The 400 Silent Years:
Before the silence—Page 14
The not-so-quiet years—Page 18
A Savior who is Christ the Lord—Page 24

Plus:
When God steps in—Page 10
Diary of a wimpy church?—Page 17
A Hanukkah menorah—Page 28
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When God Steps In
by Elwood McQuaid .................................... 10
A rapidly rising tide of aggression is aimed at Israel, and the West seems impotent to stem it. But there is One who is omnipotent, and He has made promises He intends to keep.

Before the Silence
by David M. Levy ......................................... 14
To understand the Intertestamental Period, it’s important to look at Israel’s postexilic history and see what happened to God’s Chosen People before the silence fell.

The Not-So-Quiet Years
by William L. Krewson .................................. 18
Some people misconstrue the term silent years. They think the absence of a prophetic Word from the Lord meant the Lord was absent. That was not the case, as you’ll see.

A Savior Who Is Christ the Lord
by Charles Dyer ........................................... 24
A few miles from the hubbub of Bethlehem, you can visit a spot where the message of Christmas remains pure and undiluted. Relax, and let this wonderful article take you there!

A Hanukkah Menorah
by Bonnie Pearson ......................................... 28
The menorah is the very heart of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. Here is a true story about a treasured menorah whose light will shine brightly this holiday season.

This is the season to celebrate the joyous, meaningful holidays of Christmas and Hanukkah. Throughout Israel, Hanukkah lamps will burn brightly for eight days. None will burn brighter than the one on our cover, atop the Azrieli Center skyscraper complex in Tel Aviv. It beams its magnificent holiday light across the Ayalon River and Ayalon Highway. Completed in 1999, the center’s three towers house a convention center, amphitheater, enormous shopping mall, and more. The circular tower has 49 stories and is the second tallest building in Israel. The complex is another testimony to Israel’s ability to reclaim the land: It was built on a former parking lot for garbage trucks (Tal Paz-Fridman/Israelimages).
When U.S. presidential candidate Mitt Romney visited Israel in July, he called Jerusalem the undivided capital of Israel and vowed to move the U.S. Embassy there if elected. It was the first time a president or presidential candidate recognized Jerusalem as the united Jewish capital and committed to moving the embassy there from Tel Aviv.

Romney, however, merely stated longstanding, official U.S. policy. When Congress passed the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, it declared Jerusalem should remain undivided, be recognized as the official capital of the nation of Israel, and become the location of the U.S. Embassy in Israel by May 31, 1999.

Unfortunately, a waiver provision in the law permits the president to postpone the move for six months at a time in the interest of national security. Every president since the law was passed—Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama—has enacted the waiver, keeping it in effect perpetually.

Yet the Jewish roots of Jerusalem date back more than 3,000 years, to the days of King David. In the Bible, Jerusalem is always viewed as the Jewish people’s capital city. It is mentioned 600 times in the Old Testament and 160 times in the New. By contrast, it is not mentioned even once in the Qur’an.

For more than 18 centuries, from the city’s destruction in A.D. 135 by the Romans until 1967, Jerusalem ceased being recognized as Israel’s capital. For generation after generation, Jewish people the world over looked to the day when the beloved city would again be theirs. Their optimism was expressed in the phrase Next year in Jerusalem! spoken at the conclusion of Passover seders each year.

It was on June 6, during the 1967 Six-Day War, when the long-awaited day came: Israeli paratroopers took the Temple Mount, and Jerusalem was again united under Jewish rule.

This year marks the 45th anniversary of Jerusalem’s historic reunification. On June 6 Bill Sutter, recently retired executive director of The Friends of Israel, and I attended the Jerusalem Day Prayer Breakfast at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center in Washington, DC. It was hosted by the International Israel Allies Caucus Foundation (IIACF), an organization dedicated to strengthening international support for Israel in governments and parliaments around the world.

What began in 2004 in Jerusalem, when a group of Israeli Knesset members formed a caucus with evangelical Christians to develop better ties with pro-Israel leaders, has grown into a global organization of caucuses in 17 member nations and the European Union. The IIACF coordinates activities and works to bring a unified voice on issues regarding Israel worldwide. The U.S. House formed the American Congressional Israel Allies Caucus in 2006.

The Prayer Breakfast’s goal was to remember the 45th anniversary of the reunification and promote the IIACF’s Recognize Jerusalem campaign, designed to encourage faith-based advocacy for a united Jerusalem.

IIACF is encouraging legislation similar to the Embassy Act in 20 countries. Meanwhile, in the United States, legislation has been introduced in both the House and Senate to remove the presidential waiver power and initiate the process of moving the embassy to Jerusalem. Information on taking action can be found on the IIACF website, iiacf.org, along with other resources.

At the breakfast, it was encouraging to hear Michele Bachmann (R-MN), Doug Lamborn (R-CO), John Fleming (R-LA), Trent Franks (R-AZ), Allen West (R-FL), Randy Hultgren (R-IL), Joe Walsh (R-IL), and Louie Gohmert (R-TX) express support for Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel and call on the president to relocate the embassy.

May God give our president the conviction of these congressional leaders. As Israel’s staunchest ally, the United States should show the world we stand with Israel. It was President Harry Truman who took the lead in 1947 to make America the first nation to recognize the modern State of Israel, and it should be America that leads the world again by becoming the first nation to relocate its embassy to the historical, biblical, and official undivided capital of Jerusalem.
"The Temple Mount is the holiest place to the people of Israel," he said, "the place where the First and Second Temples stood. The Temple Mount is also a holy place to Muslims, where the al-Aqsa Mosque stands, and the Temple Mount is special to Christianity as well."

Eldad’s bill would give each group access on its holidays. When holidays overlap, the groups would split time. Shared worship already exists between Jews and Muslims in Hebron at the Cave of the Patriarchs.

In another area of the world, this proposal might pose no problem. But in Israel, it will not fly. In fact, Muslim overreaction reveals a much larger story that involves the work toward a two-state solution.

When Jeffrey Feltman, UN under-secretary-general for political affairs, gave a briefing on the situation in the Middle East in August, he said, "Despite the current stagnation in the negotiating process and the obstacles to be overcome, it is clear that the two-state solution remains the best available and most realistic option for the Israelis and Palestinians."

A senior UN official agreed and said the international community should make more effort to bring the two parties closer together.

But one has to wonder what the UN officials see as so "clear" and "realistic." If the Muslims cannot even discuss worship on the Temple Mount, what type of herculean effort will be able to bring the parties together to discuss land rights, water rights, air space, borders, and other critical issues?

The prophet Amos’s simple question, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3) begs an answer.

In an attempt to comply with the U.S. State Department, an Israeli Knesset member has proposed legislation to let Christians and Jews pray on the Temple Mount. But the bill has ignited such an outburst of Muslim protest that it has almost no chance of passing.

Sheikh Kamal al-Khatib told reporters, "The stars in the sky are closer to us than Israel is from taking a place in the al-Aqsa Mosque." Some Muslims even claim the legislation is an attempt to partition the Muslim sanctuary and transform it into a synagogue.

Former grand mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, reacted by saying, "Al-Aqsa is our faith, our life, our dignity and honor. And if Muslims were to allow fanatical Jews to usurp it, in full or in part, then the belly of the earth would be better for us than its surface."

In reality, the Temple Mount is Judaism’s holiest place on Earth, while Mecca is Islam’s. But the Muslim Waqf, which has administered the area since 1967, wants only Muslims to pray there. And the Israeli government enforces that dictum.

In August the U.S. State Department released its annual report on religious freedom, which criticized Israel for denying "all non-Muslims opportunities to worship at the Temple Mount" and said, "only Muslims are allowed to pray at the site."

The Jewish Press, a weekly American newspaper, reported that Israeli Knesset member Aryeh Eldad wants to correct that Israeli policy, in compliance with the American report.
Selling the Big Lie

Explain why she left her job, a reporter for a major organization in Washington, DC, said recently, “I feel like I am, as a reporter in the Capitol, lied to every day, all day.”

Of course, not everyone in politics is a compulsive liar, but people who say we live in a “culture of lies” have a point. Sometimes lying is frivolous or self-serving. But when the objective is to inflict deliberate injury or destruction on others, lying is heinous, as well as sinful.

Nowhere can we find a better pack of heinous lies than in the Palestinian fabrication of history meant to destroy Israel and legitimize a mythological Arab state that has not one shred of evidence for its existence. However, big lies told long enough will attract a following.

The late Arab terrorist Yasser Arafat counted on that fact when he began creating a preposterous revision of history that few thought would gain traction. But it has, and from the halls of the UN to some of the courts of Europe and streets of the Western world, we hear lies passing for truth.

Dr. David Bukay’s recent piece in The Middle East Quarterly, “Founding National Myths: Fabricating Palestinian History,” provides a sharp, insightful look at the magnitude and seriousness of the Palestinian propaganda attack on Israel and the Jewish people—as well as the attack on Christianity.

According to the Palestinian Authority’s version of history, the Palestinians are direct descendants of the ancient Canaanites and Jebusites and have been in “Palestine” for more than 7,000 years. Some Palestinians claim they’ve been there since the beginning of creation.

Of course, not a speck of evidence exists to back up their claim. In fact, Joan Peters, in her book From Time Immemorial, documented the fact that most Arabs who claim to be “Palestinians” are not. During the British Mandate over Palestine, the British government allowed thousands of Arabs to flood into the land illegally, while refusing access to Jews:

While the Jews were working furiously at clearing land that had been ignored or dismissed by Government “authorities” as “uncultivable,” and created places that Government insisted “did not exist,” those opened-up places . . . [were] expropriated by the Arab in-migrants and immigrant community—Syrians, Egyptians, Hauranis, Algerians, Hejazis, and others camouflaged as “natural indigenous Palestinian population since time immemorial.”

Furthermore, Palestinians claim the world’s Jewish people are not Jewish at all, but transplants created by the Europeans who founded Zionist Israel as a means of “stealing” Palestinian land and identity. These so-called thieves, they say, co-opted virtually all Palestinian history by creating false names for towns, destroying communities through terror, and taking as their own everything they could steal—even down to music, falafel, and hummus. In this bizarre scenario, all land under Israeli control is illegitimately “occupied territory,” and Israel must be erased from the map.

Arafat even claimed Jesus was a Palestinian freedom fighter. The current, refined version says Jesus was a Muslim martyr (shahid). In His death, therefore, Jesus had the unique distinction of being, not a Savior sent from God to bear our sins, but the first Palestinian martyr tortured in “Palestinian” land.

Ironically, this reinvention of Christianity (which is not Christian at all) is, at its core, a Muslim version of Replacement Theology. Yet it has a more violent application than the one used by pseudo-Christian, Protestant theologians who promote the fiction that the church has replaced Israel and is now the sole beneficiary of the inheritance God has reserved for the Jewish people. The difference is that Palestinians make Christianity Muslim, while Replacement theorists dump Israel into the trash bin and fabricate a new brand of biblical interpretation—one that denies all of God’s promises to His chosen nation.

Clearly, in this new culture of lies, truth becomes a casualty, while chaos and uncertainty become the legacy of myths peddled and bought as reality.

The battle being waged is for truth—truth that for more than 70 years has been the foundation of the mission and message of The Friends of Israel. As we prepare to celebrate the matchless Incarnation and thank God for all He has given us through His Son, Jesus Christ, we can assure you that our foundation will not change. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32). We believe Him.
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James A. Showers, President
Over the centuries, God’s Word has penetrated many nations and cultures through translations that have made it available to people in their native languages. The Septuagint, from the Latin word *septuaginta* that means “seventy,” has the distinction of being the first and oldest Bible translation, though not all of the Old Testament was translated at once.

The Septuagint’s history began with Alexander the Great. In 331 B.C., Alexander renamed an Egyptian town located along the Mediterranean Sea after himself: Alexandria. The city became a chief center for Hellenism (eclectic Greek culture) and housed the largest Jewish community in the world at that time.

However, within two or three generations, these Jewish people had forgotten their Hebrew language and spoke primarily Greek. Thus they needed the Hebrew Scriptures in Greek. They also wanted to contribute their Jewish religious knowledge to the Royal Library and museum of Alexandria.

Jewish legend alleges that in the 3rd century B.C., 72 (some say 70) respected elders of Israel were brought to Alexandria to translate the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) into Greek. God then prompted, or inspired, them; and they all accurately wrote the Scripture (cf. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah 9a–9b).

In the following century or so, other parts of the Old Testament were translated, along with certain apocryphal books. The term *Apocrypha*, meaning “hidden,” refers to a collection of noncanonical, Judaic books supposedly written around the same time as the Septuagint.

Sound scholars believe New Testament writers used the Septuagint because more than 150 Old Testament quotations in the New Testament come directly from it.

When compared to the early Hebrew Masoretic text, and later to the Dead Sea Scrolls, only slight variations are found. And these variations do not call into question any
area of the infallibility of God’s Word.

An area the Septuagint has clarified is Messianic prophecy. A classic example concerns the controversy over Isaiah 7:14: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

There are some who like to hoot and holler over the word virgin, saying the Hebrew word used in the verse, almah, does not mean a literal “virgin.” They argue that Isaiah simply used a Hebrew word that typically meant a normal “young woman” who would give birth; therefore, no notion of a virgin birth was intended.

However, the Septuagint’s Jewish translators who lived before Christ was born, specifically chose the Greek word parthenos, which means an “inviolate virgin.” The apostle Matthew used the same Greek word in the New Testament: “So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Mt. 1:22–23).

The Septuagint should settle the question of what Isaiah meant when he wrote, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive.”

Like any translation, the Septuagint has its issues. But as Scripture says, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isa. 40:8). The Septuagint proves the truth of that verse and can help us appreciate the reliability of the Bible.

by Peter Colón, creative resources coordinator for The Friends of Israel
When God Steps In

A few days before Christians gather to commemorate the nativity, Jewish people the world over will celebrate Hanukkah (December 8–16), which memorializes Israel’s deliverance from the infamous Seleucid monarch Antiochus IV, who ruled from 175 B.C. to 164 B.C. This king aspired to destroy Judaism, annihilate the Jewish people, and install pagan worship.

In the end, God thwarted his ambitions by enabling a family, the Maccabees, to raise a rebellion and drive the tyrant’s minions from the land. The history of Hanukkah is one of many proofs that God is faithful to His Word and that, despite their persistence, Israel’s enemies will never be able to erase the Jewish presence from the earth.
Today a rapidly rising tide of aggression is aimed at the tiny State of Israel. Behind it is a cadre of anti-Semitic, anti-Israel elements in both the UN and Islamic world, as well as leaders in the West who either participate in the festival of hate or ignore the issue completely, unwilling to do anything about it. At the core of the so-called Arab Spring is a malevolent subplot to establish Islamist governments hostile to Israel’s existence and that of the Jewish people.

The evidence is undeniable. Islamic extremists who dream of a Sharia-run Muslim caliphate have pledged themselves to become the architects of a Jewless Middle East. Their objectives mirror those of ancient anti-Semites: eliminate the Jewish people or force a remnant into a state of impotence, insignificance, and servitude.

We have entered a period of history where hatred seems to be crescendoing toward a climax. From a purely human perspective, the future does not look good. Alarmists lament that Israel as we know it could be destroyed. Some say (or at least whisper) that it might be good if the Arabs got “Palestine” and the Jews found another place to bed down. After all, aren’t the Israelis the troublemakers? If those pesky Jews did not insist on survival and would just let the Arabs kill them, there would be peace—or so think the international campaigners for peace at any price.

Given the endless stream of anti-Semitic intrigues, hate campaigns, outright attacks, and wars, why haven’t the would-be murderers succeeded? When the Romans scattered the Jewish people to the ends of the earth following the Bar Kokhba rebellion (A.D. 132-135) and launched a 2,000-year-long, illegal occupation of the Jewish homeland, one would think life was over for the family of Abraham. How could a people endure after living in primarily hostile, Gentile environments where they were victimized; pillaged; murdered; disenfranchised; stuffed into ghettos; and often driven from temporary havens by violence, hatred, or avarice?

Assimilation seemed inevitable. But it didn’t happen. In fact, the survival of this persecuted, homeless nation looms as a singularly certifiable miracle of human history. Equally as amazing is the fact the Jewish people never lost hope of returning to their Promised Land. For centuries, Passover observances were anchored by the acclamation, “Next year in Jerusalem!” Israel’s national anthem, “Hatikvah,” embodies not nostalgic sentiment but a living hope that across the centuries never significantly diminished:

So long our hopes are not yet lost—
Two thousand years we cherished them
To live in freedom in the land
of Zion and Jerusalem.

So how does one explain the inexplicable? Humanly speaking, we are at a loss. There is no rational explanation. And yet! The explanation lies in divine intervention: There is a God, a plan, and a promise.

God articulates, history confirms. Israel has been delivered from every conceivable attempt to destroy it and thus disrupt God’s plan. In biblical revelation from Moses to Malachi, God empowered extraordinary people, often in spite of themselves, to rescue the nation He uniquely selected to endure as His witness to the nations: “You are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me” (Isa. 43:10).

Isaiah 43 lays out the essence of Israel’s existence as a chosen people. The Jews were scattered; and they suffered, overcame, were regathered, and will be regathered again for the purpose God described in verse 10. Neither Israel nor Jewry will be destroyed or diminished because the Jews are a people destined to complete a divine mission possessing spectacular elements yet to be seen.

The Bethlehem Connection

When Jesus was born in the little hamlet of Bethlehem of Judea, as Scripture foretold, God again directly intervened in human affairs to undertake a mission worthy only of Him. Revered Bible teacher Major Ian Thomas often expressed it this way: “God invaded humanity.”

But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting (Mic. 5:2).

Often buried beneath the trappings of the Christmas season is the monumental fact that the coming of Christ and subsequent birth of the church would alter this planet’s future and transform the lives of untold millions. “Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, ‘God with us’” (Mt. 1:23).

To fallen humanity, the church is an inconvenient contradiction to every godless thing it desires. Thus, from the beginning, hostile forces have tried to annihilate Christians, their God-loving culture, and the faith. Over more than 2,000 years, the conflict accelerated in stages until we now find ourselves in what has all the markings of a final push to finish the crusade to wipe out the faith—the same faith that has brought stability, truth, justice, social order, morality, and a sanctity of life previously unknown in history.

Many say we now live in a “post-Christian society.” Perhaps that popular phrase most clearly delineates the endgame of the anti-God campaign controlled by moral renegades who increasingly impose their will on those too spiritually emaciated to resist.

But in the midst of what may seem a hopelessly deteriorating situation, the fact remains we are not left alone to suffer the unpleasant consequences of an era ending in a tearful whimper. With Hanukkah and Christmas, we remember God is well, “He knows those who trust in Him” (Nah. 1:7), and He is able to come to our aid and bring matters to a positive conclusion.

Our confidence is in Jehovah, who steps in to take control. God has not left the arena. The last page of Earth’s history has yet to be turned, and with rest in the competence of a God who will perform what He has promised.
God articulates, history confirms. Our Lord speaks, and debate ceases. His Word is immutable fact, and history is the record of how He executed His Word.

An Inescapable Conclusion

Many of today’s popular buzzwords are associated with “hope.” Politicians and social revolutionaries trade on promising hope for a better world, a better personal life, or a better economic situation. Unfortunately, much preaching isn’t too different. What many Christians hear concerning the best in life is ensconced in the temporal and mundane: healthy relationships, successful lifestyles, financial betterment, etc.

Wisdom, discernment, and serious study of God’s prophetic Word—once indispensable attributes of the Christian life and essentials to understanding the world, our place in it, and what the future holds—are on the shelf. A case in point is the emerging church movement. It embodies a revolution in faith and practice by reassessing Christianity and reworking biblical truth to fit the whims of a fluctuating, incoherent culture.

The movement’s beliefs include de-emphasizing absolutes and doctrinal creeds, emphasizing experience and feelings, concentrating on relationship building over proclaiming the gospel, and reexamining the Bible and its teachings. The list goes on. Unfortunately, trying to fit into the changing postmodern culture adversely affects many less radical but susceptible Christian organizations.

Alteration, liberalization, and assimilation (if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em) are sure trips to a dead end. Two certainties reflecting real hope and change lie before us: (1) Israel will call for the Messiah’s coming and intervention, and (2) He will deliver His people and introduce a golden age of millennial bliss (Zech. 14:1–9; Rom. 11:26–27).

For the church—never to be confused with Israel—the Blessed Hope is His promised, imminent return to call believers to Himself, where we will “always be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:17; cf. Jn. 14:1–3).

The true dynamic in a world sputtering out of control is the absolute-ness of divine declarations. His coming and personal intervention into human affairs are certainties that hold our lives as believers together. They must be ever in our minds and hearts.

Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah!

Elwood McQuaid is consulting editor for The Friends of Israel.
Violent attacks on Nigerian Christians continue to increase at an alarming rate, and they seem to be the work of the notorious, radical Islamist group Boko Haram, which has vowed to rid Nigeria of Christianity.

Members of the Deeper Life Church in central Kogi State were gunned down in August after a Bible study. The attackers blocked all exits, then fired Kalashnikov rifles into the church, killing 19 of the trapped Christians, including the pastor. When the killers fled, the wounded were taken to hospitals.

Although not immediately identified, the attackers are suspected to belong to the Boko Haram, a radical Muslim group that reportedly has killed more than 1,000 people since 2009. Its representatives have boasted about burning churches and carrying out suicide attacks on Christians that have resulted in many deaths.

In June leaders of Boko Haram (which means “Western education is sacrilege”) boasted, “Allah has given us victory in the attacks we launched against churches . . . which resulted in the deaths of many Christians and security personnel.”

The group has stated its goal in no uncertain terms: “The Nigerian state and Christians are our enemies and we will be launching attacks on the Nigerian state and its security apparatus as well as churches until we achieve our goal of establishing an Islamic state in place of the secular state.”

Boko Haram militants backed up their announcement with a series of attacks in the predominantly Christian area of Zaria, where they crashed a car into a barricade at an evangelical church, setting off explosives that killed at least 24 people and wounded 125. Later, they detonated explosives at a Catholic church. An eyewitness told Compass Direct News at least 10 bodies were removed from the cathedral. Many more were wounded, some critically.

Cause for alarm has accelerated because the August attack on the Deeper Life Church took place in Central Nigeria where the population is primarily Christian. Most previous attacks have been in the north, which is heavily Muslim. Christians fear Islamists intent on creating an Islamic Nigeria are spreading into other areas of the country, thus widening their campaign.

The attack on the Deeper Life Church came one day after the Boko Haram demanded Nigerian President Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan, 55, convert to Islam or resign. If he did not, he was told, the attacks would continue.

Jonathan Racho of International Christian Concern believes the terror will continue regardless of what the president does. Racho and others are calling on outside governments to apply international pressure to protect Nigerian citizens.

Unfortunately, such calls usually fall on deaf ears. In countries like Nigeria, where Christians and members of other faiths used to live side by side in relative peace, the climate is rapidly changing.

Several years ago a missionary in Jos, a city of about 900,000 people, asked for prayer after churches in the area were burned and many Christians killed:

Pray for wisdom and righteousness for all decision makers in this disconcerting situation; for just actions by the military to restore order; for peace in Jos [and in all of Nigeria] amidst a populace now beleaguered with repeated instances of violence; for the LORD’s protection of His people; for His empowerment of grace upon them to faithfully seek the purposes of His kingdom amidst evil forces.

His prayer request is more relevant today than ever.

by Elwood McQuaid
Before the Silence

Repatriation of Israel

In 539 B.C., Babylon fell to the Persian Empire under the reign of King Cyrus. One year later, Cyrus freed the Jewish exiles and decreed they could return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple (2 Chr. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–2). In 537 B.C., Zerubbabel led the first group home to Jerusalem. Later he became the city’s governor (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:7; 12:1; see also Haggai and Zechariah).

Under his able leadership, 49,897 exiles returned (Ezra 2:64–65; Neh. 7). Upon their arrival, work to restore the altar and the Temple’s foundation began (Ezra 3:2).

The 400 years between Malachi (the last Old Testament book) and Matthew (the first New Testament book) are called the Intertestamental Period. Many Christians know little about this time because it is shrouded in silence as to a revelatory Word from God. To properly understand how Israel relates to this era, it is necessary to study the nation’s postexilic history from 539 to 400 B.C.

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Soon afterward, a group of Samaritans successfully petitioned Persian King Artaxerxes to shut down construction, and the work on the Temple ceased for 16 years (4:24).

In 520 B.C., the prophets Haggai and Zechariah inspired the Jewish people to resume rebuilding. King Darius I granted permission to restart the project, and the Temple was completed in 515 B.C. (6:15), beginning what is commonly called the Second Temple Period.

In 486 B.C., Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) ascended to the Persian throne, and seven years later he chose Esther to be his queen (Est. 2:17). The events recorded in the book of Esther took place between the Israelites’ first and second returns to Jerusalem.

During Ahasuerus’ reign, a wicked Persian official named Haman nearly destroyed the Jewish people because he hated one Jewish man named Mordecai (3:7–15). At that time, all the Jews in the world lived within the vast boundaries of the Persian Empire.

In 474 B.C., Queen Esther exposed Haman’s plan. In the end, Haman was hung on the gallows he had constructed for Mordecai (chaps. 5—7), and Ahasuerus let Queen Esther issue a counterdecrre giving the Jewish people the right to defend themselves (8:9–12). So the Jewish people defeated their enemies, and the Feast of Purim was established in 473 B.C. to celebrate this great victory (chap. 9).

In 457 B.C., Ezra led the second expedition back to Jerusalem. This time 1,758 Jewish exiles returned, with permission from Persian King Artaxerxes Longimanus.

Ezra was a highly respected priest and scribe whose mission was to teach the “Law of the LORD” to the Jewish returnees (Ezra 7:10). Arriving in Jerusalem, he was shocked to hear how the people, priests, and Levites had married heathen women and adopted their pagan religion.

Along with other Israelites, Ezra publicly mourned over this dreadful situation and interceded for the nation, calling on God to forgive the Jewish people their sins and spare the returning remnant from His wrath. He then led the nation to repent and convinced the men to divorce their heathen wives, demanding they send both them and their offspring back to their own countries. Within 90 days, all the marriages were dissolved (chap. 9).

In 445 B.C. Nehemiah took the third group of exiles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city’s walls, a job he accomplished in 52 days despite great opposition (Neh. 6:15). Under Nehemiah’s leadership, revival came to the land; and Judah repented of its sins.

Nehemiah reestablished the Feast of Tabernacles and ratified a renewal of the Mosaic Covenant (chaps. 8—10). Jerusalem was repopulated and its walls rededicated, and Temple responsibilities were reassigned to the priests and Levites (chaps. 11—12).

After governing Jerusalem for 12 years, Nehemiah returned to Susa in 432 B.C. to tell King Artaxerxes Longimanus of his accomplishments (13:6). In 420 B.C., he returned to Jerusalem because Israel had again fallen into sin. He reformed Temple worship, stopped the profaning of the Sabbath, and again annulled Jewish marriages to pagan women (chap. 13).

**Rebellion of Israel**

The Old Testament revelation closes with a final message from the prophet Malachi, who ministered either after Nehemiah returned to Susa or during Nehemiah’s second visit to Jerusalem. The book of Malachi has 55 verses, of which 47 are directly from God.

Malachi opened his revelation by declaring God’s unconditional love for an elect Israel—a love the nation continually questioned, doubted, and mocked with insensitivity and indifference. The prophet confronted Judah on many issues:

1. The priests profaned God’s name and worship of Him by offering polluted, defective sacrifices in the Temple.

2. Men broke their marriage covenants by divorcing their Jewish wives to become unequally yoked with pagan women, a sin Ezra had previously corrected.
(3) Israel robbed God of what was rightfully His by not paying their tithes and offerings to the Temple.

(4) The Israelites committed hypocrisy by pretending to live for the Lord while practicing wickedness. Seeking to touch their hearts, Malachi asked them a series of questions from God. But instead of acknowledging their sin, they responded with arrogance, surprise, and indifference, basically asking, “How has God loved us? And how have we despised, profaned, wearied, robbed, or spoken against God?”

**Reminder to Israel**

Malachi closes the Old Testament with God’s severe word of judgment (Mal. 4)—very appropriate given Israel’s continual sin and rebellion against Him. The final word Israel heard from God’s Holy Scriptures was *curse*: “Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (v. 6).

Failure to heed God’s warning would result in a curse. The word for “curse” is different from the one previously used (2:2; 3:9). It means to “ban” or “set apart under a ban” for utter extermination. A person, city, or thing could be put under such a curse, as were the Gentile cities Joshua destroyed (Dt. 13:12–15). If repentance were not forthcoming, Judah would be cursed and set apart for extermination.

Because Malachi ends with a curse, Jewish scholars during the Middle Ages repeated 4:5 after reading 4:6 so that the last words on their lips would not be a curse on their people.

Yet the curse was there for a reason: People usually remember the last words they read. The Israelites were to remember that their refusal to obey God would result in judgment.

However, they could be delivered by repenting of their sin and being reconciled to God.

Malachi’s message was the final, authentic revelation from God until John the Baptist shattered the 400 years of silence with “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Mt. 3:2).

By 400 B.C., the Persian Empire was starting to wane. In the coming years, Greece, Syria, Egypt, and Rome would rise to power and severely oppress Judah in the era commonly identified as the Intertestamental Period.

*David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries for The Friends of Israel.*

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A More Perfect Union

by Craig L. Parshall

Diary of a Wimpy Church?

ow that national elections are over, I have taken the time to reflect on a consistent theme in American politics of late: the presence (or absence) of civility in campaign speeches, advertisements, and debates. I found that each party accused the other of violating civility—a banner that political campaigns often run up the flagpole but rarely salute, to almost one’s surprise.

But particularly interesting was how this issue arose within a Christian context. When Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, closed in prayer at the end of the first day of the Republican National Convention, he said his theme would be “reconciling . . . truth with civility.” In January the cover of Christianity Today read, “Civil Christians in an Age of Rancor” and featured an article by Wheaton College political science professor Amy Black dealing with Christian civility during political seasons, also the subject of a book she wrote.

Then in August the news broke that Pastor Rick Warren cancelled the presidential candidate forum at his Saddleback Church in Southern California to hold a religious liberty forum instead. Warren’s theme would be “reconciling . . . truth with civility.”

Of course, followers of Christ don’t get their marching orders from journalists or society. In fact, as I read Scripture, it seems clear we are to influence society, not conform to it.

The Bible says we are to speak the truth with love and boldness, mindful of setting an example for other believers “in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). We are to speak “the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) because without love, we sound like a noisy gong or “clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). On the other hand, to speak loving words while avoiding the truth is both cowardly and spiritually ineffective.

Some segments of society will fight us, sometimes vociferously and sometimes violently, even when we speak in love. Jesus was the epitome of love mixed with boldness, and He was crucified. However, He did not evade the truth even when His life was on the line: “Now some of them from Jerusalem said, ‘Is this not He whom they seek to kill? But look! He speaks boldly’” (Jn. 7:25–26).

The apostle Paul is repeatedly described as a messenger who spoke the gospel message with boldness (Acts 9:27; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8). And when he did, it often provoked raucous opposition and, in one case, a citywide riot (19:23–30).

In fact, some New Testament verbal encounters would probably be labeled as “hate speech” today. Jesus, for example, did not mince words when He rebuked the Pharisees:

Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Lk. 16:14–15).

The apostle Peter confronted Simon the Sorcerer, who wanted to buy spiritual power, using language that would make today’s civility buffs queasy (8:20–23).

So where does this situation leave us? The current conversation within the church about civility is important, but it could drift into a wimpy, half-baked approach to Christian apologetics if it is not seasoned with a heavy dose of biblical realism and disciplined theology.

We certainly are to practice gracious speech, but access to the corridors of power may also require us to be blunt in interpreting for our leaders the “handwriting on the wall” (Dan. 5:22–28). And to the politically correct ear, those messages can sometimes sound downright uncivil.

Craig L. Parshall is senior vice president and general counsel for the National Religious Broadcasters.
Although the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments are usually termed “silent,” they were neither quiet nor dull. In fact, they were quite the opposite. Though God’s prophetic voice to His people was silent, He orchestrated many significant events to prepare the Jewish nation for the coming of their Messiah.

The last prophet of the Jewish Scriptures was Malachi, who wrote...
around 450 B.C. His book ends ominously by predicting the coming of the Day of the Lord, preceded by the appearance of God’s prophet Elijah. The Israelites heard no message from God after Malachi.

Even during the successful Jewish revolt led by the Maccabees against the Greeks around 150 B.C., they still waited for “a trustworthy prophet to arise” (1 Macc. 14:41). God would not speak to them again until John the Baptist. He was the one whom Jesus called the embodiment of Elijah, the prophesied one to come (Mt. 11:14). John ended the silent years by announcing the arrival of God’s promised Messiah.

At the end of the Old Testament history, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the Jewish people’s return from their 70-year exile in Babylon. They began to reconstruct God’s Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 3—6), such a significant event that this era is also called the Second Temple Period.

During these 400 years, three significant events prepared the Jewish people for the coming of Jesus: (1) The synagogue was created, (2) the Septuagint was translated, and (3) Hanukkah was celebrated. In fact, without an understanding of these events, it is impossible to appreciate many parts of the New Testament.

The Synagogue

The Persian Period (586–333 B.C.)

God used the Babylonian Empire to discipline His people Israel in 586 B.C. The Babylonians destroyed Solomon’s Temple, killed many inhabitants of Judea, and exiled the rest to Babylon where they lived in seclusion and slavery. Losing their land and Temple devastated the Jewish people and forced them to adapt their community life and worship of God to a new reality.

During this cruel era of captivity, the first synagogues appeared. They became places where exiled Israelites gathered both to worship their God and fellowship as a cohesive people in a foreign land.

Synagogue buildings eventually sprung up wherever Jewish people were exiled in the Mediterranean world. Although those who returned to Jerusalem rebuilt the Temple in 515 B.C., others continued to worship at synagogues throughout the world. Inside and outside Israel, synagogues also functioned as community centers where Jewish people studied the Torah, collected donations for charity, and kept the official community records.

Although the Old Testament contains no information about synagogues because they developed after the canon was closed, the New Testament mentions them repeatedly in relation to Jesus and His disciples. When Christian churches emerged, they mirrored the synagogues. For example, the order of worship came from the synagogue, as did prayer, singing, reading of Scripture, and the sermon. In the church, Jewish believers in the Jewish Messiah continued the practices of their traditions. God providentially used synagogues during those silent years as the foundation for Christian churches.

The Septuagint

The Ptolemaic Greek Period (333–200 B.C.)

For the Jewish people who returned to the land of their ancestors, Hebrew continued as the holy language, spoken by the religious leaders and written in the Scriptures. However, only about 10 percent returned after the Babylonian Captivity; most remained in the lands of the dispersion.

Two hundred years later, a Jewish community in Egypt had grown large enough to attract the attention of Egypt’s King Ptolemy II, one of four successors to Alexander the Great’s vast empire. Since Greek had become the unifying language throughout that empire, Ptolemy wanted a copy of the Jewish Torah in Greek, his own language, for his library.

The ancient Letter of Aristeas records how this translation was produced. King Ptolemy II asked the Jews in Judea to send 72 translators to Egypt, six from each of their 12 tribes. It claims that these men translated the Five Books of Moses in 72 days. The rounded number of 70 became the name for this translation—Septuagint, in Latin (also written as LXX). Over the next 150
years, all the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek and included in the Septuagint.\(^2\)

The Septuagint was extremely important to the Greek-speaking Jewish communities in the Roman Empire. It kept God’s Word accessible to new generations outside Israel who were unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew language. As a result, it was used by the inspired authors of the New Testament; most of their quotations of the Old Testament were taken from the Septuagint, not the Hebrew Scriptures.

It also became the Bible of the early church because most who embraced Christianity spoke Greek. The LXX was the perfect complement to the Greek New Testament, providing early Christians with a Bible written entirely in Greek.

**Hanukkah**

**The Seleucid Greek Period**

**(200–164 B.C.)**

Though the Greeks who ruled the Jews in the third century B.C. tolerated God’s people and supported the translation of their Scriptures, the Greeks of the second century B.C. were exactly the opposite. In a struggle to control the trade routes that passed through Israel, the Seleucid family, ruling from Syria, defeated the Ptolemies who had ruled over the Judeans.

With new rulers came new laws. These new Greek leaders wanted their captives to live like other Greeks, so they restricted Jewish religious practices. For example, the Seleucids outlawed circumcision of male infants, forced Jews to violate kosher food laws, and seized the Temple treasures. They persecuted and murdered thousands of Jewish people.

The breaking point came in 167 B.C. when King Antiochus Epiphanes committed the ultimate blasphemy: He profaned the Temple by placing an idolatrous altar over the altar of burnt offering. This act, known as “the abomination of desolation,” rendered the Temple unfit for worship, as the prophet Daniel had predicted (Dan. 11:31).\(^3\) Jewish history says Antiochus sacrificed a female pig on the altar, the worst of unclean animals and the highest insult to God.

One zealous family began to revolt. Mattathias, a God-fearing priest, led his sons in refusing to comply with the Greek laws that compromised their faith. Their courage sparked fierce fighting against the Seleucids by armed bands of Jewish freedom fighters led by Mattathias’s son Judah the Maccabee, who eventually liberated Jerusalem from Greek rule and dedicated a purified Temple. Since that day in December 164 B.C., Jewish people have celebrated that holy struggle with the holiday of Hanukkah (“Dedication”) for eight days. Also called the “Festival of Lights,” Hanukkah is still celebrated by Jewish people around the world in November or December.\(^4\)

These godly, courageous men and women who resisted the pagan Greek rulers are mentioned in the New Testament: “Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35). (To read more about this period, see the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees 6—10.)

Jesus Himself celebrated the holiday: “Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon’s porch” (Jn. 10:22–23). Here Jesus, “the light of the world,” was asked by the Jewish leaders, “If You are the Christ, tell us plainly,” to which He responded, “I am the Son of God” (vv. 24, 36). Jesus came to the Temple rededicated by the Maccabees and presented Himself as the fulfillment of God’s Messianic promises.

During the 400 years before Christ, God providentially provided His people with synagogues for their worship, Scriptures in their common language, and a holiday to remember their calling. These provisions not only fulfilled their immediate needs but also set the stage for the arrival of the Messiah. The 400 not-so-quiet years became a clarion call affirming God’s sovereign plan and pointing to the good news of the Messiah of Israel.

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\(^3\) The full account is given in 1 Maccabees 1—4 and 2 Maccabees 6—10. Maccabean means “hammer,” referring to the courageous character of Judah and his fighters.

\(^4\) The miracle of the oil lasting for eight days is a much later Jewish tradition of the Talmud and is not found in either First or Second Maccabees or Josephus.

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William L. Krewson is a professor and chairman of undergraduate programs in the School of Divinity at Cairn University (formerly Philadelphia Biblical University), Langhorne, Pennsylvania.

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**Answers From God’s Word**

**Question:** Why is faith important?

**Answer:** “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

—Hebrews 11:6
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>600 BC</td>
<td>Temple of Diana (Artemis) is built in Ephesus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>586 BC</td>
<td>Babylon destroys Solomon’s Temple.</td>
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<tr>
<td>539 BC</td>
<td>Babylon falls to Persia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>538 BC</td>
<td>Cyrus permits the Jews to return to Jerusalem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>537–535 BC</td>
<td>Zerubbabel leads first return; starts Temple reconstruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>469 BC</td>
<td>Socrates is born in Athens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>465 BC</td>
<td>Artaxerxes ascends to Persian throne.</td>
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<tr>
<td>457 BC</td>
<td>Ezra leads second return.</td>
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<tr>
<td>448 BC</td>
<td>The Parthenon is built in Athens.</td>
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<tr>
<td>445–443 BC</td>
<td>Nehemiah leads third return; rebuilds Jerusalem’s walls.</td>
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<tr>
<td>432 BC</td>
<td>Nehemiah to Sus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>255–250 BC</td>
<td>Septuagint (Hebrew Bible in Greek) comes into being.</td>
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<tr>
<td>215 BC</td>
<td>Great Wall of China is built.</td>
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<tr>
<td>167 BC</td>
<td>Antiochus IV desecrates the Temple.</td>
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<tr>
<td>164 BC</td>
<td>Maccabees cleanse the Temple.</td>
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<tr>
<td>63 BC</td>
<td>Rome conquers Jerusalem.</td>
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<tr>
<td>44 BC</td>
<td>Julius Caesar is elected emperor for life; assassinated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Top Row, left to right: Temple of Diana (Marie Mauzy / Art Resource, NY); ruins of ancient shops on the Temple Mount (Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY); ruins of Hall of One Hundred Columns in Iran, started by Xerxes I and completed by Artaxerxes (Gianni Dagli Orti / Art Resource, NY); Athens, Greece (Steve Humphreys / iStockphoto); artist’s depiction of the crowning of Queen Esther (Alfredo Dagli Orti / Art Resource, NY).*  

*Bottom Row: Bust of Socrates (Album / Art Resource, NY); Ezra reading the scroll of the Law and Nehemiah rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls.*
### Timeline of Key Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year BCE</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Haggai and Zechariah begin ministering.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Second Temple completed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>479 BCE</td>
<td>Xerxes I (King Ahasuerus) chooses Esther as queen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>474 BCE</td>
<td>Esther thwarts Haman's plot to destroy the Jews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>473 BCE</td>
<td>Purim is established.</td>
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<tr>
<td>423 BCE</td>
<td>Darius II ascends to Persian throne.</td>
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<tr>
<td>420 BCE</td>
<td>Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>333 BCE</td>
<td>Alexander the Great conquers Persia.</td>
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<tr>
<td>323 BCE</td>
<td>Alexander dies; his empire is split among his four generals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 BC</td>
<td>Jesus the Savior is born in Bethlehem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Paintings and Images:**
- Persian artifact (Alfredo Dagli Orti/Art Resource, NY)
- Painting depicting Alexander the Great in battle (RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY)
- Bottom Row: Scribe (Lars Justinen/GoodSalt)
- Great Wall of China (Jacus/iStockphoto)
- Acropolis (Toon Possemiers/iStockphoto)
- Statue of Julius Caesar (Martin Lovatt/iStockphoto)
- Model of Herod’s Temple (Erich Lessing/Jerusalem model/Art Resource, NY)
- Depiction of the three wise men following the star (Pacific Press/GoodSalt)

*by Thomas C. Simcox*
Standing in Bethlehem’s Manger Square, the words of Phillips Brooks’s hymn almost seem like a grotesque mockery: “O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie.”

The blare of honking horns competes with the cries of postcard salesmen. Muslim calls to prayer blast from nearby minarets. Radios and DVD players thump the beat of the latest Middle Eastern tune. Peddlers hawk everything from “genuine camel-leather belts” to miniature olive-wood nativity sets to stone rosaries to beaded Bethlehem bags to Arab headdresses to Bethlehem ball caps to . . . to . . . . You finally want to shout, “Enough!” Does everything connected with Christ’s birth have to be so commercialized?

The Tower of the Flock

Yet, just a few miles from this cultural cacophony you can visit a spot where the message of Christmas remains pure, undiluted, and focused. I’m referring to the fields that surround Bethlehem—fields that once held shepherds “keeping watch over their flock by night” (Lk. 2:8).

The exact field where the shepherds were the evening Christ was born isn’t known. As is true with so many spots in Israel, several locations claim to be the true site. But my favorite is a place that isn’t owned by any religious group. It’s a simple, terraced hillside north of Bethlehem, just off the road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

I like this place because it matches the other prediction about the Messiah made by the prophet Micah. We all know the prophecy of Micah 5:2, but most pass over Micah 4:8: “And you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, even the former
Isachar Photography).

dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.” But what is this Migdal Eder—this “tower of the flock”—to which Micah referred? Alfred Edersheim explained its significance:

This Migdal Eder was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks which pastured on the barren sheepground beyond Bethlehem, but lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem. A passage in the Mishnah (Shek. 7.4) leads to the conclusion, that the flocks, which pastured there, were destined for Temple-sacrifices, and, accordingly, that the shepherds, who watched over them, were not ordinary shepherds . . . Thus, Jewish tradition in some dim manner apprehended the first revelation of the Messiah from that Migdal Eder, where shepherds watched the Temple-flocks all the year round.1

Standing on this hillside as the sun slips below the horizon, one can imagine the scene 2,000 years ago. The chill of the evening comes quickly under a cloudless sky. The surrounding hills turn from golden brown to purple to black. Small lights flicker from the windows of Bethlehem’s distant houses, matched by the twinkle of the planets and stars from the heavens. The darkness of the surrounding fields only makes that starry light from heaven seem more wondrous.

As the night wears on, the houses fade into little more than faint silhouettes against the horizon. The shepherds, their eyes growing accustomed to the dark, peer through the gloom, looking for any signs of movement. These watchmen of the night scan the hillsides for predators who might use the darkness as cover to steal the gentle animals under their care.

The Amazing Announcement

Imagine the scene as it unfolded that first Christmas evening. The blackness of night is shattered by an angelic messenger surrounded by the brightness of God’s glory. His “good tidings of great joy” are followed immediately by shouts of praise from a host of other angelic beings. Then, as suddenly as it appeared, the celestial chorus vanishes. Darkness. Silence. A sense of awe and wonderment.

For me, the true message of Christmas was shouted from heaven to these shepherds keeping watch over Israel’s sacrificial lambs outside Bethlehem. Christmas is the time to focus on the birth of the One around whom history revolves. God’s heavenly messenger bestowed three titles on this newborn Child in Luke 2:11. He was “a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

First, he was announced as Savior. This child was the true Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. Eight days after His birth, when it came time to circumcise Him, His parents named Him Jesus (v. 21). That’s a transliteration of the Hebrew name Yeshua, which we know from the Old Testament as “Joshua.” The name itself means “the Lord is salvation.” Names were important, and even His name pointed toward the reason for His birth.

It was not as if Mary and Joseph sat down as parents do today to decide on a name. The name was selected by God Himself and announced to Mary by an angelic messenger from heaven when he appeared to tell her she would give birth to a son: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus” (Lk. 1:30–31).

The name pointed to His future role. As the angel later announced to the shepherds, He was born to be our Savior.

The angel then announced that this Child was the Christ. The Greek word for “Christ” is christos, which means “anointed.” It’s the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word meshiach, meaning “Messiah” or “Anointed One.” This newborn infant was Israel’s Messiah, the descendant of David promised by the prophets. The Child just born would fulfill all the predictions about the coming King.

The heavenly messenger who appeared to Mary told her the same thing: “The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (vv. 32–33). This Child was more than a Savior; He was destined to be King.

But God’s message to the shepherds was not yet complete. One more title was needed to describe this Child. He was also to be known as Lord. This Baby was the incarnate Son of God. He was not a mere human, not the product of any physical union between Mary and Joseph. When the angel first appeared to Mary to announce she would be with child, she was puzzled: “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” she asked (v. 34).

The angel explained how God would bring about this miraculous pregnancy and birth: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (v. 35).
But long before the angel even spoke to Mary, Micah the prophet had foretold the birth of this Child/King and hinted at the divine nature of His coming: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). This Child born in Bethlehem existed from eternity past—and eternality is an attribute of God.

Our Savior. Our Messiah. Our God. Three amazing descriptions announced first to a young virgin in Nazareth and then repeated to shepherds watching over their flocks at the tower of the flock on a hillside near Bethlehem. The most remarkable message from heaven, delivered to the most humble of servants here on Earth.

Tonight, walk outside and find a place where you can look up at the sky and see the stars. Then pause a few minutes to thank God for the solitude of a field outside Bethlehem where shepherds heard heaven’s bold declaration. No tinsel. No tree. No toys. No commercialism to crowd out the message. Just a clear announcement of God’s truth. “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:11).

ENDNOTE

But long before the angel even spoke to Mary, Micah the prophet had foretold the birth of this Child/King and hinted at the divine nature of His coming: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). This Child born in Bethlehem existed from eternity past—and eternality is an attribute of God.

Our Savior. Our Messiah. Our God. Three amazing descriptions announced first to a young virgin in Nazareth and then repeated to shepherds watching over their flocks at the tower of the flock on a hillside near Bethlehem. The most remarkable message from heaven, delivered to the most humble of servants here on Earth.

Tonight, walk outside and find a place where you can look up at the sky and see the stars. Then pause a few minutes to thank God for the solitude of a field outside Bethlehem where shepherds heard heaven’s bold declaration. No tinsel. No tree. No toys. No commercialism to crowd out the message. Just a clear announcement of God’s truth. “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:11).

ENDNOTE

1 Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, bk. 2, From Bethlehem to Jordan (1883; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 1993), 131–132.

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Sometimes silence is a welcome friend. Sometimes it can be deafening because of what it conveys, such as disapproval. With the final verse of the book of Malachi, the Hebrew Scriptures ended; and from then on, God was silent. Gone were the prophets and the prophetic utterances, visions, and dreams that had informed the nation. For 400 years, not a single word from the Lord went out to His people. God was still there, of course, and still very much involved in watching over and protecting His chosen nation. But after the tremendous interaction that had been the norm throughout Israel’s history, God’s silence became deafening.

Four hundred years is a long time. If we were to go back that far, we would be in 1612—the days of Pocahontas and Sir Walter Raleigh—and the year after the first printing of the King James Version of the Bible.

Thankfully, God did not remain silent forever. One day an angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias the priest in the Temple in Jerusalem (Lk. 1:11–12). He and his wife, Elizabeth, “were both righteous before God” (v. 6) but had no children because Elizabeth was barren. They were both “well advanced in years” (v. 7).

While serving in his priestly division of Abijah (v. 5), Zacharias’s lot fell to burn incense (v. 9). King David had set up 24 divisions of priests before his death (1 Chr. 24:1–18). The division of Abijah was eighth in order for service and was named for its leader. Each division served twice a year for one week. Zacharias was chosen by lot to offer the incense.

According to a commentator, “Because of the large number of priests, this would be the only time in Zechariah's [Zacharias’s] life when he was allowed to perform this task.”

Suddenly, “an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense” (Lk. 1:11). Zacharias became terrified, but the angel comforted him: “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John” (v. 13).

For the first recorded time in 400 years, God interacted with humanity, and He used one of His angelic messengers to do so. The angel told Zacharias about his future son:

For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children” and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (vv. 15–17).

The messenger was “Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God” (v. 19). A few months later, Gabriel went to Mary, a virgin in Nazareth, and told her she would bear a Son through the power of the Holy Spirit and that her Son would receive “the throne of His father David” (v. 32) and “reign over the house of Jacob forever” (v. 33).

Zacharias struggled with the message and questioned it. Consequently, he became mute and did not speak again until his son was born. Asked what the infant should be called, Zacharias wrote, “His name is John.” So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God” (vv. 63–64).

Zacharias’s son came to be known as John the Baptist. With his preaching, the 400 silent years ended. God had visited His people and was preparing them for their Messiah.

ENDNOTE


by Thomas C. Simcox, Church Ministries staffing coordinator for The Friends of Israel
A Hanukkah Menorah

Lighting a Hanukkah menorah (Anyka/Fotolia). Inset: Dr. Blair P. Grubb (Courtesy, Dr. Grubb).

Many years ago Dr. Blair P. Grubb, an American famous for his work on disorders of the autonomic nervous system, collaborated with physicians in France to help a little French girl whose disease baffled her doctors, including her grandfather, also a physician. After Dr. Grubb’s treatment, the girl made a seemingly miraculous recovery, and her grateful grandparents invited Dr. Grubb to visit them if he were ever in France.

Several years later, in 1996, Dr. Grubb went to France to speak at a large, international scientific meeting. He visited the grandparents and was
they knew of Judaism. She seemed to be particularly interested in Hanukkah. Once I had finished answering her questions, she suddenly looked me in the eye and said, “I have something I want to give to you.”

She disappeared and returned several moments later with a package wrapped in cloth. She sat, her tired eyes looking into mine, and she began to speak slowly.

“When I was a little girl of eight years, during the Second World War, the authorities came to our village to round up all the Jews. My best friend at that time was a girl of my age named Jeannette. One morning when I came to play, I saw her family being forced at gunpoint into a truck. I ran home and told my mother what had happened and asked where Jeannette was going. ‘Don’t worry,’ she said, ‘Jeannette will be back soon.’ I ran back to Jeannette’s house only to find that she was gone and that the other villagers were looting her home of valuables, except for the Judaic items, which were thrown into the street.

“As I approached, I saw an item from her house lying in the dirt. I picked it up and recognized it as an object that Jeannette and her family would light around Christmas time. In my little girl’s mind I said, ‘I will take this home and keep it for Jeannette until she comes back,’ but she and her family never returned.

“Since that time I have kept it. I hid it from my parents and didn’t tell a soul of its existence. Indeed, over the last 50 years the only person who knew of it was my husband. When I found out what really happened to the Jews, and how many of the people I knew had collaborated with the Nazis, I could not bear to look at it. Yet I kept it, hidden, waiting for something, although I wasn’t sure what. Now I know what I was waiting for. It was you, a Jew, who helped cure our granddaughter, and it is to you I entrust this.”

Her trembling hands set the package on my lap. I slowly unwrapped the cloth from around it. Inside was a menorah, but one unlike any I had seen before. Made of solid brass, it had eight cups for holding oil and wicks and a ninth cup centered above the others. It had a ring attached to the top, and the woman mentioned that she remembered that Jeannette’s family would hang it in the hallway of their home. It looked quite old to me; later, several people told me that it is probably at least 100 years old. As I held it and thought about what it represented, I began to cry.

All I could manage to say was a garbled “merci.” As I left, her last words to me were “Il faudra voir la lumière encore une fois” — “it should once again see light.”

The menorah is the very heart of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. Just as Adolf Hitler tried to exterminate the Jewish people in the 20th century, Antiochus Epiphanies tried it in the...
The Seven Keys to History

by Richard D. Emmons

Key 4: The Chosen People and Call of Israel

The first three keys to history are found in the first 2,000 years of the world, from Genesis 1 through 11: creation, corruption, and catastrophe. Genesis 12 holds the fourth key: the Chosen People and call of Israel.

REDEMPTION

God has chosen to redeem the world through Israel: “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). He gave that promise to Abraham, then to Isaac, Jacob, and the entire Jewish nation. Today Abraham stands at the head of the Jewish nation. The New Testament says all who come to faith in Jesus are sons of Abraham. So he is both the father of Israel and of all true Christians.

Furthermore, with Abraham came a change in humankind’s responsibility: Beginning with Genesis 12, people were to glorify God through living by faith in His promises.

God called Abraham out of Babylonian territory (Ur of the Chaldeans) and idolatry (Josh. 24:2), promising him, I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed . . .
To your descendants I will give this land [Canaan] (Gen. 12:2–3, 7).

Nevertheless, Abraham struggled to live by faith, just as you and I do. When a famine hit Canaan, Abraham went to Egypt, rather than trusting God to provide for him (v. 10). He abandoned the land God promised him and moved from the place of blessing. He even told his wife, Sarah, to say she was his sister; and she was taken into Pharaoh's harem. But God stepped in to deliver them and send them back to the land, where they started over.

Abraham had no Bible. God's Word had not been written yet. So his responsibility was to appropriate God's promise and to live by it.

His near-sacrifice of his son Isaac reveals Abraham's tremendous faith, which developed over the years. The Bible says he so deeply believed God's promise to multiply his descendants through Isaac that he thought God would raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19). God, of course, prevented the sacrifice. But Abraham glorified God by living by faith in His promises, which is exactly what God wants us to do today.

Genesis 15 is a turning point. According to Romans 4 and James 2, that is when Abraham was born again, to use New Testament terminology. God told Abraham to look at the stars, and He promised to make Abraham's descendants equally as numerous. “And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6; cf. Rom. 4:3; Jas. 2:23). God made Abraham righteous based on faith alone.

So Abraham became a believer in God and stands at the head of those who come by faith to the redemption experience. Abraham, his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob (whom God renamed Israel) became the patriarchs of the Israelites. Through Israel, God communicated both His design to redeem humanity and the fact that redemption comes through the Jewish people.

Under Moses, a change took place. Moses built the Tabernacle and ordained Aaron and the Levitical priesthood. Now, instead of only trusting God's promises, Israel had to follow the specific requirements of the Law. This new stewardship changed how the Israelites were sanctified and how they glorified God. However, it did not change how they were regenerated (born again, given spiritual life).

Like Abraham, they still were born again by God's grace through faith. Now, however, when believing Israelites sinned, they confessed their sin, offered the appropriate sacrifice, and were forgiven. Their sins were covered, and they were restored.

REVELATION

God's plan to reveal Himself to humanity also comes through Israel. With Abraham began a process that led to the production of the Word of God. God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, commanding him, “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). Four times God appeared to him in Canaan. He also appeared twice to Isaac; twice to Jacob; and, of course, He appeared to Moses.

While in the desert tending his father-in-law's sheep, Moses saw a bush that was burning but not being consumed. As he turned to investigate, God spoke:

"Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. . . . I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God (Ex. 3:5–6).

God manifested Himself because, as with Abraham, He called Moses to a specific task. Not only was Moses to lead God's people out of slavery in Egypt, but he also was to write the first five books of God's Holy Word: the Torah. These books form the backbone of Judaism. They are Israel's most sacred writings and are designed to present God.

When you read seemingly tedious passages in Leviticus and Numbers about leprosy and so forth, bear in mind that the point is to reveal God's holiness and our sinfulness and need for redemption.

The entire Bible, in fact, is a Jewish book. Luke is the only probable Gentile who wrote anything. It is through the nation of Israel that God revealed Himself.

The Torah is followed by the Prophets. The wisdom literature is
powers and grow into an everlasting Kingdom that will cover the earth. “One like the Son of Man” will approach the throne of glory and receive the Kingdom, comprised of all nations, tribes, and languages; and He will reign forever (7:13–14). This is the Millennal Kingdom. It will last for 1,000 years on this renewed earth and then continue for eternity.

In the seventh key to history, we’ll see how God will change the earth under the reign of King Jesus, who will be the King of kings and Lord of lords; and nobody will dispute that fact in those days.

Jesus fulfills the roles of all of Israel’s famous leaders:

- He is greater than Abraham. He said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad. I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (Jn. 8:56, 58). Abraham is the father of all believers; Jesus is the Redeemer of them all.
- He is greater than Moses. God said He would raise up a Prophet like Moses and “put My words in His mouth” (Dt. 18:18). A prophet’s role is to reveal. Jesus revealed God.
- He is greater than Aaron. Aaron headed the Levitical priesthood, which required a succession of high priests because each would die. The book of Hebrews stresses the superiority of Jesus’ priesthood because He lives forever.
- He is greater than Joshua. Whereas Joshua gave the Jewish people the land, Jesus will give them the entire earth.
- He is greater than King David. David said he will bow and worship his own Son (Ps. 110). Jesus, a direct heir of David, will be the Son of David who will rule the earth.
- He is greater than King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. Jesus said, “A greater than Solomon is here” (Mt. 12:42; Lk. 11:31).

Israel is central to God’s plan. The Messiah is Jewish. The Kingdom is Jewish. Starting with Abraham’s call, God’s plan—through which He will provide redemption for all the earth and revelation of Himself—is Jewish.

Israel has fallen under judgment for rebellion and been set aside temporarily. But the Abrahamic Covenant has never been rescinded or broken. So God still says that whoever blesses Israel, He will bless, and whoever curses Israel, He will curse.

As a parent, you don’t stop loving or praying for a wayward child. Such is God’s relationship with His child Israel.

Anti-Semitism is on the rise, and we need to be the type of Christians who recognize the Jewish people as God’s Chosen. We need to embrace them and share with them that we love and appreciate both them and the Scriptures that have come down to us through them. Then let God do His work in their lives.
A Hanukkah Menorah from page 29

second century B.C. To Bible-believing Christians, the lights of the menorah should testify to God’s faithfulness and His promise in the book of Jeremiah that no one will ever be able to destroy His Chosen People (Jer. 31:35–37).

This year Hanukkah begins at sundown on December 8. It is always celebrated for eight days in November or December, beginning four days before the new moon. Each night at sundown, Jewish families gather to light their Hanukkah menorahs. A Hanukkah menorah is special because it has nine candles: one for each day of the holiday and one called the shamash, or servant candle, used to light each of the others.

On the first night of Hanukkah, the shamash lights only one candle. On the second night, two: so on and so forth until all are lit. The candles are lit from right to left, corresponding with Hebrew, which is read from right to left.

The Hanukkah blessing is either sung or recited while the candles are being lit. I can still hear my mother’s voice singing it as she lit the little brass and blue menorah we had when I was growing up in New York. Each year I learned more of the prayer, in hopes of singing it to my own children one day.

Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu, melakh ha’olam, asher kidishanu b’mitz’votav v’ezkaron l’had’lik neir shel Hanukkah. Amein.

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the lights of Hanukkah. Amen.

The menorah reminds the Jewish people of the miracle of the oil following the defeat of the evil Antiochus IV. Antiochus liked to call himself Epiphanes, meaning “the illustrious.” The Jews, however, called him Antiochus Epimanes, “the Madman.”

He was so evil he not only murdered thousands of Jewish people but also desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem by filling it with statues of Greek gods and sacrificing a female pig on the altar. In 164 B.C. the Maccabees liberated Judea from Antiochus’s oppression and rededicated the Temple.

Tradition has it that only one cruse of consecrated oil was found—enough to keep the Temple’s eternal light burning for one day. Yet the little cruse miraculously burned for eight days, the time it took to consecrate more oil.

Oil, therefore, plays an important role in Hanukkah. Traditional foods of Hanukkah are cooked in oil, such as potato latkes (pancakes), jelly donuts, sesame candy, fried matzo, and kasha (buckwheat) with bow ties (pasta). Hanukkah is a joyous time of remembering the purified Temple as it was restored to the worship of Jehovah, the true and living God.

In Hebrew, Hanukkah means “feast of dedication.” In the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees 4:59, it is called “the days of the dedication of the altar.” In his Antiquities of the Jews, ancient historian Josephus called it “the feast of lights.”

Gift-giving is not a tradition originally associated with Hanukkah, but with its close proximity to Christmas, the giving of one gift on each night has become a favorite with children.

In Israel, however, presents are deemphasized. According to VirtualJerusalem.com, “The fifth night of Chanukah has been called ‘The Black Fifth Night,’ after that fateful night during World War I when the Turks expelled all Jewish residents from Tel Aviv and Jaffa.”

Jeanette would have understood such an event. No one knows what happened to her after the Nazis deported her and her family. Approximately 300,000 Jewish people lived in France when Germany invaded in 1940. Of those, 76,000 were deported between 1942 and 1944. Most went to the infamous concentration camp of Auschwitz, where they were exterminated.

Dr. Grubb wrote that he later learned the French woman who gave him Jeanette’s menorah that day in 1996 died less than a month later. He kept his promise to her: “This Hanukkah, the menorah will once again see light. And as I and my family light it,” he wrote, “we will say a special prayer in honor of those whose memories it represents. We will not let its lights go out again.”

ENDNOTES
3 Ibid.

Excerpts from “It Should Once Again See Light” by Dr. Blair P. Grubb are reprinted with his permission.

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

Answer: From God’s Word

Question: Why does God love the Jewish people?

Answer: “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you.”

—Deuteronomy 7:7–8
The Apocrypha

In the original 1611 printing of the King James Version of the Bible, between the conclusion of the Hebrew canon and the opening words of the New Testament, the KJV translators nestled the Apocrypha, written during the 400 silent years. Because there was no word from the Lord during this period, the Apocrypha was never embraced by the Jewish people or the apostles. In fact, it is filled with what Bible teachers have called “historical, geographical, and ethical errors”; and it “failed to impress upon the reader any mark of divine origin.”

In 1546 at the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church fully embraced the Apocrypha as Scripture and integrated its 14 books into the Bible. For example, the additions to Daniel were placed with Daniel, so on and so forth. The Roman Catholic Church refers to these writings as the deuterocanonical books, or second canon.

Protestants refer to them as apocrypha, meaning “hidden, spurious, of disputed or questionable authority.” The Puritans and Presbyterians lobbied for the Apocrypha’s removal, and in 1826 the British and Foreign Bible Society refused to allow its funds to be used to pay for printing it. By 1885 Protestant Bibles no longer carried it.

Though all the authors are generally unknown, they were clearly Jewish and composed the texts during the Intertestamental Period.

According to the Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, they are “commonly dated from the 2nd century B.C. to the 1st century A.D.” and deal with “persons, events, and themes closely related to OT [Old Testament] and post-OT figures.”

The names of the apocryphal books are 1 and 2 Esdras; Tobit; Judith; The Rest of Esther; Wisdom of Solomon; Ecclesiasticus; Baruch, With the Epistle of Jeremiah; The Song of the Three Children; The Story of Susannah; The Idol, Bel, and the Dragon; The Prayer of Manasses; and 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Though all the authors are generally unknown, they were clearly Jewish and composed the texts during the Intertestamental Period.

ENDNOTES


by Thomas C. Simcox

Question: Who is even worse off than a fool?

Answer: “Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”

—Proverbs 26:12
Abbas, Ahmadinejad Attack Christianity

Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are sounding more alike all the time. Abbas claims “Palestinian” history is 9,000 years old—even though Islam came into existence 1,400 years ago; and Ahmadinejad said recently, “God has only one religion, that of Islam.” He said, “He did not send Judaism or Christianity. Abraham was a harbinger of Islam, as were Moses and Jesus.”

The Israeli news service Arutz-7 reported that Palestinian Media Watch (PMW), which has translated PA documents, said Abbas and PA leaders have denied the first and second Temples’ existence thousands of times, thus attacking Christianity, which often mentions the Temple in the New Testament. In fact, Arutz-7 wondered why Christians do not protest.

Many Jewish sites, such as Rachel’s Tomb less than a mile from Jerusalem, have been given Arab names. The PA claims Rachel’s Tomb is a Muslim site. Yet the Jewish patriarch Jacob buried his wife Rachel there more than 2,000 years before Islam was founded.

Arutz-7 also reported that PMW also uncovered Abbas’s statement that “all of Israel’s archaeological digs and tunnels . . . will not create a [Jewish] right based on fantasy and legends.” The statement ended, “There will be no peace, security, or stability unless the occupation [Israel], its settlements and settlers will be evacuated from our holy city and the eternal capital of our state.”
Counseling the Christian

Chapter 13 of Hebrews contains the book’s final admonishment. Whereas verses 1–6 provide practical and personal exhortation on how believers should live in Christ, verses 7–17 focus more on theological issues and the gospel.

The Believer’s Consistency

Verse 7 exhorts readers to recall the ministries and conduct of their past leaders: “Remember those who rule over [lead] you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.”

The word remember tells readers to be mindful continually of leaders now with the Lord, whose lives and preaching influenced them and laid the foundation of their commitment. Those faithful leaders exemplified true faith and did not waver in their consistency or devotion to Christ. Readers are to keep recalling the messages they heard and carefully imitate the faith of these departed saints.

Leaders come and go; eventually they die and are often forgotten. But one Leader never changes and is with us always. He is Jesus Christ, “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (v. 8).

This profound, succinct summary about Jesus Christ affirms that He will never be superseded. No need to fear that Christ or His message of salvation will ever change—not now or in the future.

Christ is the same “yesterday.” He is the changeless, eternal, immutable Son of God in His person, office, and teaching. He is the same “today.” What He was yesterday is true of Him now. God has not changed Christ’s original message or the gospel preached to these believers. Jesus, who was so real to them at the inception of their salvation, remains the same. And Christ is the same “forever.” What He was yesterday and today, He will be throughout eternity.

Consequently, Scripture commands believers to guard against false doctrines and practices: “Do not be carried about with various [i.e. diverse] and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them” (v. 9).

They were to guard against a variety of doctrines and practices that differed from what they had been taught. Though the “strange doctrines” are not specified, they probably involved traditional Jewish beliefs taught by Pharisees, scribes, and elders who embellished the Law of Moses with their own oral traditions (cf. Mk. 7:1–9). Such teaching would contradict the gospel of grace and their new Christian faith.

Many believers probably focused on the Jewish laws and regulations relating to foods associated with Jewish ceremonial observances. These dietary laws (some biblical but many manmade) are of no spiritual profit in the Christian life. In fact, they are foreign to the grace of God and gospel of Christ. So the Scriptures warn against practices that would elevate Judaism over Christianity. In the past, these believers had blindly followed such rituals and ceremonies, which profited them nothing for salvation.

God reminds the readers, “The heart [is] established by [God’s] grace” (Heb. 13:9). God’s grace is communicated through the hearts of believers. If the heart is not purged from evil and made stable in the Lord, the believer will not experience the internal working of God’s grace that is necessary to bring a Christian to spiritual maturity.

The Believer’s Commitment

The author is specific in telling Jewish believers that, if they continue to embrace the Levitical system, they have no part in the New Covenant blessings: “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat” (v. 10).

Commentators differ widely concerning the word altar (v. 10). Some believe it refers to the heavenly sanctuary; others say it refers to the cross (place of Christ’s sacrifice) or Christ Himself or the Lord’s Supper or Christ’s sacrificial death. It would seem best to view the word as referring to the whole sacrificial death and atoning work of Christ, as contrasted to the altar where Levitical sacrifices were offered in the Tabernacle.

In other words, Jewish believers had the altar in Christ. Those who still went to the Temple to practice Levitical sacrifice were told to stop doing so and trust in Jesus as the once-
for-all sacrifice to take away their sin. Bringing animal sacrifices through the Levitical system indicated a failure to trust Christ’s sacrifice.

Those who practiced the Levitical system were not availing themselves of the benefits that Christ’s atoning work provided.

Priests who served in the Tabernacle had the right to eat the sin offerings (Lev. 4:22–35; 6:25–26), with one exception: on the Day of Atonement (16:27). That sin offering they had “no right to eat” (Heb. 13:10): “The bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary [the Holy of Holies] by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp” (v. 11; cf. Lev. 16:27). Of this sin offering, neither the high priest nor people could partake.

The burning of sacrifices “outside the camp” on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is applied to Christ’s similar experience of suffering outside Jerusalem. “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate” (Heb. 13:12). Disposal of the Day of Atonement sacrifice outside the “gate” (Jerusalem) foreshadowed Jesus’ atoning work. His crucifixion between two thieves (outside Jerusalem) was the worst shame, disgrace, condemnation, and repudiation that could have been inflicted on Him at the time of His death.

The phrase that He might sanctify [set apart] the people (v. 12) refers to both the purpose and people in relationship to Jesus’ death. The purpose was to remove the sin and guilt of those who received Christ and set them apart to be His holy people. “The people” who received Christ as Savior were continually to be setting themselves apart from the sins of this world system and their past lives in Judaism.

On the basis of their faith in Christ, Scripture says, “Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (v. 13). That is, go “outside the camp” of Judaism and identify with Christ, who was rejected by the Jewish leaders.

These people were at a crossroads: Would they return to Judaism or identify with Jesus, even when doing so meant suffering “reproach” (rejection, alienation, scorn, and disgrace) as outcast from their families, religion, and communities?

They were reminded, “Here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (v. 14). Like Abraham, believers are pilgrims who have no permanent dwelling place on Earth. Our eyes are not to be fixed on an earthly city and world system, but on a heavenly, eternal one—the New Jerusalem, whose Architect and Maker is God (11:10, 16; 12:22; Rev. 21:1—22:5). Christ’s followers are not to seek temporary, worldly gratification, but to keep their eyes on the eternal and spiritual qualities found in Christ.

The Believer’s Consecration

The final counsel appears in the last three verses. First, offer the sacrifice of praise: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Heb. 13:15). Did God require sacrifices from Jewish believers in Christ? Yes! Not the sacrifices of slain animals, but the “sacrifice of praise” and thanksgiving that comes from an appreciative heart for all He has provided in salvation through Christ. A truly thankful person continually worships God with praise.

Second, share: “But do not forget to do good and to share [fellowship], for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (v. 16). Believers are to do good deeds for those within the church. These actions can include encouraging others or sharing financial and material resources to help Christian brothers and sisters in need (1 Jn. 3:17).

Third, be in subjection to spiritual leaders. Earlier the author told readers to submit to past spiritual leaders; here he referred to current leaders.

God has placed shepherds within the church to watch over the sheep and guard them from false doctrines. A Christian is to “obey . . . and be submissive” (Heb. 13:17) by yielding to these spiritual leaders as long as they are true to Christ’s teachings, because they “watch out for [their] souls.” The word watch means always being awake and alert to the needs of those in the church. The leaders are shepherds whose responsibility it is to care for the deep needs of the flock, especially the feeble and fainthearted. Such leaders have a serious stewardship of oversight and will be required to “give account” of their leadership responsibilities before the Judgment Seat of Christ (v. 17).

The phrase Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you is not addressed to the leaders, but to the people (v. 17). Christians are not to be self-willed, stiff-necked, opinionated, selfish, or stubborn when it comes to being led. They are to submit willingly to pastors, elders, and deacons so that these people can lead with “joy.” Being unsubmitive causes church leaders “grief” and much difficulty in carrying out their stewardships. The result will be “unprofitable” to other Christians because they, too, will have no joy.

Rebellion against church leaders brings grief within the church and loss of reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ. In addition, a person’s rebellion could intimate to the church leadership that the individual is not a believer and, without change, is destined for eternal punishment.

There is much wise counsel in this section of Hebrews. Let us examine our own lives and heed the advice given from God’s Word.

David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
THE FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH

The Grace of God

This article begins a study of God’s grace in the Scriptures.

Key Old Testament Words for Grace

The Hebrew Verb. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew verb related to grace is hanan.1 In one form it “has the meaning ‘be gracious’ or ‘show favor.’”2 In another form it means “‘seek favor,’ mainly the favor of God, but also of mankind.”3

In Hebrew the verb hanan is active. It refers to “active acceptance and active favor. To be gracious means to aid the poor, feed the hungry, deliver those in distress from defeat and death.”4

“In all cases ‘hanan’ is a positive term.”5 “It is inconceivable that one can be angry and at the same time show favor. Nor can one receive favor from someone who is at the same time angry. Favor cannot coexist with judgment.”6

The Hebrew Noun. The Hebrew noun that is the counterpart of the verb hanan is hen.7 It appears 67 times in the Old Testament and “has two basic meanings: ‘grace’ and ‘favor.’”8 The word favor is the “more important” meaning, referring to “the positive disposition” one person has toward another.9

The noun can also mean “respect.”10 For example, Proverbs 28:23 states, “He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue.” The word translated “favor” refers to “respect.”

The noun hen appears most often in the familiar expression “find favor in someone’s eyes.”11 For example, “Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her” (Est. 2:15). “The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins” (v. 17). “So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand” (5:2).

Old Testament scholars D. N. Freedman and J. R. Lundmon said this familiar expression “is more than a mere figure of speech; it describes very concretely what in fact was taken for granted in ancient Israel, as in the rest of the ancient Near East: that favor is shown on the face.” In fact, they point out, “The other Hebrew word most often translated ‘favor’ is ‘panim,’” which means “face.”12

I entreated Your favor with my whole heart; be merciful to me according to Your word (Ps. 119:58). “But now entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?” says the LORD of hosts (Mal. 1:9).

In both of these passages the word translated “favor” is panim, which means “face.”

There is yet another word related to the subject of favor or grace: pana, which means “turn.” God is often asked to “turn” (pana) and show favor. The fact that the verb translated “turn” (pana) is related to the noun translated “face” (panim) indicates God is asked to “turn and show His face [in mercy and kindness].”13

David cried out to God, “Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have enlarged; bring me out of my distresses!” (Ps. 25:16–17). On another occasion he begged, “But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth. Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me! Give Your strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant” (86:15–16).

Thus, “to show one’s face then means to be favorably disposed toward a person.”14 By contrast, an angry person’s face is hidden.15 David exclaimed,

How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? (13:1–2). When You said, “Seek My face,” my heart said to You, “Your face, Lord, I will seek.” Do not hide Your face from me; do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation.
(27:8–9). Lord, by Your favor
You have made my mountain
stand strong; You hid Your face,
and I was troubled (30:7).

Though both Hebrew nouns *hen*
and *hesed* can be translated “kind-
ness” or “mercy,” they involve dis-
tinctive concepts. *Hesed* refers to a
covenant relationship between peo-
ple, while *hen* does not. As a cove-
nant relationship, *hesed* has estab-
lished “rights and obligations” and
requires “a favorable attitude from
both parties.” A *hesed* relationship
“is meant to be long-term” and
should be kept.”

Unlike ‘hesed,’ ‘hen’ can be with-
given for a specific situation only... .
long as the giver so desires. It can be
and sustains the relationship only so
and provides the relationship with the pos-
ease of the gifts was “to find favor
in the sight of my lord” (v. 8) and
said, “Let me find favor [hen]
in the sight of my lord” (v. 15). Esau
left Jacob in peace.

In Egypt, Joseph worked as a ser-
vant for Potiphar, an officer of
Pharaoh and captain of the guard. “So
Joseph found favor [hen] in his sight,
and served him. Then he [Potiphar]
made him overseer of his house, and
all that he had he put under his
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ial place” (47:29–30).

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household of Pharaoh, saying, ‘If
now I have found favor [hen] in your
eyes, please . . . let me go up and
bury my father, and I will come
back’” (50:4–5). Pharaoh replied, “Go
up and bury your father, as he made
you swear” (v. 6).

After Naomi’s husband and two
sons died in Moab, she and her
dughter-in-law Ruth moved to
Bethlehem in Judah, Naomi’s home-
land (Ruth 1). Boaz, a wealthy rela-
tive of Naomi’s husband, lived there
and owned part of a field where grain
was reaped (2:1–3). Ruth asked
Naomi for permission “to go to the
field, and glean heads of grain after
him in whose sight I may find favor
[hen].” Naomi said to her, “Go, my
daughter” (v. 2). So Ruth began to
 glean after the reapers (v. 3).

After Boaz learned who she was,
he told Ruth to continue gleaning
exclusively in his field (vv. 4–9). Ruth
“fell on her face, bowed down
to the ground, and said to him, ‘Why
have I found favor [hen] in your
eyes, that you should take notice of
me, since I am a foreigner?’” (v. 10).

Hannah, mother of the prophet
Samuel, said to Eli the priest, “Let your
amaid servant find favor [hen] in your
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David told his friend Jonathan,
whose father, King Saul, was seeking
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knows that I have found favor [hen] in
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When David was fleeing from
Saul, he said to Achish, the son of the
king of Gath, “If I have now found
favor [hen] in your eyes, let them give
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After King David let Joab bring
back David’s rebel son, Absalom, Joab
said, “Today your servant knows that
I have found favor [hen] in your sight,
my lord, O king” (2 Sam. 14:22).

Ziba, whom David appointed to
work for Jonathan’s crippled son, said,
“I humbly bow before you, that I may
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Proverbs instructs, “My son, hear
the instruction of your father, and do
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they will be a graceful [hen] ornament
on your head, and chains about your
neck” (Prov. 1:8–9).

“Keep sound wisdom and discretion;
so they will be life to your soul and
grace [hen] to your neck” (3:21–22).

Old Testament
Examples
of Angelic and
Human Grace

As the two angels whom God sent
to Sodom were removing Lot and his
family from that city before they
would destroy it, Lot said to them,
“Indeed now, your servant has found
favor [hen] in your sight, and you have
increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life” (Gen. 19:19).

Years after Jacob had angered his
brother, Esau, by stealing his
birthright, he had to travel through
Edom, where Esau lived. Because
Jacob feared Esau, he sent messen-
gers to him with the following mes-
 sage: “Thus your servant Jacob says:
‘I have dwelt with Laban and stayed
there until now. I have oxen, don-
keys, flocks, and male and female
servants; and I have sent to tell my
lord, that I may find favor [hen] in
your sight‘” (32:4–5). To appease
Esau, Jacob sent several droves of
animals as gifts to him before they
met each other (vv. 13–21).

When Esau saw Jacob, he ran to
meet him, embraced him, and fell on
his neck and kissed him. Then they
wept (33:4). Jacob told Esau the pur-
pose of the gifts was “to find favor
[hen] in the sight of my lord” (v. 8)
and said, “Let me find favor [hen] in
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### Endnotes

2. Ibid., 23; 3 Ibid.; 4 Ibid., 24; 5 Ibid.; 6 Ibid., 22;

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and international
conference speaker
for The Friends of Israel.
War-prep leaflet features muppet

Moishe Oofnik, Israel’s version of Sesame Street’s Oscar the Grouch, is on the cover of a new 15-page pamphlet telling Israelis how to prepare for war. The leaflet, part of a public-awareness campaign designed to teach what to do in an emergency, has been appearing in mailboxes across the country.

It explains residents will have only minutes, sometimes 30 seconds, to find shelter in case of an attack.

Reuters news service reported that Israel “stepped up the distribution of gas masks and other protective gear to the public some weeks ago, but the mailing of what-to-do information suggested an escalation in preparation for possible conflict.”

Israel not always to blame

Social protests are escalating in the Palestinian Authority (PA) territories, with rising unemployment and no economic relief. Demonstrators recently castigated PA Chairman and Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas at a protest and had their microphones suddenly silenced by authorities during a live broadcast from Tulkarem.

The move did little to quench the rage of what is fast becoming known as the approach of the “PA Winter.”

“Israel is not always to blame!” protesters shouted. “You cannot silence us!” PA Arabs have been protesting for weeks against the difficult conditions created by the global economic crisis.

Moreover, a significant percentage of the PA budget that could be used for infrastructure is instead diverted to “prisoner salaries”—that is, monthly payments to terrorists in Israeli prisons who have murdered Israelis. In fact, many of these terrorists recently received pay increases. Some now receive as much as $3,000 per month.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

Juvenile diabetes drug passes test

A new treatment for Type I (juvenile) diabetes invented by Israeli scientist-professor Irun Cohen has met its first and secondary goals in a Phase III clinical trial conducted by the Andromeda Biotech firm. Recruitment of participants has started for a second, validation trial hoping to replicate the results.

The drug, DiaPep277, created at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, was tested on 457 patients aged 16 to 45 in 40 medical centers throughout Europe, Israel, and South Africa. Patients received a subcutaneous injection once every three months for two years, while a control group received a placebo injection. Both groups also received insulin as needed.

Patients treated with the drug for a year or more exhibited significantly higher pancreatic function than those in the control group. No significant differences were found with regard to side effects.

Andromeda Biotech is a second-tier subsidiary of Clal Industries, which belongs to the IDB group. Three years ago, the company gained FDA approval for the development plan for DiaPep277, which is set to become the company’s flagship product.

If the medication succeeds and makes it all the way to market, it will face virtually no competition, being the first of its kind to at least slow down, if not halt, the march of juvenile diabetes.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

Jerusalem now in missile range

Iran says it has a “domestically produced” cruise missile capable of being launched “from land, sea, and air” and reaching major Israeli cities, including Jerusalem.

Iranian Deputy Defense Minister Mehdi Farahi announced the existence of the long-range Iranian missile, dubbed “Meshkat,” with a range of 2,000 kilometers, or 1,250 miles, that could easily reach Israeli cities, including Jerusalem, a report says.

The weapon will serve as “the upper hand of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran. . . . [The] Meshkat cruise missile, which Allah willing will be unveiled soon, has a range of more than 2,000 kilometers,” the report quoted Farahi as telling Iran’s Press TV.

Diamond lab opens in Israel

The Gemological Institute of America has opened a new laboratory in Israel’s diamond center in Ramat Gan to provide on-site services, including GIA Diamond Grading Reports, Diamond Dossiers, and related services. GIA, the world’s foremost gemological institution, maintains a presence in 16 cities around the world.

The new Ramat Gan facility is the eighth GIA laboratory and the sixth outside the United States.

“Israel has long been a center for the global diamond trade,” said Donna Baker, GIA president and CEO. “We hope that having direct access to GIA diamond-grading services in Israel will support the success of Israeli companies.”

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)
If your will is up-to-date, you enjoy a certain peace of mind. The fact that a plan is in place to care for your loved ones and favorite charities is a reason to sleep well. It’s comforting to know you have thoughtfully arranged your affairs before you go home to be with the Lord.

Yet our world is changing rapidly. In these uncertain times, you may be wondering if your will can withstand the changes that lie around the corner. In light of today’s realities, it might be a good time to review your estate plan. Or perhaps you have yet to “get your house in order” and are looking to take that first step. Let us help. We can put you in touch with a capable professional to work around the uncertainties of the times.

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

Israel’s Satellite TV Provider Gives CNN the Heave-Ho

A staple of Israeli television since the inception of digital, multichannel broadcasts more than 20 years ago, CNN soon will no longer be seen in Israel. Satellite broadcaster YES has announced it is dropping the station due to high costs. No replacement station has yet been named. CNN broadcasts on YES will end December 31.

Once considered the standard in international cable news, CNN has been losing ground in recent years to competitors like Fox News, which is available in Israel. As in the United States, Fox News has higher ratings among YES customers than CNN, even though Fox News is a “premium” channel that customers must pay for above the costs of their subscriptions.

Industry insiders said the satellite broadcaster felt it was paying too much to feed CNN to local customers, a situation that came about because of the original contract Israeli broadcasters signed with CNN some two decades ago; the price started out high and remained so, they said. In a statement, YES said it was examining replacement services but that, in the meantime, customers who want to watch an international news service in English could choose from a wide variety of stations, including Fox News, Sky News, BBC World, Bloomberg, and English-language news services from France, China, and Japan.

Last year, HOT, the cable-television provider, dropped CNN over a similar contract dispute. HOT replaced CNN with the much more reasonably priced MSNBC.

In a statement, CNN said it “is exploring the way we deliver our news in Israel. It’s worth noting, however, that with . . . the continued dynamics of this region, and major global events that impact us all, the need for independent and objective journalism has never been greater. CNN recently grew its viewership across Europe, the Middle East, and Asia to remain the #1 news channel by a mile.”

The statement added, “With that leadership comes a responsibility to viewers. For CNN, the consumer comes first and they will drive any discussions we have with operators before any other considerations.”

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)
A few months ago, a young ultra-Orthodox man whom I did not recognize came to our home with some of his friends. He was not nice or friendly. In fact, he was extremely unfriendly. I suspected something was wrong when he began to make himself at home.

“What is it you want?” I asked.

He replied, “This is important for you. I come to you with a great warning.”

“What have I done?”

“If you do not want dangerous trouble, you must give me $10,000,” he said.

When I asked him why, he replied, “Let us be more open. We know that you believe in That Man. If you do not want people around here to know in whom you believe, you must give me $10,000. And if you do not give me the money, I will see to it that even the newspapers know about you and the fact that you are active in your Christian faith. I will tell them how you go to people and talk to them about it, doing what is not legal here in Israel.”

I listened patiently to his long speech. Then I realized I knew him.

“Do you remember what you read to me?” he asked.

I had read him Proverbs 19:21: “There are many plans in a man’s heart, nevertheless the LORD’s counsel—that will stand.” I was surprised I could recall the details so many years later.

“What have you got to say for yourself?” he asked.

So I explained, “This verse was written in the Bible by the Holy Spirit of God.” When he asked how I knew the verse and who my rabbi was, I told him, “I read the Holy Bible for myself and believe what is written. I do not read rabbinical stories, as you do.”

Then he became much more agitated and told me, “Many times I have taken the Holy Bible and read it. And it does not give me rest. I knew I had to come and speak to you because I have no peace. I want to know why you left the true faith and started to follow gods according to a religion that is far from what is written in the Bible. That is why I came to you today. How do you feel about your new faith and the Bible that you cast away from you? I want to know.”

I asked him who told him that those of us who believe in Yeshua (Jesus) have cast away the Bible?

“Our great rabbis told us,” he said. “They said you no longer read the Bible.”

So I showed him and his friends a few Bibles. I opened one to a passage they know well, Deuteronomy 6, and had them read: “You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you” (vv. 13–14). I told them they are the ones who do not follow the true faith because they
follow their rabbis, not what is written in the Bible.

They did not like what I said and started jumping around in great anger, shouting at me. “How can you say such a big lie! Show me where it is written in the Holy Bible about This One in whom you have believed! Do you think you know more than our rabbis, who have studied for years? How dare you say they do not follow the truth! Show me in the Bible where it is written about This One in whom you have believed! That is what we want to see right now!”

“Now you have come to the most important point,” I replied. “And in a few minutes you will see for yourselves where it is written about This One whose name is Yeshua. Have you ever read Isaiah 53, this well-known chapter in the Bible?”

Of course, they told me no.

“Why do you not read it?” I asked.

“We do not read it because the rabbis told us not to read it. They said we must study much before we may read it, and then we may only read it in their presence. We are very interested in what is written here.”

So, standing in my home, they read Isaiah 53 for the first time. They asked many questions, and I explained about whom it is written. Though Isaiah wrote 700 years before the birth of Yeshua, the Holy Spirit of God gave the prophet a clear picture of Jesus. It is unmistakable.

I told them, “No one has the right to tell you to boycott any of the words written in the Holy Bible.”

By now they had become much nicer. “You know,” one told me, “we are starting to become good friends. And we will come to visit you more.” Before they left, they again read Proverbs 19:21.

I told them, “Here is the Bible. Follow what is written here before you start to fight against those of us who follow God Almighty.”

And they replied, “Amen.”
Up to Jerusalem

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