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CONTENTS

10 Someone to Believe In
A look at what it takes to make an honest-to-goodness hero.
Steve Herzig

12 Errant or Inerrant? That Is the Question.
What scholars say about the reliability of our Bibles—good and bad.
David M. Levy

14 The Changing Face of Dispensationalism
A dispensationalist used to consistently distinguish Israel from the church. Today there is CD and PD—and it’s important to know the difference.
Randall Price

20 Redefining the Gospel
How the Good News is being turned into different news today.
Bruce Scott

24 Navigating the Current Theological Fog
Here is a look at the shifting theological landscape, with pointers on how to preserve biblical truth.
David Mappes

MORE IN THIS ISSUE

4 From the Editor
5 Inside View
6 Editorial: The Perpetual No
7 Eye on the Middle East: The Saudi-Israeli Connection
8 Christian Persecution
19 Glossary
27 The Berean Box
28 Understanding the Kingdom
30 How to Spell Blessing: ISRAEL
35 Unearthing Truth With Randall Price: United Hearts, Divided Tongues
36 Rightly Dividing: Our Blessed Hope
38 Faith for Living: When We Hurt
40 Israel in the News
42 Apples of Gold
A minister once told me about a church that was having difficulty finding a pastor. Its doctrine was identical to that of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry. The church used the literal-historical-grammatical method of interpreting the Bible; believed the Rapture will precede seven years of unprecedented tribulation on Earth; and believed Jesus will return afterward to establish a literal, 1,000-year Messianic Kingdom, when He will sit on the throne of His ancestor King David. So far so good.

To the church’s delight, it received hundreds of applications. But to its dismay, few applicants held the same doctrinal position—or so the pulpit committee thought. When the candidating began, the committee was in for an even ruder awakening.

Under extensive questioning, some of the applicants who had appeared compatible with the church’s doctrine admitted they did not believe in a literal Messianic (Millennial) Kingdom. Nor did they believe the Jewish people would receive the future blessing God promised Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures. In their view, God was through with Israel and had replaced it with the church.

“So,” I told the minister relating the story, “these men were liars. They lied on their applications and had no qualms about lying to the congregation.” Worse still, they thought truthfulness less important than steering the church away from its current doctrine and support of Israel. If hired, they said, they had planned to change the church’s way of thinking. Sadly, this wasn’t the first time I’d heard such a story.

I asked the minister if he thought these men were truly born again. He said he didn’t know but hoped they were not because he hated to think genuine believers, particularly pastors, would lie.

The longer I serve the Lord, the more fervently I believe discernment is worth its weight in gold. Doctrine may sometimes seem daunting to those of us without degrees in theology, but we need to understand what is happening in Christendom in order to make wise decisions in all sorts of matters. We must know what we believe, why we believe it, and be able to recognize the warning signs when we meet a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

This issue of Israel My Glory examines how certain concepts are being redefined, making it more difficult for most of us to truly understand what someone believes. Since these articles use many theological terms, we’ve included a glossary on page 19.

We pray this issue will be a blessing and illuminate some of the important differences in Christian doctrine.

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
As we all know, President Donald Trump in December officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel.

Why it took seven decades for the United States to do so can easily be blamed on politics. However, we know a great spiritual battle is at play that resists acknowledging Jerusalem’s place in Israel’s history. Since the day King David conquered the Jebusite city 3,000 years ago and established it as the capital of the Jewish people, it has never served as the capital of any other nation. There has never been a sovereign nation of Palestine in the history of the world, and Jerusalem has never been an Arab or Muslim capital.

Israel is the only nation with a God-given right to the land and city and the only nation with a historic claim to Jerusalem as its capital. Jerusalem is where God placed His house, the Temple, to dwell with Israel. It is where He has written His name and where He has promised to set His only begotten Son, the Messiah, on the throne of David to rule over Israel and the world. God has never given Jerusalem to any other nation or people, including the church.

The justification for a divided Jerusalem has no basis in history. So-called East Jerusalem is, in fact, the ancient, historic city. It includes the City of David, the Temple Mount, Calvary, and the tomb where Jesus was buried until His resurrection. All of the major Jewish and Christian sacred biblical sites lie within what people are calling East Jerusalem.

Trump’s bold, courageous action was reminiscent of President Harry Truman’s when he made the United States the first nation to officially recognize the State of Israel moments after David Ben-Gurion read Israel’s Declaration of Independence in 1948. Both men acted in the face of great opposition.

However, we wish President Trump had gone further and declared Jerusalem the indivisible, eternal capital of the Jewish people. His remarks left the door open for dividing Jerusalem in future peace negotiations. He also could have ordered the U.S. State Department to move our embassy’s shingle immediately from Tel Aviv to the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem, thereby officially relocating our embassy to Jerusalem until a permanent embassy can be built there.

Yet we must not lose sight of the significance of Trump’s action. He walked where other presidents have failed to tread. He has instructed the State Department to make plans to move the embassy, and we hope the Trump administration will fulfill the president’s promise.

The importance of presidential recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital cannot be overstated. It marks a pivotal point in U.S. policy that rejects the idea the Arab-Israeli conflict is the primary cause of the Middle East’s troubles and the biggest obstacle to peace. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, a 68-page report released by the White House on December 18, 2017, identifies Iran and terrorist organizations as “the cause of the region’s problems.”

Trump’s action also will change the dynamics of future peace negotiations, removing from the negotiating table the question “To whom does Jerusalem belong?” and allowing negotiators to focus on the real issues that prevent peace: Arab refusal to recognize Israel. U.S. recognition also stands in opposition to UN and European efforts to deny Israel’s historical connection to its ancient city.

After President Truman officially recognized Israel, other nations followed suit. Our hope is that even more nations will again follow the U.S. lead and recognize Jerusalem as the eternal capital of the Jewish nation.

by Jim Showers, executive director of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
No, no, no! Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’s resounding “No!” came as no surprise when President Donald J. Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in December and vowed to relocate the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv.

Abbas also doubled down on his negative response by calling for a day of rage in the West Bank, Gaza, and eastern Jerusalem, even though Trump promised recognition and relocation would not dissolve any potential peace deal between the Arabs and Israelis.

“We want an agreement that is a great deal for the Israelis and a great deal for the Palestinians,” Trump said. “We are not taking a position of any final status issues including the specific boundaries of the Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem or the resolution of contested borders. Those questions are up to the parties involved.”

In a meeting called by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who summoned the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to Istanbul, Turkey, at the end of 2017 to discuss the “repercussions” of U.S. recognition of Jerusalem, Abbas made a characteristic threat. Until Jerusalem is recognized as the capital of a future Palestinian state, he said, there will be “no peace or stability” with Israel.

Unfortunately, Arab leaders have a long history of saying no to peace with Israel. The latest threat is nothing new.

They said no in 1947 to the UN Partition Plan that promised them a future Palestinian state alongside Israel. They said no in 1967 to peace, negotiations, and recognition of Israel after the Six-Day War and Israel’s recapture of Jerusalem. They said no in 2000 when Israel offered them 97 percent of the West Bank as a future Palestinian state and eastern Jerusalem as the capital. They said no in 2008 when Israel offered them 93 percent of the West Bank plus land around Gaza that would have given them the equivalent of 100 percent of the land mass of the West Bank.

Imagine how different the Middle East would look if the Arabs ever said yes. If they had accepted the partition plan in 1947, the Arab-Israeli conflict as we know it today might not exist. If they had recognized Israel and negotiated with the Israelis, who were seeking peace with them after the Six-Day War in 1967, reconciliation could have been realized decades ago. Israel has proven with Egypt and Jordan that establishing peace is possible.

If the Palestinians had agreed to either one of Israel’s offers of land in 2000 or 2008, they could have established a Palestinian state in the West Bank.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian leaders have proven time and again that they do not want peace with Israel. They want Israel to disappear because they reject Israel’s right to exist. When Israel handed them the Gaza Strip in 2005—complete with flourishing agricultural fields and greenhouses—in hopes of making peace, they not only said no but ripped up the fields, destroyed all the greenhouses, and continued to talk about “liberating all of Palestine,” meaning, annihilating Israel.

They continually say no to anything that validates a Jewish presence in Israel, the West Bank (biblical Judea and Samaria), or Jerusalem. Their perpetual no prolongs conflict, promotes terror, and produces nothing that will ever bring peace.

After 70 years of no, Abbas would be wise to change his tune. Saying yes would be a game-changer, not only for the Palestinian people who suffer serious deprivation under the current regime, but also for Israel and the world.
EYE ON THE MIDDLE EAST

THE SAUDI-ISRAELI CONNECTION

In a recent interview with Army Radio, Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz revealed Israel has been holding covert talks with Saudi Arabia amid mutual concerns over Iran’s ascendency in the Middle East. It was the first time a senior official from either country admitted to the long-rumored secret contacts.

Israel and Saudi Arabia both view Iran, which has emerged stronger than ever from the power vacuums created by the wars in Iraq and Syria, as the greatest threat to the Middle East. Tehran is now close to achieving the strategic goal of establishing a so-called Shia Crescent—an arc of Iranian influence stretching from the Persian Gulf to Lebanon—in the heartland of the Sunni Arab world. Such an arc would not only challenge Saudi Arabia’s claim to leadership of the Islamic world, but it would also allow Iran to establish a military presence on Israel’s northern border.

With Iran and Saudi Arabia battling for supremacy, tensions between Riyadh and Jerusalem have eased. Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gadi Eizenkot recently said Israel was prepared to share “intelligence information” with Saudi Arabia, saying their countries share a common interest in confronting Iran.

Israeli official Yisrael Katz has called for the creation of an Arab-Israeli economic bloc as the basis for an “anti-Iran axis.” Widely viewed as a contender to succeed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Katz said the bloc should be anchored by a rail and port network—dubbed as the “Orient Express”—that would pull the region together through trade.

“Iran is the big enemy,” he told the Canadian newspaper The Globe and Mail. “It’s very clear we [Israel and Saudi Arabia] are practically on the same side. All Sunni countries are against Iran. They see Israel as the only power that can stand against Iran in the region.”

Katz has invited Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to Israel. He has also discussed the Saudi peace and economic development plan with Jason Greenblatt, U.S. President Donald J. Trump’s adviser on the Middle East. “I had seven meetings with Jason Greenblatt about these things in Washington about this initiative, about the railway,” Katz said.

Saudi Arabia insists that any approach with Israel hinges on a peace deal with the Palestinians. However, Netanyahu’s former national security advisor, Yaacov Nagel, said Riyadh was so keen to begin open cooperation with Israel that it "doesn’t care" what kind of deal is reached with the Palestinians. According to Nagel, the current Saudi leadership is looking for any type of Israeli-Palestinian peace deal to give it political cover for normalizing relations with Israel.

Saudi Arabia and other Arab states have a shared strategic interest in improving relations with Israel, according to Kobi Michael, a senior fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University. “Egypt, Jordan, the Gulf states, excluding Qatar, have two strategic threats: Iran and the Salafi or radical Islamic terrorism,” he said. “Unfortunately, the U.S. left a vacuum in the region which was filled by the Russians in Syria and by the Iranians and their proxies in other parts of the Middle East. Israel is perceived as the most reliable potential ally. Therefore, the Saudis understand pretty well that it is a good time to be good friends with Israel.”

This paradigm shift in Middle Eastern politics is reflected in the Trump administration’s new national security strategy. The document asserts, “For generations the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has been understood as the prime irritant preventing peace and prosperity in the region. Today, the threats from radical jihadist terrorist organizations and the threat from Iran are creating the realization that Israel is not the cause of the region’s problems. States have increasingly found common interests with Israel in confronting common threats.”

by Soeren Kern, a senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, a nonpartisan foreign-policy think tank based in New York City.
KENYA—A group of Somali Muslims recently broke into the home of a Somali Christian widow and brutally attacked her three children in a small Kenyan town outside Nairobi.

Hadiya, a widowed immigrant from Somalia, was attending a funeral during the attack. The Muslims knocked on her front door early in the morning while her 17-year-old daughter, 13-year-old son, and 21-year-old son were asleep.

The sons awoke and asked who was at the door. The Muslim men refused to identify themselves and smashed a window to enter, according to the older son.

Then one of the men shouted, “We have warned you several times to stop taking the children to church. You have become an embarrassment to our clan as well as the entire Muslim community. We are here today to finish you and your children.”

The gang beat Hadiya’s three children until neighbors came to the rescue. “When we arrived at the scene of the incident, the attackers fled,” one neighbor told Morning Star News. “We took the three to a nearby clinic before their mother arrived and then transferred them to a government health center, where the youngest child was discharged, while two who were seriously injured were admitted for four days.”

The younger son suffered injuries to his left leg, neck, and chest; the older son sustained injuries to his head, chest, and back from a blunt object; and the daughter received heavy blows and kicks, resulting in a bloody nose and rib injury, according to a medical report.

“We are living in great fear and experience sleepless nights,” Hadiya said. “It is not safe for us to stay in this particular place. We need prayers and financial help at this difficult moment.”

Most Somalis believe all Somalis are born Muslim and therefore should be charged with apostasy and killed if they become Christians, according to Islamic law.

Hadiya fled Somalia more than 13 years ago after the death of her first husband. She has eight children, two of whom are from her second husband, who recanted his Christian faith amid a wave of persecution and returned to Somalia in 2010.

Hadiya said her family has suffered many attacks since embracing Christ. Three years ago, after filing a police complaint about an attack by Somali Muslims in Kenya in 2014, at least 10 Islamic elders warned her she was risking her life by doing so.

Last year, Somali Muslims attacked another of her adult sons and beat him until he became unconscious. Five years earlier, Somalian neighbors seriously injured the same son after learning his family had become Christians. They hit him with a metal bar on his forehead and face, stabbed his hand, and left him for dead.

“My family has experienced difficult times since the time we embraced the Christian faith, but God has been always coming to our rescue and meeting our needs,” Hadiya said. “We are grateful to the church and good Samaritans who have stood with my family in trying moments. We are at a crossroads. But how long will this kind of life and persecution continue?”

“We will not recant the Christian faith,” she said. “We will continue putting our faith in God.”

Kenya ranks 18th on Open Doors’ 2017 World Watch List of the 50 countries where Christians experience the worst persecution.

by Morning Star News
To read the full report, go to Morningstarnews.org.
The Dispensations
At different times, God gave mankind various stewardships, or dispensations, with a view toward glorifying Himself. This chart, compiled by Richard D. Emmons, explains the dispensations and the basis of Dispensational Theology.

The Gospel Message
This poster, compiled by Thomas C. Simcox, is the perfect tool for presenting humanity's need and God's provision of salvation through Jesus Christ... using both the Old and New Testaments.

The Lies of the Devil
This fabulous poster by Thomas C. Simcox pits Satan's lies against God's eternal truth. Great for home schoolers, Christian schools, and businesses.

A Prophetic Panorama
This concise and attractive prophetic time line, compiled by Renald E. Showers, clearly explains Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks determined on Israel and how the Church Age fits into the prophetic blueprint.

The Bridge
This popular painting by well-known artist William C. Ressler illustrates that Jesus Christ is the only bridge between heaven and Earth, God and man.

See enclosed envelope for ordering details.
Someone to Believe IN

A LOOK AT WHAT IT TAKES TO MAKE A HERO

My wife enjoys watching Antiques Roadshow, a popular television program where appraisers provide the monetary value of something you may have had in your attic for years. I usually read while it’s on, but one item recently caught my attention—the Carnegie Medal. It was minted for the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission started by Andrew Carnegie, the famous Scottish-American industrialist and philanthropist who died in 1919.

I wasn’t paying close attention until I heard, “Encircling the medal are the words from John 15:13: ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends’” (KJV). Suddenly, I became extremely interested. What was the medal for? How many were minted? Who were the recipients?

And so began a journey that led not only to answers about the medal but also to a deeper connection with the life of our Savior and our current culture, which is in such desperate need of Jesus.

THE STORY BEGINS
Daniel Lyle and Selwyn Taylor became heroes on a frigid January morning in 1904. They had not planned it, nor did they have any superpowers, fancy capes, uniforms, or masks. But on that January morning, they heard a huge explosion coming from the Harwick coal mine (about 12 miles from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) and immediately, almost instinctively, ran from two different places to the mine.

When Taylor, a mining engineer, arrived at the site, he quickly descended the main shaft and found 17-year-old Adolph Gunia alive but severely burned. As it turned out, Gunia would be the only one to survive the explosion. As Taylor descended farther, he was overcome by afterdamp, an asphyxiating gas. As a result, he died the next day, leaving a wife and stepson.

Lyle, a coal miner, began working on a rescue team. He, too, descended into the shaft, going down farther than any other person on the team. He, too, was overcome by afterdamp and died, leaving a wife and five children. In all, 181 people died. The tragedy remains one of America’s worst mining explosions.

When Carnegie heard about the accident from his home in New York City, he was profoundly moved. He wrote, “I can’t get the women and children of the disaster out of my mind.” He matched the $40,000 raised by the public for the miners’ families. But it was the stories of Daniel Lyle and Selwyn Taylor that occupied Carnegie’s thinking. He believed them to be heroes.

So within three months, Carnegie established a $5-million trust known as the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission. Its purpose is twofold: “to recognize persons who perform acts of heroism in civilian life in the United States and Canada, and to provide financial assistance for those disabled and the dependents of those killed helping others.”

The commission recognizes “heroes” by issuing a medal and a cash award. Carnegie designed the medal with a bust of himself, encircled by the verse from John 15:13.
Today, 114 years later, the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission continues to look for heroes like Taylor and Lyle. A 21-member commission in Pittsburgh is charged with the responsibility of recognizing these “heroes of civilization.” To date, nearly 10,000 medals have been awarded, along with approximately $40 million in one-time grants, scholarships, death benefits, and continuing assistance. The commission’s working definition of a hero is “a person who’s under no obligation to act, leaves a place of safety, puts himself or herself in serious risk of death or major injury to save the life of another human being.”

Carnegie believed in heroes. He saw Taylor and Lyle’s meritorious actions and knew there would be others like them. Today we see many acts of heroism following terrorist attacks. Stories abound, for example, of heroic acts during the senseless, deathly shooting spree in Las Vegas, Nevada, last year. In each case, individuals were willing to test the limits of their own abilities and become examples of how we all can be better.

THE ULTIMATE HERO

Like Carnegie, we all gravitate to heroic stories. In a September 27, 2017, USA Today article addressing superheroes, writer Brian Truitt quoted entertainment writer Mike Ryan: “Most people just want something to believe in.” In the same article, Jeff Bock, senior box-office analyst for exhibitor relations, said, “People are clamoring for a cut-and-dried true hero.”

Heroes are remarkable. They do remarkable things; and because they stand out when they act, they often are recognized. The apostle Paul wrote, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die” (Rom. 5:7). But not one of the nearly 10,000 Carnegie Medal recipients nor any of the thousands or hundreds of thousands of recognized or unrecognized heroes could ever save someone completely. That is, every life saved by an earthly hero must face eternity without that hero.

But there is one hero who is unlike all others—and this is where my journey ends. This hero not only fits the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission criteria perfectly, but He also fits the biblical mandate for Messiah and Savior.

First, a hero is “under no obligation to act.” But act Jesus did, taking on Jewish flesh and blood to become our Kinsman.

Second, he “leaves a place of safety.” Jesus, the second Person of the Godhead, left His place in heaven to be born as a lowly human being on Earth.

Third, he “puts himself . . . in serious risk of death or major injury to save the life of another human being.” Jesus surrendered His life by shedding His blood for all of us, willingly taking the judgment we deserve for our sins.

Hebrews 7:25 says, “He is also able to save to the uttermost [completely] those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” There is no one like our Hero, the Lord Jesus Christ, because as our Kinsman- Redeemer, His saving power is unlimited.

Jesus received no medal from the Father, but He is alive today and seated next to the Father, making intercession for those He redeemed.

In the preface of his book The Supremacy of God in Preaching, John Piper wrote, “People are starving for the greatness of God.” He is right. People are looking for heroes; but most of them are unaware their real Hero is right there in front of them, if they would only accept Him.
For centuries conservative biblical scholars have believed in the inerrancy of Scripture. Such theologians as Augustine (354–430), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Martin Luther (1483–1546), John Calvin (1509–1564), B.B. Warfield (1851–1921), and many others too numerous to mention upheld the doctrine of inerrancy.

In the Age of Enlightenment (Age of Reason, as it was known in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe), philosophical rationalism crept into theology and began producing an antisupernatural way of thinking that undermined seminaries, Bible schools, denominations, and churches.

Major religious institutions started questioning the trustworthiness of God’s Word, particularly inerrancy. Soon human reason replaced divine revelation in determining the validity and interpretation of Scripture. The development of higher and lower criticism, which analyze everything about Scripture to determine its authenticity, eroded widespread belief that the Bible was divinely inspired. These methods were destructive to biblical truth and inerrancy, prompting many people to deny that God has spoken to mankind through biblical revelation.

Today, liberal theologians deny the inspiration of Scripture, and some have even redefined the doctrine of inerrancy.

**INERRANCY REVEALED**

Simply stated, biblical inerrancy means the Scriptures are without error in the original autographs and everything they affirm is true. However, this definition is insufficient because some evangelicals today claim to believe in the inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture while still maintaining that Scripture is not error-free.

A fuller definition might read more like this: God Himself, who is truth and cannot lie (Num. 23:19; Jn. 17:17; Ti. 1:2; Heb. 6:18), has divinely inspired Scripture to reveal Himself to humankind (2 Tim. 3:16). Scripture is the supernaturally revealed Word of God. It was written by men chosen by God and superintended by the Holy Spirit to express, through their personalities and literary styles, the God-breathed Word without error (2 Pet. 1:20–21). The Holy Spirit guaranteed Scripture’s infallibility in all matters it touches: creation, geography, geology, salvation, doctrine, life sciences (ethics, social, physical), world history, literature, and every area of knowledge. It is without error in the original autographs and entirely true in all it affirms. Inerrancy does not apply to ancient Greek and Hebrew manuscripts or copies of Scripture no matter how accurate.

Some people say the Bible is inerrant on doctrine and theology but not, for example, on matters of history and science. But such a statement is fallacious. For example, when scientists believed the world was flat, the Bible said it was round (Isa. 40:22). Scientific fact and spiritual truth in Scripture are entwined...
We expect pseudo Christians to deny inerrancy. But since inerrancy is based on original autographs that do not exist, inerrancy is a recent doctrine not held by earlier theologians. Inerrancy is not mentioned in the Bible.

The death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead. A God of truth, who cannot lie, could not and would not authorize error. Doing so would contradict truth.

Thus, if Scripture did not reveal truth about history and the physical world (no matter how major or minor), it could not be trusted at all. God cannot err, and the Scripture that proceeds from Him is the inspired, verbal, infallible Word of God. Therefore, the Bible in its original autographs is inerrant.

INERRANCY REJECTED

We expect pseudo Christians to deny inerrancy. But since the first quarter of the 20th century, some evangelical theologians have denied it. Others claim to believe in it but deny the credibility or truth of certain biblical facts, particularly those involving Jesus’ life and ministry. Here are a few of the major objections being circulated today:

- **Inerrancy is not mentioned in the Bible.** However, the words Trinity and Bible are not mentioned in Scripture either. Yet that fact does not negate their validity. Scripture clearly teaches God’s truth “endures to all generations” (Ps. 100:5). Psalm 119:160 says, “The entirety of Your word is truth”; and Jesus said, “Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). We develop terminology to explain what we see in the Bible, just as other disciplines do. And what we see is that all of God’s Word is true and will endure forever.

- **Inerrancy is a recent doctrine not held by earlier theologians in the development of bibliology.** Not so! Early theologians believed in Scripture’s inerrancy.

- **Inerrancy is based on original autographs that do not exist, so it cannot be proven or disproven.** This argument is untenable because thousands of manuscripts do exist and agree with each other 99 percent. Concerning the New Testament, Bible scholar Norman Geisler wrote, “The New Testament has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book from antiquity, but it has survived in a much purer form, . . . a form that is over 99 percent pure.” The Dead Sea Scrolls have verified the accuracy of the Old Testament. If the ancient copyists made an error, they burned the manuscript. With the thousands of accurate manuscripts available that have been thoroughly analyzed, no so-called error has been verified to disprove inerrancy.

Inerrancy could be proven false by finding a provable error in the existing copies of the text. However, that has not happened.

INERRANCY REDEFINED

In the 20th century, some theologians redefined inerrancy—a trend still with us today. Liberal theologians do not believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. They consider the Bible a book like any other, written using history and the traditions of the Israelites to whom it is addressed.

They view Scripture through the grid of human reason and reject biblical inerrancy. But as Giesler said, “If we can’t trust the Bible, we’ve lost the very foundation of our faith.”

Christianity means nothing without inerrancy. Modern liberals add higher criticism to their already liberal views. They, too, deny inspiration and inerrancy.

Two great influences against inerrancy were Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) and German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976). Barth developed the theory of Neo-Orthodoxy. He taught that Scripture is not the revelation of God’s Word but, rather, a witness to God’s Word. Thus fallible men wrote the Bible, and it is not without error.

However, the Bible says it is God-breathed: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). It also says, “Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21).

Bultmann, a former criticism leader, dedicated himself to discovering the exact words and events in the Gospel texts. Through “demythologizing” (removing ancient myths from the text and interpreting it into language of the day), he gave theological terms new names and categories that totally distorted the true meaning of God’s Word. Bultmann’s theology lies clearly outside the realm of Christianity and makes no sense at all.

All these redefinitions are based on biased presumptions, faulty evaluations, and defective hermeneutical principles. So the conclusion that the Bible is errant is wrong.

Forty years ago, the attack on the historic doctrine of inerrancy was so invasive that conservative theologians and pastors took action. On October 26–28, 1978, 300 leading evangelicals met at the Hyatt Regency O’Hare in Chicago to craft what became known as the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*. (To download the statement, go to israelmyglory.org.) This statement is one of the most complete definitions on the affirmation of scriptural inerrancy.

When all the evidence is thoroughly analyzed, it leads to the inescapable conclusion that all Scripture is inspired (God-breathed), plenary (wholly inspired), and verbally given as God’s written Word to mankind—infallible, inertent, and authoritative in the original autographs. Someone said it well: “The Bible—nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else!”

**ENDNOTES**

1 Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *From God to Us* (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1974), 183.

YEARS AGO, A DISPENSATIONALIST
WAS SOMEONE WHO CONSISTENTLY
VIEWED THE CHURCH AS DISTINCT
FROM ISRAEL. TODAY THERE IS CD
AND PD—AND IT’S IMPORTANT TO
KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.

BY RANDALL PRICE
OF LISM
Dispensationalism, which holds to a literal interpretation of Scripture, is one of the most maligned and misunderstood theological concepts in the church today. Many Christians have abandoned it, while others seek to redefine it.

**The Big Retreat**

Anglican evangelicals, such as popular theologian N. T. Wright, regard the American form of Dispensationalism (what they call “Left Behind theology”) as “bizarre” and contend it is unknown in British circles. However, long before Wright made his observation, American Reformed theologians—such as John Gerstner and R. C. Sproul, who have shaped the thinking of today’s generation—had labeled Dispensationalism heresy.!

The Emergent Church has discarded Dispensationalism altogether as an obstacle to inclusiveness. And the modern church, appealing to millennials who largely steer clear of eschatology (the study of future things), has little room for the broader teaching of futurism, much less the distinctions of Dispensationalism.

These trends, coupled with the recent popularity of Reformed teaching, have caused many seminaries and Bible colleges to retreat from defending Dispensational Theology.

In addition, more than two decades earlier, a reformulation of Classical Dispensationalism (CD) had already spread throughout dispensational institutions. Known as Progressive Dispensationalism (PD), this view attempts to understand the core tenets of Dispensational Theology through a so-called complementary interpretation, a confusing term in itself because it seeks to explain the equally confusing idea of an “already/not yet” and “both/and” eschatology.

PD’s central tenet teaches that the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants are already being progressively fulfilled today and will also be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom. Thus PD’s concept of futurism includes an aspect of present fulfillment in the church for the biblical covenants made with national Israel, while CD holds that the biblical covenants find their fulfillment exclusively in the Millennium.

**Historical Overview**

The first half of the 20th century witnessed a retreat from futurism with C. H. Dodd (1884–1973) and his “Realized Eschatology,” which taught that the eschatological passages in the New Testament (drawn largely from the Old Testament) do not refer to the future but, rather, to the experiences of Jesus and the New Testament church.!

Many liberals, who preferred the principles of love and peace to the expectation of future apocalyptic destruction, embraced Dodd’s position. His view continues to influence evangelicals today through the writings of Wright and his “Kingdom Now” theology, which largely characterizes the 21st-century “millennial” churches.

A different form of Kingdom Now Theology that also sees some or all Bible prophecies as fulfilled in historic events of the past is Preterism. Once the provenance of liberal scholars, Preterism is now advanced by the teachings of conservative Christians such as radio “Bible Answer Man” Hank Hanegraaff and the late R.C. Sproul.

Another evangelical, historic premillennialist, Gordon E. Ladd, promoted Oscar Cullman’s “Inaugurated Eschatology,” a view that taught the promises of the Kingdom Age were initially being realized in the Church Age. Many well-known, evangelical, premillennial scholars, such as D. A. Carson, have promoted this view, which forms the substance of Progressive Dispensationalism. It retains the CD distinctive concerning the future Kingdom, but also embraces a spiritual fulfillment of those promises within the Church Age.

**Progressive Dispensationalism**

Progressive Dispensationalism debuted in the 1990s as developed and defended in the works of evangelical scholars Craig A. Blaising (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), Darrell L. Bock (Dallas Theological Seminary), and the late Robert L. Saucy (Talbot Seminary).

These authors claim their view simply revises the core tenets of Dispensationalism. But PD’s inclusion of tenets from opposing systems of interpretation obscures CD’s distinctive and makes possible a progression toward the next inevitable position: Amillennialism or Postmillennialism.

Evangelical theologian Walter A. Elwell observed, “The newer dispensationalism looks so much like non-dispensational pre-millennialism that one struggles to see any real difference.”

Postmillennialist Keith Mathison stated,
In my opinion . . . progressive dispensationalists have moved closer to Reformed theology on a number of doctrines. They now acknowledge that the kingdom has been inaugurated and that there is a present as well as a future aspect of the kingdom. They have also recognized the two-peoples-of-God theory* to be unbiblical, which, ironically, brings us to the negative side of progressive dispensationalism. If the defining doctrine of dispensationalism is the two-peoples-of-God theory, then to reject that theory is to reject dispensationalism itself. 


d vs. PD

Classical Dispensationalism has three essential distinctive:

1. It makes a clear distinction between Israel and the church in God’s purposes.
2. It employs a consistent, literal hermeneutic* (method of interpretation), especially when it comes to the prophetic Scripture.
3. It maintains a doxological focus that sees the ultimate purpose of God as bringing glory to Himself.

Let’s look at these three distinctive in greater detail.

1. Israel and the Church. Theologian Charles C. Ryrie said,

   The one who fails to distinguish Israel and the church consistently will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions; and one who does will. Progressive dispensationalists seem to be blurring this distinction by saying that the concept is not in the same class as what is conveyed by the concepts of Gentiles, Israel, and Jews. 

Progressive dispensationalists maintain that the “one new man” of Ephesians 2:11–22 refers to the church as a continuation of believing Israelites in the Old Testament. Therefore, believing Jews and Gentiles constitute the “one people of God.” This concept may be true on a redemptive level, but Gentiles and Jews are distinct historic people groups with distinct callings and promises within the biblical covenants. PD correctly sees the church as consisting of both the believing remnant of national Israel and the believing remnant of Gentiles, but it incorrectly views this unity as an “initial fulfillment” of the New Covenant, which God specifically made with Israel:

   Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. . . . I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. . . . For they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jer. 31:31, 33–34).

   The church’s participation in the New Covenant is a present, partial guarantee of the future, full realization of the promise in the Millennial Kingdom. It cannot be fulfilled literally until the Lord forgives the sins of the entire remnant of Israel and Judah, “from the least of them to the greatest of them” (a universal expression).

   The apostle Paul said the present believing remnant of Jewish people exemplifies the future, full inclusion of national Israel. The Gentile nations are included through the spiritual promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3):

   At this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Now if [Israel’s] fall is riches for the world, and their failure rich for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, . . . that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:5, 12, 25–26).

   This text reveals the New Covenant cannot find initial fulfillment until the Second Advent of Messiah since Israel now remains blinded during the Church Age.

2. Literal Hermeneutic. Dispensationalism uses a consistent, literal method of interpreting Scripture. It takes the biblical text at face value, without imposing on it a theological interpretation foreign to the text. However, PD’s “complementary hermeneutic” redefines the understanding of the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament.

   It argues that Christ currently occupies King David’s throne in heaven. But the normal reading of the Old Testament understands David’s throne to be an earthly one promised to the Davidic dynasty in national Israel, even

3 ESSENTIAL DISTINCTIVES OF CLASSICAL DISPENSATIONALISM

1. It makes a clear distinction between Israel and the church in God’s purposes.
2. It employs a consistent, literal hermeneutic, especially when it comes to the prophetic Scripture.
3. It maintains a doxological focus that sees the ultimate purpose of God as bringing glory to Himself.

[This is the position of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.]
under the New Covenant (Jer. 33:17–22). It also views Christ as David’s descendant reigning in Israel as a Messianic promise to be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom (1 Chr. 17:14; cf. Ezek. 37:25).

Classical dispensationalists argue that the Bible never says David’s throne is in heaven during the Church Age. Instead, it specifies Christ will rule over “the house of Jacob”: “He [Jesus] will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever” (Lk. 1:32–33). While PD still views Christ’s reign as a future reality (both/and), it changes the text’s plain meaning to accommodate its theology that the Kingdom’s initial fulfillment has already begun.

PD contradicts the fact the apostle Peter tied the Messiah’s return to set up His earthly Kingdom to Israel’s national repentance (Acts 3:19–21). How could the Kingdom be inaugurated in the Church Age if national Israel remains under divine discipline and its national repentance will take place only at the end of the Tribulation? (See Matthew 24:29–30 and Luke 21:28.) Likewise, if Messiah’s reign on David’s earthly throne depends on Israel’s repentance, then Messiah cannot be sitting now on the throne of David.

PD confuses this distinction. One of PD’s formulators conceded the fact in a theological debate with an amillennial theologian. He said the term Israel is symbolic. Later, I asked him what he meant by that statement. He simply replied, without explanation, “It is both/and.”

In other words, PD teaches Israel both symbolizes the church and literally refers to national Israel as distinct from the church. PD’s “complementary” hermeneutic permits its adherents to call their view Dispensationalism, while embracing views from an opposing theological system whose core tenets spiritualize Israel.

**PD’s “complementary” hermeneutic permits its adherents to call their view Dispensationalism, while embracing views from an opposing theological system whose core tenets spiritualize Israel.**

**CAUTIONARY NOTE**

I want to caution those who hold to Classical Dispensationalism against overstatement in their critique of progressive dispensationalists, who may represent the dominant view of evangelical churches and seminaries today. Most advocates of PD hold to a pretribulational Rapture and believe in Messiah’s Second Coming to establish His Millennial Kingdom for Israel and the nations. They are also among the leading defenders of the evangelical faith and strong supporters of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

My concern is for the next generation of progressive dispensationalists who may move beyond the theology of the founders. In his treatise *Theology Adrift: The Early Church Fathers and Their Views of Eschatology*, D. Matthew Allen explains that the eschatological shift in the ancient church from Premillennialism to Amillennialism began when the church lost its understanding of Israel as a uniquely chosen people of God with specific promises from God yet to be fulfilled.

Hopefully, recognizing how redefinition has occurred may aid this generation of Bible students against further redefining terms and encourage them to rethink how perceived progress may in fact be a retreat from established truths.

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**ENDNOTES**

7. These are the three sine qua nonns given by Charles C. Ryrie. See Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 39–40. I also am indebted to H. Wayne House for many of the contrasts between CD and PD found in his paper “Danger of Progressive Dispensationalism to Pre-Millennial Theology: Reflections of a Pre-Progressive Dispensationalist,” Pre-Trib Research Center, December 2003 <tinyurl.com/yau2z1rm>.

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Amillennialism (No Millennium) rejects Christ’s literal 1,000-year reign on Earth; spiritualizes Revelation 20 to mean His reign in heaven with Christians; and claims Christ’s Second Coming is accompanied by a general resurrection and judgment of all people, followed by the eternal state.

Covenant Theology views God’s relationship with mankind through a Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace. (Some add a Covenant of Redemption.) Most Reformed theologians hold this position. Old Testament prophecies are interpreted figuratively, not literally, and prophecies concerning Israel’s future are seen as fulfilled in the church. Thus the church replaces Israel as the people of God.

Dispensationalism (Classical Dispensationalism) uses a literal-grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture; distinguishes between Israel and the church; and places the Rapture before the seven-year Tribulation, which is followed by Christ’s return to establish the Millennial Kingdom, which merges into the eternal state at the end of 1,000 years. The Abrahamic, Davidic, and New Covenants are fulfilled in the Millennium. This is the position of The Friends of Israel.

Emergent Church is a postmodern, subjective, relative, and feeling-oriented movement that is continually changing to meet modern spiritual needs. It possesses no unified theological position and denies the existence of absolute biblical truth. Its hallmarks include mysticism, ecumenical inclusion, and relativism.

Eschatology is the study of last things (Bible prophecy) and reveals the outworking of God’s sovereign plan and purposes in history.

Hermeneutics is the science and art of Bible interpretation. It refers to the principles, rules, and methods used in studying Scripture.

Historic Premillennialism maintains Christ will return to establish His Millennial Kingdom on Earth after the Tribulation, and that is when He will rapture His church. Thus it is posttribulational Premillennialism. It makes no distinction between Israel and the church.

Inaugurated Eschatology employs the “already/not yet” philosophy, claiming God’s Kingdom began at Christ’s First Coming but will be fully consummated at His Second Coming. The church today supposedly has access to the Kingdom promises. This view blurs the distinction between Israel and the church and leads into Progressive Dispensationalism.

Kingdom Now Theology believes the church must reestablish God’s rule on Earth before Christ’s return; denies the Rapture; and spiritualizes future promises to Israel, seeing them fulfilled in the church. Kingdom Now Theology is filled with unbiblical, false teachings.

Millennial Kingdom is Christ’s literal reign on Earth for 1,000 years after His Second Coming (Rev. 20:1–7).

Postmillennialism is a 19th-century teaching that claims preaching the gospel will Christianize the world and that Christ will return after a time of peace called the Millennium.

Postmodernism is a 20th-century, Western-society movement that radically reappraises assumptions about culture, personal identity, history, and religion. It emphasizes diversity in worldviews and the inability to know absolute truth.

Premillennialism (Dispensational Premillennialism) maintains Christ will return to establish His Millennial Kingdom on Earth after the Tribulation. It holds to a Pretribulation Rapture and clearly distinguishes between Israel and the church. This is the position of The Friends of Israel.

Preterism claims the book of Revelation communicated how God would deliver Christians from the Roman Empire and predicted Jerusalem’s fall in AD 70 when the Romans destroyed the city. It sees no future for national Israel.

Progressive Dispensationalism embraces the “already/not yet” view that Jesus is ruling spiritually in heaven on David’s throne but that He will reign in a future 1,000-year Kingdom on Earth at His Second Coming.

Rapture is Christ’s imminent return for His church prior to the seven-year Tribulation.

Realized Eschatology claims all New Testament prophecy was fulfilled during Christ’s ministry on Earth; and when Jesus said, “Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 4:17), He meant His Kingdom was present and not future.

Reformed Theology originated with the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century and holds strongly to the sovereignty of God and salvation by grace. Its beliefs are stated in the Westminster Confession. Most Reformed theologians interpret the Old Testament prophecies figuratively, not literally, and see prophecies concerning Israel’s future as fulfilled in the church; so the church replaces Israel as the people of God.

Replacement Theology (Supersessionism) teaches that the church has replaced Israel and prophecies made to Israel are being fulfilled in the church today. Prophecies made specifically to Israel in the Old Testament are spiritualized or allegorized and referred to as blessings to Christ’s church. This is not the position of The Friends of Israel.

Tribulation/Great Tribulation is a future seven-year period called “Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7). It begins when the Antichrist confirms a covenant with many in Israel (Dan. 9:27) and God pours out His judgment on the entire ungodly world and brings Israel to national repentance and reconciliation (Rev. 6–19).

Two-peoples-of-God Theory is a defining aspect of Dispensationalism that views Israel and the church as separate entities with distinct promises.
REDEFINING
THE GOSPEL

A look at the true Good News and how it’s being turned into different news today
When our children were young, my wife and I would take them every October 31 to the storage shed behind our house. They each brought a sheet of paper on which they had written a simple sentence thanking God for something: “Thank you, God, for the Bible,” or “Thank you, God, for salvation.”

Inside the shed, we gave them a hammer, and they nailed their papers to the wall. By the time they were teenagers, many yellowed, curled, and dusty pages adorned the shed wall.

Why did we do it? Because on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenberg, Germany, sparking the Protestant Reformation. Luther’s action unfurled a chain of events that realigned many people’s understanding of the gospel with biblical truth. Namely, we are saved from our sins by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone—and not by good deeds or religious traditions.

We had our children reenact Luther’s act so they would remember the event’s significance and how it continues to impact our lives today.

But not all professing Christians today remember. A 2017 Pew Research Center survey, conducted in conjunction with the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation, found that “most Christians in the U.S. (62%) say that both faith in God and good deeds are necessary to get into heaven.” The same is true in Western Europe. According to the survey, “In every country except Norway . . . belief in sola fide [Latin for “faith alone”] is a minority view even among Protestants.”

Redefining the gospel is nothing new. (See Galatians 1:6–7.) People have always been tempted to infuse it with new meaning and structure it into something other than the gospel in the Bible.

OTHER GOSPELS
Here is a sampling of what is being preached today that deviates from Scripture:

**Law-Keeping Gospel.** The New Testament books of Acts and Galatians debunk the notion that people need to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved. Recognizing the importance of this issue and the centrality of the gospel to the Christian faith, a council of church leaders convened in Jerusalem to discuss the matter. After much debate, the apostle Peter stood up and made the case for the gospel of grace (Acts 15:8–11). The council subsequently decided that keeping the Law was not a part of the gospel. We are saved by faith, not by works.

**Lordship Salvation Gospel.** Proponents of lordship salvation insist we must submit to Jesus as Lord or Master of our lives prior to, or as part of, believing the gospel in order to be saved. Their concern is that people will profess faith in Christ and then live however they want. The problem with lordship salvation, however, is that it contradicts the fact that faith is the only condition for salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). Some try to circumvent this issue by redefining faith to include an act of submission. But doing so confuses the essence of genuine faith (an internal assurance and conviction of things hoped for and unseen; Heb. 11:1) with the evidence of genuine faith (our external works; cf. Jas. 2:18).

If, as the lordship-salvation gospel proposes, we had to submit completely to Christ’s lordship in order to be saved, how would we know if we had submitted enough? We wouldn’t. Thus lordship salvation moves perilously close to becoming a gospel of works, contradicting a gospel of grace (Eph. 2:8–9).

**Prosperity Gospel.** This gospel claims God does not want anyone to be sick, poor, or troubled. Come to Jesus; and you will be healthy, wealthy, and problem-free. Certain televangelists promote the prosperity gospel. However, the Bible does not promise us physical and material blessings. Instead, we are promised every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (1:3), as...
well as the certainty that we will suffer tribulation and persecution in this world if we live godly in Christ Jesus (Jn. 16:33; 2 Tim. 3:12). The apostle Paul’s life was proof of that fact. (See 2 Corinthians 11:23–28.)

**Self-Esteem Gospel.** This gospel actually repackages Norman Vincent Peale’s popular positive-thinking philosophy. Peale’s 1952 book, The Power of Positive Thinking, so captivated America that it held a spot on the best-seller list for 186 consecutive weeks. Proclaimers of this gospel focus on being all you can be, becoming your best self; and if you can think it, you can make it happen.

The problem with this philosophy is that it either downplays or completely ignores humanity’s central problem: sin. We need salvation because we are sinners by nature and choice; and the wages of sin is death, both temporal and eternal (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). The cold, hard fact is that we cannot become better. That’s why we need a Savior.

**Social-Justice Gospel.** Like the self-esteem gospel, the social-justice gospel also repackages error. Today’s movement is a retread of the social-gospel movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and emphasizes changing the world by ending poverty, challenging injustices, and bringing equality to the oppressed in the hopes of creating a social revolution that ultimately will bring the Kingdom of God to Earth (a new form of Postmillennialism).

A vanguard in this movement was the 2009 book by Richard Stearns, president of World Vision U.S., titled The Hole in Our Gospel: What Does God Expect of Us? The book postulates that if we do not publicly fight for the poor and for justice and equality, we are not demonstrating the whole gospel. However, the problem with the social-justice gospel is twofold:

First, it confuses means with message. Even though as Christians we are to do good deeds, doing good deeds is not the gospel. No one ever got saved by observing good deeds. The true gospel is a message disseminated through proclamation (1 Cor. 1:21; cf. Rom. 10:13–15; Gal. 3:2). Meeting people’s physical needs is a means to the gospel, and a good means. But we cannot make it a necessary component of the gospel. Godly means for the gospel must be distinguished from the message of the gospel. (See 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.)

From its inception in 1938, The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry has helped refugees, the poor, and the downtrodden; and this work continues today. (Visit our website, foi.org, to view our online gift catalog and see how we provide aid and relief around the world.) But The Friends of Israel also has acknowledged from its beginning that life is fleeting and this work continues today. (Visit our website, foi.org, to make it happen.

The problem with this philosophy is that it either downplays or completely ignores humanity’s central problem: sin. We need salvation because we are sinners by nature and choice; and the wages of sin is death, both temporal and eternal (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). The cold, hard fact is that we cannot become better. That’s why we need a Savior.

**WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?**

The term gospel means “good news.” It is a message eternally profound, yet so simple even a child can understand and believe it. Based on its central elements as outlined in 1 Corinthians 15:1–11, here is a straightforward presentation of God’s amazing gospel of salvation:

- We all are sinners ( Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10, 23).
- The penalty for sin is death (Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 5:12; 6:23).
- Only blood can atone for sin (Lev. 17:11).
- Jesus Christ shed His blood and died in our place (Isa. 53:1–12; Rom. 5:8).3
- Jesus Christ was raised from the dead (Ps. 16:10; Isa. 53:12; Acts 13:30; Rom. 5:10).4

If you believe Jesus Christ did all these things and that there is no way you can remove your sin other than through faith in Him, you will be saved, meaning, you will receive forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life (Acts 10:43; 16:31; Rom. 6:23). Our children are grown now, and we have grandchildren. But whenever I’m in the shed, I take the time to look at the papers hanging on the wall and whisper a prayer of my own, thanking God for His wonderful and simple gospel of grace. ★

ENDNOTES

1 “U.S. Protestants Are Not Defined by Reformation-Era Controversies 500 Years Later,” Pew Research Center, August 31, 2017 <goo.gl/5sa2Ar>.
2 “After 500 Years, Reformation-Era Divisions Have Lost Much of Their Potency,” Pew Research Center, August 31, 2017 <goo.gl/w38HFW>.
3 The proof being He was buried (1 Cor. 15:4).
4 The proof being He was seen by more than 500 people (1 Cor. 15:5–8).

Bruce Scott is the director of Program Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
Navigating the Current Theological Fog

by David Mappes
As a child, I loved to play with silly putty. I would make putty pancakes and press them onto newspapers so the words would appear on the putty. Then I’d remove the putty and stretch and reshape it until the transferred image was almost unrecognizable. Words took on a new shape and meaning.

*Puttyology* is a term I use to describe the current shifting, reshaping, and redefining of biblical truth and doctrine within contemporary religious studies. Many doctrines are being reformulated, including justification by faith, God’s retributive judgment, the eternal destiny of unbelievers, Christ’s substitutionary atonement, the nature of the church and Israel, prophecy, and the nature and interpretation of Scripture.

**THE FOG OF POSTMODERNISM**

Many recent theological challenges have evolved from postmodern theories of interpretation, language, and culture. Postmodernism,* a movement that began in the late 20th century, promotes relativism and pluralism and, in doing so, denies our ability to know absolute truth.

Postmodernists argue all knowledge is provisional and all truth claims have equal standing. They believe our cultural lenses and presuppositions distort our ability to interpret reality accurately. Therefore, truth becomes subjective and based on our personal perspectives, passions, and experiences. What one person considers truth, another may consider fiction. Consequently, it’s easy to see how Postmodernism would erode the Bible’s standing as the authoritative, absolutely truthful Word of God.

Postmodernism also insists all knowledge is shaped and constructed by one’s culture; therefore everyone is limited by subjective, linguistic-cultural forces—even the authors of Scripture.

Postmodernists view the knowledge of truth as a composite of emotions and values embedded in a community and hold openness, tolerance, and dialogue as the loftiest of virtues needed to understand these embedded communal truths.

Christian postmodernists often describe language as broken, slippery, and unable to express God’s infinite greatness and timeless, cultureless universal truths. They often ask, “How can finite language express the infinite?” and argue that the frailty of human language, which is a product of our culture, limits our thoughts. Since language then becomes a mere reference to cultural, linguistic descriptions, they deny a direct correspondence between God’s revelation and the Bible.

Postmodernists deny that Scripture presents untainted truth about reality and instead argue it presents only what its authors perceived to be real and true. They allow for multiple...
meanings and continually revised interpretations of passages based on the reader’s perspective. Doctrine is important and true only to the extent that it facilitates community.

These theories separate God’s revelation from Scripture, thus reducing doctrine to merely a human author’s distorted view, rather than God’s revelation of His eternal truth, and reducing the Bible to nothing more than an inspired narrative based on the reader’s perspective. Doctrine is important and true only to the extent that it facilitates community.

Throughout the book of Acts, Luke referred to a body of doctrine called “the faith” as he emphasized that more priests were becoming “obedient to the faith” (Act 6:7). Paul, too, referred to a discernable body of doctrine as “the faith” when he censured the Galatian church (Gal. 1:23; 3:23–25). Paul concluded his first epistle to Timothy by saying some professing believers at Ephesus had strayed from “the faith” (1 Tim. 6:21).

This objective body of truth is so knowable, definable, and preservable that it can withstand any amount of challenge and can even adjudicate angelic messengers or Paul himself (Gal. 1:6–24).

Paul commended the Roman believers because they had “obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which [they] were delivered” (Rom. 6:17), and he stressed the fact the teaching of God’s Word formed the believers. The Greek word for “form” is *typos*, which connotes the sense of a pattern or mold.

Paul emphasized that the Roman believers were poured into the mold and form of Scripture. The believers’ presuppositions did not shape their interpretation of Scripture. Rather, Scripture shaped and molded their presuppositions and beliefs, just as it should today.

**CORRECTING THE COURSE**

The following correctives can help us preserve biblical and theological truths against redefinition:

1. We should consistently use literal interpretation, which means discerning the human author’s intention by examining what he affirmed in the historical context of his writing. The meaning of a text is limited by its immediate historical and textual parameters—not by personal meaningfulness. Once the meaning is determined, we can seek to apply that meaning.

2. Let Scripture define its nature and knowability, rather than imposing linguistic philosophies on it. The Bible’s writers emphasized that God has revealed His knowledge and will to humanity in His Word.

3. Be alert to warning signs that an organization is denying or depreciating objective interpretation, diminishing the single intended meaning of a text, or refusing to separate a text’s historical meaning from personal meaningfulness.

4. Insist that Scripture, rather than cultural relevancy, be the first and final voice to adjudicate principles for change. Cultural relevancy and meaningful change are important, but they must be validated and regulated by Scripture.
5. Insist on institutional transparency on core doctrinal values and practices and recognize when leaders refuse to communicate, practice, or systemically integrate and enforce those values. Also, institutions should enrich their doctrinal statements to address current theological challenges. 1

6. Emphasize the practice of scriptural disciplines, such as prayer and Bible study, rather than mystical, sensual experiences and liturgies. Knowing our Creator God through Jesus transforms us, but Scripture must measure and govern our experience of transformation.

7. Stay informed about theological trends. For example, many Christian scholars insist they believe in absolute truth; yet, when pressed, they deny we can know absolute truth.

8. Contend for “the faith” without being contentious (Jude 22–25) or retreating to anti-intellectualism. The apostle Peter wrote, “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense [a rational explanation] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15).

9. Finally, proclaim and teach the simple gospel and live for Jesus our Savior. *

ENDNOTE

*See Glossary on page 19.
1 See Dr. David Mappes, “Prioritizing and Revising Articles of Faith,” The Baptist Bulletin (July/August 2016), 16–22.

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THE BERANEAN BOX

What did Jesus mean when He said, “This generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place” (Mt. 24:34)?

The key word here is generation (Greek, genea). It can mean race, nation, or age and can also refer to a physical or moral span of time.

Jesus made the statement when discussing the timing of His return, which He illustrated with a lesson “from the fig tree” (v. 32). The fig tree’s new leaves in late spring assured people summer was near. In like manner, Jesus said, “When you see all these things [the signs in Matthew 24:4–30], know that it [Christ’s Second Coming] is near— at the doors!” (emphasis added; v. 33). The “generation” that sees all these signs will know for certain Christ could return at any moment.

Some people erroneously believe the word generation refers to the people who would witness the Roman army’s destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. But this view is not possible unless we spiritualize the events of Matthew 24:29: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” Jesus said all these things will precede the “Son of Man [Christ] coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (v. 30). These events did not happen in or around AD 70.

Others believe the word generation refers to the Jewish people, who will never pass away “till all these things take place.” Although it is true the Jewish people will never pass away, this fact does not seem to be what Jesus was teaching in the context. We know Jewish people will survive in perpetuity after the events in Matthew 24 are fulfilled (cf. Jer. 31:35–37).

Still others say Christ was teaching that the prophecies in Matthew 24 began to take place in the apostles’ generation. However, this interpretation does not fit the context because Jesus said “all these things” and predicted their fulfillment after His death and resurrection.

So it appears the word generation refers to Jews and Gentiles who will be alive when “all these things” take place. Thus Jesus was saying the generation that witnesses all the Tribulation events will be the generation that also will witness His Second Coming (Mt. 24:4–30; cf. Rev. 6:1–19:21).

BY DAVID M. LEVY
Understanding the Kingdom

Many people refer to the “Kingdom” these days. But to what are they referring? And does their definition agree with the Bible?

by Mike Stallard

The topic of the Kingdom of God dominates Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels. Yet throughout church history, an amazing disunity has characterized the interpretation of the phrase. The Bible certainly uses it in more than one way, which may lead to confusion if we do not rightly divide the Word of God.

The Kingdom of God, for example, refers to God’s sovereign rule over the entire universe at all times. God providentially rules over nature (Ps. 104) and raises up and pulls down nations (Dan. 4:3, 34–35). He is the boss of the universe, and the terminology of Kingdom is sometimes used to feature that idea.1

Since Jesus is God, He rules over the entire universe, which He made (Jn. 1:1–3). In this sense, we can say Jesus is reigning today.

But the Bible also expresses God’s sovereign rule in more specific ways. The apostle Paul taught that Jesus is the Head of the church (Eph. 1:22), which means He is the boss and rules over it.

Christ works spiritually in and through Church Age believers, who are seated positionally in “heavenly places” with Him (v. 20). Jesus governs the lives of believers, especially as they submit to the work of God’s Word and the Spirit in their lives (Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:16).

The Bible’s most frequent use of the word Kingdom refers to Christ’s earthly, political, ethnic, Israel-centered Kingdom that will begin in the last days. This Kingdom has several names: Messianic Kingdom, Davidic Kingdom, and Eschatological Kingdom.

The Kingdom is referred to as the Messianic Kingdom because Messiah Jesus will return to establish this specific rule of God on Earth (Isa. 11; Dan. 7; Zech. 14; Rev. 19). It is also called the coming Davidic Kingdom because it will fulfill God’s promise to King David in the Davidic Covenant to send the Messiah to reign forever from David’s throne in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7; Ps. 89; Amos 9:11–15). And it is sometimes called
the Eschatological Kingdom because Christ will establish it in the last days. (Eschatology is the study of last-days events.)

The Kingdom will usher in Israel's national and spiritual restoration (Joel 3; Ezek. 36; Dan. 7:13–14). The Millennium, Christ's 1,000-year reign on the present earth, will be the grand "kickoff party" that jumpstarts this specific earthly rule of God (Rev. 20). The eternal state will follow and consummate God's plan to rule eternally in His Kingdom on Earth (Rev. 21–22).

DEPARTURE FROM TRUTH

Unfortunately, this future, earthly Kingdom centered in Israel and launched at Christ's Second Coming has been ignored or redefined since the early days of the church. As early as the second century, church fathers began calling Christians the "true Israelite race." They jettisoned Jewish aspects of the Messianic Kingdom in favor of a Christian-only version of Premillennialism* (the view that Christ will return before the Millennium).

By the time of Origen in the third century, many Christians had abandoned Premillennialism altogether for a robust Amillennialism* (no-Millennium view) that sees the church as the Kingdom. Using an allegorical, rather than literal, interpretation, they redefined Scripture's promises of a future, earthly, Israel-centered Kingdom to mean a spiritual Kingdom that characterizes the time between Christ's two advents. (It is important to note, however, that throughout church history, Premillennialism never vanished.)

Naturally, this redefinition viewed the Millennium of Revelation 20:1–6 as events that began with Christ's First Coming, instead of events to follow His Second Coming, as described in Revelation 19:11–16. This redefinition of the Kingdom was part of the overall theology that saw the church as replacing Israel in God's plan. This replacement view dominated Christianity through the Reformation.

OTHER REDEFINITIONS

Another redefinition of the Kingdom arose in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Its codifier was Daniel Whitby, whose work A Treatise on the True Millennium (1703) argued that the church triumphant would usher in the Kingdom by successfully evangelizing and Christianizing society's institutions. Jesus would then return at the end of the Millennium.

Whitby's postmillennial* redefinition of the Kingdom became the most prominent view among American evangelicals during the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was easy to view the Kingdom in terms of the church's upward progress during the heady days of the rise of 19th-century American economic and military might. But the harshness of the 20th century's two world wars and the Holocaust failed to support the optimism inherent in postmillennial dreams of progress; so the view fell out of favor.

At the same time, a revival of Premillennialism* was underway. Of special interest was the rise of dispensational forms of Premillennialism in the early 19th century, which, in essence, constituted a rediscovery of the Jewish perspective on the Bible.

Dispensationalism,* which never confuses Israel with the church, brought about a return to a more literal understanding of God's promises to Israel in the Old Testament, including belief in Israel's future restoration to the Promised Land. Political events seemed to bolster the view: The modern Zionist movement began in the 1890s, and Israel became a nation again in 1948—after almost 1,900 years of dispersion.

As a result, this biblical view rose to prominence among Bible-believing Christians in America following the Second World War.

Recently, the religious landscape has become cloudier. The premillennial view of the Kingdom remains the most widely held position among evangelicals, but Replacement Theology* is rising again with the resurgence of Reformed Theology. Some evangelical churches that used to teach the literal, biblical truth about God's promises to Israel have now defected.

This departure from truth, usually to Amillennialism, communicates a new definition of Kingdom that is unfamiliar to many evangelicals. But it is merely a reformulation of an older redefinition that began in the church's early days.

A survey of history's redefinition of Kingdom should remind us to make sure the Bible—not current events—drives our conclusions. As part of that understanding, we must take God's promises to Israel seriously and believe that Messiah Jesus will return to Israel to set up an earthly Kingdom. His literal presence on Earth is necessary to establish the Kingdom predicted by the prophets (Isa. 11; Dan. 7; Zech. 12—14; Rev. 19—22).

The Kingdom should never be redefined in ways contrary to the truth. 

ENDNOTES

- For a definition, see the Glossary on page 19.

1 This idea is sometimes referred to as God's "universal Kingdom." For example, see Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom (1959; reprint, Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1992), 22–36.


4 For details on these historical developments, see Ronald E. Diprose, Israel in the Development of Christian Thought (Rome: Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000). Also, Michael J. Vach, The Church as a Replacement of Israel (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009).


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We live in a world of widespread redefinition. Some people view the practice as a positive modification to an old, outdated understanding of certain terms and practices, while others see it as a fundamental loss.

The redefinition of marriage represents the most glaring contemporary example. The word has been reformulated to mean more than the God-ordained union of one man and one woman for life. It now includes the union of two men or two women.

For many people today, the word Israel in the Bible no longer means “Israel.” But redefining the term not only hurts the Jewish people, it hurts the Gentiles as well.

BY MARK MCGINNIS
Though some view this change as a gain, it is actually a fundamental loss. It has eroded the foundational meaning of marriage, and it’s only a matter of time before society loses the original definition altogether.

Redefinition causes the same essential loss in theology. One of the common biblical redefinitions concerns Israel. For some, Israel does not mean ethnic Israel. Some say it refers to all believers throughout history and that the church is a replacement for, or continuation of, the Old Testament’s ethnic Israel. Yet any redefinition of Israel turns it into an entity that is completely different from what God intends.

As with the redefinition of marriage, redefining Israel presents significant loss. If we take Israel to mean anything other than national, ethnic Israel, we not only strip Israel of God’s future blessing but we strip Gentile believers of it, as well.

**LOSS OF PROMISED BLESSING**

The Lord told Abraham,

> Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3).

The Jewish people call Abraham their father because of this promise, known as the Abrahamic Covenant (v. 2; Jn. 8:53, 56; Acts 3:25; 7:2). Nowhere in the Bible does God nullify, abrogate, or redefine this promise. The covenant was physical, unconditional, and eternal (Gen. 17:7–8); and the apostle Paul said even Israel’s sin could not separate God from His people or cause Him to reject them or rescind His promises to them (Rom. 11:1).

It is difficult to comprehend how someone could redefine Israel to mean anything other than national Israel since God’s promise to Abraham of a nation, land, and seed was made by an everlasting covenant. Redefining this term takes away the Jewish people’s nationhood, land, and divine blessing.

However, the loss is not confined to Israel. Gentile nations also lose the promise of God’s blessing as they bless ethnic Israel. If Israel is not truly Israel, there remains no Israel to bless and, therefore, no blessing for Gentiles. Without national Israel there is no Abrahamic Covenant for Jew or Gentile.

**LOSS OF PROMISED COMFORT AND RESTORATION**

Reports of violence, destruction and devastation bombard us daily. But our suffering in the West does not compare to Israel’s history of suffering. History overflows with anti-Semitism, pogroms, the Holocaust, and utter hatred of the Jewish people. Psalm 83:3–4 captures the continual evil Israel faces:

> They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.”

However, in the midst of such horrible and continual wickedness, God promises future comfort, safety, and restoration. He recognizes Israel’s tenuous position and has promised joy:

> Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, so that no one went through you, I will make you an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations. Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise (Isa. 60:15, 18).

A day is coming when Israel will no longer experience violence at the hands of its enemies but will dwell in perfect security. Ethnic Israel possesses a divine promise of comfort
in the regathering of its people (v. 4). God also promises the nation wealth (vv. 5–6, 9), a new Temple, the reinstatement of Temple sacrifices (v. 7), and recognition as the leading nation of the world (vv. 12–14). But most thrilling is that the Lord Himself will dwell in Israel’s presence, and Israel’s people will be righteous before Him and enjoy His divine favor forever (vv. 10, 16, 19–21).1

If Israel does not refer to ethnic Israel, what comfort would these promises have provided the believing Jewish remnant in Isaiah’s day? Isaiah’s audience looked forward to a time when Israel would no longer be hated or forsaken (v. 15).

Israel still looks forward to a future when God’s promises will be fulfilled. If they’re not fulfilled as stated—if God does not fulfill His everlasting covenant to Israel—then we might question God’s integrity.

Redefining Israel not only robs the Jewish people, but it also cheats Gentiles of a future time of worship and blessing in Jerusalem with them (v. 11–12).

**LOSS OF THE PROMISE OF GOD’S INTEGRITY**

God does not lie. What He says, He will do. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, contains many future prophecies conferring divine promises on national Israel. These promises gave the Jewish people hope, comfort, encouragement, and motivation for holy living in the past; and they continue to do so today.

God’s integrity is the foundation for these divine guarantees. Moses wrote, “God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Num. 23:19).

For God to replace or redefine Israel, He would have to lie and subvert His own Word.

If God were to redefine Israel and thus negate His prophecies concerning it, why should we trust Him to keep His Word to us? What is our faith built upon if not God’s Word? A trustworthy God keeps all His promises—to Jew and Gentile alike. God Himself declares,

Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The Lord of hosts is His name): “If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever” (Jer. 31:35–36).

Today the sun still shines. The moon and stars still stand in their appointed places, and the sea waves still rise and fall. Using these four elements—sun, moon, stars, and sea—God Himself declares the permanency of His Covenant with Israel. God has not redefined Israel or cast off His Chosen People.

Theological redefinition robs Israel of its rightful place in God’s continuing program, Gentiles of their blessings for blessing Israel, and God of His integrity. Redefining Israel is not a gain but, rather, a profound loss for Jew and Gentile alike. If God has not redefined Israel, neither should we.

**ENDNOTE**

1 The promises in Isaiah 60 correspond to the future events described in Revelation 21 (Isa. 60:19–20 cf. Rev. 21:2; Isa. 60:20 cf. Rev. 21:4).
When we read the Scriptures it’s easy to forget that the authors of the Bible were virtually all Jewish and that Christianity is deeply rooted in Judaism. To the early church, Christianity was not a different religion from Judaism—it was the fulfillment of all that was written in the Law and the Prophets.

The Jewish Roots of Christianity takes you to Jerusalem for eye-opening insights into the link between Judaism and Christianity. Watch various interviews by Israeli Christians including The Friends of Israel’s own, Pastor Meno Kalisher, son of Holocaust survivor Zvi Kalisher.

See enclosed envelope for ordering details.

Making a Will That Works

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.

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

To learn more about wills, request our free, no-obligation brochure Making a Will That Works. Simply check the appropriate box on the envelope in this magazine, call Tom Geoghan at our office at 800-257-7843, or email us at advancement@foi.org.

Our Advancement Team

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Its stairway supposedly served as an access point for gods to travel between heaven and Earth. The Akkadian word sim Illitu (stairway) is related to the Hebrew word su llam (ladder), which the Bible uses for Jacob’s ladder that “reached to heaven” and upon which “the angels of God were ascending and descending” (28:12).

The ziggurat’s purpose was to provide a gateway to the heavenly abode. But rather than allow men to ascend heavenward in their arrogance, God descended to stop their construction and end their prideful work by causing them to speak different languages so they could not understand one another (11:7).

The Bible also states the tower’s purpose was to prevent the world’s people from being “scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (v. 4). It was intended to keep the population together in order to achieve greater benefits than that of segregated societies.

The archaeological record reveals this urbanization deified the human rulers who controlled the temple-state, a form of government described of the gods in Mesopotamian mythology. So God was displeased, not because the builders of the Tower of Babel sought to construct a tower, but because they purposed to create a cultic center that deified man and degraded God.

If this concept of the temple-state had taken hold, it would have altered mankind’s relationship with the Creator, a thought reflected in Genesis 11:6: “This is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do [for themselves] will be withheld from them.” Babylon later formalized this act of divine distortion and degradation, but its roots began in Babel.

The story of the Tower of Babel reminds us that man’s attempt to defy God will ultimately end in failure. Although God may delay His judgment of such societies today, Judgment Day is coming. God’s Word and the archaeological record attest to this truth.

ENDNOTES

3 Ibid., 168.

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When Paul established the Thessalonian church, he taught believers there about Jesus Christ’s imminent return. They were told, “wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Th. 1:10). After he left Thessalonica, some believers eventually died, causing the church to wonder what would happen to these dead saints at Christ’s coming.

The church had questions: Had those who died missed Christ’s imminent return? Do people who die before the Rapture lose all hope of sharing in the blessed hope? Had they missed the Kingdom Age? Would they be raised at a general resurrection? In other words, what happens to those of us who die in the Lord? These may be the same questions some of us ask today.

First Thessalonians 4:13–18 explains what happens to all believers, dead and alive, when Christ returns for His church.

THE ASSURANCE
The apostle Paul gave clarity and comfort concerning the Lord’s return: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope” (v. 13).

He affectionately called the Thessalonians “brethren” and did not rebuke them for being ignorant. Instead, he wanted to educate them about the position of those who had died.

The phrase fallen asleep is a euphemism for death. There is no thought here of so-called soul sleep; that doctrine is not scriptural. The soul never sleeps after death; it is extremely conscious. (See Luke 16:19–31.)

By teaching those in “sorrow” (pain and grief) over the death of loved ones, Paul removed the misconception that dead saints missed out on Christ’s coming. On the contrary, believers who die will receive the same benefits as living Christians at Christ’s return for His church. This knowledge gave the Thessalonian believers great hope, peace, and assurance that no one had missed the Rapture.

Our hope as Christians rests in our relationship with Jesus Christ: “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (1 Th. 4:14). We should never sorrow over those who died in the Lord because Jesus will bring them with Him at the Rapture.

Paul assured the Thessalonians his teaching was from the Lord: “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord” (v. 15). Paul’s very words came to him from the Lord Jesus Christ: “We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means [never under any condition] precede those who are asleep [already dead]” (v. 15). The dead in Christ will rise first and will be the first to meet the Lord in the clouds.

Notice how Paul lived with the great expectation of the Lord’s imminent return: “we who are alive and remain.” This teaching gave further assurance the dead in Christ had not missed the Rapture.

THE REAPPEARANCE
Paul explained the process that will take place at the Rapture: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (v. 16). Christ will return personally for His church (cf. Jn. 14:3; Acts 1:9–11).

We’ll hear three sounds at the Lord’s appearing:

1. A shout. Christ will descend with a shout in the form of a command, like a drill sergeant ordering his troops to attention with authority and urgency. Scripture does not divulge the content of the shout, to whom it is directed, or who does the shouting—whether it is Christ Himself, an archangel, or simply a voice from heaven. This much we know: The sound from heaven will be heard by church saints dead and alive, and they will respond immediately.

2. The voice of an archangel. We do not know if there is more than one archangel; Michael is the only one the Bible

THE PURPOSE OF BEING CAUGHT UP IS “TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR. AND THUS WE SHALL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD.”
(1 Th. 4:17)
mentions (cf. Dan. 10:13; 12:1; Jude 9). The Bible does not reveal what the voice sounds like or whether it contains spoken words.

3. **The trumpet of God.** The trumpet belongs to God, but Scripture tells us nothing else. The trumpet is connected to end-times events: the Rapture of the church (1 Cor. 15:52), the seven trumpet judgments in the Great Tribulation (Rev. 8—9; 11:15), and the trumpet blown to gather God’s elect from around the world after Christ’s Second Coming (Mt. 24:31).

The trumpet in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and the “last trumpet” in 1 Corinthians 15:52 speak of the same event, when God raises dead church saints and unites them with living church saints in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

**THE RAPTURE**

Paul said, “And the dead in Christ will rise first” (v. 16). Even though we die, we are still part of the church. Death does not change our standing or relationship to Jesus Christ.

Although our bodies lie in the grave, our souls and spirits are in God’s presence, where we consciously enjoy eternal bliss as we wait for our glorified, resurrected bodies: “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). When the Lord appears for His church, the dead in Christ are the first to be resurrected. “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. 4:17).

The phrase **caught up** comes from the Greek word **harpazo,** meaning, “to seize,” “snatch up,” or “carry off by force.” It means the same as the Latin word **rapturo,** where we get the English word **rapture.** Scripture calls the rapture a “mystery” (1 Cor. 15:51) that takes place “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (v. 52). Those of us who are Christians will be changed and receive glorified bodies, preparing us to live forever in the eternal state.

Jesus said He will come again to take believers to heaven (Jn. 14:1–3). The purpose of being caught up is “to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:17).

**THE COMFORT**

The apostle concluded his words of assurance with a simple statement: “Therefore comfort one another with these words” (v. 18).

The word **comfort** could be translated “encourage.” Both words provide hope. Notice, Paul did not say he would comfort them continually. Rather, he exhorted them to encourage and comfort one another in the Lord. This was a command, not a suggestion.

**THE CONTROVERSY**

Over the years, scholars have debated the timing of the Rapture. (See “When Is It?” by Mike Stallard in the January/February 2018 issue.)

I believe Scripture teaches a pretribulation Rapture (it will occur before the seven-year Tribulation) for the following reasons:

1. God promises to deliver His church from the wrath of the Tribulation that will come on the whole world (1 Th. 1:10; 5:9–10; Rev. 3:10).
2. The word church appears 19 times in Revelation 1—3 but not at all in Revelation 4—18 when God pours out the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments on Earth.
3. The Rapture is imminent (impending), meaning no prophecy in Scripture need be fulfilled before it occurs.

We do well to ask ourselves, How should I prepare for the imminent return of the Lord? Only people who have put their faith in Christ alone for salvation will go with Him at the Rapture. If you aren’t certain you have trusted in Him alone, now is the time to repent of your sin and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior. Why not do it today?

**OUR HOPE AS CHRISTIANS RESTS IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST:** “FOR IF WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN, EVEN SO GOD WILL BRING WITH HIM THOSE WHO SLEEP IN JESUS.” (1 TH. 4:14)
WHEN WE HURT

Easter was the next morning. I was at church, tired but rejoicing after three packed-out presentations of our church’s passion play that weekend. Hundreds of people had visited, and dozens had made professions of faith in Christ.

Just then, a distraught man approached me. His 5-year-old grandson had been in a car that was struck by a drunk driver. The boy was in critical condition. The situation was every grandparent’s worst nightmare.

We gathered his wife and other family members, held hands, and prayed for young Ollie. The next morning they learned he had died. Where can we find hope when life seems to crumble around us?

Our culture generates plenty of emotion concerning Christmas, with scenes of silver bells, jolly elves, and the babe in a manger. But it doesn’t seem to care much about Easter. Yet that first Easter Sunday was dramatic. Luke 24 presents one of the most fascinating Easter accounts and illustrates the path to unlocking hope in our own lives.

DOLDRUMS OF DESPAIR

The disciples’ hopes were crushed with Jesus’ crucifixion. When they heard Jesus’ tomb was empty, they didn’t believe it. Their doubts disoriented them. Two disciples decided to go home immediately, “to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And as they talked together of all these things which had happened,” they tried to make sense of their confused emotions (vv. 13–14).

In that culture, people walked everywhere. So it was not unusual for someone to join them along the way. “While they conversed and reasoned . . . Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him” (vv. 15–16). The other traveler was the risen Christ.

Wanting to draw them out, Jesus asked, “What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?” (v. 17).

The man named Cleopas asked the stranger if He was the only one in Jerusalem who did not know the things that had occurred. The Lord asked, “What things?”

They told Him about the crucifixion and voiced their disappointment: “We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel” (v. 21). “Indeed,” they continued, “besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see” (vv. 21–24).

Doubt, disorientation, disappointment, depression, and despair had gripped these men.
How could they find hope? How can we? How can we offer hope to grieving grandparents or others in our despairing world?

UNLOCKING HOPE

Only when the two men had finished venting their despair did the stranger respond: “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ [Messiah] to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” (vv. 25–26). He rebuked them for failing to understand God’s written revelation in the Hebrew Scriptures, which could have prepared them for His suffering, death, and resurrection.

As they walked, Jesus taught them: “Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (v. 27). The entire Old Testament had paved the way for Him.

Unlocking hope requires understanding God’s written Word. The better we know the Bible, especially what it says about our Savior, the better prepared we’ll be for hope-threatening tragedies. And the better we know the Savior Himself, the more peace we have in life.

After expounding the Scriptures, Jesus gave the men an opportunity to spend more time with Him. Then He revealed His identity. As the evening unfolded and they ate together, Jesus blessed and broke bread. Suddenly, “their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight” (v. 31). The veil was finally lifted, and they recognized that the One with whom they personally had walked, talked, and eaten was the risen Messiah. Unlocking hope requires a personal relationship with the living Lord—not merely knowing about Him, but knowing Him.

After He departed, the men exclaimed, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (v. 32). Their personal understanding of the written Word prepared the way for their personal experience with the living Lord.

The men were never the same. Their hearts burned with joy and an excitement they had to share. They immediately returned to Jerusalem and told everyone what had happened. They had been hurting, but they found their hope in Christ.

What about little Ollie’s family? His kindergarten teacher and principal both approached me moments before I conducted his funeral. They were shaken, not only by his unexpected death but also by his extraordinary life. You see, the day before Ollie died, he was overheard telling a classmate, “We don’t have anything to be afraid of because God is always with us and takes care of us.”

From age 3, Ollie’s favorite place was church. He loved to quote Bible verses about Jesus and was often overheard singing his favorite song, “I Have Decided to Follow Jesus.”

Today Ollie is with Jesus. God had personally prepared him for heaven and made him an amazing witness to family, classmates, and teachers. Yes, his family grieves; but they don’t sorrow as others who have no hope. And they know for a fact they will be reunited with Ollie someday.

If you are treading along the path of despair, Jesus wants to walk with you, reveal Himself to you, and give you undying hope. On Easter morning and every morning, we can face tomorrow because He lives.

If you don’t have a personal relationship with Jesus, why not meet Him in the Bible and receive Him personally by faith today?

Unlocking hope requires a personal relationship with the living Lord—not merely knowing about Him, but knowing Him.
Teva Pharmaceutical Industries—the world’s largest manufacturer of generic drugs and one of Israel’s largest employers—has announced its decision to lay off 1,750 of its Israeli employees and shut down two of its plants in Jerusalem due to financial trouble.

The announcement elicited a firestorm of protests across Israel. Teva workers skipped work, picketed outside the company's medical plant, and barricaded themselves inside the factory, *The Jerusalem Post* reported.

“These people work around the clock [for Teva], giving their souls and lives. It’s very sad and very frustrating; this place is like family for us; we never dreamed we would be in a situation like this,” chairman of the Petah Tikvah workers union told *The Times of Israel*.

Teva accumulated its massive debt in 2016 after paying $40.5 billion for Allergan’s generic drug unit and faces increasing generic-drug competition. Israelis resent the fact that employees must now bear the consequences for the company’s bad financial management, Bloomberg.com reported.

Teva’s CEO Kare Schultz called the closing of the Jerusalem plants “painful, but absolutely vital.” “In order for Teva to remain an Israeli company and continue to prosper in Israel, and to continue with our significant contribution to the Israeli economy, we must first and foremost save our company,” Schultz said.

In addition to firing one-fourth of its Israeli workforce, Teva plans to lay off 14,000 international employees. The layoffs and plant closings are part of Teva’s overall plan to decrease costs by $3 billion within two years. After the layoffs, Teva will be left with around 5,000 Israeli employees, the *Post* reported.

From news reports

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**ISRAEL EMERGES AS GLOBAL LEADER IN DIGITAL CURRENCY**

Israel has emerged as a global leader in the current financial technology revolution of digital currency, such as Bitcoin. The Jewish nation’s cyber capabilities, security proficiency, and wealth of entrepreneurial expertise provide the ideal foundation for blockchain technology projects, according to financial experts.

Blockchain is a distributed database where transactions made in digital currencies like Bitcoin are recorded chronologically and publicly, without the need of banks.

“It is overwhelming to watch the ‘start-up nation’ transform into the ‘crypto nation,’” said Nimrod May, chief marking officer of the Swiss-Israeli technology firm Sirin Labs. “Blockchain technologies and the promise behind decentralized services is a profound game-changing technology. It represents the combination of deep thinking, value creating and ‘seeing the light’ regarding the future direction of technology. These are all central to the Israeli technology ecosystem, which is why we are only at the beginning of the tidal rise of companies in Israel which are harnessing the potential of the blockchain,” said May.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu echoed May’s sentiments in a recent interview, where he highlighted the role banks currently play as mediators and how the decentralized technology at the core of digital currencies eliminates the need for such formal institutions. “Will the banks disappear in the future?” a reporter asked him.

“The answer is yes,” Netanyahu responded confidently. “Will it happen tomorrow? Will it happen because of bitcoin? That is the question, but bitcoin is certainly pushing in that direction.”

Several digital currency start-ups in Israel, such as Bancor and Stox, already have valuations in the tens and hundreds of millions, and hundreds more are expected to emerge in the coming years.

*JNS.org*
TRUMP FREEZES GRANT TO PALESTINIANS

U.S. President Donald Trump has decided to halt a $125 million grant to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA) until the Palestinians agree to participate in peace negotiations with Israel.

The U.S. annually gives more than $600 million to the Palestinians, with about $375 million going directly to the UNRWA, JNS.org reported. The president “doesn’t want to give any additional funding until the Palestinians agree to come back to the negotiation table,” U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley said.

Trump tweeted, “We pay the Palestinians hundreds of millions of dollars a year and get no appreciation or respect. . . . With the Palestinians no longer willing to talk peace, why should we make any of these massive future payments to them?”

The UNRWA, which is supposed to provide humanitarian assistance to Arab refugees, uses its resources to incite terror against Israel in its schools and to house Hamas rockets in its facilities.

From news reports

NEW CHILDREN’S BOOK PRAISES INTIFADA

Jewish parents in New York City have begun to speak out against a new children’s book called P is for Palestine, which praises the Arab-Palestinian Intifada as a “rising up for what is right” and indoctrinates children to hate Israel.

The book was released at the end of last year by Iranian-born author Dr. Golbarg Bashi, who said she wrote it to teach children the ABCs of Palestinian culture, Haaretz reported. “I is for Intifada, Arabic for rising up for what is right, if you are a kid or grownup!” the book reads. It shows an Arab-Palestinian father and son standing near barbed wire (symbolizing “Israeli oppression”) and flashing the V-for-victory sign over Israel, JNS.org reported.

The Intifada, far from being a “rising up for what is right,” was a murderous rampage of Palestinians killing Jewish Israelis. Rabbi Ammiel Hirsch of Manhattan’s Stephen Wise Free Synagogue, one of the book’s chief critics, described it as “the glorification of the Palestinian Intifada—a cruel, murderous, and terrorist campaign that purposely targeted innocent Israelis, including children, in restaurants, buses, hospitals, schools, and shopping malls.”

From news reports

OTHER COUNTRIES CONSIDER MOVING THEIR EMBASSIES

Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales has announced that Guatemala will follow the United States in moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The Central American leader and evangelical Christian said Guatemala also “supported the creation of the State of Israel.”

The Israeli Foreign Ministry said more than 10 nations have contacted it, expressing interest in relocating their embassies. Although the Foreign Ministry did not release any names, three of the countries are thought to be the Czech Republic, Philippines, and Romania. Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely said many have a strong Christian base. Between 35 percent and 40 percent of Guatemala’s 16.6 million citizens reportedly are evangelical.

From news reports

NEW CABLE CAR SYSTEM TO BE BUILT IN JERUSALEM

Israel’s Ministry of Tourism has introduced the idea of building a new cable car system to link Jerusalem’s key religious landmarks. Projected to be up and running by 2021, the system will take visitors from Jerusalem’s German Colony neighborhood to the Western Wall and then to the Mount of Olives.

Israel’s Tourism Minister Yariv Levin called the project “yet another boost to tourism” in the capital city. The initiative was officially unveiled in May, when the Israeli cabinet held a special session in the Western Wall tunnels to mark the 50th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem. Officials project the system will cost around $56 million.

JNS.org

ISRAELI SECURITY FORCES UNCOVER HAMAS TERROR CELL

Israeli security forces recently uncovered a Hamas terror cell intended for kidnapping local Jewish residents from bus stops in Samaria. The cell’s leader, 26-year-old Muad Ashtiyah from the village of Tel near Nablus, had acquired weapons and recruited terrorists Mahmoud Ramadan and Ahman Ramadan, both 19, to assist with the kidnappings.

The terrorists had collected intelligence on the main routes in the area and planned to disguise themselves as Jews to lure potential victims into entering their vehicle. Israel’s Shin Bet security agency seized several weapons from the cell, including a pistol, stun gun, and pepper spray.

JNS.org

MORE ANCIENT JEWISH ARTIFACTS FOUND IN ISRAEL

The Israel Antiquities Authority recently revealed two new archaeological discoveries dating back to the ancient Jewish kingdoms of Israel.

One discovery included an ancient inscription of a seven-branched menorah on a large stone slab found in the northern Israeli city of Tiberias. According to archaeologists, the basalt block featuring the engraving was originally used as a door to a Jewish tomb between the second and fourth centuries BC.

The second finding was a 2,200-year-old clay oil lamp dating back to the time when Judah Maccabee fought the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes. A mother and her 7-year-old daughter found the lamp during a hike in Israel’s Beit She’an Valley. Archaeologists said the lamp’s discovery attests to the activity that existed in the valley during the Hellenistic period.

JNS.org
n Psalm 56:4, it is written, “In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?” It is Passover season, and the ultra-Orthodox travel from house to house trying to convince the new Russian immigrants here to believe as they do. They believe they are performing a great mitzvah (good deed) and fighting to sanctify God’s holy name.

Recently, my wife and I had the privilege of welcoming them into our home. As we often say here, “If the mountain will not come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the mountain.” They came not knowing who I was, but I knew who they were.

When they arrived, I warmly welcomed them, as I receive everyone. Our door is always open. Once inside, they opened a big package they were carrying and took out many booklets. Most of the books spoke against people who believe in Christ the Lord.

“What books have you brought?” I asked them.

“These books are very important. You must read them so you will know how holy they are. You will learn much, including how to live,” one replied.

“You see,” I said, “I do not believe in all of those fictitious stories or in the old rabbinical traditions. I believe only in the mighty God. As it is written in Deuteronomy 6:13, ‘You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him.’ And what are you doing? You say you are fighting for the sanctification of the holy Name, but have a good look around you and see whom you worship,” I said.

They were not ready to hear what I was saying. They thought they had come to the home of a new immigrant. I came to Israel before the 1948 War of Independence. Soon they began looking at one another and trying to leave. So I...
said, “I am very happy to speak with you; you can stay here. Say whatever is on your mind.”

“Let us get to the root,” one said. “Who are you? You are not like most people we visit.”

I had been waiting for that question. When speaking with such people, you cannot say right away, “I believe in Christ!” No, with such people you must be patient. As it is written in 2 Timothy 2:24, “A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient.”

The ultra-Orthodox have been coming to our house a great deal lately because we live in a neighborhood filled with new immigrants. These newcomers do not know the Scriptures or the true faith. So the ultra-Orthodox find it easy to convince them to think as they do. I was not easy to persuade, which surprised the men.

They tried to convince me from their many commentaries that they were right. But as we continued to speak, they became more nervous. They wanted to know how I gained so much knowledge. That question gave me the great opportunity to share with them something they had never heard. I read them the “forbidden chapter” of Isaiah 53, where it is written,

He was despised, and we [the Jewish people] did not esteem Him. . . . We esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. . . . And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (vv. 3–6).

“Do you know about whom this is written?” one asked me. “This is written by the Holy Spirit of the Lord about ‘This One’ [Jesus]. You are so fearful to even say His name because your rabbis have put a great fear in you to keep you from knowing the truth.”

They talked among one another. Then I read Isaiah 44:6: “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God.’”

Surprisingly, they did not try to argue with me about what I shared. As our long conversation came to a close, one said, “We have listened, and you have given us much to think about. We have a lot of homework to do.”

— The Friends of Israel Archives, April 2004

Zvi Kalisher (1928–2014) was a Holocaust survivor who was known for his unswerving faithfulness to the Lord and his bold witness in Jerusalem. He was with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry for more than 55 years.
Jesus’ disciples were as anxious as we are today to know the timing of His return as King. “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’”

In Matthew 24—25, Jesus delivered the well-known, but often misunderstood, Olivet Discourse to help ease the fear that this world will never know peace. Join us as we open the Scriptures and examine what Christ told His disciples regarding the future and the direction in which the world is moving.

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