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CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

FOCUS ON ISRAEL NIGHT – Tuesday at 6:30 P.M.
Elliott Chodoff is a political and military analyst specializing in the Middle East conflict and global war on terror. He is the founding and managing editor of Middle East: On Target and is deputy chief of staff for Population for the Northern Region of Israel in Home Front Command.

PASTORS’ LUNCHEON – Wednesday at 12:30 P.M.
Open to pastors currently serving in local church ministry. Wives are invited. Speaker: Clarence Johnson, director of Institute of Jewish Studies. No charge. Registration required.

YOUTH EVENT – Wednesday at 6:30 P.M.
“On the Frontline With Timothy Rabinik.” Open to students in grades 6 through 12. Pizza and ice cream! No charge. Registration required.

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ISRAEL PAST – ROMANS 9

6:30 P.M. TO 8 P.M.
SESSION #1: JIM SHOWERS
An Overview — Romans 9–11
SESSION #2: DAVID LEVY
Israel’s Problem — Romans 9:1–3
Featuring Jewish and Christian Music

ISRAEL PRESENT – ROMANS 10

6:30 P.M. TO 8:30 P.M.
Focus on Israel Night
Guest Speaker — Elliott Chodoff
Featuring Jewish and Christian Music

ISRAEL FUTURE – ROMANS 11

For more details, please call The Friends of Israel Monday through Friday between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. (Eastern time) at 800–257–7843, and ask for Lisa Grosso at extension 144. Or visit our website, www.foi.org/events.

SPEAKERS

ISRAEL–Past, Present, and Future: Romans 9, 10, 11
THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL WINONA LAKE
PROPHECY CONFERENCE • JULY 20–24, 2014
THE MANAHAN ORTHOPAEDIC CAPITAL CENTER • GRACE COLLEGE & SEMINARY
610 WOOSTER ROAD, WINONA LAKE, INDIANA 46590

Update on Russia and Ukraine
Timothy Rabinik
Poland

Children’s Program
Sunday through Thursday during all sessions. The Manahan Orthopaedic Capital Center (2nd floor classroom)

Special Report Blessing Israel
Tom Geoghan
Vice President
Ministry Advancement

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Shocking as it seems, anti-Semitism is becoming almost mainstream. And you may be surprised to learn who is not opposing it.

Caesarea Maritime
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Jerusalem’s Old City
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The Western Wall
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If there’s one place everyone associates with Jerusalem, it’s the Western Wall. But it’s far more than a tourist site, as you’ll soon see.

Israel My Glory (ISSN 8755-402X) is published bimonthly for $19.95 per year by The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1179 Almonesson Road, Deptford Township, Westville, New Jersey 08093. Periodicals postage paid at Westville, NJ, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Israel My Glory, P.O. Box 908, Bellmawr, NJ 08099-0908.
Life is filled with questions. Questions help us focus on a subject and motivate us to seek answers. Many questions are simple; others can be complex.

Arguably, the most important question Jesus ever asked was one He posed in the least likely of places, when He took His disciples north of Galilee into the region of Caesarea Philippi (Mt. 16:13–20). Caesarea Philippi was a Gentile, pagan community where false gods were worshiped.

Each of our Friends of Israel Up to Jerusalem tours stops at Caesarea Philippi to recall where Jesus declared He would build His church. A rock cliff marks the location of the ancient Roman community. In Jesus’ day, temples to pagan gods stood at the base of the cliff. The flute-playing, half man-half goat, Greek god Pan was honored and worshiped there. A spring flowed from the mouth of a cave at the base of the cliff. Believing the cave was the connection to the underworld, the pagan worshipers referred to it as the “gates of hell.”

Jesus was in Caesarea Philippi when He asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (v. 13). After hearing their answers, He asked them a much more personal question: “But who do you say that I am?” (v. 15).

The apostle Peter boldly replied, “You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God” (v. 16). Most English translations use the words the Christ. However, the word Christ is the anglicized version of the Greek Christós, which means “Messiah.”

Jesus responded by telling Peter he was blessed for correctly identifying Him because such understanding comes only from God, not from human reasoning (v. 17).

I believe the personal question Jesus asked His disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” is as relevant today as it was when He asked it several millennia ago. In fact, it is such an important question that we recently added it to our website, www.foi.org. It’s easy to find. Just look for “Who is Jesus?”

Jesus’ identity has been debated for centuries. What makes knowing the truth so critical for each person is the eternal blessing that comes from belief in Him as the Messiah. If Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, as Peter attested to and as we at The Friends of Israel believe, then Jesus is more than a great historical figure. He is humanity’s one and only Redeemer.

Peter identified Jesus as the Messiah, the promised one spoken of by the prophets in the Old Testament, who would redeem mankind from the curse of sin. But redemption comes only to those who believe in Him.

In all of life, there is no more important question that a person will answer than “Who is Jesus?” Scripture testifies that every individual’s eternal destiny is at stake when considering this question. The “Who is Jesus?” section on The Friends of Israel website walks readers through a series of questions, with answers from God’s Word:

- “Does God care what I think about Jesus?”
- “Does my dilemma matter to Jesus?”
- “Did Jesus have to die for me?”
- “Is Jesus my only answer?”
- “Who is Jesus to you?”

As evangelical Christians, it is part of our DNA to share the good news of the Messiah. Evangelical comes from the term evangelize, which means “to share or proclaim good news.” Telling the world about Jesus is what we are called to do (Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). Not to share about Jesus would amount to denying who we claim to be. And we would be less than honest in identifying ourselves as disciples of “the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

If you would like to share “Who is Jesus?” with others, you may download it in pamphlet form from our website at www.foi.org/whoisjesus. Then you may print it and hand it out. Or you may request copies be sent to you by calling our headquarters at 800-257-7843.

If you have never come to faith in the Messiah, I pray that you will explore “Who is Jesus?” on our website. If you have come to faith in Jesus the Messiah, please pray with me that God will lead many to examine the question “Who is Jesus?” and come to saving faith in Him.

James A. Showers is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
Sometimes it boggles the mind to see who some of the people are who withhold support from the State of Israel.

The controversy is starting to die down now, but New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio’s remarks in January at a private meeting with American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) board members drew fire from some unexpected places. De Blasio told AIPAC, “There is a philosophical grounding to my belief in Israel and it is my belief, it is our obligation, to defend Israel. But it is also something that is elemental to being an American, because there is no greater ally on earth.”

The meeting was closed to reporters, none of the regional AIPAC meetings are open to the press. But a reporter for the online news site Capital New York (a subsidiary of the Capitol Hill newspaper POLÍTICO) tapped it and released its content. The release created a firestorm of controversy for the newly elected mayor.

De Blasio is New York City’s first Democratic mayor in two decades and the most liberal in its history. Yet most of the furor over his remarks came from those who helped elect him, including many prominent Jewish people.


In fact, 58 leading liberal Jewish rabbis, philanthropists, and cultural figures reacted by signing an open letter to de Blasio saying, “AIPAC speaks for Israel’s hard-line government and its right-wing supporters, and for them alone; it does not speak for us.” One Reform rabbi called the speech “a mini-crisis and a major embarrassment.”

De Blasio’s position on Israel is not new. His support is well known and well documented. When he served as public advocate, he called for tough sanctions against

Iran until it gives up its quest for nuclear bombs. He stood in solidarity with Israel’s consul general in New York, Ambassador Ido Aharoni, and the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York to declare publicly his support for the State of Israel.

As a councilman from the borough of Brooklyn, he visited Israel and made it a point to express his solidarity with the city of Sderot, an Israeli town whose citizens are constantly bombarded by missiles launched from Gaza. When he was running for mayor last year, he declared, “If anyone doesn’t like my stance in favor of Israel, they can vote for someone else.”

About a week after the AIPAC meeting, Brian Lehrer interviewed de Blasio on WNYC (public radio) and asked him to clarify his position on Israel. “Given your general politics, I might not have figured you for such an ambiguous supporter of Israel, as opposed to someone who’d speak more about a balance between Israeli security and Palestinian conditions and self-determination,” Lehrer said.

De Blasio corrected him: “You said ambiguous. I assume you meant unambiguous.”

Lehrer was shocked that a self-described Democratic socialist did not fall in step with the well-known progressive stance against Israel.

“I’m unabashedly pro-Israel,” de Blasio said, “meaning: the state of Israel, the survival of Israel, the sense of alliance that this country needs to have with Israel. I think Israel is in constant danger. I think, bluntly, there’s been some real indications of sustained anti-Semitism all over the world.”

How refreshing. At least on one day, a politician—in this case a liberal one—stood proud and strong for his convictions and did not crumble to political correctness. God promises to bless those who bless the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 12:3). Let’s pray He blesses de Blasio mightily.

by Steve Herzig, director of North American Ministries and Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel
Give More, Get War

Under threat of international isolation and more boycott and divestment scenarios, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said, “Enough.” His declaration of Israel’s right to survive, articulated in Washington, DC, in March, was forthright and etched in the realities of the quagmire of violence and uncertainty that is the Middle East.

Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Mahmoud Abbas was waiting for the West to make his dream of acquiring a possession without concession come true. But Netanyahu refused to walk the plank, rejecting onerous terms that would put Israel at risk.

Backed by an intense propaganda campaign painting Israel as an apartheid country with no legitimate right to exist, Abbas held fast to the essentials of the Jewish state’s demise. Behind the smile and profession of good faith, he and his cohorts refused to bend on a trinity of issues:

1. They will not recognize Israel as a Jewish state. This follows the consistent position of the Khartoum Declaration of September 1967, when the Arabs vowed, “No peace with Israel, no negotiations with Israel, no recognition of Israel.” The failure to recognize accepted, legitimate borders also creates an opportunity for aggression, particularly if a future Palestinian state becomes radicalized by jihadists like those controlling the Gaza Strip and much of the Middle East.

2. They will not tolerate Jewish people living outside the 1949 armistice lines. This plan, endorsed by Western negotiators, would cede the lion’s share of disputed territory to a formalized Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital. Banking on Arab trust and nonaggression, Western proponents assume this concession would guarantee Israel peace. However, such a conclusion defies every available historical analysis, both past and present.

3. They refuse to be flexible in their demand for a “right of return” for Palestinian “refugees.” In 1948 a UN mediator said 472,000 Arabs fled what is now Israel, and the figure was considered high. Today the Arabs count descendants as refugees, placing the number in the millions.

Their goal is to flood the miniscule territory with Palestinians, assuring demographically what they could not accomplish militarily. If the Palestinians have their way, the Jewish entity would amount to an enclave with no rights of nationhood.

Contrary Evidence

Ironically, as Israelis were being pressured to be flexible and make painful sacrifices in the interest of “giving peace a chance,” an Iranian ship was bound for Gaza with a supply of long-range rockets to be used to decimate Jewish communities and kill Israeli citizens. The Jerusalem Post reported the missiles originated in Syria.

The Post said, “Had the shipment not been intercepted, the rockets could have been unloaded at Port Sudan and taken overland, through Egypt into Sinai, and through smuggling tunnels into the Gaza Strip.”

Is Israelis are constantly searching for these tunnels. Late in 2013 the Israeli Defense Forces discovered a massive, Hamas-built attack tunnel that was complete with phone lines and electricity and was large enough to move great numbers of jihadists and their weapons from Gaza into Israel.

Furthermore, the PA’s determination to praise terrorists and incite hatred against Jews and the State of Israel casts a dark shadow over prospects for a serene, long-term, neighborly relationship. A prime example, documented by the Palestinian Media Watch (palwatch.org), is the celebration of Dalal Mughrabi:

Terrorist Dalal Mughrabi led the most deadly terror attack in Israel’s history. 37 civilians, 12 of them children, were killed in her 1978 bus hijacking. The Palestinian Authority has turned this terrorist into a celebrated hero and role model, as schools, summer camps, and sports tournaments are all named after her. Her attack was celebrated by a Fatah spokesman as “the most glorified sacrifice action in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli struggle.” . . . Advisor to Mahmoud Abbas, Deputy Secretary of the Fatah Revolutionary Council, Sabri Saidam said on the day of the naming of a [Ramallah] square in her name: “Every one of us has tried in his own way to express his pride in this Martyr.”

An Unspoken Omen

There is a persistent failure to acknowledge the essential motivating force in the Palestinian-Israeli divide: the jihadist Islamic fervor for the destruction of Israel. Pandering to the forces that wreak havoc throughout the Middle East and Africa and threaten European stability is an omen of things to come.

Refusing to factor jihadist radicalism into measures that are supposed to provide a stable, defensible settlement fails both Israelis and Palestinians who wish only to have peace, without bombs and terror as a destabilizing way of life.
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Israel My Glory is also available in Spanish.

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Banias, or Panias in Greek, is situated near the ancient remains of Caesarea Philippi at the base of Mount Hermon in the Golan Heights in northern Israel. In the Old Testament, the area was called Bashan and was ruled by two godless Amorite kings: Og and Sihon (Num. 21:21–35).

Then half the tribe of Manasseh received the region as part of its land inheritance (32:32–33). During the Greek Empire, the area became identified with the half man-half goat god, Pan.

Today a spring flows from the mountain’s base. But in ancient times, a substantial amount of water gushed from a cave above. Wrote Bible and Israel expert Dr. Charles H. Dyer,

“When Alexander the Great came through this area, his conquest brought with it the Greek language and culture. And this spot, with its flowing stream and lush vegetation, seemed like the perfect place to worship the Greek god Pan, the god of shepherds, flocks, and nature. So the place eventually became known as Panias: “Pan’s place.”

During the Muslim conquests the invaders brought a new language, Arabic, to the region. And Arabic lacks a P sound. The closest sound to it in Arabic is B. As a result, Panias became Banias, which is the name it has today.¹

A large grotto and many shrines are located near the spring, where Pan worshipers sacrificed. This area had such a strong identification with the underworld and evil that it was known as the gates of Hades.

Jesus used the location as a powerful object lesson when he asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Mt. 16:13). They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets” (v. 14).

Then He asked them again, “But who do you say that I am?” (v. 15). Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God” (v. 16). Peter grasped the reality that Jesus was the long-promised Messiah. Jesus replied,

“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter [petros, meaning “a detached stone”], and on this rock [petra, meaning “a mass of connected rock,” a foundation] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (vv. 17–18).

This is the first mention of the church. Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah would be the rock on which Christ would build His church (Greek, ecclesia, “called out ones”). And nothing—not even the gates of Hades—would prevent it from moving forward in victory.

Anytime someone embraces Christ, he or she is snatched from Satan’s kingdom and brought to everlasting life in God’s Kingdom; and Satan can do nothing to prevent it.

A Look at the Persecution of Christians Around the World

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

In February, the rebels, who seek to impose Sharia law throughout Nigeria, shot some Christians and slit the throats of others while shouting "Allahu Akbar" ("Allah is greater") in Izghe village in Borno state. They also destroyed homes and shops. Thousands of villagers fled to Cameroon.

That massacre came after a Boko Haram attack on a church in neighboring Adamawa state in January that took the lives of 11 people. The Islamist gunmen killed the 50-year-old pastor of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria and 10 members of his congregation.

Boko Haram activity in Borno state displaced an entire church in 2012. The attack, said the pastor, "destroyed our worship building and our homes. We've become a remnant of a church in exile."

EGYPT—In February a Muslim went on an anti-Christian rampage in Upper Egypt that left one woman dead and another wounded. Now many area Coptic women are too afraid to leave their homes.

The man attacked several Christians, including employees of two Coptic-owned pharmacies and two students who were walking nearby. Madline Wagih Demian, 30, was killed solely because of her faith, said her brother, Ayman Wagih Demian. "He killed her because she is a Christian," Demian said. "There was nothing else. He was targeting Christian pharmacies. He went and tried to attack a Christian, and when he failed, he went to the next Christian pharmacy."

Security officials arrested Mahmoud Mohamed Ali around midnight the night of the attacks, which began shortly before 7 P.M. when Ali walked up to the service counter of a Coptic-owned pharmacy, requested some medication, and asked for the price. He said, "I am going to kill you. I am going to kill you." The victim grabbed the hand that had the knife in it and kicked Ali repeatedly, causing him to flee.

Ali went to another Coptic-owned pharmacy and, once inside, pulled out the knife and plunged it into Madline Wagih Demian's neck, severing one of her arteries, witnesses said. Demian screamed, fell to the floor, and bled to death within seconds.

Ali ran out of the pharmacy and viciously stabbed Marian Kamal Shafik, 19. She was walking by with Youstina Nasser Gendy, 18. Both were friends of Demian. They survived. Ali told Shafik, "You deserve it."

"What was the girl who was killed guilty of?" Gendy asked, her voice filling with anger. "What are we guilty of that we are not able to walk the street? What have we done to 'deserve' this?"

Copts are concerned Ali will be labeled mentally incompetent, allowing him to escape punishment. The tactic is employed frequently in clear-cut cases of violence against Copts, so people attack Christians with impunity.

by Morning Star News
(morningstarnews.org)
“Let’s burn the Jew!”

No, the words were not taken from the yellowed pages of a Nazi manual on the mass genocide of innocent people. They were shouted in a Canadian school by a 15-year-old student as he shoved a burning lighter into a Jewish girl’s head and set her hair on fire.

As one would expect, the attacker was apprehended, charged with assault with a weapon, pleaded guilty, and was later ordered to appear in Manitoba Provincial Court. Jaws dropped in January, however, when the Winnipeg judge ruled the action was one of teen impulsiveness and not anti-Semitism. The incident was refused the status of a hate crime and was handled as an insignificant case of student impropriety. The bully was sentenced to 18 months supervised probation and ordered to perform 75 hours of community service.

Besides the obvious question (How is saying, “Let’s burn the Jew” not anti-Semitic?), there is a larger question: What type of environment influenced this young man to use such language? The words certainly did not merely pop into his head on their own, which raises the issue of why anti-Semitism is gaining ground on so many fronts.

Wrote journalist Christine Williams, Today, we ignore a creeping anti-Semitism that singles out Jews unfairly, and targets the state of Israel. In addressing the New Anti-Semitism, Victor Davis Hanson, Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, discusses how Israel is being singled out by the international community.
with over 75% of recent UN resolutions targeting Israel for human rights violations, far more than for more deserving countries such as Sudan, Congo, or Rwanda in which millions have been killed in genocides. In answer to the question, "why is the international community so anti-Israel?" Hanson points to a "new sort of fashionable and socially acceptable anti-Semitism" that looms large.1

**Mein Kampf, a Bestseller**

To those who remember the manic rampages of Adolf Hitler, which resulted in the massacre of 6 million Jewish people and took the lives of more than 50 million, popularizing the Führer’s rant more than six decades later would seem inconceivable. Yet that is what is happening.

*Mein Kampf*, Hitler’s anti-Semitic manifesto on the “Jewish peril,” spells out the formulation of Nazi ideology. It was written from a Munich prison and published in 1925. Later in 1941, he enshrined as the “Bible of the Third Reich,” and jackbooted Nazi legions goose-stepped into his erstwhile home of Nazi ideology. It was written from a Munich prison, but it was published in 1925. Later it became the “Bible of the Third Reich,” and jackbooted Nazi legions goose-stepped into history as the greatest killing machine the world had ever seen.

Reason would conclude that, with Hitler’s ignominious demise by his own hand in a fetid underground bunker in 1945, *Mein Kampf* would have been put to rest with its demented author. But in the convoluted world we live in, where right and reason no longer reign, Hitler’s literary legacy is again making waves.

For years it has been a bestseller among Muslims and Palestinians. Now, however, it is enjoying a resurgence in and outside the Muslim world. A new wave of Hitler glorification is washing over Muslims and Arabs in the Netherlands, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, Thailand, Japan, India, and South Korea. *Mein Kampf* has become an international e-book bestseller. Journalist Chris Faraone at Vocativ.com wrote,

> On Amazon there are more than 100 versions of Mein Kampf for sale in every conceivable print and audio format, from antique hardbacks to brand-new paperbacks. Of those 100 iterations, just six are e-books—yet all six of them rank among the 10 best-selling versions overall. And those are just the ones people are paying for.2

Understandably, scholars are attracted to *Mein Kampf* as a historically relevant document. But the recent surge of interest transcends scholarship. Some believe people are now thinking that perhaps Hitler may have been right, which translates into fuel for the fire of anti-Semitism.

‘Jew, France Is Not for You!’

January 27 marked the official international observance of Holocaust Remembrance Day. Representatives from the United States and Europe, along with the entire Israeli Knesset (Parliament), gathered at Auschwitz in Poland where solemn commemorations were held in remembrance of the Holocaust.

In France, however, radical elements gathered for what has been called a “Day of Anger.” What began as a protest against the policies of French President Francois Hollande quickly turned into a hate fest aimed principally at the Jewish people. An estimated 17,000 protesters began raising their arms in Nazi salutes while chanting, “Jew, France is not for you!”

The demonstration turned viciously anti-Semitic, shocking the French Jewish community and others who remembered when such rhetoric routinely filled the streets as Jews were marched to the deportation trains on their way to extermination camps. In the aftermath of the genocidal bloodbath of the 1930s and ‘40s, few would have believed that such hatred would ever surface again. Yet it has.

Some Evangelicals Shift Left

Unfortunately, anti-Jewish sentiment is coming today from a previously unexpected quarter. According to recent reports, a discernible shift is developing among some evangelicals who are becoming anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian.

Christian writer Robert W. Nicholson wrote in *Mosaic* magazine, “The sheer strength of this new anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian movement came as something of a shock to me.”3

Peter Wehner, also a Christian who supports Israel, commented,

> Mr. Nicholson does an excellent job explaining the rise of pro-Palestinian sentiment among some segments of American evangelicalism. The basis for this movement rests in part on the belief that Israel is a nation whose very founding in 1947 was illegitimate and immoral; since then, it is said,Israel has become an enemy of justice and peace. Authentic Christianity therefore requires one to embrace the pro-Palestinian narrative, or so this line of argument goes. “The bottom line is simply this,” writes Nicholson. “More and more evangelicals are being educated to accept the pro-Palestinian narrative—on the basis of their Christian faith.”4

Though one may question Nicholson’s conclusions, which likely were drawn from mainline denominations loosely called evangelical, there is no question that forces are moving away from both biblical Zionism and support for Israel.

Fabricated, revisionist history and stories about “social injustice” are parroted by Israel-haters in the UN and religious, theological anti-Semites. These lies have made many inroads. Add to them the liberal media, whose overwhelmingly biased news coverage relentlessly maligns Israel at every turn in an attempt to turn public opinion toward the Arabs.

However, to a greater degree, evangelical opinion is being altered by Replacement Theology (Supersessionism), now taught by militant anti-Zionists who are revered in some evangelical circles. In short, Replacement Theology claims that God has abrogated the biblical mandates that once promised Israel for them the liberal media, whose overwhelmingly biased news coverage unrelentingly maligns Israel at every turn in an attempt to turn public opinion toward the Arabs.

The issue actually can be reduced to acknowledgement or denial. Biblical Zionism acknowledges the veracity and continuity of all of God’s affirmations of Israel’s past, present, and future prospects. When, therefore, Scripture asks the rhetorical question, “Has God cast away His people [Israel]?...? (Rom. 11:1) and then answers it emphatically with “Certainly not!” (v. 1), the Lord authenticates the entire scope of Old and New Testament promises yet to be resolved.

Supersessionists deny the undeniable. In reality, they call into question the stability of any proclamation of irrevocability or promise of security made in Scripture. If we can disregard or replace the huge volume of promises, plans, and fulfillments ascribed to Israel as “unchanging” and “everlasting,” then no promise of security in God’s Word—including to the church—would be truly secure.
Aiding and Abetting the Haters

Commenting on what he called Nicholson’s “admirable essay,” Lutheran editor-at-large and self-described nonevangelical James Nuechterlein cited the incomprehensibility of siding with the enemies of the Jewish state:

In the present instance, one need not depend on biblical prophecy or covenantal theology to find reasons to support the state of Israel. Israel has the only truly democratic political culture in the Middle East. It is a friend of the West in politics and political economy, and, more important, a consistent and unswerving ally of the United States. It is a regional bulwark against the radical Islamists who are its and America’s sworn enemies. The more I see of the populist Arab spring, the stronger is my commitment to Israel. I support Israel not because I am a Christian—though nothing in my Christian beliefs would preclude that support—but because that support coincides with the requirements of justice and the defense of the American national interest.

Why are anti-Semitic hatred and unjustified alliance with Palestinian and Islamic rejectionists flourishing in some evangelical, democratic circles? It cannot be, as some claim, because Israel supposedly stole Jerusalem from its legitimate Muslim heirs. The Jewish people and the Old City, with its Temple Mount, have been inseparable since the days of the Jewish patriarchs. Jerusalem is Judaism’s holiest city. On the other hand, the holiest city of Islam is Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

For years, wars, intifadas, and suicide missions have threatened tiny Israel’s survival. To this day, Palestinian leaders and Arab hardliners promise never to recognize a Jewish state. America’s and Israel’s archenemy, Iran, promises to incinerate Israel as soon as it achieves nuclear capability. Thousands of missiles have rained down on Israeli towns from Gaza, which Israel gave in good faith to the Palestinians in 2005, even though it meant the eviction of 8,000 Jewish residents by their own leaders.

And while Palestinian leaders promise that no Jew will ever set foot in a Palestinian state, the world has no problem forcing a diminished Israel to assimilate millions of hostile “refugees.”

No, it doesn’t make sense. That is, unless you agree that an evil entity is moving throughout the world in a war of conquest, bent on destroying all we have held sacred.

The prophet Isaiah said, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20). Too many people today cannot tell the difference between good and evil, darkness and light. Israel is to be admired and supported as a jewel of freedom and democracy in the sea of chaotic unrest and violence that is now the Middle East. To join those who hate her is an unspeakable betrayal.

END NOTES

1 Christine Williams, “Let’s Burn the Jew” is not Anti-Semitic?” Gatestone Institute, January 15, 2014 <gatestoneinstitute.org/4131/burn-the-jew-antisemitism>.

Elwood McQuaid is consulting editor for The Friends of Israel.
Everyone loves a good story. Today, perhaps the most powerful storytelling takes place on the silver screen. And 2014 looks as if Hollywood is casting its attention toward the Bible and Christian themes as never before.

Director Darren Aronofsky retells the Genesis flood story in his controversial movie Noah, starring Russell Crowe, released only a month after a more traditional and reverential Bible movie, Son of God, based on the Gospel of John.

A major motion picture on the life of Moses is slated for the end of 2014 starring Christian Bale, and popular actor Brad Pitt reportedly is contemplating a film about first-century Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate.

Christian commentators originally balked at Noah because early scripts departed substantially from the redemptive theme in Genesis and appeared more like a thinly disguised pitch for liberal environmentalism. Later Paramount, which produced it, scrambled to make some final adjustments.

How should Christians respond when Hollywood gets it wrong in telling such stories? Boycotts, which give these movies more unwarranted attention and box office sales than they deserve, rarely accomplish their intended result. Better that Christians champion with ticket sales the movies worthy of their support.

But how do we decide if a film warrants our support? Context is essential. Years ago I participated in a symposium in Hollywood with a number of movie directors. The subject was the role of violence in storytelling. My novels often contain a measure of violence. In fact, I pointed out that one of my favorite stories of all time includes murder, mayhem, and even a graphic incident where a man’s eyes are gouged out. I was describing Shakespeare’s tragedy King Lear.

The point was that, contextually, King Lear neither glorified nor endorsed violence. Rather, its message lay in the fact that even brilliant, successful kings can be victims of the evil and frailty that are inherent in the human condition. If stories are to be truthful, even redemptive, one of the first steps is to explain this human condition. If sin and evil were merely a mirage, a psychological artifact, or the result of some type of social neurosis, then Jesus’ death on the cross would be meaningless.

But we also need stories that tackle the solution to this dilemma of sin. The 17th-century Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal noted that because man is naturally disinclined to believe in the God of the Bible, our job is twofold: (1) to show there is a “cure” for this condition by making faith “attractive, [making] good men wish it were true,” and (2) “then show that it is.”

The second part is the domain of apologists, preaching, theology, and evangelism. The first part can be a province of the creative enterprise: telling a good story that makes people “wish” for a “cure” for the darkness of the human heart and misery of the human condition.

I disagree with those who dismiss movies as merely entertainment and therefore trivial. Cinema has become a primary means of transmitting certain values and worldviews to millions of people. It shapes the culture. But even more important, storytelling is something God Himself takes seriously.

Jesus communicated some of His most well-known truths through parables, using all the standard components of good storytelling: interesting characters, compelling storylines, and an enduring message at the end. God is a communicator, and His method of transmitting truth can teach us something about how we should approach modern storytelling.

The Lord chose to communicate the greatest story of all time by inspiring His followers to write the 66 books of the Bible. Just think of the dramatic arc of this nonfiction story: God creates a perfect world and plan for mankind. Enter the malevolent Satan. Man and woman succumb to temptation and break from fellowship with their Creator. From a human perspective, all looks lost. The world is now in the grip of a sinister prince of darkness and corrupt human hearts.

But there is hope. Throughout the long march of human history, God faithfully pursues rebellious humankind, telling and retelling the story of His love. Eventually, God’s own Son, Jesus Christ, comes into the world to redeem it. But He does the unexpected: He does not conquer by force. Instead, the perfect, flawless, divine Son gives Himself up to His enemies and dies a sacrificial death so that we—the rebels who betrayed and disobeyed the King who loves us—can be pardoned and enter the gates of His realm.

What a story! What an amazing God! And how amazing is His grace!
Caesarea is located on the Mediterranean coast between Haifa and Tel Aviv and was originally a Phoenician trading post called Strato’s Tower (c. 250 B.C.). In 25 B.C. Herod the Great built a large city and harbor there and renamed the site Caesarea after Caesar Augustus.

Caesarea became the headquarters for the Roman government in Israel. Herod built a palace, aqueduct, temple, amphitheater (seating 7,000), hippodrome (stadium for chariot racing), and breakwater barrier on the coast of the city. Pontius Pilate resided in the city during his term as procurator, and the Jewish war against Rome began at Caesarea in A.D. 66.

The book of Acts records all the biblical events that took place in Caesarea:
(1) Philip preached to the Gentiles and settled there (8:40; 21:8).
(2) Herod Agrippa I died from worms (12:19–23).
(3) Agabus prophesied Paul would be...

The event with Cornelius was a turning point for the church:

Preparing God’s Servants. An angel appeared to Cornelius, a Roman centurion who feared God, gave generously to the Jews, and prayed consistently. The angel told him to send men to Joppa and bring Jesus’ disciple Peter to Caesarea (vv. 1–8).

While in prayer in Joppa, Peter saw a sheet descend with unclean animals and heard God’s command, “Kill and eat” (v. 13). Peter refused God’s command three times. While contemplating the vision, the Holy Spirit convinced Peter to accompany the men to Cornelius’ house in Caesarea (vv. 9–23).

Personal Sharing. Cornelius had already gathered his relatives and close friends at his house before Peter arrived. When he got there, Peter told of his experience in prayer, emphasizing it was unlawful for Jews to associate with Gentiles, but that God had revealed the Gentiles were no longer to be considered unclean.

Cornelius shared with Peter his experience of the angel’s appearance and message, ending with, “Therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God” (v. 33).

Proclaiming the Savior. In his message, Peter said God is not partial but will accept all God-fearers who do righteousness. He emphasized that Jesus Christ is Lord of all and was anointed by the Holy Spirit. Although men killed Jesus on a tree, God raised Him from the dead after three days. One day Jesus will judge all men. It is through Jesus Christ that men receive remission of sins (vv. 34–43).

People Saved. In the midst of Peter’s sermon, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles there. Then Peter commanded that they should be baptized in the Lord. Those baptized asked Peter to stay a few days and teach them (vv. 44–48).

The gospel is for everyone, and God seeks to save those who are lost. In fact, God orchestrates all events, and His timing is perfect according to His eternal purpose in building His church.

Legalism, religious bias, prejudice, and nonbiblical traditions can hamper God’s program. Yet Cornelius showed great faith and risked his reputation by inviting family and friends to hear a Jewish person he never met speak a message he never heard.

Peter’s message was powerful, gospel-centered, and brief. It was devoid of enticing words or skillful oratory or philosophical arguments or heart-tugging stories. Yet God used it because the Holy Spirit was involved. It would be good to apply these lessons in our walk with the Lord.

David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.
Capernaum

Blue skies mirrored in the waters of the Sea of Galilee, the gentle breeze, the aroma of exotic vegetation under the hot sun, the dusty basalt and limestone ruins, the stillness. All these features make Capernaum an unforgettable place.

While exploring Capernaum, I have often observed the memorable phenomenon of thousands of storks in migratory flight, soaring high overhead in a surging column that stretches from horizon to horizon. As is true for nearly every pebble in Israel, a story lies behind the uninhabited archaeological site frequented by 21st-century tourists.

In Jesus’ day, Capernaum, or Kfar Nahum (Hebrew for “hometown of [the prophet] Nahum”), was a thriving city where trade routes converged, generating enough commerce that the Romans built a customs house to collect taxes. Also known for fishing and agriculture, Capernaum was where Jesus chose to headquarter His earthly ministry, in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa. 9:1; cf. Mt. 4:13–16).

It was truly a privileged city because many of Jesus’ miracles recorded in the Gospels occurred in or near Capernaum. He healed:

- A demon-possessed man and another man with a withered hand in the local synagogue on separate occasions (Mt. 12:13; Mk. 1:21–26).
- The apostle Peter’s mother-in-law while she lay sick at home near the synagogue (Lk. 4:38–39).
- A nobleman’s son who was dying in another part of the city (Jn. 4:46–51).
- A Roman centurion’s servant at the commander’s request (Mt. 8:8–13).
- A disabled, bed-ridden man whose four friends had lowered him through the roof to circumvent the crowded house (Mk. 2:2–12).
- A woman with “a flow of blood for twelve years” when she touched the hem of His garment (Lk. 8:43–48).
- Another demon-possessed man and was slandered by religious leaders near Capernaum (Mt. 12:22–24).

Jesus miraculously provided the Temple tax when He sent Peter to the shores of Galilee to retrieve a coin from the mouth of a fish (17:24–27), and He raised the synagogue leader’s daughter from the dead (Lk. 8:40–42, 51–54).

He also “healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons” (Mk. 1:34).

Crowds thronged Him and were amazed at His teaching. The inhabitants of Capernaum should have recognized their Messiah. Jesus’ miracles validated His Messianic claims; yet, they did not accept Him.

Later Jesus condemned Capernaum, along with Bethsaida and Chorazin, for unbelief despite the overwhelming evidence they had witnessed:

And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you (Mt. 11:23–24).

Those who receive greater revelation will also receive greater condemnation for their unbelief (vv. 21–22; cf. Lk. 12:48).

Yet it was from this city that Jesus offered the ultimate message of hope for every person who places his or her faith and trust in Him: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28).
Plateau in the south, Haifa Bay in the north, and the Jezreel Valley on the east.

Not considered particularly high, Mount Carmel reaches approximately 1,800 feet above sea level. Its proximity to the Mediterranean brings a higher level of precipitation and, combined with its rich soil, makes the area a prime place for growing grapes.

The first settlement, which became the town of Zichron Ya’akov in 1882, was established and developed as a result of wine production. The mountain provides a beautiful view of the Mediterranean and the coast.

Though the Bible describes Mount Carmel as beautiful and fruitful (2 Chr. 26:10; Isa. 35:2; Jer. 46:18), most believers associate the area with a contest unlike any other. First Kings 18:17–40 records the Hebrew prophet Elijah’s spectacular confrontation at Mount Carmel with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah.

The Lord had commanded Elijah to confront Israel’s wicked King Ahab, who for years had disobeyed and defied the God of Israel by forsaking His commandments (v. 18); allowing worship of the Canaanite fertility god, Baal; and standing by as his evil Phoenician wife Jezebel had the Lord’s prophets massacred (v. 4).

Elijah declared his challenge to the people: “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (v. 21).

The contest rules were simple: 
Let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God (vv. 23–24).

The prophets of Baal went first. As they shouted to their so-called god, they received nothing in return. Elijah began to mock them: “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened” (v. 27).

The Baal worshipers continued to cry out through the afternoon, to no avail. They even cut themselves with knives and lances “until the blood gushed out on them” (v. 28). Yet for all that, they still received no answer.
Then it was Elijah’s turn. After repairing the altar, he called the people to draw near. He took the cut bull pieces and placed them on the wood, had a trench built around the altar, and ordered that four water pots be filled and poured over the sacrifice. He repeated the dousing procedure twice to make sure water overflowed the altar. Then he prayed:

_LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again (vv. 36–37)._

Suddenly, fire from the Lord came down and consumed the sacrifice, water and all. When the onlookers saw the clear victory of the God of Israel, they proclaimed, “The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!” (v. 39).

Mount Carmel reminds us there is no God like the God of Israel, and we should bow before Him and worship Him alone.
The name Dead Sea does not appear in the Bible. Biblically, the body of water is called the “Salt Sea” (Gen. 14:3), “Sea of the Arabah” (Dt. 3:17; 4:49), and “eastern sea” (Zech. 14:8). In reality, however, it is more a lake than a sea. Water from the Jordan River and other streams created the Dead Sea, which is 1,300 feet below sea level, making it the lowest place on Earth; 1,300 feet at its deepest point; and about 50 miles long and 10 miles wide. It has no outlet and receives two to four inches of precipitation per year.

The arid climate causes the lake to evaporate at a rate of 7 million tons of...
Lot greedily chose the Jordan Valley because it was well watered, like the Garden of God (Eden). So he left Abraham and pitched his tent in the direction of Sodom, where he eventually moved (vv. 10–13).

In time, angels visited Abraham, telling him of Sodom's impending destruction, whereupon Abraham interceded in prayer for Lot's survival. When the angels left Abraham they went to Sodom, where Lot met them and persuaded them to lodge with him. The depraved men of Sodom demanded to have sexual relations with the angels, but Lot vehemently disapproved and offered his virgin daughters instead. The men rejected the offer.

Lot warned his sons-in-law of Sodom's impending doom, but they mocked him in unbelief (18:16—19:14). In the morning, Lot and his family tarried in the city and had to be forcibly delivered by the angels. His wife looked back in disobedience to God's warning and immediately turned into a pillar of salt.

God destroyed Sodom by fire and brimstone, and no remains have ever been found. Sometime later, Lot's virgin daughters committed incest with him, and each bore a son. One was Moab; the other, Ammon—the fathers of the Moabite and Ammonite nations destined to become bitter enemies of Israel (19:32–38).

Lot's life contains many interesting facts and spiritual lessons:

1. Lot was exposed to spiritual privileges and given material possessions from God but became a carnal man, living outside of His will.
2. Strife between family members often arises, but must be settled in a godly manner.
3. Lot took advantage of Abraham's generosity when given first choice of the land, and he greedily chose the best for himself.
4. Lot was a worldly man, lured into Sodom by its luxury and position; and Sodom caused his downfall.
5. Lot was godly in his character. Yet he sat with wicked leaders in Sodom, offered his virgin daughters to the wicked men of Sodom, and had no godly testimony or credibility with his sons-in-law when telling them of Sodom's impending destruction by God.
6. Lot ended up losing his wealth, wife, relatives, credibility, children, character, influence, property, and two virgin daughters who committed incest with him.
7. Lot was spared from judgment because of God's mercy and Abraham's intercession.
Rabbis have said that Jehovah created seven seas, but the Sea of Galilee is His delight. Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, called it “the ambition of Nature.”

Visiting the Sea of Galilee is a highlight on any tour of Israel. The lake is known by five names: Chinnereth (or Chinneroth), Hebrew for “harp-shaped” (Num. 34:11; Josh. 12:3); Kinneret, its modern name; Gennesaret (Lk. 5:1); Sea of Tiberias, named for Roman Emperor Tiberius (Jn. 6:1, 23; 21:1); and the Sea of Galilee (Mt. 4:18; Mk. 1:16; Jn. 6:1).

At almost 700 feet below sea level, the Sea of Galilee is the lowest freshwater lake in the world. It is the only natural freshwater lake in Israel, serving as Israel’s largest and most important source of drinking water. It is 13 miles long, 7.5 miles wide, and 33 miles in circumference and has a maximum depth of under 200 feet. Steep hills rise abruptly on the east and west of the lake, some to a height of 2,000 feet above sea level.
The Jordan River begins at Mount Hermon in the north and provides the major water supply for the Kinneret. Cool air blowing down from the north can meet with hot air in the valley below, causing violent storms to erupt over the lake (Mk. 4:35–41). In the Old Testament, the lake is referred to only in relationship to Israel’s borders (Num. 34:11; Josh. 12:3; 13:27).

A few cities surrounding the Sea of Galilee were Magdala (Mt. 15:39), the home of Mary Magdalene; Hippos; Capernaum (4:13); Bethsaida (Mk. 6:45); Chorazin (Mt. 11:21); Tiberias (Jn. 6:23); and Gadara (the Gadarenes, Mk. 5:1). The cities produced an abundance of wheat, barley, figs, grapes, vegetables, and a variety of wild flowers. Today a large fishing industry exists in the area, with more than 22 varieties of fish.

Sitting in a boat in the center of the lake, Bible in hand, contemplating Jesus’ ministry is a meaningful experience on a tour of Israel. Of the 33 miracles Jesus performed around the lake, 10 were healing miracles. He also fed 5,000 men, plus women and children (Mt. 14:13–21), and demonstrated His power over nature by calming the lake’s waves (8:23–27; 14:22–33).

It was on this lake that the disciples Peter, James, and John forsook everything to follow Jesus (Lk. 5:1–11). Jesus borrowed Peter’s boat to stand in while He addressed the multitudes, and then He asked Peter to launch out into the lake and let down his net. Peter did so reluctantly, thinking the effort useless because he had toiled all night without catching anything (v. 5).

When Peter did what he was told, a miracle took place: He caught so many fish the nets broke, and two boats full of fish started to sink. Overcome with guilt because of his unbelief, Peter said to Jesus, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (v. 8).

Jesus responded with mercy because He had a mission for Peter: “Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men” (v. 10). Upon arriving at the shore, Peter, James, and John forsook all and immediately followed Jesus (v. 11).

We can learn much from this account:

- A servant must allow Jesus into his boat (i.e., his life).
- Jesus is the one who produces fruit in a believer’s life.
- The Lord knows where the fish are when He calls us to go and evangelize our world.
- A servant must respond immediately to Jesus’ call, no matter where it leads, and put his or her future in Jesus’ hands.
- A servant must be willing to forsake all and follow Jesus.
- The secret to serving is yielding to Jesus’ guidance.

Faith does not stay close to the shore when serving. We must willingly follow the Lord to be fishers of men, wherever that may lead.

by David M. Levy

On one of my early trips to Israel, I stood one blustery evening on the pier of Kibbutz Nof Ginosar on the northwest coast of the Sea of Galilee and watched as whitecaps crashed against the shore. Bracing myself from being blown into the water, I realized the impact climate and geography have on this unique body of water.

Because the Sea of Galilee is almost 700 feet below sea level yet is surrounded by hills almost 2,000 feet above sea level, it is susceptible to extreme temperature and pressure changes. As cold, dry air funnels through the Galilean highlands and plunges into the warm, semitropical lake environment, it often generates high winds. Because the Sea of Galilee is relatively shallow, it is especially susceptible to the strength of these winds, which cause dangerous climatic conditions to develop quickly and without warning. Winds from the east can whip up waves that, in extreme cases, can grow up to 10 feet high. In 1992, winds off the Golan Heights sent 10-foot waves crashing into the city of Tiberias, causing serious damage.

As I stood in the howling wind with my then-teenage son, we recalled an incident in the life of the apostle Peter that became especially vivid to us that night.

Jesus had just fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes. It was a spectacular miracle. People were amazed, and the disciples were doubtless ecstatic as they distributed the food to the seated crowd. The Gospel of Matthew says that after the people were fed, Jesus sent them away and compelled the disciples to get into a boat to cross to the other side of the lake. He went up to a mountain alone to pray.

The Gospel account provides two important facts: (1) When evening came, Jesus was alone on the mountain; and (2) the disciples’ boat was “in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary” (Mt. 14:24). It also indicates it.
was the fourth watch, or between 3 A.M. and 6 A.M.

Six-foot waves powered by strong winds could instill fear in the hearts of even the most seasoned fishermen. The disciples no doubt rowed feverishly to keep the bow into the waves so the boat wouldn’t capsize. They probably were bailing water frantically to keep it from being swamped. As morning approached, they must have been exhausted.

Suddenly, they saw someone striding toward them through the wind, walking on top of the foaming waves. They could not believe their eyes. As the figure got closer, He hailed them: “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid!” (v. 27).

Peter challenged, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water” (v. 28). Some people criticize Peter for his comment; but a moment later, he was walking on the water toward Jesus, experiencing something no other human being ever had.

Things were fine until Peter started looking around. Seeing “that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, ‘Lord save me!’” (v. 30).

We might have expected Jesus to say, “Hey, at least you tried. You were doing all right there for a few seconds. I actually saw you walking on top of the water. That’s something to tell your grandchildren! You’ll do better next time.” But instead, He said, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (v. 31).

Jesus’ question is profound: “Why did you doubt?” In faith, Peter responded to Jesus’ invitation, and actually walked on the water. He alone had the faith to get out of the boat and trust Jesus to help him do the impossible—until he began to doubt.

There’s a simple lesson in the narrative. Whatever we are called to do as we live for Christ, we do not do alone. He is there to provide everything we need. We are without excuse. We have no reason to say, “I can’t do that; it’s impossible.” “I can’t do that; it’s never been done before.” “I can’t do that; I’m not qualified.” or “I can’t do that; I’m scared.”

With Jesus’ help, Peter could walk on water. And with Jesus’ help, we can likewise do whatever our Lord asks of us.

by Charles E. McCracken

David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.

Charles E. McCracken is the Canadian director of FOI Gospel Ministry in Brampton, Ontario, and a Bible teacher.
Jesus, of course, arose from the dead; and the tomb is empty. And though the site is a quiet and peaceful place to visit, Jesus’ resurrection makes three thunderous statements:

1. All true believers in Jesus have His heavenly image:
   
   But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. And we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man (1 Cor. 15:20, 22, 49).

2. God has a perfect plan of salvation:
   
   Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (vv. 1–4).

   But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

3. Everyone can come to Christ and receive the gift of salvation:
   
   For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

   But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name (Jn. 1:12).

Sitting among the plants and flowers of the Garden Tomb, it’s easy to appreciate the quiet reverence of the place. It is like an oasis in a turbulent world. Yet it’s a site that shouts its message of Jesus’ suffering, burial, and resurrection loud and clear. Can you hear it?

—

by Peter Colón, the creative resource coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel

Editor’s Note: To read Peter Colón’s article “Assault at Gethsemane,” go to www.foi.org/imgextras.
The Jewish sages spoke of Yerushalayim shel malah, or the spiritual, heavenly Jerusalem, and Yerushalayim shel mata, the earthly, gritty, day-to-day Jerusalem. My Jerusalem is a little bit of both.

Who Lives in Jerusalem?

Israel fought its War of Independence in 1948. When it was over, there was no border and no peace, only the 1949 armistice lines, which too many diplomats and media people tenden-
tiously refer to as “the 1967 borders.”

Embedded into the mountain ridges of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), Jerusalem was a divided city between 1949 and 1967. Jordan held the West Bank, the Old City and its holy places, and large swaths of North, East, and South Jerusalem.

During the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel captured and reunited Jerusalem, regaining access to the walled Old City.

Of the 830,000 Jerusalemites, roughly 35,000 reside in the Old City, an area comprising

Though I've lived in Jerusalem almost 17 years, sometimes I still find the place bewildering.

People who don't live here probably think primarily of the Old City and its stone walls. The walls are not ancient by Jerusalem standards, slightly less than 500 years old. Most of the ancient walls from biblical times are long gone. Conquerors came and went. The walls were destroyed, rebuilt, and extended through the ages.

Jerusalem today is much more than the Old City—though without the walled Old City at its epicenter, there is no Jerusalem.

The Jewish sages spoke of Yerushalayim shel malah, or the spiritual, heavenly Jerusalem, and Yerushalayim shel mata, the earthly, gritty, day-to-day Jerusalem. My Jerusalem is a little bit of both.

Who Lives in Jerusalem?

Israel fought its War of Independence in 1948. When it was over, there was no border and no peace, only the 1949 armistice lines, which
slightly more than 200 acres. The Old City’s population does not reflect the city’s overall demographic profile. Most Old City residents are Muslim Arabs and Christian Arabs, with some Armenians and others.

An estimated 6,000 Jewish people also live there. During the Jordanian occupation, no Jews could approach, let alone live, in the Old City—although they had lived there for centuries.

Most Christians who live permanently in the Holy Land are Arabs. About 10 percent of Israel’s 161,000 Christians live in Jerusalem. Of these, 38 percent call the Old City home.

Overall, Jerusalem is Israel’s largest and most crowded city, spread out over 31,000 acres. Its demographic makeup is about 62 percent Jewish, 35 percent Muslim, and 2 percent Christian.

The Jewish population is heterogeneous. Roughly 32 percent is insular and fervently Orthodox (haredi), 21 percent is modern Orthodox (“national religious”), and 28 percent is traditionally observant. The rest describe themselves as not religious.

The city’s Muslim population is almost entirely Sunni and traditional. Almost every Muslim fasts during the month of Ramadan. The norm nowadays—we’ve witnessed this change over the past decade—is for women to cover their hair.

Lost in the Old City

At night, with its floodlit walls, the Old City conjures up thoughts of a fairy-tale kingdom, a Middle Eastern Disneyland. A more prosaic way to think of it is as a borough enveloped by metropolitan Jerusalem.

Despite all the trendy restaurants, five-star hotels, promenades, art galleries, houses of worship, and mosaics of people in modern Jerusalem, it’s this Old City—laden with political, religious, and historical significance—that visitors want to see most.

The modern metropolis where we live—where the Knesset meets; where Yad Vashem memorializes the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust; where the Israel Museum shows off our artistic, archaeological, and cultural treasures; and where most tourists stay—is a comparatively recent outgrowth of the walled Old City.

With my wife, Lisa, I am fond of getting lost in the Old City during Christmas week when the place is packed with pilgrims, tourists, and travelers from all over the world.
Then we notice a directional sign a few feet from the forbidden Bab al-Hadid archway pointing to what is called Ha-Kotel Ha-Katan, or “Little Western Wall.” Like the grander version, this wall is part of the outer retaining wall that surrounded the second Temple complex. Ha-Kotel Ha-Katan is part of an alcove and is thought to be awesomely close to where the Holy of Holies was situated.

We know where the Holy of Holies was located. According to Jewish sacred history, the outcrop of bedrock at the heart of the Dome of the Rock is the “place of the sacrifice,” where Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:2) and where Jacob dreamed of angels ascending a ladder (28:12). Jewish scholars also believe it was where God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3:1–4).

The Holy of Holies is where the Ark of the Covenant, which housed the Ten Commandments, resided in the first Temple and where Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) sacrifices continued to be offered during second Temple times.

Many fervently Orthodox Jews believe it is forbidden to go up to the Temple Mount for fear of treading on this holiest of ground. National religious rabbis tend to say that since we know the Holy of Holies stood smack on the bedrock of the Dome of the Rock, as long as visitors avoid that location and immerse themselves in a ritual bath beforehand, it is permissible, indeed praiseworthy, to ascend the Mount.

All observant Jews agree it is religiously forbidden to enter the Dome of the Rock itself.

Christian pilgrims who are prepared to stand in a long security line leading to the Mughrabi Gate can readily visit the Temple Mount, except during Muslim prayer times, on the Muslim holy day of Friday, during Ramadan, or when there is too much political tension with its attendant menace of Arab rioting.

**Living With History**

As we stood at the Little Western Wall, I was flooded with thoughts of history.

Israel’s first capital, under King David, was Hebron in Judea. Even earlier, during the time of the Judges, Israel’s de facto capital was Shiloh in Samaria, where the Ark of the Covenant first rested. Around 970 B.C. David left Hebron and made Jerusalem his capital.

David and his son Solomon turned Jerusalem into a bustling city. Solomon built the first Temple, which was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. The second Temple, without the Ark of the Covenant to grace the Holy of Holies, is the one that stood at the time of Jesus. It was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70.

Chronologically, Jerusalem first became holy to the Jews under David; then approximately 1,000 years later, to Christians because of Jesus; and finally, in A.D. 638, to the Muslims.

Given the security lines, we skip going up to the Temple Mount, which the Muslims call Haram al-Sharif. There we would have seen the shining golden Dome of the Rock (built around A.D. 691); the tarnished, silver-domed al-Aqsa Mosque (built around A.D. 705); and several other buildings of importance to Muslim civilization.

These were built by Arab caliphs who trace their lineage to the Muslim prophet Muhammad at the end of the seventh century, when Muslims from Arabia captured the city from Christian Crusaders.

Getting lost and encountering so much history makes me hungry. So we pop into one of the many hole-in-the-wall Arab eateries in the Old City for a plate of steaming hummus topped with a raw onion and straight-from-the-oven pita bread.

Then we stroll away from the Western Wall through the Jewish Quarter and into the Armenian Quarter, stopping in at our favorite Armenian crafts shop to pick up ceramic gifts for friends. We meander past David’s Tower, which houses a museum and archaeological remains dating to Israel’s ancient monarchies, and toward Jaffa Gate.

The Ottoman and British were the last foreign empires to leave their mark on Jerusalem.

The Ottomans were Muslim Turks, not Arabs, who ruled the Middle East from 1299 to 1917. Under Ottoman rule, Jewish people had become a majority of the city’s population by 1864. As the Old City became congested, they began to establish neighborhoods outside its walls, as did the Muslim and Christian Arabs.

On the eve of World War I, the Jews were still a majority. All the while, a new city beyond the Old City walls was blossoming. Jaffa Street became a thoroughfare that led from the Jaffa Gate to the road that descended from Jerusalem down toward the coast, heading to the port city of Jaffa some 40 miles away.

During World War I, the British captured Jerusalem from the Turks. On December 11, 1917, British General Edmund Allenby entered the Old City on foot through Jaffa Gate. Only a month earlier, Britain’s Balfour Declaration had promised that Palestine would be reconstituted as the homeland of the Jewish people.

It would take 31 years to get the British to leave. And even after Israel gained its independence in 1948, it would take until 1967 for Jerusalem to be reunited at last, and under Israel’s control.

**Elliot Jager is a journalist and lecturer. He blogs at elliotjager.blogspot.com. Follow him on Twitter @JAGERFILE.**
What and Where Is East Jerusalem?

Recent news report: "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to approve plans to build 1,400 new homes in both the West Bank and East Jerusalem in the coming days."

When we bring visitors to the Sherover-Haas Promenade in our Talpiot neighborhood, with its magnificent vista of the old and new Jerusalem skyline, they often ask, “So, where is East Jerusalem?”

And we find ourselves pointing in all directions because the term is artificial and a misnomer.

Jerusalem is a city built on hills, embedded on a mountain ridge. Samaria lies to the north, Judea to the south. The city has no grid system—no Fifth Avenue, as in New York City, to divide the east and west sides.

Until Israel’s victory in the June 1967 Six-Day War, parts of Jerusalem were artificially separated along the armistice lines that ended the 1948 War of Independence. Parts of North, South, and East Jerusalem lay under control of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

By June 28, 1967, the barriers that had divided Jerusalem were dismantled. The city—whose boundaries have since been expanded beyond the municipal borders demarcated by Jordan—was incorporated into Israel proper. The annexation was opposed by the U.S. State Department and condemned by the UN Security Council.

No country recognizes Jerusalem—not even “western” Jerusalem—as Israel’s capital. And Israel held “western” Jerusalem when the city was divided.

The Palestinian Arab population of “east” Jerusalem was granted the right to vote in municipal elections but has opted to boycott political participation. Still, Jerusalem Arabs carry ordinary blue Israeli ID cards like mine that allow them to make full use of universal health coverage and the social welfare benefits available to all Israeli citizens.

At the time of reunification, former Premier David Ben-Gurion called for a national effort to settle the empty, formerly Jordanian spaces of metropolitan Jerusalem.

International opposition notwithstanding, all Israeli governments have worked on a bipartisan basis to solidify Jewish control of the city by constructing a string of strategically placed residential neighborhoods: Gilo and Har Homa in the south; East Talpiot in the east; Ramat Eshkol, French Hill, Pisgat Ze’ev, and Neve Yaakov in the north; and Ramot and Ramat Shlomo on the northern flank of the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv Highway.

All these neighborhoods, as well as Jerusalem’s walled Old City, fall under the East Jerusalem blanket. And the international community considers them “settlements” in the “occupied territories.”

Jordanian government land and some private land were confiscated, but most of the sites chosen for these “settlements” were unpopulated.

Only in recent years have small numbers of ideological settlers moved into densely populated Arab neighborhoods, such as the City of David, the Muslim Quarter of the Old City, and Sheikh Jarrah (also known as Shimon HaTzadik).

A further word about Ramat Shlomo, since it comes up again and again in the news. Any routine, bureaucratic approval of additional dwellings within this existing and fervently Orthodox neighborhood is invariably leaked to the media by Peace Now lobbyists (the group is primarily funded by the European Union and foreign foundations). When this happens, for example, during a visit by U.S. Vice President Joe Biden or Secretary of State John Kerry, it ignites a faux crisis in U.S.-Israel relations.

On June 19, 1967, U.S. President Lyndon Johnson declared, “No one wishes to see the Holy City again divided.”

Today even casual visitors can readily appreciate that the city is a mosaic of neighborhoods built on hills and in valleys where Jews and Arabs live in proximity and share common public spaces. They attend the same Hebrew University, have access to the same hospitals, and shop in some of the same supermarkets.

With mutual generosity and goodwill, the city can be peaceably shared. But to imagine Jerusalem divisible along an east-west axis bespeaks a profound ignorance of political geography.

by Elliot Jager

Sultan Suleiman Street in East Jerusalem (Hanan Isachar/www.isachar-photography.com).
Jaffa is the modern name for Joppa, which was and still is a major seaport on the Mediterranean. God gave the region to the tribe of Dan (Josh. 19:40–46).

The timbers from Lebanon used to build the first Temple and other construction projects in the days of King Solomon were floated down the Mediterranean in rafts to Joppa and then were transported to Jerusalem (2 Chr. 2:16).

Later, after the Jewish people returned from the Babylonian Captivity, Joppa was again the port of choice for bringing cedar logs from Lebanon to rebuild the Temple, according to permission the Jewish people had from King Cyrus of Persia (Ezra 3:7).

Joppa was home to Dorcas, also called Tabitha. After Dorcas died, the apostle Peter “knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up” (Acts 9:40).

In the Old Testament, Joppa is identified with the prophet Jonah who fled to Tarshish from the port, going in the opposite direction of Nineveh, where God had commanded him to go (Jon. 1:1–3).

Ultimately, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish that spewed him out after three days. God then commissioned him to go to Nineveh, and he obeyed, sparking a great revival there.

Today a bronze sculpture of a smiling whale by Ilana Goor, a native of Tiberias, Israel, reminds tourists of the biblical account of Jonah.

Jonah is the only book in the Hebrew Scriptures devoted to God commanding a Jewish prophet to go to Gentiles and preach repentance. Nineveh was the capital of the evil Assyrian Empire.

To Christians, Joppa is best known as the home of Simon the tanner, where the apostle Peter received a vision from the Lord. Peter, a Jew who kept kosher, saw a sheet lowered from heaven containing all types of non-kosher animals. God told him, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat” (Acts 10:13). When Peter refused, God told him, “What God has cleansed you must not call common” (v. 15).

God was telling Peter the good news of salvation in Christ was not exclusively for the Jewish people; He was including the Gentiles also. The event led to Peter taking the gospel to the Gentiles via Cornelius, a Roman centurion who had been seeking the truth.

Perhaps Joppa could be considered a pivotal city in taking God’s message to the Gentiles. Jonah attempted to flee from there when told to go to the Gentile Assyrian Empire, and years later the Lord commissioned Peter there to go to the Gentiles of the Roman Empire.

Thomas C. Simcox is the church ministries training coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.
Masada is spectacular. It’s a mighty fortress on a massive rock plateau. The mountain is about 1,500 feet above the shores of the Dead Sea. The fortification is about 1,950 feet long and 650 feet wide. In his concise traveler’s companion to the Holy Land, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor described this top tourist site as “a great rock curiously like an aircraft-carrier moored to the western cliffs of the Dead Sea.”

First-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus wrote of the sad and tragic event that occurred on Masada in the spring of A.D. 73 or 74. After enduring a long siege by the Roman army, 960 Jewish men, women, and children committed mass suicide there, rather than let the Romans capture them.

In modern Israel, Masada is revered as a symbol of Jewish heroism. The motto “Masada, never again!” has become symbolic of the Jewish people’s determination to fight for their lives and freedom in their own land.

The word Masada comes from the Hebrew word for “fort,” “fortress,” or “stronghold.” It is not difficult to imagine David, fleeing from King Saul in the Judean wilderness, gazing up at this imposing mount and writing, “The Lord is my rock and my fortress [Masada] and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold [Masada]” (Ps. 18:2). For David and Bible believers, Masada is a powerful metaphor for God’s strength, stability, safety, and salvation.

The site itself is an architectural marvel. An article on LoveIsrael.com had this to say:

King Herod’s northern palace was built on three rock terraces overlooking the gorge below. King Herod was Jewish by faith but Arab

by birth and his loyalty to the Romans and their Empire [is] evident in the structures. Near the palace is a large Roman style bathhouse with a colorful mosaic floor and walls decorated with murals representing his connection to the Romans. Other buildings such as the luxurious western palace, the mikveh a Jewish ritual bath, storerooms, watchtowers, and a synagogue relate to his Jewish faith. Artifacts such as storage containers, decorated pottery, scrolls, and coins have been discovered at Masada. The beautiful embossments and murals that were discovered on the walls of the buildings have been restored by Italian experts for preservation. Masada is the largest most complete Roman fortress that remains today.

In 1973 archaeologists uncovered a 2,000-year-old cache of date palm seeds at Masada. In 2004, a researcher with a medical organization in Jerusalem asked for some seeds to plant. After a little wrangling, the researcher received three of the two-millennia-old seeds. Amazingly, a year after the seeds were planted, one seed sprouted. Eventually, it grew into a three-foot-high sapling.

Jesus often taught about the Kingdom of God using a seed motif in His parables. Mark 4:26–27 is an example. Farmers do not fully understand the growth process of their crops. They must simply trust on conditions from God to bring about an eventual harvest.

The promise of the Messianic Kingdom is like the seed from Masada. Many reject the doctrine of a literal Jewish Kingdom on Earth. To them, it simply does not make sense. Yet the mystery of the Kingdom seed goes beyond human understanding. God alone fulfills His promises and makes all things, whether people accept them or not, come to pass.

The miracle seed growth from Masada is an admonishment to keep preaching the Word (2 Tim. 4:2). It will bear fruit. For it is God alone who causes the seed of His Word that is planted in hearts and minds to germinate into new life and grow.
Above ground the Western Wall, or Kotel, measures around 187 feet long. But it actually runs another 1,350 feet underground, beneath homes in Old City Jerusalem. For centuries the wall was left unexplored, buried beneath the ruins of the second Temple destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70 and built on through the years.

After the Israelis won the Six-Day War in 1967, Orthodox rabbis under the Ministry of Religious Affairs began a project to tunnel north of the Kotel to search for archaeological evidence of the Holy of Holies and Ark of the Covenant. The result is a subterranean passageway that helps tourists better understand the scope of the ancient Jewish Temple.

The project was tricky due to concern for the structural integrity of the Muslim-owned homes above ground. A mistake (cave-in) not only would have been dangerous but also politically explosive.

In 1982 workers broke through an ancient gate and found several chambers. When they reached the north end of the wall, they connected with a water tunnel from the Hasmonean dynasty (140 B.C.–37 B.C.). The area is now officially known as the Hasmonean Tunnel.

Visitors to the tunnel enter from the Kotel plaza. After a short, high-tech presentation of the Temple Mount history, the amazing walk along the Western Wall begins.

One immediately notices the wall’s massive stone blocks, each weighing several tons. One Herodian stone stands out from the rest. Measuring 41 feet long, 11.5 feet high, and 15 feet wide, it weighs an estimated 600 tons (1.2 million pounds).

Two thousand years ago slaves cut and moved these huge stones, using a sophisticated pulley system. They cut them on-site and moved them into place, using no mortar or cement. The Western Wall truly is a structural marvel.

The tunnel was finally opened in 1988. For the first eight years, all tours proceeded north the length of about four football fields. Tourists walked through the narrow passageway all the way to where the excavation stopped. Since there was no exit at the north end, they had to turn around and walk back the same way.

This situation limited the number of daily tours the tunnel could accommodate. Israeli officials, however, were reluctant to build a door at the north end because it would open in the Muslim quarter. Since the Dome of the Rock is close by, any Israeli action, even building a door, could have been misinterpreted as aggression and led to violence.

In September 1996, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected such sentiment and ordered an exit door built, reasoning that it would facilitate tourists, as well as benefit Arab businesses when the tourists exited.

Unfortunately, then Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian leaders did not care about the potential boost to business and encouraged Palestinian protests. The riots caused the most severe violence in the area since the Six-Day War.

Today use of the exit door is contingent on the political climate, which is always in a state of flux. Either way, walking through the tunnel is a thrilling, thought-provoking experience. The opportunity to touch stones placed there 2,000 years ago and to realize the Messiah of Israel could have seen them as He walked, talked, and taught never ceases to amaze and inspire.

by Steve Herzig, the director of North American Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel
Standing atop the plateau of Tel Megiddo, the Valley of Jezreel (Megiddo Valley) stretches out like a verdant patchwork of farms, kibbutzim, and moshavim. Lying to the east are Mount Tabor, the hills of Gilboa, and the cliffs of Nazareth off in the distance. To the northwest are Mount Carmel and the entrance to the valley. It is difficult to envision this fruitful, productive plain as the staging ground for military conflict. But the Bible cites the Valley of Megiddo as the location of a colossal confrontation at the climax of human history.

At the end of the future seven-year Tribulation, the Antichrist will gather the world’s armies to the Valley of Jezreel under the pretense of decisively eradicating the Jewish people. In reality, the forces assembled will exceed what is necessary to do the job because the Antichrist’s real agenda will be to destroy the Messiah as He returns to establish His 1,000-year Messianic Kingdom.

With the Antichrist’s armies terrorizing Jerusalem and millions gathering on the staging ground of Armageddon (Hebrew, Har-Magedon), the heavens will break open to reveal the Messiah returning to Earth on a white horse, followed by “the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean” (Rev. 19:14; cf. Zech. 12:9–10).

As theologian John Walvoord wrote, “Christ’s return will be a spectacular and majestic procession . . . that will take many hours. During this period, the movement of the procession and the earth’s continued rotation will permit the entire world to witness the event.”

As the procession nears the planet, an angel will appear, silhouetted against the sun, inviting the birds to the “supper of the great God” (Rev 19:17–18). The apostle John described the event: “Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations” (v. 15). This sword is symbolic of His word, which is “not a lifeless sound, but an active agent.” The word of Jesus Christ brought all things into existence (Col. 1:17) and will also bring the military power arrayed against Him to nothing (Rev. 19:21).

Like the precision of a laser beam, the word of the returning Messiah will instantaneously destroy the rebel Gentile nations seeking to eradicate the Jewish people and prevent His return to establish the Messianic Kingdom. In one moment, the soldiers of the Antichrist’s multinational army will be standing poised and arrogant behind their sophisticated weaponry; and in the next moment, they will be nothing more than millions of lifeless corpses littering the Valley of Jezreel.

The staggering victory that Antichrist envisioned will turn into a grotesque feast for the birds. Rather than being hailed as Earth’s liberator, he and his False Prophet will be plucked up and tossed “alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone,” abruptly and dramatically ending humanity’s ultimate expression of rebellion against God (v. 20).

It is easy to become overburdened by the escalating evil in the world. In fact, sometimes it seems as though wickedness is gaining the upper hand. But the Megiddo Valley is a reminder that the success of the wicked is short-lived, but Christ’s Kingdom will last forever.

\* A kibbutz (plural, kibbutzim) is a collective farm in Israel where everything is held in common.
\* A moshav (plural, moshavim) is a cooperative settlement of small, individual farms in Israel.
\* John F. Walvoord with Mark Hitchcock, Armageddon, Oil and Terror (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2007), 182.

by Charles E. McCracken, the Canadian director of FOI Gospel Ministry in Brampton, Ontario and a Bible teacher
M any people journey to Israel as pilgrims to visit the only place the Lord calls the “Holy Land” (Zech. 2:12). Others go there to see the reality of the Zionist dream birthed in the 1800s by Theodor Herzl. Zionism is the movement to return the Jewish people to their homeland in Israel and protect them there.

One of the few sites in Israel that combines both holiness and Zionist pride stands in the Old City of Jerusalem. In Hebrew it is called ha-kotel ha-ma’aravi, meaning “the western wall.” Most Israelis simply know it as ha-kotel—“the wall.”

What makes the Wall an attractive site for Zionist pride is its location. For 19 years (1948–1967) the capital city of Jerusalem was divided—half in Jordan and half in Israel. The Jordanians forbade Jewish people to enter East Jerusalem, where the Wall is located, and expelled all the Jews who had lived there for years.

During the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel reunited Jerusalem by counterattacking a Jordanian assault. Thousands of Jewish people assembled at the Wall to celebrate Israel’s victory and the unification of their sacred city. Their jubilant cry was, “Never again will Jerusalem be divided!”

What makes the Wall holy is also its location on Mount Moriah. The books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles in the Hebrew Bible describe the building of the first (Solomon’s) Temple. Inside, the Holy of Holies housed the Ark of the Covenant where God’s Shekinah Glory resided. This Temple was destroyed when the Babylonians invaded Judah in 586 B.C.

Under Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, the Temple was rebuilt (515 B.C.). Herod the Great (37 B.C.–4 B.C.) later expanded it, adding four retaining walls to double the size of the surrounding plaza. The second Temple was built in the same spot as Solomon’s Temple (Ezra 6:7).

In A.D. 70, the Romans destroyed the second Temple, leaving not one stone upon another, as Jesus had foretold (Mt. 24:1–2). All the retaining walls still stand. But the Western Wall is the closest to where the Holy of Holies once was. Today some observant Jewish people believe God’s glory never leaves the Western Wall. Unquestionably, the Kotel and the Temple Mount above it are the holiest places on Earth for the Jewish people. Thousands congregate at the Wall and pray there every day.

The Wall’s exposed portion rises 62 feet above the ground and extends 187 feet. It consists of 45 stone courses, 28 of which are above ground, 17 below. The bottom seven visible rows are Herodian stones, which are much larger, heavier, and more finely crafted than the newer stones above them. No mortar or cement was used to hold these massive stones in place.

The Kotel is accessible around the clock. It has its own website (thekotel.org). Anyone anywhere can pray anytime at the Wall in person or online. Because some Jews believe God’s glory still resides at the Wall, it is a tradition to place written prayers in the stones’ crevices and cracks. Prayer requests can be e-mailed to the Kotel’s website, and volunteers will place them in the Wall.

Before 1967 Gentiles called the Kotel the Wailing Wall or Wall of Tears because they saw Jewish people crying when they prayed there. Today many Jewish people call it the Wall of Joy because of the 1967 victory that gave them back their holy site.

As Christians, we should come to the Wall reverently because it symbolizes God’s faithfulness to His people. But we should also come rejoicing, knowing that one day King Messiah will return to sit on David’s throne and rule and reign in righteousness.

by Steve Herzig, the director of North American Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel
The Mount of Olives

A view from the Mount of Olives: The Eastern Gate, also called the Golden Gate of Mercy, overlooking the Kidron Valley (Hanan Isachar/www.isachar-photography.com).

One of the most spectacular places to visit in Israel is the Mount of Olives.

The view from this elevation is breathtaking, and people gaze in awe at the Eastern Gate and the wall surrounding the Old City of Jerusalem.

Located slightly east of Jerusalem across the Kidron Valley, the Mount of Olives stands 2,641 feet above sea level and is 318 feet higher than the Temple Mount. Many biblical events took place on the Mount of Olives, making it a significant spot on any tour of Israel.

It was through the Kidron Valley and up the slope of the Mount of Olives that King David and his entourage went when they fled Jerusalem, escaping from David’s son Absalom who had usurped the king’s throne (2 Sam. 15:20–32). On this summit David also accepted much-needed supplies from Ziba, the servant of Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth (16:1–2).

When the Shekinah Glory left the Temple in the vision God showed the prophet Ezekiel, it went out the Eastern Gate, up the Kidron Valley, up the Mount of Olives, and on to heaven (Ezek. 10–11).

From the Mount of Olives Jesus began His entry into Jerusalem on what is now called Palm Sunday (Mt. 21:1–11). The Olivet Discourse was given from the Mount of Olives (Mt. 24–25), and it was there that Jesus lamented,

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!” (23:37–39).

It is to this mount Christ will someday return to protect and defend His beloved Chosen People: “And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two. . . . Thus the Lord my God will come, and all the saints with You” (Zech. 14:4–5).

In that day, resurrected Christians will accompany Jesus as He returns to Earth. The apostle John drove home that reality: “And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses” (Rev. 19:14).

What a spectacular day that will be when God the Son returns to the Mount of Olives.

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by Thomas C. Simcox, the church ministries training coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel
Behold God’s Love

God’s redemptive program began with His love for fallen humanity. Those who have been “born of Him” (1 Jn. 2:29) by faith in Jesus Christ manifest this love to a dark world. The world cannot know or understand such love because people cannot know God without being born again (Jn. 3:3).

The apostle John was so overwhelmed with the greatness of God’s love that he focused on it in the remaining three chapters of 1 John. In the 66 verses of chapters 3 through 5, John used the word love or a form of it more than 40 times, explaining how God loves believers and how they are to love one another in return.

Children by Redemption

John wanted his readers to stand in awe of the greatness of God’s love: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 Jn. 3:1).

The word behold is a command for Christians to stop and respond in astonishment, awe, and adoration of God’s love, which is beyond understanding and measureless in depth. They should gaze on and contemplate the quality and quantity of God’s love, letting it sink deep into their minds, hearts, and souls. Then they will find it is beyond comprehension.

The Greek word for “love” is agape.

Such love is unique in both its nature and character when applied to God. God does not merely love; His entire nature is love. He is love personified (4:8). His self-sacrificing love was beautifully demonstrated when He sent Jesus Christ into a sin-cursed world to seek and save the lost by paying the redemptive price for sin through His crucifixion.

Agape transcends any human expression of love and is completely foreign to man’s nature. God the Father is the source of such love, and He freely bestows it on people of His own choosing.

God “has bestowed” (lavished, 3:1) His love on all believers through His grace (unmerited favor). Notice, John said “on us,” including himself. He added, “that we should be called children of God,” indicating that all born-again believers join God’s family at the moment of their salvation. Once God bestows His love on a believer, it remains there forever.

What a privilege to be called a child of God and to have access to God the Father’s fellowship through Jesus Christ! What a privilege to be recreated through salvation and to be in the process of being conformed into the likeness of God’s divine Son. Every believer should stand in awe that God would reach down to bestow unmerited grace on us who were once dead in sin.

John concluded verse 1 by saying, “Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.” The word world refers to unbelievers and their world system, as mentioned in the previous chapter (cf. 2:15–17). The world lacks the experiential knowledge to understand or appreciate the believer’s relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son. Unbelievers cannot understand because they do not know God. The world never understood or accepted God the Father, though given revelation of Him and His divine Son (cf. Jn. 1:10–11; 15:18—16:4; Rom. 1:20–23). Since the Father is foreign to unbelievers, it is impossible for them to know (by experience) or comprehend the believer’s born-again position in the family of God.

Christlikeness Revealed

The apostle united himself with his Christian brothers and sisters by calling them “Beloved.” Then he revealed what God has in store for them: “Now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). We are the children of God “now,” and the position we enjoy in Christ is connected to our eternal future at His unveiling.

The phrase it has not yet been revealed what we shall be is better translated, “it has not yet been unveiled or made public what we shall be.” God has not yet unveiled or displayed the glory that awaits His children when their fleshly bodies will be transformed into glorified bodies prepared for eternity.

When will Jesus be revealed? Scripture is silent on the date, but we know He will appear twice:

First, He will come in the clouds to rapture all church saints to heaven (Jn. 14:1–3; 1 Th. 4:13–17). All Christians will meet Christ in the air and enjoy intimate fellowship with Him throughout eternity.

Later Christ will return to Earth with His church to reign and rule from David’s throne in Jerusalem (Lk. 1:30–33; Rev. 5:10). The church saints “shall be
priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (20:6).
Scripture does not reveal details concerning the duties and positions they will hold in the Kingdom.

When Christ does appear, “we know . . . we shall be like Him” (1 Jn. 3:2). Even though believers have not yet experienced glorification, John assured them they can “know” it will happen for a number of reasons:

1. John saw Christ in His glorified state during His 40 days of postresurrection ministry before He ascended back to heaven (Acts 1:3).

2. As Christians, we know from experience, tested faith, and the promises of Christ through the apostle Paul that one day we, too, will be changed to possess glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:55–54).

3. John assured his readers that all believers “shall be like Him [Jesus Christ]” (1 Jn. 3:2).

How will our bodies be be like Christ’s? The Bible does not specify. But they will function as Christ’s did in His postresurrection ministry. We will have changed bodies prepared for eternity: “The Lord Jesus Christ . . . will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Phil. 3:20–21; cf. 1 Cor. 15:50–53).

In 1 Corinthians 15:42–44 Paul described four ways the glorified body will differ from the human one:

1. First, the human body is “sown in corruption” (perishable) and “raised in incorruption” (imperishable) (v. 42). It deteriorates, dies, and turns to dust. The glorified body will never tire, deteriorate, or die (1 Pet. 1:3–4).

2. Second, human bodies are “sown in dishonor” and “raised in glory” (1 Cor. 15:43). We fall short of glorifying God because of our sinful natures, but our glorified bodies will be perfect.

3. Third, human bodies are “sown in weakness” and “raised in power” (v. 43). We are physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially weak because of sin. In contrast, our resurrected bodies will be perfect and powerful, without need of rest or replenishment.

4. Fourth, the human body is “sown a natural body” and “raised a spiritual body” (v. 44). The word natural means it is fleshly, is subject to natural laws, and will one day die. In contrast, believers will be raised with physical, spiritual bodies suited for eternity, not bound by the laws of nature or death, and animated by God’s divine Spirit and power.

Like Christ’s, these glorified bodies will be recognizable. Jesus’ disciples recognized Him after His resurrection (Jn. 20:24–29). Scripture is silent on details, such as what age believers will be in the Resurrection.

It does, however, show us the Lord could appear and disappear (Lk. 24:31), walk, talk, eat, and rise into heaven (Jn. 21; Acts 1:11). Christ was not bound by gravity, time, or space, and He could travel at will. We will be able to do likewise.

Furthermore, “we shall see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). Only believers will experience this face-to-face meeting with the glorified Christ, which completes the salvation experience of being conformed to His image (Rom. 8:29). Christians have been redeemed, justified, and sanctified; and at that meeting they will be glorified (v. 30).

**Character of Righteousness**

The living hope that they will be glorified at Christ’s coming for the church affects how believers live in this world: “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3). The word everyone refers to those who are born again (2:29). This “hope” is not uncertain. It is guaranteed to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

Believers who possess this hope purify themselves daily from sin and moral corruption. Self-purification does not mean Christians are cleansed by their own efforts, although they must be willing to repent of known sin. Rather, it means the Holy Spirit convicts them of the need for moral cleansing and accomplishes that cleansing through what is called progressive sanctification.

Sanctification begins at the time of one’s salvation and continues, or progresses, until receipt of a glorified body at Christ’s return for His church.

If one claims to be born again but practices a lifestyle of habitual sin, he is willfully disobeying Christ’s command; and his salvation is questionable.

John’s statement “just as He is pure” establishes Christ as the standard for purity. Jesus never had to be purified because He is and always was pure from sin in His character and conduct. He is the example and standard every believer is to imitate.

Like John, we should stand in amazement of God’s great love for us. Isaac Watts must have experienced this love when he wrote the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” published in 1707. In the fifth stanza, Watts caught the vision of how we should respond to God’s love: “Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel.

**Question: Why can Jesus help us deal with temptation?**

**Answer:** “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”

—Hebrews 2:18
Biblical Definition of ‘Wisdom’

Job asked,
But where can wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?
Man does not know its value, nor is it found in the land of the living. From where then does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living, and concealed from the birds of the air (Job 28:12–13, 20-21).

Job indicated that “God understands its way, and He knows its place. For He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees under the whole heavens” (vv. 23–24) and that with God “are wisdom and strength” (12:13). He also declared, “And to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding’” (28:28).

Webster’s New International Dictionary defines wise as “discerning and judging soundly concerning what is true or false, proper or improper.” It defines wisdom as the “quality of being wise; ability to judge soundly and deal sagaciously with facts, esp. as they relate to life and conduct.” These definitions are valid in relationship to daily human conduct in society.

But there is another significant concept of wisdom that could be called ultimate reality wisdom. It not only addresses issues related to daily human conduct but also the issue of ultimate reality.

Ultimate Reality Wisdom

Ultimate reality wisdom addresses such issues as how the universe and everything in it came into existence. How did the sun originate to illuminate the earth by day? How did the moon and stars come to illuminate it by night? How did all the living creatures, including people, animals, and plants, come into being?

The Bible addresses both this ultimate reality wisdom and the wisdom related to daily human conduct in society.

The biblical concept that the fear of the Lord is wisdom “encountered a secular world in which natural processes obeyed their own inner laws, and values such as life, possessions, and honor were esteemed for their own sake.” But that secular form of wisdom failed to explain the origin or foundation of the inner laws of the natural processes and the existence of human and animal life forms.

In contrast, God made it clear to Job that the universe and everything in it, including all life forms, are the result of His wisdom (38:1—39:30). Thus Job was right to declare that with God “are wisdom and strength” (12:13). God had the wisdom and power to bring the entire universe into existence.

Other biblical passages emphasize this same truth. Psalm 104 exclaims, “O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all” (v. 24).

Psalm 136:3–9 exhorts,
Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! . . .
To Him who alone does great wonders, . . .
To Him who by wisdom made the heavens, . . .
To Him who made great lights, . . .
the sun to rule by day, . . .
the moon and stars to rule by night, for His mercy endures forever.

Proverbs 3:19–20 states, “The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens; by His knowledge the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew.”

In Proverbs 8:22–31, King Solomon, to whom God had given incredible wisdom, personified the wisdom God used when He created the heavens, earth, and human beings. Solomon portrayed wisdom as “a master craftsman” who daily was with God as His delight, rejoiced in God’s world that He inhabited with all His created life forms, and especially delighted in God’s creation of people.

God told the prophet Jeremiah,
Thus you shall say to them: “The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens.”

He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the
heavens at His discretion. When He utters His voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens: “And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasuries” (Jer. 10:11–13).

The apostle Paul wrote, Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?” For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen (Rom. 11:33–36).

Paul closed his letter to the Romans with the following benediction: “To God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen” (16:27). Through this statement he emphasized that the God of the Bible, whose Son is Jesus Christ, is the only God possessing wisdom. Nothing else worship as gods possesses wisdom because they are impersonal images of wood, clay, metal, or stone formed by human beings.

In Ephesians 3:10 Paul referred to “the manifold wisdom of God.” The word translated “manifold” means “many-sided.”6 New Testament language scholar Heinrich Seesemann indicated that Paul was claiming, “The wisdom of God has shown itself in Christ to be varied beyond measure and in a way which surpasses all previous knowledge thereof.”7

James 1:5–6 indicates that God dispenses wisdom to those who ask for it in faith without doubting: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”

James 3:17 describes the quality of the wisdom God dispenses to those who ask for it properly: “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”

Jude 25 indicates that God’s wisdom is exclusive: “To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.”

Revelation 4:1–11 and 7:11–12 reveal that God’s unique wisdom is permanent. It will never come to an end. The apostle John was shown the throne room of heaven. In Revelation 4, John saw four living creatures, apparently high-ranking angels, around God’s throne. Day and night without rest they give glory, honor, and thanks to God, “who lives forever and ever.”

Twenty-four elders fall down before God “and worship Him who lives forever and ever” and say, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (4:10–11). Later,

All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen” (7:11–12).

The apostle Paul wrote, Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:20–24).

Then he wrote,

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (2:6–8).

In Colossians 2:2–3, Paul referred to “the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Questions: What is a believer’s relationship to good works?

Answer: “Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.”

—Titus 3:8
U.S. denies Israeli visas

The U.S. State Department is rejecting nearly one out of 10 Israelis who apply for tourist visas to the United States. “This is more than a three-fold rise in visa rejections in a mere seven years,” said a press release by the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA). ZOA President Morton Klein said Israelis are “being rejected in record numbers . . . for no apparent, justifiable reason.”

The U.S. denied 9.7 percent of Israelis who requested visas—some 12,000 people—in 2013, compared to 5.4 percent in 2012 and 2.5 percent in 2007.

Wrote journalist Jeff Dunetz, “The denial numbers have grown so dramatically that Charles Schumer (D-NY) sent a letter to Secretary of State John Kerry [in March] demanding an end to the State Department policy of categorically denying young Israelis tourist visas that makes it nearly impossible for any young Israeli to visit the U.S.”

Tensions mount after new attacks

The terrorist group Islamic Jihad has warned Israelis in a Hebrew-language video, “Get out of our country” meaning all of Israel. The warning came after terrorists fired more than 60 rockets into southern Israel in a single day in March, the worse barrage since 2012.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is bracing for the potential of a larger-scale military operation. In response to the attacks, the Israeli Air Force struck 29 terrorist targets in Gaza.

In the video, a man dressed in black warned the “terrorist Zionist government” to show “restraint” if it wants his group to stop firing rockets. Then he addressed the “cowardly Zionist army”: “We in the Quds Brigades [Islamic Jihad’s military wing] are ready for your invasion. If you come you will have no choice: death or captivity.”

The video finishes with a message to the Israeli people: “Do not hand over your lives as hostages to the government of your leaders. We invite you to leave our country and find your own country.”

Later, according to Israel’s Channel 2, a terrorist spokesman threatened longer-range rockets. “Every time they kill someone from among our people, the al-Quds Brigades is obligated to respond—and the response will not be a normal one. We will respond with violence and will respond with barrages of rockets. You have not seen even a bit of the capabilities of al-Quds until now.”

Israel gave Gaza to the Palestinians in 2005. The area is now run by terrorists.

Iran lays claim to Einstein!

An Iranian cleric claims in a video that has been circulating in Iran that German-born, Jewish scientist Albert Einstein, once nominated to be president of the State of Israel, was a Muslim.

Ayatolla Mahadavi Kani claims Einstein converted to Shi’ite Islam and was actually a Shi’ite Muslim, a follower of the eighth-century Shi’ite Imam Ja’far Al-Sadiq. He also said Einstein got the idea for his Theory of Relativity from Muhammad’s ascension to heaven, which was “a process which was faster than the speed of light.”

Einstein was offered the presidency of Israel in 1952, even though he was not an Israeli citizen. In declining the offer, he wrote, “I am the more distressed over these circumstances because my relationship to the Jewish people has become my strongest human bond, ever since I became fully aware of our precarious situation among the nations of the world.” Einstein died three years later, in 1955.

Hezbollah calls Hollywood

a Jewish plot

Hezbollah says Hollywood is a conspiracy invented by Jews. Hezbollah-run Al Manar television network launched a program in March, translated into English by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) television network, saying Hollywood is a Jewish tool to “conquer all the world.”

Using Superman as an example, university professor Farroukh Majidi said Jewish people in Hollywood create outsider characters who do not fit into society but who are strong enough to overcome obstacles and even induce fear.

He specifically mentioned Joe Schuster, the Jewish man who created the popular comic book hero Superman in 1938. "Everybody wanted to be like Superman, the hero from outer space who could not fit in society as superman."

He also said Universal Studios has perpetuated the story of the “so-called Holocaust” with the film Schindler’s List.

Norwegian ends cruises to Tunisia

The Miami-based Norwegian Cruise Line will no longer make port calls in Tunisia after Israelis were barred from entering the country.

Israeli passengers were not allowed to disembark in Tunis “because of a last-minute decision made by the Tunisian government,” the cruise line said. “In response to this discriminatory act, Norwegian Cruise Line . . . has cancelled all remaining calls to Tunisia and will not return,” the company said.

“We want to send a strong message to Tunisia and ports around the world that we will not tolerate such random acts of discrimination against our guests,” said CEO Kevin Sheehan, according to the news agency Agence France-Press. “We are outraged by this act and the fact that we were not notified in advance of this practice,” he added.

In January, Tunisia’s Tourism Minister Amel Karboul was forced to resign hours after being sworn in because she had made a trip to Israel for professional reasons.
PCUSA Study Guide Blames Zionism for . . . Everything

An arm of the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) is taking another stab at trying to persuade its 2.4 million members that Zionism is the sole reason why there is no peace in the Middle East.

The Israel Palestine Mission Network of the PCUSA has released its newest educational resource: a 74-page, congregational study guide called Zionism Unsettled. It comes with a DVD. The package is called a “how-to guide for class leaders with focused discussion prompts.”

The guide is a condensed version of a book by Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land, due out this year.

Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Center called Zionism Unsettled an “outrageous screed [that] is the theological twin of the infamous 1975 UN ‘Zionism is Racism’ resolution” and “a compendium of distortions, ignorance and outright lies,” reported The Times of Israel.

The Times said the study guide accuses Israel of all types of things and argues “Israel is entirely uninterested in peace, and does not negotiate in good faith.” It also misuses quotations, and “word tricks run throughout the work.”

The guide was released in time to try to influence the June meeting of the PCUSA General Assembly in Detroit, which is expected to vote on a resolution to divest church funds from companies doing business with Israel. PCUSA is a key player in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement (BDS), hoping to cripple Israel economically and force it to turn its land over to the Palestinians.

A pro-Israel faction within the church, Presbyterians for Middle East Peace (PFMEP), has vowed to fight Zionism Unsettled and BDS, whose true agenda, it says, is “the end of the Jewish State of Israel.”

“The study guide reveals a desire by some in our denomination to transform Israel into a state of an unknown nature that would erase the claim of the Jewish people to a homeland,” PFMEP said.
A 45-year-old man who came to Israel from Hungary some years ago would visit our home frequently. He lived nearby, and his children played with our children. However, when his wife found out that I was a believer in Jesus, she asked her husband to keep away from me because she said he might become infected with my “poison.”

She also told her children not to play with ours. Nevertheless, the man ignored his wife’s advice and visited us often, mostly because he liked to argue with me about religious matters. Sometimes, when he was unable to prove his point, he would get angry and shout at me.

But he could not resist talking to me and arguing. It became obvious after a while that he was spiritually starved and needed the Bread of Life.

Sometimes he would tell me, “You know I completely disagree with you. I even support the anti-missionary organization. And when these people come to my home, I make a contribution. And yet I cannot resist talking to you. What is it that draws me to you?”

I told him that he was not the first, nor would he be the last, who found himself in such a situation. Other men have fought against the Lord. But in the end, they were overcome by Him. I mentioned the Bible’s accounts of Jonah (who did not want to preach to the Gentiles of Nineveh) and the apostle Paul, who went from being the greatest enemy of Christ to being His greatest messenger.

“Perhaps the Lord is also dealing with you and wants to win you,” I said.

He asked me what were the books in which the Christians believed. I told him that in addition to the Tanach (Hebrew Scriptures), we also have the New Testament, which tells us about Jesus and His life, His salvation, and His apostles.

“Would you give me this book?” he asked.


“How do you Christians pray?” he wanted to know. “Do you have prayer books, as we do?”

I told him, “Most of the time we pray from the heart and speak to God as to our heavenly Father. There is one prayer the Messiah Jesus taught us that we use sometimes.” I read to him Matthew 6:9–13, which begins, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.”

He liked the prayer very much and went home with his New Testament.

The next morning his wife came storming into our home. She shouted, “Why did you give my husband this book, which is full of lies, this New Testament!”

I asked her, “Was the prophet Jeremiah a Jew?”

“Of course he was!” she replied.

“Then I gave her the book of Jeremiah and asked her to read chapter 31, where it is written, Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant (Hebrew, Berith Chadashah) with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land.
That night he went to bed and died in his sleep.
The next morning his wife came to us, weeping, and told us about it. “Zvi,” she said, “When the Messiah comes again, will He bring back my husband to me? You know, he believed in Him.”
I told her that if she also believed in the Messiah, she will one day be reunited with her husband in the glorious presence of the Messiah of Israel.

by Zvi Kalisher in Jerusalem, from The Friends of Israel Archives, 1972

Please continue to uphold Zvi and Naomi Kalisher before the throne of grace. They appreciate your prayers immensely.

Zvi Kalisher has lived in Israel since 1946 and has been a columnist for Israel My Glory since 1959.

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Assault at Gethsemane

After eating His last supper, Jesus and His disciples crossed the Kidron Valley and came to a familiar garden of olive trees known as Gethsemane. Called in Hebrew Gat Shemanim, meaning “oil press,” it was located on the lower western slope of the Mount of Olives.

When Jesus made His way to Gethsemane, He surely passed the ancient tomb structures along the ravine. Those monuments probably reminded Him of His imminent death. How easy it would have been for Him to bypass Gethsemane, continue to the top of the Mount, and escape to the open desert. Yet, on behalf of an undeserving, sinful world, He entered Gethsemane (cf. Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8).

Once inside, Jesus separated from the rest of His disciples and took Peter, James, and John with Him to a separate section in the grove. He became more anguished and distressed, and His soul was sorrowful to the point of death (Mt. 26:38). Jesus moved farther away to be alone, then knelt to pray, three times petitioning God the Father to remove the cup from which He was to drink.

Nevertheless, Jesus submitted Himself completely to His Father’s will. Then He returned to the disciples and announced, “The hour has come; behold, the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners” (Mk. 14:41).

Few can appreciate that Jesus was able to face His suffering and death at Calvary because of the victory gained at Gethsemane. The full weight of bearing the sins of mankind—past, present, and future—was to come crashing upon Him. Imagine such defilement!

He said to Peter, James, and John, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch” (v. 34). Then “He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him” (v. 35).

Is it any wonder Jesus was troubled and deeply distressed? “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Lk. 22:44).

Jesus was not dreading the cross; He was dreading having to become sin for you and me: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

The full weight of human sin was placed on Him. That is quite an assault. But as the prophet Isaiah foretold, “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand” (Isa. 53:10).

Gethsemane is the very heart of the biblical faith. Christ bearing our sin and guilt is God’s answer to what began in the Garden of Eden with Adam (Gen. 2:8; 3:23). By taking our sin, Jesus made it possible for us to obtain life for eternity: “For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:21–22).

In 1912 songwriter Samuel E. Reed penned these words in his hymn “In Gethsemane Alone”:

Long in anguish deep was He,
Weeping there for you and me,
For our sin to Him was known;
We should love Him evermore
For the anguish that He bore
In Gethsemane, alone.
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