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You’re invited to join us for our 75th Anniversary Celebration Dinner!

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We hope you will join us to celebrate 75 years of God’s faithfulness!
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About the Cover

In days of old, when a Jewish Temple stood on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, Passover was a holiday of sacrifice. People brought their paschal lambs, which had to be without spot or blemish, to the altar in the only city where God had chosen to place His name. Passover was one of three holidays requiring Jewish people to go up to Jerusalem. The others were the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost, Shavuot in Hebrew) and Tabernacles (Sukkot in Hebrew). Perhaps the fields in those days looked something like our cover by Israeli photographer Hanan Isachar. A shepherd tends his flock of sheep and goats in Israel’s Sharon region. (Hanan Isachar/Hanan Isachar Photography)

Also Featuring

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The super-sized, thousand-mile-wide Hurricane Sandy set its sights directly at us here in southern New Jersey. I witnessed God’s incredible power on display as trees swayed back and forth in 75-mile-per-hour gusts and rain pelted the windows. The roar of the wind sounded like a jet taking off. It was impressive!

I couldn’t help but feel surrounded, with nowhere to turn. No way to avoid the unavoidable. Sandy was upon me, and I had to go through it. It reminded me that my security is entirely in God’s hands. Though that fact is true all the time, it is in moments of trial that we see it most clearly.

Just the previous week, I had returned from our October tour to Israel, which reminded me how isolated the tiny Jewish state really is. Surrounded by enemies both internally and externally, Israel has nowhere to turn to avoid the people who want to wipe it off the map.

In the town of Ariel, in biblical Samaria, we saw the Israelis’ determined struggle to live a life of high values amid opposition from Arab terrorists and negative world opinion. They live on land they purchased that was never occupied by Arabs and is part of God’s land covenant with Israel.

On the mountainous border of Lebanon, at Kibbutz Misgav Am, we heard of Hezbollah’s massive stockpiling of missiles. We looked down on the Hezbollah villages below, where Israel’s enemies are poised to strike at any moment. The homes have no glass in the windows so they can readily fire on Misgav Am.

At the Syrian border, we looked up the road toward Damascus and grasped how close Israel lies to Syria’s capital. We spoke to many Israelis who worry about Iran developing nuclear weapons and launching them against Israel.

Living in such a difficult neighborhood, Israel finds itself isolated. And apart from the United States and Canada, it receives condemnation, rather than support, from the nations of the world. We know Israel’s security is in God’s hands, and God has promised Israel will not disappear unless the universe does (Jer. 31). But this promise doesn’t mean Israel won’t experience difficult days.

A memorable moment on our tour occurred at Masada, King Herod’s massive mountaintop fortress at the southern part of the Dead Sea. Masada is another reminder of Israel’s struggle to live in its Promised Land. The Romans sent an entire legion to defeat 1,000 Jewish rebels who occupied the fortress in A.D. 70. But the Jewish people chose to take their own lives rather than surrender.

There is an ancient synagogue atop Masada that we see each time we visit. In a side room we met Rabbi Louis, a modern-day rabbi who painstakingly copies Old Testament scrolls much like the scribes did in biblical times.

Rabbi Louis was pleased to have guests, and he took the time to explain the careful process of copying the Scriptures onto parchment scrolls using ink and quill.

When he learned we were a group from The Friends of Israel, he was excited to know more about us. He had never heard of The Friends of Israel and was grateful to meet Christian Zionists. I was able to share about our worldwide ministry and how it came into existence in 1938, 10 years before the birth of the modern State of Israel.

He was so moved to know that, despite being surrounded by enemies that so vehemently oppose Israel, Israel is not alone. The Jewish people have Christian friends who stand with and support them.

It made me appreciate how God is using Christian Zionists—Christians who believe the Jewish people have a God-given right to exist as a sovereign nation in the Promised Land—to encourage and bless His Chosen People.

God led a group of godly men to found The Friends of Israel 75 years ago, and today He uses our worldwide ministry to bless Israel. He does it through you and me—all of us who stand with the Jewish nation. Though Israel’s back is continually against the wall, it is an encouragement for Israelis to know they are not alone.

Rabbi Louis was so touched by our visit that he wrote a blessing for us in Hebrew and gave it to me. Miriam, our guide, translated it: “And all the nations of the earth shall know that Your name is upon them.” He said it was his prayer that God will bless The Friends of Israel around the world to continue its important work of standing with Israel. To that I say, “Amen!”

James A. Showers is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
In November 2012 the Czech Republic voted against a UN resolution to make “Palestine” a non-Member Observer State. It was the sole European country—and one of only nine (Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Panama, Palau, United States)—to do so.

Nevertheless, the resolution passed easily with 138 yes votes and 41 abstentions. The Czech Foreign Ministry said it voted no because “it might further delay peace talks” between Israelis and Palestinians. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas pushed hard for this resolution and has shunned direct talks for some time.

In thanking Czech Prime Minister Petr Nečas for his country’s support, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, “I know that your country has learned the lessons of history.”

The lessons occurred in 1938, shortly before World War II. In May 2012, the then 47-year-old Czech prime minister told The Jerusalem Post, “We’ve got a special feeling for Israel’s situation—that of a small nation surrounded by enemies. We remember our situation in the 1930s, when the small democratic Czechoslovakia had neighbors that wanted to destroy or take part of our territory.”

Nečas knew his country had watched helplessly as France and Great Britain negotiated away Czechoslovakia’s security in the name of peace. Czechoslovakia was created in 1919 with the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I. Carved from the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovakia was comprised of several nationalities, including approximately 3 million Germans who lived in the area known as the Sudetenland. Though Czech citizens, they were Germans first.

As a result, most of them joined the Sudeten German Party that was formed in 1933. As Adolf Hitler gained power, he encouraged and empowered the German People’s Party to demand the Sudetenland become part of the Third Reich. The Czech government staunchly refused. The Sudetenland was a vital geographic area, rich in natural resources and strategic for Czechoslovakia’s security. Yet, immediately after Germany annexed Austria with little world reaction in March 1938, Hitler announced his intention to do the same with the Sudetenland.

The Czechs were willing to defend their turf but counted on their agreement with Great Britain and France to help them avoid military conflict. However, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain wanted peace and believed he could achieve it by talking face-to-face with Hitler.

Disregarding the Czech government, Chamberlain met with Hitler three times to discuss a peaceful solution. The final meeting (the Munich Conference) included Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany. These countries agreed to transfer the Sudetenland to Germany, reneging on their treaty with Czechoslovakia. Believing his piece of paper would bring peace, Chamberlain arrived back in London where he stood before a large, cheering crowd at Buckingham Palace and told the British, “Go home and sleep quietly in your beds.”

Unfortunately, that “quiet sleep” did not last long. Hitler regarded that piece of paper so cherished by Chamberlain as nothing more than scrap. After Germany received the Sudetenland in October 1938, the Nazis marched into Prague, Czechoslovakia, five months later. Within another six months, World War II began.

Clearly, Petr Nečas understands what 18th-century British statesman Edmund Burke once said: “Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it.”

Seventy-five years ago, France and Great Britain consorted with Germany and gave away Czechoslovakia’s national security. In November 2012, 179 nations were willing to give away Israel’s.

Seventy-five years ago, France and Great Britain ignored their treaty and threw the Czechs under the proverbial bus. In November, the UN ignored all previous international agreements that call for direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians and threw Israel under the bus.

Seventy-five years ago, alone in the world, Czechoslovakia was forced to comply with the will of its neighbors, resulting in Nazi occupation. Today the world wants Israel to comply with the will of its neighbors, which would result in the Jewish state’s demise.

However, God has a promise for Israel: “He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them” (Dt. 4:31). It is good to know God has raised up the Czechs to remind Israel He is faithful.
The Romans Are Back

Travelers standing atop the fortress Masada in the Judean wilderness and looking a dizzying 1,000 feet down to the desert floor become instantly aware of a stunning, historical panorama. Ringing the plateau is an ancient wall (the remains of Roman siege camps) and a huge ramp built by attacking legionnaires to dislodge the last holdouts of the Jewish rebellion against the Roman Empire in A.D. 70.

For centuries the winds above the summit seemed to whisper the words never again. Sixty or 70 years ago, those words would have burned in the minds of those who surveyed the sobering scene; and the world would have echoed its near unanimous approval. Now, however, the winds have shifted. In a manner of speaking, the Romans are back.

This time they do not use catapults, stones, swords, and spears. They use rockets, explosives, and automatic weapons; and they are hostile regimes bent on finishing what their ancient compatriots started.

Consider. Egypt is in the hands of terrorists tethered to Hamas fanatics. At the rate things are going, feckless Western leaders are all but handing Iran the time it needs to get the bomb, with its announced first drop on Tel Aviv, Israel.

The recent Syrian rebellion prompted Israel to build another wall to circumvent the attacks that will come if jihadist forces there take over the government. The Middle East, in fact, looks like an Israeli fortress surrounded by the same minds that have perpetually called for liquidating the Jewish people. The difference between today and the year 70 is only a matter of altitude. At ground level, everything else looks the same.

Here’s a question that begs an answer: If the UN were to vote today on the same resolution it passed on November 29, 1947, giving the Jewish people the land for their national home, would the vote turn out the same? The answer is an emphatic NO. If the vote were today, you can be sure there would be no sovereign State of Israel.

Is a nation’s survival to be decided by corrupt assemblies dominated by hostile people with their own agendas?

What has changed? The vast majority of self-indulgent leaders and Westerners have chosen to forget what Israel’s enemies have vowed to remember: their hatred of the Jewish people and their determination to eliminate them.

Do the words never again have any contemporary meaning? Is a nation’s survival to be decided by corrupt assemblies dominated by hostile people with their own agendas?

There is much to be said about the price paid by those who have done the right thing, rather than bend to opinion polls or opt for the comfort of being in the popular loop. Those who paid that price are people whose determination has stood the test of time and whose courage has passed on to us the greatest period of peace, prosperity, and personal freedom known on this planet.

The good news is that, while the siege engines and the ancient operators are no more, Israel is alive and well. That fact will not change and is the eternal message for all pretenders with bad intentions. When they are gone and forgotten—meaningless footnotes to history—little Israel will still be standing. It’s written in the Book, and history has consistently uttered a confirming amen.
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The Changing Face of America

Religion
Minus God
Atheism
Agnosticism

(Family, Piotr Wawrzyniuk/Fotolia. Scale, Alex Slobodkin/iStockphoto.
Digital composition and enhancement, Thomas E. Williams.)
Drive through almost any town in America on a Sunday morning and you’ll see church parking lots filled with cars. Yet a cultural revolution is taking place that defies everything many of those churches have believed and accepted as true and moral for more than two centuries.

A militant minority is waging all-out war on God and Christianity, and it seems to be winning. Atheists continually beat the drum for a godless society, ridiculing Christian beliefs and heaping contempt on anyone who rejects their philosophy. The result is a society in chaos and possibly on the verge of collapse.

Ironically, a secular commentator took it upon himself to ask why most Christians aren’t rising up against the religious bigots bent on destroying the moral and spiritual fiber of America. Why the virtual silence by those most affected and having the most to lose if the radical fringe’s secular paganism becomes the religion of the nation?

**Religion Minus God**

Regardless of protestations to the contrary, atheism is a form of religion. While true Christianity centers on faith in Christ, atheism (along with agnosticism) worships nothing. It is a fable faith in which every individual (in practice) fabricates gods of his or her own making.

Atheists even proselytize, but with a unique twist: They force entire communities or people groups to bow to their beliefs or suffer the legal consequences. Often a single atheist’s complaint of being personally aggrieved over some Christian artifact, display, or celebration prompts a compliant judge to scorn the will and traditions of the majority in favor of one person. Forcing their unbelief on others appears to be the atheists’ sacred commitment. They brook no opposition, leave no room for the philosophy of live and let live, and are determined to search and destroy everything connected with God.

Perhaps a participant on a television talk show said it best. “I like Christmas,” she exclaimed. “I just don’t like the religious part of it.”

**Separation Versus Integration**

Among the most debilitating offenses of the ancient Israelites was their desire to become like the nations around them. Their clamoring for a king resulted in Saul’s disastrous tenure as Israel’s first monarch. This was, of course, not the end of the story. But in every generation, believers are pressured to become less conspicuous as people whose distinction is separation from corrupt cultures and lifestyles.

Forgotten in today’s rush toward assimilation and acceptability is the fact that the early church triumphed over paganism by being different. *Separation* is a word that has become virtually extinct in the current evangelical lexicon. Sadly, it mistakenly has been paired with *legalism*.

In reality, the early church’s appeal lay in the willingness of believers to forfeit their lives, rather than capitulate to the conformists and adopt the mores of the godless societies around them. The early Christians demonstrated an unquenchable commitment to Christ above all. It was the strength of their witness and steadfast devotion that changed the world. Their monotheism, fidelity in marriage, insistence on truth as the standard of living, and refusal to be inclusivists by endorsing the worship of mythological gods set them apart as immovable believers.

They refused to adopt a posture of “your god may be as good as mine” in order to fit in. Had early church leaders played along and condoned popular heathen practices and deities, the result would certainly have been the death of Christianity. The current fascination that significant segments of the evangelical community seem to have with compromising biblical essentials is extremely dangerous. The “if you can’t beat them, join them” strategy contradicts Christ’s teaching. Jesus said,

> If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (Jn. 15:18–19).

Too many religious advocates of change are more interested in becoming socially accepted than in staying true to Scripture. This turn in the road has many evangelicals on a spiritually slippery slope. They evidence more play than pray; they mute the clear imperative of the gospel of Christ, lest it offends; they embrace inclusivism, claiming a newfound understanding of a more universal brotherhood. These are concepts never dreamed of by our spiritual forebears; and unless they are corrected, much of contemporary evangelicalism is in peril.

On his blog, georgebarna.com, author and researcher George Barna made an astute observation in 2011 concerning where the current course can take us:

> Overall, the picture is not pretty though it falls somewhat short of disaster. If existing tendencies continue, then we will likely see an increase in the numbers of people who do not accept a conventional definition of God’s character and those who reject the accuracy of the principles taught in the scriptures.

Conformists believe relationships, camaraderie, and affability will lead people to Christ. It’s a sort of salvation by osmosis. In their view, redemption will be subjectively induced without verbal definition.
The problem is, it doesn’t work that way. Jesus’ command to preach the gospel to a lost and dying world is an absolute, not an option. We can and should be pleasant folk, but you can’t smile people into heaven. Remove the message of life-transforming salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and there is nothing left but another emaciated religious faction.

The Irony of Exclusion

Something telling is happening in America. Clearly, some people have a compulsion to establish harmonious relationships through assimilation—a sort of peace through compromise. The idea seems to be that, by becoming more like the world, the world can be changed for the better. Yet ironically, for all of the budding up being done by Christian leaders, the world says, “We only want you on our terms; otherwise, please leave.”

Look around. See what happens when a prayer in Jesus’ name is offered in public. Then ask yourself how many times you have heard His name taken in vain publicly. When have you heard the same disrespect spewed in the name of any other religious figure, such as Muhammad or Buddha? Listen to what the neopagans say to us, in and out of the courts.

No longer is there any doubt that conservative Christianity is on trial as an evil that must be purged from American life. Though certain elements in society may tolerate virtually any other religion, cult, or even subversive set on destroying the country, they will not tolerate vibrant, Christ-honoring Christianity.

Like it or not, America is changing. But we have a sure hope. God is neither dead nor off course in His plan for His people. Megachurches may fall by the wayside, deductions for charitable contributions may go by the boards, and we may someday join our brethren in other countries who endure physical persecution. These things all may happen, but they also will clarify one thing: in whom you have placed your faith—in Christ or in a comfortable, politically endorsed, present-tense experience. The true church will endure; governments may or may not. A personal relationship with Jesus Christ is for time and eternity. All other accommodation will end upon our departure from this life.

Frances Jane “Fanny” Crosby, beloved hymn writer of another era, wrote, “Take the world, but give me Jesus.” For her, everything began and ended in Him. A friend of hers once commented that it was a pity God had given her so many wonderful attributes, yet had not bestowed on her the gift of sight. Fanny was blind her entire life.

Yet she told her friend, “Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I should be born blind?”

“But why?” asked her friend.

“Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior!”

Jesus said, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33). The gospel of Christ is what matters. It’s real, it’s personal, it’s imperishable, it’s all about Jesus, and it’s nonnegotiable.

Elwood McQuaid is consulting editor for The Friends of Israel.
Christians are targeted for persecution more than any other religious group in the world. And if something isn’t done soon to stem the situation in the Middle East, Christianity may disappear from there entirely. A 54-page report, Christianophobia by Rupert Shortt, published in December 2012 in Great Britain (available online at www.civitas.org.uk/pdf/Shortt_Christianophobia.pdf) blames Muslim-majority nations for the “lion’s share” of the persecution. The report delves extensively into Christianity’s plight in seven countries:

- **Iraq**, where the number of Christians has dropped from 1.4 million in 1990 to fewer than 200,000 today.
- **Pakistan**, where Muslims routinely and falsely accuse Christians of blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad and then torture, imprison, and/or kill them.
- **Nigeria**, where “an orgy of violence at Christmas, 2010 . . . is an image of the country’s chronic sectarian problems.” Since the institution of Sharia law, 60,000 people, mostly Christians, have died.
- **India**, where “between August and October of 2008, the eastern state of Orissa in India saw the worst outbreak of brutality against Christians since Independence.” Hindus have murdered 90 people, “displaced at least 50,000 more from their homes, and attacked about 170 churches and chapels. The victims included Hindus who had tried to defend their Christian neighbours.”
- **Burma**, where there is a “catastrophic human rights record,” and “government clampdowns have been draconian.”
- **China**, where there are 23 million “registered” Protestants and 50 million to 60 million unregistered. “More Christians are imprisoned in China than in any other country in the world.” They are also sent into forced labor in “re-education” camps.
- **Egypt**, actually listed first in Shortt’s list, where Christian Copts face increasing persecution since President Mohammed Morsi has instituted Sharia law.

In Egypt the situation worsens almost daily. Raymond Ibrahim, a specialist on Islam and the Middle East with the David Horowitz Freedom Center and Middle East Forum, reported on his website (raymondibrahim.com) in December 2012 that a Muslim Egyptian cleric is threatening the Copts with genocide:

> Dr. Wagdi Ghoneim—who earlier praised Allah for the death of the late Coptic Pope Shenouda, cursing him to hell and damnation on video—made another video entitled, “A Notice and Warning to the Crusaders in Egypt,” a reference to the nation’s Copts, which he began by saying, “You are playing with fire in Egypt, I swear, the first people to be burned by the fire are you [Copts].” The video was made in the context of the Tahrir protests against Morsi: Islamic leaders, such as Hegazy and Ghoneim, seek to portray the Copts as dominant elements in those protests; according to them, no real Muslim would participate. Ghoneim even went on to say that most of the people at the protests were Copts, “and we know you hid your [wrist] crosses by lowering your sleeves.”

> The heart of Ghoneim’s message was genocidal. “The day Egyptians—and I don’t even mean the Muslim Brotherhood or Salafis, regular Egyptians—feel that you are against them, you will be wiped off the face of the earth. I’m warning you now: do not play with fire!”

Ibrahim pointed out that Ghoneim compared the Christian Copts to animals and addressed all Egypt’s Christians as Crusaders, “once again showing Islam’s simplistic, black-and-white vision, which clumps all Christians—of all nations, past and present, regardless of historical context and denomination—as one, in accordance with an Islamic tradition that states ‘All infidels are one religion.’”

Ghoneim also mocked America, Ibrahim said:

> “What do you think—that America will protect you? Let’s be very clear, America will not protect you. If so, it would have protected the Christians of Iraq when they were being butchered!”—a reference to the fact that, after the U.S. ousted Saddam Hussein, half of Iraq’s Christian population has either been butchered or fled the nation, and all under U.S. auspices.

On the other side of the coin, Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice in Washington, DC, told The Jerusalem Post Israel is the “most free and protective of religious liberty for Christians” of all the region’s nations.
How It All Began
Of all the Passovers that have ever been celebrated, only one was the actual Passover. It took place more than 34 centuries ago when the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was preparing to free His Chosen People from slavery in Egypt.

The Lord had sent Moses and his brother, Aaron, to Pharaoh to demand the Israelites be allowed to go into the desert to worship Him. Pharaoh refused. So God assaulted Egypt with nine devastating plagues. Yet Pharaoh still refused.

Then the Lord told Moses, “I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh and on Egypt. Afterward he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, you will surely drive you out of here altogether” (Ex. 11:1).

God, as always, did as He promised. The tenth plague is the key to the holiday of Passover because it involves the paschal lamb.

The tenth plague was the death of all firstborn males, both human and animal. And unlike the previous nine plagues—which never affected Goshen, where the Israelites lived—this plague would affect everyone.

The Lord also used the tenth plague to teach the Israelites the biblical principle of redemption through a substitute. He told Moses, “Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine” (13:2). If the Israelites failed to follow God’s instructions, these firstborn males would die, along with those of the Egyptians.

God told the Israelites to choose a young male lamb or goat (one per family) on the tenth day of the month of Nisan and observe their lambs for three days to ensure they were “without blemish” (12:5). Then, on “the fourteenth day of the same month . . . the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it” (vv. 6–7).

The Lord also told them, “Eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs. . . . Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire” (vv. 8–9).

God was not interested in their personal preferences on food preparation. The lambs were to be prepared His way only, and nothing of the animals was to remain. “What remains of [them] until morning you shall burn with fire” (v. 10).

That night, with the blood on their doorposts, the Jewish people sat in their homes and ate the Passover lamb. They were not to go outside. When God saw the blood, He protected them from the destroyer who passed through the land at midnight (12:29). Where there was no blood, the firstborn males in every household in Egypt, including Pharaoh’s, died.

The judgment gave victory to the God of Israel and exposed the impotence of Egypt’s idols and false deities.

The key elements of the original Passover were the roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread. Today’s seders are very different. The lamb is replaced by a shank bone of a lamb, called a zerah in Hebrew. The bitter herbs remain, as does the unleavened bread (matzoh). But other elements have been added, and the holiday has morphed from a somber time of dread into a joyous celebration of deliverance.

Passover’s main message, of course, is redemption. It is about God’s plan to redeem Israel from slavery. But it contains wonderful parallels to Christianity:

(1) The lamb was observed for three days to make sure it was perfect, without defect. Jesus was carefully observed during His three years of ministry on Earth and was pronounced not guilty by Roman prefect Pontius Pilate, who declared, “I find no fault in Him” (Jn. 19:6). John the Baptist, a Levite, said of Jesus, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (1.29).

(2) Immediately following Passover is the seven-day feast of Unleavened Bread. In the Bible, leaven represents sin. So for these seven days, observant Jewish people abstain from eating all products containing a leavening agent, such as yeast. Scripture teaches that Jesus, the God-Man, was perfect—without defect, without sin—making Him the perfect sacrifice for a holy and righteous God.

(3) Finally, there is the holiday of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:9–14). According to the Bible, it was to be observed “on the day after the Sabbath” (v. 11). Though there is some disagreement concerning what that instruction means, Firstfruits nevertheless clearly falls during Passover. In Christianity, it is associated with the resurrection of Christ. As the apostle Paul wrote, “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive (1 Cor. 15:20–22).

Though Passover today differs substantially from the original observance, it still points clearly to God’s profound love for Israel and His physical deliverance of the Jewish people. It also is a beautiful picture of His love for all mankind through His provision of Jesus, the ultimate Passover Lamb, whose death and resurrection provide spiritual deliverance from the bondage of sin to all who put their faith in Him.
The Four Cups

As we sat around the Passover table, my host took us back in time to the days when his grandfather conducted wonderful seders that would last for hours. He spoke of the special dinnerware his family used, some of which was now on our table; the extensive housecleaning; and the hours of food shopping and preparation.

He told us of the candles, stories, four questions, the place set for the prophet Elijah, the songs, and—of course—the food. The look in his eyes and the tone of his voice told us these were fond, fond memories.

That seder, though not my first, was a special occasion for me. I grew up in a Christian, rather than a Jewish, home. Although I attended good Bible-believing churches my entire life, graduated from seminary, and planted the church I now pastor, I received little theological training about the important biblical holiday of Passover. Yet Passover is as important for Christians as it is for Jewish people because it is a clear and beautiful picture of God’s plan of redemption for all mankind.

My dear friend Tom Simcox, with The Friends of Israel, led me through my first seder many years ago. Since then, I have led them at my church for more than a decade and have seen how they have blessed us all.

Seder is a Hebrew word meaning “order” and usually refers to the service conducted at the dinner table. Each participant follows along in a Haggadah, a booklet that contains the seder service. It tells the
story of the first Passover under Moses (Ex. 12) and includes songs and prayers. It also includes a requirement to drink four cups of wine (or grape juice). The four cups are a vital part of the dinner and one of the most important aspects of the seder. They correspond to four “I wills” God promised the Jewish people in Exodus 6:

1. “I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (v. 6).
2. “I will rescue you from their bondage” (v. 6).
3. “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments” (v. 6).
4. “I will take you as My people, and I will be your God” (v. 7).

The four cups acknowledge the fact that God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt. Together they comprise a step-by-step memorial of that great event and the anticipation of one event yet to come.

**The First Cup.** This is the Cup of Sanctification. It is consumed early in the meal. Sanctification means “set apart.” Jewish people acknowledge, remember, and praise God that He selected, exalted, and set them apart by giving them His commandments. A prayer of praise is offered before the cup is drunk.

In Hebrew, the word for “sanctification” is kiddush. So the cup has become known as the Kiddush Cup. It is used to sanctify (set apart) every Sabbath, as well as Passover, and reminds the Jewish people God has set them apart from all other nations.

**The Second Cup.** This is the Cup of Praise. After the story of the Exodus—the ultimate account of liberation from slavery—is read, the Cup of Praise is drunk with a prayer of praise to God for being the constant source of deliverance in every generation of Jewish history. He is praised for rescuing His people from Egypt, as well as from Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Assyria, Rome, and all other foreign countries. From Abraham to today, God has delivered His people from their enemies.

**The Third Cup.** This is the Cup of Redemption. It is drunk after the meal and after the afikomen is found. (See

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**I**f you’re conducting a Passover seder demonstration for a large group, it’s efficient to set the tables as pictured above. Although this isn’t how an authentic Jewish seder would look, the setup works well for teaching purposes and saves loads of time.

At each seat, place a plate containing the key elements: horseradish, charoset, a fourth of a hardboiled egg, and parsley. Each place setting also gets four small cups already filled with grape juice. Several other cups contain salt water. We’ve found it best to label those “salt water” so no one attempts to drink them. Also place on each table one or two baskets of matzohs that have been broken into roughly the size of saltine crackers.

At an authentic seder, everyone receives a Haggadah, the booklet used to conduct the service. That way people can follow along, recite the prayers, and sing the songs. As the leader explains the meaning of each seder item, participants follow his directions and partake of the elements. Conducting a seder demonstration this way allows everyone to take part and makes the best use of time because nothing has to be passed around the table.

Passover is truly a wonderful Jewish holiday, filled with significance. Understanding it should illuminate the unbreakable bond between Judaism and Christianity. We wish all our Jewish friends a very Happy Passover.
If you enjoy our column “Zvi” in Israel My Glory magazine, you’ll love this book.

The Fourth Cup. Everyone partakes of this cup near the end of the dinner. It is called the Cup of Acceptance or the Cup of Anticipation and celebrates the relationship God desires with His Chosen People.

This is the cup the Lord Jesus used to symbolize the ratification of the New Covenant and to institute communion. He did not drink it Himself, however, but said He will drink it when the Messianic Kingdom is established:

Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (Mt. 26:27–29).

Each time we celebrate the Lord’s supper in church and partake of the communion cup, we memorialize the Lord’s sacrifice of Himself as the Passover Lamb of God.

Too few churches today understand the significance of this beautiful Jewish holiday. I highly recommend churches hold a seder every now and then. Not only does it help Christians learn more about biblical Jewish history and culture, but it also helps them understand more about what it truly means to be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

Robert J. Stahler
is the pastor of Great Commission Baptist Church in Cape May Court House, New Jersey.
For several years Google has displayed on YouTube, its Internet video platform, an end-of-the-year review in images, photographs, and news footage designed to illustrate what people are looking for when they log on to Google.

Not surprisingly, Google spared no expense in constructing the video last year. A soaring musical score accompanied a visually stunning review—not of the topics that garnered the most “hits,” but, rather, a collage of subjects that generated the fastest-growing trend of searches. In other words, Google showed us the people and events that sparked the most phenomenal rise in spontaneous and consistent curiosity among the planet’s Internet users in 2012.

Topping the list were searches involving celebrity tragedy (Whitney Houston), trivial music fads (the ultra-silly Asian dance craze “Gangnam Style”), natural disasters (Hurricane Sandy), our obsession with new technology (the iPad 3), more celebrities of the royal type (Kate Middleton), and sporting events (the London Olympics).

The review, “Zeitgeist 2012,” employs the German word meaning “spirit of the age.” After all, when certain videos go viral on YouTube, the only explanation for their gathering millions of hits is that we are influenced by the trending opinions of others who are basically telling us, “You’ve got to see this!”

People are definitely swept along by the fads and trends of the day, most of which have no intrinsic or lasting value. We follow them for no other reason than they are, well, trendy.

But other Web searches on Google are of a different sort. Apparently we are interested in natural disasters, for example, because they impact us or those we love. They also evoke fear and awe, elements the ancient Greeks knew made for good tragedy or drama—or in Google’s case, a compelling Web search.

And there are still other types of searches. For several years, Google conducted a search of its own called Google Street View. It is an ambitious project through which the digital-media giant tries to photograph and make available on the Web pictures of every house and every street on planet Earth. If successful, it will obviously aid Google’s well-known desire to become the foremost repository of the world’s information. Its dominance of the information market would become complete and certainly boost its profits, which is the legitimate aim of every business venture.

Ironically, though, Google’s search for information has met with some roadblocks. It appears the company did not like the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) conducting a search of its own into Google’s Street View project. Last year the FCC fined Google for obstructing the investigation. A Swiss court has ordered Google to modify its effort.

As it turned out, in the process of roving through streets with its specially equipped “Google cars,” Google was obtaining electronic information from some of those homes—including computer passwords and private e-mails—a search result Google said was inadvertent.

Google and modern technology notwithstanding, the most important search we can conduct is one that has ancient roots and eternal ramifications. In the first century, Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Mt. 7:7–8).

Jesus was talking about a search that begins in the heart and seeks a connection with the living God. For such a search, the heart must be open, honest, and willing. The Lord Jesus addressed the religious leaders of His day who had performed a perfunctory search for God but studiously avoided the obvious destination to which they were being led: “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (Jn. 5:39–40).

Information is important. And Web searches will continue to be a handy resource to gather data from the trivial to the sublime. But for the truly searching soul, the Word of God, which proclaims Christ as the centerpiece of God’s redemptive plan, is the ultimate “search engine.”

The Bible contains what is able to make us “wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). Google’s search engine may have given us the “spirit of the age,” but Scripture reveals the Spirit of God. Only the latter answers not only our searches, but also searches and discerns “the thoughts and intents” of our hearts (Heb. 4:12).

Craig L. Parshall is senior vice president and general counsel for the National Religious Broadcasters.
My favorite dish, though, was Grandma’s homemade matzoh ball soup with its perfect balance of chicken and seasoning and exactly the right-sized, dumpling-like matzoh balls. Of course, before that was served, the slimy gefilte fish with horseradish made its appearance on a bed of lettuce. Some people loved it. I was not a fan.

Passover is a sacred time of remembrance. But it is also a joyous time for getting together with family and friends.

Sweet treats and wonderful aromas always awaited me at my grandmother’s home on Passover. Even today, I have vivid memories of delectable chocolate-raspberry jelly rings and soft coconut macaroons.
to celebrate God’s deliverance of His people from the harsh hand of the Egyptians more than 3,400 years ago.

The holiday traditionally lasts for eight days, with a seder on the first and second nights. This year the first seder is on March 25. The modern observance involves much preparation, and there are many tasks that can involve everyone.

Special dishes and silverware, reserved for Passover alone, are brought out of storage. Besides the regular housecleaning, Jewish families purge their homes of all leaven—products containing yeast. Traditionally, a family will go through the house with a wooden spoon, feather, and a lit wax candle looking for any crumbs containing leaven. Usually a few cracker crumbs are left behind on purpose for the children to find. When they spot the crumbs, they sweep them onto the spoon with the feather and take them outside to be burned. Sometimes bread and other yeast products are given or sold to Gentile neighbors until Passover has ended.

No yeast products are to be eaten during Passover week. Jewish children can sometimes be spotted at school eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on matzoh instead of bread.

Seder guests sit at the dinner table and follow a booklet called a Haggadah, which means “showing forth.” Since it is a holiday to remember and teach the next generation about God’s deliverance of His people, children are deeply involved in the celebration. The youngest child asks the famous Four Questions to the seder leader:

(1) Why is this night different from all other nights? On all other nights we eat either leavened bread or matzoh, but on this night we eat only matzoh.

(2) On all other nights we eat vegetables and herbs of all kinds. Why on this night do we eat bitter herbs especially?

(3) On all other nights, we never think of dipping even once. Why on this night do we dip twice?

(4) On all other nights, everyone sits up straight at the table. Why on this night do we all recline?

Then the leader answers from the Haggadah. In her article “Making Passover Fun” at education.com, Lisa M. Cope offers suggestions for making the seder more enjoyable for youngsters by using “kid-friendly haggadahs” and stocking the table “with finger puppets or props for all of the ten plagues.”

This is the one night where children are even allowed to put their fingers into their drinks. As the leader recites the plagues one by one, everyone dips his little finger into his cup, placing a drop of juice or wine on his plate. When the recitation is over, the 10 spots on each plate become an object lesson.

There are many items to taste at the Passover table to help Jewish people remember their heritage in order to keep it alive through the generations. Parsley dipped in salt water symbolizes the tears shed as slaves. More horseradish is available to try with the matzoh. This, too, serves as a reminder of the bitterness the Israelites endured. Eating the charoset, a mixture of apples and honey, is always a treat and serves as a reminder of the sweetness of freedom when Pharaoh finally let God’s people go.

Of course, it wouldn’t be a Jewish holiday without music. Lively Hebrew music, such as “Dayenu,” which means “for that alone we would be satisfied,” is sung at the table.

The highlight of the evening for the children, though, is the search for the afikomen. Earlier in the evening, the seder leader hides a wrapped piece of matzoh. (See “The Marvelous Afikomen” on page 28.) After the meal, the children are dismissed to find it. It is entertaining for the adults to watch them search, and it is fun for the children to know that whoever finds the afikomen can redeem it for a prize, usually money.

The actual dinner is a wonderful event. My grandmother always made chicken, potatoes, and green beans.
We even got our own can of soda. Of that, I was a big fan!

Based on the Hebrew Scriptures, Jewish people believe the prophet Elijah will announce the coming of the Messiah: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5). So each year at seder tables around the world, a place is set for Elijah in hopes that he will come. At a point in the festivities, a child is sent to open the front door to see if Elijah is there. A hearty verse of “Eliyahu Hanavi” (Elijah the Prophet) is then sung.

For dessert, there are more candy jelly rings, as well as chocolate and coconut macaroons. Sesame candy is a favorite for some; and sweet honey cake, pound cake, or apple cake (all made without leavening) is often served.

When the time came to go home from the seder, my grandmother would slip each of my siblings and me a fresh dollar bill and a box of Chiclets. We’d say our goodnights and agree on how nice it would be for our seder to take place “Next year in Jerusalem!”

Bonnie Pearson is a field representative with The Friends of Israel in New Jersey.

How to Make Charoset

Charoset (also spelled haroset) is a mixture of apples, nuts, honey, and a little cinnamon. It is one of the elements on the seder plate, symbolizing the mortar the Israelites used to build bricks when they were slaves in Egypt.

During the seder, each participant makes a small matzoh sandwich of bitter herbs (horseradish) and charoset. The tradition began with Rabbi Hillel (110 B.C.–A.D. 10), who said Passover was not fully celebrated unless the bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and lamb were eaten together. After the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, ending the sacrificing of lambs, the sandwich became charoset and bitter herbs.

The bittersweet taste is intended to teach the bitterness of bondage and the sweetness of freedom.

The following recipe will make 15 tablespoons. Serving size is one tablespoon per person:

1 large apple, any variety
1/2 cup chopped nuts
2 tablespoons honey
1 tsp cinnamon
small amount of lemon juice (optional)

The easiest method is to put the apples and nuts into a food processor and pulse until finely diced. Sprinkle enough lemon juice on the mixture to keep the apples from turning brown. Then mix in the other ingredients. Some people also mix in a little grape juice or wine.

The nice thing about charoset is that the measurements do not have to be exact, so nothing is really ever wrong.
I f there is one Passover food that can present a dining challenge, it would be matzoh, or unleavened bread. Though it really shines at breakfast when combined with eggs to make one of my wife’s favorites, fried matzoh, it makes a messy sandwich. The boards break easily, and she tells me it was no fun eating tuna salad or peanut butter on matzoh during Passover when she was growing up. Exactly why do Jewish people avoid leaven (yeast) for these eight days?

First, God commanded it. The Israelites were to eat the Passover lamb “with unleavened bread” (Ex. 12:8). They also were to remove all leaven from their homes and eat unleavened bread for an additional seven days: “On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel” (v. 15).

The Hebrew word for “leaven” is hametz. Observant Jewish people around the world literally remove all hametz from their premises. Some even will sell their baked goods to a Gentile friend and buy them back after the holiday.

Second, the Jewish people “came out of the land of Egypt in haste” (Dt. 16:3) and had no time to wait for their bread to rise. So the holiday commemorates the Exodus with unleavened bread.

However, another plausible reason why leaven is forbidden is because God often associates it with sin. Jesus told His disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” (Mt. 16:6). The disciples did not immediately grasp that He was speaking of the religious leaders’ doctrine, which was characterized by sin and hypocrisy. Jesus later told the Pharisees, “For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves” (23:15).

Jesus wanted His followers to be different. He wanted them to be holy. Later in the New Testament, the apostle Paul (also Jewish) wrote to the church at Corinth: “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6). A tiny package of yeast can produce two large loaves of bread. Leaven permeates the other ingredients, begins to ferment, and expands. Sin is similar. It begins small, like a little germ or infection, then grows bigger and bigger. In many cases, it can totally overtake an individual.

God required His people to eat unleavened bread for eight days to remind them that they were to be separate from the world. God had redeemed them from bondage in Egypt via the 10 plagues. Then He commanded Israel, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). He also told them, “I am the LORD, I do not change” (Mal. 3:6).

He is the same “yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8) and still desires holiness from those who are called by His name.

by Thomas C. Simcox, Church Ministries staffing coordinator for The Friends of Israel
"Then the Lord spoke to Moses, 'Say to Aaron, "Take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in buckets of wood and pitchers of stone" (7:19).

“Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your rod over the streams, over the rivers, and over the ponds, and cause frogs to come up on the land of Egypt.’ So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt” (8:5–6).

“Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your rod, and strike the dust of the land, so that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt.' . . . The dust of the earth . . . became lice on man and beast. All the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt” (8:16–17). Note: The Hebrew word can mean lice or gnats.

“And the Lord said to Moses, . . . 'Stand before Pharaoh . . . then say to him, . . . "I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants, on your people and into your houses. . . . And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell. . . . I will make a difference between My people and your people"'” (8:20–23).

“The hand of the Lord will be on your cattle in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the oxen, and on the sheep—a very severe pestilence. . . . All the livestock of Egypt died; but of the livestock of the children of Israel, not one died” (9:3, 6).

God’s plagues on Egypt are key events in the Hebrew Scriptures and history of the Jewish people. The Lord used these divine plagues to make Himself and His power known to both the Israelites and Egyptians and to bring Israel “out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” and “into the land which [He] swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Ex. 6:6, 8). He promised Israel, “I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord” (v. 8). Seven times in Exodus 6—14, God used the words know that I am the Lord. Through the plagues, He showed the Egyptians their gods did not exist, as they were impotent before His increasingly more powerful plagues. God, however, loves Egypt and has a future for both it and His beloved nation of Israel: “In that [future] day Israel will
"Take for yourselves handfuls of ashes from a furnace, and let Moses scatter it toward the heavens in the sight of Pharaoh. And it will become fine dust, . . . and it will cause boils that break out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt" (9:8–9).

"The LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire. . . . And the hail struck throughout the whole land, . . . all that was in the field, both man and beast; . . . every herb of the field and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, there was no hail" (9:23, 25–26).

"The LORD brought an east wind . . . and the locusts went up over all the land. . . . They were very severe; . . . the land was darkened; and they ate every herb of the land and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left" (10:13–15).

"So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all of the land of Egypt three days. They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (10:22–23).

"And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead" (12:29–30).

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be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, 'Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance'” (Isa. 19:24–25). (Left to right: lightyear105/iStockphoto; Joel Blit/iStockphoto; Peter Lilja/Media Bakery; Antagain/iStockphoto; gkuna/iStockphoto; Design Pics/Fotosearch; Ales Veluscek/iStockphoto; Ruvan Boshoff/iStockphoto; FOI Image Archive; Pacific Press/Good Salt.)

by Thomas C. Simcox
Preparations for the evening were ready. When the hour had come, Jesus and His disciples went to an upper room, where they reclined around a low, three-sided table. Jesus opened the evening: “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Lk. 22:15). This night would be different from all other nights.

At the first Passover in the days of Moses, only three items were on
the table: roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs (Ex. 12:8). Since Israel’s history and observances are viewed in light of the Messiah and His Kingdom (Talmud Sanhedrin 99a), these items have special significance.

**THE LAMB: A Submissive Messiah**

Passover is a time to remember how God, with a mighty arm, redeemed His people. As God prepared to free them from slavery in Egypt, He instructed the Israelites to select one male lamb per household, bring it home, slay it after four days, and apply the blood to the outer doorposts and upper posts of their houses. When God saw the blood, He passed over those dwellings; and the tenth plague, death of the firstborn, did not strike that home (Ex. 12). (See “How It All Began” on page 12.)

The lamb was a picture of what the Messiah would be like: submissive even while being led to the slaughter. The prophet Isaiah foretold of Him: “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearsers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Isa. 53:7). Jesus suffered silently before the religious and civil authorities as they interrogated Him (Mt. 26:62–63; 27:12–14; Mk. 14:60–61; 15:3–5; Lk. 23:8–9; Jn. 19:9).

Earlier in Jesus’ ministry, a Levitical priest and chosen forerunner of the Messiah, John the baptizer, saw Jesus and declared, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29).

**THE UNLEAVENED BREAD: A Sinless Messiah**

God also commanded the Israelites to eat unleavened bread. It pointed to what the Messiah would be: sinless—an unblemished, perfect sacrifice. Leaven symbolizes sin and its effect. Unleavened bread symbolizes purity and holiness. Isaiah prophesied, Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand (Isa. 53:10).

Sin offerings had to be perfect (Lev. 1—5). They could have no defect whatsoever. Likewise, the Passover lamb had to be “without blemish” (Ex. 12:5). The Gospels tell how the religious authorities challenged Jesus with questions, trying to entrap Him and find fault with Him. But they could not. Pharisees and Herodians probed Jesus about His allegiance. Yet even on the issue of paying taxes, no one could entrap Him. He told them, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt. 22:21).

Next came the Sadducees. They did not believe in the concept of resurrection. Distorting the law, they posed a hypothetical question about a widow marrying seven brothers. They challenged Jesus to tell them whose wife she would be in the resurrection (Mt. 22:23–33; cf. Dt. 25:5–6). Jesus chided them for not knowing Scripture or the power of God and said people will be unmarried after they are resurrected (Mt. 22:29–30).

Finally, a teacher of the Law tested Him by asking, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” (v. 36).

Jesus replied, quoting from the all-important Shema in Deuteronomy 6 and from Leviticus:

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 22:37–40; cf. Lev. 19:18; Dt. 6:5).

The inquisition was over. Unknown to the antagonists, God allowed their questions so that Jesus would be seen as “a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19).

**BITTER HERBS: A Suffering Messiah**

On the night of the original Passover, all the firstborn in Egypt were under the sentence of death (Ex. 11:4–5). However, if they followed God’s instructions, the lambs became their substitutes. The bitter herbs pointed to what the Messiah would become: the suffering substitute who would die in their place. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah explained in detail why the Messiah would suffer:

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

After the Passover meal, Jesus entered an olive grove in Jerusalem called Gethsemane. He was soon filled with dread and crushed with sorrow, almost to the point of death (Mk. 14:34). He was then arrested, and His disciples deserted Him (vv. 46–50).

After being falsely charged with blasphemy, Jesus was spit on, blindfolded, and hit repeatedly in the face (vv. 63–65). The Roman prefect, Pontius Pilate, charged Him with treason and had Jesus flogged with a lead-tipped whip. The Romans put a crown of thorns on Him and then beat Him mercilessly on the head with a staff, driving the sharp points into His skull while spitting on Him (Mt. 27:29–30; Mk. 15:19).

Jesus then carried His cross most of the way to Golgotha and was crucified (Jn. 19:17–18).
It was a bitter scene. Yet He was willing to suffer through it all. Why?
The Bible teaches that, like the first-born in Egypt, everyone born of man is
under a sentence of spiritual death (Rom. 3:23; 5:12; cf. Jn. 3:3). The good news of
Passover is that Jesus—the submissive, sinless, and suffering Lamb of God—suffered,
died, and rose again so that “in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according
to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7). He became our substitute; and through faith
in Him, we have everlasting life.
Rabbi Gamaliel once told the Jewish people, “In every generation, a man
must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt.” In the
same way, individuals must decide for themselves whether to accept Jesus as
their Passover Lamb. The apostle Paul, also a Jewish rabbi, wrote, “For indeed
Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). Life is in the blood of
the Lamb.

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I’m happy to announce that on January 15, 2013, The
Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry launched its first blog,
appropriately dubbed the FOI Blog.
The FOI Blog is a place for you to come, read, and
participate in conversations about Scripture, theology, prophecy, exciting archaeological finds, news from
Israel, events in the Middle East, and what’s happening
locally and globally with The Friends of Israel.
You can read the FOI Blog at www.foi.org/blog. Articles
and my own personal musings will be posted there weekly.
So stop by. I’m looking forward to hearing from
you online.

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Chris Katulka
@FOIKatulka

As The Friends of Israel turns the bold age of 75 this
year, we continue to hold fast to our mission to com-
municate biblical truth about Israel and the Messiah while standing in solidarity with the Jewish people.
Though our convictions remain steadfast, our methods of
communicating are changing as we attempt to adapt to the
tidal wave of new technology flooding the world. For
instance, right now you could be reading this very article on
your computer, tablet, or cell phone.

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Peter Colón is the creative
resource coordinator
for The Friends of Israel.
Looking for Elijah

Every seder table has an extra place set for the prophet Elijah. A specially designated wine cup, Elijah’s cup, is filled to the brim for him.

Malachi 4:5 says Elijah will be the forerunner to the Messiah: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” Elijah’s cup also serves as a reminder of God’s promise in Exodus 6:8: “I will bring you into the land.”

The possibility that Elijah will come to announce the Messiah, along with the hope that all Jewish people will return to their homeland of Israel in peace, are joyful anticipations at Passover. Perhaps that is why every seder concludes with the wistful words, Next year in Jerusalem!

As the youngest boy in my family, I had the important and somewhat frightening job of seeing if Elijah had actually come. I’d run downstairs from my grandparents’ second-floor apartment, open the door, and look for the prophet to invite him to join us.

I held this job for several years. Each time, I first ascertained the exact level of the wine in relation to the top of the cup. My reasoning was that, in Cleveland, Ohio, where I grew up, spring is usually windy. Often I’d open the door, and a huge gust of wind would rush up the staircase, creating such a howling I thought for sure Elijah had entered the building.

My heart raced as I thought this was the moment for which we have waited more than 3,000 years. I could not get my legs to run up the stairs fast enough to see how much wine Elijah drank.

At several different seders, I knew in my heart the time had come! The Messiah was coming! Then, sadly, I’d see no change in Elijah’s cup (with the exception of the year my cousin drank from it to fool me).

Yet my great disappointment soon would be replaced by a renewed hope that maybe, just maybe, he would come next year—in Jerusalem.

by Steve Herzig
One of my most vivid childhood memories of celebrating Passover with my family is of finding the hidden afikomen and demanding my reward: “I’d like the bike I saw in the store window!” I told my dad.

Observing Passover (Hebrew, Pesach) at my grandparents’ home was a mixed blessing. The food and family time were great; the seder was long and sometimes boring. Year after year, as we commemorated that first Passover and the freedom from bondage it brought, the highlight of my evening was the drama of the afikomen. It provides a poignant message for both Jewish people and Christians.

A beautifully decorated white linen bag or the like, with the Hebrew word matzoh embroidered on it, sits on the Passover table next to the seder leader. This matzoh tash, or unity bag, holds three matzohs, each in its own compartment. The two most common rabbinical interpretations of the three matzohs are that they represent (1) the unity of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or (2) the three classes of Jewish people: the priests; the Levites; and the am ha’aretz, meaning “people of land” (ordinary people). The idea is that, when we are united, we are strong.

Jewish people follow the order of the seder service in a booklet called the Haggadah. At a specific time, the leader takes the middle matzoh from the unity bag, breaks it in half, and wraps it in a white linen cloth. Then, as the Passover participants cover their eyes, he hides it. That wrapped, broken matzoh is the afikomen.

After the Passover meal, the drama of the afikomen unfolds. There is great excitement as the children are dismissed to search for the missing matzoh. The boy or girl who finds it receives a prize. Probably every Jewish child who has ever participated in the search wants to be the one to find the afikomen because tradition says the finder can demand anything he wants from the leader, who must redeem it.

Rabbis say each person at the seder must then eat a piece of afikomen. They say it is dessert and signals the end of the meal; nothing more should be eaten afterward.

The biblical account of the Passover, of course, centers on God redeeming His people through the
blood of the lamb. Many rabbis teach the *afikomen* takes the place of the paschal sacrifice. So the *afikomen*’s taste and significance should linger as long as possible.

If the *afikomen* brings drama to Jewish homes, it brings even more drama to Christians privileged to observe the tradition. The reason is the marvelous picture the *afikomen* paints of Jesus as the Passover Lamb.

The three matzohs in a unity bag perfectly symbolize the three Persons of the triune Godhead. As the second Person of the Godhead, Jesus was broken, wrapped in burial cloths, and buried—just as the middle matzoh is broken, wrapped, and hidden. Then Jesus arose from the dead and was seen by many—just as the *afikomen* is brought back and seen by everyone.

Jesus Himself took the unleavened Passover bread and broke it, saying, “This is My body which is broken for you” (I Cor. 11:24). He partook of His final Passover and then became the final Passover for us.

Rabbis say *afikomen* means “that which comes later” or “dessert.” Yet the Greek word *aphikomenos* in the aorist tense means “He has come,” making the message of the *afikomen* the message of the gospel. As the Jewish people remember the lamb that brought them redemption from the bondage of slavery, Christians see Jesus providing redemption from the bondage of sin.

Even though I found the *afikomen* that year, I didn’t get my bike. I got a dollar. But the Lord had so much more in store for me. One day many years ago, I realized “He [Jesus] has come” to redeem me from the bondage of sin. And there has been nothing boring about my new life in Him.
The Seder Plate

These are the elements that belong on the seder plate:

**Betzah** (egg). The egg speaks of winter yielding to spring and life reemerging from seeming death. In Jewish tradition, eggs are eaten when mourning the death of a loved one. In the Passover context, Jewish people mourn the destruction of their Temple, where Passover lambs were sacrificed. Thus a hard-boiled egg serves as a reminder of the paschal lamb. It is dipped in salt water and eaten.

Since it was not included in the seder until after the death of Christ, some people speculate it may have been added by early Jewish Christians to symbolize His death and resurrection.

**Zerah** (shank bone of a lamb). Some people use a chicken bone. It symbolizes the Passover lambs sacrificed at the Temple, as well as the lambs slain in Egypt to protect the Israelites from the tenth plague of death of the firstborn.

After the Temple was destroyed, it became impossible to offer sacrifices. So the bone is a substitute for the paschal lamb. Lamb roasted in fire was part of the original Passover (Ex. 12) and speaks of redemption.

**Maror** (bitter herbs, usually horseradish). The maror reminds the Jewish people of their bitter tears the Jewish people shed while slaves in Egypt.

**Karpas** (a green vegetable, usually parsley). This symbolizes the hyssop used to apply the lamb’s blood to the doorposts and lintels (v. 22). It, like the egg, is dipped in salt water and eaten.

**Charoset.** This tasty mixture symbolizes the sweetness of freedom. The Hebrew word charoset means “clay.” The mixture represents the mortar or clay the Israelite slaves used to make bricks for their cruel Egyptian taskmasters. (See “How to Make Charoset” on page 20.)

**Salt Water.** This represents the hard work the Israelites did in Egypt.

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Of all the events that have shaped history, there have been none more important than the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God’s ultimate solution to sin was brought to bear in the One who would become the Lamb of God.

While on Earth, Jesus told Israel, “Repent, for the kingdom . . . is at hand” (Mt. 4:17). Everyone at that time understood He meant the Davidic Kingdom. Israel, however, was unwilling to follow Him, leading to the sixth key to history: the church.

The Mystery Kingdom

A major shift took place in Jesus’ ministry in Matthew 12 when religious leaders accused Jesus of casting out
demons “by Beelzebub [Satan], the ruler of the demons” (v. 24).

Jesus replied, “[A] house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?” (vv. 25–26).

He then told them they had deliberately blasphemed the Spirit of God by attributing to Satan a miracle He had performed in the Spirit’s power. (Such blasphemy probably cannot occur today because Jesus is not here physically.) “Whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come,” Jesus said (v. 32). So on that day, those religious leaders severed themselves from God’s Kingdom forever.

From then on, Jesus spoke many things in parables (13:1-3). Yet He told His disciples, “It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (v. 11). So Jesus revealed a new phase in God’s program: the mystery kingdom—the church. He told the apostle Peter, “I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build [future tense] My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (16:18). God had a plan all along that Jesus revealed.

The Church’s Composition

On the day of Pentecost (the Jewish holiday of Shavuot), God instituted the church. The Spirit of God fell in a special way on about 120 men gathered in an upper room. The event—the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 2)—took place 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection and 10 days after His ascension. The Spirit was present in the Old Testament, but His ministry changed in the new economy.

Many years later, the apostle Paul explained this special baptism: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). With the baptism of the Spirit, the church began.

When the Jewish leaders rejected Jesus, God revealed His longstanding plan: to reach out to Gentiles and make them fellow-heirs and members of the body of Christ, along with believing Jews. Paul explained this fact to the Ephesians:

When you read, you may understand my knowledge in 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: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel (Eph. 3:4–6).

The plan had been a “mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (vv. 9–10).

Who are the “principalities and powers in the heavenly places”? They are the angels. The same purpose that existed for Adam and Eve and for the nation of Israel exists for the church: to manifest “the manifold wisdom of God” to the angels who stayed true to God when Satan rebelled.

The church, therefore, is comprised of all Spirit-baptized believers from Pentecost to the Rapture. There was no Spirit baptism in the Old Testament. Jesus told His disciples, “You shall be baptized [future tense] with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). This ministry is unique to the Church Age.

Also unique is the bond between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Remember, God had given all the covenants to Israel. Unless Gentiles came to God through Israel, they were without hope and eternally lost. Paul told them,

You were without Christ [Messiah], being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, . . . that is, the law of commandments [the Ten Commandments and Old Testament Law], . . . so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace (Eph. 2:12–15).

Today Jewish people who receive Jesus as Savior belong to the church, together with Gentiles who receive Him. No longer is there a separation because believers are one in Christ. Through Jesus, Gentiles who become Christians are grafted into God’s root program for Israel. However, Paul warned Gentile Christians not to think more highly of themselves than they ought:

For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree [meaning Israel], how much more will these, who are natural branches [meaning the Jewish people], be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11:24–25).

During this age, the essential difference between Jewish people who believe the Hebrew Scriptures and believing Gentiles is the identity of the Messiah. Consequently, everyone in the world falls into one of two categories: (1) Jews and Gentiles who reject Jesus as Messiah and Savior or (2) the body of Christ, made up of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus as Savior/Messiah. And though God’s ultimate program for Israel is in no way diminished or replaced by the church, in this divinely appointed interim, reconciling grace is extended freely to all through His commission to the church to proclaim the gospel the world over.
**The Church’s Stewardship**

The church’s foremost stewardship is the pursuit of maturity. Believers should glorify God by walking consistently under the control of the Holy Spirit, which produces spiritual maturity. Christians who do not walk under the Spirit’s control cannot glorify God even if they evangelize the lost.

Maturity can be both personal and corporate. God wants individuals to come to maturity, as well as corporate bodies of Spirit-baptized believers around the world. In fact, Paul said the objective of the spiritual gifts God gives believers is “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, . . . till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, . . . that we should no longer be children” (Eph. 4:12–14).

Maturity means reaching “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13) and involves consistently applying biblical wisdom to life’s circumstances. If we remain “children,” we are easily “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,” and so forth (v. 14).

Many people today teach unbiblical doctrines. It takes maturity in Christ to decipher the truth. We are to walk in the Spirit, speak the truth in love, and show love in our relationships. The ultimate mark of maturity is to love one another. Jesus said, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35). Knowing all the correct theology in the world means nothing without being able to manifest God’s love (1 Cor. 13:1–3). Paul reminded Timothy, “The goal of our instruction is love” (1 Tim 1:5 n ASB).

Under the Law, the believer’s stewardship was to glorify God by obeying the Law. Under the church, the stewardship is to glorify God by walking under the Spirit’s control and growing to maturity. If you are a believer, God has given you all the help you need to walk in the Spirit and glorify Him, “which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:24–27).

If you have placed your faith in Christ alone (not in good works), you have Christ in you and therefore are part of the church. You have been baptized into Jesus, and Jesus dwells in you. It is through the church—this conglomeration of believers around the world—that people hear how they can become right with God and have their sins forgiven. They learn that whoever believes in Christ “shall not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16).

**The Church’s Future**

The Rapture. The next event on the church calendar is the Rapture. Paul said, “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:16–17).

The church’s future is to be forever with the Savior. God’s church program on Earth ends with the Rapture. Our lives will continue in heaven, but Jesus will no longer be building His church.

The Judgment Seat of Christ. Second, all Church Age believers will then appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive what God wants to give them for the degree of faithfulness they exhibited on Earth (2 Cor. 5:10).

The Marriage of the Lamb. The third event is the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7). As the bride of Christ, the church will have a special relationship with Jesus and be alongside Him as He reigns in His eternal Kingdom, first for 1,000 years on Earth, and then throughout eternity in the new Jerusalem.

The sixth key to understanding history is the church. Through it, God turned Israel’s rejection of Christ into a blessing for the Gentiles. For 2,000 years He has brought Gentiles from every nation, tribe, and tongue into His Kingdom. One day, as He has promised, He will bring the Jewish people back into the fold (Rom. 11:26–27). And their return will enrich the world (v. 12).

Until then, we must teach about Jesus, so people everywhere have an opportunity to repent and receive Him as Savior. For it is through Him alone that they can know true peace.

*Adapted in part from the “Seven Cs of History” presented by Answers in Genesis.*

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**Question:** Why is God called a Shepherd and Jesus “that great Shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20)?

**Answer:** “For thus says the Lord God: ‘Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day.’” —Ezekiel 34:11–12
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The First Epistle of John

In most Bible-believing churches, a Sunday morning service seems filled with a spirit of joy and harmony. Visitors are welcomed warmly and invited to please come back next Sunday. If one attends for a while, however, the initial impression fades, and the church appears to be filled with problems and sometimes doctrinal inconsistencies.

In each generation, God’s church faces internal and external difficulties with false doctrine and corrupt people. The first-century church was no different; it had to deal with false teaching, corrupt teachers, and pastoral and polemic issues.

Plaguing the church in the apostle John’s day were such heresies as Docetism, which claimed Jesus’ humanity was not real; Gnosticism, which emphasized the need of philosophical knowledge for salvation; and the heresy of the Cerinthians, which claimed Jesus was merely a man and not God. Consequently, John repeatedly presented a strong Christology so believers would be able to avoid doctrinal error and become grounded in truth.

Left unchecked, a pseudo-Christology taught by false teachers can produce disharmony and eventually divide a church. John dealt with false doctrine head on to stem the problems before they produced a schism within the body of Christ.

John said many false teachers in the church claimed to be without sin and to walk in the light and love of God. But in reality, they were utterly self-deceived and were deceiving others. He declared that such people cannot have true fellowship with God and other Christians because they walk in darkness and deception.

The First Epistle of John is extremely important because it provides sound doctrine, while dealing with pastoral and polemic problems facing believers throughout the Church Age. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, John gave special attention to the doctrines of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin, salvation, and endtimes prophecy.

The epistle is greatly needed today because it provides God’s guidelines for addressing conflict within the church. John provided the essential, foundational practices that will lead any church to a sound, God-honoring fellowship.

**Author of the Book**

Though the author of 1 John is never mentioned in the epistle, the letter has been attributed to the apostle John since the first century. The same is true of the Gospel of John, whose author also is not mentioned. Of the five books John authored, only the book of Revelation bears his name.

The church fathers in the first and second centuries recognized John as the author of 1 John. Irenaeus, who when he was young, heard Polycarp speak, testified that Polycarp had been John’s disciple and knew he wrote 1 John. The epistle’s content, language, and style are similar to those in the Gospel of John, and the epistles of 2 John and 3 John.


In our redeemed state we are “of the devil,” who has sinned and lied and murdered “from the beginning” (1 John 3:8). We are “from the world” (2:16; 4:5; 5:19). We therefore “sin” (3:4; 4:15) and “have sin” (1:8; 9:41), “walk in the darkness” (1:6; 2:11; 8:12; 12:35) and are “dead” (3:4; 5:25). God loved and sent His Son to be “the Savior of the World” (4:4; 4:42) so that “we might live” (4:9; 3:16). Believing in him or in his “name” (5:13; 1:12), we pass from death to life (3:14; 5:24). We “have life” (5:11, 12; 3:15, 36; 20:31), for life is in the Son of God (5:11–12; 14:6). This is what it means to be “born of God” (2:29; 3:9; 5:4, 18:1:13).

When and where John wrote this epistle are uncertain. Some say it was written before A.D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. Others say around A.D. 85-90, after the Gospel of John. The date has been placed at the end of the first century because of the type of heresy John’s epistles condemn and the information Polycarp and Irenaeus supplied. There is not enough internal or external evidence to fix an exact date. Whatever date one chooses, one must leave time for the development and growth of the doctrinal error mentioned in the book.

There is no indication where the Gospel of John or the First Epistle of John
was written. Tradition maintains John wrote this letter in Ephesus. Soon afterward, in A.D. 95, Roman Emperor Domitian arrested him as a religious-political prisoner and banished him to the island of Patmos, a small, isolated, volcanic island in the Aegean Sea. The aged apostle was forced to perform hard labor in the mines on Patmos. However, he was released after 18 months by Emperor Nerva. It is traditionally held that John returned to Ephesus, where he lived out his remaining years and died an old man.

**Addressees of the Book**

The First Epistle of John provides no internal or external information concerning the people being addressed. Nor is a particular area mentioned to indicate where the addressees lived. It seems John wrote to believers in and around the city of Ephesus, where he ministered in his latter years. Because of statements he made about their spiritual state (1 Jn. 2:12–14, 21; 5:13), it is believed he was writing to specific believers who were anointed by the Holy Spirit (2:20, 27). They were mostly Gentile believers from a heathen background because John concluded his letter by commanding them, “Keep yourselves from idols” (5:21).

Although there are no Old Testament references in 1 John, it is believed the letter was also to Jewish believers scattered throughout Asia. It was probably written to a number of churches under John’s supervision. Those addressed were very knowledgeable about the truth of the Christian faith because John continually reiterated that this was not new truth he was sharing with them, for they had known it from the beginning (2:7, 18, 20–21, 24, 27; 3:11). It is also evident John had been their teacher and had known them a long time.

However, they had various levels of commitment. Some were committed Christians who faithfully followed the Lord and John’s teachings. Others constituted a heretical group of professing believers from a Jewish or Gentile background. And still others were anti-Christians who originally professed faith in Jesus Christ but eventually left the church fellowship (2:18–19, 22–23). The epistle was not merely for believers in the first century, but also for generations of Christians in the future. His message touches theological heresies and ethical issues facing the church in every era.

**Authority of the Book**

The authority of John’s writing is anchored in Jesus Christ: who He is; His purpose in coming; and what He has provided for humankind, especially the church. Christ is the central point for faith and practice, and John began his letter by saying, “That which was from the beginning” (1:1). All Christology begins with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is the preexistent Word of God who came to Earth via the incarnation. In other words, Jesus Christ is God who took on human flesh and now exists throughout eternity as the God-Man. As the foundation of the church, Christ is central to all Christian theology, and from Him will flow the revelation that John pens to the church in his epistle.

The apostle also testified that he heard, saw, physically touched, and bore witness to Jesus Christ as the Word of life, with whom He had precious fellowship. He wrote extensively in his Gospel about Jesus’ authority, identified Him as the Messiah, and confirmed Him as God. John’s testimony was enlightening, uplifting, convincing, and encouraging to the first-century reader, as well as to Christians in every period of church history.

In his epistle, John also wrote about the unique relationship that existed in eternity past between Jesus the Son of God and God the Father. Through Jesus Christ, a similar type of precious fellowship is available to all Christians. Within the family of God, believers experience the light; love; and, above all, life provided by God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son. Thus fellowship with God the Father is through one’s connection with Jesus Christ, whom the Father loves. All these truths were revealed to Christians so that their “joy may be full” (1:4).

**Assurance of the Believer**

The church under John’s supervision dealt with many false doctrines and faced both personal and practical problems within its fellowship. Some within the church had become confused about their relationship with the Lord, making them unsure of their salvation. Sadly, the same is true for many believers today. Using the word know 26 times in his first epistle, John set out to encourage believers that they can “know” with certainty they possess eternal life in Christ:

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God (5:12–13).

These words, penned under the inspiration of God, provide irrefutable assurance to believers that they indeed possess eternal life and warn unbelievers of their destiny should they reject Christ as Savior.

In the next article, we will start our exciting journey through the First Epistle of John. Lord willing, it will be a journey that will bless your heart, provide spiritual strength, and give you answers as you face many of the same doctrinal and practical issues experienced by the first-century church.

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David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
The Grace of God (Part 3)

God's grace is evident throughout Scripture. The previous article presented examples of that grace. This article will continue that study.

Old Testament Examples of God's Grace

The cry for God's grace by the godly people of the southern kingdom of Judah when the Assyrians attacked. "O LORD, be gracious to us; we have waited for You. Be their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble" (Isa. 33:2).

God's grace for all the people of Israel threatened by Assyria. King Hezekiah of Judah sent the following exhortation to everyone in the northern kingdom of Israel, southern kingdom of Judah, and the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh when they were threatened by Assyria:

Children of Israel, return to the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then He will return to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation, as you see. Now do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the LORD; and enter His sanctuary, which He has sanctified forever, and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you. For if you return to the LORD, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn His face from you if you return to Him (2 Chr. 30:6–9).

God's grace for the Israelites who were not killed by the Assyrians and Babylonians but were scattered from their homeland. "Thus says the LORD: 'The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness—Israel, when I went to give him rest'" (Jer. 31:2).

God's grace for the Israelites who returned to their homeland from their captivity in Babylon. Ezra, a priest and scribe of the Law of Moses, traveled to Israel after Israel's captivity ended. He declared,

And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage (Ezra 9:8).

God's grace for the fathers and people of Israel. Levites who returned home from captivity rehearsed God's gracious response to their ancestors' rebellion against Him after He brought them out of Egypt:

Our fathers acted proudly, hardened their necks, and did not heed Your commandments. They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them (Neh. 9:16–17).

The Levites also reminded God of His gracious response to the rebellion of the Israelites who lived in their Promised Land for several centuries:

Yet for many years You had patience with them, and testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; for You are God, gracious and merciful (vv. 30–31).

God's grace for the people of Nineveh. Because God forgave the people of Nineveh when they repented of their evil, Jonah was exceedingly displeased and angry (Jon. 4:1). So he prayed:

Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I knew that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm (v. 2).

God's grace for David. King David wrote, "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in
mercy” (Ps. 103:8). “The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy” (145:8).

When proud people rose against David and a mob of violent men tried to kill him, David placed his trust in God, who is “full of compassion, and gracious” (86:14–15).

God’s grace for people of Israel willing to repent of their rebellion against God. God said the following when He was threatening to bring a massive, devastating army against the people of Israel because of their persistent rebellion against Him:

“Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm (Joel 2:12–13).

God’s grace for people of the northern kingdom of Israel willing to repent of their self-centered, luxurious, abusive, immoral, covenant-breaking lifestyle. When Israel was at peace and prosperous, and the wealthy were building expensive homes, abusing the poor, using slaves, having immoral relationships, and breaking Israel’s covenant with God by worshiping images of golden calves:

Seek good and not evil, that you may live; so the LORD God of hosts will be with you, as you have spoken. Hate evil, love good; establish justice in the gate. It may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph (Amos 5:14–15).

God’s grace for the people of Israel at the end of the seven-year Tribulation, when they turn to their Messiah and are reconciled to Him. The armed forces of all the nations of the world will come against Israel near the end of the Tribulation (Zech. 12:1–8; Rev. 16:12–16). At that time, two thirds of the people of Israel living in their homeland will perish (Zech. 13:8).

The remaining third will be surrounded and attacked in Jerusalem (142). With their backs to the wall and every nation trying to eliminate them, the Jewish people will realize their only hope of survival is God. They will plead with Him to send their Messiah. (See Matthew 23:37–39.) Then God will go to war against the nations and fight for His beloved Israel (Zech. 12:8–9; 14:3).

To rescue them, He will send the glorified, resurrected Jesus Christ, with the wounds of His crucifixion still in His body:

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, . . . and the land shall mourn, every family by itself (12:10–12).

Then “a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness” (13:1). And God “will say, ‘This is My people’; and each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God’” (v. 9).

Christ will descend to the Mount of Olives in His Second Coming (Zech. 14:3–4), and a plague will strike “all the people who fought against Jerusalem” (v. 12; cf. Rev. 19:11–21). Then He shall restore God’s theocratic Kingdom and reign as God’s appointed King over the earth for the last 1,000 years of its existence (Zech. 14:9, 16–21; Rev. 20:1–6).

God’s offer of grace to the people of Israel who lived in their homeland during the first century after their captivity in Babylon and completion of the nation’s second Temple. It was a time of great spiritual and moral decline. The priests and people alike questioned God’s love and His covenant promises to Israel. They wondered if it did any good to serve Him.

The priests and people violated the Mosaic Law; despised God’s name; disrespected, resented, and dishonored Him; offered defective sacrifices; failed to give tithes and offerings; oppressed the poor; divorced wives; married pagans; and indulged in illicit sexual relationships.

In light of these deplorable conditions, God sent the following message to the Israelites through the prophet Malachi:

“But now entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?” says the LORD of hosts (Mal.1:9).

Random expressions of God’s grace.

“The LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Ps. 84:11). “The LORD is gracious and full of compassion” (111:4). “Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yes, our God is merciful” (116:5).

Psalm 77 describes the turmoil of a person who is so convinced he cannot be delivered from a trying situation that he asks, “Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?” (v. 9). A father tells his son God “gives grace to the humble” (Prov. 3:34).

Endnote


Answers from God’s Word

Question: What type of person holds nothing in check?

Answer: “A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back.” —Proverbs 29:11
NYT columnist calls AIPAC ‘pigs’

A New York Times columnist has come under fire after retweeting a message calling the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the National Rifle Association (NRA) “the 2 most pig like lobbies” in America.

According to Adam Kredo of The Washington Free Beacon, Nicholas Kristof in January retweeted the message written by longtime Israel critic M. J. Rosenberg. “OBAMA told the 2 most pig like lobbies, AIPAC & NRA, to drop dead in same month. Next: Chamber of Commerce,” wrote Rosenberg, who was recently fired by the liberal Media Matters for America for his use of border-line anti-Semitic language.

A pro-Israel activist said Kristof is helping to promote anti-Semitic slurs. “Given that Rosenberg regularly deploys rhetoric associated with neo-Nazis and classic Jew hatred, engaging in what has been described by the Simon Wiesenthal Center as ‘toxic anti-Jewish prejudice,’ it is shocking to see a New York Times journalist promoting his ideas.”

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

U.S. arms Egypt

The Egyptian government has started taking delivery of 10 F-16 fighter jets and 200 American-made tanks, all paid for by U.S. taxpayers. However, opposition mounted following exposure of Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi’s remarks calling Jewish people “blood-suckers,” “warmongers,” and “the descendants of apes and pigs.”

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) circulated a petition that read, “A Shariah dictatorship on Israel’s border—armed with American weapons—is a deadly threat to Israel and America. All U.S. funding to Egypt must be cut off until we can certify that aid to Egypt will help the national security interests of the United States and Israel.”

Morsi’s remarks, made in a 2010 interview, were translated and posted that year by the Middle East Media Research Institute. He also said, “Negotiations must stop once and for all. Everybody must turn to the support of the resistance . . . . We must all realize that resistance is the only way to liberate the land of Palestine.”

U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL) recently called for ending aid to Egypt. He told FoxNews.com in December 2012 that giving state-of-the-art fighter jets to the Muslim Brotherhood-backed government may be dangerous.

“American tax dollars must not be used to aid and abet any dictatorial regime that stands with terrorists,” he said.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

Archaeology archive online

The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) has launched a new Israel Archaeological Archive accessible online in English, with a general explanation also available in Hebrew.

A Heritage Program jointly initiated by the Prime Minister’s Office and the IAA, the digital archive will feature tens of thousands of documents, photos, maps, and plans from the period of British Mandate (1919-1948).

“The information constitutes the principal foundation of archaeological research of the past one hundred years,” noted a spokesperson. “We will make this extraordinary information accessible to the general public in Israel and abroad.”

The archive may be accessed at www.iaa-archives.org.il.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

‘We’ll do what’s good for Israel’

Jewish Home Chairman Naftali Bennett, commenting on reports the White House is deeply concerned about growing support for his party, said recently, “We will listen to the Americans, but we will do what is good for Israel.”

Bennett wrote on his Facebook page that the United States is an important ally, but “Israeli citizens must first of all think about the Israeli interest—a secure Israeli state. A State of Israel without terrorist attacks in its cities. A State of Israel not flooded by Palestinian refugees.”

He said when Israel gave Gaza to the Palestinians, and under U.S. pressure we also gave up the Philadelphia crossing, in return we got thousands of rockets on southern Israel—until this very day.”

Bennett added that Israel should respect the United States, but “above all” the country has to protect its own interests and must do what is necessary to ensure security within the state.

“A weak Israel, under a barrage of missiles and attacks, is not in America’s interests either,” added Bennett.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

New spy station

Iran has established an intelligence station in the Golan Heights, close to Syria’s border with Israel, to supply information on Israel to Hezbollah, Iran’s leading terror proxy.

Israel has been monitoring Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal containing hundreds of tons of chemical agents, including sarin and VX nerve agents, as well as older blistering agents. U.S. officials recently said there is evidence Syrian President Bashar Assad’s troops have moved deadly sarin and that its binary components, usually stored separately, have been combined and placed into bombs.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)
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.

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Former Vice President Al Gore, the “go green” king and aggressive advocate of alternative energy, has sold his failing, liberal cable-television station, Current TV, to Al Jazeera for a reported $500 million. The new network will be called Al Jazeera America.

“He’s supposed to be the face of clean energy and just sold to very big oil, the emir of Qatar! Current never even took big oil advertising,” said one high-placed Current staffer, according to a report by Linda Stasi in the New York Post.

Worse than being “ungreen,” however, is the fact that Al Jazeera has long been considered an outlet for Arab extremists and terrorists. Osama bin Laden regularly used Al Jazeera to spew his anti-American venom, as have others who found a sympathetic ear in Al Jazeera for their anti-Jewish, anti-Israel propaganda. The deal gives the all-Arab network access to 40 million American homes.

One political pundit declared, “Gore, who consistently postured himself as a friend of Israel, shows now how unreliable the Jewish state’s ‘friends’ are when the chips—or the money—is down.” In fact, he said, an Al Jazeera journalist suspected of being a Hamas operative was arrested in Israel in 2011.

The English-language Al Jazeera operates 24 hours a day. The programs, reported The Jerusalem Post, “are geared to give their wealthy Arab financial backers the pictures they wish to project worldwide, ensuring the way they are keen to be seen and supported internationally. It is a highly professional and effective advocacy vehicle.”

Abe Foxman, head of the Anti-Defamation League, “is reeling,” reported Newsmax.com. He “worries the pan-Arab media company may spew anti-Israeli propaganda to a huge American audience.” Foxman told Newsmax that Al Jazeera has given “all manner of virulent anti-Israel and even anti-Semitic extremists access to its airwaves.” And though the English version is somewhat toned down, Foxman said the rhetoric “stems from the same source. It’s the same ownership, it’s the same direction.”

“He [Gore] was always lecturing us about green,” a staffer told the New York Post. “He kept his word about green all right—as in cold, hard cash!”
I want to wish you all the best as we approach the great days of Passover. This is a holiday to remember how God delivered the Jewish people from their bitter bondage in Egypt. Today we are free, but many people would like to see us return to bondage and remove us from the land God gave to us as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Some of the people who hate us are Muslim. I have lived here in Israel more than 65 years and have many Arab neighbors. Awhile ago several Muslims came to me. They were not ordinary people, but Muslim leaders. I know them well because we have been neighbors for 38 years. They used to be extremely hostile, but in time they learned I speak to them from the Holy Bible. So they sometimes come and ask me questions.

This time one said, "We know you are not a rabbi. Can you tell how you came to preach the Bible and why you go to the Jewish people, who are so far away from God?"

I replied that it is my obligation as a Jew—a member of His Chosen People—to speak to others about His true salvation.

They were surprised. One responded, "You mean to tell us God has chosen the Jewish people? Such a thing is not written in the Bible! Do not tell us fictional stories! It is not written that your people, who call themselves Israel, have been chosen by God to be His servants to go to others and bring them, as you say, 'His salvation.' If such a thing is written in the Bible, we want you to show it to us, not in English but in Arabic! And if it is not as you say, we will never speak with you again."

So in the Arabic-language Bible I had with me, I had them read Isaiah 43, where it is written:

But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. You are My witnesses,” says the Lord, “and My servant whom I have chosen” (vv. 1, 10).

I also showed them Isaiah 49:3, where it is written, “You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”

After they read, one said, “We are ready to speak with you for many hours.”

So I asked them, “Do you believe in what Christ said to the Chosen People of Israel?"

This time one replied, “Christ hates the people of Israel. And not only He, but all the world!”

I listened patiently, then replied, “Now is a good time to say to you what the Lord said to His Chosen People.”

“If you will show us that He liked the people of Israel, we will believe. But do not show us from the Hebrew Scriptures, but from the New Testament,” one said. So I opened first to Matthew 10:5–6, where it is written, “These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: ‘Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans.}
But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

Then I asked them to read Luke 13:34, where Jesus wept over the Jewish people and said to them,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!

They were very surprised. They insisted Jesus hated the Jewish people. So I told them, “The Lord Jesus Christ came from among the Jewish people. He was Jewish. Everything I tell you about Christ is written in your Arabic Bible. Jesus is not only for Jewish people. He is for everyone. And I showed them Isaiah 53:

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (vv. 5–6).

Now they were listening carefully. “How did this come to be written in the Bible?” one asked.

“Because,” I replied, “the Bible was not written by people who simply like to write. The Holy Bible was written by the Holy Spirit of God. What is written here is eternal, and no one has the right to erase it. It is our duty as His Chosen People, Israel, to go to the ends of the earth to teach about His salvation.”

Before our conversation, they were much against me. But now they were friendly. “We will come again. We want to know more,” one said. This was a long conversation with people who have been our greatest enemies. I pray they will see the truth and that we will become brothers through faith in Christ.
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