especially to Israel, Christians continued to visit the Holy Land. I love our Christian friends because your support is not contingent on political developments, calls of delegitimization, and questions of our basic right to exist. You stand with us when everyone else abandons us. I love you because you show the Israeli people that we are not alone in this world. Evangelical Christians have taken up the cause of preserving Israel with a passion. We speak and act with one voice. You have done so much, and I humbly ask you to continue to carry the torch. Thank you, and may God bless you.

An hour after the program ended, people were still mingling, discussing, and fellowshipping with one another in a way that surely pleased the Lord. I believe an event like this one, having such eternal implications, could never have been orchestrated apart from the Lord’s design and blessing. What started as a handful of Christians and Jews meeting together has expanded to hundreds who have moved beyond simply fleeting curiosity. Jewish people and Christians alike are ready for the Lord’s next opportunities.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
The Magic of Mahmoud

Like a diminutive political time bomb, Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stalked the halls of the United Nations in September. He took his vitriol to the podium of the General Assembly to announce that the United States was behind the September 11, 2001, attacks, Israel has no right to exist, and “All values, even the freedom of expression in Europe and the United States, are being sacrificed at the altar of Zionism.”

Predictably, the U.S. delegation and 27 European Union delegates walked out. The bad news was that 164 other delegations stayed and gave the megalomaniac a polite round of applause.

Interestingly, this odious pretender to unassailable power seems, to some, to have an aura of rock-star magic about him, the type of magic Webster’s describes as “an extraordinary power or influence seemingly from a supernatural source.” And the conclusion is foregone as to the source, which is driving the man to create nuclear power capable of wiping Israel and its 6 million Jewish citizens off the face of the earth with one giant mushroom cloud.

Evidence of his perverted influence is the number of collaborators willing to join both him and Iran’s mullahs in the diabolical quest to spread a blanket of radical Islamic hegemony over the Middle East.

In mid-October Ahmadinejad spoke to thousands of enraptured Lebanese in the Hezbollah-controlled town of Bint Jbeil two miles from Israel’s northern border. “Resistance is the key,” he declared, “to the Lebanese nation and all nations in the region. The people of Lebanon, of all religions and all walks of life, have found the secret to victory.”

And with these words there was neither thought of a negotiated settlement nor the fantasy of two states living side by side in peace. Which, by the way, some Western leaders have convinced themselves can be achieved by bringing Hezbollah terrorists into the negotiating process.

Here is Ahmadinejad’s take on the purpose of the resistance being forged with Lebanon, Hamas, Syria, and others: “The Zionists will not last long. Bring defeat to the Zionists.” He said “Palestine” should be “forcefully freed” and the Zionists sent back “to where they came from.”

Incredibly, he blamed the Jewish people for the current economic crisis and air pollution and claimed they are “depriving” other nations of and “monopolizing” nuclear technology.

Feigning a desire for ecumenical harmony, Ahmadinejad counseled, “All divine religions guide mankind to prosperity and invite human societies to monotheism, justice and friendship.” All religions, that is, with the obvious exceptions of Christianity and Judaism.

For Israel and its Jewish citizenry, the huge stockpile of rockets in the Hezbollah enclaves of South Lebanon represents anything but an ecumenical-harmony hug. As for the United States and its vast majority of professing Christians, the message will be delivered by nuclear-tipped, intercontinental ballistic missiles when they become available.

And about his talk of sending Jews back to where they came from—an attitude finding much currency in Palestinian and Arab circles today—the man’s grasp of history fails the test. The homeland of world Jewry is not Germany. Nor is it Poland, Europe, North America, or more rational Arab states. The Jewish people in the State of Israel are at home. To them—biblically, legally, and historically—belongs the very soil Mahmoud Ahmadinejad wants to vaporize.

And while he can stand safely near the border of the Promised Land and thumb his nose at its rightful owners, it would be well to remember that, millennia before Islam was around to place a footprint in the sands of the Arabian desert, Jewish people were at home in Eretz Yisrael. And they will be there when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad isn’t even a memory.

by Elwood McQuaid
Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, leader of the crusade to build a mosque near Ground Zero in New York City, trashed his “moderation” pose when he disregarded millions of concerned Americans and declared that moving the proposed facility could cause a violent backlash from Muslim extremists and endanger national security.

Rauf told CNN, “The headlines in the Muslim world will be that Islam is under attack... Anger will explode in the Muslim world.” The fury, he said, could be worse than the violence that followed the publication of Danish cartoons of Muhammad in 2005.

No moderation here. Islamist muscle-tactics are now in full swing, threatening violence and retaliation and creating an air of intimidation that offers surrender as the only alternative to placing innocent lives in jeopardy.

And why not use fear as a weapon of choice? The publication of the cartoons of Muhammad by the Jyllands-Posten newspaper in Denmark was used by radical Muslim clerics to foment extreme violence. Muslims rioted, burned embassies, and boycotted Danish goods. Many people died because Muslims claimed they had a right to commit murder and mayhem because their religious sensitivities were offended.

The editor of the Danish newspaper explained he commissioned the cartoons to respond to the self-censorship being imposed in Europe when dealing with issues related to Islam. In other words, he objected to the press being intimidated into silence. Islamic extremists justify their long list of atrocities as Sharia-compliant and therefore acceptable for striking fear in the hearts of “infidels.”

Extremist Muslim aspirations were made clear when Islamic cleric Anjem Choudary told ABC’s Christiane Amanpour in October, “We believe that one day the flag of Islam will fly over the White House.” Those who dismiss his statement as the ranting of the radical fringe are not listening. His words echoed a pledge made by the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat who vowed the Palestinian flag would eventually fly over the churches of Jerusalem.

These are not idle threats. They are the long-term goals of Islamists who want a global caliphate that will destroy Israel and reduce Western Christianity to humiliating subservience.

It is a huge mistake to ignore or underestimate these militant Islamists whose declarations of intent grow ever bolder on the streets of our cities and in liberal media outlets providing open microphones for their diatribes. Consider the current situation in Europe. In 2004 historian Bernard Lewis told the German newspaper Die Welt, “Europe will be Islamic by the end of the century.” Competent observers repeat his predication today.

In Sweden, for example, police in Malmo, the country’s third largest city, publicly admit they can no longer control the violent Muslim gangs. Medical personnel refuse to enter certain areas without a police escort.

Concessions are being made based on fear. In the end, they will hasten Bernard Lewis’s prediction. Clearly, the Islamic objective is to establish a state within a state, bridgeheads operating under Islamic Sharia law, from which to achieve total conquest. As events unfold on the continent, we see the strategy is working.

It is critical to understand Muslim intransigence—particularly on matters some Christians, politicians, and social-betterment operatives cave in on in the name of tolerance. Two important cases are:

1. Muslim inflexibility on the Cordoba Islamic center near Ground Zero. It telegraphs a message that American sensitivities are inconsequential. What’s important to Imam Rauf and his supporters is that Islam has its way. For all the talk about the center being for all faiths, it will, if built, stand as a monument to Muslim triumph.

2. Palestinian and Arab intractable insistence that Israel not be recognized as a Jewish state. To concede here would be a fatal mistake. Without a clear Jewish identity, infiltrated by masses of Palestinian immigrants, the nation would eventually morph into a Palestinian entity allowing only a minority Jewish population. Goodbye Israel.

When concessions are the fruit of fear, the bullies always win.
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The Invisible Revolution

When I read the comment in Wired magazine last fall, I was so astonished I had to read it again. It reaffirmed my suspicion that there is a quiet, almost invisible, revolution going relatively unnoticed in our culture. It is in ideas and worldviews and the effect new communications technology is having on the way an entire generation sees truth and reality.

The Wired article “Kevin Kelly and Steven Johnson on Where Ideas Come From” contained an interview with Kevin Kelly, a new-technology author and journalist. Kelly said he’s “come to see technology . . . as a different source for understanding where we are in the cosmos. I think technology is something that can give meaning to our lives, particularly in a secular world.”

For Kelly and many like him, technologies like the Internet, iPhone, and “cloud computing” have not merely created functional utility and convenience but have provided a reason to live, a definition of “where we are in the cosmos.” This is a stunningly troublesome admission. If we are alone in the universe—no God, no ultimate truth—then how can flying faster through a meaningless universe or communicating instantaneously with others about things that don’t matter give any real meaning to our lives?

When Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press—a historic innovation not unlike the Internet—and then printed the first Gutenberg Bible in 1455, it wasn’t the movable type, levers, or screws that imparted truth or meaning to the world; rather, it was the Scriptures, which Gutenberg’s invention made available to the masses.

Kelly’s reference to “a secular world” is the giveaway. Absent the ultimate and objective truth that God exists and has communicated His Word to us, we sadly are left to worship innovation rather than the Master Innovator. And there is a lesson in that as old as Genesis.

There also is a problem with the new-technologists’ novel view of “reality.” Said Kelly: “We should think of ideas as connections, in our brains and among people. Ideas aren’t self-contained things; they’re more like ecologies and networks. They travel in clusters.”

Kelly and other tech-gurus (I read them constantly) are beginning to argue the case for viewing our minds, values, and ideas as purely digital impulses on a computer model or as postings on a social network. But this position introduces a problem many of us saw with the rise of video games and cyber communications: a subtle drift away from the real “stuff” of the world designed by a personal, Creator-God.

We live in a universe created by a sovereign Lord, where violation of His rules has genuine and serious consequences. When ideas are no longer anchored in the belief objective truth exists, we have no reason to seek God’s truth or His reality. Any transitory, subjective “truth” or “reality” will do—even one based on computer chips and wireless networks.

The recent movie Social Network, which depicts the creation of Facebook, is a good example. The people most responsible for developing the idea of “friending” one another through a worldwide cyber network are ultimately shown to be socially dysfunctional and morally empty.

The point here is not to flee technology, denounce it, or fear it but, rather, to use it as a tool the way the Gutenberg printing press was used. We also must recognize that the next generation—one that has been weaned on Twitter, texting, and the Internet—will be running the engines of our Republic one day. As a result, the church has a great educational and evangelistic task ahead if we are to ensure that America will be guided by eternal, rather than ephemeral, values.

A good starting point would be a history lesson on great American, evangelical Founding Fathers, like John Witherspoon. Here was a Christian pastor and educator who spiritually mentored three Supreme Court justices, a president, and 77 members of America’s early Congress. Witherspoon once noted, “If the Scripture is true, the discoveries of reason cannot be contrary to it; and therefore, it has nothing to fear from that quarter.” An updated version would be, “If Scripture is true, the innovations of new technology can never replace it; and we have nothing to fear from it.”

Craig L. Parshall is a leading trial attorney who argues cases involving civil liberties, constitutional rights, and religious freedoms. He is also senior vice president and general counsel for the National Religious Broadcasters and a critically acclaimed novelist.
When the World Descended Into Madness

From death to life. Clockwise, from top: The front gate of Auschwitz, the infamous Nazi extermination camp in Poland (A2585/Frank Leonhardt/dpa/Corbis); a poignant photograph by Karen Gillerman Harel, now an Israeli postage stamp; Lilly Friedman standing near her wedding gown at the former Bergen-Belsen concentration camp (Courtesy, Lilly Friedman).
Lilly Friedman lost virtually everything—parents, brothers, and home—during Hitler’s manic rampage through Europe during World War II. She survived the Auschwitz extermination camp and a forced-death march before ending her journey through Holocaust hell in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany. She managed to survive; and her story survives, too, in the form of her wedding dress—a symbol of triumph over tragedy—fashioned from a German parachute and now permanently on display in the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

As I read Helen Zegerman Schwimmer’s story of Lilly’s life in the darkness of the Shoah, her phrase when the world descended into madness hammered its way into my mind. I think it’s because of America’s plunge into political, moral, and social depravity over the past several years.

For generations we have been taught that, through some sort of social evolution, humanity is being swept upward into a utopian field of dreams. The theme was the mantra of “success” thinkers who peddled the notion “Every day, in every way, I’m getting better and better.”

We, of course, are not. The problem is that the philosophy was grounded in material success, self-love, “making it” in business and social circles, and believing that the basic component common to all was inherent goodness. These “thinkers” claimed mankind’s nature was universally disposed to altruism, benevolence, goodwill, and international harmony of thought and action capable of developing one brave new world of perpetual peace and prosperity.

The Fortunes of Fantasy

If such were true, why are we experiencing what appears to be an unprecedented increase in uncertainty, collective incompetence, and aggressive behavior? Why the obscenity of revisionist fantasy that degrades the accomplishments of truly great statesmen and turns every spectacular achievement of Western history into a criminal enterprise? And (at the top of the list) why are we countenancing the unconscionable atrocity of Holocaust denial?

Holocaust denial represents a union of the most despicable elements of human thought and deed. It degrades, devalues, and dehumanizes even our right to exist. In every respect, Holocaust denial is the very gutter of hate-mongering.

The question we must ask is this: With the fraternity of revisionist history and Holocaust denial growing, accompanied by the international groundswell of anti-Semitism and irrational animosity toward the State of Israel, are we nearing a repetition of the time when the world descended into madness?

Remembering Reality

A few years ago I stood with our beloved Zvi Kalisher, a Holocaust survivor, at the site of the Treblinka concentration camp in Poland, a killing factory that owned the distinction of murdering more Jewish people in less time than any other Nazi death camp. It was probably here that Zvi’s father, mother, and sister were “processed” after being moved from the Warsaw Ghetto.

At the far end of the camp is a large pit pockmarked by evidence of hand shoveling. After spending time in a garden where memorial stones, equal in number to the slain, cover the spot where the crematory once stood, we saw the pit. It deepened the reality of what happened in that dreadful place. Like the ovens at Auschwitz, there stood the physical evidence of what went on. Every shovelful of earth was dug by a Jewish man or boy who, after being worked nearly to death, was disposed of in the ash pits where human remains were dumped.

I have seen, many times over, the faded numbers on the arms of survivors who, though they made it through, had their lives inconceivably crushed by their encounter with the incomprehensible.

American Gen. Dwight Eisenhower did the right thing by ordering residents from nearby towns and villages to walk by the piles of human remains to witness what they had refused to acknowledge. He also made young GI’s enter the gates and look at what had been done. He reasoned correctly they would return home bearing eyewitness accounts with confirming photographs of what we must never forget. The general was farsighted enough to see that, one day, people would choose to forget.

Some might question whether pushing aside unpleasant chapters of history is a choice or a simple casualty of the passing of time. And while time does put distance between events and recollections, the fact is that the vast majority of people do not wish to be reminded of man’s unthinkable cruelty to man.

A recent example was heard in the voices of those offended by video reruns of the collapse of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. Their preference was to put the atrocity out of mind and move on. We must, of course, move on; but doing so does not justify ignoring the reality of the events.

Anyone who has ever ascended to the top of Masada near the Dead Sea has been exposed to a gruesome calamity that befell the Jewish people some 2,000 years ago. It was Rome’s final act in its quest to obliterate the Chosen People. The invaders had ravished Jerusalem, and the Jews fled and scattered. Nearly 1,000 refugees made their way to the fortress in the desert in an effort to escape the fury of the Romans. After three grueling years of siege and attacks, Masada fell; and the refugees died.

But after two millennia, the event has not been forgotten. It’s as though
Out of Death Comes Life

I once asked a Jewish immigrant to Israel why she left the safety of England to make her home in a settlement where everyone was in constant danger of being attacked. She replied that her life was in the homeland of her people and that she would rather be part of the Jewish dream to rebuild the country than live quietly in Great Britain.

I reminded her she was placing her life in daily jeopardy. When I asked whether she felt the risk was worth it, she replied,

Yes, I am aware of that. And I choose to remain because I truly believe that, if I should lose my life here, out of my death new life will come. Everyone here believes the same. It doesn’t matter how many times this place is destroyed by our enemies, we will build it again. And one day death will be overcome, and life will flourish here.

And though the concept is difficult to grasp in hard times, it is the true nature of things.

Accompanying the article on the remarkable life of Lilly Friedman was a poignant photograph. Resting on an Israeli flag draped over a table, slightly above the point of the flag’s Magen David, is a wrinkled forearm bearing the faded blue numbers 55374. The Nazis identified their extermination-camp victims by numbers and tattooed the numbers on them.

The tattoo is a witness to history—a history of suffering and unmitigated evil the likes of which the modern world has rarely seen. It also gives evidence of a commitment to destroy an entire people—a “final solution.”

...
We have been hearing reports that the sprawling Muslim country of Indonesia is a model of pluralism and religious harmony. According to an article on www.america.gov by Louise Fenner, “Indonesia Building Bridges Between Religions,” an Interreligious Council formed last year in Jakarta “underscores that nation’s commitment to religious freedom and pluralism and provides a foundation for expanding interfaith cooperation.”

The Council’s opening ceremony was held in the Foreign Ministry’s historic Pancasila Mansion “where the founders of modern Indonesia first proclaimed the philosophical basis for the Indonesian state.” Fenner wrote that one official declared, “This is the place where the religious pluralism that’s enshrined in the constitution was made a key part of Indonesian identity and constitutional process.”

As in so many countries with large Muslim populations, the commitment to freedom of religion and worship enshrined in constitutional documents does not necessarily square with what takes place on the ground. Indonesia, housing the world’s largest Muslim population (197 million), is a prime example.

Compass Direct News recently called attention to the Indonesian-Muslim effort to halt “Christianization.” In West Java, Islamic organizations have declared their intent to create “paramilitary units in local mosques and a ‘mission center’ to oppose ‘ongoing attempts to convert people to Christianity.’” Muslim leaders contend, “If the Muslims in the city can unite, there will be no more story about us being openly insulted by other religions [Christianity].”

On August 17 Indonesia celebrated its 65th Independence Day with a growing sense of distrust in the government’s ability to stop radical Islamics from attacking churches, reported Compass Direct. Earlier that month, in a suburb of Jakarta, more than 300 members of the extremist Islamic People’s Forum and Islamic Defenders Front broke through a police barricade on a Sunday and injured at least a dozen people worshiping in a field, the news agency said. This particular church has faced attacks since November 2000 when it was constructing a church building.

The Jakarta Post told Compass that churches were being attacked every week, but the news media avoided coverage because it is an “emotional and controversial issue.” The Post spokesman said, “You also risk being accused of taking sides when you report on religious conflicts.”

Compass said Dr. Musda Mulia, a Muslim research professor at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, “told Compass all Indonesians have a right to freedom of faith. It seems the government doesn’t want to deal with the radicals. Persecution of Christians and other minorities has been my concern for many years. But the government is very weak.”

Violence by Islamist groups is increasing, and the determination to destroy pluralism is strengthening. Recently a terror plot was discovered against the president. The plot was part of a comprehensive plan to target not only Westerners but also state officials deemed “symbols of secularism.” One of the stated aims, Compass reported, “was to ‘accelerate the transformation of the country’s democratic system into one controlled by Islamic [Sharia] law.’”

In today’s terror war against Christians, our highest priority is prayer. We can ill afford to fail our Lord or our brethren at this most decisive time in our lives.
The Jewishness of the Temple Mount
I was ushered into a large room with conference tables and bookshelves filled with books on Islamic Law. Sitting at the head of the table, in official attire, was the recently appointed Palestinian grand mufti of Jerusalem, Ikrima Sabri. Behind him hung a portrait of then-Palestinian President Yasser Arafat who had installed him. I was there to interview the Islamic cleric for a documentary dealing with the religious controversy over the “Haram.” When my question turned to the issue of the Haram being the Jewish Temple Mount, the mufti became agitated. “No Temple ever existed there!” he declared. As proof, he offered this argument: “Had a Temple ever existed on the Haram, Allah would not have commanded Muslims to build a mosque there.”

Moreover, he said, “Not a single stone in the entire city proved [an ancient] Jewish existence” in Jerusalem.

His statement reflects the Palestinian revision of history that has become the official history of the Palestinian people. It is taught in every school at every level and is passionately preached from mosque pulpits every Friday by Muslim clerics. The Temple Mount and the issue of rebuilding the Temple are cornerstones of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Most Israelis do not seriously regard the intensity of Muslim feeling toward the prospect of a third Temple. From the torching of the al-Aqsa mosque by a prophetically impassioned “Christian” tourist in 1969 to the opening of an exit to the Western Wall Tunnel in 1995 to the reconstruction of a walkway to the Mughrabi Gate in 2006 to the reconstruction of the Hurva Synagogue in the Jewish Quarter last year, Islamic authorities interpret every act near what they call the Haram al-Sharif as a deliberate attempt by the State of Israel to destroy the Muslim holy places and build a Jewish Temple.

So prolific is the Muslim propaganda denying the ancient Temple’s existence that many Westerners question the Temple’s historicity, as well as the argument for its location on the now-Islamic Haram. It is necessary, therefore, to review the evidence.

**What the Bible Says**

The Bible unequivocally records the historic existence and topographical location of two Jewish Temples that, throughout Jewish history, have been situated on Mount Moriah. The location first surfaced when God commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac on a specific mountain in the land of Moriah (Gen. 22:2).

Later God established the Israelites in the land of Israel (2 Sam. 7:10) and told King David, “[your son] shall build a house for My name” (v. 13). The Lord confirmed His choice of the Temple site when He commanded David to purchase the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite and erect there an altar for burnt offering (1 Chr. 21:18–29). David declared, “This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel” (22:1).

The site was Mount Moriah: “Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the LORD had appeared to his father David, at the place that David had prepared on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite” (2 Chr. 3:1).

When the Jewish people returned to Jerusalem from Babylon under the edict of King Cyrus (36:22–23), they built the second Temple exactly where the first had been: “Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site” (Ezra 6:7). They were required to build it “in its place,” meaning on its original foundation (2:68). Theologically, there could be no other location for the second Temple (or any future Temple) than the one historically sanctified by the Divine Presence. At the first Temple’s dedication, the “glory of the LORD” (the Shekinah) filled the Temple’s Holy of Holies (1 Ki. 8:10–12), making the Temple Mount God’s dwelling place forever (v. 13). Also, God showed the prophet Ezekiel that this glory, which had departed before the destruction of the first Temple, would later return as it had departed (Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 18–19; 11:22–23; 43:1–7). Consequently, the Temple site must remain unchanged until Israel’s final restoration in its land, when God’s presence will dwell within the Temple forever (37:22–28).

**What Archaeology Tells Us**

Archaeological excavation also unanimously confirms that the present elevated platform Muslims call the Haram is on Mount Moriah and once housed the Jewish Temples. Although the 10th-century B.C. Davidic and Solomonic kingdoms were once disputed, today archaeological discoveries affirm their historicity. At Khirbet Qeiyafa, a provincial town in the...
Elah Valley region, archaeologists uncovered impressive fortifications from this period. In addition, an ostracon (inscription on a potsherd) in Hebrew from the same period was found in one of the buildings. It reveals a high level of scribal culture that implies the presence of an archive. The site was probably an administrative center now identified as Netaim because of its proximity to the biblical site of Gederah (1 Chr. 4:23).

Archaeology has also uncovered the ancient City of David, which used the remains of earlier Canaanite and Jebusite fortifications and water systems. In southern Jerusalem, on a narrow ridge bordering the Kidron Valley, excavations have revealed a massive, 12-story, stepped-stone structure from the 13th century B.C. upon which David began to build his city. (See 2 Samuel 5:9.) It may have served as a retaining wall, buttressing his Fortress of Zion, since a recent discovery of monumental buildings above has been interpreted as the remains of David’s palace. It was on the elevated extension of a ridge above this palace that Mount Moriah was situated and the first Temple built by King Solomon, David’s son.

In 2010 a city wall with a gatehouse dating to the late 10th century B.C. was discovered in the Ophel. It shows that sophisticated engineering existed then in the city. A partial inscription in ancient Hebrew on one of several large storage jars unearthed in the complex indicates it belonged to a high-level government official. Seal impressions also argue for a royal context. These discoveries fit well with the biblical record of royal construction that employed skilled Phoenician architects and engineers to build the first Temple (1 Ki. 7:13–14). Scripture says Solomon “finished building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall around Jerusalem” (3:1). According to Eilat Mazar, the archaeologist who excavated the site, the wall probably connected with the City of David and “goes quite well with the biblical description about King Solomon building the fortification line around the new construction of Jerusalem, which means the temple itself and his royal palace.”

Scores of clay bullae (small seals stamped with the sender’s name and attached to documents) were discovered in a room in the City of David that was burned when the Babylonians destroyed the first Temple in 586 B.C. Many personal names in the books of Jeremiah and Chronicles were found, including Azariah son of Hilkiah who belonged to the family of high priests that officiated at the end of the first Temple period (1 Chr. 9:11).

An enduring testimony to the ancient Temple is the Western Wall, an extant portion of the second Temple’s retaining wall to which Jewish people for centuries have directed their prayers. This wall extends some 50 feet above the modern plaza, but also another 50 feet below it. Visitors can walk along at least 1,000 feet of this wall through what is known as the Western Wall Tunnels.

In addition, there is Robinson’s Arch. From 1968 to 1978 Israeli archaeologist Benjamin Mazar excavated many structures related to the second Temple, including a great staircase known as Robinson’s Arch, used by the priests to enter the Temple. This monumental structure began at the Pool of Siloam in the Kidron Valley and brought Jewish people (including Jesus and His disciples) up through the Huldah Gates and onto the Temple Mount.

From 1996 to 1998 Ronny Reich excavated in this area. His discoveries included an ancient street lined with shops where Jewish people bought sacrificial animals for the Temple; the landing for Robinson’s Arch; more miqva’ot (ritual immersion pools) used by Jews requiring purification to enter the Temple precincts.

What Happened?

Islam’s goal to dominate the region and place a Palestinian capital in Jerusalem has demanded rewriting the facts. Islam must destroy the Jewish claim to Jerusalem and to the site of the Muslim holy places. Any Palestinian support of Jewish claims, as Israelis request during peace negotiations, would be tantamount to sedition and punishable by death throughout the Islamic world.

Therefore, it is inconceivable the Palestinians will ever compromise on their demand for total sovereignty over Jerusalem or admit the existence of the Jewish Temples. It remains for those of us who know the facts to tell the truth and stand with the State of Israel in this great war of propaganda that is as pernicious and deadly as any weapons formed by man.

ENDNOTES

Muslims today vociferously deny a Jewish Temple existed on the Temple Mount (Haram). However, their own literature affirms this fact and shows how they have changed their position to accomplish their objective of Islamic domination.

Page 4 of *A Brief Guide to Al-Haram Al-Sharif*, published by the Supreme Moslem Council in 1924 (but also in all subsequent editions through the 1950s), made the following declaration:

_The site is one of the oldest in the world. Its sanctity dates from the earliest (perhaps pre-historic) times. Its identity with the site of Solomon’s Temple is beyond dispute. This, too, is the spot, according to the universal belief, on which “David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.”_

On page 16, the booklet declares,

_In the west wall of the chamber [beneath the southeast corner of the Haram], a door opens into a staircase descending to Solomon’s Stables. This is a vast subterranean chamber. . . . It dates probably as far back as the construction of Solomon’s Temple. According to Josephus, it was in existence and was used as a place of refuge by the Jews at the time of the conquest of Jerusalem by Titus in the year 70 A.D._

The booklet teaches that the late Graeco-Roman marble monoliths inside the Dome of the Rock were taken from Hadrian’s Temple of Jupiter. Roman Emperor Hadrian ended the Second Jewish Revolt and punished the Jewish people by renaming Jerusalem and plowing the Temple Mount with salt. So this Muslim document affirms that Hadrian had indeed erected a pagan temple on the site of the Jewish Temple, as history has recorded.

Moreover, this official Muslim publication (page 16) reveals the Haram was clearly understood to have been the site of a Byzantine Christian Church venerating Jesus’ infancy (at the Temple). In addition, it states,

_The first flight of steps takes us down to the small chamber . . . which was believed in medieval times to have been associated with Jesus Christ’s infancy; . . . and underneath the dome is a small niche lying horizontally, which was believed in early times to have been the Cradle of Christ and referred to under that name by several Arab historians._

How could such statements have been made by the same Muslim authority that today denies the existence of the Temple and its location on the Haram?

The answer is the need to develop a revisionist history in light of its goal to delegitimize the 1948 establishment of the Jewish state and its conquest of East Jerusalem (which includes the Temple Mount) in 1967.
Rebuilding the City of Gold

by Thomas C. Simcox
Troublesome Times

Upon his arrival Nehemiah conducted a secret nighttime inspection of Jerusalem’s walls. The next day he encouraged the city’s residents: “Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.” And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king’s words that he had spoken to me. So they said, “Let us rise up and build.” Then they set their hands to this good work (vv. 17–18).

Whenever there is great spiritual blessing, there is often trouble and testing. Such was the case for Nehemiah and his crew. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite heard Nehemiah and the Jewish people were rebuilding the walls, “they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel” (v. 10).

At first they simply mocked the Israelites, insulting them and belittling the work. When that tactic failed, their opposition became more sinister: “They became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion” (4:7-8). They told themselves, “They [the Israelites] will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease” (v. 11).

The Jewish people were scared, but Nehemiah “arose and said, . . . ‘Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight’” (v. 14). Nehemiah reminded them who was on their side. The Lord, the sovereign God of the universe, protects His people during spiritual attack; and this was a spiritual war.

The Real Opposition

The book of Nehemiah does not directly implicate Satan, but it seems clear he was behind the plot to thwart God’s work. Jerusalem is special to the Lord, who has declared, “See, I have

Music is a powerful medium. A few notes can swell your chest with pride and bring you to your feet. Other notes can make you cry. Recently a few notes carried me far, far away as I listened to the chorus of the beautiful Israeli song Yerushalayim Shel Zahav, “Jerusalem of Gold.”

The lyrics come directly from the Hebrew Scriptures: “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill!” (Ps. 137:5). Such powerful love for a city is something divinely implanted into Jewish hearts. Most Jewish people have an indelible identification with and passion for the city of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah had this passion too. Surrounded by enemies, he took on the difficult job of rebuilding the ruined city’s walls; and with God’s help, he prevailed.

Nehemiah was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes I, the sixth ruler of the Medo-Persian Empire. While in Shushan the citadel, Nehemiah’s brother Hanani came to him with men from Judah and reported on Jerusalem’s status and that of the Jewish people who had returned home (Neh. 1:1-2). (See the chart on page 26.) The report was anything but encouraging.

Nehemiah learned the Jewish remnant in the land was “in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire” (v. 3). The news devastated him. He “sat down and wept, and mourned for many days . . . before the God of heaven” (v. 4). Like many have since, Nehemiah cried over Jerusalem.

As the king’s cupbearer, Nehemiah had regular access to Artaxerxes. It was imperative that he never go before the king looking sad or downhearted because such a countenance was forbidden. However, as Nehemiah entered the king’s presence, his sadness was evident; and he “became dreadfully afraid” (2:2).

He told the king, “The city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire” (v. 3).

The king asked, “What do you request?” (v. 4). Nehemiah prayed and then asked permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls. Artaxerxes granted his request and gave him letters confirming Nehemiah’s authority, in addition to giving him “captains of the army and horsemen” (v. 9).
inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me” (Isa. 49:16). Scripture also calls Jerusalem “the city of the great King” (Ps. 48:2).

Because Satan wants to be God (Isa. 14:12–15), it follows that he wants that which belongs to God. The land of Israel belongs to the Lord, and His love for it is so special that Moses told the Israelites, “The land which you cross over to possess is . . . a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year” (Dt. 11:11–12).

This is why the battle for Jerusalem has been a historical constant. Jerusalem’s destiny has been predetermined by God, as King Messiah will reign and rule over the entire world from the city of gold.

Ultimately, Nehemiah’s enemies tried to kill him (Neh. 6:2), to slander the Jewish people, and to hire a false prophet to issue lies (vv. 10–14). But Nehemiah prevailed, and “the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days” (6:15). This tremendous feat testifies to the power of God.

Despite Satan and his earthly emissaries, the walls were finished in record time; and the Jewish people were able to worship the Lord in “the place where the Lord [their] God . . . put His name for His dwelling place” (Dt. 12:5).

Today Israel continues to struggle to hold on to its land and beloved city. Enemies surround the nation and continue to attempt to separate God’s people from their Promised Land. But the Lord will triumph, as He did in the days of Nehemiah. For the time being, the Messiah is seated at the Father’s right hand until His enemies become His footstool (Ps. 110:1). But the day is coming, as God promised, when He will fulfill His role as King of kings and Lord of lords and reign over all the earth from Jerusalem of gold.

Thomas C. Simcox
is the Northeastern States director
for The Friends of Israel.

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In 2008 building remains from the first Temple period (eighth and ninth centuries B.C.) were discovered in the northwest part of the Western Wall plaza that runs adjacent to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. My team worked on this excavation at its conclusion in 2010 and helped uncover a large section of the colonnaded Eastern Cardo of Jerusalem that was laid by Roman Emperor Hadrian in the middle of the second century A.D. The Cardo’s heavy limestone blocks were laid on top of a layer dating to the end of the first Temple period, and in one corner of the excavation where the paving stones had been removed were found remains of the first Temple, built by King Solomon.

On the floor were found inscribed seals and bullae indicating the structures were probably part of an administrative complex. One of the most interesting seals bore the inscription “[belonging] to Netanyahu ben Yaush.” The biblical name Netanyahu (also the family name of the current Israeli prime minister) appears several times in the biblical books of Jeremiah and Chronicles, and the name Yaush is found in the Lachish letters. It was in Lachish where God destroyed the Assyrian monarch Sennacherib who threatened to lay siege to Jerusalem (2 Ki. 19; 2 Chr. 32; Isa. 37). This was the first time evidence of structures from the first Temple period were uncovered so close to the Temple Mount.

Also of great significance was the discovery of the lid of a stone sarcophagus engraved with the Hebrew words Ben HaCohen HaGadol, meaning “son of the high priest.” It was discovered in the ruins of a Muslim settlement built over the remains of second-Temple-period Jewish homes near Jerusalem (IAA/ Getty Images). Bottom: Fourteenth-century B.C. clay fragm

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<td>Gen. 22:1–2</td>
<td>&quot;God tested Abraham, . . . 'Take now your son, your only son Isaac . . . and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him . . . on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.'&quot;</td>
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<td>David buys Mt. Moriah from Ornan</td>
<td>ca. 988 B.C.</td>
<td>1 Chr. 21:24–25</td>
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<td>Solomon begins building temple</td>
<td>ca. 982 B.C.</td>
<td>2 Chr. 3:1</td>
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Except where otherwise indicated, dates come from The Reese Chronological Bible (KJV) by Edward Reese, published by Bethany House Publishers, 1980, Minneapolis, MN. The dating system was by Frank R. Klassen.
### Temple Timeline

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<td>&quot;In the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice . . . and on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate.&quot;</td>
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by Thomas C. Simcox
Zerubbabel was born to a Judean family exiled in Babylon sometime after the second Jewish deportation of 597 B.C. His name is of Babylonian origin and means “seed or offspring of Babylon.” He came from a lineage that was heir to the Davidic throne, since he was the grandson of King Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah, 1 Chr. 3:17–19; cf. Mt. 1:12), second to the last king of Judah.

Zerubbabel is called the “son of Shealtiel” (Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2; Neh. 12:1; Hag. 1:1), but the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 3:19 identifies him as the son of Pedaiah, Shealtiel’s younger brother. One commentary explains:

This problem is usually resolved by assuming that Pedaiah was the adoptive father of Zerubbabel, or that Shealtiel died childless and that Pedaiah married the widow of his brother and had a son with her; this son, in accordance with the law of levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5–10), was legally considered to be a son of Shealtiel.¹

Years before Babylon destroyed Judah, Jeremiah prophesied the Jewish people would be in exile for 70 years (Jer. 25:11), after which they would be restored to their land. In 539 B.C. Babylon fell to the Persian Empire under Cyrus II. Cyrus granted the Jewish captives the right to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple (2 Chr. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:2–3). He also funded the project (Ezra 1:2–4; 6:3–5, 8–10).

Construction Troubles

Zerubbabel was selected to lead the first group of returnees in 536 B.C. (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:7; 12:1). Under his leadership, nearly 50,000 people took advantage of Cyrus’s offer and returned to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:64–65). When Zerubbabel arrived, he was appointed governor and given oversight of the Temple construction (Hag. 1:1). Immediately, along with the priests, he restored the altar of burnt offering and in the second month of the second year started to lay the Temple’s foundation (Ezra 3:2).

Soon after work began on the Temple, opposition arose. Samaritans (a mixed race of Jews and Gentiles from northern Israel, 2 Ki. 17:24–31) volunteered to help. Zerubbabel rejected their offer because they did not follow the God of Israel. An ungodly alliance with them would have weakened or even stopped Israel’s resolve to finish the project.

Rejected, the Samaritans wrote to the Persian court, petitioning that the project be stopped. King Artaxerxes shut down the work, and construction ceased for 16 years.

Other factors also contributed to the stoppage:

(1) Gentiles hired counselors to intimidate the workers and frustrate construction.
(2) Workers grew discouraged because of their personal poverty; lack of food and shelter; and the deplorable condition of Jerusalem, which lay in rubble.

(3) People began building their own houses and businesses (Ezra 4). The prophet Haggai castigated the returnees for their selfishness and negligence in not finishing the Temple.

Sixteen years later, an angel informed the prophet Zechariah that Zerubbabel would complete the project (Zech. 4:1, 8). Through Zechariah, the angel told Zerubbabel the Temple would not be completed through the strength, wisdom, wealth, or military power of Judah, but exclusively through the power of God’s Spirit. This message, along with others from Haggai and Zechariah, inspired Israel to resume construction.

Singing and Weeping

As the Temple foundation was laid, people reacted in two ways. Those who had never seen the grandeur of Solomon’s Temple sang, shouted, and praised the Lord. But the older generation wept loudly and profusely because Zerubbabel’s Temple could not compare in size or splendor to the Temple they remembered (Ezra 3:8–13). Neither did this Temple’s Holy of Holies possess the Ark of the Covenant or the Shekinah glory of God.

God silenced the critics: “For who has despised the day of small things? For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth” (Zech. 4:10). In other words, while Zerubbabel worked, the Lord watched over the project, making sure it would be completed according to His will. Nothing is hidden from God’s infinite intelligence and omniscience. He providentially watches over Israel against its enemies and will accomplish His sovereign program for the Jewish people.

God told Israel, “But from this day I will bless you” (Hag. 2:19). He assured Zerubbabel that Gentile opposition could not stop completion of the Temple, nor would it destroy Israel. In his final message, Haggai further encouraged Zerubbabel by announcing that Israel will ultimately triumph over all its enemies when the long-expected Messiah comes to judge the Gentiles (vv. 20–23).

Haggai told Zerubbabel he was specifically “chosen” to be “like a signet ring” (v. 23) before the nation of Israel, not only then but in the future. A signet ring represents a king’s royal authority. It was used as the king’s signature to validate a sealed document (1 Ki. 21:8) and guarantee its promises would be fulfilled (Gen. 38:18). By making Zerubbabel His signet, God reversed the curse and judgment pronounced on Coniah (also called Jeconiah) the son of Jehoiakim (Jer. 22:24). It was prophesied of Coniah, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days; for none of his descendants
shall prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah” (v. 30). This prophecy did not mean the king would be childless, for he was not (1 Chr. 3:17–18). Rather, he would be written childless—that is, none of his descendants would be listed with the kings of Judah.²

In other words, God renewed His promise that the Davidic line would not die out but would once give birth to Israel’s Messiah. Zerubbabel is recorded in Christ’s genealogy (Mt. 1:12; Lk. 3:27). This promise assured the governor that blessing would once more flow to Judah in his day and symbolized the blessing yet in store for Judah during the Messiah’s reign.

Haggai’s prophecy to Zerubbabel was irrefutable evidence to Israel and its enemies that God’s Spirit would enable the nation to finish reconstructing the Temple. Four years later, Zerubbabel put the capstone in place, signifying the Temple was finished (Ezra 6:13–18; Zech. 4:7–10). The year was 515 B.C., beginning what is commonly called the second Temple period.

God is sovereign over all the earth, and His prophetic program will succeed and accomplish what He has divinely decreed.

ENDNOTES


When Israeli statesman Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in 2000, he was surrounded by 1,000 Israeli police. His visit, along with the announcement that the complex would remain under perpetual Israeli control, was followed by Arab rioting, stone-throwing, and killings. Thus began a five-year intifada (Arabic for “rebellion”) against Israel.

Sharon's visit was perceived as a direct challenge to the Waqf, the Islamic trust administering the Temple Mount. The Waqf is responsible for the site, deciding who will be allowed on it and how they will behave. The two principal structures on the Temple Mount today are the Islamic Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque.

Why, you might ask yourself, are the Arabs in charge of the Temple Mount? After all, didn't Israel win control of Jerusalem, including that highly prized 35-acre site, during the 1967 Six-Day War? Israel did indeed. But in a magnanimous gesture for peace, it continued to let the Waqf rule, subject to Israeli sovereignty. Israel has no desire to manage Muslim holy sites.

From 1948 to 1967, Jerusalem was divided. Jordan controlled the Old City, including the Temple Mount, and barred Jewish people from their holiest of places: the Western Wall (Kotel in Hebrew). The Kotel is a remnant of the retaining wall (below the Mount) that surrounded the second Temple, which was on the Mount.

In June 1967 Israel found itself fighting a two-front war (Syria in the north, Egypt in the south). The tiny Jewish nation’s very existence was at stake. Jordan was not involved, and Israel had no desire to open a third front. So Israel appealed to Jordan to refrain from attacking and keep the status quo.

However, Egypt tricked Jordan into entering the war, and Jordan struck Israel. Within two days of the attack, Israeli Gen. Mordechai (Motta) Gur reported to his company commanders, “The Temple Mount is in our hands! I repeat, the Temple Mount is in our hands!” For the first time in 19 years, Jewish people had access to worship at their holiest site.

And for the first time in 2,000 years, a Jewish state controlled an undivided Jerusalem and access to the Temple Mount. Almost immediately upon victory, Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan issued the following statement from the Western Wall: “To our Arab neighbors we extend, especially at this hour, the hand of peace. To members of the other religions, Christians and Muslims, I hereby promise faithfully that their full freedom and all their religious rights will be preserved. We did not come to Jerusalem to conquer the Holy Places of others.”

By the end of June 1967 the Israeli Knesset extended Israel’s legal and administrative jurisdiction to all of Jerusalem and expanded the city’s municipal borders. It also passed one of the most extraordinary pieces of legislation in world history: the Protection of Holy Places Law. This law grants special legal status to all the holy sites, making it a criminal offense to desecrate or violate them or to impede freedom of access to them. Under this law Israel turned over the administration of the Temple Mount to the Waqf, although it maintained military security.

According to Dr. Randall Price, a Bible scholar and long-time archaeologist, Jordan’s 1994 peace agreement with Israel gave Jordan custodianship of the Temple Mount. “However,” said Dr. Price, “Palestinians now claim this right based on their political demand that Jerusalem is to be the capital of a future Islamic, Palestinian state.” For example, Yasser Arafat, the late Palestinian Authority chairman, replaced the Jordanian grand mufti of Jerusalem with a Palestinian of his own choosing. “Since 2000,” said Price, “when Ariel Sharon allegedly violated the Muslim holy sites and launched what Palestinians call ‘the Battle for al-Aqsa,’ Israeli sovereignty has been increasingly ignored.”

Why the Waqf Rules

Entering the Old City of Jerusalem through the Lions Gate after Israel’s victory over Jordan in June 1967 are (left to right) Gen. Uzi Narkiss, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, and army Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin (Israeli GPO/Newsmakers/Getty Images).Inset: Israeli Premier Rabin (left) shakes hands with King Hussein of Jordan in 1994 (Sven Nackstrand/AFP/Getty Images).
Ezra is much to be admired and emulated. And yet, for reasons understandable (but insufficient), he seems perpetually consigned to the “B-team” of Old Testament heroes. Although Ezra plays important roles in two Old Testament books, they are secondary positions. The book that bears his name and that he was used of God to pen is, in large part, history. Chapters 1 through 6 record the Jewish exiles’ return from Babylon under Zerubbabel and the building of the second Temple, events that transpired from around 538 B.C. to around 515 B.C., decades before Ezra was born.
Only the latter section is Ezra’s diary. Chapters 7 through 10 tell of the marvelous reformation in 458 B.C. under his direction. Again, Ezra is very much involved in the effort to refortify and repopulate Jerusalem around 445 B.C., as recorded in the book of Nehemiah (8:1–13; 12:26); but in that story he gets a bit lost behind the prevailing figure of the governor, Nehemiah.

The most important reason for such comparative neglect is that Ezra lived and ministered during the final stage of Old Testament history, which is little remembered by many Christians: the restoration period. During this era the Jewish people, captives in Babylon for 70 years, were allowed to return under the Persians to reestablish themselves in the Promised Land of Israel.

It is a fascinating time, punctuated throughout with remarkable heroes, exciting adventures, political and military struggles—everything that makes for gripping tales of noble human effort and thrilling divine enablement. But there is one element often associated with biblical narrative that is remarkably—and instructively—absent: miracle. The absence renders this period a bit disappointing and explains why it is often underappreciated.

When compared to the parting of the Red Sea or the tumbling down of the walls of Jericho or the floating of a millstone in Ezekiel (11:22–23). That departure, that theocratic arrangement, was judicially abandoned. Yahweh had resided in the Tabernacle/Ark of the Covenant at Mount Sinai in 1446 B.C. (Ex. 19—24), and He had reigned until 592 B.C. when the Glory-Cloud departed, as recorded in Ezekiel 11:22–23. That departure signaled the end of the theocratic arrangement.

During the remarkable time when King Yahweh resided in the Tabernacle/Ark of the Covenant at Mount Sinai, He often intervened immediately—miraculously—in the affairs of His people. But with the Glory-Cloud’s departure, that theocratic arrangement was judicially abandoned.

This is not to say God abandoned His covenant with Israel; the covenant relationship is unilateral and thus eternally binding on God (Gen. 15:1–21; 17:1; 22:15–18). Ezra made his horror evident (Ezra 9:3–5) and then poured out his heart in a prayer of contrition and confession (vv. 6–15). His zeal impacted the city. Bold action was necessary; and at the suggestion of one of the citizens, Shechaniah, the decision was made to put away the pagan wives (10:1–8).

Courts were convened, justice and morality were honored, doubtless reparation was made, and difficult situations were resolved. Those who refused to submit to the Law were expelled from the community (vv. 9–17). This section of the record concludes with a catalog of those who submitted to the tribunal and thus contributed to the reformation and revival accomplished by God through Ezra (vv. 18–44). Ezra continued to live and minister in Jerusalem, and he played a pivotal role in Nehemiah’s work more than a decade later (Neh. 8; 12).

**Instruction in Omission**

Miracles are conspicuously absent in this narrative, yet there is instruction in that omission. Yahweh had made Himself King in Israel at Mt. Sinai in 1446 B.C. (Ex. 19—24), and He had reigned until 592 B.C. when the Glory-Cloud departed, as recorded in Ezekiel 11:22–23. That departure signaled the end of the theocratic arrangement.

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Heb. 6:13–18). Indeed, the theocratic arrangement had to do only with the form in which Yahweh’s relationship to that people was administered. The significance of the Glory-Cloud’s departure was not that Yahweh would no longer honor His covenant relationship with Israel and protect it from its enemies; it was that He would do so mediatelty rather than immediately, providentially rather than miraculously.

This is the grand message of the book of Esther. And it is a reality we see worked out in the most practical way in the restoration narrative recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. On those pages we watch as Israel learns what it is to live and honor God (however reluctantly) during the “times of the Gentiles” (Dan. 2:44–45; Rev. 19:11–21).

Douglas Bookman is professor of New Testament Exposition at Shepherds Theological Seminary in Cary, North Carolina. He also teaches and preaches across America and abroad. You may contact him through his Web site, bookmanministries.com.

“I will never allow a single Israeli to live among us.”

—Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, discussing what will happen if a PA state is created in Judea and Samaria (West Bank). He also vowed to prevent Jewish soldiers from serving on any international peacekeeping force stationed on PA-controlled land. Yet Israel is accused of being an “apartheid” state. Israel allows Arabs to enjoy full citizenship, including representation in its parliament.

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Of the Good Life!

When the United Nations voted to create the independent State of Israel in 1948, most of world Jewry rejoiced. Israel provided a safe haven for thousands of traumatized Jewish Holocaust survivors. Interestingly, however, only a small remnant of Jews from England, France, Canada, and the United States opted to make aliyah (to return to Israel). For them, the allure of living in the land promised to them by God was trumped by the reality of insecure borders and loss of steady income. Simply put, life in the Diaspora was just too good to leave.

Sometimes when life is “too good,” people fail to make the sacrifices necessary to follow the Lord. Perhaps such was the case in the sixth century B.C. when Jewish people hesitated to leave Babylon and return to their homeland.

Many were taken to Babylon as captives beginning in 605 B.C. In 586 B.C. Jerusalem’s fate was sealed when the Babylonians burned the city and first Temple and deported the bulk of the Jewish population. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God explained that Israel’s captivity would last for 70 years: “When seventy years are completed, . . . I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity,” says the LORD; “and I will make it a perpetual desolation” (Jer. 25:12). Toward the end of the captivity, a new generation had sprung up that found life outside Israel less frustrating than their fathers and grandfathers had. Yet living farther from the land also brought them farther from the Lord. Spiritual lethargy prevailed, and many either ignored or were unaware of God’s Word.

Two hundred years before the captivity, God gave the prophet Isaiah words that would encourage that future generation. In addition to providing the details of the future proclamation, the prophecy also named the man who would issue it: Cyrus (Isa. 44:28—45:1).

Cyrus was on the throne when Ezra was alive. Unlike many of his brethren, Ezra did not suffer from spiritual lethargy. Although a priest without a Temple, he devoted himself to copying the Law of Moses as a scribe (Ezra 7:6). In addition, he attempted to inspire the Israelites by promoting the public reading of God’s Word (Neh. 8:1). His desire was for spiritual revival, which he believed could only happen by understanding God’s Word.

Ezra records the fulfillment of Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s prophecies concerning the Jewish people’s permission to return to their land: “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah (Ezra 1:1–2).

Although Cyrus’s proclamation was a dramatic fulfillment of prophecy, the Jewish response was less than enthusiastic. Only 49,897 Israelites were willing to make the arduous return home (2:64–65).

Is life too comfortable for you? Jewish people are certainly not the only ones who sometimes hesitate to make sacrifices in order to follow the Lord. In fact, as Christians, we should be ready to go whenever and wherever He tells us, whether across the street or around the globe. Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He said, “Go into all the world” (Mk. 16:15). Perhaps it’s time to take inventory. Are you where you’re supposed to be? Or is the “good life” too difficult to leave behind?

by Steve Herzig, director of North American Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
According to Bible prophecy, an inferior empire (symbolized by silver in Daniel 2:31, 39) would replace the gold kingdom of Babylon. The Medo-Persians conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. According to fifth-century B.C. historian/storyteller Herodotus, the Medo-Persians developed a vast system of taxation heavily dependent on silver during the reign of Darius the Great (522–486 B.C.).

Under Cyrus the Great the empire issued the decree in 538 B.C. allowing all captives, including the Jewish people, to return to their homelands. The decree was verified in 1879 when a clay cuneiform text known as the Cyrus Cylinder was discovered in the ruins of ancient Babylon. Today the artifact is on display in the British Museum.

Cyrus gave generous grants from both the imperial treasury and his personal fortune to help all returnees. But his liberal disbursements had a pecuniary agenda. He was creating a source of retrievable revenue by taxing the nations under his domination. Provincial dues—payable in gold or silver—were imposed on almost everything, including land, horses, mules, sheep, ivory, slaves, grain, forests, mines, and fisheries.1

One typical type of Persian coin was called a siglos. It was made of silver and depicted a bearded, crowned king holding a bow and spear. Darius is credited with minting this distinctive coinage.

The image of the king, however, may or may not be Darius. Darius authorized construction to resume on the Temple in Jerusalem and decreed, “Let the cost be paid at the king’s expense from taxes on the region beyond the River [Euphrates]” (Ezra 6:8). This was a shrewd investment move in the Cyrus tradition. Darius may have thought a rebuilt Temple would yield happy, tax-paying subjects.

When Darius died, his fortune and all the Persian wealth since Cyrus went to his son Xerxes I (486–465 B.C.) who would need it to finance his massive war against the Greeks. During Xerxes’ reign 300 Spartans stood their ground and were slaughtered in the famous Battle at Thermopylae in 480 B.C.

Known as Ahasuerus in Scripture, Xerxes chose the Jewish maiden Esther for his queen. During his reign the Feast of Purim was established (Est. 2:16–17; 9:27–28). Some rabbis believe that, after Haman’s plot to kill all the Jews in the kingdom was foiled (7:3–10), a sudden shock came over the king when he realized he would have lost a steady, lucrative source of tax revenue.

To sway Ahasuerus to issue the annihilation order, Haman had offered to put 375 tons of silver from his own coffers into the royal treasury (3:9). After realizing the potential fiscal loss had Haman’s plan prevailed, the king levied a tax on the land and on the “islands of the sea” (10:1). Apparently the love and lure of silver outweighed any perceived threat to his realm by a “certain people” (3:8).

Scripture says the Medo-Persian Empire would be inferior to Babylon (Dan. 2:39). The word inferior in Hebrew means “earth, world, ground.” Through meticulous taxation, the Persians built and maintained their kingdom. Perhaps this was one reason for...
Persia's inferiority. It had developed an earthly, worldly dependence on silver (money). Indeed, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9).

ENDNOTE


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Quoteworthy

“Though it is largely unknown to the public, the Arab lobby in the United States is at least as old as the Israeli lobby. . . . Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Arab lobby has grown to include defense contractors, former government officials employed by Arab states, corporations with business interests in the Middle East, NGOs [non-government organizations], the United Nations, academics, Israel haters, a significant percentage of the media and cultural elite, non-evangelical Christian groups, European elites, hired guns, American Arabs and Muslims, and the leaders and diplomats from no fewer than 21 Arab governments.”

Millions of people today fail to grasp the differences between Jewish and Muslim claims to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. But the differences are enormous. Jewish claims are based on Scripture and more than 1,000 years of historical possession that predates Islam; Muslim claims are based on Muhammad’s vision of a mystical midnight ride and a rewriting of the Holy Bible.

Muhammad was born around A.D. 570 in Mecca in what is Saudi Arabia. In 610, at the age of 40, he began to receive what he said was revelation from Allah who demanded complete surrender (Arabic, Islam). So began the Islamic faith—more than 2,000 years after the Five Books of Moses were written and more than 2,500 years after the Jewish patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, according to Islam, the patriarchs were Muslims.

How can someone belong to a religion that would not exist for another 2,500 years? Rewriting sacred Scripture makes everything possible.

According to the Muslim publication History of Al Aqsa Mosque by Kais Al-Kalby and Emad J. Meerza on the Stanford University Web site, Islam claims the following:

- The “prophet Ibrahim” (Abraham) built the Kaaba in Mecca with his son Ishmael. Muhammad is Ishmael’s descendant. Fact: Scripture never puts Abraham in Saudi Arabia nor says he built anything with Ishmael. There is no reliable way to prove Muhammad descended from Ishmael because Muhammad was born about 1,000 years after the Old Testament was completed.
Abraham also built a house of worship in Jerusalem “known as The House Of Allah (God), or Beteyel.” **Fact:** Scripture never says Abraham built anything in Jerusalem.

Isaac worshiped in Beteyel “but also made journeys to Kaba [Kaaba] in Makkah [Mecca] for Hajj (Pilgrimage) as did Ibrahim.” **Fact:** Scripture never says Isaac worshiped in Jerusalem or that anyone in all of Scripture ever journeyed to Mecca.

“The natives of the land, the Palestinians, believers in the teachings of the Prophet Ibrahim,” also worshiped there. **Fact:** The “natives” of the land were not Palestinians. They were Canaanites who did not believe in the God of Abraham and whose practices were so vile God ordained the Canaanites’ destruction. The name Palestine comes from the word Philistine and was not used until A.D. 135.

Abraham “referred to Beteyel as ‘Masjid Al-Aqsa’, which means the farthest place of worship of the One God . . . stating that Masjid Al-Aqsa was the farthest place of worship west of Kaba in Makkah.” **Fact:** No record of any aspect of this claim exists in the Bible. No Temple existed until Solomon’s, which was completed approximately two millennia after Abraham’s time. Furthermore, Jehovah would not have condoned worship in Mecca because He stated explicitly that He was to be worshiped in the Temple in Jerusalem because He put His name there (Dt. 12:5; 1 Ki. 9:3).

Muhammad, in fact, never set foot in Jerusalem. The Qur’an says, “Glory to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque [in Mecca] to the Remote Mosque [in Jerusalem]” (surah 17:1). The passage refers to a mystical night ride Muhammad purportedly had in A.D. 621 when a winged, donkey-like creature called al-Buraq brought him from Mecca to Jerusalem and back (a round trip of 1,510 miles) in a single night. Tradition says Muhammad ascended to heaven from Jerusalem and led all the prophets in prayer in the Masjid Al-Aqsa. But the experience was purely mystical. Wrote Muslim scholar Maulana Muhammad Ali: “The Ascension was not a translation of the body, but the spiritual experience of the Holy Prophet.”

The Qur’an existed in book form in 632. However, not a single Muslim structure existed on the Temple Mount until after 638, when the Muslims conquered Jerusalem. So to what does the Qur’an’s mention of “Masjid Al-Aqsa” refer? It is the site of the Jewish Temple that Islam says began with Abraham as a mosque and was eventually enlarged by Solomon. In other words, Muslims today claim the Temple Mount is holy to them because the Jewish Temple was actually a mosque (although Islam would not exist for another 1,500 years) and because Muhammad spiritually ascended to heaven from there on his night ride.

The Jewish people say the Temple Mount is holy to them because the Jewish Temple was actually a mosque (although Islam would not exist for another 1,500 years) and because Muhammad spiritually ascended to heaven from there on his night ride.

The Temple Mount is holy to them because Scripture says a Jewish Temple stood on the site for 389 years and then for 585 years. Unlike Muslims, who revere Mecca above all else, there is no place holier or dearer to Jewish people than the city of Jerusalem, which was the seat of the historic Davidic kingdom for more than 400 years—and will be again when the Messiah returns.

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**ENDNOTES**


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Words of Warning

This section of the book of Hebrews comes on the heels of a strong warning in 10:25 that believers not abandon assembling together, as some were doing. In fact, Christians in every generation are exhorted not to forsake meeting together.

With judgment approaching, the author provided the fourth of five warnings in Hebrews. This one is much severer than the previous three (cf. 2:1–5; 3:7—4:13; 6:4–8) and is directed to people planning to desert the local congregation and return to the ritualistic system of Judaism. Harsh though it is, it is balanced by a promise of hope and reward to all who remain faithful until Christ returns for His church.

Peril of Rejection

“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” (10:26–27). The word for connects this section with the previous part of chapter 10 and tells readers why they should heed the warning:

(1) Because they possessed full “knowledge of the truth” they received in Christ.

(2) Because they understood the sin they would be committing. If they proceeded, they would be doing so “willfully,” giving forethought to their action and deliberately choosing to pursue sin, no matter what others might say.

(3) Because forsaking the church and returning to Judaism meant embracing a legalistic system that was replaced by the ministry of Christ’s heavenly priesthood. The Levitical system they had come out of operated under the Mosaic Law and “no longer [had] a sacrifice for sins” (v. 26). That is, the sacrifices offered under the Law were no longer effective in God’s sight because it is Christ’s sacrifice that removes sin.

(4) Because forsaking the church meant facing “a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation” (v. 27). Leaving the church to identify with the ritualistic Temple system brought God’s judgment on those who returned to a religious system outside of Christ. In this case they were reuniting with a people who would suffer physical judgment from the hand of God.

The author followed his statement with an example from the Mosaic Law: “Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?” (vv. 28–29).

Under the Law, if a person refused to accept the authority of the Mosaic Law and showed his disdain by deliberately not obeying it, there was no sacrifice offered for, or mercy shown to, that individual. Such a person was convicted on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Once convicted, he was executed by stoning (Dt. 17:4–7).

Although the offense of deliberately rebelling against the Mosaic Law was serious in God’s eyes, the offense against Christ and the New Covenant was more serious and deserved greater punishment.

Why? Because this offense rejects the triune God by (1) trampling underfoot God the Father’s plan to provide salvation through Christ; (2) counting Christ’s blood a common thing; and (3) turning one’s back on the Holy Spirit who regenerated, sealed, filled, and baptized that very individual into the body of Christ. This is a great insult.

To count the blood of Christ, through which believers obtain salvation and positional sanctification, as being of less value than the blood of Old Testament sacrifices is a major offense. It is even a worse offense to reidentify with those who reject Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. Such action would align believers with people who completely reject the triune God’s plan for salvation.

Quoting from Deuteronomy 32:35–36, the author emphasized that it is God who will judge the apostates: “For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people’” (Heb. 10:30).

Here the author tells why God must judge:

- God cannot look on or overlook sin without taking action on the sinner.
- God’s character, righteousness, and holiness demand that He bring judgment on willful sin that is not confessed.
- “Vengeance” belongs only to God who is able to administer judgment rightly and appropriately to fit the rebellious deeds of man.
- Scripture clearly teaches that people cannot reject God and sin against Him without punishment.
- God’s judgment is well deserved on those who possess full knowledge...
of Christ’s perfect sacrifice, receive Him as Savior, and then reuni
tе with those who deny Him.

If those being addressed thought they
could simply return to Judaism after
coming to Christ, they were gravely mis-
taken. Even in the Old Testament, peo-
ple who turned away from God experi-
enced His judgment and perished. Verse
31 states, “It is a fearful thing to fall into
the hands of the living God.”

Falling into the hands of someone
means being brought under that
person’s authority and power. God is fully
aware of the spiritual states of all men,
especially the hearts and deeds of believ-
ers. God is perfect and righteous and will
execute absolute justice on all people
according to their deeds. “Shall not the
Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen.
18:25). Such sobering words should have
awakened any believer and caused him
or her not to return to Judaism.

Whether the author had in mind
believers who turned back to Judaism
after embracing Christianity or believ-
ers who only might do so is impossible
to know. Most likely the passage
warns true believers of the outcome,
should they decide to forsake Christ.

Plea to Remember

Readers are alerted to remember a
major persecution they suffered at
their conversion: “Recall the former
days in which, after you were illumi-
nated [enlightened], you endured a
great struggle with sufferings” (v. 32).
The word illuminated refers to the light
of the gospel clearly being perceived,
understood, and appropriated, result-
ing in salvation. They are to “recall”
continually the time when they
endured severe civil and/or religious
persecution when they boldly stood
for Christ. Their steadfastness gave
evidence of genuine salvation.

These believers suffered for their
faith in two ways. First, they “were
made a spectacle both by reproaches
and tribulations” (v. 33). The word
spectacle is our word for “theater” and
means to be put on stage, as in an
amphitheater, and held in derision or
mocked and ridiculed with contempt.
Second, they suffered because they
were “companions of those who were
so treated” (v. 33). That is, they were
companions of other Jewish believers,
and this fact brought them persecution
because of their identification with the
church. These Jewish believers were
being unjustly mocked by other Jewish
people for their commitment to Christ.

The author says of these believers,
“For you had compassion on me in my
chains, and joyfully accepted the plun-
dering of your goods, knowing that
you have a better and an enduring
possession for yourselves in heaven”
(v. 34). They were companions with
fellow believers who showed them
“compassion” (deep feelings of sym-
pathy) during their imprisonment.
They “joyfully” accepted the unjust
seizure of their possessions because
they knew they had possessions in
heaven that were theirs forever. These
last two verses provide evidence of
their true faith in Jesus Christ.

Promise of Reward

Verse 35 is a direct personal chal-
lenge: “Therefore do not cast away
your confidence [boldness], which has
great reward” (v. 35). The phrase cast
away means to “fling” or “throw
away.” The Scripture exhorts them not
to throw away the boldness they once
had in Christ, as one would throw
away an old, worthless garment. In the
past, these believers manifested a life
of boldness that supported and sus-
tained them during suffering and loss
of their possessions. Now they are
exhorted and encouraged to exercise
the same boldness they had then to
sustain themselves through the pre-
sent crisis that was shaking their faith-
fulness. They must not throw away
their boldness and faith in Christ so as
not to lose their “reward” at the judg-
ment seat of Christ.

These believers are told exactly what
they need: “For you have need of endur-
ance [patience], so that after you
have done the will of God, you may
receive the promise” (v. 36). They did not
need more faith because, in the past, they
had sufficient faith to stand against per-
secution. What they needed was to exer-
cise their faith with patient endurance
to obtain the promise. By doing the “will of
God” they would “receive the promise,”
or the reward, promised at the judgment
seat of Christ.

In order to support his point, the
author quoted Habakkuk 2:3-4: “For
yet a little while, and He who is coming
will come and will not tarry. Now the
just shall live by faith; but if anyone
draws back, My soul has no pleasure in
him” (Heb. 10:37–38). Sometimes it
seems as if the Lord tarries and delays
the fulfillment of His promises, but
such is not the case.

In Habakkuk’s day, it seemed as if
God took no notice of Judah’s sin because
it went unjudged. But God’s judgment
was certain; He would use the
Babylonians to punish Judah. God has an
appointed time to execute His divine
plan. In the meantime, “the just [righ-
teous] shall live by faith” (v. 38; cf. Hab.
2:4). In other words, righteous people
must live by faith in the midst of persecu-
tion and trust that God is faithful to fulfill
what He has promised. One who “draws
back” in disobedience and unbelief will
experience the Lord’s displeasure.

The message concludes with an
expression of confidence in the Jewish
believers to whom the author was writ-
ing: “But we are not of those who draw
back to perdition [destruction], but of
those who believe to the saving of the
soul” (v. 39). Because he identified with
his readers, we know the author consid-
ered them believers in Christ. Those who
drew back into Judaism were unsaved.
He was confident those he addressed
would not forsake the life of faith.

Where do you stand?

David M. Levy is the director
of International Ministries
for The Friends of Israel.
The Love of God (Part 2)

The previous article began to focus on God’s love in the Old Testament. God’s love involves a confirmed, inner, favorable disposition toward the objects of His love and a high, passionate degree of action on behalf of them.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the fathers of the nation of Israel—were special objects of God’s love. In fact, the Old Testament reveals that Israel was a primary object of God’s love and that God intended His primary love for Israel to be permanent, guaranteeing the nation’s unique relationship with Him forever.

Expressions of God’s Love for Israel

God’s love for Israel is expressed in a number of places and in various ways in the Old Testament.

Moses’ statements to Israel.

The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Dt. 7:7–8).

Balak, the king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse the Israelites when they pitched tents on the plains of Moab on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land (Num. 22). Later Moses reminded the people how God helped them: “Nevertheless the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you” (Dt. 23:5).

Shortly before Moses died he told the Israelites, “The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints; from His right hand came a fiery law for them. Yes, He loves the people” (33:2–3).

God’s statements.

“I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place. Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you” (Isa. 43:3–4).

“When Israel was a child, I loved him” (Hos.11:1).

God said to Hosea, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans” (Hos. 3:1).

God stated the following concerning the people of Israel: “I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love” (11:4).

Despite Israel’s unfaithfulness, God declared, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him” (14:4).

God said to Israel, “I have loved you” (Mal. 1:2).

Statement about God. “In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old” (Isa. 63:9).

The Permanency of God’s Primary Love for Israel

The Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, “Your God has loved Israel, to establish them forever” (2 Chr. 9:8).

God said to Israel, “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3).

Other Objects of God’s Love in the Old Testament

God’s love of individuals. When Bathsheba bore David a son, David named the son Solomon, which
means “peace.”

God loved Solomon and sent word through Nathan the prophet, “so he [Nathan] called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:25). The name Jedidiah means “loved by the Lord.”

When God spared King Hezekiah’s life from premature physical death, the king acknowledged that it was because God loved him (Isa. 38:17).

God declared His love for Cyrus, the Medio-Persian king who would be His instrument to crush Babylon, end Israel’s Babylonian Captivity, and command and assist the Jews to return home to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple (Isa. 48:14–15.) (Also see Isaiah 44:28; 45:1; and Ezra 1:1–11.)

**God’s love of impersonal things.**

Psalm 78:68 indicates that, when God chose the place where He would dwell in a unique sense on Earth, He chose “Mount Zion which He loved,” within Israel’s tribe of Judah. Originally Zion was a hill on which a Jebusite fortress stood. David and his men conquered it. Then David dwelt in the fortress and called the location “the City of David” (2 Sam. 5:6–9).

Later David brought the Ark of the Covenant, God’s unique dwelling place, to Zion (6:1–17). After Solomon had the Ark moved to the Temple at nearby Mount Moriah, the name Zion was also applied to that holy mount where God dwelt (Joel 3:17; Mic. 4:7). Eventually it was applied to the city of Jerusalem (Ps. 48:1–2; Isa. 1:8). Scripture says, “The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob” (Ps. 87:2).

God also loves justice: “For I, the Lord, love justice” (Isa. 61:8). The word translated “justice” has many different meanings. It can mean “decison,” “legal case,” “verdict,” “punishment and deliverance,” “right,” “righteousness,” “law,” “custom,” or “justice.” So which meaning is intended in Isaiah 61:8?

Since context determines the meaning of a word in its passage, two items related to the context of God’s statement must be noted. First, immediately after the statement, God declared, “I hate robbery for burnt offering.” The Hebrew word translated “robbery” refers to “a powerful, unlawful snatching away or stealing” of people, animals, and things.

The Hebrew word translated “burnt offering” means “iniquity” or “injustice.” In conjunction with the meanings of this word, Old Testament language scholar J. Schreiner wrote, “Yahweh has nothing to do with injustice or wrong; he is completely free of it. . . . He makes things right, acts rightly, punishes his adversaries, the wicked, and the evil doers, and makes the righteous prosper.”

Second, the context of Isaiah 61:8 describes Israel’s situation when the Messiah will establish the future Millennial Kingdom. During most of Israel’s history, other nations have abused it and subjected it to many injustices. Because God loves justice and hates powerful, unlawful robbery and injustice, He will reverse Israel’s abusive and unjust treatment. When the Messiah establishes the future Millennial Kingdom, Israel will get spiritually right with God and finally fulfill its God-ordained purpose to be the spiritual leader of the world.

The Gentiles will recognize the Jews as God’s appointed spiritual servants and the people whom God has uniquely blessed. To enable the Jewish people to devote themselves to God’s service, the Gentiles will care for their livestock and fields. Ruined areas of the nation will be rebuilt or repaired. Double honor will replace Israel’s past shame, and Israel’s land inheritance will double. The people of Israel will have everlasting joy and an everlasting covenant with God (vv. 4–9).

Related to this promise are statements that God loves righteousness and judgment (Ps. 11:7; 33:5; 37:28) and those who follow after righteousness (146:8; Prov. 15:9).

He also loves the holy institution of Israel. Malachi 2:11 states, “Judah has profaned the Lord’s holy institution which He loves.” The Hebrew word translated “holy” refers to something that is set apart or consecrated exclusively to the Lord and, therefore, is loved by Him. In this context, the holy institution God loves is the nation of Israel. God intended Israel to be a holy nation—the holy seed—different, distinct, unique in contrast with the Gentile nations that worshiped false gods (Ex. 19:6; Dt. 7:1–9; Ezr. 9:2). “Israel was holiness to the Lord” (Jer. 2:3).

To guarantee that Israel would remain “holy,” God forbade marriage with pagan Gentiles (Ex. 34:14–16; Dt. 7:3–4). He knew such marriages would influence the Israelites to worship false gods. The men of Judah, who had returned from the Babylonian Captivity to Israel’s homeland, had compromised the holy nature intended by God for the nation. They had divorced their Israelite wives and married pagan Gentiles (Ezr. 9:1–2; 10:1–4; Neh. 13:25–27; Mal. 2:11–16).
PA says Jews have no right to Western Wall

Israel no asset

Freeze fracsas

Israel blamed for terrorism

Ariel Sharon moved home

There is definitely a new American perception that does not see Israel as a strategic asset in the Middle East for both the United States and the free world. This is a development that even we, the veteran politicians, see as something new.”

Asked if it would help if the Americans signed a letter saying that a building freeze would not include Jerusalem, Rivlin replied, “They’ll say to the Palestinians, ‘Don’t be afraid, you know we’re behind you. Israel says that Jerusalem isn’t included, but we won’t let them build there,’ or something similar to that. They will speak two languages—one for the Palestinians and one for the Israelis. A letter making promises on Jerusalem doesn’t hold water.”

“There are definitely a new American perception that does not see Israel as a strategic asset in the Middle East for both the United States and the free world. This is a development that even we, the veteran politicians, see as something new.”

A controversial British politician has accused Israel of being the “cause of terrorism” and said the West’s treatment of Muslims was caused by “Holocaust guilt” and the “power of the pro-Israel lobby.”

In 2004 Tonge said she would consider becoming a suicide bomber if she were an Arab living in the Palestinian Authority. In 2006 she said, “The pro-Israeli lobby has got its grips on the Western world, its financial grips. I think they’ve probably got a grip on our party.”

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UN Declares Rachel’s Tomb a Mosque

A R U T Z - 7 — The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has officially voted to declare Rachel’s Tomb to be a mosque. It is also called for Rachel’s Tomb and the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron—the burial site of the other biblical patriarchs and matriarchs—to be removed from Israel’s National Heritage list.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) claims Rachel’s Tomb is holy to Muslims as the site of the Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque and demands control over both the Tomb and the Tomb of the Patriarchs, as well as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, Israel announced it will suspend its cooperation with UNESCO until the organization reverses its decision. Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon said, “This resolution was adopted by the Arab automatic majority, led by the Palestinian Authority, in another attempt to delegitimize Israel. UNESCO has become a rubber stamp for the PA.”

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovich, rabbi of the Western Wall, termed the decision “outrageous.” “They have never said in the past that this was a Muslim holy site. The [UN] organization responsible for heritage has turned heritage into politics.”

Knesset Member Aryeh Eldad called UNESCO’s decision “hypocritical and anti-Semitic” and said, “Islam is trying to rob the past and falsify history.” He called on the Israeli government to declare the sites National Heritage Sites and invest in their development. Doing so, said Eldad, “will shut the mouths of those who try to rob Israel of its past.”

Tens of thousands of Jews recently visited Rachel’s Tomb to mark the biblical anniversary of the matriarch’s death. It is located within Bethlehem city limits but remained under Israeli control when the rest of Bethlehem was transferred to PA control.

Journalist Nadav Shragai, writing for Yisrael Hayom, noted that Muslims living in Israel have historically referred to Rachel’s Tomb as “Kubat Rahel,” the Arabic term for “Rachel’s Tomb.” Under Ottoman rule (1516–1917), it was a Jewish site. Only in 1996 did the PA begin to call it a mosque, he said.

Rachel was the wife of Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel. She was buried more than 2,300 years before Islam came into existence.
As it is written in Proverbs 19:21, “There are many plans in a man’s heart; nevertheless the Lord’s counsel—that will stand.” A few years ago, a religious school invited me to speak about the Holocaust. I was 10 when the Nazis occupied my native Poland. It was the beginning of my journey through the seven halls of hell, as we say here in Israel. Few of us are left who passed through those terrible days. So students listened with great attention. Then they asked questions.

I also spoke about my faith in Christ and how the Lord helped me. That part was difficult for them. In fact, some became angry and said such things as, “This man should not be at our school!” “Why did he come here?” “Who brought him here?” Many questions were not so nice.

When students asked how I came to believe as I do, I told them, “I came to know the Lord according to the Holy Bible.” They were surprised and wanted to know where it is written in the Bible about “This Man,” meaning Jesus. I was happy to show them.

Afterward, students would see me on the streets of Jerusalem, point me out to others, and say, “This is the one who came to our school and tried to brainwash us to believe in This Man.” That was not so good.

But as time passes, things change. Recently someone recognized me on the street. He called out to me and asked if I remembered speaking at the school where he works. “You spoke about the Holocaust. Do you remember?” he asked. “So now we want you to come back. Many of the pupils are new, and they will be very interested to hear you.”

I was surprised. I thought the school would never invite me again. I was happy to go. The students were not quiet. Each one wanted to prove he was smarter than I. So they asked many questions and tried to attack me. But my answers came from the Holy Bible, so I was not afraid. They do not know about the Lord from the Bible.

Finally they asked how I came to know the Lord. One asked, “Why did you leave the Jewish faith?” It was for these questions I was waiting.

“I did not leave my faith in the Lord,” I replied. “You need to ask yourselves, ‘In whom do I believe?’ Do you follow the Lord, or do you follow men with such faithfulness that you have almost turned them into false gods against God’s will?” I asked them this question because they do not realize they respect their rabbis more than God’s Word. They believe what the rabbis tell them and do what the rabbis say.

What I said was too much for them. One demanded, “Now we want to see...
with our eyes where in the Bible it is written about whom you speak.” I opened my Bible to Isaiah 53 where it is written,

> 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. For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken (vv. 5, 8).  

Now they began to think. “How did you find this?” one asked.

“I read what is written in God’s Word,” I replied. “There it says, ‘You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him. . . . You shall not go after other gods’” (Dt. 6:13–14).

“Do you have a Bible with you?” one asked. So I showed them my Bible. They looked through it very carefully, turning it over and over.

I asked, “Have you read enough? What do you say? Am I telling you what is right or not?”

Then they gave my Bible to their teacher, who told the students, “If he is following God according to the Bible, I cannot be against him.” Then the teacher started to ask questions. “Why is it that most Jewish people do not believe as you do?”

I replied that it is because so many do not read the Bible for themselves. And when they do read, they do not trust God to show them what is right. Instead, they ask their rabbis and teachers and believe the interpretations they are given rather than what they have read with their own eyes.

“Take a good look around you,” I said. “Do most people believe the Bible or what they are told about it? If they will believe according to the Holy Bible only, which was written by the Holy Spirit of God, they would believe as I do.”

Please pray for these children, that they will read the Bible for themselves and trust God alone to give them understanding.

Z

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