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I often encourage people to advocate for Israel and speak up when others berate the Jewish state. Recently, a friend, Pastor Roger Truax, contacted me because of an anti-Israel article published in his denomination’s magazine. It presented a one-sided, pro-Palestinian, anti-Israel view. He wanted to respond but didn’t know where to begin.

I gave him a few resources, and he wrote a compelling response. I was so blessed when I read it that I want to share it with you. We edited it slightly to fit this space. Perhaps it will encourage you to speak up for Israel the next time you encounter anti-Israel bias.

I read with interest “What American Christians can learn from Palestinians” by John and Joyce Cassel in the May issue of Messenger. I know it was well intentioned, but we must remember there are two sides to any story. What is missing is Israel’s side. Many are not aware there are programs that I believe are designed to fill people with one side of the story and send them back to the U.S. to be ambassadors for the Palestinian-Arab cause: that is, make Israel the bad guy and present everything the Palestinian Arabs are doing as morally justified.

One can go to the Scriptures and make a case that Israel has a biblical right to the land under the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob, but that does not answer the charge that Israel is a morally bankrupt nation that has no justifiable reason for its actions.

While Israel, like any other nation, is capable of making mistakes and does so at times, they do have the right to be a sovereign nation in the land promised to them by God—their ancestral, historic homeland. There is no other place on Earth where Israel has existed as a nation other than the Promised Land. Although, according to Jeremiah 31:31–37, Israel’s security is in God’s hands and the nation will not disappear unless the universe does, they do have a right to defend themselves from those who would seek to destroy their nation.

The article does not address why there are Palestinian refugees. While the Jews accepted the 1947–48 partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, all the neighboring Arab states rejected it and invaded Israel to annihilate it at birth.

Also missing is an explanation of how Israel’s occupation of the West Bank came about: In 1967, Israel’s neighbors sought to exterminate Israel—just as Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, and most Palestinians and other Muslims in the Middle East wish to do today. Only because of that war, won by Israel, did Israel come to occupy the West Bank of Jordan.

Where is the mention of Palestinians honoring their numerous terrorists or of the anti-Semitic propaganda that saturates Middle Eastern media or the widespread Palestinian support for terrorism? (According to the just-released Pew Forum poll of Muslims, 40 percent of Palestinians support suicide terror.)

The article fails to acknowledge what happened in Gaza after the Israelis gave the whole of Gaza to the Palestinians: The Palestinians converted it into a terror state that regularly launches rockets into Israel to kill as many Israelis as possible.

Also, the article does not note, let alone condemn, the Muslim countries and organizations that seek to annihilate Israel, an existential threat that no other country or people in the world face.

If Israel was oppressive for building communities in the West Bank on land they have purchased from the Arabs, then, to be fair, we Americans are occupiers for living on land once belonging to the American Indians. If the call is for Israel to withdraw from the West Bank, then should we not walk away from our homes and towns and return to Europe, etc., from whence we came?

One other thought. West Bank is not the biblical term for the land. The Bible calls it Samaria and Judea. If we are people of biblical faith, then we should refer to the land as the Bible identifies it, rather than use the politically charged terminology used in the propaganda war by the enemies of Israel.

Perhaps the next time you encounter anti-Israel bias, you can do as Pastor Truax did and become an advocate for the truth.
In an interview on Iranian state television, he proudly declared that he and the regime utterly flouted a 2003 agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in which it promised to suspend all uranium enrichment and certain other nuclear activities. All Iran did, he said, was merely suspend “ten centrifuges” in the Natanz enrichment facility. “And not a total suspension. Just reduced the yield.” Rouhani admitted that under his watch in 2004, Iran developed yellowcake (a type of uranium concentrate powder) and 3,000 centrifuges.

Netanyahu encouraged the world body to continue strong sanctions, along with considering military action against Iran, because a nuclear Iran endangers not only Israel but the world. Michael O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution told FOX News he did not like the speech. He said Netanyahu cannot know what Rouhani is thinking and said Israel “would be foolish” to take action quickly. O’Hanlon preferred to “give it a little bit of time.”

The New York Times was more condemning. It called the speech “aggressive, combative, sarcastic and sabotaging diplomacy.” It also said, “It could be disastrous if Mr. Netanyahu and his supporters in Congress were so blinded by distrust of Iran that they exaggerate the threat.”

Less than a month after Rouhani’s speech, Iran met for two days with representatives from the so-called P5+1: United States, Russia, China, France, and United Kingdom (all of whom have permanent seats on the UN Security Council), plus Germany. His goal: to persuade them to lift sanctions.

No one wanted to hear the truth about Hitler in 1938 either. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returned from signing the Munich Pact, boasting he had achieved “peace in our time.” Yet, within months, Germany invaded Czechoslovakia. Netanyahu no doubt had this in mind when he courageously told the world he will not allow the same thing to happen to Israel.
Him or Us; You Decide

Can a nation survive long after an extended time of peace and prosperity? Americans should be asking themselves that question. We have reached a crossroads in our fight for life as we have known it.

We have come to our peculiarized version of Babel. Genesis 11:1–9 reveals the pivotal point in the early record of national existence when there was unity: one people, one language, and divine awareness. Then everything changed.

It was simple, yet profound. Humanity pivoted away from Jehovah to “Us.” An ancient cadre of “progressives” decided on a new direction: “Let us make bricks.... Let us build ourselves a city;.... let us make a name for ourselves” (vv. 3–4).

“Us” became of prime importance, and God became a liability. In the end, going it alone brought disintegration, alienation, and turmoil. Babel became a succinct summary of the no-God philosophy of the insipid paganism that prevailed.

On the other hand, the pinnacle of national achievement is defined in Psalm 33:12: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”

There has been controversy over whether or not America is a Christian nation. U.S. President Barack Obama believes not. In 2009 he declared Americans “do not consider ourselves a Christian nation or a Jewish nation or a Muslim nation; we consider ourselves a nation of citizens who are bound by ideals and a set of values.” But what is the source of the “set of values” by which we are bound?

The unassailable fact of history is that, until Babelized, amoral, social, and political chaos invaded our culture, the values were Judeo-Christian. They came to the pagan West when the apostle Paul heard the historic Macedonian call to change direction and take the gospel toward Europe, rather than Asia. Paul’s message was the matrix out of which the essentials of faith, orderly government, compassionate society, and adherence to truth as the guiding factor were born.

And with all due respect, the common values built into America—the greatest nation the world has ever known—were not brought by Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, or atheists. They came through what the Founding Fathers established, citizens cherished, and thousands within the Greatest Generation fought and died to preserve.

Jesus Christ is not a name to be despised and banned. His is the name above every name. He is the fountainhead of all we have inherited as a people. He promises liberty, peace, and emancipation; and through the Bible and its message-bearers, those blessings were delivered to our shores.

Nor is secularist scorn for the Torah a step toward a better future. America’s legal codes were moored to the sacred dictates of the biblical Law and the prophets. “In God we trust” was not the stuff of demented fanatics. Nor were the Ten Commandments, replicas of which today are literally being smashed and trashed by hedonistic cynics.

American painter Norman Rockwell illustrated mid-20th-century American life with humor and insight. “Without thinking too much about it,” he wrote, “I was showing the America I knew and observed to others who might not have noticed.”

In 1943, moved by President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s famous Four Freedoms speech, Rockwell produced a series of illustrations depicting Freedom of Speech, Freedom to Worship, Freedom From Want, and Freedom From Fear. The nation was overwhelmed with inspiration when it saw what he had translated from words to canvas. The reason was simple. In a struggle for the life of the country at that time, people still believed. Patriotism was alive and well, and Rockwell had captured the soul of America.

Have you noticed that those freedoms are under attack? Will we let them be taken from us?
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Park East Synagogue in New York City was the venue in October for an Honor Israel night, cosponsored by The Friends of Israel (FOI) and American Friends of Rambam Medical Center (AFORAM).

New York City boasts the largest Jewish population of any city in the world. As anti-Semitism grows, FOI is more determined than ever to stand by its mission statement of "fostering solidarity with the Jewish people."

Seven Jewish organizations participated with FOI, which distributed complimentary copies of the September/October issue of *Israel My Glory*, featuring an article on Rambam’s progress constructing an emergency underground hospital, the only one of its kind in the world. In case of war, Rambam, in Haifa, Israel, can convert a three-story underground parking garage into a fully operational, self-sufficient, 2,000-bed hospital within 72 hours.

“Our hope is that it remains a parking garage always,” AFORAM Executive Director Michele Segelnick told the mostly Jewish audience.

FOI Executive Director Jim Showers spoke of the biblical mandate to support Israel, citing Genesis 15:18; Psalm 105:6–11; and Ezekiel 11:17. “The land belongs to Israel,” he said. “Land is a physical promise, not a spiritual promise.” He said that others call Israel’s existence a mistake, but “we say Israel is God’s miracle!”

“As Christians,” he said, “we are blessed by Israel. Our Scriptures were penned by Jewish men. Our Savior, Jesus, was born Jewish and worshiped in synagogues. There would be no Christianity without Israel and the Jewish people.” Jewish people have won more than 200 Nobel Prizes for their contributions to humanity, Showers said, and Israel has been a first responder in many world crises, particularly in Haiti and Japan, where the Jewish state opened field hospitals and sent surgeons and medical specialists.

“Tonight,” he said, “we declare our identification as Christian Zionists. To our Jewish friends, we stand with you—yesterday, today, tomorrow, and forever.”

Besides AFORAM and FOI, display tables included:

- Emunah of America, staffed by National President Fran Hirmes and Myrna Zisman.
- American Friends of Magen David Adom, staffed by Northeast Regional Director Gary Perl.
- Volunteers for Israel, staffed by Richard Bernstein.
- Heroes to Heroes, staffed by Founder-President Judy Schaffer.
- Friends of the Israel Defense Forces, staffed by Alex Reback, development assistant for community engagements.
- StandWithUs, staffed by Avi Posnick.

“When I volunteered to represent Volunteers for Israel,” said Richard Bernstein, "I had no expectation that it would be as interesting and rewarding an experience as it turned out to be.”

Pastor Alex M. Perednia of Laurelton Park Baptist Church in Brick, New Jersey, said, “I attended this event with a conservative rabbi from my community. As a result, we are both interested in cosponsoring a Standing United With Israel event in our community next year!”

From the state’s reconstitution in 1948 until today, Israelis face the challenge to survive in a hostile neighborhood. Honor Israel nights, like the one in Manhattan, communicate a message of hope, love, and support. In an era of tweets and instant messaging, this event is a message that extends to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, letting Israelis know they are not alone.
Cairo, Egypt—The wounded mother of a 12-year-old girl killed at a Christian church wedding in October in suburban Cairo, Egypt, lay in a hospital bed recently, lost in anguish. Her daughter, Mariam Nabil Fahmy Azer, was shot dead in an attack that killed three other wedding guests.

“Mariam! Oh, God, why did You take her from me? Why did You give me two daughters and then take one from me?” Howida Azer cried. “Thank you, God. Please forgive me, God. I can’t take any more of this.”

Azer’s daughter was one of two girls killed in a drive-by, machine-gun attack on Coptic Christians who were filing into the church for a wedding. The other was 8-year-old Mariam Ashraf Mesiha, Mariam’s cousin.

The attack came amid weeks of anti-Christian violence by supporters of ousted president Mohamed Morsi. Muslim Brotherhood members and other supporters blame Christians for his ouster.

Camila Helmy Attyia, 62, the mother of the groom, died on the pavement outside the church. Samir Fahmy Azer, 46, died on the way to the hospital, as did the girls, according to family members; he was the brother of Howida’s husband.

Hours after two men on a motorcycle sprayed the crowd outside the church with bullets, the couple was married very late that night, dressed in mourning black, the groom’s brother told Morning Star News. Three people attended the ceremony.

At the Armed Forces Hospital in Maadi, the fifth floor was full with members of the bride’s family, who believe they must turn to God.

The family has been unable to tell Howida’s husband, Nabil Fahmy Azer, 40, also injured, about the death of his daughter. Since learning about the killing of his brother and his niece, he has been unable to speak.

Because of the near-constant presence of his daughter’s image in news media around the country, no magazines or newspapers are allowed near him; and any television sets, radios or Internet sources around him remain silent.

How his faith confronts the trauma he’s suffered remains to be seen, while the faith of others is more apparent. Most of those injured in the ward were men, with bullet wounds to their legs. One critical exception was Ashraf Ayad Attyia, 33, who was shot through the neck. Miraculously, the bullet passed completely through without severing his larynx, arteries, or spinal column.

Even though he was still in pain, he smiled and admitted he realized how lucky he was to be alive. “I thank God for sparing my life,” Attyia said.

Awad Botros Khalil, 40, a self-professed “nominal Christian,” said the shooting convicted him of his lack of faith. He was hit in his right leg. The bullet went in and severed three veins just above his foot, which he now cannot move. In a country where attending church services can mean death, he said he needed to “step up” to what he is supposed to be spiritually.

“When I was shot, almost dying and seeing the love of God and people around me, I know now I need to get close to God,” Khalil said.

Members of the Azer family said they feel Copts in Egypt are being attacked as a people, but that the assaults make their faith stronger.

Rev. Sawaris Boushra was in the church library when the shooting started. “Christianity is based on persecution,” he said. “Christ said there would come a time when people will kill Christians and think they are doing God’s will. That is happening now.”

by Morning Star News (morningstarnews.org)
When 5-year-olds are expelled from class for pointing, school bus drivers refuse to intercede while teenagers pummel and bully children, and the Pledge of Allegiance and patriotic assemblies are banished from schools, it’s time to ask, “Whatever happened to common sense?”

The answer is political correctness. Imposed by forces totally out of step with America’s traditions, political correctness has emerged as the promised “transformation” of the nation.

A revolution is raging. What was revered historically as common sense is gone, and there is a reason why. America’s social awareness and rules of conduct were based on the Christian values the Founding Fathers wove into the fabric of the
republic. The Ten Commandments, truth, respect for others, and a love of God and country undergirded the governing system that rose among the nations as a spectacular exception to the oppressive cultures immigrants fled to breathe the free air of America, the land of endless opportunity.

Today most Americans share a nearly universal lack of awareness concerning the seriousness and consequences of the attacks on their country’s way of life. Some, however, have connected the dots and are demonstrating the courage to say so.

One such person is David Horowitz, the 75-year-old founder and president of the David Horowitz Freedom Center and editor-publisher of FrontPage Magazine (frontpagemag.com). In Horowitz’s words, “I was born . . . into a family of high school teachers who were members of the Communist Party, and therefore were actually part of a vast conspiracy dedicated to the destruction of this country, although they never would have looked at it that way.”

In a speech titled “The Threat We Face,” delivered at a conference in October 2013, Horowitz articulated the objectives and defining features of current liberals (they prefer the term progressives) in America:

The first of these features is their alienation from country. If you ask progressives about their patriotic feeling, they will tell you that they don’t think of themselves first as Americans but as “citizens of the world.” . . . They are, in fact, so profoundly alienated from their country as to be in some sense foreigners to it. They are hostile to its history and to its core values, which they see as reflections of a society that has been guilty of racism and oppression on an epic scale. And they are fundamentally opposed to its constitutional arrangements which the framers specifically designed to thwart what they deemed “wicked projects” to redistribute income and share individual wealth. . . .

Progressives are on a mission to create the kingdom of heaven on earth by redistributing income and using the state to enforce politically correct attitudes and practices in everyone’s life. They want to control what you do, and who you are, and even what you eat. For your own good, of course.

The fact that they see themselves as saving the world—or “saving the planet” as they would prefer—explains why they are so rude and nasty when you disagree with them or resist their panacaus.

. . . That is why the politics of personal destruction is their favorite variety, why they are verbal assassins and go directly for the jugular, and why they think nothing of destroying the reputations of their opponents and burying them permanently. And that is why they can perform their character assassinations without regrets.1

An example of this imposed big-brotherism was on display in West Virginia months ago. A frustrated official of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, previously called the Federal Food Stamp Program) complained when mountain people refused to accept government assistance. The official said the big challenge is to break down “mountain pride.” In other words, the “problem” is having tenacity in wanting to take care of yourself and your family without help from the government—not a good thing in the eyes of those on a quest for universal dependency based on a supreme socialist ideology.

Christianity in the Crosshairs

However, the major hindrance to the progressives is the church: Bible-believing followers of Jesus whose faith is the touchstone of a life of purpose and commitment to divine truth. Christianity’s message, morals, and mission diametrically oppose their secular “heaven on Earth” new creation. To them, Christianity is an intolerable obstacle that must be destroyed.

One tactic is to ridicule it relentlessly until everyone and everything associated with the name of Jesus Christ is delegitimized and disqualified for a place in society.

Socially acceptable Christianity is that which disassociates itself from the staples of historic Christian orthodoxy, such as evangelism and obedience to God’s Word, and refuses to view Scripture as the inerrant, impeccable guide to faith and practice. This path of compromise allows one to “fit in” and be accepted as “relevant” participants in “social progress,” godless though it may be.

All of which explains why some evangelical circles have morphed into social-gospel fraternities reminiscent of the liberal Progressive Movement of the early 20th century, which repudiated belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and reduced the Bible to stories written by men. In his book A Guide to Understanding the Bible, prominent liberal minister Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969) claimed writers of the biblical texts drew from ancient Hebrew beliefs that were essentially pagan. He said the Hebrew concept of “monotheism, taken morally in earnest, mingled with old ideas involved in tribal deities, racial prejudices, religious bigotries, and national hatreds.”2

Belief in the literal return of Christ was, in Fosdick’s view, a myth. That conviction induced a strong anti-Zionist sentiment. He and his “progressives” much preferred to humanize Christ, marginalize God, and deify man—whom they credited with possessing an ever-evolving “divine spark.”

During the years of the fundamentalist/Modernist controversy, liberals painted Bible believers as intellectual and spiritual has-beens clinging to traditional myths and legends. After all, they reasoned, the great advances in science and critical scholarship were refining theology, liberating humanity from antiquated beliefs, and demanding new ways of interpreting and practicing faith. In addition, Darwinism birthed a new religion founded on evolution that has been force-fed to the nation’s offspring as the replacement for Christianity.

The trouble is that heaven has not come to Earth through liberal enlightenment. Humanity has not evolved. In fact, its devolution is more the confirmed reality. There is no universal divine spark in man. And sin still drives the mainframe of the human anatomy.

The Pandora Process

In Greek mythology, Pandora’s box was a gift that, when opened, released all the evils of the world. Today the term refers to something that appears innocent but creates far-reaching, irreversible, corrupting consequences.

Progressive, liberal theology, designed to liberate, has produced a hailstorm of doubt, disillusionment, division, religious futility, and frustration. The blessed hope became the banished hope, with nothing to answer the need for real redemption or an eternal relationship with the God who stooped down to pick us up, save us, sustain us, and usher us into eternal glory when we die as true believers in Christ.

In the wake of this spiritual void and hopelessness come the inevitable, fatal consequences. For whenever a vacuum appears, someone or something will surely fill it. Enter false teachers. Masked in sheep’s clothing, they are spiritual wolves who prey on the disoriented, innocent, susceptible flock. Scripture
Why can’t one person redeem another person’s soul?

“None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls is costly. . . . But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave.”

—Psalm 49:7–8, 15

The final reference predicts the onslaught of attacks on the conservative interpretation of endtimes prophecy, including the persistent anti-Zionism of early progressives and their current theological descendants. Theological anti-Zionism and militant aggression against historical, grammatical application of biblical truth are seeding the soil of the prophesied, coming apostasy.

When a society abandons the moral, spiritual, and intellectual standards instilled through divine authority, it forfeits its common sense as well. Allowing every person to concoct his or her own standards, using self as the supreme relevant factor, is a prescription for disaster.

Thankfully, that isn’t the way the world was designed to work. And for that reason, Jesus has promised to return and set things right. How do we know? It’s in the Bible. And that is the only Book with standards that will endure forever.


Elwood McQuaid is consulting editor for The Friends of Israel.

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Last fall author Joseph Atwill made a splash in London when he claimed the Gospels were faked by the Romans to quell a possible Jewish uprising. The theory, preposterous as it is, goes like this: Jesus preached that government should be obeyed (Mt. 22:21); so the Romans who occupied Judea and surrounding areas invented a religion with Christ (Messiah) at the head to rally the Jews together and render them docile and obedient to Caesar.

However, history refutes Atwill’s theory. The Jewish people still revolted in a bloody insurrection that culminated in the destruction of the second Temple and the stand-off in the desert at Masada. Furthermore, followers of Jesus refused to worship Caesar, resulting in their blood running fast and furious in the Circus Maximus in Rome and elsewhere.

Atwill’s silly speculations remind us of the Bible’s admonition, “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). So let us review some of those reasons.

1. Christianity, unlike other religions, is rooted in God’s intervention in history and substantiated by historical fact. Luke, the Greek physician, verified the eyewitness testimony on which he based his Gospel of Luke (Lk. 1:1–4). He also documented the fact that Jesus’ resurrection was authenticated by “many infallible proofs” (Acts 1:3).

The apostle Peter affirmed that he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ miraculous ministry (2 Pet. 1:16). Paul, who encountered the resurrected Christ, affirmed that the gospel has nothing in common with human speculations and “profane and old wives’ fables” (1 Tim. 4:7)—a category into which Atwill’s theories seem to fall.

The New Testament overflows with historical data. Furthermore, ancient secular sources also verify Jesus’ life and times. Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius corroborated Christ’s historicity, as did Pliny the Younger (ca. 112), who wrote that early Christians led surprisingly righteous lives and sang hymns “to Christ as to God.”

He described their communion meals, and Roman Emperor Trajan corroborated the authenticity of Pliny’s observations. According to ancient secular historian Julius Africanus, the pagan historian Thallus, writing within two decades of Jesus’ death and resurrection, noted the solar eclipse and earthquakes Luke’s Gospel said had occurred following Christ’s crucifixion. (See Luke 23:44–45.) Also, the Jewish Talmud, Sanhedrin 43:a, says Jesus was crucified on Passover on charges of blasphemy and “sorcery.”

(2) Christianity gives us a coherent explanation of the world around us. The January/February 2013 issue of MIT Technology Review advertised a scientific symposium that promised to illustrate the “beauty” of science in “satisfying the essential human drive to understand the world in which we live.”

Science is useful to discover operational features of our world. But when it aspires to “beauty” and absolute truth, it becomes scientism—the worship of science. Scientific materialists seem to forget the scientific method is only possible because of the consistent rules of the universe, which permit observation and deductive analysis. But such rules (called “laws of nature”) presuppose an overriding Rule Maker, or Law Giver.

The more science digs, the more it encounters nonphysical realities and principles. Popular Science magazine recently investigated the phenomena of “dark matter,” a kind of “shadow universe” that physicists now theorize may exist alongside ours. Is belief in “dark matter” any more reasonable than belief in a spiritual dimension that exists alongside the physical one?

(3) Christianity not only explains our world and the sinful nature and failings of human nature, but it also gives Christians a life that can be lived successfully and consistently with that worldview.

The late Christian theologian Francis Schaeffer wrote about the failure of followers of secular philosophical systems to live consistently with their own theories. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre, the famous French existentialist, wrote about the meaninglessness of the universe; yet he fought in the French resistance against the Nazis because he knew the Third Reich was evil. He also fell in love, had friendships, and manifested other evidences that life does, indeed, have meaning and value.

In the end, the most impressive proof of Christianity’s truth is the witness of the Holy Spirit to believers who trust in Christ. Even the famous philosopher David Hume, a hardened skeptic, noted that the believer in God “is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person” that transcends “custom and experience.”

But then, this should not come as a surprise, as God’s Word tells us the same thing: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:16).

Why do we believe? Because God’s truth is factual, intellectually coherent, and consistent with real life. And when we trust in His Son, Jesus, God imprints it indelibly on our hearts.

Craig L. Parshall is senior vice president and general counsel for the National Religious Broadcasters. His newest novel with Tim LaHaye, Mark of Evil, will be available in February.
Have you ever wished you could return to the purity of the first-century Christian church, when there were no denominational differences and all believers were simply called Christians? This longing for the “unspoiled” past is understandable in light of the church’s fragmented history.

However, the short epistle of Jude dispels the myth that the New Testament church was a simple, peaceful, perfect place of tranquil worship and doctrinal unity. In fact, the book of Jude reveals the early church’s intense battle for doctrinal purity and moral integrity.

The Author
Jude identified himself as “a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James” (Jude 1). Other passages in the New Testament reveal more about Jude than he himself told his readers. According to Matthew 13:55,
he was a son of Joseph and Mary, making him a half brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, as surprising as it may seem, Jude was an unbeliever at first: “Even His [Jesus’] brothers did not believe in Him” (Jn. 7:5).

The New Testament is filled with metaphors, Paul used it to discuss how Christ was a road to deception and eternal condemnation. His zeal for Jesus alone beingMerely growing up with Jesus did not guarantee His family’s hearts would be inwardly renewed. Reminding us that salvation is a personal decision, independent of one’s proximity to godly people.

However, one event changed both Jude and his brothers into true believers: Jesus’ miraculous resurrection. The risen Christ appeared specifically to His brother James (1 Cor. 15:7). The word “Sons” in the GreekNew Testament can mean “brothers” or “children.” Therefore, Jesus would be “Eternal Father” to His family’s hearts.

For many years Jude opposed Jesus’ message, living in the Kingdom of God, and a mortal life. But after he placed his faith in Jesus Christ, Jude realized every other religious path was “dive in error, vanity, and condemnation. His zeal for Jesus alone being the way, the truth, and the life is a common thread throughout the epistle.

You know how to discern the face of the stranger, you can love for the gospel of our God (Rom. 13:12).

The Message

Jude’s love for God with Jesus did not end with his conversion. It spread to the rest of Jesus’ family, con- volving them in the Kingdom of God and eternal life. The apostle Paul in explaining the wonders of God’s redemptive plan. But instead, the Holy Spirit prompted him to focus about “our common salvation” (Jude 3). He intended to mirror the apostle Paul’s teaching about “our common salvation” (Jude 3). He intended to mirror the apostle Paul’s teaching about “our common salvation” (Jude 3).

The Danger

“contend earnestly for the faith.” Jude exhorted his listeners to contend for the faith by battling against the poisonous doctrines of false teachers and faithfully teaching people God’s truth in the race for eternal life.

Even in the church’s earliest days, false teachers proclaimed a false way of salvation that sounded extremely close to the truth. Not only did they attack Christianity from outside the church, but they also infiltrated the body of Christ, creeping in “unnoticed” (v. 4). They sinisterly distorted the gospel by turning “the grace of our God into lewdness” (v. 4), claiming that people who received God’s grace were free to live any way they chose.

They failed to teach that true saving faith leads to a transformed life. Their corrupt doctrine denied “the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ,” who makes a transformed life possible (v. 4). The lordship of Jesus Christ includes not only our initial salvation but also our ongoing pursuit of holiness; anything less denies Jesus as Lord.

Their teaching about God’s grace contradicted the very essence of Jesus’ message, which was to “call . . . sinners, to repentance” (Lk. 5:32). Paul exhorted believers not to abuse grace as an excuse to sin: “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh” (Gal. 5:13).

God’s grace not only provides freedom, it also produces a desire for godly living: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Ti. 2:11–12). The lordship of Jesus Christ reaches to every part of our lives. Holiness is not optional; it is imperative. Jude said false teachers show their true colors by their sensual and immoral conduct (Jude 6–7).

The New Testament is filled with similar warnings about people who teach false doctrine. Jesus cautioned that fero-cious wolves will come disguised in sheep’s clothing; but we will be able to discern their true nature by their ungodly lives: “By their fruits you will know them” (Mt. 7:20).

Paul warned, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29–30).

The apostle Peter also described false teachers as those who “promise . . . liberty, [though] they themselves are slaves of corruption” (2 Pet. 2:19).

For the last 2,000 years, false teachers have infiltrated the church and promoted their heresies. During the second and third centuries, Gnosticism infiltrated, teaching that Jesus was a divinely created being who merely appeared to be human. This false doctrine corrupted morals in the church, and early Christian leaders contended for the faith by opposing it vigorously.

During the same period, a teacher named Marcion denied the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures and much of the New Testament. Church leaders contended for the faith by affirming the inspiration of the books that now make up the New Testament canon.

An early Christian leader who is well known for his zealous defense of the faith is Epiphanius, who wrote The Panarion in the fourth century. The title means “the medicine chest” because it was written to heal those who had been wounded by the “snakebites” of 80 different heresies taught during the first four centuries of the church.

The early believers’ vigorous defense of the faith should challenge today’s church to follow in their footsteps and “contend earnestly for the faith.”

William L. Krewson is chairman of undergraduate programs in the School of Divinity at Cairn University, Langhorne, Pennsylvania.
Apostasy is nothing new. Although it may seem worse today than in previous years, it has been around almost forever; and it reaps God’s judgment.

An apostate is one who departs from the religion, principles, party, or cause that he or she formerly associated with and professed. The book of Jude gives examples of apostates in Old Testament times and the divine judgment they reaped.
Old Testament
Apostates

The first example involves the people of Israel whom God brought out of Egypt under Moses’ leadership (Jude 5). All were delighted to be delivered from the bondage of suffering they had experienced for many years. But the Israelites who were unbelievers were pleased merely for selfish reasons, rather than for the honor and glory of God.

As a result, God “afterward destroyed those who did not believe” (v. 5). Jude’s second example involves a group of holy angels whom God created for a special angelic domain or sphere of influence (v. 6). Apparently, these angels were pleased with their supernatural power of influence but decided to use it for selfish reasons instead of for God’s purposes. The angels’ sin consisted of four actions:

1. Abandoning their God-ordained domain or sphere of influence in order to become part of a different domain.
2. Leaving “their own abode” (v. 6). These angels deserted the God-ordained residence for angels in the heavens in order to live in another location.
3. Giving “themselves over to sexual immorality” (v. 7). Verse 7 begins, “as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these.” Some interpreters claim verse 7 has no relationship to the angels of verse 6. They insist the words to these in verse 7 refer back to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, not to the angels of verse 6, and that Jude was saying the cities around Sodom and Gomorrah gave themselves over to sexual immorality in like manner as Sodom and Gomorrah.

However, the Greek word for “cities” is feminine. By contrast, the Greek words translated “to these” in verse 7 and “angels” in verse 6 are both masculine. Thus “to these” in verse 7 must refer to the angels of verse 6, not to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude was saying Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them sinned like the angels of verse 6, by committing sexual immorality.

This does not mean, however, that the angels engaged in the same type of sexual immorality as the men of these wicked cities. The Greek word translated “sexual immorality” in verse 7 refers to any kind of sexual relationship forbidden by God. The sexual immorality of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah and neighboring cities involved their going after “strange flesh.” To “go after strange flesh” means to “indulge in unnatural lust.” The men engaged in unnatural sexual relations with one another, even though God created human males to be sexually foreign to other human males (Lev. 18:22; 20:13;Dt. 23:17).

4. Going after “strange flesh” (Jude 7). The angels’ sexual immorality also involved going after “strange flesh.” God created angels as spirit beings, without physical bodies of flesh and bone. Thus the angels of verse 6, contrary to their nature and to what God intended, pursued sexual relations with physical flesh. The end of verse 6 indicates God punished their fourfold sin by confining them to a gloomy place of darkness, where He keeps them until their final judgment at the end of this earth’s history: He has reserved them in everlasting “chains of darkness” for the judgment of the great day.

The apostle Peter had these same angels in mind when he wrote, For . . . God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [Tartarus] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:4–5).

Several things should be noted concerning these comments: First, Peter was referring to a group of angels whom God had confined and chained in a terrible place of darkness in the past.

Second, though English translations call this place “hell,” Peter did not use the New Testament word for “hell” (Hades). Instead, he used the word Tartarus. The ancient world understood Hades and Tartarus to be distinct from each other. Both the Greeks and Jewish apocalyptic writers thought of Tartarus as “a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was meted out.” Chapter 22, verse 2 of the Apocryphal Book of Enoch presents Tartarus as the place of punishment for fallen angels. Peter was indicating that these evil spirits are imprisoned in the deepest pit of gloom.

Second Peter 2:4 is the only place in the New Testament where this place of judgment is mentioned by its proper name. Several other passages refer to it by its descriptive term, the “bottomless pit” (literally, “the abyss”). The word abyss means “unfathomably deep.” Jewish apocalyptic writers called it “the place in which runagate [fugitive, runaway, vagabond] spirits are confined (Jub. 5:6 ff.; Eth. En., 10:4 ff.; 11ff.; 18:11 ff. etc.; Jd. 6; 2 Pt. 2:4).”

Third, Tartarus is only a temporary place of judgment for the angels confined there. At the end of this earth’s history, they, together with Satan and all fallen angels, will be consigned to another place of judgment: the eternal Lake of Fire (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

Fourth, Peter made it clear these angels were already in Tartarus because of a sin they committed before he wrote his epistle. This sin was not the original angelic rebellion against God because, if it were, then all angels—including Satan—would be confined there. Instead, it had to be a more grievous sin, one committed by this group of angels after the original angelic rebellion against God.

Before and after Christ’s time on Earth, the understanding of Genesis 6:1–4 was that the “sons of God” were angels who married human “daughters of men” and produced giant
offspring who became mighty “men of renown” before the Noahic flood. These angels abandoned their assigned sphere of influence and vacated the residence of angels in the heavens.

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, produced by Jewish scholars in the second or third centuries before Christ, indicated the “sons of God” of Genesis 6 were angels. The Book of Enoch (which Jude quoted in verses 14–15) and The Book of Jubilees, Jewish literature produced in the second or third centuries before Christ, presented the same view. So did Josephus, the famous Jewish historian of the first century A.D. This view was also the historic position of the early church until the fourth century A.D.

God’s judgment on the men of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the neighboring cities serves as an example of those who will undergo the punishment of eternal fire (Jude 7).

**New Testament Apostates**

Beginning in verse 8, Jude applied the examples of the Old Testament apostates to the apostates of verse 4 who had crept deceptively into churches. They were false prophets who claimed to “have visions in dreams,” believed that God’s grace permitted sexual immorality, and despised the lordship authority of Christ over their lives. In addition, as mere humans, they took it upon themselves to rebuke angels.

Jude contrasted their actions with that of Michael the archangel (a high-ranking angel) who, when in a dispute with Satan about the body of Moses, said, “The Lord rebuke you” (v. 9) instead of daring to rebuke Satan himself. Jude used this example to warn apostates to beware of rebuking angels, who are far more powerful than they.

In verse 10, Jude accused these apostates of blaspheming things about which they are ignorant and, like unreasoning animals, corrupting themselves with things they understand.

In verse 11, Jude declared, “Woe to them!” because of three things they had done:

1. They had “gone in the way of Cain” by rejecting God’s command and lordship authority in order to do as they pleased.
2. They had “run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit.” Just as Balaam greedily used his prophetic ministry to become wealthy, these men deceitfully claimed to have significant visions in dreams in order to get rich.

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(3) Just as Korah perished for his rebellion against Moses (Num. 16), these apostates also perished for rebellion against God’s appointed church leaders.

God is certainly quick to forgive and slow to anger, but eventually He gets around to dealing with apostasy.

END NOTES


7 Ibid., “aperxomai,” 84.

8 Ibid., “tartarow,” 813.


13 Arndt and Gingrich, “enupniazomai,” 270.

Question: How was Abraham, who lived 430 years prior to the Mosaic Law, made righteous?

Answer: “He believed in the Lord, and He [the Lord] accounted it to him for righteousness.”

—Genesis 15:6
On the evening of January 13, 2012, the luxurious cruise ship Costa Concordia was sailing off the coast of the Tuscan Island of Giglio when, without warning, it struck mountainous terrain hidden beneath the sea’s surface. Panic ensued.

Many of the ship’s leaders fled, and people lost their lives as the vessel partially sank on the rocky ledge. The celebration and joy of the preceding hours were ruined by the rocky fingers that ripped open the ship’s underbelly. The photos of the tragedy were startling.

The church is much like a ship at sea. It must always be on the alert for false teachers who lurk dangerously underneath the surface, so to speak, threatening to capsize it.

Led by the Holy Spirit, Jude graphically described in his epistle the spiritual devastation false teachers bring. Verses 12–13 present six snapshots depicting the character of these men and the impact they have on the believing church:

> These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame;
wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

(1) Spots. Much like the unsuspecting passengers on the Costa Concordia, the church is pictured as celebrating and enjoying its blessings in Christ while gathered for a fellowship meal and the Lord’s supper, totally unaware that dangerous, ungodly apostates who deny Christ have haughtily joined with them undetected, without guilt or fear of exposure.

The word spots more accurately means “a ledge or reed of rock in the sea,” lying undetected just beneath the surface of the water. The language paints a vivid picture: The church was about to be ripped apart like a ship on the rocks. Standing watch on the bow, Jude was warning true believers to beware of the serious nature of apostasy.

(2) Shepherds. The letter quickly transitions to another scene: shepherds. The word serving is actually shepherding. It appears the false teachers had crept into leadership. True shepherds focus on their flock’s well-being. In contrast, apostate leaders use and abuse the flock to feed their own greed and lust for power and attention. They manipulate the flock to prosper themselves. Such men are like those in Ezekiel 34:2: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?” The flock suffered under such shepherds:

My flock became a prey, and My flock became food for every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock, but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock (v. 8).

It would be a horrible sight to see a starving, abused flock of sheep limping along the ancient roadside, but that is the picture of the church under the leadership of false teachers.

(3) Clouds. Farmers know how vital rain and water are to survival. Jude’s third snapshot presents the apostates as “clouds” blowing in the breeze on the horizon, giving hope of rain in a dry and thirsty land. A persecuted believer searches daily for hope and relief like a farmer scanning the sky for a promising rain cloud.

But a false teacher’s promises of refreshing, living water from the Word come and go like clouds, leaving the church dry and thirsty, “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men” (Eph. 4:14). These clouds are “without water.”

(4) Trees. The next phrase portrays these apostates as trees devoid of fruit, even though it is late autumn and the harvest has come and gone. The trees are dead, leaving those who depend on the harvest without provisions for the winter ahead. In fact, the trees are “twice dead” because their roots have been pulled up, cutting them off from all sources of life and nourishment. Psalm 1 describes such men as “chaff which the wind drives away” (v. 4).

The church needs leaders who are “planted by the rivers of water” (v. 3) and bring forth fruit in season, or it will be left with unfulfilled expectations. Dead trees can’t bear fruit, and dead men can’t give life.

(5) Waves. Anyone living close to a large body of water has seen the power of waves. Waves can be wild, tossing ships at sea and demolishing buildings on shore. False teachers, according to Jude, are like raging waves: unmanageable, destructive, and dangerous. Their outrageous behavior stirs up and reveals their disgrace, coating the church and her Head, Jesus Christ, with a foam of shame.

(6) Stars. The final snapshot portrays false teachers as wandering stars, most likely meteors, that shoot across the sky in brilliance then quickly fade to black forever. Before satellites and GPS navigational systems, people used the fixed position of the heavens to set a proper course and follow it. Pursuing wandering stars leads to a dark and gloomy path devoid of light.

Today so many people follow “stars” that rise up, shoot across the sky, and then leave them alone in the dark. Only a proper proclamation of God’s Word provides light for life’s path. A church without light is easily misled.

In verses 14–15, Jude returned to his previous theme of judgment with a modified quotation from the familiar, noncanonical Book of Enoch. The use of a nonbiblical source is neither cause for concern nor an affirmation of the book. The coming of the Lord with His angels to judge the ungodly has been a common theme in religious literature through the ages. Led by the Holy Spirit, Jude slightly modified this prophecy to drive home the point that God’s judgment is a truth that has been declared from the beginning:

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”

The repeated use of the word ungodly stresses the stark reality of the lifestyles and words of those who speak against Christ. God will “execute judgment on all”—not only on the false teachers, but also on those who follow them.

The book of Jude sounds like a blaring warning to the church today. When false teachers attack the faith and inflame the ranks, Christians need a strong, in-your-face warning that makes them take a hard look at reality. Jude accomplished this feat in his visually descriptive epistle. It isn’t pretty.

Now is the time to open our eyes, stand up, fight the good fight, and contend earnestly for the faith without delay. The church is taking on water and leaning to one side. It is important to root out false teachers before they shipwreck the church, leaving it starving, thirsty, disappointed, disgraced, and lost.

ENDNOTE
### Examples of Faith

<table>
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<th>Evolution is true and was used by God.</th>
<th>There is no absolute truth.</th>
<th>God wants you rich and happy.</th>
<th>Every goes to hell.</th>
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#### What the Scripture Says

- **“God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”** (Gen. 1:27).
- **“So the evening and the morning were the sixth day”** (v. 31).
- **“Jesus answered, ... But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female”** (Mk. 10:5–6).

- **“All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth”** (Ps. 25:10).
- **“His truth endures to all generations”** (100:5).
- **“The entirety of Your word is truth”** (119:160).
- **“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”** (Jn. 8:32).
- **“Your word is truth”** (17:17).

- **“I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake”** (Acts 9:16).
- **“Others were tortured, ... stoned, ... sawn in two, ... slain, ... being destitute, afflicted, tormented”** (Heb. 11:35, 37).
- **“Do not love the world or the things in the world”** (1 Jn. 2:15).

- **“The wicked shall be thrown into hell, and all the nations of the earth shall forget God”** (Ps. 14:5).
- **“Fear Him who, after he has power to cast into hell, fear Him!”** (1 Jn. 5:17).
- **“Anyone not found writing that Life was cast into fire”** (Rev. 20:14).

#### Other Examples

- **Only Gentiles need Jesus.** *(Dual Covenant)*
- **Sinless perfection is possible.**
- **Jesus was not born of a virgin.**
- **God does not condone sin.**

- **“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him”** (Jn. 3:36).
- **“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’”** (14:6).

- **“There is none who does good, no, not one”** (Ps. 14:3).
- **“For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin”** (Eccl. 7:20).
- **“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”** (1 Jn. 1:8).

- **“Before they came together, [Mary] was found with child of the Holy Spirit”** (Mt. 1:18).
- **“The angel said, ... ‘You will conceive ... and bring forth a Son.’ ... Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’”** (Lk. 1:30–31, 34).

- **“Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness”** (Rom. 6:13).
- **“This is the will of God, that each of you should abstain from sin”** (1 Jn. 5:19).

*(All images from iStockphoto. Panels 2, 3, 5, 6 top row and 1, 5, 6 bottom row digitally enhanced by Thomas E. Williams.)*
## A L S E T E A C H I N G

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<tr>
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### Scriptures Say

- **Examples of unfulfilled prophecy:**
  - “[The Lord’s] feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, . . . and [it] shall be split in two” (Zech. 14:4).
  - “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall. . . . They will see the Son of Man coming” (Mt. 24:29–30).
  - “Who has declared this from ancient time? . . . Have not I, the Lord?” (Isa. 45:21).
  - “I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done. . . . I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass” (46:9–11).
  - “Jesus . . . spoke to them, . . . ’Go therefore and make disciples . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you,’” (Mt. 28:18–20).
  - “You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

- **Jesus isn't mind lifestyle.**

- **Jesus is not God.**

- **The Bible is only God's Word when it speaks to you.**

- **Salvation can be attained by works.**

### Scriptures Say

- **Examples of unrighteousness:**
  - “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God’” (Isa. 44:6).
  - “I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore” (Rev. 1:17–18).
  - “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).
  - “No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20–21).
  - “Abraham “believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6).
  - “For by grace you have been saved through faith: . . . it is the gift of God, not of works” (Eph. 2:8–9).
  - “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us” (Tit. 3:5).

*by Thomas C. Simcox*
The short epistle of Jude is a scathing denunciation of false teachers and their immoral doctrines. It portrays them as evil individuals who worm their way into churches even though they are hell-bound sinners whom Jude groups with some of the worst offenders in the Bible: Korah, Cain, fallen angels, Balaam, the judged Israelites of the wilderness, the Devil, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 5–16).

Because of the danger they pose, the epistle exhorts the church “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3).

Scripture lists the wicked practices to be expected in the last days, a phrase many commentators say refers to the Church Age:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but
It should come as no surprise that mockers and scoffers are in our churches today (2 Pet. 3:3; Jude 17–18). Jude described them as “grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage” (Jude 16).

To help the church, Jude listed three practical essentials for true Christians. They will help you detect and avoid false teachers, and they’re easy to remember: keep growing, keep praying, and keep trusting (vv. 20–23).

**Keep Growing**

Jude wrote of “building yourselves up on your most holy faith” (v. 20). There is a Jewish saying, “Remembrance brings action in its train” (Talmud Menahot 13). It means that remembering instruction associated with God’s Word produces godly thought and behavior. Knowing and studying God’s Word is essential to ferret out false teachers.

It’s easy to become distracted today with so much opinionated Bible-study information available. Some is helpful; some is wrong. “Building yourselves up” comes from reading the Bible itself. This concept may sound simple and naïve; but if you want to grow in faith, you must rely on God’s Word. All things are to be judged through the lens of Scripture.

Another Jewish expression is “Not all things are kosher.” Kosher means proper and ritually pure. It implies authenticity. Jude teaches that spiritual-sounding doctrines creep into churches, but “not all are kosher.” Beware of novelties. Jude wrote of “building yourselves up on your most holy faith” (vv. 20–23).

Scripture is sufficient. It is the first line of defense against assaults from the evil one in these last days. Contending for the faith involves studying and “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). That is why the apostle Paul told his young protégé, Timothy, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (4:2).

**Keep Praying**

Our warfare is spiritual. Satan wants to destroy godly testimonies and the church. Therefore, Scripture admonishes us, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Prayer is a powerful weapon. It is essential to fight the seductions of false teachers and their counterfeit doctrines. That is why Jude told believers to keep “praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20).

In Ephesians 6:11–18, Paul likened the Roman legionnaires and their gear to Christians putting on the whole armor of God. He listed six specific items (belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, and sword) and implied a seventh, which is often overlooked yet vital: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (v. 18).

In battle Roman infantrymen first threw their spears to disarm their enemies’ shields and perhaps even gore them. Then the order was given for the soldiers to advance confidently with swords drawn.

As a metaphor, the spear represents prayer. Prayer can thwart the enemy’s evil plots and should always be part of the equipage of the well-armed Christian. Always remember in times of trouble, pray to God for help.

Notice Jude 20 does not merely say pray, but pray “in the Holy Spirit.” According to Bible commentator Matthew Henry (1662–1714), “Our prayers are most likely to prevail, when we pray in the Holy Ghost under his guidance and influence, according to the rule of his word, with faith, fervency, and earnestness.”

**Keep Trusting**

Jude closes with a powerful doxology. It stresses that our confidence rests in a mighty God (El Shaddai). An old Christian axiom still rings true: “When God is all you’ve got, then He is all you need.”

*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless* (v. 24).

The apostle Paul warned us that, as time progresses, spiritual deception will increase: *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables* (2 Tim. 4:3–4).

Christians must be constantly vigilant. The good news is that we are not alone. The God of Scripture can keep us safe and secure (Rom. 8:31).

In the 18th century, an itinerant preacher in London named Thomas Oliver decided to attend a synagogue service. At the conclusion of the service, the cantor (official who chants the prayers) sang a traditional Hebrew doxology called the “Yigdal,” which means “may He be magnified.” The tune so moved Olivers that he asked and was graciously given a copy of the melody. Using the tune, he wrote a hymn that soon became extremely popular, in part because it conveys the same confidence in God that Jude expresses in the closing doxology.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob can be trusted. He is truly a shield and tower who keeps His own secure and guards them by His side. The hymn is “The God of Abraham Praise.” Here are two of the stanzas:

The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above; Ancient of everlasting days, and God of Love; Jehovah, great I AM! by earth and Heav’n confessed; I bow and bless the sacred Name forever blessed. He keeps His own secure, He guards them by His side, Arrays in garments, white and pure, His spotless bride: With streams of sacred bliss, with groves of living joys— With all the fruits of Paradise, He still supplies. No matter what false teachers say, nothing can destroy the truth about God and Jesus Christ. Faithful Christians who desire to serve God and be loyal to Jesus Christ should keep growing, praying, and trusting. These are the essentials, and they will give you the discernment you need to recognize and resist false doctrine.

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Peter Colón is the creative resource coordinator for The Friends of Israel.
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Despite the foul mouth, the church’s website boasts that Driscoll’s “hour-long sermons received 10 million plays and downloads in 2011, with another 5 million views of his sermon clips on YouTube and other channels.”

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In days gone by it was common for parents to resort to washing their children’s mouths out with soap as punishment for using foul language. Gutter talk, locker-room jokes, bathroom humor, and vulgarity were unacceptable. In fact, the inability to control one’s speech was seen as a mark of immaturity.

Yet in today’s culture, free-flowing foul language is not only acceptable, it’s considered “cool.” Movie celebrities, rock stars, and shock jocks like the edgy public persona crude talk gives them.

Sadly, some pastors and preachers have drunk the same cultural Kool-Aid. They are using scatological terminology—vulgarity—in their sermons. Thankfully, this practice is not widespread, at least not yet. The preachers who use actual profanity are most often YouTube extremists and crackpots. But there are those in positions of spiritual influence who are using vulgarity in more traditional church venues. And that situation is disturbing.

Yes, Virginia, There Really Are Angels!

This time of year, people across America quote the New York Sun’s affirmation in 1897 of the “existence” of Santa Claus. But you know what? There REALLY ARE angels! They exist as surely as you and I do.

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To his credit, Driscoll recently has toned down his rough rhetoric. But earlier sermons and his 2006 book, Confessions of a Reformission Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church, held little back. In one message, Driscoll called Jesus “a dude” while wearing a T-shirt with a picture of what he called “drag queen” Jesus. The caption under the picture read, “Jesus is watching you download porn.”

Other comments are too coarse to print. Because form communicates significance, Driscoll’s crude efforts to humorously portray Jesus as merely one of us ends up demeaning Christ and lowering Him to a level that trivializes Him.

Anyone who would seek to make the message of the gospel palatable to itching ears by making Jesus common and using crude language would be wise to heed the admonitions of Scripture:

- **Titus 2:7–8**: “In all things [show] yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned.”
- **Colossians 3:8**: “But now you yourselves are to put off . . . filthy language out of your mouth.”
- **Ephesians 5:3–4**: “Let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.”

In the old days, the tops of some pulpits bore an engraved plaque to remind the preacher, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus” (Jn. 12:21). If the current trend continues toward blurring the distinction between the sacred and the profane, it might be good to see a resurgence of that plaque attached to the top of pulpits, along with a soap dispenser.

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**ENDNOTES**

2 “Pastor Profile: Mark Driscoll,” Mars Hill Church <pastormark.tv/about>.
3 Ibid.
S
o many churches and Christian organizations are facing crises in their leadership. Godly leadership is critical if Christians are to grow in Christ and glorify Him. Here are four principles of godly leadership from 1 Timothy chapter 1.

(1) Godly Leaders Protect the Flock From False Teachers. It’s becoming popular in American churches today to downplay sound doctrine. We appear to be moving toward a blended, flavorless Christianity that does not stand for much of anything. The problem, in part, stems from false teaching that tends to turn the insignificant into the main thing.

The apostle Paul told his young protégé Timothy to make sure no one teaches strange doctrine:

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith (1 Tim. 1:3–4).

The Greek word for “other” is heteros, which literally means “different.” Paul used the same word in Galatians 1:6 when he said, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.”

This warning implies that there is a core Christianity, and that is what we need to teach. False teachers will often come into a church, pick some obscure issue, blow it out of proportion, and violate a key principle of the gospel.

There is a tremendous need for pastors and church leaders to know the teachings of Scripture so they can recognize false teachers. Unbiblical ideas continually invade Christian circles. There are numerous examples of this: prosperity gospel, success gospel, and teachers claiming apostolic authority, to name a few. False teaching was present in Paul’s day and is still around today.

Without a solid biblical education, church leaders are unequipped to train their flocks; and people become susceptible to cults. Godly leaders must protect their flocks from false teachers by preaching the Word and teaching sound doctrine.

Many churches today are so interested in having a personal experience with God through music or some other medium that they shuffle God’s Word onto the shelf. Forty-five-minute, solid biblical expositions are being replaced by 45 minutes of music and 20-minute “practical” and “relevant” messages that tend to be topical and focused on the felt needs of the congregation. If we do not get systematic teaching from the Scriptures in church, where else will we get it?

(2) Godly Leaders Stay Focused on the Main Thing. What is the main thing? The goal of our instruction, Scripture says, is “love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5).

That is the main thing and what we are to focus on. The goal is not to get people whipped up about whether they are somehow descendants of King David, for example, but to teach them love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

First, love comes from a pure heart. Purity of heart speaks of motive. God’s agape love is selfless. A godly leader genuinely loves others from the heart.

How to Be a Godly Leader

by David Hard

Lives in deep appreciation of God’s grace

Understands selfless agape love

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you really are is who you are in secret.” Hypocrisy often parades as religiosity. Love emanates from people who have been purified by Christ, who are authentic, and who have good consciences. They are not fakers who go to church, look holy, then go home and commit some secret sin.

Certainly, many legitimate believers have personal struggles. We are all sinners saved by grace. Some people struggle with anxiety; they cannot rest in the fact that God holds the future securely in His hands. Some struggle with pornography. Others have eating disorders or are alcoholics.

There is a freedom that comes with a clear conscience. If you are going to be a godly leader, you cannot be living with secret sin.

Third, love comes from a sincere faith. Faith is the center of all we do. The whole of the Christian life is lived by faith, in contrast to the speculations of false teachers. The Bible always presents faith not as a blind leap into the unknown, but as a response to the evidence. Jesus healed people and then asked them to believe in Him. He gave them something to hold onto. He rose from the dead and then basically said, “If you believe that I am the Son of God, put your trust in Me.”

He always backed up what He said with signs. False teachers ask you to believe in things that have no real foundation in Scripture.

(3) Godly Leaders Understand Their Own Sinfulness and Live in Deep Appreciation of God’s Grace. Paul wrote, “I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:13, 15).

Are we ex-sinners? No, we are sinners. Paul said, “of whom I am chief.” Some church leaders have a tendency to think more highly of themselves than they ought. They see themselves as holier than their brethren. But Paul never forgot how much he was in debt to God’s grace. We all must understand our need of God’s grace. A deep appreciation of how merciful God has been to us will help us to be compassionate and patient with those who are struggling in their Christian walk.

(4) Godly Leaders Fight the Good Fight. Paul told Timothy, his son in the faith,

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good
we fight the good fight, having faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme (vv. 18–20).

We fight the good fight “according to the prophecies previously made.” Paul probably was referring to Timothy’s ordination service, when the elders laid hands on the young man and made prophetic statements about him. (See 1 Timothy 4:14.)

If you go into ministry, whether as a volunteer or in a paid position, you will be entering into spiritual warfare. The enemy will bring false teachers, discouragement, upset, and opposition. If you are weak, you will crash and suffer shipwreck like Hymenaeus and Alexander.

You must hang onto the truth of God’s calling. Paul told Timothy to remember when they laid hands on him and affirmed their belief that God had called him to serve. Follow your call; hang onto it because that is God’s word to you. Perhaps you teach Sunday school, and a parent castigates you. Or you serve in another way and are severely criticized. If criticizing you is all Satan has to do to get you to quit, then he has an easy job. Remember God’s word to you, and stand fast.

The ministry is a battle. It is not a nice, cozy job. It is a spiritual war. Godly leaders must be prepared, stay on point, and be ready to defend the faith against false teachers and opposition.
The Girl Almost Nobody Loved

by Mark Johnson

The Unwise Father

When God called Abraham, He made an unconditional covenant with him, promising to bless the entire world through his son Isaac and later through Isaac’s son Jacob. The blessing included the coming Messiah.

Abraham found a wife (Rebekah) for Isaac from among his Mesopotamian relatives. She bore Isaac twins in his old age. The second-born twin, Jacob, colluded with his mother; deceived his blind and failing father; and defrauded his brother, Esau, to receive the covenant blessing. Jacob then fled from Esau to live with his mother’s relatives, the family of his Uncle Laban.

“Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah’s eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance” (Gen. 29:16–17). The Hebrew word for “delicate” means “weak” and is difficult to interpret. Something about Leah’s eyes stood out negatively. Perhaps she had poor vision or was cross-eyed. Or perhaps her eyes were light when most people had dark eyes. Whatever the reason, she was not considered attractive and grew up in the shadow of her beautiful little sister, Rachel.
Christian Anti-Zionism: On the Wrong Side of History, Justice, and the Bible

In June 1982, Israel decided enough was enough. After setting up new headquarters in Lebanon in the early 1970s, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) led by Yasser Arafat launched frequent terrorist attacks into northern Israel, accompanied by incessant rocket barrages. Scores of Israelis were killed, hundreds wounded, and thousands forced to flee or hide in underground bunkers. With Operation Peace for Galilee, Israel invaded Lebanon and forced the PLO to retreat to Tunisia.

Not everyone was pleased that Israel went into Lebanon to defend itself.

On June 22, 1982, John Piper, then pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, wrote the following in an article titled “Prophecy and the Invasion of Lebanon”:

Woe to the followers of Christ who condone the displacement of 600,000 Lebanese citizens [Note: it was closer to 200,000] at the point of Jewish rifles. Woe to the Christians who think Jesus Christ sanctions the killing of 10,000 Lebanese [Note: the actual 6,000 civilian deaths came from both sides, not only Israel] because the bullets came from Israeli tanks. God does not sanction the sins of this rebel people. They stand under his judgment for their sins. Our response can be only this: an outcry of righteous indignation against Israel’s arrogance and aggression; and a prayer that they might repent and be saved before it is too late.

Why would Piper make such a statement? Biblically, we can understand why the world...
would unjustly turn against Israel. It is predicted (Zech. 12; 14). But why would a Christian say such things? It is because John Piper is a Christian anti-Zionist.

Christian anti-Zionists (CaZs) are professing Christians who dispute the modern State of Israel's historical, legal, moral, prophetic, and/or divine right to the promised and demarcated Holy Land of Scripture. They are part of a movement that grows stronger each day. Many of them seek to isolate and punish Israel through economic sanctions.

**Common Characteristics**

Their teaching shares a number of common characteristics:

1. CaZs wrongly assume New Testament revelation has more value than Old Testament revelation. They believe Jesus and the New Testament writers expanded and redefined Old Testament concepts, such as the Kingdom, the Chosen People, and the Land. Consequently, CaZs assign new meanings to the Old Testament promises God gave Israel. This practice leads to Replacement Theology, to which many CaZs adhere.

2. CaZs use the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture. The Church of Scotland's anti-Zionist stand clearly reveals this approach: "To Christians in the 21st century, promises about the land of Israel shouldn't be intended to be taken literally, or as applying to a defined geographical territory. . . . The 'promised land' in the Bible is not a place, so much as a metaphor of how things ought to be among the people of God."

3. CaZs use a fallacious argument from silence to try to prove their point. They falsely assume their position on the Holy Land is true simply because the New Testament writers spoke so infrequently of God's land promises to Israel and Israel's restoration to its land. On one occasion, when confronted about his argument from silence, Gary Burge countered, "It is such a loud silence."

4. CaZs are advocates and activists for leftist ideals. There is an evangelical Left, to which many CaZs belong. They believe the church's role in the world is to strive for peace and social justice and promote a contemporary version of the Social Gospel movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Social Gospel movement was liberal in its theology, contained socialist components, and concentrated on correcting societal problems through social activism, rather than stressing heart change through personal faith in Jesus Christ.

5. CaZs evidence a lack of humility in their standing before God by their treatment of Israel. Despite Paul's warning in Romans 11:18 not to boast against the branches, meaning not to denigrate the Jewish people, Christian anti-Zionists demonstrate an attitude of arrogance and triumphalism toward Israel, as does their high-handed, judicial assessment that modern Israel has no divine right to the Holy Land.

On the contrary, what right has any man to judge whether Israel should possess the Holy Land? God promised Jacob, "Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession" (Gen. 48:4).

It is true that modern Israel is not a theocracy but, rather, a secular state. Like any other nation, it errs occasionally in policy and practice. Most Christian Zionists recognize that fact.

But out of reverential fear of God, the absolute and final Judge, and in deference to His many promises regarding Israel's divine right to the land, Christian Zionists do not presumptuously conclude that the Jewish people should be dispossessed of what God has pledged to them. Christian Zionists approach Israel, not as self-appointed arbitrators, but as reproving, yet supportive friends.

CaZs do not understand that God holds the nations accountable for their treatment of Israel, even when Israel is in a state of unbelief (Jer. 2:3; Ezek. 35).

**Who Is on the Lord's Side?**

Christian anti-Zionist Gary Burge proclaimed, "Christian Zionists . . . are Holy Land zealots because they are poor theologians. They follow the road that leads to Masada, and when they get there, they will find that Jesus is not at the top to greet them."4

Burge is right in that Jesus will not be at the top of Masada. He will be at the top of the Mount of Olives, fighting for His people Israel (Zech. 14) when He comes to set up His Kingdom in the land He promised to give them forever.

Until then, the struggle for the land of Israel is ultimately a spiritual battle; and Christian anti-Zionists must be careful or they will find themselves fighting on the wrong side.

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1 John Piper, “Prophecy and the Invasion of Lebanon,” Desiring God, June 22, 1982 <tinyurl.com/PiperCaZ>.
4 Ibid.

Bruce Scott is the director of Field Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
What Christian Anti-Zionists Teach

Christian anti-Zionism is gaining strength both in America and abroad. Its teaching turns the world against Israel as God’s Chosen People, casts Israel as the aggressor rather than the victim, and denies God’s promise to give the Jewish people the land of Israel as an “everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:8; 48:4). Here are some of Christian anti-Zionism’s most outspoken, influential proponents and what they say:

- **Stephen Sizer**—vicar of Christ Church, Surrey, United Kingdom: “There is no evidence that . . . the Jewish people had a divine right to the Land in Perpetuity, or that Jewish possession of the Land would be an important, let alone claim to land of the Bible in the name of God. Ownership of the land is not a Christian question.” Burge has written extensively on what he calls the obsolescence of “territorial theologies.”

- **Gary Burge**—professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois: “Ownership of the land is not a Christian question.” Burge has written extensively on what he calls the obsolescence of “territorial theologies.”

- **Tony Campolo**—speaker, author, sociologist, and professor emeritus of sociology at Eastern University in Pennsylvania: “The most serious threats to the well-being of the Palestinians in general, and to the Christian Palestinians in particular, come not from the Jews, but from Christian Zionists here in the United States.”

- **Lynne Hybels**—author; activist; and wife of Bill Hybels, senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Illinois: “I have become convinced that if Jesus were here today he would stand with those who non-violently protest the occupation of the Palestinian Territories, the extreme military violence used against the Palestinians, and the economic decline and psychological pain caused by the occupation.”

- **John Piper**—former pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and founder of desiringGod.org: “The secular state of Israel today may not claim a present divine right to the Land.”

Some well-known, vocal, Christian anti-Zionist institutions include Knox Theological Seminary in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, founded in 1989 by D. James Kennedy; General Assembly of the Church of Scotland; Bethlehem Bible College in Bethlehem, Israel, founded in 1979, which in 2007 opened a campus in northern Israel called Galilee Bible College and now plans to expand into Gaza; and Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem, Israel, founded in 1989 by Palestinian Anglican priest Naim Ateek.

Here are three more statements:

- **Knox Theological Seminary**: “Ownership of the land is not a Christian question.”

- **Bethlehem Bible College**: “Any exclusive claim to land of the Bible in the name of God is not in line with the teaching of Scripture.”

- **Palestinian Christians**: “We Palestinian Christians declare that the military occupation [by Israel] of our land is a sin against God and humanity and that any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings.” The statement was contained in the 2009 Kairos Palestine document, written by Palestinian Christians.

Contrary to what these men and institutions teach, more than 130 verses in the Bible reiterate the truth that the land of Israel has been divinely given to the Jewish people. Not a single verse in all of Scripture declares that God has revoked the promise He gave to Abraham in Genesis 17:8. (As a sampling, see Deuteronomy 4:8; Psalm 105:8–11; Jeremiah 23:7–8; Ezekiel 28:25–26; 34:13; 36:24; 37:1–14, 21; 39:28; 47:21; Amos 9:15; Acts 7:5.)

**END NOTES**

2 Gary M. Burge, Jesus and the Land (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 127.
5 John Piper, “Israel, Palestine, and the Middle East,” DesiringGod.org, sermon March 7, 2004 <tinyurl.com/PiperIsrael>.
6 An Open Letter to Evangelicals and Other Interested Parties: The People of God, the Land of Israel, and the Impartiality of the Gospel, 2002, Article 9. The Open Letter is no longer available on the Knox Seminary website. It can be read at bible-researcher.com/openletter.html, which lists only 26 of the signatories. A response by Dr. Mike Stallard can be read on the Pre-Trib Research Center website at <tinyurl.com/KnoxResponse>.

By Bruce Scott
The Girl Almost Nobody Loved  from page 31

To make matters worse, Laban was unwise in guiding his daughters and in downplaying the comparisons between them. In fact, his behavior in arranging their marriages was that of a father who seemed to think the only way he could get a husband for Leah was to trick someone into marrying her.

Laban was also unwise spiritually. His dealings with Jacob indicate he was a crooked businessman living for material things. When Jacob finally left after serving Laban for 15 years, he told Leah and Rachel, “Your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me” (31:7).

Laban valued material possessions and was willing to deceive to obtain them. In addition, he was an idolater and not a believer in Yahweh, Jacob’s God (vv. 29–30). So Leah was raised by an unwise, materialistic, idolatrous father.

The Unloving Husband

Enter Jacob. Immediately infatuated with Rachel, he proposed working seven years for Rachel’s hand in marriage. It was an exorbitant bride price in that culture. Sensing the young man’s vulnerability, Laban gave an evasive answer: “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me” (29:19). After working seven years, Jacob demanded to marry Rachel.

It takes imagination to picture how Laban pulled off this hoax. Picture an ancient wedding feast going late into the night with plenty of wine, a heavily veiled bride, and no electric lights. Jacob thought he married Rachel. But it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah” (v. 25). You can imagine his shock.

When Jacob confronted Laban, “Why then have you deceived me?” (v. 25), Laban’s reply must have pierced Jacob like a dagger: “It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn” (v. 26). The Holy Spirit surely used these words to confront Jacob with how his father must have felt to have been deceived in his darkness by the younger son taking the place of the firstborn. The deceiver had been deceived.

Laban then let Jacob marry Rachel after a one-week wait, but only for the promise of seven more years of work. Jacob agreed, and the sad practice of polygamy reared its ugly head. Thus the stage was set for another devastating comparison in Leah’s life: “Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah” (v. 30).

The Unhappy Sister

Leah’s longing to be loved by her husband was unfulfilled. Ironically, Jacob in his old age chose to be buried in the family grave next to Leah (49:31), rather than near Bethlehem where Rachel was buried. Perhaps he finally came to appreciate her.

Through Leah, God quickly gave Jacob four sons, one after another: “When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren” (29:31). After a few years, Rachel was frustrated and confronted Jacob, “Give me children, or else I die!” (30:1). Jacob’s answer was harsh but conveyed an important theological truth: “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” (v. 2). God is sovereign, and children are a gift from Him.

How ironic that each sister had what the other wanted. Leah had children, but not her husband’s love. Rachel had her husband’s love, but no children. Through it all, our wise and loving God was seeking to get the attention of both women and draw them to Himself.

Leah’s comments upon naming her first three sons showed a woman yearning for her husband’s love. She named her firstborn Reuben (from “to hear”). Her second son’s name, Simeon, came from “to hear.” Leah lamented, “Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also” (v. 33). The third son she named Levi (from “to be attached”). How heart-wrenching it is to read Leah’s lament, “Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons” (v. 34).

Somebody changed with the arrival of the fourth son. God did a great work in Leah’s heart. “And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, ‘Now [literally, “this time”] I will praise the LORD.’ Therefore she called his name Judah (from “praise”)” (v. 35).

It was as if Leah defiantly decided, “I will not let the men in my life or my difficult circumstances keep me from praising the Lord and enjoying His blessings!” Leah learned what God is trying to teach us all: True joy in life is found in the Lord alone. Marriage can be good and children are a blessing, but they are not the ultimate source of fulfillment and meaning. God is.

God did a great work in Leah, but He also did a great work through her. When all was said and done, He made her the mother of six of the sons of Jacob, from whom came the 12 tribes of Israel. She became renowned through the generations as one of the two women “who built the house of Israel” (Ruth 4:11).

God also made Leah the ancestor of the Messiah. Readers of Genesis who know the whole biblical account rejoice in the role of her son Judah (“Praise”) as head of the kingly tribe (49:10) through whom came King David and eventually the “Son of David,” Jesus the Messiah.

God delights in using the “foolish . . . weak . . . base . . . despised” things of this world to do His greatest work, “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:27–29). The Messiah Himself had “no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isa. 53:2). God took an unloved woman like Leah and, in His love, made her the mother of the Messianic line.

Like Leah, you can find your true longings met in the God who loves you and provided Jesus, who went to the cross to bring you to His Father. Take your longings to God, and see what He will do in you and through you.

Mark Johnson is the pastor of Independent Bible Church of Martinsburg, West Virginia.

Question: What does God call an atheist?

Answer: “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

—Psalm 53:1
Love Not the World

In 1 John 2:12–17, the apostle John provided three tests his readers could use to examine their personal commitment to Christ. The tests offered Christians assurance that they knew God and were walking in fellowship with Him. John’s purpose for writing was not to make believers question their spiritual states but, rather, to teach them how to detect false brethren.

In this section, John assured his readers of his confidence in their salvation (vv. 12–14); and he instructed them to guard against loving the world and becoming part of its evil system (vv. 15–17).

Reasons for Writing

In the second of the three statements (2:13–14), John used the same form of address: children, young men, and fathers. Although he still used the word children (v. 13), this time he used the Greek word paidia, denoting they were older than mere infants. He had confidence in their spiritual stability but indicated they still needed to be under supervision and instruction. John then addressed the “fathers” and “young men” (v. 14).

After John’s general opening to all believers, he addressed the fathers: “I write you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning” (v. 13). The phrase have known indicates the fathers acquired this knowledge in their past and still possessed it in their senior years. They had known “Him who is from the beginning.” This is not a reference to God the Father but, rather, to the incarnate, divine Son of God, Jesus Christ (cf. 1:1–2). Jesus Christ is the only person in Scripture referred to as being “from the beginning.”

First, John addressed young men: “I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one” (2:13). Here John clearly referred to men of younger age. The phrase young men (Greek, neaniskos) in the New Testament always speaks of physical, not spiritual, age.

John’s purpose in writing to young men was to commend them for overcoming the “wicked one” (cf. 2:13; 3:12; 5:18–19), that is, the Devil. Even though more battles lay ahead, John was sure these men would be victorious because of their strong, vigorous faith in Christ.

Recipients of the Writing

In two sets of three statements, John addressed readers as “little children,” “fathers,” and “young men” (vv. 12–14). There are three parts to each statement: an assertion (“I write to you” or “I have written”); an addressee; and an affirmation of the addressee’s commitment, beginning with the word because (used six times).

Commentators differ on the composition of John’s audience. Some believe he was addressing three specific categories of spiritual growth within the church. Others believe he was affectionately addressing all of his readers as “little children” first, then dividing them into “fathers” and “young men.” This view seems to have the most scriptural support since John used the phrase little children throughout his letter (cf. 2:1, 28; 3:18; 4:4; 5:21).

John said, “I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake” (2:12). The phrase little children (Greek, teknion) was a term of endearment for small children and always appears in the plural. John used it to refer to all born-again believers as children of God. He then added, “Because your sins are forgiven” (v. 12). The apostle already dealt with the confession and forgiveness of all believers’ sins (1:9). Their sins were forgiven “for [on account of] His name’s sake” (2:12). That is, people were forgiven their sins because they believed in Christ and His sacrificial work on the cross (cf. 2:2; 4:10). This truth is the basis of fellowship with God for all Christians.

After John’s general opening to all believers, he addressed the fathers: “I write you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning” (2:13). The fathers were spiritually mature, having walked with the Lord for years. This qualified them to be leaders within the fellowship and instrumental in leading others to the Lord.

The apostle was confident in their commitment to the Lord “because [they] have known Him who is from the beginning.” This is not a reference to God the Father but, rather, to the incarnate, divine Son of God, Jesus Christ (cf. 1:1–2). Jesus Christ is the only person in Scripture referred to as “from the beginning.”

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Scriptures into their lives and growing stronger spiritually.

Third, John told them, “You have overcome the wicked one.” The indwelling Word of God strengthened them to overcome the Devil’s temptation and provide victory over him (cf. Mt. 4:1–11). Abiding in the Word is the key to maintaining fellowship with God and gaining victory over Satan.

Revelation of Worldliness

Abruptly, John switched from complimenting his readers to giving them a negative command, urging them to separate from Satan’s world system: “Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 Jn. 2:15).

He used the phrase the world (v. 15) six times in verses 15–17 to refer to the invisible, evil, spiritual system of this world governed by the Devil. The “things in the world” (v. 15) can be material, but here they refer more to worldly values, attitudes, evil thoughts, and evil practices that oppose God. Love for the world and love for God are mutually exclusive (cf. Mt. 6:24).

The command is twofold. First, “Do not love the world.” That is, never give your affections to this world’s system. Second, do not love “the things in the world.” John urged believers not to become involved in this evil world’s system. The apostle again reinforced the fact that a Christian’s faith is linked to his or her walk (conduct) in the Lord. He appealed to his readers’ wills to guard their minds and souls against becoming caught up in the world.

“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (v. 15). The word if indicates a hypothetical situation where one habitually makes the world an object of his or her love—indicating “the love of the Father is not in him.”

The phrase love of the Father has three possible meanings: (1) love emanating from the Father, (2) the Father’s love for an individual, or (3) an individual’s love for the Father. Here it means the individual’s love for the Father is absent. Therefore, people who love the world do not love the Father. Love for God and the world cannot coexist.

Next, John provided three descriptions of what it means to love the world:

(1) Lust of the Flesh (v. 16). Scripture uses this term most often to describe the sinful desires of man’s fallen nature to satisfy selfish cravings. Flesh refers to the depraved disposition of man’s inner fallen nature that is at enmity with God.

(2) Lust of the Eyes (v. 16). This phrase refers to what enters the mind. Lust of the eyes can be expressed two ways: A person may see an image or object and then develop a craving to possess it, or intentionally look at images or objects he or she will never possess and then lust and fantasize about them.

(3) Pride of Life (v. 16). This sin is an outward expression of haughtiness or arrogance, boasting about possessions, talents, abilities, and achievements in life instead of giving glory to God.

These three things are “not of the Father, but [are] of the world” (v. 16). Since everything within this world’s evil system is contrary to God’s nature and purpose, believers must guard against loving possessions, positions, and pleasures.

The final reason to avoid becoming entangled with this world is because it “is passing away, and the lust of it” (v. 17). All the lustful attitudes and pleasures under Satan’s control are transitory (cf. Mt. 24:35). All creation groans in pain under God’s curse and the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:21–22). The world is already decaying back into the dust from which it was created, destined for judgment and destruction at the return of Jesus Christ. All who enjoy this world’s evil system are destined for destruction as well.

But there is hope. Scripture promises, “He who does the will of God abides forever” (1 Jn. 2:17). God’s will is for sinners to repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ, and then He gives them the grace and power to follow the teachings of God the Father through Christ. (See John 6:40; 8:51; 14:21; 15:10.)

Christians who follow Christ’s teachings and no longer willingly serve the lusts of this world demonstrate their fellowship with the Lord and can rest assured that they abide in Christ forever. What a promise to be treasured.
The Grace of God (Part 8)

The previous article on the grace of God showed that Christ commissioned the apostle Paul “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24) and that Paul did so.

We saw that the word translated “testify” refers to “an emphatic affirmation that a thing is or will be so.”

The word translated “gospel” means “good news.” A commission is “an authoritative order” that may command “the performance of certain duties.” Paul earnestly fulfilled his duties, frequently at the price of significant personal abuse for the rest of his life.

What motivated or drove him to obey a commission that involved such personal cost? Certainly, one factor was his desire to obey Jesus Christ as his Lord.

But it appears that, in addition, Paul was greatly intrigued by the concept of “the grace of God.” This man, who consented to killing Stephen, an early Hebrew Christian; made havoc of the church; had Christian men and women imprisoned; rejected Jesus as God’s Son; and insisted the only way to be right with God was by keeping all the regulations of Israel’s Mosaic Law, was overwhelmed by the concept of becoming right with God solely through God’s grace. Nothing short of seeing the resurrected, glorified Christ while on the road to Damascus to persecute believers could have radically changed Paul’s conviction. Thus he became greatly intrigued by the truth that the only way to become right with God is through God’s grace.

Since it was God’s grace through the redemptive work of God’s Son that brought Paul into a right relationship with God, he was greatly motivated to obey Christ’s commission “to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (v. 24).

### Evidence of Paul’s Great Motivation

A significant evidence of Paul’s great motivation is the many times he used the word grace. Obviously, we have no way of knowing how many times he used the word outside of Scripture. But he used it so many times in the 13 biblical epistles he wrote that we know he was consumed by the transforming reality of God’s grace.

### Paul’s Use of the Word ‘Grace’

- **In His Epistle to the Romans:**
  1:5—Concerning Jesus Christ: “Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations.”
  1:7—“To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
  3:23–24—“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”
  4:4—“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.”
  4:16—“Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”
  5:1–2—“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”
  5:15—“But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.” The reference to “one man’s offense” is a reference to Adam’s original sin.
  5:17—“For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”
  5:20–21—“Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
  6:1—“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”
  6:14–15—“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!”
11:5–6—“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.”

12:3—“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”

12:6—“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them.”

15:15—“Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God.”

16:20—“And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.”

16:24—“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

In His First Epistle to the Corinthians:

1:3–4—“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.”

3:10—“According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation.”

15:10—“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

16:23—“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

In His Second Epistle to the Corinthians:

1:2—“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

1:12—“For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.”

4:15—“For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.”

6:1—“We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.”

8:1—“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.”

8:6—“So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.”

8:7—“But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—you see that you abound in this grace also.”

8:9—“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

9:8—“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.”

9:14—“And by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.”

12:9—“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

13:14—“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.”

In His First Epistle to the Galatians:

1:3—“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1:6—“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.”

1:15—“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace.”

2:9—“And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcision.”

2:21—“I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

5:4—“You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

6:18—“Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.”

END NOTES


Renald E. Showers is an author and international conference speaker for The Friends of Israel.

Question: Why do so many people reject Jesus?

Answer: “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

—John 3:19
NYT apologizes

The New York Times has apologized for the picture it chose to go with an article it published in November about the brutal murder of 19-year-old Israel Defense Forces soldier Eden Atias, who was stabbed to death on a public bus in Israel.

Rather than running a photo of the soldier, the article titled “Attack on Israeli Worsens Tensions With Palestinians” featured a photo of the 16-year-old terrorist’s mother as she was visited by relatives.

The newspaper’s public editor Margaret Sullivan posted a blog in which she admitted her mistake. She went on to quote some of the angry letters she has received from readers. For example, Allan Lieberman of Long Island wrote, “In the eyes of The New York Times, Israeli victims of terror are mere footnotes to a one-sided narrative of Palestinian suffering and Israeli responsibility for that suffering.”

Freya Morrison of Toronto wrote, “Using a photo of the murderer’s mother to represent the item regarding the fatal stabbing of Eden Atias is the epitome of slanted journalism and bad taste. Let’s get it straight. The Israeli soldier is the victim here. How dare you make it appear otherwise!”

Sullivan added that she had spoken to two senior editors at The Times and that both agreed the photo “was a regrettable choice.”

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

Palestinian aid money ‘disappears’

Over the past four years, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has managed to “lose” nearly $3 billion in financial aid from Europe, according to a European Court of Auditors’ report that was leaked to Britain’s Sunday Times. Yet Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas blames Israel for his regime’s economic woes.

The report reveals that $2.7 billion in direct aid to the Palestinians between 2008 and 2012 cannot be accounted for.

The Jerusalem Institute of Justice has noted that, per capita, the PA has received 25 times more aid than did Europe following World War II.

Israel Today (israeltoday.co.il)

Philippines thanks Israel for aid

Philippine Ambassador to Israel Generoso D.G. Calonge said his nation is most grateful for the immediate and overwhelming support the Jewish state provided in the wake of super-typhoon Haiyan, which killed an estimated 10,000 people and left another 800,000 without food, water, or shelter.

“I can’t describe the feeling right now . . . that my host country cares about our stricken people,” Calonge told The Jerusalem Post.

An Israel Defense Forces Home Front Command jumbo jet took off for the Philippines in November with 148 Israeli doctors, nurses, and medics aboard. In all, the Israeli army plans to send 234 medical personnel and enough supplies and equipment to establish a state-of-the-art field hospital.

Israel provided similar assistance to Haiti and Japan following earthquakes that devastated both of the island nations in 2010 and 2011, respectively.

Israel Today (israeltoday.co.il)

Israel quietly feeds Syrian refugees

Among the organizations funding and distributing physical and emotional aid to the hundreds of thousands of Syrians flooding into northern Jordan to get away from Syria’s ongoing civil war is IsraAid, an Israeli humanitarian group with years of experience in Africa and other regions.

In Jordan, the group is buying and assembling large sacks of essential goods that are passed out to Syrian refugees daily. But it must do so discretely. Both IsraAid and its Jordanian partners are careful to remove any labeling that identifies the packages as coming from or being paid for by Israelis. With Syria still officially at war with Israel, it is a precautionary step organizers feel is necessary to maintain order and security in the refugee areas.

“We don’t announce with trumpets that we’re Israeli,” one of the IsraAid workers told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. “There’s no need for that. Once you let that cat out of the bag, everything starts to blow up.”

Israel Today (israeltoday.co.il)

Israeli company develops total lift hospital bed

An Israeli company, VitalGo Systems, has devised a hospital bed that helps sick people sit up and ultimately get up and walk. The innovation raises the patient from a lying to sitting or fully standing position without assistance. This can improve the quality of treatment for hospitals and care centers worldwide.

The new bed has been approved for use in the U.S. and Europe, with two companies already supplying facilities in America. And sales are booming.

Because it makes the treatment and rehabilitation of patients much easier, the company envisions the bed becoming the international standard for health care.

Israel Today (israeltoday.co.il)
**Israel Invents Cardboard Bicycle**

**Israeli inventor Izhar Gafni rides his cardboard bicycle in Israel** (Baz Ratner/Reuters/Corbis).

If you don’t have much money to purchase reliable transportation, Izhar Gafni’s new cardboard bicycle may be your ticket to life on the road.

Although people told him it couldn’t be done, Gafni, a mechanical engineer who lives on a kibbutz in Israel, found a way to construct a sturdy, waterproof, fireproof bicycle entirely out of recycled materials and is now hoping to put it into production in Israel.

To raise the projected $5.5 million needed to build a production facility, Cardboard Technologies tried but failed to raise $2 million through crowdfunding. A way to raising money from a vast number of people via the Internet.

Various news sources also report that Jeffrey Swartz, former president and CEO of the footwear and apparel company Timberland, has hitched his wagon to the project as an investor.

The bicycle, made of recycled cardboard, plastic, and rubber, weighs only 20 pounds (9 kilograms) but can handle a 275-pound passenger.

Almost as astounding as its unconventional makeup is its unconventional price. It reportedly costs only $9 to manufacture. At first Gafni said he would market the cardboard bicycles for $20 each. But now news reports say he plans to sell them for $30 to $50 each in underdeveloped countries and $100 each in developed countries. Other sources say the bicycles likely will cost much more.

According to the website israel21c.org, cardboard bikes are only the beginning: “For those who have been following the news stories about Cardboard Technologies, the bike prototypes are only the beginning of this planned cardboard revolution. They’ve already got a cardboard wheelchair and a cardboard baby stroller model, too.”

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**Gift Annuities**

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

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

If you decide to give appreciated property, such as stock or real estate, rather than sending a check, you will pay capital gains tax on only part of the appreciation. In addition, the capital gains tax will be spread over many years, rather than all being due in the year of your gift.

A gift annuity has benefits both lifelong and eternal, allowing you to maximize the impact of your financial stewardship. For details about how a gift annuity can work for you, complete this form and mail it in the return envelope in this magazine. There is absolutely no obligation on your part.

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Address___________________________________

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Date of Birth(month/day/year) ____________________

(Suggested minimum age of 60)

Name of Joint Annuitant ______________________

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Relationship to First Annuitant _________________

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OUR DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Tom Geoghan
Vice President
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Bob Duarte

Mike Brown

Harold Summers
Fully proclaimed God’s unchanging truth on the streets of Jerusalem ever since.

Filled with wisdom from the Holy Spirit, Zvi always knew how to lovingly turn a conversation into a presentation of the gospel and how to give an answer for the hope that lay within him. His column quickly became a favorite with our readers. In 1991, no longer feeling the need to protect Zvi’s privacy, we changed the name to “Zvi.”

With this issue comes another name change. We chose “Apples of Gold,” from Proverbs 25:11: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.” We know of no one whose life has better exemplified this verse than Zvi Kalisher. Since the day he received Christ, he has been a faithful, dedicated servant of the Most High God; and his words truly have been like apples of gold.

Zvi’s declining health no longer permits him to write for us. After running his column for 55 years, we have a treasure trove of godly wisdom and good reading that will benefit new generations. So we plan to dig deep into our archives and treat you to columns Zvi wrote many years ago. We hope you will enjoy them as much as we do.

Please continue to pray for Zvi and his dear wife, Naomi. They greatly appreciate it.

1973: Recently I was again called up for a term of military service. There were a number of fellows with me who knew me personally. Out of sheer boredom, one of them tried to start an argument with me. This is how it began:

“Which symbol is more popular among people, the cross or the Star of David?”

Everybody answered, “Of course, the cross.”

The man who asked the question looked at me and said, “No, I disagree. The cross appears only on churches and cemeteries, but the Star of David flutters on our flags and in our homes.”

And so they argued among themselves. But I did not say a word. I thought the whole discussion seemed to be pointless.

Finally, the man asked me, “Zvi, you know all about the cross and you believe in the cross. What is your opinion? Do you believe in the cross like all the Christians do?”

I said, “No. I never believed in the cross. I only believe in Him who...”
who rose again for the forgiveness of our sins. He shed His blood for our salvation. He was God’s sacrifice for all mankind so that all who believe in Him should not perish. He died for all men, even for those who hated Him and put Him on the cross. This was prophesied by Isaiah in chapter 53.

“That would not be such a terrible idea,” I remarked. “In countries where freedom of religion is granted to all citizens, Jewish soldiers are provided with synagogues where they can worship undisturbed. To me this is not most important. I can worship the Messiah anywhere. The main thing is that He should be in my heart.”

One of the men asked, “Zvi, tell us, how did you come to believe in Him?”

I told him, “One day I received a complete Bible, Old and New Testaments. The more I read the Book, the more I became convinced that Yeshua [Hebrew for “Jesus”] is truly the Messiah. The Holy Spirit did the rest. Today I am happy that I did believe.”

When they heard all this, they became serious and stopped making fun of me. I pray the Holy Spirit will do His work in the hearts of these young soldiers of Israel.
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