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Tom Geoghan
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W e all leave footprints on the sands of time, made by the imprints of our devotion to Christ and the effect of our lives on others. And the impressions we leave behind enhance the lives of our friends and loved ones, giving them footprints to follow.

Thoughtful estate planning is one means we have to make an imprint that helps others recall our priorities. For example, consider the effect of a plan that provides for family members and leaves resources for the Lord’s work through The Friends of Israel.

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Did you know a high percentage of
Christians really don’t know what they
believe? This excellent article takes a look
at what’s important and what’s not.
I rejoiced in the Lord as I flew home recently from Israel after leading our first adult-volunteer Hesed Project trip. In the two weeks our 13 team members worked at Kaplan Hospital in Rehovot, God blessed the Hesed ministry in many ways beyond my expectations.

Taking our lead from the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mt. 20:28), we served others. Of course, you don’t need to go all the way to Israel to do what we did. There are many opportunities in local churches, hometowns, and other parts of the world.

But what makes Hesed unique is its focus on serving the Jewish people. God said, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you” (Gen. 12:3); and His promise is as valid today as it was when He spoke it to Abraham.

We named the adult-volunteer program the Hesed Project because hesed is a Hebrew word used frequently in the Old Testament to speak of loyal loving-kindness. Volunteering one’s time, resources, and energy is a tangible way Bible-believing Christians can bless and show loving-kindness to God’s Chosen People.

In the evenings, after returning from work, we took time to study hesed in the Bible. In one lesson, we learned hesed pays back hesed. For example, in Genesis 24 it is recorded that Laban showed hesed to Abraham’s servant by granting permission for Rebekah, Laban’s sister, to return with the servant to Abraham’s land so she could marry Isaac.

Little did Laban know that, years later, Rebekah and Isaac’s son Jacob would return to bless Laban. When Jacob came looking for a wife and met Rachel, Laban’s daughter, he spent 14 years working for his Uncle Laban. Before leaving, Jacob asked Laban’s permission to return to his grandfather Abraham’s home. Laban testified that God had blessed him through Jacob, for he had little when Jacob arrived but had become a prosperous, wealthy man (30:27–30). Hesed pays back hesed!

The greatest act of hesed in all of history was the solemn day when Jesus Christ went to the cross to pay our penalty for sin. It is because of His hesed that 13 people became volunteers in Israel through The Friends of Israel. We were returning hesed for the hesed Christ bestowed on us.

However, during our two weeks at Kaplan Hospital, we also learned God was rewarding us with hesed for our volunteer work through the friendships and acquaintances we made with the Israelis we worked with each day. It was endearing to hear them say, “Thank you for coming!” They recognized we stayed despite missiles from the Gaza Strip that were raining down on Jewish communities just a few miles south of Kaplan.

Some asked why we came all the way from the United States, at our expense, to help them. What a wonderful opportunity they gave us to share about our hope and the love that lives within us for the Jewish people.

One conversation particularly caught my attention. Minutes before we departed Kaplan after our last day of work, an Israeli walked up to Chris Katulka, one of our team leaders, and said, “Thank you for coming. You need to come back and teach us to love like you!”

All of the Hesed volunteers left Kaplan feeling so much more blessed than when we came. A blessing for a blessing, just as God promises—but so much more abundant than we ever imagined. We arrived in Israel hoping to bless the Israelis, but we did not foresee all the rich and wonderful blessings we would receive in return.

The next Hesed adult-volunteer trip is scheduled for February 22 to March 9, 2013. The Hesed Project is open to Christians 18 years and older. I pray God will lay upon your heart a desire to become a part of this wonderful ministry to bless the Jewish people.

James A. Showers is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians to the Nazi treatment of Jews.

The conference’s academic atmosphere provided a smokescreen for its true agenda: promoting a vision for the region that is shared with terrorist organizations like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Fatah.

Harvard’s own dean of the Kennedy School of Government recognized the conference’s jive talk:

I am deeply disappointed to see that the list of speakers for this student conference is so one-sided. . . . Without the balance of divergent views that characterize the most enriching discussions, the credibility and intellectual value of any event is open to question.

U.S. Sen. Scott Brown (R-MA) strongly condemned the conference, saying it “is dangerous thinking that gives comfort to Israel’s enemies who view the ‘one-state solution’ as a euphemism for eliminating Israel as a Jewish state. Harvard may have a right to do this, but that does not make it right.”

From A.D. 70 to 1948, the Jewish people were scattered throughout the world. They suffered as outcasts through such persecutions as the Crusades, pogroms, and the Holocaust. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu put it well when he said, “I will never let my people live under the shadow of annihilation. . . . 2012 is not 1944.” Netanyahu does not talk jive.

Unknown to these jive talkers is a one-state solution that will work. It won’t be democratic or secular. Its worldwide government will be theocratic, and its King will be Jesus. Jewish people will be the envy of the nations; and shalom—peace—will reign.

That is not jive talk; it is God’s talk. And His Word is settled in the heavens.

Jive talk is slang for deceptive or insincere speech. Los Angeles Lakers basketball forward Metta World Peace (Ron Artest) was jive talking when he said in April, “It was unfortunate that James [Harden] had to get hit with the unintentional elbow.” Peace was ejected from the game for delivering a vicious blow to Harden’s head.

Another example of jive talk took place in March at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Its prestigious John F. Kennedy School of Government partially funded a student-run conference titled “Israel/Palestine and the One-State Solution.” A one-state—sometimes called binational—solution is the call for a singular, secular, democratic country in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip. The “solution” would strip Israel of its Jewish identity, remove the Law of Return that gives automatic citizenship to Jewish immigrants, and allow millions of Palestinians into the country.

Organizers stated the goal of the conference was “to educate ourselves and others about the possible contours of a one-state solution and the challenges that stand in the way of its realization.” A look at its planners, however, reveals their jive talk: Justice for Palestine, the Palestine Caucus, the Arab Caucus, and the Alliance for Justice in the Middle East. In fact, the organizers have called Israel an “apartheid state” responsible for ethnic cleansing, and they oppose Israel’s Law of Return.

If realized, their one-state solution would create a 23rd Arab state, eradicating the world’s only Jewish country—which is also the Middle East’s freest place for Muslims and its only democracy.

Most of the conference speakers were heavily anti-Israel. According to the news agency Arutz-7, they included the following:

Ali Abunimah, the executive director of the Electronic Intifada; Dalit Baum, of the BDS (Boycott Divestment and Sanctions) organization, Coalition of Women for Peace; Ilan Pappe, radical left Israeli academic and fervent supporter of the BDS movement; Marc Ellis, director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Baylor University, who compares Zionism to colonialism and
A Declaration of Peace

History has a nasty way of repeating itself. And it’s happened again. Those of us who remember 1938 recall Britain’s then-Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain triumphantly waving a paper while disembarking from his flight home after meeting with Adolf Hitler. His declaration turned out to be a colossal show of naiveté.

“Peace in our time” were his words. He had made a deal with Hitler, trusting that the Nazi fuehrer was a man who would keep his word to the Free World. The very next day, the Germans took the Sudetenland; and history shredded Chamberlain’s paper, along with the delusion that wishes come true if one wishes hard enough.

In April, a senior U.S. State Department official stunned us by announcing, “The war on terror is over.” Sound familiar?

Furthermore, he was quoted in the National Journal as saying, “Now that we have killed most of al Qaida, now that people have come to see legitimate means of expression, people who once might have gone into al Qaida see an opportunity for a legitimate Islamism.”

Although the word terrorist has been expunged from America’s official description of bad guys, this declaration seemed more than a little much. The irony is that, as absurd as it may sound, it is no laughing matter. Nor can the comment be dignified as an expression of some new vision of American foreign policy that reads, “If you want to end war, just declare peace.”

Things don’t work that way. “Legitimate Islamism” does not exist, and merely coining the phrase does not alter reality for the millions of oppressed people living under the brutal dictates of Sharia law.

Try to sell the idea that terror has subsided to Christians in Sudan, under attack for weeks by Muslim extremists. A frenzied crowd of terrorists armed with clubs, iron rods, a bulldozer, and fire stormed a Christian compound in Khartoum in April, determined to destroy a Bible school, clinic, home for the elderly, classrooms, and living quarters.

In Jos, Nigeria, Christians were watching a soccer match in a television-viewing center when Islamic extremists threw an explosive into the crowd, killing one person and seriously injuring others. It was the second time in two weeks the Christian area had been bombed by terrorists.

These incidents are the tip of the iceberg. Islamic terror afflicts Africa, the Middle East, and numerous other spots around the globe. Ignoring or minimizing it or making bizarre statements like the State Department representative’s not only aids and abets the enemy, but is morally reprehensible and dangerous. In fact, such actions pacify people, making them complacent and unwilling to do anything to stop the ongoing war against those who want little more than to live peacefully and practice their faith in a safe environment.

Of course, bomb-throwing, radical Islamists are more than happy to be labeled “legitimate Islam.” The terminology translates into cash and prestige within the international community. However, terminology changes nothing. They are fundamentalist Islamists.

And while the sycophantic West panders to their so-called desire for democracy, these Islamists continue to make war on everything un-Islamic in an attempt to establish a global caliphate with the as yet unrevealed 12th imam, or Mahdi, on the throne. After all, they believe their holy book teaches the Mahdi ultimately will lead the armies of Islam to victory over all non-Muslims.

A fatal failure of secular analysis of the war on terror is its dismissal of religion as a central factor in the conflict. The fact is, if religion is removed from the picture, the true image is lost. Ask yourself a few simple questions:

(1) Why the relentless war on Christians across the Middle East and Africa?
(2) Why the obsession to destroy Israel?
(3) Why the demographic strategy to flood Europe with Muslim immigrants and create an Islamic continent?
(4) Why the rush to build ballistic missiles to reach Europe and America?
(5) Why the attempts to force Sharia law into countries and communities that are non-Muslim?

The issue is not land or a pluralistic world peace. It is world conquest by force and intimidation, and that reality will not change because the non-Muslims unilaterally declare peace.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of a future day when people “shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isa. 2:4).

No premature, impulsive declaration will bring about that day. God alone will do it. And unfortunately, it is not today.
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Israel My Glory is also available in Spanish.
Part of Israel’s latest preparations for war includes a new television station built underground in Haifa in the north of Israel that will allow state-run broadcasting to remain on the air during an emergency. Hezbollah missiles in the Second Lebanon War in 2006 knocked telecasts in northern Israel off the air.

The Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA) recently unveiled its new underground studio to the news media. It is constructed seven meters (23 feet) underground, and its concrete walls are 12 inches thick. The control room includes a radio booth.

The facility will allow Israel to broadcast news and emergency information in time of war. The IBA plans to build similar facilities in three other cities. They were not named, but one of them presumably will be metropolitan Tel Aviv.

The talk of a regional or even world war has been in the air for the past two years, as Iran continues to develop unsupervised nuclear facilities while evidence piles up that it is trying to manufacture a nuclear weapon.

One of the obstacles to a military attack on Iran’s nuclear plants is the fact they’re situated underneath concrete bunkers located in mountainous areas.

Iran has vowed to destroy Israel and shows no signs of relenting.

by Arutz-7

(IsraelNationalNews.com)
Ministry Freedom in the Balance

When I read the e-mail in May from a legal webcasting group that regularly advises lawyers on current, but usually mundane, employment issues, I knew it was one more bit of evidence that the freedom of Christian organizations and ministries in America is in jeopardy.

The notice publicized a webcast advising employment lawyers that it might be time to revise their business and organizational clients’ “workplace policies to be compliant” with laws regarding “same-sex relationships.” The guest speaker was with the National Center for Lesbian Rights.

The agenda of homosexual-rights groups has become so mainstreamed in this country that the rights of Christian ministries to hire people using faith-based criteria will now be the next battleground.

In a separate development earlier this year, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)—the federal agency enforcing employment discrimination laws—announced a shocking decision: From now on, employers who consider the fact that a potential or active employee is a “transgender” person will be guilty of employment discrimination under existing federal law. Current federal law provides no explicit protection for people who surgically alter their sex. But a few comments in a handful of legal cases apparently provided enough justification for the EEOC’s new, radical decision to treat transgender status as another form of gender discrimination.

Whether Christian ministries can terminate employees who declare themselves transgender is unclear at best. Current law exempts religious employers from lawsuits only when the ministry and employee conflict over matters of “religion.” However, where the complaint is over an employee’s gender, Christian groups are not exempted.

The EEOC’s reasoning would leave Christian ministries nearly defenseless in this area.

The head of the EEOC, Chai Rachel Feldblum, was appointed by President Barack Obama in 2010 and has been a longtime homosexual-rights activist. She signed a 2006 manifesto urging recognition for radical new forms of marriage—including polygamy—but withdrew her signature in 2009 when nominated to head the federal employment discrimination agency.

She has also been an ardent supporter of ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, a gay-rights bill that has been repeatedly introduced in Congress, though not yet passed.

ENDA has an anemically weak exemption for religious groups that mirrors the current exemption in federal employment discrimination law. The real problem surfaces when we apply this exemption language to ministries that refuse to hire homosexual, lesbian, or transgender people. Though the Christian organization would argue it should be exempt because its decision was a matter of religious faith, the complaining party would cry “gender discrimination,” a category where religious groups generally do not get a pass.

I pointed out this dilemma a few years ago when testifying against ENDA in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Of course, the pro-ENDA law professors who also testified balked at my scenario, saying it wouldn’t happen. But the EEOC decision has proven there is a real and substantial risk that the rights of conscience of Christian organizations are under attack.

This is not an isolated instance. President Obama’s Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships issued new guidelines that make it harder, perhaps even impossible, for Christian nonprofit organizations to provide community or social services with government grant money and still maintain their programs of evangelism, worship, or Bible teaching. Neither has the White House assured that such organizations will be permitted to hire and fire staff on the basis of religious doctrine or faith.

In October 2011, an assistant solicitor general, appointed by the administration and arguing for the EEOC before the U.S. Supreme Court, made the astounding claim that the First Amendment provides almost no protection for religious ministries regarding employment decisions. Happily, in a stinging rebuke, the high court disagreed. It ruled unanimously that a private religious employer is exempted from all federal discrimination laws regarding the selection of its “ministers” (pastors in churches, rabbis in synagogues, etc.). Unfortunately, the decision would not directly protect employment decisions regarding middle management or lower-level ministry staff.

As the freedom of Christian ministries hangs in the balance, we are reminded of the importance of electing leaders who embrace the same vision our Founding Fathers had for protecting the fundamental rights of faith. Furthermore, we must always remember what our Savior told the apostle Peter: “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18).
Has the Dream Lost Its Luster?

If you will it, it is no dream.

Those were the immortal words of Theodor Herzl in his 1902 novel, Old New Land. The founder of modern Zionism expressed a hope welling up in the hearts of many Diaspora Jews who, along with Herzl, sensed the welcome mat was being pulled out from under them in Europe. Five years earlier, at the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, Congress Chairman Max Nordau formalized the pursuit of the dream: “The aim of Zionism is to create for the Jewish people a home in Eretz Yisrael [Hebrew for “the land of Israel”] secured by law.”
And so began in earnest the evolution of a spectacular miracle the likes of which had never been seen: After 2,000 years, an ancient people would return from around the world to their inheritance and experience the resurrection of their Promised Land. Thus began a dizzying spiral of events that captivated and inspired much of civilized society and affirmed agreement with Nordau’s declaration of purpose. Large swaths of the Western world became, in sympathies and conviction, admiring quasi-Zionists.

Then and Now

But that was then, and this is now. And the now is not a pretty sight. On March 30, 2012, an event billed as the Global March to Jerusalem hoped to incite a million people to storm Israel’s borders, displace Jewish citizens from Jerusalem, and hand over the land to Palestinian Arabs. In the end, the effort was a dismal display of tepid numbers and failed conquests. Nonetheless, leaders claimed participants from 84 countries demonstrated in rallies and marches elsewhere.

Although the Global March was nothing to write home about, it encapsulated the mushrooming mood of left-wing forces determined to turn the dream into a nightmare and shove the Jewish people back into ghettos.

This time the plan involves combining Israel and the disputed territories into a single state—Arab Palestine—where a tattered remnant of Jewish survivors would be tolerated as dhimmis (non-Muslims living in an Islamic country); and, as in the aftermath of Israel's 2005 retreat from the Gaza Strip, the spectacular achievements of Israeli ingenuity and energy all would be dismantled.

That prominent leaders in America and Europe would even consider such lunacy is incomprehensible. However, the real nightmare would come later, when Sharia law devotees in the new Palestinian state decide to replicate the ravages of the “Arab Spring” and terminate the only stable democracy and Western ally in the Middle East. The loss would be irreparable.

If the policies of leadership seem senseless, consider this: While the threat of being nuked by Iran dangles over Israeli heads, Western leaders dither away opportunities to stop it in favor of ineffectual sanctions and diplomatic gab sessions disguised as meaningful negotiations.

Rewind to Reality

Has the Zionist dream lost its luster? Has the concept of winning become distasteful and somehow detrimental to national integrity? If the answer is yes, we will all suffer the consequences. Israel is an invaluable case in point. For the tiny Jewish state, winning is about survival—although Israel’s enemies (and even some professed friends) don’t see it that way.

The fact is that the Arabs have lost consecutive wars and two intifadas and not only have lived to fight another day but still hope to launch a final coup de grace that will obliteruate the Jewish state once and for all. Though losers, they can try, try again. But if Israel loses even once, it will cease to exist. And that is the material issue. Today’s warped international culture views fighting to win as a demoralizing, antiquated concept. However, when winning means survival, it’s not only fair but imperative.

A longtime friend of mine was a sapper who defused land mines and other explosives over four wars. When he was assigned to the job during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence, his instructor told him, “You have the most unique post in the entire army because, in defusing explosives, you have to be perfect every time. You only get one mistake.” Some scenarios provide no viable choices; you either win, or you die trying.

In the 1940s, the fledging Jewish state was seen as David fighting the armies of the Arab Goliaths. It was an accurate description. Who gave little Israel even a remote chance of surviving? Not many. But the struggling Jewish fighters were certain of several things: (1) The land was theirs. It was Israel or nowhere. (2) Building a Jewish state embodied every positive aspect of what the future promised. Eretz Yisrael represented a haven where the Jewish soul could at long last find rest and peace. Those imperative considerations made Israel worth fighting for.

In fact, Israel’s audacity of spirit in the face of threats of imminent annihilation was admired by prominent Gentiles Randolph and Winston Churchill, son and grandson of renowned British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. In the run up to attacks on Israel by Egypt, Syria, and later Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War, they wrote, “Israel, like a cowboy of the old Wild West, did not wait for the enemy to draw—he had seen the glint in [Egyptian President Gamal Abdal Nasser’s] eye.”

The Churchills stood with a core of British groups, such as the influential Restoration Movement, that promoted creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Often forgotten is the enormous contribution these groups made toward the 1917 Balfour Declaration in which the British government officially endorsed the Jewish right to a national homeland there. The document was the forerunner of other legal decisions confirming Israel’s legitimacy.

Furthermore, the Jewish homeland’s borders were to follow those delineated in the biblical land grant. So the original landmass set aside for the Jewish people after World War I encompassed everything from the Mediterranean Sea to the border of Iraq—meaning all of modern Israel and Jordan. Two points here are relevant:

● The land was granted to Israel based on an inalienable right of ownership as established through historically verifiable records and confirming archaeological evidence.

● In a later decision by Britain, which controlled the territory under the auspices of the League of Nations, 78 percent of the land set aside for the Jewish people was gifted to Sheikh Abdullah for the creation of Transjordan (now called Jordan) in exchange for perceived services rendered during the war.
Later, of course, serious problems arose with British conduct. Britain strongly favored the Arabs in their uprisings against the Palestinian Jews and issued the infamous White Papers that denied thousands of Holocaust survivors entrance to Palestine. Nevertheless, earlier British contributions were vital.

The Imperative of Truth

The West is making a colossal blunder painting Israel as the bad guy in the region. Israel is more of an inspiration than an impediment. Yet the far left peddles revisionist nonsense and pure propaganda, while claiming it is on a noble quest for truth, honesty, and fairness.

Most of the self-righteous Global Marchers and anti-Israel campus crusaders are an uninformed, over-emotionalized lot, completely out of touch with germane issues. Consequently, they not only will contribute to Israel’s harassment, but also will affect measures that will regretfully double back on their own countries.

This is not to say that Israel is always right. Israel is not immune to the same foibles that plague other functioning democracies. But Israel genuinely wants a stable peace with security. In my more than 35 years of personal interaction with Israelis at all political, military, and individual levels, I have seen firsthand how they are absolutely unified in their desire for a just, negotiated settlement with their Palestinian neighbors—regardless of differing political passions or persuasions.

Has the dream lost its luster? Perhaps, as with romantic love, it has matured into something deeper and more substantial; but in its essence, the answer is no. The heritage left by the Israelis who cleared the malaria-infested swamps, fended off a succession of brutal attacks, reclaimed Jerusalem, stunned the world at Entebbe, built great cities in the sand, and enriched the world through their medical and technological achievements cannot be diminished or erased.

The luster is still there—and with it, the assurance to Bible-believing Christians that God keeps His promises and the best is yet to come. May it be soon.
Eleven Christians in India barely escaped death recently after Muslims barged into a home where they were praying and tried to kill them. The mob grew larger and larger until the scene turned to chaos. Now the Christians are being barred from buying and selling.

“The Christians were running in all directions for their lives, including the children who were crying in fear, but the [adult] Christians were stopped at every corner by the radicals who thrashed, bashed, and verbally abused them,” said Pastor Bashir Pal, founder and pastor of the village’s Believer’s Church.

Initially, seven Muslims in Nutangram, Murshidabad district forced their way into the home of Gaffar Shaike on March 30 as 11 church members gathered for lunch and worship. They demanded the meeting be stopped and called the Christians pagans as they assaulted them. A year earlier, they had burned Shaike’s crops for his faith in Christ.

“I asked the radicals why they barged into my house and why they were not allowing us to pray in my own home,” Shaike said. But the Islamists were so blinded by fury they only continued their violence, threatening to do so until the Christians returned to Islam.

“We want freedom to worship Jesus in our home,” Shaike said.

Soon the mob swelled to about 100 Islamists who charged into the house, shouting anti-Christian slogans and threatening murder as they pummeled the Christians. When the Christians tried to flee, Muslims blocked their way. One Muslim beat a 65-year-old Christian widow. The wife of another Muslim was called in from the front porch to beat a Christian woman while someone else attacked Shaike’s wife, kicking her in the head and stomach and deeply cutting her hand.

Somehow the Christians made their way out and scattered, chased by a man brandishing a sickle in an attempt to murder them all. By then about 500 Muslims had gathered and were watching in amusement for about 90 minutes. “The Christians were cornered at one place, where they all stood petrified in fear, but somehow the almighty God saved them,” the pastor said.

“We pleaded with the radicals to let us go, and eventually they freed us while they were still shouting at us to leave Jesus or face more sufferings,” said one of the believers.

Area Christian leaders told a police officer who immediately sent police to the site. They took the 65-year-old widow to her home, assuring her they would take action against the assailants. But when they arrived, a furious mob of Islamic extremists was already there. Officers warned the Islamists not to disturb the Christians again, but Muslims continued to taunt and mock them and later told the woman they would kill her.

“Even though the radicals have beaten me many times and want to kill me, I will not leave Jesus,” she said. “I will worship Him as long as I live on this earth.”

The Islamists have since ostracized the Christians, prohibiting them to buy or sell in the area and keeping them from using the public bathroom and water well, he said. They have warned all shopkeepers not to sell to the Christians, and all are complying with the order. No arrests have been made.

by Compass Direct News
A small dinghy, a sandy beach, brilliant sunshine, and lapping waves all make for a perfect day of vacation. That is, unless you and your rubber raft are being dragged out to the open sea by a rip current. I listened with horror as several people who survived a riptide talked about it. The moral of their story was clear: Keeping the shore in sight and knowing what to do can make the difference between life and death.

The same can be said for Christians facing strong undercurrents today within the professing church. Unfortunately, a rip-current-like phenomenon is pulling the evangelical community away from the foundational principles of God’s Word and carrying it off toward influential voices pushing to reinvent, “reimagine,” and reformulate Christianity.

More and more pastors have tuned into a “new” way of “doing church,”
convincing their congregations this approach “will open the way for an exciting spiritual adventure into new territory and new ways of believing, belonging, and becoming”—according to the inside cover of one of emergent church leader Brian McLaren’s books.1

The changes are advocated as a way to communicate Christianity’s message more effectively to the next generation. “If we have a new world,” wrote McLaren, “we will need a new church . . . a new framework for our theology . . . a new spirituality.”2 This coming from the man whom National Public Radio’s Morning Edition calls “one of the country’s most influential evangelicals.”3

Relativism Instead of Absolutes

Brushing off the impact of what is happening to Christianity, noted author Phyllis Tickle—founding editor of the Religion Department of Publishers Weekly—believes that every 500 years Christianity holds a giant “rummage sale” where it “takes a look at its old stuff and decides to sell what it no longer needs. We are going through this kind of giant sale today.”4

According to her, the last “rummage sale” was the Great Reformation. The consensus among those driving change today is that Christianity desperately needs another. “This new style of western Christianity,” she said, “is not hierarchal or based on a certain doctrinal system. It’s more about community and conversation, not about a set of beliefs and creeds.”5

Interestingly, McLaren, a leader of this alleged reformation, is being compared to 16th-century reformer Martin Luther.6 McLaren’s book A New Christianity is actually promoted as one that “takes aim at some core doctrinal beliefs.” In his book Finding Faith, he contended that chapter two “considers, and rejects, the religious claim that the Bible or some other document can provide certainty.”8

Alan Jones, another prominent figure in the movement to “reimagine” Christianity, agreed: “A monk who greatly influenced me used to say, ‘The opposite of faith isn’t doubt. It’s certainty. Keeping the big questions alive is as important as answering them.”9

At the core is the question of whether the Bible should be understood literally. Jones doesn’t think so and quoted Robert Wilken, a professor at the University of Virginia: “There is no original Christian faith, no native language, no definitive statement of the meaning of Christ for all times.”10 Said Jones, “There is no objective authority—only authority as interpreted by individuals. When people say, ‘Back to the Bible!’ they think there’s some objective truth to be found in its pages. In reality, we read the Bible through the filter of our presuppositions and prejudices.”11

A former dean of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, Jones believes the Bible should be read “as allegory and metaphor, not as literal truth. . . . We can get to the truth only through inference—through myth and poetry, through metaphor and storytelling. There is no such thing as ‘what really happened.’”12

Not surprisingly, McLaren stated much the same thing: “No articulation of the gospel today can presume to be exactly identical to the original meanings proclaimed by Christ and the apostles.”13 In a telling comment on the New Testament, he implied Scripture is true only if it seems true to the one reading it:

These stories are so improbable, so unexpected, so challenging to the status quo, so idiosyncratic, so earthy and rough and unedited and unrehearsed, that they simply seem to have the ring of truth to them, and so I believe them. And more, the truths that these stories yield are so inspiring that if they are fiction, whoever made them up would appear to deserve the honor we Christians give to Christ himself!14

The Bible, however, does not allow for subjectively cherry-picking the truth. It declares categorically, “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).

Reworking the Gospel

The attempt to reinvent Christianity necessarily involves reinterpreting the unique, biblical message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone and undermines the gospel’s distinctive nature. Often it involves syncretism: combining Christianity with something else.

Rob Bell, founding pastor and pastor emeritus of Mars Hill Bible Church in Michigan, does that very thing. “Jesus,” he said, “is bigger than any one religion. . . . He will always transcend whatever cages and labels are created to contain and name him, especially the one called ‘Christianity.’”15

In Bell’s controversial book Love Wins, which denies the existence of eternal punishment, he twisted the interpretation of one of the most well-known New Testament verses until it was barely recognizable, suggesting good people “from across the cultural spectrum” (religions of the world) ultimately will enjoy the benefits of salvation without even knowing “that they are coming exclusively through him [Jesus].”16

But Jesus’ words are straightforward: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6). Furthermore, the Bible teaches that salvation is experienced by individuals who, by decisive acts of the will, have placed their faith in Jesus Christ and in His sacrifice at Calvary (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 10: 9–11).

After deriding an exclusive view of salvation where “you’re either in, or you’re going to hell,” Bell presented the inclusive alternative: “As long as your heart is fine or your actions measure up, you’ll be ok.”17
Demeaning God the Creator

A Bible that cannot be understood literally calls into question the Person of God Himself and leads to speculation about God’s relationship to His creation. The Bible says God is unique and separate from His creation. He brought all things into existence: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16; cf. Jn. 1:3; Heb. 1:2).

In stark contrast to Colossians 1:16 are statements by the popular Rev. Michael Dowd, a “religious naturalist,” whose best-selling book Thank God for Evolution smacks of Monism, the pagan worldview that sees no distinction between the Creator and His creation. Wrote Dowd, "The whole of reality is creative in a nested emergent sense, and we are part of the process. Like nesting dolls, smaller realities are contained within larger ones—from the infinitely small to the infinitely vast—and every one of them is divinely creative. . . . Ultimate Reality, or God, is the One and Only Whole (Holy One) that is not part of some larger, more comprehensive reality." So he falsely concluded, “God is that which sources and infuses everything, yet is also co-emergent with and indistinguishable from anything.”

Twisting the Bible’s words to suggest it teaches a convoluted evolutionary process shows staggering audacity. Dowd also equates God with various New Age and pagan concepts: “Here are some names that have been offered for this unseen, nonmeasurable, non-material realm: the Implicate Order, the All Nourishing Abyss, the Void, the Vacuum State, the Akashic Field, the Mother Universe, or simply, God.”

His website, michaeldowd.org, calls him a popular “evolutionary evangelist” who is bringing “what may be his boldest message yet to fellow Christians: ‘The New Atheists are God’s prophets, and believers need to listen up.’” Believers need to listen to the apostle Peter: “There will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction” (2 Pet. 2:1).

E N D N O T E S

2 Ibid., 119-120.
3 Ibid., 125.

by Charles E. McCracken
Aboriginal reader offered a dream-time reflection. 19

Jones asks, “Was this Christian?” and emphatically affirms, “The answer, as far as I’m concerned, is ‘Of course.’”20

Dowd has a similar point of view: Ultimately, we are “saved by grace through faith.” Of course, this doesn’t mean that Jews and Buddhists and Muslims and Taoists and Confucians are wrong. Each religious tradition on the planet, and every philosophical belief system, has unique gifts and limitations. Different religions are like different flowers. Each one has its own special fragrance and beauty.21

The apostle Paul, of course, would not have agreed. When Paul preached in the pluralistic city of Athens, his message to the diverse group gathered around him was that God “commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:30–31).

Salvation is through Jesus and His sacrifice alone. Peter declared, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Welcome to Universalism

When you distort salvation, it naturally follows that you minimize or altogether discount the consequences of rejecting that salvation. Bell ridicules the notion of hell and relegated the subject to a public relations problem:

If your God will punish people for all of eternity for sins committed in a few short years, no amount of clever marketing or compelling language or good music or great coffee will be able to disguise that one, true, glaring, untenable, unacceptable, awful reality.22

Expanding on his position, he clarified: Many people find Jesus compelling, but don’t follow him, because of the parts about “hell and torment and all that.” Somewhere along the way they were taught that the only option when it comes to Christian faith is to clearly declare that a few, committed Christians will “go to heaven” when they die and everyone else will not, the matter is settled at death, and that’s it. One place or the other, no looking back, no chance for a change of heart, make your bed now and lie in it . . . forever. Not all Christians have believed this, and you don’t have to believe it to be a Christian.23

McLaren, who has defended Bell’s book, sympathizes: “It’s very hard to square the idea of eternal conscious torment with a just or holy God.”24

Never mind that the Bible states, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). God’s Word clearly correlates the consequence of sin with the purpose for Christ’s substitutionary death as a sacrifice for sin. It also leaves no room for debate: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

Like a sign at the beach cautioning swimmers about rip currents, Paul’s warning to Timothy is a powerful reminder to the church that “in the last days perilous times will come” (2 Tim. 3:1). He said people “will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears . . . will heap up for themselves teachers; and . . . will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (4:3–4).

The key to surviving the present push to reinvent Christianity is to heed Paul’s admonition to “be watchful in all things” (v. 5) and to move out of the flow that degrades the Bible to the level of myth and fable.

ENDNOTES

2 John Longhurst, “The times they are a-changing” <christianweek.org/features.php?id=59>.
3 Ibid.
5 McLaren, A New Kind of Christianity, back flap.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 154–155.
17 Ibid.
19 Jones, 88.
20 Ibid.
21 Dowd, 61–62.
22 Bell, 175.
23 Ibid., 110.
Palestinian Liberation Theology

Building that houses the Sabeel Center, Jerusalem (Ryan Jones/FOI Image Archive).
Naim Ateek believes you cannot take the Bible literally. He has a particular problem with the Torah (Pentateuch), which he considers a “Zionist text,” and the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings—all of which confirm God gave the land of Israel to the Jewish people. He speaks of peace and nonviolence but makes no apology for Palestinian terrorism. In fact, much of his rhetoric regarding Israel is indistinguishable from that of a Palestinian Muslim.

But Naim Ateek is not a Muslim. In fact, he is a highly respected, American-educated, Palestinian Christian and ordained Episcopal priest. At 75, he is the president and director of the Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem, which he also called the Sabeel Center (Arabic for “the way”), which he helped found in the 1990s. He has written books and won awards; and as an Israeli citizen and pastor to Palestinian Christians, he speaks on behalf of his people, whom he says feel disenfranchised under “the colonialist Zionist Israelis” who stole their land during the War of Independence in 1948.

Believing his people cannot accept the “dangerous theology” of Zionist Christians, Dr. Ateek helped develop Palestinian Liberation Theology (PLT), which he and the Sabeel Center say provides a relevant way to interpret Scripture for Arab believers who need a healthy dose of encouragement living in Israel. Today PLT is the primary doctrine of Palestinian Christians, rooting and grounding them in a highly politicized form of Replacement Theology.

**Political Activism**

Liberation Theology itself is nothing new. In the 1960s it surfaced in Latin America, advanced by the Roman Catholic Church to encourage the poverty-stricken to react against President John F. Kennedy’s economic development plan for Latin America, which the church believed would cause further injustice.

Proponents of Liberation Theology encouraged political activism against those who sought to preserve a class system. The movement’s leaders in Latin America manipulated the gospel message to mean deliverance from political, social, and economic injustice. As a result, the theology spread throughout mainline Christian denominations and has typically been labeled a Christian form of Marxism.

Liberation Theology faded not long after it began. However, within the past 20 years it has reemerged as the principal theology of Palestinian Christians in Israel because it focuses on freeing the outcasts and downtrodden.

The most important issue Palestinian Christians struggle with is the literal interpretation of the Bible. Before the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, most considered the Old Testament crucial to the Scriptures. It stood as a witness and guide to the coming of Jesus Christ. However, after 1948, Arab Christians abandoned reading and preaching it because it is too “Zionist” for their liking. Instead of recognizing God’s faithfulness in seeing the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant fulfilled before their eyes, many found the Old Testament repugnant and offensive.

Dr. Ateek and the Sabeel Center have used the Palestinian dismissal of the Old Testament as an opportunity to propagate PLT, which desires to de-Zionize the Bible in order to promote an anti-Israel agenda. In fact, Sabeel’s definition of PLT refers to Jesus as having lived “under occupation” and tries to rally people to “stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people”:

Palestinian Liberation Theology is an ecumenical grassroots movement, rooted in Christian Biblical interpretation and nourished by the hopes, dreams and struggles of the Palestinian people. . . . In a situation where justice has been long neglected, Palestinian Liberation Theology opens new horizons of understanding for the pursuit of a just peace and for the reconciliation proclaimed in the

**Ahab and Naboth**

The biblical foundation used for PLT is the account of King Ahab and Naboth in 1 Kings 21. Usually, Liberation Theology uses the Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt to establish its message of freedom from political oppression. But for Palestinians, the Exodus is too pro-Israel.

So Dr. Ateek teaches how Israel’s King Ahab and his evil wife, Jezebel, murdered Naboth for his land and how the Lord sent Elijah the prophet to them to pronounce judgment on them. Their eventual death provided the divine justice Naboth deserved.

Dr. Ateek’s interpretation of 1 Kings 21 portrays King Ahab as the modern State of Israel, murdering Naboth and stealing the land of the Palestinians, who are cast as the stalwart Naboth. He preaches that a day is coming when God will judge Israel for what Ateek says is its abuse of the Arabs, and divine justice will prevail for those who suffered at the hands of the Zionist Israelis.

For Dr. Ateek, Naboth is the story of every Palestinian Christian. He has been quoted as saying, “The death and dispossession of Naboth and his family has [sic] been re-enacted thousands of times since the creation of the State of Israel.” Ateek was 11 when his family lost its home in Beth Shean in the 1948 War of Independence.
Palestinian Christians.” Scripture, “the Bible can be reclaimed for a new and relevant interpretation of Palestinian Christians.

A Wall of Separation

As PLT advanced to become the primary theology for Palestinian Christians, it has built a wall of separation between believers—something Jesus died to tear down (Eph. 2). With it has come increased tension between Israeli and Palestinian churches.

Meno Kalisher, pastor of the Jerusalem Assembly, said in a recent interview, “Whenever our young adults go to activities to fellowship with other churches that include Palestinian Christians, they immediately hear how Israel is the problem and the oppressor of the Palestinian people. As a result, our young adults have lost the desire to fellowship with Palestinian Christians, which is tremendously upsetting.”

Sadly, although Dr. Ateek and the Sabeel Center claim to stand on Christian principles, their rhetoric sounds no different from that of Palestinian Muslims who incite violence against Israel. In fact, in his quest for peace, Ateek makes no apology for Palestinian terrorism nor holds Palestinian Muslims accountable for their ill treatment of Palestinian Christians.10 Ironically, Arab Muslims consider Arab Christians weak and spineless.

While Dr. Ateek and the Sabeel Center claim PLT offers Palestinian Christians a fresh way to read the Scriptures, the truth is there is nothing novel about it; PLT is Replacement Theology. Wrote Shelley Neese, vice president of The Jerusalem Connection Report,

Replacement Theology teaches that the Church superseded Jews as the benefactor of God’s covenants. PLT goes one step further saying that the Jews never had a place of favor in the first place. In some cases, they erase Israel from the Bible altogether. Many Palestinian Churches that teach PLT have changed the Psalms by removing every reference to “Israel” and “Zion.”

PLT blatantly disregards God’s eternal promises to the Jewish people by manipulating Scripture to suit its needs. Wrote Neese, “It is a dangerous propaganda tool cleverly wielded by Sabeel to undermine Israel’s right to the land. All the while, this anti-Semitic politically-driven theology void of the Gospel hides behind a façade of peace, justice, and love.”

In the end, said Kalisher, the Palestinian Christians themselves will lose out: “Due to their theology they consider Israel an enemy and lack the blessings God could provide.”

ENDNOTES

5 Ibid.
6 “Palestinian Liberation Theology,” Sabeel Center <sabeel.org/ourstory.php>.
7 Ateek, 87.
8 Ibid., 82.
9 Ibid., 86.
10 Neese.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.

Christopher J. Katulka is a Church Ministries representative for The Friends of Israel in Dallas, Texas.
After a long battle with cancer, our beloved friend and fellow educator Dr. O. Herbert “Herb” Hirt passed into the presence of His Lord on April 3, 2012. At the time of his death, Herb served as the dean of the School of Bible and Ministry at Philadelphia Biblical University (PBU) in Langhorne, Pennsylvania.

Herb had many wonderful personal and professional attributes, but two stand out the most: integrity and grace. In character, Herb reflected the love for missions that marked the life of his influential father, Oscar H. Hirt, who served for 30 years as the general director of the Bible Club Movement International.

Prior to his affiliation with PBU, Herb served for 10 years as the director of The Friends of Israel’s Institute of Jewish Studies (IJS). Before that, he taught part-time as he prepared to serve in missions as a teacher in the Netherlands.

Dr. Hirt earned his bachelor of science degree in Bible from Philadelphia College of Bible (now PBU) in 1977. From there he went to Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas, where he earned both his masters in theology and his doctorate. He then taught at Washington Bible College and Capital Bible Seminary in Maryland, leaving for the Netherlands in 1989, where he taught at Tyndale Theological Seminary in Amsterdam.

In 1994, after returning to the United States, Dr. Hirt joined The Friends of Israel’s Institute of Jewish Studies as a full-time instructor.

As does every person who serves in the name of Christ, Herb Hirt left behind a legacy that far surpasses his mere ability to perform effectively and professionally. That legacy is written in the hearts of the students, coworkers, and friends who were associated with him.

A testimonial to his godly influence can be seen in the scores of life-altering memories his students posted online upon learning of his death, recalling times they spent with Herb during their trips together to Israel, the Middle East, and Europe.

To tell you the truth, we’ve never met anyone who did not have a good word to say about Herb Hirt.

In the deepest sense, he will be missed. Too few among us bear the distinctions of depth, commitment, and compassion that he did. Herb’s quiet, congenial manner had a way of rubbing off on you—a way that made it easy to be with him and regretful to depart. That fact was true then and is even truer now with the permanence of his absence. Yet we rejoice in the assurance of our coming reunion with him in glory.

Our heartfelt prayers continue for his wife, Diane, and for his family. May they experience the abiding presence of Christ in all its fullness.
Throughout history Satan has used two lines of attack in his continuing war against God: Eliminate God’s people physically and nullify God’s ministries through apostasy. *Apostasy* is defined as “an abandonment of what one has voluntarily professed; a total desertion or departure from one’s faith, principles, or party.”

An effective method Satan uses to induce biblically sound ministries to go apostate is syncretism. *Syncretism* is...
Recognizing Syncretism

When the Roman Empire established Christianity as the only legal religion in the late fourth century, many pagans became associated with Christian churches. They practiced the pagan religion the Babylonians had adopted in the 22nd century B.C., which involved the worship of a goddess addressed as “The Holy Virgin,” “The Virgin Mother,” and “Queen of Heaven and Earth.” The Roman pagans Christianized those titles by ascribing them to the virgin Mary, and the Roman Church eventually adopted them through syncretism.

In Brazil, spiritism has amassed a widespread influence. A significant number of devout Roman Catholics use the services of spiritist mediums. On at least one occasion, the archbishop of a large Roman Catholic cathedral in a major city of Brazil invited a spiritist leader to help him serve the Mass to his congregation at Easter.

Darwinian evolution has had a powerful syncretistic impact on organized Christendom. Beginning in the late 19th century, it played a key role in the development of liberal theology within some church groups that originally were biblically sound. Since then it has radically changed society’s moral compass. In his book Darwin’s Dangerous Idea, Daniel Dennett of Tufts University in Massachusetts said Darwinian evolution is like a “universal acid; it eats through just about every traditional concept and leaves in its wake a revolutionized worldview.”

Market-Driven Churches

Another form of syncretism impacting churches today is the market-driven approach to being relevant to the unsaved (people who have not accepted Christ as their personal Savior). Just as manufacturers ask people what types of products they want, many churches are asking unsaved people what the church should be like in order for them to attend. Just as manufacturers retool to produce popular products, “market-driven” churches retool to attract the unsaved. They think the church must conform to the world’s concept of relevancy in order to reach unsaved people with the gospel.

Although the motivation of these churches is commendable, the result has negative consequences. There is conflict between two different worldviews: the biblical and the secular-humanistic. God holds the church responsible to cleave to, propagate, and conform to the biblical worldview.

The word translated “church” in the New Testament means “called out.” God has called out the church from Satan’s godless world system with its secular-humanistic worldview and expects it to be different from that system. Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for her” so the church “should be holy” by nature (Eph. 5:25–27). The word translated “holy” means “divided, different, distinct,” as opposed to the word translated “profane,” which means “secular, common, ordinary.”

The church is to be “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). A pillar is responsible for upholding another object. God established the church to uphold His biblical truth and be steadfast against all opposing forces in the war between these two worldviews.

The word translated “ground” means “foundation” and refers to what is “firm, steadfast, immovable.” A foundation’s purpose is to prevent a building from shifting or moving from its original location.

God intends the church to prevent His revealed truth from being shifted or moved around to something that is no longer true. Christ commanded believers, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15). He ordained that evangelism take place primarily in the world, where the unsaved are. Making the church relevant to the unsaved to draw them into its services for salvation reverses the order of evangelism ordained by Christ and defiles the church’s holy nature by conforming it to the world’s concept of relevancy, rather than to God’s.

The market-driven approach uses the world’s wisdom instead of the weapons God has provided: “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4–5).

The emergent church movement is another example of syncretism. It places a mystical emphasis on the inner self through some forms of worship borrowed from other religions and opposes other things contained in God’s Word, such as the Bible as the ultimate source of authority, doctrine, Christ’s death as God’s judgment for mankind’s sin,
capital punishment, eternal judgment, and the existence of absolute truth. Instead, it focuses on establishing God’s Kingdom on Earth through social welfare.

Unfortunately, there are no signs syncretism will disappear. Rather, it appears it may play a key role in the ultimate apostasy before the revelation of the Antichrist (2 Th. 2:3).

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid., 2558, s.v. “syncretism.”
4 Ibid., 236.
6 Ken Ham and Britt Beemer, Already Gone (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009), 27, 31, 39.
Some say the evangelical church in America is in a time of transformation. I say it is on the precipice of total disarray. I realize my perspective is limited, and I’m hopeful we can still get it right in the end. But I cannot deny the obvious.

The issue is not politics or culture but, rather, theology. When Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees, He called them “blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (Mt. 23:24). They concentrated on trivialities while ignoring essentials.

Unfortunately, a significant segment of the evangelical church today is swallowing a “camel” while busily straining out the “gnats.” In this case, the essentials are the fundamental, theological truths of Evangelicalism: the core beliefs of Scripture that should guide us in our walk, inform our witness to the world, and identify us as people who worship and honor the Lord Jesus.

What are the so-called gnats? They are nuisance statements from people who have little or no understanding of true Christianity but, nevertheless, feel duty-bound to pontificate about it. Such people particularly dislike conservative Christians, often calling them narrow-minded and intolerant for sticking to biblical principles that oppose society’s immorality and growing contempt for God.

In fact, many evangelicals themselves are in a quandary when they read what God has clearly said on a subject and then apply that truth to the corrupted culture around them, only to find themselves marginalized or even demonized by popular voices labeling them as strident, delusional, or divisively partisan. However, they should not be surprised by such attacks. In a December 6, 2011, piece, “The Tempting of the Christian Right,” New York Times columnist Ross Douthat revealed his views on evangelicals:

Conservative Christianity in America . . . faces a looming demographic challenge: A rising generation that is more unchurched than any

before it, more liberal on issues like gay marriage, and allergic to the apocalyptic rhetoric of the Pat Robertson–Jerry Falwell era.

The world can tolerate a Jesus who is loving and full of grace. But itwinces—as all of us should—at His stinging rebukes of hypocrisy, dishonesty, immorality, and spiritual deception. Yet because those passages give us the most discomfort, we probably should pay the greatest attention to them. A Jesus meek and mild doesn’t indict or convict. But that picture of the Savior doesn’t exist in the New Testament. Jesus is tough, confrontational with religious heresy, and uncompromising about the world and its true ruler, Satan (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

For gay activists who claim Jesus said nothing about homosexuality, I invite them to study the fact that He said everything about heterosexual marriage as the biblical, God-ordained norm. For people who believe Christians should exit politics, I recommend reading Acts 16 where the imprisoned apostle Paul led the Philippian jailer and his entire household to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Then he held the equivalent of a political sit-down strike to protest the corrupt magistrates’ sanctioning of his illegal arrest and jailing as a Roman citizen.

It shouldn’t surprise us that, when we apply the Word’s theology, we are ridiculed and berated. In an October 2011 issue of Time, columnist Jon Meacham lambasted conservative evangelicals for recognizing the difference between Mormonism and traditional Christianity. Mormons consider the Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith, published in 1830, to be Scripture. Bible-believing Christians do not. Evangelicals, claimed Meacham, have “contempt” for the Mormon doctrine of “ongoing revelation” because we are “desperate,” “shrill,” “extreme,” and desire to install a “theocracy” in America. We should be considered a “wounded” (and therefore dangerous) “foe” to democracy.

According to a recent Pew poll, most Americans don’t understand the doctrinal differences between Mormonism and Christianity. When asked whether Mormons should be categorized as Christians, 51 percent said yes; 49 percent said no or don’t know. When pollsters asked the same question to people identified as white, Protestant, evangelicals, 35 percent said yes; 53 percent said no; and 12 percent did not know.

That means 47 percent of evangelicals polled neither knew nor cared enough about the doctrines of the Christian faith to realize the core beliefs of Mormonism differ drastically from those of Christianity. Shockingly, the percentage is merely four points away from the 51 percent of the general population polled that came to a similar conclusion. We can only wonder what most Christians really believe about the essentials of the faith.

One reason believers de-emphasize theological truth could be the fear of appearing “shrill” and “extreme.” But there are other reasons. We are submerged in a flood of misinformation about Jesus, the Gospels, and Christianity. Deepak Chopra, a popular “mind-body healer” and mystic, has written a book called The Third Jesus. Do born-again Christians realize that, when he talks about Jesus and quotes from a Gnostic “gospel,” he is citing an unknown author who wrote more than a century after the apostles? Do they know that 1,500 years ago the Church Fathers rejected that source not only as unauthentic and not divinely inspired but also as heretical?

Do followers of Christ see the divergence from their own biblical understanding when they see mega-icon Oprah Winfrey join with an all-female group in an earth “healing” ceremony in Hawaii, or when she travels to India on a junket with Chopra?

There is clearly a feel-good element to these anti-biblical worldviews.

continued on page 31
Wearing God’s Glasses

Have you ever seen an optical illusion? A picture, perhaps, that can look either like a duck or a rabbit, depending on your perception? That’s how the world can be. People who cling to God’s Word see things one way; people who don’t, see them another. It’s a matter of perspective.

Christians are supposed to have God’s perspective, which is usually a far cry from everyone else’s. God says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8–9). God doesn’t see things as we do; and He designs our lives, from spiritual birth to physical death, to move us toward His perspective and make us like His perfect Son.

To do that, He uses the Bible—the objective, infallible record of God’s thinking and values. Its entire purpose is to reveal God in order to make this transformation of perspective possible. In America, there is no lack of Bibles, only a lack of people using them.

According to LifeWay Research, 89 percent of American households own an average of three Bibles, but 52 percent of Americans rarely or never read them.1 While a third of Americans say they read the Bible at least once a week, apparently the vast majority merely practice lightweight devotions. Few study God’s Word for serious changes in their perspectives, and surveys reveal the values and practices of self-proclaimed Christians vary little from those of their unsaved neighbors.

Combating Kingdom Myopia

In Matthew 16, Jesus worked with His disciples to adjust their perspective. In chapters 11—12, He began to tell them about the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven. In chapters 13—20, He prepared them for the transition to the church He would build. In chapter 16, which first mentions the church, He asked, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (v. 13). He wanted to clarify the Jewish people’s perspective. The disciples said most saw Him as “one of the prophets” (v. 14). When He asked, “But who do you say that I am?” (v. 15), Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16).

That perspective, Jesus said, could come only from God: “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to

This optical illusion by British cartoonist W. E. Hill was published in 1915 in Puck humor magazine. Do you see two women? The old woman’s nose is the young woman’s chin, the necklace on the young woman’s neck is the old woman’s mouth, and the old woman’s eye is the young woman’s left ear.
you, but My Father who is in heaven” (v. 17). This may be the first time any disciple had fully verbalized the true identity of the Messiah.

Then Jesus further adjusted the perspective: “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” (v. 21).

But Peter objected: “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” (v. 22). Peter was not trying to be difficult or to oppose Jesus and make himself a spokesman for Satan. Certainly, he loved Jesus and did not want to see Him suffer. Yet His view of the Messianic Kingdom required a living King. Perhaps his anticipated role in the Kingdom flashed through his mind, along with the two years he had invested in following Jesus. Undoubtedly, his theology influenced his response.

Jesus’ statement did not coincide with Peter’s perspective for Jesus’ life. So in the heat of the moment, Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him (v. 22). No doubt his confidence from the preceding discussion contributed to his boldness. Had he thought about it, he may have realized the incongruity of rebuking “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Those words originated in heaven; the words in verse 22 did not. Just because a believer has heaven’s perspective in one breath doesn’t mean he has it in the next.

Knowing the other disciples had heard Peter, Jesus quickly rebuked him: “Get behind Me, Satan!” (v. 23). Jesus did not mean Peter was actually Satan but, rather, that he had functioned as Satan’s tool: “You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (v. 23).

Though Peter finally grasped God’s perspective regarding Christ, he was still hung up on man’s perspective regarding Christ’s mission to become the once-for-all sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:4–10). In Peter’s defense, this was the first time Jesus told the disciples He would die. However, Peter did not understand because he was focused on human agendas.

That none of these men understood until after Jesus’ resurrection should warn us all about the difficulty of gaining God’s perspective. Like Peter, we are all products of our culture and rearing, deeply immersed in the natural world around us. And, like Peter, our perspectives do not change completely the moment we are born into God’s family. Herein lies both the problem and challenge of the rest of our earthly lives.

The apostle Paul urged the Roman believers, “Do not be conformed to this world” (Rom. 12:2). The Greek literally means “stop being conformed,” which indicates this was a battle they all had to fight. Conformity is not a disease believers might catch; it is a congenital defect that afflicts us all. Blindness to God’s perspective characterizes every believer to one degree or another.

All who receive new life through faith in Christ begin that life with Kingdom myopia—the absence of Kingdom perspective. God wants His children to become like His Son (Rom. 8:29). We are to be “transformed by the renewing of [our] mind[s]” (Rom. 12:2). This transformation is accomplished only by replacing man’s thoughts and ways with God’s through “the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26).

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, in an article titled “The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It’s Our Problem,” wrote, “Fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels. Many Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples. According to data from the Barna Research Group, 60 percent of Americans can’t name even five of the Ten Commandments. ‘No wonder people break the Ten Commandments all the time. They don’t know what they are,’ said George Barna, president of the firm. The bottom line? ‘Increasingly, America is biblically illiterate.’”

Speaking to the point of biblical literacy, Barna wrote, “The problem facing the Christian Church is not that people lack a complete set of beliefs; the problem is that they have a full slate of beliefs in mind, which they think are consistent with biblical teachings, and they are neither open to being proven wrong nor to learning new insights. Our research suggests that this challenge initially emerges in the late adolescent or early teenage years. By the time most Americans reach the age of 13 or 14, they think they pretty much know everything of value the Bible has to teach and they are no longer interested in learning more scriptural content. It requires increasingly concise, creative, reinforced, and personally relevant efforts to penetrate people’s minds with new or more accurate insights into genuinely biblical principles. In a culture driven by the desire to receive value, more Bible teaching is generally not viewed as an exercise in providing such value.”

Our society is not unlike the one Jesus sought to penetrate. Our world and even our Christianity are largely caught up in the pseudo reality of Satan’s world, like an optical illusion. Our thoughts and ways—from borrowing and spending versus sacrificing and giving, for example—mimic the world around us.

The only way to become transformed is by immersion in God’s Word. Otherwise, it becomes easy to act like Peter and become a stumbling block to others by presenting Satan’s perspective rather than God’s to a lost and dying world.

**ENDNOTES**

1. “‘Americans’ Experience with the King James Version of the Bible,” Lifeway Research <tinyurl.com/lifewayresearch>.

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The entire world lives on a seven-day cycle that was God’s design and creation: In six days He created the world, and on the seventh He rested. Genesis 1 says God saw all He had made, “and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (v. 31). So what happened? How did the world end up the way it is today? The answer is the second key to history: Corruption.

The Bible teaches that God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden. Then He told them what He expected of them. It is what He expects of all mankind: to glorify Him by governing the earth in worshipful submission.

God told Adam to (1) “be fruitful and multiply” (v. 28), (2) cultivate the garden, (3) subdue the earth and rule over it, and (4) refrain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Nothing was wrong with the
Satan entered the garden as a serpent, offering what the Bible calls “the lie.” It is the lie of lies and undergirds all others. Satan told Eve, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it [from the tree of knowledge] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God” (Gen. 3:4–5). That is the lie: You will be like God.

Satan presented the opportunity to destroy the distinction between Creator and creature. He invited Eve to make herself equal with God. The book of Romans says Adam, Eve, and the entire human race “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature [Satan] rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen” (1:25).

He persuaded Eve to focus on the fruit—on what she could see—rather than on the God who created the fruit and revealed Himself to her. Satan was really saying, “God is holding out on you. God doesn’t really love you. If He loved you, He would not say, ‘Don’t do this.’”

Does that sound familiar? Has anyone ever told you, “Don’t do this”? And you think, “If (s)he loved me, (s)he’d let me do it.” As adults, we sometimes say, “God, if You really love me, You’ll let me do this.”

The truth is, however, God does not hold out on us. He always does what He knows is best for us, giving us an opportunity to respond to Him as God. We should say, “God, I don’t know why You say no. But I’m going to accept it because it came from You. And I’m going to trust You to know more than I know and to handle the circumstances of my life.”

God wants us to trust Him. He wants us to walk through trials with Him, not knowing the outcome but knowing He sees beyond the circumstances. That is what Eve should have done. Instead, she succumbed and gave her husband the fruit as well. Eve was deceived, but Adam was not (1 Tim. 2:14).

So Satan seduced mankind. This single act caused the human race to seek its own glorification, thereby giving glory to Satan rather than to God. When you strip away the details, every sin is egocentric: People do what they want to do, what they think is right, instead of what God tells them is right. All sin involves trying to elevate ourselves to God’s level, and every sin is an attack on God’s holiness.

The Consequences

Unfortunately, sin has yielded worldwide, historical consequences.

First, death occurred. Fossils do not predate Adam. Death entered the universe for the first time in Genesis 3 and spread throughout the earth. Furthermore, the moment Adam and Eve sinned, they died spiritually.

Death is separation: Spiritual death is a separation of the soul and spirit from God; physical death is a separation of the soul and spirit from the body. When God re-entered the garden, Adam and Eve—for the first time ever—hid from Him. Their relationship with Him was broken.

As descendants of Adam and Eve, we are all born spiritually dead and alienated from God (Eph. 2:1–3).

Many people say man is basically good. That is a lie. The Bible clearly says man is basically evil, sinful, selfish, and self-centered. People have rebellious natures because of the Fall. Understanding this truth lets us see the world around us realistically and gives us a proper view of ourselves, particularly in relation to the holiness of God.

Second, Satan was cursed. But God promised to bring a Redeemer (the Messiah), the Seed of the woman; and though Satan would bruise the Redeemer’s heel, the Redeemer one day will bruise Satan’s head, destroying him (Gen. 3:15).

Satan usurped authority. Before the Fall, Adam ruled the world as God’s theocratic representative. When Adam sinned, he subjugated his realm to Satan’s authority. Since the Fall, Satan’s influence has dominated society. Scripture calls him “the prince of the

Trouble Begins

Unbeknown to Adam, a rebellion had taken place in heaven. It appears to have occurred before the creation of the universe. An angel called Lucifer (ultimately known as Satan) rebelled against God’s holiness, repudiating God’s uniqueness (“I will be like the Most High,” Isa. 14:14). Satan saw himself as equal to God and defied His Creator’s stated order.

If that weren’t bad enough, the Bible says at least a third of the angels agreed with him. There is a minimum of 400 million good angels (Rev. 5:11), so at least 200 million rebelled and became what we know today as demons.

This was no minor disagreement in an obscure corner of the spirit realm. It was an open rebellion by created beings, and it needed to be addressed. God responded by creating the material universe: the galaxies, Earth, animals, and people—the highest level of the material world.

Of course, God could have destroyed Satan instantly. But doing so would not have proven God is holy, only that He is all-powerful. Instead, He devised an elaborate plan, on an elaborate stage, to demonstrate His holiness through people who would voluntarily recognize the superiority, sovereignty, and glory of their Creator. Having established His relationship with Adam, God set the stage for the test.
power of the air” (Eph. 2:2) and the “ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31). Understanding this truth explains why the world is in such chaos today.

All people need redemption: We all need the Savior to extract us from Satan’s kingdom and place us “into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). God Himself provided that redemption for us. The only way our relationship with Him can be restored is through a salvation experience. We are born in sin, separated from God; and when we are born again, we are restored.

One day the Messiah will return, and He will restore this earth to near-Edenic conditions. Until then, “The whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs”—suffering travail, agony, hardship, and difficulty—awaiting the day when the universe will be redeemed (Rom. 8:22).

We live in a fallen world filled with pain, disappointment, and death because of corruption, the second key to understanding history. But God has a plan of triumph through Jesus the Messiah, the Savior of the world, who can give us new life so that we can truly “love the LORD [our] God with all [our] heart, with all [our] soul, and with all [our] strength” (Dt. 6:5) and glorify Him forever.

Adapted from the “Seven Cs of History” presented by Answers in Genesis in its Creation Museum in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area.

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Question: Where will Jesus’ throne be situated?

Answer: “In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.” — Isaiah 16:5

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Camels, Gnats, and the Importance of Doctrine from page 25

Eastern mysticism can be inviting because, after all, it is ambiguous and nebulous enough to defy objective analysis. Therefore, it avoids the necessity of a reasonable defense. Christians do not have that option, nor should we. Rather, believers should “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).

In her new book, When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God, author and anthropologist T. M. Luhrmann approached her in-depth study of two evangelical churches from the standpoint of behavioral psychology and sociology, as well as from anthropology. But after pointing out the limitations of Evangelicalism as she sees it, she ended the book with a mystical view of religious experience, inviting us to be comfortable in the vague world of the unknown, rather than being occasionally uncomfortable with the revealed and knowable God of Scripture:

*In the end, this is the story of the uncertainty of our senses, and the complexity of our minds and world. There is so little we know, so much we take on trust. In a way more fundamental than we dare to appreciate, we each must make our own judgments about what is truly real, and there are no guarantees, for what is, is always cloaked in mystery.*

Scripture, of course, uses the term mystery. But it denotes a truth God hid from human understanding then revealed in the New Testament. In Ephesians Paul spoke of the “mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (3:4–5). He asked believers to pray “that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (6:19).

Followers of Christ possess God’s revealed Word and, guided by His Spirit, can discern its essential truths (1 Cor. 2:14–16). Thus we have the opportunity to understand the Scriptural doctrines of our faith. Equally important, we have the mandate to understand, promote, and apply them to our lives.

The New Testament speaks of the importance of the “apostles’ doctrine” (Acts: 2:42) as opposed to “strange doctrines” and “myths” (1 Tim. 1:3–4, NASB) that later would frequent the so-called Gnostic gospels. Nor are we to be “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14). Instead, we are to be nourished by “good [sound] doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:6) that comes from Scripture alone (2 Tim. 3:16).

God has warned us about people who want their ears tickled and “heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (4:3–4). There is a terrible and powerful difference between teaching that purports to speak for God and teaching that is from God. (See Isaiah 29:13 and Matthew 15:9.)

Some of us may not spend time studying doctrine because it appears dreary, overly theological, unexciting, or sometimes even irrelevant to our lives. Yet if God spoke so often to us about it through His apostles, how can we ignore it? More important, why would we choose to? It is the sword of truth God has given us as an effective tool of spiritual victory.

The great 19th-century preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon said it well when he addressed the importance of understanding what we believe and why:

*Nowadays, we hear men tear a single sentence of Scripture from its connection, and cry, “Eureka! Eureka!” as if they had found a new truth; and yet they have not discovered a diamond, but only a piece of broken glass. Had they been able to compare spiritual things with spiritual, had they understood the analogy of the faith, and had they been acquainted with the holy learning of the great Bible students of past ages, they would not have been quite so fast in vaunting their marvelous knowledge. Let us be thoroughly well acquainted with the great doctrines of the Word of God, and let us be mighty in expounding the Scriptures.*

We would do well to heed his advice. Perhaps then we’ll stop focusing on the “gnats” and concentrate on the things that really matter.

ENDNOTES

Chester and the True Gospel of Christ

Chester tried and tried to change his ways, but he always failed. His life included drugs, alcohol, immorality, broken relationships, gambling, lying, and other evils. He had divorced his wife to pursue another woman. When that relationship failed, he moved back in with his ex-wife but didn’t marry her. He was often estranged from his children, his siblings, and even his widowed mother.

His language was abusive and filled with obscenities. He lost jobs because of his temper and money because of his indulgences. His life was a wreck, and he knew it.

He tried to change. He read self-help books. He joined support groups. He talked to professionals and those who had overcome destructive lifestyles. He even joined a Bible study that turned out to be a scam and a disappointment. Still, he tried to change. Finally his ex-wife, children, family, and acquaintances began to doubt he would ever be any different.

Unfortunately, millions of people are like Chester. Their lives are wracked with brokenness and despair; and though they reach out for help, they never get what they need: the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the true way to salvation.
Gospel comes from a Greek word meaning "good news." The gospel is the good news of what Jesus accomplished for humanity by His life, death, and resurrection. Scripture teaches the perfect, sinless Son of God became the final atonement for mankind’s sins. Faith in Him alone—not in good deeds or self-effort—provides forgiveness of sin and everlasting life.

It also provides something more that Chester desperately needed: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who guides us away from evil and enables us to walk with God.

At the end of his rope physically and emotionally, one of Chester’s few remaining friends invited him to a country western concert. He went, hoping to take his mind off his problems. In reality, it was a Christian concert. Chester enjoyed the music and was impressed with the musicians. Midway through the evening, one of the band members spoke of his own past struggles. Chester found them amazingly similar to his own. He eagerly listened to every word, anxiously awaiting the solution this man had discovered. The musician explained how he came to understand the gospel and to receive Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord. He used words like saved and born again to describe this life-changing experience.

It was as though a light turned on for Chester. This is what he was looking for! He needed God’s help as offered by Jesus Christ. The musician told the crowd anyone can pray and invite Jesus into his or her heart and life and be born again—experience a spiritual birth. That night Chester admitted his sins and evil ways and asked God to forgive him. In genuine repentance, he bowed his head, prayed, and asked Christ to become his personal Savior. God forgave Chester, and that night Chester was born again.

Immediately he began to change. He stopped drinking, smoking, gambling, and chasing women. He apologized to his mother and his employer. He spent time with his children (now grown) and his grandchildren, went to work on time, and did not cheat the boss. He proposed to his ex-wife, and they were remarried in the church they were attending.

He also put himself under the teaching of a local pastor. Eventually he quit his job and attended a Bible institute in the Midwest. After both he and his wife graduated, they returned home to work in Christian ministry. They also tried to rebuild relationships he had broken. Before his death more than 30 years later, he saw relationships with his mother, siblings, children, and former friends all restored. Before he was placed in a nursing home due to declining health, he had served in several local churches and at a Christian retreat center. He also helped to plant a church.

Chester gave up trying to change himself, and he let God do it through Jesus Christ.

A vital part of the gospel is repentance, and repentance is change. Change occurs when people genuinely embrace and accept the truth of who Christ is and what He did for them. Old habits, attitudes, behaviors, and even vocabulary can change as a result of hearing the gospel and embracing it. The apostle Paul said, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Many churches today not only fail to preach repentance, but they have abdicated their responsibility to preach the true gospel. So millions of Chesters wander aimlessly through life, desperately trying to change themselves but never hearing how Christ can change them.

My own mother responded to the gospel on a Sunday night in the early 1950s in an evangelistic meeting in Ocean City, New Jersey. She was never the same after that night. The marvelous changes in her remained for the rest of her life. Soon after she accepted Christ as her Savior, she began to pray earnestly that others would do the same.

One warm Sunday evening in the 1970s, as I sat on the front porch with my parents, the phone rang. I answered it. “Hello. Oh, hi, Uncle Chester. How are you? Fine, thank you. Sure, my mom is here. I’ll get her.”

When she returned to the porch and sat down, she simply said, “Well, your Uncle Chester accepted the Lord last night. He’s saved.”

She told us how her brother Chester, for whom she had prayed for so many years, had gone to a Christian concert and accepted the Lord. Then she sat quietly and stared into the distance with tears in her eyes. I think she was silently thanking the Lord for saving her brother and providing for him an eternal home in heaven.

In the years to come, Mom would see many more of her family and friends come to know the Lord, including her three children, siblings, nieces, and nephews. In 2005 I conducted her funeral with many of those people in attendance. Each one had been genuinely changed after hearing the true Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
Joyful reunions, laughter, and sweet fellowship flowed at the recent 25th anniversary celebration of The Friends of Israel’s Institute of Jewish Studies (IJS). Alumni, faculty, staff, and friends gathered at Friends of Israel (FOI) headquarters in Deptford, New Jersey, to commemorate God’s faithfulness in using this unique ministry in their lives.

The depth of relationships was evident as people reminisced about their IJS experiences and shared their testimonies. Awards were presented to founding dean, William C. Varner, whose vision and work for the school made it a reality in 1986, and former IJS director, William L. Krewson, for their years of faithful ministry with the school. It was also announced that trees will be planted in Israel in memory of Herb Hirt who directed IJS for 10 years and whose presence at the reunion on April 28 was sorely missed.

IJS, originally the Institute of Biblical Studies (IBS), began with a desire to expand a Friends of Israel summer training program for college students in Atlantic City, New Jersey. In the spring of 1987, the first IBS class graduated after completing a year-long, residential program of biblical studies under Will Varner’s leadership. The same year, students were moved from Atlantic City to what is now FOI headquarters. As the Institute grew, Will Varner was joined by Renald Showers, Herb Hirt, Keith Megilligan, Bill Krewson, Sonja Rentschler, and others who carefully taught the Scriptures or helped in the dormitories.

In 1996 the school relocated to the campus of Philadelphia Biblical University in Langhorne, Pennsylvania. It was renamed the Institute of Jewish Studies (IJS) and remained a ministry of The Friends of Israel. The move also ushered in Dr. Hirt’s leadership as IJS director, succeeding Dr. Varner who left to become a professor at The
Master’s College in California and director of the college’s IBEX semester-in-Israel program.

For the next 10 years, Herb Hirt shepherded IJS until additional responsibilities led him to step aside. In 2006 Dr. Krewson, a faculty member for many years, became the director.

In the fall of 2009, under the transitional guidance of FOI Vice President James A. Showers, FOI decided to enlarge the school by abandoning the confines of a small college campus and making this quality Bible education available worldwide via the Internet. IJS returned to its roots at FOI’s international headquarters and retooled as an online, distance-learning school for students of all ages around the globe.

Today IJS has 10 times its previous enrollment and a full complement of courses designed and taught by some of the finest men in their field. In addition, new subjects are added each year and draw students from as far away as Israel, Hong Kong, Japan, and Afghanistan.

In 2010, the school’s leadership was passed to Clarence Johnson who is committed to FOI’s goal of ensuring that IJS equips followers of the Lord Jesus Christ through the study of biblical truth, which includes a proper understanding of Scripture and God’s love for the Jewish people and their importance in His eternal plan.

William E. Sutter, who retired May 1 as FOI’s executive director, closed the celebration with a moving reminder: 

Every twist and turn in IJS’s development was solidly based on a commitment to present God’s Word accurately and to instill in students a passion for the land of Israel and a love for Jewish people around the world.

For information on attending the Institute of Jewish Studies, go to www.foi.org/ijs.

Israel is an exciting and exotic place to visit, with ancient biblical sites, beautiful scenery, luxurious hotels, and colorful cuisine. So why would a small group of American Christians take time out of their busy lives, pay their airfare and hotel, and fly to Israel to wash dishes, scrub floors, clean windows, service air conditioners, and labor diligently for two weeks in March without pay?

That was the question Israelis asked repeatedly of the small group of young professionals and retirees from across the United States who made up the 2012 Friends of Israel Hesed Project team. In partnership with Kaplan Medical Center in Rehovot, Israel, Hesed members worked alongside Israelis to support the men and women who provide medical care to more than 700,000 people in southern Israel.

This area is often the target of Arab rocket attacks, yet the Jewish hospital provides advanced medical assistance to Arabs and Israelis alike. During Hesed’s stay, a Palestinian boy from Gaza, who was seriously burned while allegedly trying to launch a rocket, was treated at Kaplan’s new Children’s Medical Center.

Hesed participants were often asked, “Who are you?” “Where do you come from?” and “What are you doing?” But the number one question was “Why?”

continued on page 41
The Final Warning

In a fifth and final warning to Jewish believers in Christ, the book of Hebrews contrasts the experience of God’s people at Mount Sinai as they received the Mosaic Covenant with the blessedness of being associated with Mount Zion under the New Covenant. Both Mounts represent defining moments as God spoke to His people. For Israel, Mount Sinai was a place of terror and judgment should the nation disobey God’s Law. However, Mount Zion is pictured as a place of grace, joy, and eternal redemption for all believers in Christ.

Hebrews 12:18-29 summarizes the main thrust of the book, emphasizing that what Christians possess in Christ, their great High Priest, puts them in a far better position than under the Mosaic Covenant.

The Mount of Dread

To make an indelible impression on his readers, the author provided a soul-stirring description of what their Jewish forefathers experienced at Mount Sinai:

For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: “And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.” And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling”) (vv. 18-21; cf. Ex. 19:10-25; 20:18-21; Dt. 4:10-24).

Moses told the Israelites to wash their clothes and refrain from sexual relations with their wives for two days; and on the third day, God would speak to them from Mount Sinai. The mountain was off limits to both people and animals. Anyone touching even its base was to be “stoned or shot with an arrow” (Heb. 12:20).

On the third day, a thick cloud of smoke completely engulfed Mount Sinai. Thunder and lightning filled the atmosphere as a violent earthquake shook the mountain. Darkness descended, and the Israelites trembled at the eerie feeling of doom.

God instructed Moses to lead Israel out of its camp to meet with Him at Mount Sinai. A loud, deafening trumpet was sounded, whereupon the Lord descended from heaven to the top of the mountain. The visible manifestation overwhelmed Israel with wonderment and awe. When the people heard God speak, they stood petrified, trembling in fear; and they begged Moses to speak instead of God: “You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Ex. 20:19).

Hebrews 12:19-20 explains they were convinced that if God continued speaking His Law, they would perish because of their sin. Initially, even Moses was frightened: “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling” (v. 21).

At Sinai, Israel stood before a holy, omnipotent, omniscient God who was unapproachable by vile, sinful man. Mount Sinai represented the Old Covenant, with its Mosaic system of laws that required people to keep all its commandments—which was humanly impossible. Those who broke the Law were subject to judgment, separation from God, and eventual death and punishment.

God originated the sacrificial system to provide atonement for sin so that sinful people could approach a holy God. Yet these sacrifices could never take away sin (10:4); they merely functioned as a vicarious substitute to propitiate the wrath of God’s judgment against them.

The Mount of Deliverance

A contrast is made between the terrors experienced at Mount Sinai and the blessings believers possess in their relationship to Jesus Christ.

First, Mount Zion is in heaven, not on Earth: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22). This city is free from bondage (Gal. 4:26), was sought by Abraham (Heb. 11:10), is described in the book of Revelation (Rev. 21:2—22:5), and is called Mount Zion. It is God’s abode and a place of grace, joy, and eternal redemption for all believers in Christ.

Second, someday believers in Christ will be in the presence of “an innumerable company of angels” who are gathered in festal celebration (Heb. 12:22; cf. Rev. 5:11). These angels continually worship God and stand ready to carry out His will in heaven and on Earth. In the New Jerusalem, we will worship and serve alongside them.

The words general assembly (Greek, panegurei; Heb. 12:23) refer to large, festal gatherings, such as the Olympics. Scholars
differ on whether to connect them with the word angels (v. 22), church (v. 23), or both. Most commentators connect the words with angels and translate the phrase “to myriads of angels in festal gathering.”

Third, Mount Zion is the eternal home for Christians, referred to as the “church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” (v. 23). The word church (Greek, ekklesia) refers to a “called out group of people” comprised of regenerated Jews and Gentiles who, from the day of Pentecost to the Rapture, constitute the body of Christ. The church also is referred to as “firstborn,” identifying its spiritual birthright in union with Christ as Savior and making believers “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17).

Today the church dwells on Earth, but its citizenship already has been “registered in heaven” (Heb. 12:23; cf. Lk. 10:20; Rev. 13:8; 21:27); and it will one day reside in the heavenly Jerusalem. This will be a festive gathering of the church in heaven, in contrast to the terrifying setting of Sinai.

Fourth, the supreme Ruler in heaven is “God the Judge of all” (Heb. 12:23). The verse emphasizes His position and supreme right to judge all things in heaven and on Earth. Israelites at Mount Sinai could not approach God’s presence; they would have died. However, at Christ’s crucifixion, the veil into the Temple’s Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom (Mt. 27:51), giving all believers access to God’s presence, where they can receive mercy and grace (Heb. 4:16). That was an enlightening thought to someone ready to forsake Christ, return to ritualistic Judaism, and suffer God’s judgment because of his decision.

Fifth, the phrase to the spirits of just men made perfect (12:23) refers to Old Testament saints whose spirits and souls are in heaven without their resurrected bodies. They are “just” (justified), or redeemed, and need to be “made perfect” (complete) in their redemption—which will occur when they receive their resurrected bodies prior to Christ’s Second Coming (Dan. 12:2; Heb. 11:40).

Sixth, all come to faith through “Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant” (Heb. 12:24). The word new (Greek, neus) refers to new in time and emphasizes the revelation that Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant through His shed blood, which provides complete cleansing from sin (8:7–13; 9:11–15; 10:15–18).

Seventh, Christ “sprinkling” His blood on the cross “speaks better things than that of Abel” (12:24). After Abel was murdered by his brother Cain, his blood cried out to God from the ground for judgment (Gen. 4:10). However, Christ’s shed blood is far better because it purchased salvation and cleanses all believers from sin.

The choice between being under the Old Covenant of Law or the New Covenant of grace could not be clearer: Mount Zion is light, grace, peace, rest, forgiveness of sin, inexpressible joy, access to God, and eternal life. Mount Sinai is fear, death, and judgment. Believers must choose Mount Zion.

The Moment of Decision

God has another warning to anyone considering deserting the faith:

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven” (Heb. 12:25–26).

God warns believers that if Israel did not escape temporal judgment on Earth when it refused to heed God who spoke to them at Mount Sinai, they certainly will not escape God’s temporal discipline if they refuse to heed His message from heaven through Christ. Greater is their responsibility to the message of God in Christ (cf. 2:2–3).

When God spoke at Mount Sinai, “[H]is voice . . . shook the earth.” It was symbolic of a great shaking in the future when He will shake “not only the earth, but also heaven” (12:26). The verse quotes Haggai 2:6 and refers to the shaking before and at Christ’s Second Coming (cf. Joel 3:16; Zech. 14:4–5; Mt. 24:29; Rev. 16:18, 20) when He will destroy Gentile world rule (Dan. 2:34–35; 44–45; Hag. 2:21–22).

The author mentioned a “removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb. 12:27). The destructive things are those under the Mosaic Covenant; the permanent things are the New Covenant blessings in Christ, the New Jerusalem, and all that pertains to God’s eternal Kingdom. A final shaking will take place after the Millennial Kingdom, when God destroys the material universe (2 Pet. 3:10, 12; Rev. 20:11) and creates a new heaven and new Earth that will be eternal (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1).

An application to the entire warning follows: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace [be grateful], by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28). Since God has provided grace, salvation in Christ, and future blessings in an eternal Kingdom, these persecuted Jewish believers to whom the book of Hebrews is addressed should in no way consider returning to Judaism. Instead, they should serve God gratefully, with prayer and praise, and worship Him in reverence and awe. Their faithful perseverance would determine their rewards in the Kingdom (1 Cor. 3:14).

There is a final, poignant warning: “For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29; cf. Dt. 4:24). All who returned to Judaism would face God’s displeasure and discipline. True, God bestows grace on all believers. But He is also a God of judgment and will discipline us as He did Israel in the wilderness and Esau, mentioned earlier (Heb. 12:16–17).

Have you heeded the warning? Which Mount have you chosen?
The Love and Mercy of God (Part 6)

The New Testament reveals that Jesus defended and administered God’s mercy in various ways during His ministry on Earth.

Mercy for the Guiltless

On another occasion Jesus and His disciples walked through grain fields on the Sabbath. Being hungry, His disciples plucked and ate heads of grain. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to Jesus, “Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!” (Mt. 12:2; cf. Mk. 2:23–24; Lk. 6:1–2). Jesus asked them if they had not heard that, when King David and his men were hungry, he entered the House of God and ate the showbread, which was lawful only for priests to eat. In addition, had they not read in the Law that, on the Sabbath, the Temple priests profaned the Sabbath and were blameless (Mt. 12:3–5)? Then He said, “In this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (vv. 6–8).

When Jesus heard their question, He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mt. 9:12–13).

Jesus’ point was that God’s mercy for the unsaved prompted His Son to come into the world to save sinners. The only way they could become saved was through personal contact with Him.

Mercy for Healing

While on Earth, Jesus mercifully healed people from various illnesses:

The New Testament reveals that Jesus defended and administered God’s mercy in various ways during His ministry on Earth.

While on Earth, Jesus mercifully healed people from various illnesses:

Healing the Blind. Two blind men followed Jesus, begging for His mercy, and came to Him while He was in a house:

Jesus said to them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They said to Him, “Yes, Lord.” Then He touched their eyes, saying, “According to your faith let it be to you.” And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, “See that no one knows it” (9:28–30).

When Jesus left Jericho, two blind men sitting by the wayside heard He was passing by. They cried out, “Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David!” (20:30). The great multitude following Him told the blind men to be quiet. But instead, they cried out to Him all the more. When Jesus asked what they wanted Him to do, they requested their sight. “Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him” (20:34; cf. Lk. 18:35–43). (The word translated “compassion” is related to the concept of mercy.)

Healing the Demon-Possessed. A man brought his son who was possessed by an unclean, deaf, and dumb spirit that would seize the son and violently throw him to the ground. The son would foam at the mouth, grind his teeth, and become stiff. The father said Jesus’ disciples were not able to cast out the spirit. Jesus told the father to bring his son to Him. When the son was brought, the spirit violate established Sabbath rules, He had authority to be merciful and permit blameless violation.

Mercy for the Unsaved

On one occasion Jesus and His disciples went to a house and ate a meal with publicans and sinners whom the Pharisees considered evil and defiling in God’s sight. Offended, they asked Jesus’ disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (Mt. 9:11; cf. Mk. 2:16; Lk. 5:30). They were convinced eating with such corrupt people corrupted the holiness of God.

When Jesus heard their question, He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mt. 9:12–13).

Jesus’ point was that God’s mercy for the unsaved prompted His Son to come into the world to save sinners. The only way they could become saved was through personal contact with Him.
immediately threw him to the ground, making him roll and foam at the mouth.

Jesus asked the father how long this had been happening. The father replied, “From childhood” (Mk. 9:21). He also told Jesus the spirit often threw his son into fire and water, trying to destroy him. Then the father asked Jesus to have compassion on them and help them if He could.

Jesus answered, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes” (v. 23). Immediately the father “cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’” (v. 24).

The cry prompted the crowd to run to where Jesus and the father and son were located. Jesus “rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!’” (v. 25).

The spirit cried out, convulsed the son severely, and came out of him. The son appeared lifeless; many claimed he was dead. “But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose” (v. 27).

On another occasion a Canaanite woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon came to Jesus and cried out, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!” She was desperate because her daughter was severely tormented by a demon (Mt. 15:22).

At first Jesus did not respond. His disciples urged Him to send her away because she had been pursuing them with their cries. But Jesus explained to them why He had not responded to her. He had been sent to minister exclusively to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” not to Gentiles (v. 24).

Nevertheless, the woman prostrated herself before Him in humility and adoration, pleading with Him, “Lord, help me!” (v. 25).

Jesus responded, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs” (v. 26).

The woman’s persistent response was, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table” (v. 27).

Jesus was so impressed by her persistence that He exclaimed, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire” (v. 28). As a result, the woman’s daughter “was healed from that very hour” (v. 28).

Jesus and His disciples also met a man possessed by an unclean spirit after they had crossed the Sea of Galilee to the country of the Gadarenes. Because of his condition, the man lived among the tombs in caves. No one could tame or bind him, though many had tried. He would pull apart chains and break shackles into pieces. Twenty-four hours a day he would be in the mountains and tombs, crying and cutting himself with sharp stones (Mk. 5:4–5).

When he saw Jesus in the distance, he ran and prostrated himself before Him, screaming, “What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me” (v. 7). He did so because Jesus had said, “Come out of the man, unclean spirit!” (v. 8).

Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” The man replied, “My name is Legion; for we are many” (v. 9). The demons urgently implored Him not to send them out of the country but, rather, into a herd of about 2,000 pigs that were feeding at the nearby mountains. Jesus acquiesced. The unclean spirits left the man and entered the pigs; and the pigs rushed headlong down the steep slope into the Sea of Galilee and drowned.

The herdsmen fled to a nearby city and countryside to report primarily to the owners of the pigs. When people came to the Gadarenes to understand exactly what took place, they found the formerly wild, demon-possessed man sitting calmly. He was fully dressed and in his right mind.

As the herdsmen recounted what they had witnessed—including Jesus’ transforming power to free the demon-possessed man and allow the demons to possess the pigs—the people became fearful of having such a powerful person in their midst. So they asked Jesus to leave their region.

When Jesus boarded the boat to leave, He rejected the formerly demon-possessed man’s request to go with Him. Instead, He ordered him to return to his home and people and tell them “what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you” (v. 19). The man returned home to Decapolis and began to relate everything Jesus had done for him. And all who heard his report were astonished (v. 20).

**Healing Lepers.** A leper came to Jesus, entreated Him, knelt down before Him, and said to Him, “If You are willing, You can make me clean” (1:40). Filled with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand, touched him and said, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed (vv. 41–42).

When Jesus entered a certain village, 10 men who were lepers and stood far off came toward Him. They lifted their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” (Lk. 17:13). When Jesus saw them He replied, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And . . . as they went, they were cleansed” (v. 14).

**Question:** To which nation does the land of Israel belong?

**Answer:** “Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel.” —Ezekiel 37:21–22
No ‘Hatikva’ for Arab grads

Many Arab graduates from Hebrew University in Israel refused to sing Israel’s national anthem at recent graduation ceremonies.

“This is not a single event,” said someone who attended, “but a symptom of a much larger phenomenon in which Israeli Arabs refuse to recognize the Jewish character of the state. We lie to ourselves as a people: They enjoy everything that Israel has to offer; but at the moment of truth, they do not identify with the country. If they are unable to sing the anthem, at least stand and show respect.”

In April Arutz-7 reported Supreme Court Justice Salim Jubran did not sing the anthem at the inauguration of Supreme Court President Asher Grunis. He did stand. Jubran’s decision infuriated some, who charged his “insolence” was a “degradation to the Jewish state.”

Druze lawmaker Ayoub Kara said Israel’s non-Jewish citizens should sing ‘Hatikva’ and recognize the country’s Jewish character. “Without Jewish rule there would be no democracy in Israel,” Kara said.

Dutch TV pulls anti-Semitic game

Dutch public broadcasting network VPRO has removed from its website a game decried by human rights groups as anti-Semitic. The decision follows an exposé in The Jerusalem Post about the game, which features Israeli settlers who use an “Anne Frank card” and “Jewish stinginess” to colonize the West Bank.

According to a VPRO statement, “In November 2010, the VPRO platform for younger viewers, Dorst, published on the website and in the TV guide a satirical item, The Settlements of the West Bank, a commentary over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shaped in the form of a well-known board game, The Settlers of Catan. . . . The Settlers of the West Bank is now, almost one year and [a] half years later, the subject of discussion on whether it contains elements of an anti-Semitic nature. . . . The VPRO finds the political question relevant and will obligingly discuss the borders of satire. But it has no desire or need to discuss alleged anti-Semitism through this item. Therefore, the VPRO took off the game The Settlers of the West Bank from the Dorst site.”

Birthrate up

The Jewish birthrate in Jerusalem is higher than the Arab birthrate, putting an end to reports of an Arab demographic threat in the united capital. The birthrate for Jewish mothers is 4.2 children, compared with 3.9 children for Arab mothers, reflecting a trend throughout Israel. In 1999, the birthrate was 3.8 for Jewish mothers and 4.4 for Arabs.

Jews are a solid majority in Jerusalem, with Arabs constituting 36 percent, almost all of them in areas restored to the capital in the 1967 Six-Day War. The total Jerusalem population in 2011 was 801,000.

The largest Jewish neighborhoods are Ramot and Pisgat Ze’ev, each one with slightly more than 40,000 people, followed by Gilo with 29,600. All three neighborhoods are located in areas restored to Israel in 1967 and which are claimed by the Palestinian Authority.

PM: ‘Infiltrators flooding Israel’

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says Israel should prevent “illegal infiltrators flooding the country,” Israel’s Army Radio reported. “If we don’t stop their entry, the problem that currently stands at 60,000 could grow to 600,000, and that threatens our existence as a Jewish and democratic state.”

The fence on the border with Egypt will be completed by October, Netanyahu added, with the exception of a mountainous area near Elat. Israel’s rapidly growing African migrant population has become a hot-button issue over the past two years.

The Public Security minister said the issue demands government discussion because of police concerns Israels will respond to recent violence by Africans with their own violent acts against African migrants.

Security sought for Rachel’s Tomb

The Rachel’s Tomb Heritage Fund wants Israel to restore security to Rachel’s Tomb. Dozens of Arabs went on the rampage there recently, besieging Jews inside the compound, which had to be closed after masked Arab rioters threw stones at the entrance of the Jewish holy site outside Bethlehem.

A wealthy ultra-Orthodox man from Cleveland, Ohio, recently invested $5 million to renovate the site, said a Fund spokesperson. “He renovated the dome, which was in danger of collapse, purchased new air conditioners, and renovated the restrooms. It is a huge privilege, but that does not absolve the Israeli government from its commitment to do what it must do.”

Rachel’s Tomb has been undergoing renovations for the benefit of the tens of thousands of visitors who come to the compound.
The quest to understand why Christians would leave the comforts of home in America to work for free doing manual labor in Israel even led *The Jerusalem Post* to print an article in several editions highlighting The Friends of Israel’s Hesed Project.

Why did they go? Because, as Christians, they believe God’s Word. God has a plan to bless Israel and fulfill all His promises to His Chosen People because He loves them. The blessings of a Christian’s personal relationship with God come through the Jewish people. Jewish men penned the Scriptures, even the New Testament; and Jesus the Messiah (Yeshua Hamashiach, in Hebrew) is Jewish. In His Holy Scriptures, God promises to bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse Israel (Gen. 12:3). Hesed was there to be a blessing to the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

At the hospital and across the region, Israelis welcomed the team with appreciation and open arms. This openness resulted in visits to an Israel Defense Forces training base and the city of Ariel in biblical Samaria (called the West Bank by the news media).

The hospital honored the participants by planting an olive tree on the hospital grounds for each one. Friendships were formed and hearts were touched. The group’s hard work superseded language barriers and prompted hugs, smiles, kisses, and hearty thanks from almost everyone who knew what these Americans were doing.

The Bible records several accounts of God using Gentiles in mighty ways through seemingly insignificant expressions of kindness (*hesed*, in Hebrew) toward the Jewish people. Hegai, King Ahasuerus’s custodian of the women, showed *hesed* to the Jewish maiden Esther by providing her with additional beauty treatments, maidservants, and luxury accommodations (Est. 2:9). He also advised and prepared her to meet the king (v. 15). The result: Esther became the queen and was used by the Lord to save the Jewish people from extinction. God used Hegai the Gentile and his simple acts of *hesed* to position Esther to save the Israelites.

Sometimes God magnificently uses what people call irrelevant in ways that are beyond our imagination. Are you willing to trust God to use you and your simple acts of *hesed* toward the Jewish people? If so, pray about becoming a part of the next Hesed Project, scheduled to leave for Israel on February 22, 2013. For more information, go to www.foi.org/hesed.

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by Clarence Johnson,
director of The Friends of Israel Institute of Jewish Studies and the Hesed Project

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If your will is up to date, you enjoy a certain peace of mind. The fact that a plan is in place to care for your loved ones and favorite charities is a reason to sleep well. It’s comforting to know you have thoughtfully arranged your affairs before you go home to be with the Lord.

Yet our world is changing rapidly. In these uncertain times, you may be wondering if your will can withstand the changes that lie around the corner.

In light of today’s realities, it might be a good time to review your estate plan. Or perhaps you have yet to “get your house in order” and are looking to take that first step.

Let us help. We can put you in touch with a capable professional to work around the uncertainties of the times.

To learn more about wills, you can request our free, no-obligation brochure, *Making a Will That Works*. Simply check the appropriate box on the envelope in this magazine, call Tom Geoghan at our office at 800-257-7843, or e-mail us at development_dept@foi.org.
I am always looking for a chance to speak with people about our Savior, Yeshua Hamashiach (Hebrew for “Jesus the Messiah”). And often people are looking for me, but they want to make trouble for me because of my faith. The ultra-Orthodox in particular do everything they can to make trouble for people who believe in Christ.

Few ultra-Orthodox young men become soldiers. There has been a great controversy over this issue in Israel because the government exempts ultra-Orthodox students from enlisting in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

I have lived in Jerusalem for 65 years, and many people know in whom I have believed. Recently several ultra-Orthodox young men came looking for me to argue with me. And what did they boast about? Being in the IDF.

“You see what we are doing for this land of Israel,” one said. “We were in the army, fighting for our land! And you? What are you doing to help Israel? And your children, what do they do? They do not serve in the army. They are as bad as you, and you are worse than our sworn enemies because you have run away from Judaism. You are against all that is written in our Holy Bible.”

I listened patiently until they finished their abusive tirade. Then I asked, “So where have you taken part in those wars against our enemies?”

Then the truth came out: “Not we,” one said, “but our parents. We are very proud of what our parents have done for the land of Israel.”

“I am happy to hear your parents are such great heroes,” I replied. “And, of course, I expect your parents have received the highest decoration our country offers.”

“Our parents are the greatest heroes!” one said. “You do not even know what you are talking about!”

So I said again, “Of course, your parents have many medals of decoration.”

The men merely looked at me and resumed their rant: “You must be ashamed that you never served in the army. Nor did your sons serve because they were afraid to be soldiers—so afraid they even changed their faith!”

Finally, I had spent enough time listening patiently to all their boasting. So I replied, “You think of yourselves and your family as such big heroes. What did you do in all those wars?”

First they became quiet. Then they suddenly began yelling at me again: “How can you speak with us about medals and decorations when you never took part in any war for this country? Neither you nor your sons!”

“Well,” I replied, “then your parents must have received great decorations from the army, if they are such great heroes. Let me show you what the highest decoration actually looks like.”

“You are a liar!” one shouted. “We have heard about you!”

“What will you do if I show you the highest decoration the army gives, signed by several famous generals who gave it to me?”

“Such a thing would be difficult to believe. We want to see it in black and white!” one demanded.

So I showed them. I came to Israel from Poland as a teenager after the Holocaust and fought in all of Israel’s wars for almost 40 years. Also, all three of my sons have served in the Israeli military, as well as my daughter.

When they saw I had received the highest decoration this country offers, they almost went berserk. “How can
this be?” they shouted. They examined it from all sides, trying to make sure the signatures were not forged. But they recognized the generals’ signatures and could see they were genuine. So they grew quiet. Then they began speaking to me with the highest respect. And if that were not enough, they also summoned their friends, who usually despise people like me who believe in Jesus.

Then one said, “Now we will open a new part of our conversation. We want to know how you came to believe in Christ.”

It was a great surprise that he actually spoke the word Christ and did not use the words This Man, as all ultra-Orthodox do because they will not speak our Savior’s name.

“How could you take part in all those wars for the land of Israel and believe in Him?” they wanted to know.

“I will tell you,” I replied. “I am an Israeli Christian. And as I am faithful to our faith, so, too, I am faithful to my country—the land God has given to us.”

“But God gave the land to His Chosen People Israel. You consider yourself a part of the Chosen People of God, but you are not—are you?” one asked.

“Yes, I am,” I replied. “So are all Jewish people who follow God according to what is written in the Bible. We are not like you. We do not listen to stories told by teachers. We do not follow rabbinical tradition. Instead, we read God’s Word and let the Holy Spirit of God teach us. You do not serve God but, rather, your teachers. And you spend your lives listening to them instead of to what God says in His Holy Word, where it is written, ‘You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him’” (Dt. 6:13).

They left saying they would discuss the matter with their rabbis. This was one of the most interesting witnessing experiences I have had. These men need our prayers. Please pray the God of Israel will show them the truth.
THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL
LANCASTER PROPHECY CONFERENCE
SEPTEMBER 7–11, 2012
DoubleTree Resort • 2400 Willow Street Pike, Lancaster, PA 17602

CONFERENCE COST: $519 per person single/double occupancy
Final registration and payment are due Thursday August 2, 2012.

SPEAKERS

JIM SHOWERS
DAVID LEVY
STEVE HERZIG
CLARENCE JOHNSON
RENNIE SHOWERS

DAILY SCHEDULE

FRIDAY: Registration 4-6 p.m.; dinner 6:15 p.m.; concert 7:30 p.m.
SATURDAY: 9 a.m. to noon; 7-9 p.m.
SUNDAY: 9 a.m. to noon; 5:30-7:30 p.m.
MONDAY: 9 a.m. to noon, 6:45-9 p.m. TUESDAY: 8-11 a.m.

SPECIAL FEATURES

Concert with Diane Susek, Friday, September 7, at 7:30 p.m. in Statesman Hall.

Update on the Jerusalem Assembly with Pastor Meno Kalisher, Saturday, September 8, at 10 a.m.

Golf Outing Saturday, September 8, Tee Time 1:15 p.m.

Focus on Israel Night, Monday, September 10, at 6:45 p.m. with Israeli Colonel Benzi Gruber.

Special Seminars, Tuesday, September 11 from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. with Peter Colón.

DIANE SUSEK

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