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As Jewish people prepare to celebrate their High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, our cover turns to Jerusalem and the Western Wall, also called the Kotel. There people lift their voices to the true and living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with the blessing of the Israeli government, which freely gives access to men and women of all faiths. The Western Wall was the closest retaining wall to the Holy of Holies located inside the second Temple that stood on Mount Moriah—the Temple Mount—Judaism’s holiest site in the world. The Bible says that, one day, people from every nation shall go to the Millennial Temple “to worship the King, the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 14:16). To all our Jewish friends, LeShanah Tovah. Happy New Year! We hope everyone enjoys this wonderful issue of Israel My Glory. (FOI Image Archive)

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Are your church leaders in sin? According to Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, if they want your church’s statement of faith to include a particular millennial view, they are dividing the body of Christ and are in sin.

Although Dever’s position—voiced in his July 12, 2009, sermon series on Revelation—is bothersome, more troubling is the underlying concept that prophecy separates believers.

Recently I have heard well-intentioned Christians call the study of prophecy a divisive waste of time. They believe sharing Christ is our calling and nothing else really matters.

There is a kernel of truth in what they say. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are called to a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) and reproduction (making disciples, Mt. 28:19–20). In fact, the word evangelical means to “tell forth a good message.” Telling the world the “good news” of Jesus Christ and His redemptive work for us is our calling and the fabric of who and what we are as evangelicals.

But making Christ known is not all we are called to do. Jesus Himself said we should go and “make disciples of all the nations, . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (vv. 19–20). Teaching all things involves more than merely proclaiming the gospel; it encompasses imparting a deep understanding of who Jesus is and what He did.

Ignoring prophecy and theological issues regarding the future Kingdom of God limits our understanding of Jesus. Jesus taught us we should pray for God’s Kingdom to come so that His will would be done on Earth, as it is in heaven (6:10). Now we’re told it is sin for a church to take a biblical position on God’s Kingdom to come because it will divide us! Quoting John 17:21, where Christ prayed His followers would be united, Dever concluded anything that divides us must be sin.

If this were true, we would open the door to eliminating many areas of theology on which people disagree. Doctrinal division was not the issue Christ addressed in John 17. Rather, it was human division. He knew His followers would be under Satanic attack and susceptible to their old sin natures. When believers differ on Scripture, it is a human disagreement and not an inherent conflict within God’s Word. A local church is defined by its beliefs and should have the integrity to articulate them in its statement of faith. Not doing so is less than honest.

No wonder we see a “dumbing down” in the church today. When we ignore segments of Scripture, we lose the bigger picture of God’s work in history—past, present, and future. A church’s understanding of the Millennium affects everything about its view of God, His purpose for history, and His plan of redemption. Its position on the Millennium communicates its beliefs about these issues.

Mark Dever—and many today who think similarly—equate disagreeing on the Millennium with disagreeing about the use of alcohol or schooling options for children. But it is radically different. The restoration of God’s creation to its pre-sin condition and the final defeat of all God’s enemies are foretold in God’s Holy Word. The Millennium is a climax in His plan of redemption—when Jesus Christ, His Redeemer, returns to re-establish God’s theocratic rule (Rev. 19–20), so Earth is restored to its pre-sin condition and God’s will is done on Earth as it is in heaven (Isa. 11).

This is the biblical prophecy of the Millennium, and it is our blessed hope that someday God will eternally right the wrong of His creation’s rebellion, according to His preordained plan. The sin for a church is not proclaiming what it believes.
The elephant in the room is the Iranian threat of nuclear capability. Former White House official Dennis Ross said the “potential for nuclear war goes up dramatically” if Iran becomes nuclear capable.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Iranian nuclear challenge “represents a ‘hinge of history’” and added that Western civilization will fall if Iran develops nuclear weapons. Iran has vowed to destroy Israel and is behind the Hamas and Hezbollah terrorist operations in Gaza and southern Lebanon. It also supports Syrian President Bashar Assad, who depends on Iran for survival.

Yet Ashton says the settlements need the most attention. She sees Israel as the world’s major problem. In her first official speech after her 2009 appointment, she labeled East Jerusalem “occupied territory” and demanded Israel immediately lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip. In February 2010, after Netanyahu implemented a 10-month building moratorium to achieve a “historic peace agreement” within a year, Ashton acknowledged it as only a “first step.”

When a terrorist shot and killed three students at a Jewish school in Toulouse, France, in March, Ashton delivered a speech comparing the shooting to suffering children in Gaza. Only after Israeli leaders expressed outrage did the EU correct the transcript.

When PA President Mahmoud Abbas attended a ceremony honoring the remains of 91 Palestinian suicide bombers as “killed in action,” she was silent. When the PA minister of Social Affairs called for the PA and Hamas to focus efforts on the destruction of Israel and the “liberation of Palestine,” she was silent. Evidently building homes for families is far more threatening.

Ashton was anything but silent in the spring when she emerged from a meeting with Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator. Iran had stalled a formal meeting for more than 18 months while working toward nuclear capability. Former White House official Dennis Ross said the “potential for nuclear war goes up dramatically” if Iran becomes nuclear capable.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Iranian nuclear challenge “represents a ‘hinge of history’” and added that Western civilization will fall if Iran develops nuclear weapons. Iran has vowed to destroy Israel and is behind the Hamas and Hezbollah terrorist operations in Gaza.
Christians and the Right to Vote

Many Christians are loath to participate in the political process. Some write it off, espousing the notion that voting is a fruitless waste of time. Others say it’s all in the Lord’s hands. What will be, will be. I leave it with Him.

Rising above these camps is Jesus’ admonition, “Render therefore to Caesar” our obligation to secular governments (Mt. 22:21). Furthermore, Romans 13 specifically instructs believers on their responsibilities to secular powers “appointed by God” (v. 1):

Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor (vv. 5–7).

High on the list of blessings God has bestowed on free societies is the right to participate in government. We have a say in how we are governed and by whom, which gives us an ability to influence our culture.

In scores of countries, such is not the case. Rulers dictate, and the ruled obey—or else. America is different. However, the country’s problems of the hour—an intoxication with affluence and a preoccupation with self-gratification—have led to an abdication of responsibility.

Consequently, the void created by indifference and neglect in both Christian and responsible secular circles has been filled by radical minorities that have imposed (often through laws) onerous, destructive practices threatening the survival of freedom, morality, and a just social order.

Yet throwing up our hands and opting out are not options. Whether we like it or not, we are already in. The only question is how we will be counted.

Perhaps you haven’t noticed, but the forces that oppose everything we stand for have already dragged us into a war of their creation. Bible believers—or, if you wish, evangelicals—have been tagged and targeted as the disruptive drag that must be removed from the scene because it hinders progress toward social liberation and radicalized government.

Indeed, the current anti-Christian crusade is one of the most blatant political bullying campaigns in the nation’s history. If you like being depicted as the most despicable species of vermin on the planet, do nothing—opt out. But remember that in so doing, your non-vote is a yes to those who oppose our freedom to exercise our faith in a nation that is still “under God.”

The phrase for God and country is often associated with patriots who, in the words of President Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg, “gave the last full measure of devotion.” Theirs was given to preserve our fundamental right as Americans “to Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” as stated in the U.S. Declaration of Independence. These are not expressions that were intended to be fodder for ridicule or for snickering, late-night comedians’ tasteless diatribes. They are words imbued with self-sacrifice, devotion, and conviction. We have been gifted as none before us with a nation worth dying for.

Politicians may inspire, disappoint, or make promises they have no power or intent to deliver. But in the end, good or bad, that fact is beside the point. We have the ultimate weapon in the arsenal of the free: the right to vote.

It is the people who patiently stand in lines to cast their ballots who will shape the future for us, our children, and all who follow. In a way, it is our personal “full measure of devotion” for whom and what we love. Your appearance at the polls is a privilege and solemn obligation. Vote!
ISRAEL MY GLORY
A Ministry of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc. • Isaiah 46:13

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The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.
Statement of Activities
Year Ended December 31, 2011

Changes in net assets:
Public support and revenue:
Public support:
Contributions:
General ministry contributions ................................................. $4,357,118
North American ministry contributions .................................... 1,251,762
Foreign ministry contributions .................................................. 1,194,858
Institute of Jewish Studies ....................................................... 56,225
Gift portion of annuities ............................................................ 424,327
Legacies .................................................................................... 649,426
Gifts-in-kind .............................................................................. 9,915
Total public support ................................................................ 7,943,631

Revenue:
Ministry publications, audio and video .................................. 1,571,386
Conferences and special functions ......................................... 71,436
Interest and dividends ............................................................. 55,327
Other revenue ........................................................................ 14,850
Total revenue ......................................................................... 1,712,999

Total public support and revenue ............................................. 9,656,630

Program services:
Outreach ministries ................................................................. 4,176,026
North American ministries ...................................................... 1,711,816
Foreign ministries .................................................................. 1,526,720
Institute of Jewish Studies ...................................................... 202,921
Conferences and special functions ........................................ 324,699
Total program services .......................................................... 7,942,182

Supporting services:
Management and general ....................................................... 1,495,180
Stewardship and fund raising ................................................ 446,229
Total supporting services ...................................................... 1,941,409
Total program and supporting services ................................. 9,883,591

Change in net assets from operating activities ....................... (226,961)

Other changes in net assets:
Realized and unrealized gains/losses on investments ............... (13,689)
Change in actuarial value of gift annuities and trusts ............. (303,926)

Changes in net assets ............................................................. (544,576)
Net assets at beginning of year ................................................ 4,218,830
Net assets at end of year ......................................................... 3,674,254

Our financial statements are audited by the accounting firm of Lambrides, Lamos, Taylor LLP, Certified Public Accountants. Their report on the audit for the year ended December 31, 2011, was rendered on April 20, 2012, with an unqualified opinion. The above figures are taken from that report.
When Jewish people hear the shofar, they know it's a call to their people. In ancient days, it called them to prayer, safety, or war or to hear God's Word. In June 1967, Rabbi Shlomo Goren blew the shofar atop the Temple Mount after Israeli paratroopers reunited the city of Jerusalem. It was a signal to all who heard it that the Jewish people's 19 years of exile from their holiest site on Earth had come to an end, and it called them to come home.

In September, they will hear the shofar blast tekiyah, shevarim, teruah, and tekiah gedolah when they assemble in synagogues around the world to celebrate the High Holidays: Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), which begin at sundown on the 16th.

So significant is the blowing of the shofar (usually a ram's horn) that these are the only two holidays when the blasts are heard. Tekiah is a long, single blast; shevarim, three short blasts; teruah, nine rapid staccato blasts; and tekiah gedolah, a single blast held as long as possible.

Though called Rosh Hashanah ("head of the year") by the rabbis, the Bible calls the time "a memorial of blowing of trumpets" (Lev. 23:24). In the book of Joshua, God instructed seven priests each to carry a shofar as they circled the city of Jericho. Then they blew a long blast and the walls fell (Josh. 6:2–5).

Rabbinic literature teaches that, when the shofar sounds on Rosh Hashanah, three books in heaven are opened: one containing the names of the righteous, one the "semi-righteous," and one the thoroughly wicked.

To that end, observant Jews use the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, called the Ten Days of Teshuvah ("repentance"), to try to tip the scales in their favor.

Some practice Kaparot ("atonements"), a ritual that involves swinging a chicken over one's head and symbolically transferring one's sins to the
chicken, while saying, “This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement. This chicken will die, but I am going to a good long life and to peace.” The chicken is then killed and given to the poor. Much charity is given and good works done during these 10 days in hopes of being written in the Book of Life for another year.

Another practice is Tashlich, meaning “to cast.” People go to a lake or river, recite a special prayer, and symbolically cast their sins into the moving water in hopes of starting the new year fresh. As the Chabad organization writes, Tashlich “serves as a crucial part in the process of repenting and returning to G-d [sic] in purity. May we all shake ourselves from sin and be signed and sealed in the Book of Life for a good and sweet new year!”

On Rosh Hashanah the books are opened; on Yom Kippur they are sealed. The Day of Atonement concludes with one long blast of the shofar and the words, Next year may we be in Jerusalem?

“You don’t hear the sound of the shofar,” a Jewish man explained, “unless it’s significant. Something huge is happening.”

There is also a solemn association with the sounding of a shofar for expectant Christians. It is related to the coming of our Savior to call His people home:

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Th. 4:16–17). That will be a significant blast indeed.

**ENDNOTES**


Contributors to this article were Peter Colon, Steve Herzig, and Lorna Simcox.
It seems worth noting that America’s president has, for the third time, delayed moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Mandated in the Jerusalem Embassy Act by an overwhelming declaration of both houses of Congress in 1995, the move was to take place no later than May 31, 1999.

However, for 13 years, at six-month intervals, every commander-in-chief has clicked the repeat key to circumvent carrying out the nearly unanimous will of the
American people. Without even altering previous wording, the president informed the secretary of state, “I hereby determine that it is necessary to protect the national security interests of the United States, to suspend for a period of 6 months the limitations set forth in sections 3(b) and 7(b) of the Act.”

In adopting the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, Congress acknowledged the obvious in its list of 17 findings. Among them are these:

1. Each sovereign nation, under international law and custom, may designate its own capital.
2. The United States maintains its embassy in the functioning capital of every country except in the case of our democratic friend and strategic ally, the State of Israel.

The fact that Israel has the only capital in the world America refuses to recognize not only ignites our national integrity but telegraphs a suspicion that somehow the Jewish state is illegitimate. In fact, two perceptions of America emerge with every delay to transfer our embassy:

1. Weakness. U.S. national security is not an issue here. Actually, it would enhance our position to step up to the plate and act, rather than capitulate, by determine that it is necessary to protect the national security interests of the United States, to suspend for a period of 6 months the limitations set forth in sections 3(b) and 7(b) of the Act.  
2. Disloyalty. It looks like we’re betraying the one true ally we can always count on and that we acquiesce to carving Jerusalem once again into a two-state tangle, despite “congressionally prevailing opinion that Western ‘Arab spring’ that masquerades temporarily as democracy.

Grace Gestures

On June 7, 1967, in response to Lt. Gen. Mordechai (Motta) Gur’s dramatic announcement, “The Temple Mount is in our hands,” Israeli paratroopers gathered at the Western Wall to celebrate the return of Jerusalem to its rightful heirs. Rabbi Shlomo Goren sounded the ram’s horn, signifying the city’s reunification and calling for all Jews to come home at last. On that momentous day, Israeli Gen. Moshe Dayan expressed the sentiments of virtually the entire Jewish world and its friends:

“We have returned to the holiest of our Holy Places, never to part from it again. To our Arab neighbours we extend, also at this hour—and with added emphasis at this hour—our hand in peace. And to our Christian and Muslim fellow citizens, we solemnly promise full religious freedom and rights. We did not come to Jerusalem for the sake of other peoples’ Holy Places, and not to interfere with the adherents of other faiths, but in order to safeguard its entirety, and to live there together with others, in unity.3

In the words of another, “To Israelis and Jews all over the world, this was a joyous and momentous occasion. Many considered it a gift from God.” Israel has kept Dayan’s promise. In perhaps one of the greatest good-faith gestures in history, Israel placed the holiest of holy shrines, the Temple Mount itself, in Muslim control. Its generosity was rewarded with a Muslim edict prohibiting Jewish people from praying there, followed later by the preposterous claim that there never was a historic Jewish presence or Temple on the Mount. It seems ironic that, while the Jewish state has scrupulously allowed all religions free access to their places of worship—including Islam—Jews cannot, without dire consequences, pray at their holiest place. They must content themselves with praying at the Herodian retaining wall supporting the Temple platform. Furthermore, Islamists blatantly proclaim that, when they finally conquer all of what they deem to be Arab Palestine, they will expel the Jews altogether or intimidate them into fleeing, as has been the situation in the Gaza Strip, Bethlehem, and other Islamic-controlled areas.

Harbingers of the Future

What does this portend for the future? Nothing good for the Jewish state, particularly when the buzz words from the West to Israel are no, stop, don’t, concede, wait, and give more to the Palestinians with no expectation of reciprocity.

This analysis is not difficult to defend. The world has opposed every legitimate construction plan Israel has had in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Plus there is an apparent diplomatic paralysis in dealing with Iran’s mania to destroy Israel, as well as unrealistic appraisals of the anti-Israel, anti-Western “Arab spring” that masquerades temporarily as democracy.

To worry about irreparably damaging Israel’s partners for peace and the two-state solution is beyond fantasy. Face it: Israel does not have a partner for peace—certainly not in the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, or other Islamic organizations sworn to its demise. How many times do these groups have to tell us their ultimate goal is to buy time (while bleeding the West of economic aid) on the way to an all-Arab, one-state solution called Palestine?

In the 1950s, a young Jewish pop singer, Kitty Kallen, scored a vocal triumph with the song “Little Things Mean a Lot.” The sentiment of the title often holds true. Don’t be fooled by the Grandiose pomp and ceremony associated with publicity-grabbing peace-talk summits that vaunt great promises and greater expectations. If you’re looking for the real action, explore the little things done beyond the glare of TV...
Israel, glorifies suicide-bombing terrorists as *shahids* (martyrs), and plans to rid its future State of Palestine of Jews. PMW cites a chilling call to action by PA secretary general of Abbas’s office, Tayeb Abd Al-Rahim: “Oh brothers [Martyrs], your souls now hover above us and say to us: ‘Follow in our path.’”5

Whistling in the Dark

To continue to ignore the evidence or insist this hubristic flame-throwing is simply political rhetoric is unacceptable. Cooling the narrative or buying off the belligerents will not alter the situation. These people are saying precisely what they mean and should be taken at their word. It’s as simple as that. To cave in or vacillate is to court catastrophe. Strength, solidarity, moral integrity, and determination are the options our enemies will understand. I say our enemies because Israel’s enemies are ours as well. Praying for the peace of Jerusalem is a mandate from God, and putting feet to those prayers is an obligation.

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid.

Elwood McQuaid is consulting editor for *The Friends of Israel*.

---

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All Egyptian Christians should flee from Egypt, and they should never look back.” The stark warning came from a commentator in the aftermath of Mohammed Morsi’s election as Egypt’s new president in June. Morsi was backed by the Muslim Brotherhood, the radical Islamist faction now taking control of the country.

Christians fear a bloodbath if the Brotherhood eventually suppresses the army, enshrines Sharia law, and installs a Muslim caliphate-type government. Though they pray this will not be the final outcome of the Arab Spring revolution, the various Christian sects that comprise approximately 10 percent of Egypt’s population are not optimistic.

Radical Islamist groups frequently attack Christians, giving ample reason for concern. Compass Direct News reported that a Coptic Christian teenager, Gamal Abdou Massoud, has been sentenced to three years in prison for allegedly insulting Islam. The court claimed the 17-year-old posted cartoons on his Facebook page that mocked Islam and its prophet, Muhammad:

After the incident came to light, Muslims in Assuit, where Massoud lives, rioted. They fire-bombed his home and burned down at least five other Christian-owned homes in several Assuit villages. Massoud’s family left their village. . . . The court also held Massoud responsible for inciting the riots. No one responsible for burning down any of the homes has been charged. . . . The three-year sentence was the maximum Massoud could have received.

Ironically, Watani, a weekly newspaper in Cairo, claimed the charges were trumped up by anti-Christian radicals and reported it could find no evidence Massoud even had a Facebook page, calling him “almost computer illiterate.”

Such court rulings provide what some regard as a window into the future. Certain elements within Egypt will view the Islamists’ ascent to power as a license to attack churches and individual Christians, as they did in May 2011 when 12 people were killed and an estimated 200 injured when members of the hard-line Salafi Muslim movement assaulted two Cairo churches, burning one in a fire that virtually gutted the five-story structure. The crowd then surrounded many Christian-owned homes and businesses. The attack was one of many by Salafi militants on Coptic Christians. The Cairo incident marked the second time in two months a church was burned.

Will Egypt become yet another Middle Eastern country where Muslims dedicated to forcing everyone into Islam drive Christians from their homes, producing a massive Christian exodus? The question remains open. But that is the fear.

As for the victims, their unfortunate options are (1) to remain and live day to day looking over their shoulders or (2) to pack up and leave the region where their ancestors have lived for hundreds—in many cases, thousands—of years, in search of safe havens for themselves and their families.

One would like to think the era of unspeakable atrocities has ended and that mankind has entered into a more civil state where life, limb, and divergent choices are respected—or at least tolerated. However, history does repeat itself, and we are witnessing the tragic reruns in too many places.

Etchings of believers huddled on the floors of ancient arenas have come down to us for a reason. Yet fallen humanity learns nothing from the past. The instruments for dealing death have changed, but the hate-driven frenzy to eliminate Christians has spanned the centuries, and today’s lions still gather to take their turn.

by Elwood McQuaid
Many people today live with emptiness and despair. Depression and apathy seem ubiquitous. Others aggressively pursue the elusive goals of this earthly life, only to be confronted with the hollowness of their dreams. Like gerbils running aimlessly in cages, they expend their energy but never seem to get anywhere.

Life doesn’t have to be this way. God has made wonderful provisions for us that should be good news to
everyone who wants fulfillment and joy. The apostle Paul was eager to share this information with the fledgling church in Rome. Writing to believers he had not yet visited, he provided, in his epistle to the Romans, the fullest presentation of the gospel that he had been preaching elsewhere.

He began by expounding on the forgiveness of sin through Jesus. But he went much further, providing help and hope to believers (“beloved of God, called to be saints”; 1:7) who struggle with sin and hardship: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel [“good news”] of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation [Greek, soteria, “deliverance”] for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek [Gentile]” (1:16).

Deliverance From the Penalty of Sin (Romans 1—5)

At the outset, Paul wanted to make sure his readers understood the sinfulness of the human race and the hope God provided. In Romans 1:18—3:20, he explained that every single human being is bound in sin: “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (3:19).

The good news is that deliverance from this sinful condition is available because “the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, . . . through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe” (vv. 21–22). Any man, woman, or child—Jewish or Gentile—can be “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ [Messiah] Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood” (vv. 24–25).

How wonderful that we can share this message with people around us who are otherwise doomed in their innately sinful state. Deliverance from the darkness of sin and death and from eternal separation from God is available without charge. The very righteousness of God—which has been manifested through Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection—is free to all who place their faith in Him. This gospel delivers people from the guilt and fear of death that has plagued them all their lives (Heb. 2:14–15).

The penalty for your sin has already been paid. The debt to God you could not pay has been canceled. It is as though you visited a doctor, learned you have an incurable disease, and then heard of a miracle cure guaranteed to work instantly. What news could be better? The only requirement is that you avail yourself of the cure.

Deliverance From the Power of Sin (Romans 6—8)

Paul’s gospel, however, extends beyond the wonderful news of deliverance from the penalty of sin. It includes deliverance from the power of sin. Romans 6—8 presents God’s solution to every believer’s struggle with sin. Even Paul was exasperated over it: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (7:24).

His answer was the Holy Spirit, who ministers in the lives of believers to set them free from the law of sin and death. Through baptism, believers symbolically die with Christ to sin and are raised with Him to “walk in newness of life” (6:4): “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 11). The logical conclusion of this teaching is this:

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God (vv. 12–13).
And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (11:25–27, 29).

Paul taught that the sovereign God eventually will restore the Kingdom to Israel, and with that restoration will come the deliverance of all creation “from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (8:21). This, too, is great news. Believers have the opportunity to be part of God’s sovereign plan to glorify Himself, knowing He will fulfill all of His promises, both to Christians and to Israel.

The book of Revelation says Jesus will rule this Jewish Kingdom, and the glory of God will cover the earth. Satan and his deception will be eliminated. Consequently, sin and its effects will largely be absent during the Millennium, until Satan is released.

For today’s Church-Age believers, deliverance from sin’s presence will occur at death or the Rapture, whichever comes first. Tribulation saints will experience this deliverance at death or at the onset of the Messianic Kingdom, whichever comes first.

Consequently, Paul wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’” (1:16–17).

The entire book of Romans is the gospel. It reveals God’s righteousness and explains how people can have victory over sin. Good news, indeed.
Y
ears ago, as a young Christian attending a large Midwestern university, I slipped into the meeting of a radical group on campus to check it out. A speaker talked about the leftist revolution he envisioned in America once a “critical mass” (enough momentum to make success inevitable) of citizen support was achieved.

Recently, as I finished my work with Tim LaHaye on our next futuristic novel, *Brink of Chaos*, I couldn’t help but remember that day and recognize that, unless God steps in to stop it, global convergence is coming at us like a bullet train. And it will impact us all.

**MEDIA TECHNOLOGY.** Several years ago at the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, communications experts predicted that, in this decade—from China to Iceland to America to Africa—we would be using handheld devices that bring together every aspect of communications. That trend is here. Today tech companies, broadcasters, and congressmen are discussing ways to install radio receivers as basic features in cell phones.

The growth of communications technology has been revolutionary, and so has its effect on commerce. According to *Money*, in the fourth quarter of 2011, Apple Inc. alone accounted for half of the entire growth in the Standard & Poor’s 500 stock index.

**ECONOMICS AND CURRENCY.** Global financial interdependence is a fact. Not only do we see international markets for stocks and commodities, but we also see trade, manufacturing, and investment markets crossing borders at an unparalleled rate. America’s hand-wringing over Europe’s financial crisis is evidence that when Europe’s economy sneezes, we catch a cold.

Earlier this year, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso turned that argument around, alleging that U.S. bank failures caused the debt crisis undermining Greece and Spain. Either way, the interdependence is beyond dispute.

And, according to many pundits, so is the inevitability of a one-world currency. A Pew Research poll shows that 41 percent of Americans expect a single currency by 2050. The likelihood is that it will come sooner. Money-watcher and author David Wolman, writing in *Wired*, made the intriguing suggestion, “The seed for that universal currency has already been planted.”

**THE INTERNET AND GLOBAL SURVEILLANCE.** In 2012 governments and technocrats from around the world convened in Dubai to consider having the United Nations or one of its agencies control the flow of information on the Internet. The implications, especially from a prophetic viewpoint, are staggering—and disconcerting.

All modes of communication in our world are continuing to migrate to Web-based platforms, whether it is newspapers, magazines, school curricula, books, movies, or news media outlets. Ceding to a single global agency the worldwide power to control the flow of ideas and messages ought to ring bells like a five-alarm fire.

Closely related is the rise of electronic surveillance. The companies that control the Internet systems we use on our computers often use “behavioral tracking” to catalog our every mouse click and Web search so that marketing pitches tailored to our preferences either pop up or stream across our computer screens. Google is being investigated by Swiss authorities (and here in Washington) for its Street View project in which special Google cars drive around photographing our planet, street by street. It turns out these automobiles were also harvesting private data, like e-mails and Web postings, from the houses on those blocks. Google claims such activity was inadvertent. However, technology will soon make it possible for media platforms, governments, or other mega entities to connect to, trace, and communicate with every citizen on Earth.

Read Revelation 11:9, and ask yourself whether the ability to view the same event simultaneously around the world is not a prediction of our current global media technology. Further, prophecy is replete with pronouncements about a future, global, economic Babylon (Rev. 18:3, 11, 15).

Yet there is a practical aspect to all of this, as well. Scripture gives us a description of the future, as God has proclaimed it in His Word. Knowing what lies in store, the apostle Peter posed this question: “Therefore . . . what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?” (2 Pet. 3:11).

Our eschatology and knowledge ought to bring us to our knees in worship of the King and impact our walk with Him. It should also cause us to communicate His eternal truth to those around us, making the most of our opportunities while there is still time.
Awaiting the Bridegroom

by Patrick Neff

(Israel Talby / Israel Images)
Imagine someone loving you so much He wants you to live in a place He has prepared for you in His presence forever. There is someone like that. His name is Jesus; and as the troubles and trials of life oppress us, we need to remember what the early believers knew: Jesus is coming for His church.

Though some dispute the reality of the Rapture, the teaching is certainly biblical. A day is coming when the believing church will be caught up—snatched away—to be with the Lord. The early church, in fact, believed so strongly in Christ’s imminent return that Christians greeted one another with the word maranatha, meaning “O Lord, come!” (1 Cor. 16:22).

The belief buoyed the early church during suffering and persecution. That is why the Rapture is also called “the blessed hope.” This joyful expectation of the any-moment return of Christ is about love, a resurrection body, a reunion with believing loved ones, and the church’s removal from the earth before the coming and terrible Tribulation.

A Special Place

Jesus said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn. 14:3). This passage is about love, betrothal, and a wedding. In the Jewish culture of the day, the bridegroom prepared a dwelling place for his prospective bride. When the new home was ready, he returned for her.

My wife and I have been to some beautiful places. But I assure you, not one of them is even a little bit as wonderful as the heavenly home being prepared for the church, which is also called the bride of Christ (Jn. 14:1–3; Rev. 21:1–6).

A Grand Reunion

Another aspect of the blessed hope is the promise of a resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:50–53). Are you in pain? Is your sight failing or your body deteriorating? If you belong to Jesus, you will receive a new body that will be impervious to disease and decay. It will not need doctors or dentists or experience death. This is why born-again believers are looking for the “upper taker,” not the undertaker.

A sad part of life is being separated by distance or death from those we love. My wife and I live 2,000 miles away from our children and grandchildren. We have experienced the death of precious relatives and friends. But at the Rapture of the church, there will be a great reunion:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Th. 4:16–18).

Luke’s Gospel tells the story of a widow whose only son had just died. Jesus arrived during the funeral procession. As He witnessed the widow’s grief, He was moved with compassion, brought her dead son to life, and “presented him to his mother” (7:11–15). This is but a tiny taste of what will take place at the Rapture, as our believing loved ones are restored to us in the presence of God.

My family has not been big on family reunions. But a few years ago, most of the cousins on my mother’s side were able to get together. Some of us had not seen one another for several years. What a wonderful time we had. Yet an even greater reunion awaits the believing church of Jesus Christ. No wonder the Rapture is called the blessed hope.

Impeccable Timing

The Rapture is the next event on God’s prophetic calendar. Jesus is coming to catch away His bride before the seven-year Tribulation when the Antichrist will rule the world. There are three compelling reasons for a pre-Tribulation Rapture:

1. The Argument From Scripture. Revelation 3:10 contains a wonderful promise: “I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” In addition, 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 clearly separates believers from this coming time of darkness and destruction, declaring,
“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 9).

(2) The Argument From Sequence. The apostle Paul addressed the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4 and then, in chapter 5, the Tribulation. A similar sequence appears in Revelation. Chapters 2—3 discuss the Church Age, but not until chapter 6 does the Tribulation come up. In between, in chapters 4—5, we read of believers who are assembled around God’s throne in worship. Who are they, and how did they get there? I believe they are Church-Age Christians who were “caught up”—raptured—prior to “the wrath of the Lamb” (6:16) that begins with the seal judgments of Revelation 6.

(3) The Argument From Silence. Why is there no mention of the church in the Tribulation section of Revelation? Why is the church so prominent in the early chapters, yet so conspicuously absent in chapters 6—9, which deal with the Tribulation? I believe the answer is the blessed hope.

The Tribulation will punish unbelieving Gentiles and prepare Israel for its Messiah (Zech. 12:10), but it has no similar purposes for the church. Instead, the church will be taken up and out.

Far too many people in today’s believing church are dismayed, discouraged, and defeated. They have lost their focus and forgotten their blessed hope—the “glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13).

A new day is coming. Jesus will come for His church. Believers still on Earth will leave this vale of tears behind forever. “Surely,” Jesus promises, “I am coming quickly” (Rev. 22:20). And the apostle John’s reply is most fitting: “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (v. 20).

Patrick Neff is the director of Church Ministries for The Friends of Israel.

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It was Sunday afternoon, and my grandmother and I were seated comfortably in the high school gym waiting for the movie to begin. I was 9 years old and had no idea that film would change my life.

I come from a long line of churchgoers. My great-grandparents actually helped build my childhood church, served on a multitude of church committees, and taught Sunday school. My grandmother was the church organist, and my mother was active in the women's ministry.

I guess you could say I had attended church since before I was born. Everyone in my family loved the Lord and had received Christ as his or her personal Savior. So I assumed I was a Christian too.

The gymnasium that Sunday was filled with people who had brought friends to the new Christian movie we were there to see. Although the plot about troubled teens in the 1960s didn't apply to me, the message did. It was the first time I understood the gospel.

I sat there feeling lost and scared. Suddenly it hit me that my Christian heritage did not make me a Christian. I couldn't ride into heaven on my family's coattails. I realized I was a sinner and needed to accept Jesus for myself. I hadn't committed adultery. I was 9 years old! But I wasn't perfect; and I finally understood that, if you do anything God Himself would not do, you fall short "of the glory of God" and are a sinner (Rom. 3:23). And the penalty for sin is death: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:23).

That afternoon I asked Jesus, the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world, to forgive my sin and be my personal Savior. I knew at that moment I had become His child and was assured of heaven.

Today so many people either scorn the idea of heaven or believe their good deeds will get them there. Nothing in either the Old or New Testament says good deeds can remove sin. Heaven is only available to those who by faith admit they are sinners and ask Jesus to take their sin away with His blood:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of

His grace. For He [the Father] made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (Eph. 1:7; 2 Cor. 5:21). The prophet Isaiah said it well:

But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:5–6).

In 1893 James M. Black sat at his piano and wrote the hymn "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder." It probably isn't sung much these days, but perhaps it should be because it conveys the joyful hope all believers in Christ have. One of the verses goes like this:

On that bright and cloudless morning when the dead in Christ shall rise, And the glory of His resurrection share; When His chosen ones shall gather to their home beyond the skies, And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.

I thank the Lord I had a godly grandmother who brought me to Riverside High School that Sunday when I asked the Lord to forgive my sins and make me His child. That was 45 years ago. And if the roll is called up yonder today, I'll be there. Will you?

by Thomas C. Simcox
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAPTURE</th>
<th>Departs</th>
<th>Precedes</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus returns to claim His bride, the church. Only church saints (dead and alive) will depart Earth to meet Christ in the air and ascend to heaven. Unbelievers remain on Earth.</td>
<td>This event precedes the seven years of tribulation (part of God’s unique program for Israel, not the church), when God’s wrath will afflict the entire earth.</td>
<td>This event belongs to the church. There are no church saints left on Earth. These events are covered by 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17, Daniel 9:22–27, 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Revelation 3:10.</td>
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<tr>
<th>SECOND COMING</th>
<th>Returns</th>
<th>Follows</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All church saints (the bride of Christ) will return with Christ to Earth from heaven. (After the Rapture, church saints “shall always be with the Lord.”) Unbelievers are removed from Earth.</td>
<td>This event follows the Tribulation. It also precedes the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom.</td>
<td>The Church is removed from Earth. The Church will judge the Earth. These events are covered by 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Revelation 19:11–16, Revelation 6—20.</td>
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This chart is designed to help people distinguish between two unique events. The Rapture is strictly for the redeemed of the Church Age. The Second Coming will impact the entire world. At the Rapture, dead church saints will be resurrected, and the bodies of living church saints will be transformed instantly from mortal to immortal, without dying. As Dr. Renald E. Showers wrote, “Jesus clearly taught that the order of things at His Second Coming will be exactly opposite of the order of things at the Rapture. At the Rapture, all saved people alive on Earth will be taken from the earth in blessing, and all unsaved people will be left on Earth (Jn. 14:2–3). At His Second Coming, all unsaved people will be taken from Earth in judgment. (See the parables.
## SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

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<tr>
<th>Not Judged</th>
<th>Hidden</th>
<th>Signless</th>
<th>Absent</th>
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<tr>
<td>This event delivers those longing to Christ from the coming Tribulation. There are no references to the church on Earth in Revelation 6—8, which covers the Tribulation.</td>
<td>This is a hidden event, unseen by the world. Only Church-Age believers will see Jesus as He comes and resurrects their physical bodies.</td>
<td>This is an imminent, signless event. It can happen at any moment. No prophecy must be fulfilled before this event can occur.</td>
<td>Scripture makes no reference to the Devil or Satan regarding the Rapture.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Will Judge</th>
<th>Visible</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Church-Age saints will return with Christ, who will judge the earth.</td>
<td>The entire world will witness Christ’s return.</td>
<td>This event will occur at the end of the Tribulation, after the fulfillment of specific prophesied signs.</td>
<td>The Devil is captured, bound, and cast into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

of the tares [Mt. 13:24–30, 36–42] and the dragnet [vv. 13:47–50]). All saved people alive on Earth at that time will be left on Earth to continue into the next period of history: the Millennial reign of Christ [v. 43].”

For more information on the Rapture and Second Coming, see Dr. Showers’ book *Maranatha, Our Lord, Come!* published by The Friends of Israel.

by Thomas C. Simcox
Our world is a real mess. Watching the news is seriously depressing. First we hear of all the murders, attacks, robberies, and corruption that have transpired locally. Then, during the national segment, we are told of all the unrest on the planet, as terrorism looms large, nuclear threats abound, political upheaval is prevalent, and a global financial collapse seems imminent.

For Christians, it is comforting to know that this life is not all there is. While the news is depressing, God’s Word is encouraging. Jesus promises that someday, perhaps soon, He will return in the clouds for His church; “and thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:17). This imminent (literally, “at any moment”) return of Jesus for His own is often identified as...
as “the blessed hope” or Rapture of the church.

The apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, told the believers in Thessalonica, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope” (v. 13). The Thessalonian Christians were afraid their loved ones who had died in Christ would miss the Rapture. Paul sought to allay their fears and, in so doing, gave lasting hope to centuries of believers who struggle with this evil world.

The words fallen asleep refer to physical death, not soul sleep. At death, the soul is separated from the body. The bodies of Christians who pass away are pictured as sleeping because the souls go immediately to be with the Savior. Absent from the body is present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

Not only will the dead in Christ be raptured, but they actually will be the first to depart:

Even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. . . . The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Th. 4:14–17).

The Latin word for “caught up” is rapturo, from which comes the term Rapture.

How will this event unfold? “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (v. 16). The Lord will descend from heaven but will not touch down on Earth. He will not visibly return until the end of the seven-year Tribulation, which will begin sometime after the church is removed.

As He descends, an angel will shout and a trumpet will blast—sounds that appear to be for believers alone; no one else will hear them.

Can you imagine if Jesus were to come on a typical morning while people are driving to work, flying in airplanes, talking on phones, or merely walking on busy streets? Though unbelievers apparently will hear nothing, they certainly will experience the result. The Rapture’s effects will keenly impact society.

Where will the raptured go? From the first Jewish people who responded to the apostle Peter’s preaching on the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) in Acts 2 to the last person to come to Christ in the future—all will “meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (v. 17). Wherever He will be, His church will be as well. At the Rapture, believers will receive resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 15:52), and “we shall be like Him” (1 Jn. 3:2)—unable to die and unable to sin.

The Rapture is for the church alone. Old Testament and Tribulation saints appear to receive their resurrection bodies after the Tribulation but before the start of the 1,000-year Messianic Kingdom (Rev. 20:4). The unsaved dead are resurrected at the end of the 1,000-year Kingdom, are judged at the Great White Throne (vv. 11–15), and are cast into the lake of fire for eternity (v. 15).

The world is on a collision course with its Creator. As things get worse (and they will), evil will increase. Yet this world is not all there is. Believers are waiting for the city “whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). This is not our home. We’re just passing through.

**Answers from God’s Word**

**Question:** What did Jesus say about the Law of Moses?

**Answer:** “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled.” —Matthew 5:17–18
During our more than 35 years together, my wife and I have never needed much of an excuse to enjoy nature. We’ve done everything from backpacking to tenting to trailer camping—relishing every minute of daylight in the great outdoors. Nightfall brings its own pleasures; and with a luminous star chart in hand, we’ve gazed into the night sky, sequestered away from city lights.

We generally celebrate our anniversary viewing the Perseids meteor shower in August, and we willingly brave the cold to catch the Leonids and Geminids. I even skipped a day of college on February 26, 1979, when we skied to Pierre’s Knob at Bridger Bowl in Bozeman, Montana, and donned welding masks to observe the totality of the last solar eclipse of the century. The next one visible in North America is in 2017. If I ever grouch about getting up in the wee hours of the morning to observe these naturally occurring phenomena, my wife reminds me that skywatching is fascinating—and it’s free!

Granted, not everyone lives with his eyes on the sky, but the Bible speaks of a time when all of Earth’s inhabitants will focus on the heavens. There they will see “the sign of the Son of Man” heralding the singular event that will change history, not only for the remainder of time, but also for eternity: the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Mt. 24:30).

The sun and moon will grow dark at the end of seven years of terrible tribulation, adding to the drama of the event and accentuating the stunning revelation of the Messiah. After the Son of Man grabs the world’s attention, the heavens will break open to reveal a majestic procession, as Jesus Christ approaches the...
planet with His saints and the angelic host to establish His Kingdom on Earth (1 Th. 3:13; 2 Th. 1:7; Jude 14; Rev. 20:4).

As He descends through the atmosphere, the armies of the world will scramble to prevent His return (Ps. 2:2). In a fraction of a second and with the precision of a laser, the Word of Christ will reduce to nothing the military power arrayed against the King of kings (Col. 1:16–17; Rev. 19:21). Earth will then be ready to enjoy an unparalleled golden age, with King Messiah ruling the planet.

Everyone will benefit from the fulfilled promises of the literal, 1,000-year Messianic Kingdom embodying all of the unilateral covenants God made with Israel. The Messianic Kingdom will be the final dispensation of history; and Earth’s inhabitants will enjoy peace, prosperity, and righteous justice as the Messiah rules. Not only will there be an absence of war, but all species of animals will coexist harmoniously; and humans will no longer be threatened by predatory or venomous creatures (Isa. 11:6–9). The world will be restored to its pre-Fall condition before sin entered the picture, and mankind will experience longevity far beyond its wildest dreams (65:20).

A Glimpse of Eternity

Satan’s rebellion at the end of the thousand years is followed by the Great White Throne judgment in which death, Hades, and everyone not found written in the Book of Life are cast with Satan into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:15). This is the most somber moment in the annals of Earth’s history; but at this judgment, death—man’s final enemy—is destroyed forever.

After witnessing the purging of the old heavens and earth (2 Pet. 3:10–12), everyone who has loved the Lord will be on hand to hear God declare, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). They will watch in awe as He creates a new heaven and new earth (Isa. 65:17; 2 Pet. 3:13).

The new earth will have significant modifications: It will no longer be the “blue planet” hanging in space because, as the apostle John observed, “There was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1). Currently, 71 percent of Earth’s surface is covered by oceans that contain 97 percent of its water supply.

The most prominent feature of the new earth will be the New Jerusalem, with beauty comparable to a bride adorned for her husband—awesome, radiant, bejeweled, and pure. Descending from heaven to the new earth, the New Jerusalem will be an immense city with four sides, each measuring 1,300 to 1,500 miles in length; and its height will be equal to its width (vv. 2, 9–10, 16–17).

Using the dimensions of the New Jerusalem provided in the book of Revelation, the late Dr. Henry Morris roughly calculated the amount of space available for the redeemed. Predicated on the assumption that (1) the city will need to accommodate some 20 billion people and (2) only 25 percent of the total area will be actual dwelling places, with the remainder designated for streets, parks, and public buildings, Dr. Morris calculated the average size of each residence to be 75 acres.1 Even if the space allotted each occupant is only a third that size, there obviously will be ample room in the awesome New Jerusalem.

Equally impressive will be the city’s radiance. The same colors John used to describe God’s throne in Revelation 4:3 are associated with this magnificent metropolis descending from heaven and “having the glory of God. Her light was . . . like a jasper stone, clear as crystal” (21:11).

There will be no need for the sun or moon because God’s glory illuminates the New Jerusalem: “The Lamb [Jesus] is its light” (v. 23). One can only imagine the effect, as every wall, roofline, pinnacle, and street reflects that radiant light. Today the earth depends on the sun, not only for light, but also for the energy to fuel its mechanical systems. In the new creation, the sun is unnecessary because Christ Himself will energize these systems.

The New Jerusalem will be without architectural precedent. Its 12 foundations are colossal gemstones engraved with the names of the apostles (vv. 14, 19–20). Not fabricated from commonplace materials, each gate is a single pearl, forming a massive, arched opening into the city and bearing the inscription of the name of one of the tribes of Israel (vv. 12, 21). The streets and all of the structures are made of unknown, transparent gold that further reflects the brilliance of God’s glory.

A prominent feature of the city is a pure river of the water of life proceeding from God’s throne (22:1). Gushing to water the entire earth, this life-giving river courses and cascades through every level of the city, making water abundantly available to all. God promises, “I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts” (21:6).

Planted on either side of the river is the Tree of Life (22:2). It appears this colonnade of trees, as John described it, sits along the banks of the river of the water of life. Though unavailable to humanity since the Fall, the Tree of Life will be a conspicuous feature of the New Jerusalem, abundantly yielding its fruit each month.

Mysteriously, its leaves will somehow provide healing for the nations. It is possible that, just as God will wipe away anguished tears of regret, the tree’s leaves will heal the scars of prejudice.
enable pure, wholehearted, unhindered service to God for eternity. Living in the New Jerusalem and enjoying unending fellowship with Messiah Jesus comprise the blessed hope of every born-again Christian (Ti. 2:13). In the meantime, enjoying God’s handiwork in the night sky is still an awe-inspiring pastime, although it is nothing compared to what He has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9).


ENDNOTE

Question: How merciful is God?
Answer: “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him.” —Psalm 103:11

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Radicalized Christians?

When Texas Congressman Al Green (D) chastised Rep. Peter King (R-NY) in June for holding Homeland Security Committee hearings on the radicalization of Muslims in America, he demonstrated how little he knows about Christianity. Green asked, “Why not have a hearing on the radicalization of Christians?”

A television talk-show host and a guest quickly agreed. It seems they believe there are more radical Christians than radical Muslims. Of course, they made no mention of the Islamic terror attacks of 9/11 and failed to provide a single example of “radical” Christian violence.

Even Green himself said, “And if you agree that we have Christians . . . who become radicalized, they become part of Islam and they become radicalized as is being said, why not have a hearing on the radicalization of Christians?”

So what Green actually said is that Islam is radicalizing converts to Islam—people who likely were never true, biblical Christians to begin with.

Yet the fact his comment was quickly used to skewer Christianity, rather than Islam, articulates the current war on American, Bible-believing Christians to begin with.

Yet the fact his comment was quickly used to skewer Christianity, rather than Islam, articulates the current war on American, Bible-believing Christians. Of course, Christians are concerned about the denigration of the moral and spiritual values that have undergirded this republic since its founding. And, yes, we wince when absurd bans prohibit singing the likes of “God Bless America” at public functions and mentioning God in public prayer or discourse.

But the issues go further. These incidents are ensigns of what will be contested in more radical terms in the future.

In 2003 an obscure essayist named Michael Webb wrote an online diatribe about the “right.” Unfortunately, his verminous reasoning reflects core aspects of the forces being marshaled to destroy conservative Christianity:

Those points [abortion and gay rights] have been used to radicalize the religious right in the United States in the same way that Islamicists have long used the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to radicalize their own people. In fact, we can draw many parallels between the radical religious right in the US and Islamic radicals in the Middle East.

Like most radical movements, both are unwilling to compromise or coexist with their adversaries. In their minds, the continuing presence of political or ideological adversaries can only be bad. Radicals feel they must persist in their struggle until the world is completely purged and free of the adversaries. . . . There is no appreciable difference between Islamic fundamentalism and the radical Christian right.

Indeed, it’s not too great an exaggeration to say that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a fairly clear model of where the religious right wants to take the United States. Only the details differ. We hear much these days from pollsters and political prognosticators who refer to the “evangelical vote” and its influence in the next presidential election. Who identifies these evangelical voters?

The conservative Christian community has never voted as a monolithic block. Nor is it controlled by czars who dictate which levers to pull in the polling booths.

Individual believers vote just like other Americans: according to their personal convictions. And if this is radicalism, then all Americans have been radicalized.

The danger of real radicalism lies in how anti-Christian elements will react toward their Christian enemies if things fail to go their way.

END NOTES


by Elwood McQuaid
Have you ever heard the expression “the then world”? It comes from 2 Peter 3:

For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in water. . . . The world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire (vv. 5–7).

In the original Greek, the phrase the world that then existed means “the then world.” The third key to history involves understanding what happened to that world. In a word, it was catastrophe.

The Human Calendar

There were 1,656 years between the creation of Adam and the universal flood. Since the ancient world did not calculate time as we do, God provided a human calendar:

- “And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years” (Gen. 5:3–4). So Adam lived 130 plus 800, for a total of 930 years.
- “Seth lived one hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. After he begot Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and seven years” (total of 912 years, vv. 6–7).
- “Enosh lived ninety years, and begot Cainan. After he begot Cainan,
Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years, and had sons and daughters (total of 905 years, vv. 9–10). So on and so forth.

The list is not a strict “father, first-born son” genealogy because Seth was not Adam’s firstborn. Cain and Abel preceded him. However, Scripture gives us a godly line that functions as a calendar. If you tally everything, you have 1,656 years between Adam’s creation and the Noahic flood.

Some people say you can’t trust the Bible’s numbers. However, if you can’t trust Genesis 5, how can you trust John 3 or Romans 3, which speak of God’s love and His provision for our salvation through Christ? If you deny the truth of Genesis, you might as well create your own theology—which is exactly what many people today do.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were responsible to govern the earth in worshipful submission to God, thereby glorifying Him. From Genesis 3 through the flood, humanity’s responsibility was to glorify God by living with a clear conscience. Today we still have those responsibilities, however many other things have changed.

The Then World

The then world apparently had a temperate global climate that changed with the catastrophe of the universal flood. It appears a canopy of water hung above the earth because, in Genesis 1, God separated the waters above the firmament from those below it. This massive water bubble diffused the sun’s rays and created a closed ecosystem much like a terrarium. There were no polar ice caps, and Earth’s climate was ideal all the time.

The Bible is also clear it never rained, nor was there a rainbow. There were no typhoons, hurricanes, or devastating weather systems. Furthermore, Earth’s landmass appears to have been contiguous; people could virtually walk around the planet.

So prior to the flood, Earth was vastly different. Also different was the human lifespan. People lived almost 10 centuries—and those numbers are reliable. However, all was not well: “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (6:5). Despite the wonderful environment, humanity was evil; and God was disgusted with what He saw.

When left to their own devices, people tend to ignore God, live in sin, and pass their sins on to others. That’s a danger we live with every day. It’s important for us to work at our sanctification and understand God is trying to transform us to become like His Son, Jesus. If we don’t change, it’s likely our offspring will be worse than we are.

So God decided to destroy mankind:

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, “The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make yourself an ark of gopherwood. Behold, I Myself am bringing floodwaters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh” (vv. 11–14, 17).

Second Peter explains that the then world, which was made of water, was also destroyed by water. But God saved Noah, a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5). Jesus Himself spoke of the flood:

But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (Mt. 24:37–39).

Some people ask, “With all of the signs the Bible talks about, how can Jesus’ return still be like a thief in the night?” Jesus used Noah to illustrate how that will happen: People saw Noah building a huge ship. Yet they rejected his preaching. Then one day Noah entered the ark, it rained, and all flesh perished.

A Different World

When Noah and his family finally emerged from the ark, the world was a different place. God then established a covenant with mankind. First, He instituted human government, giving Noah and his descendants authority to execute capital punishment (Gen. 9:6).

Whereas before the flood people were on their own and were responsible to live before God with clear consciences, after the flood they became responsible to govern one another with a view to righteousness. They were to pass laws and execute lawbreakers.

Second, God promised never to destroy the world again by water.

Third, He gave people permission to eat meat (vv. 3–4). Until then, all were vegetarians.

In addition, a new cosmology emerged: Earth began to have rainstorms and weather patterns. The
polar ice caps formed quickly, larger bodies of water were created. Today the sun shines through more directly. It is also hotter at the equator and colder at the poles, which are angled away from the sun.

Forget the nonsense about the Ice Age. It is a false cosmology postulated, as written in 2 Peter, on a view that claims everything is continuing exactly as it has since the beginning. That simply is not true. God says there was a then world and a now world.

The flood explains why wooly mammoths and other animals were quickly frozen and completely preserved in the ice caps—so much so that the food in their stomachs was still intact. God gave us proof about what happened, but most people seek other explanations because they don’t want God’s cosmology.

Today we have much larger oceans that separate people from one another, making it harder to traverse the earth and interact to share sinfulness.

This new cosmology explains fossils. Some scientists claim fossils were formed over billions of years. The organisms died, they say, and became encrusted in the earth. Yet the only way to form a fossil is by encasing a living organism in some type of sediment and subjecting it to extreme pressure over a short time. Otherwise the organism decomposes—as we all know, because dead things decay after burial. But with hundreds of thousands of pounds of pressure applied quickly, the organism has no time to decay and becomes pressed into the mud around it. The only logical explanation of fossils is the Noahic flood.

Neither was the Grand Canyon carved over hundreds of millions of years. Huge amounts of water running off North America formed it in a matter of days.

Another consequence of the flood is man’s shortened lifespan. God has reduced our lifespan three times:

(1) In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were given life indefinitely; but when they sinned and death entered the world, man’s lifespan was reduced to 1,000 years. Early in Genesis, people lived into their 900s. God wants people to live, populate the earth, and glorify Him. He has never reneged on His command “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 9:1). A long lifespan enabled the population to increase rapidly.

(2) After the flood it dropped again, this time to 120 years (6:3). Compare the lifetimes of the people listed in Genesis 5 with those in Genesis 11. God was tired of people living so long and proliferating their sin.

(3) In Psalm 90 Moses wrote, “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow” (v. 10). Moses lived to 120, but God decreed man’s lifespan to be 70 years or thereabouts.

Today people talk about finding ways to freeze Aunt Suzie until we can extend life. In fact, some have spent great fortunes to have their bodies cryogenically preserved, hoping a scientific breakthrough will bring them back to life. That breakthrough won’t happen. You may as well use an ordinary pine box when you die because no one will come back from the dead until Jesus returns. That’s Scripture, and that’s truth.

A New Stewardship

The flood also ushered in a new stewardship: People now were to glorify God by governing one another toward righteousness. A favorite cry of our culture today is, “You can’t legislate morality.” Of course, you can. God basically said, “I want you to govern the earth toward righteousness, and I give you capital punishment to do it.”

The book of Romans calls government God’s servant. It is there to punish the unrighteous and protect the righteous. Though you cannot legislate a person’s heart, you can and should legislate his behavior. God gave people that responsibility in the post-flood world. Good, bad, or indifferent, government is here because God put it here. As bad as the Roman government was in Jesus’ day, Jesus still said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mk. 12:17).

So the Lord used the flood to destroy an evil, sinful world and change Earth’s topography to separate people in order to slow down the progression of sin. Then He decreased our lifespan and instituted government to regulate behavior and steer people toward righteousness.

The catastrophe of the flood is the third key to understanding history. The next key involves specific revelation, wherein God reveals Himself in more detailed ways, so people can understand exactly who He is.

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

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Question: Why is it important to memorize Scripture?

Answer: “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” —Psalm 119:11
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Whatever Happened to Sunday Dinner?

The Crucial Role of Biblical Preaching

Andrew Telford (1895–1997), an effective expository preacher even in his 90s, wrote, “The achievements of the Christian church are the achievements of the pulpit. With preaching, Christianity either rises or falls.”

The biblical foundation for such a claim is explained in 2 Timothy 3:16—4:4. Because Scripture is God-breathed, it is profitable and fully equips the man or woman of God for every good work.

God inspired the Bible with a purpose: to be the tool for the man of God to equip the flock in Christlike living. Wrote Warren Wiersbe, “The Word is profitable for doctrine—that’s what is right; for reproof—that’s what is not right; for correction—that’s how to get right; and for instruction in righteousness—that’s how to stay right.”

Based on what Scripture is (God-breathed) and what it does (completely equips God’s people), pastors receive one of the most solemn charges in Scripture:

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (4:2–4).

The word for “preach” (Greek, keruxon) is the term for what a town crier would do: “herald, proclaim, announce.” He came from the king’s court with an authoritative proclamation that he was obligated to make known verbally with absolute clarity and accuracy.

Pastor John Piper said this description of a shepherd’s job stresses both understanding and feeling—both seeing and savoring the message:

It is not disinterested or cool or neutral. It is not mere explanation. . . . Preaching is expository exultation. . . . It is uniquely suited to feed both understanding and feeling. . . . God has ordained that the Word of God come in a form that teaches the mind and reaches the heart.

That is why the King of the universe sends a man of God as a preacher and does not send merely a written text or a movie.

Wiersbe defined preaching as “the communication of God’s truth by God’s servant to meet the needs of God’s people” and quoted Phillips Brooks, who described preaching as “the bringing of truth through personality.”

Preaching uniquely channels God’s inspired truth through a man who is passionate about

I am not sure how my mother pulled it off, but she made Sunday dinner a special occasion. I have fond memories of the smells, tastes, and family atmosphere of the midday meal after Sunday morning worship. Often we shared roast beef, potatoes, garden-fresh vegetables, and homemade pie. It was a highlight of the week for our entire family, and the food was so plentiful that Sunday was the one day “lunch” was called “dinner.”

In this day of two-income households, few families even eat together, let alone share a leisurely, home-cooked dinner after attending church as a family. The Sunday meal is more likely pizza ordered by cell phone from the church parking lot or fast food grabbed on the way to the kids’ afternoon soccer games. Adequate family time and balanced nutrition face many challenges in our stress-packed society.

Another, and more significant, Sunday dinner also has fallen on hard times: the feeding of the Word of God to the flock of God by shepherds of God. Many sheep are malnourished and become easy prey for wolves in a post-Christian and increasingly anti-Christian culture.

Today the flock often lives on a diet of junk food, rather than on well-planned, nourishing banquets that include the meat of the Word. Why this sorry state? Here are some of the many reasons:

1. Many people have come to devalue God’s Word as less than inerrant, less than authoritative, and less than relevant.
2. Experimentation with how to “do church” stresses exciting methodologies but places less emphasis on preaching or leaves little time for Bible teaching.
3. Expository preaching has fallen on hard times. It is considered out of date for a postmodern culture that shuns proposition-alism (presenting and defending theological truths through propositions that can be proven true) and absolutism (the view that certain things are right or wrong).
4. The busyness and low commitment level of society militate against believers becoming consistently involved in or seriously focused on the local church.

A pastor cannot control the popular philosophies of ministry, let alone the influence of secular culture. As pastors, we need to make a fresh commitment to “preach and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4) and do whatever it takes to feed Christ’s flock under our care. Unless a pastor makes such a commitment and has a ruthless, systematic plan for studying and preaching, his good intentions will likely fall victim to the intense demands of pastoral life or his own distractions.
God. Wrote Piper, “People are starving for the greatness of God. But most of them would not give this diagnosis of their troubled lives. The majesty of God is an unknown cure. . . . The vision of a great God is the linchpin in the life of the church.” Biblical preaching is meant to provide that vision.

Sunday dinner needs to be restored to prominence in the life of the local church. The apostle Paul pleaded with the Ephesian elders, “Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28, KJV).

Looking across a charcoal fire on the seashore at His disciple Peter, who professed to love Him, Jesus challenged, “Feed my sheep” (Jn. 21:16, KJV). His command reverberates through the corridors of history to our own day, and all shepherds who profess to love Him should do no less.

ENDNOTES
1 Andrew Telford, Pearls for Practical Preaching: A Study Course in Homiletics (Richmond, VA: Cussons, May and Co., 1970), 12.
4 Wiersbe and Wiersbe, 17, 19.
5 Piper, 13–15.

Question: What is a consequence of sin?

Answer: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” —Isaiah 59:2
**The Christian’s Commitment**

To this point, the book of Hebrews has stressed the superiority of Christ, while exhorting believers not to leave the church because of persecution but to go on to Christian maturity.

In chapter 13, the book abruptly shifts to moral and ethical issues of the Christian life and exhorts believers to walk their talk: What you claim to believe about God should be evident in your daily relationships with believers and nonbelievers alike. Warren Wiersbe said it well: “There is no division between doctrine and duty, revelation and responsibility. The two always go together.”

The first six verses of chapter 13 contain moral exhortations concerning living the Christian faith. Since no connectives link to the preceding material, each exhortation stands on its own as an individual command.

**Compassion**

First, believers are to show fellow Christians love: “Let brotherly love continue” (13:1). This command acknowledges that such love existed among these Christians, and it admonished them not to let it grow cold. The Greek word for “brotherly love,” philadelphia, refers to showing affection and fondness for fellow believers by offering them kindness and sympathy and helping to meet their needs. Such love binds the body of Christ together in an unbreakable union of deep, heartfelt affection that is nurtured over time and prompts believers to look after one another.

The word “brother” in the Greek, adelphos, means “from the same womb.” Thus, the basis of their Christian fondness and affection for each other, the source of their Christian fellowship, was the fact that they all came from the same source, having one Father, God.

Christians are commanded to continue showing this type of love. Love is foundational to everything in the family and fellowship of the church (cf. Jn. 13:34–35; 1 Cor. 13; 1 Th. 4:9; 1 Jn. 3:14; Rev. 2:1–7). Love was present, but persecution was causing it to wane (cf. Rev. 2:1–7). The exhortation spoke to those who had grown cold and indifferent to their Christian brethren and were considering leaving the church and returning to Judaism.

When love within the church starts to disappear, the fellowship weakens. This command to love is an ever-needful reminder to the church, especially with the schisms and splits erupting within many churches today.

Second, Scripture says, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Heb. 13:2). The word entertain (Greek, philoxenia) is better translated “love of strangers.” Though it connotes showing love to all people and receiving them with fraternal friendliness, it especially entails loving the brethren by opening one’s heart and home and providing resources to help when needed.

Hospitality was essential in the first century because travelers usually were unfamiliar with areas far from home. Since there were no hotels then, they frequented inns that were limited, expensive, often rowdy, and sometimes abusive and hostile to strangers—not places where Christians would feel comfortable.

Due to persecution, many believers had fled their homes, leaving everything behind to become wanderers until they found a place to resettle. Such “strangers” were in great need of Christian hospitality.

Lodging travelers (especially preachers) was an expected, needful, and common practice. These brethren needed safety, shelter, and food for themselves and their animals, as well as information or help. Bishops and church leaders were expected to show hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; Ti. 1:8). Godly women were praised for lodging strangers (1 Tim. 5:10).

This command is couched in language that suggests some Christians were refusing to welcome strangers. The apostle Peter commanded that hospitality be shown “to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet. 4:9). The apostle John praised Gaius for how he received strangers (3 Jn. 5–8). There is one exception: Christians are explicitly told not to greet or receive into their own home false teachers who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 9–11).

Some who welcomed strangers did not know they were entertaining angels (Heb. 13:2). This text gives no specific example, but the Old Testament provides a number of illustrations where God’s people entertained angels. For example, Abraham (Gen. 18:1–8) and Lot (19:1–3) entertained the angels who came to announce Sodom and Gomorrah’s destruction. Gideon entertained the Angel of the Lord when he was commissioned to deliver Israel from the Midianites (Jud. 6:11–24).
Zarah, Manoah’s husband, entertained the Angel of the Lord when He came to announce she would give birth to Samson (13:3–20). We should never expect to entertain angels, but it may sometimes happen; and we never know how doing so will impact our lives. Jesus revealed that ministering to strangers, especially His Jewish brethren, was the same as ministering to Him (Mt. 25:35–40).

Third, we are to remember to sympathize with suffering saints: “Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also” (Heb. 13:3). This verse refers to believers incarcerated and suffering physically and mentally because they confessed Christ as Savior. Many would be crucified, burned at the stake, killed in the Roman arena, or be impaled on stakes and set on fire to become living torches at Emperor Nero’s garden parties.

Those not imprisoned were told to view themselves as suffering along with their brethren “as if chained with them” because of their bonds through faith in Christ. Though free, they, too, could someday be subject to the same inhumane fate. So Christians should see themselves as being imprisoned with their fellow believers, as if their own bodies were receiving the same treatment (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2; Col. 4:18). This was a sober exhortation to motivate Christians to sympathize with their suffering brethren.

**Chasteness**

Couples are commanded to practice sexual sanctity in marriage: “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Heb. 13:4). A better translation is, “Let marriage by all be respected, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for the sexually immoral and adulterers God will judge.” This is an exhortation to honor marriage as precious and highly esteemed.

Scripture cites two abuses to marriage: (1) false teachers who forbid Christians to marry (1 Tim. 4:3) and (2) fornication and adultery. The word bed (Greek, koite) is used of a married couple and emphasizes keeping the sexual relationship pure. The word undefiled refers to any moral impurity, uncleanness, or defilement. In context, it refers to adultery and sexual immorality; that is, refraining from “fornication” (Greek, pornoi), sexual immorality, or adultery. Fornication dishonors a marriage before it takes place, and adultery defiles and dishonors a marriage after it is consummated. “God will judge” and condemn such actions, even if society accepts and condones them.

**Contentment**

Christians are to be satisfied with their material state in life:

*Let your conduct [manner of life] be without covetousness [i.e., love of money]; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (Heb 13:5–6).*

Covetousness is defined as an inordinate desire or craving for wealth and possessions or the greedy desire to acquire the possessions of another. Scripture is full of illustrations on how greed and covetousness caused men to compromise their commitments to God (Achan, Josh. 7:1, 5, 26; Gehazi, 2 Ki. 5:15–27; Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1–10). Scripture condemns covetousness and the love of money and continually warns Christians to guard against such cravings (cf. Mt. 6:24; 1 Tim. 6:8–10).

Believers today live in a materialistic society and can easily succumb to the belief that wealth and possessions produce inner peace and lasting satisfaction. However, the apostle Paul said Christ-ans should be content with their situations, and God will supply all they need according to His riches in glory through Christ (Phil. 4:12, 19).

Two great encouragements are given to believers, both quotations from the Old Testament. First, “For He Himself [God the Father] has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13:5). This promise is quoted twice in the Old Testament: once to Israel and Joshua when Moses commissioned Joshua to lead the nation into the Land of Promise (Dt. 31:6, 8) and again when King David commissioned his son Solomon to build the Temple (1 Chr. 28:20).

Security is not found in money or material possessions, but rather in God’s personal promise and faithfulness never to fail or forsake believers under any condition. The Lord will never abandon, desert, or leave you alone if you belong to Him.

Second, because of God’s faithfulness, “We may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:6; quoted from the Septuagint translation of Psalm 118:6). The word we links the author with his readers and expresses bold confidence in God meeting their needs.

Believers should have bold confidence because the Lord is with us to help us in every circumstance. We should have no fear because God is our Helper; man can do nothing to us unless God allows it. Knowing all these things, Christians should face life’s challenges with confidence and courage and trust in God’s help.

**Endnotes**


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The Love and Mercy of God (Part 7)

The previous article cited examples of Jesus administering God’s mercy in various ways during His ministry on Earth. He administered mercy to the unsaved and guiltless and healed the blind, demon-possessed, and leprous.

Now we will observe other examples of how He administered God’s mercy and demonstrated that God requires people to be merciful to one another.

God’s Mercy for the Multitudes

Jesus expressed His mercy for people on more than one occasion. As a result of His traveling to many cities and villages, teaching in synagogues, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every kind of illness and disease, great multitudes were drawn to Him (Mt. 9:35). “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (v. 36).

After John the Baptist was beheaded, Jesus traveled to a deserted area alone. But when people heard about it, a large crowd followed Him out of cities (14:10–13). When He saw the “great multitude,” He “was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick” (v. 14).

When evening came, His disciples suggested that, since they were in a deserted area and it was late, He should send the crowd to villages to buy food for themselves (v. 15). Jesus said His disciples should give them food. They asserted that all they had were five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus told the disciples to bring the crowd to Him (vv. 16–18).

When the people came, Jesus told them to sit on the grass:

And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude (vv. 16–18).

When the people came, Jesus told them to sit on the grass:

God’s Mercy for a Widow

Jesus, many of His disciples, and a large crowd of people came near the city gate of Nain when a dead man was being carried out of the city. He was the only son of his widowed mother. She and a large crowd were leaving with her son’s body (Lk. 7:11–12).

When Jesus saw the woman, “He had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep’” (v. 13). Those carrying the body stopped when Jesus came to the open coffin and touched it. Then He said to the corpse, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” The young man sat up and spoke, and Jesus delivered him to his mother (vv. 14–15).

God’s Mercy in Time of Need

Believers are exhorted to come boldly to God’s throne to obtain His mercy in time of need (Heb. 4:16). We
have this access because Jesus, our High Priest, is constantly located at that throne; and He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because, during His life on Earth, He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (vv. 14–15).

God’s Mercy Unto Eternal Life

Jude 21 refers to believers “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Eternal life is obtained for believers, not through their human works, but as a result of Christ’s mercy. The word translated “looking” is present tense in the Greek text and communicates the concept of “expectation.” This fact implies believers should continually be expecting Christ’s mercy to bring them to eternal life, not eternal judgment.

God’s Requirement of Human Mercy

Jesus declared, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt. 5:7).

In response to a man’s question, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus told a story concerning a traveler attacked by thieves who took his clothes, wounded him, and left him for dead. Later a priest and then a Levite passed by the wounded man, but neither helped him (Lk. 10:29–32).

Then a Samaritan saw him and had compassion for him. He bandaged the man’s wounds, set him on his own animal, took him to an inn, and paid for his keep (vv. 33–35).

When Jesus finished the story, He asked, “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” (v. 36).

The man answered, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise” (v. 37).

Jesus declared,

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone (Mt. 23:23).

“Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Lk. 6:36).

The apostle Paul exhorted the Philippian believers, “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded” (Phil. 2:1–2).

To the Colossian Christians he wrote, “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering” (Col. 3:12).

Jesus told the story of a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. One servant owed the king 10,000 talents and was unable to pay. So the king commanded that the servant, his wife, children, and possessions be sold to pay off the debt. The servant fell at the king’s feet, begged for patience, and promised to pay in full. The king was so moved with compassion he mercifully released the servant and forgave his debt.

Then the servant went to find a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller debt. Grabbing him by the throat, he demanded payment. The fellow servant fell at the forgiven servant’s feet, begged for patience, and promised to pay in full. But instead of doing for the fellow servant what the king had done for him, he had the man put in prison until he could pay the debt. He had no merciful compassion for his debtor.

When other servants saw what had been done, they were grieved and told the king everything.

The king was so disturbed he required the forgiven servant to come to him. “You wicked servant!” declared the king, “I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” The king was so angry he turned the man over to torturers until the servant could pay what he owed the king (Mt. 18:23–34).

After telling this story, Jesus delivered the following application: “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” (v. 35).

Jesus’ story is an excellent illustration of the principle in James 2:13: “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” The word translated “triumphs” expresses “comparative superiority.” Thus the expression “mercy triumphs over judgment” communicates the concept that showing mercy to a person is superior to administering judgment on him.

The apostle Paul indicated that people who do “not like to retain God in their knowledge” become “haters of God” and are “unmerciful” toward others (Rom. 1:28, 30–31).

He also said mercy is to be shown “with cheerfulness” (12:8). The word translated “cheerfulness” refers to an outward countenance that “reflects a kind heart” characterized by “generosity.” In other words, acts of mercy are not to be done grudgingly. Thus Paul also wrote, “Let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7).

In line with this, the apostle John wrote,

But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth (1 Jn. 3:17–18).

ENDNOTES


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Mahdi virus steals data

A new computer virus with Persian words in its programming code has infected sensitive computers across the Middle East, including Israel, and gathered information on critical national infrastructure, an Israeli security expert told The Jerusalem Post.

The Trojan horse has been dubbed “Mahdi” after the Shi'ite Iranian messiah-like figure, since the programmers appear to have used a key folder with that name and also included a text file named mahdi.txt in the malicious software.

Aviv Raff, deputy chief technology officer at the Petah Tikva-based Scalelert company, which discovered the new virus, said that, like the earlier Flame virus discovered in Iranian computers, Mahdi can turn on microphones in computers, record in-room conversations, take screenshots, and steal file content.

The five countries with the highest number of infected computers are Afghanistan, Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Iran, then Israel, are the most affected respectively.

In Israel, as in other countries, computers found to be infected by Mahdi belong to engineering students and people working on national infrastructure projects.

Raff said that while the program code was effective, it was not so complex and was created quickly. “Whoever did this needed to have some kind of financial backup,” he said. “It’s a big threat to any state’s security.”

The Jerusalem Post (jpost.com)

Israel at war, Syria dangerous

Israeli President Shimon Peres told CNN recently Iran is in an “open war” with Israel and blamed the Islamic regime and Hezbollah for the bombing in Bulgaria that killed five Israelis in July.

He said Israel has hard intelligence about the attack and believes more attacks are being planned, calling Iran a “center of terror.” “Israel is not threatening Iran. Iran is threatening Israel. It’s not a war; it’s a one-sided attack,” Peres said.

The Kayhan newspaper, which operates directly under the supervision of Iran’s Islamic supreme leader, is calling for Syria to attack Israel. Meanwhile, Syria is believed to have the largest stash of chemical weapons in the world, consisting principally of sarin, mustard gas, and cyanide.

According to Gen. Adnan Silou, the most senior-ranking member to defect from Syrian President Bashar Assad’s regime and join the Free Syrian Army (FSA), “There were two main stores: warehouse 417 in east Damascus, and another, number 419, in Homs area. We had 1,500 soldiers and two or three generals stationed at each base.”

“I know Bashar al-Assad’s character,” he said. “It is very possible that he will use the chemical weapons against his own people.” He said the weapons can be deployed “from tanks, from rockets, and from helicopters.” He is convinced the regime sprayed pesticides from planes on population areas in Rastan, a hub for the FSA close to Homs.

Two of Israel’s top security officials say Assad’s forces still control Syria’s chemical weapons arsenal and have recently intensified security around it.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

China signs deal for railroad

Israel and China have signed historic cooperation agreements to build the Eilat railway and future projects, including the inland canal port north of Eilat, Globes, Israel’s business daily, reported. Minister of Transport Yisrael Katz and China’s Minister of Transport Li Shenglin signed the memorandum of understanding in Beijing.

“The main project,” Globes said, “is construction of a cargo rail line that will link Israel’s Mediterranean ports in Ashdod and Haifa with the Eilat Port. There are also plans to extend the line to Jordan’s Aqaba Port.”

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has declared the Eilat railway a priority, and Israeli sources told Globes the Chinese also consider it important.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

U.S. teens in IDF

A record 350 American teens have enlisted in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) this year, and many of them serve in elite commando units.

The majority, ages 18 to 22, want to enlist in combat and infantry units. The Nefesh B’Nefesh aliyah organization flew 120 of the future IDF soldiers to Israel over the summer as part of the Garin Tzabar program for Diaspora Jews to move to Israel and directly serve in the armed forces.

Deputy head of the Nefesh B’Nefesh organization, Erez Halfon, said, “This is the best answer to Iran’s and Hezbollah’s terror activity: Jewish teens from North America that leave behind the easy life for the Zionist ideal.”

Today more than 20 percent of the IDF’s soldiers are new immigrants, and approximately 70 percent have stayed in Israel after their service.

Arutz-7 (IsraelNationalNews.com)

Israel, S. Sudan sign water pact

In the first official agreement between Israel and South Sudan, Israel Military Industries Ltd. has signed a pact to cooperate on water infrastructure and technology development.

Israel’s Energy and Water Minister Uzi Landau said in a statement aimed at Akec Paul Mayom, water and irrigation minister of South Sudan, “We will continue to do everything possible in order to assist you. You are among friends.”

The agreement outlined plans for cooperation on desalination, irrigation, water transport, and purification, according to the Energy and Water Ministry.

Both peoples, Landau said, have had to stand up for their existence, and Israel has much to pass on to South Sudan, which is struggling.
New Dispute Over Temple Mount

A new dispute has erupted over the Temple Mount after Israel’s Atty. Gen. Yehuda Weinstein declared recently Israeli law must be applied—though with great sensitivity—to the Al-Aqsa Mosque complex there.

Weinstein merely responded to a petition by the Temple Mount Faithful, which claims the Muslim Waqf’s construction to strengthen the Dome of the Rock’s roof is harming the Foundation Stone, a large stone on which the Ark of the Covenant is believed to have rested.

Jerusalem police said the Foundation Stone is protected by scaffolding, a tarp, and oversight by the Israel Antiquities Authority. But the police’s attempt to diffuse the situation apparently did not satisfy Sheikh Yusuf Salameh, a preacher at the mosque.

Salameh denounced Weinstein, declaring “Al-Quds” (the Arabic name for Jerusalem) will remain Islamic until the end of time. He said it is “an Islamic city, as determined by the creator of the world and as indicated in the Qur’an,” reported Arutz-7.

He said the entire 35-acre site—both above and below the ground—including the area within the walls, as well as the buildings, roads, terraces, and domes, belong to the Waqf. He then called on the UN to get involved.

Although Muslims refuse to recognize any history that predates Islam, the fact is the Muslim religion did not exist prior to Muhammad, who was born in 570. Not a single Muslim structure existed on the Temple Mount until after 638. However, Jewish history there dates back thousands of years to Abraham, who almost sacrificed Isaac on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:2), and King David, who purchased the site from Ornan the Jebusite (1 Chr. 21:24–25). Later Judaism’s two Temples stood there.

As a gesture of goodwill after defeating the Arabs in the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel gave administration of the Temple Mount to the Waqf.

“The Waqf has taken advantage of this,” reported Arutz-7, “and removed every sign of ancient Jewish presence at the Jewish holy site. At the entrance, a Waqf sign says, ‘The Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard and everything in it is Islamic property.’”

Israeli police limit the number of Jewish worshippers allowed on the Temple Mount and often close it to Jews in response to Muslim riots that are planned in advance for the specific purpose of forcing Jews out, Arutz-7 said.

Peace of Mind in a World With No Peace

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

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

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

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

To learn more about wills, you can request our free, no-obligation brochure, Making a Will That Works. Simply check the appropriate box on the envelope in this magazine, call Tom Geoghan at our office at 800-257-7843, or e-mail us at development_dept@foi.org.
I have lived in the same neighborhood in Jerusalem for 37 years, and now I am becoming important to my Arab neighbors here. Why? Because I speak Arabic and am willing to spend many hours discussing the land of Israel with them. I tell them it belongs to the Jewish people. They tell me it belongs to Islam and that we Jews have no right to be here and should live far away, as in Europe.

They even come to my home to talk. Of course, in Israel they are free to say what they want. Often they bring their Muslim fundamentalist spiritual leaders who are certain they can use the Bible and Qur’an to make me look foolish.

Recently they came to my home again. This time they brought reinforcements: a big contingent of Muslim leaders. Of course, this was not the first time I have met with such people. They came with great confidence that they could put me down; but I came with the Holy Spirit of God and His Word, which is eternal. As it is written, “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven” (Ps. 119:89).

I have lived in Israel for 65 years and have fought in many wars, including the War of Independence in 1948. I have seen with my own eyes how God has been faithful to us. “In 1948,” I told them, “we were only half a million people, and you came against us with your many armies and millions of soldiers. You were so full of confidence that in a few hours you would cast us into the sea. Most of us were Holocaust survivors. We were weak, with few weapons. Yet who won?”

One of the Muslims replied, “You always tell us God was on your side. We want to see where such a thing is written! You think if you show us fictitious books written by your rabbis, we will say, ‘Amen.’ No! We will not believe it! How long will you continue to believe what your rabbis write? Show us from the Bible, in our own language!”

Now they had come to the important point. “Our Bible,” I said, “was not written by the rabbis of whom you speak. Our Bible was written by the Holy Spirit of God. If we had been without help from heaven, where would we be now? Do you believe what is written in the book of Psalms?”

“Yes,” one replied. They all agreed they believe the Psalms.

So I opened an Arabic Bible to Psalm 124 and gave it to them. “Read,” I said. “If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,” let Israel now say—“If it had not been the LORD
who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us.” . . . Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. . . . Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth (vv. 1–3, 6, 8).

“So who was on our side if not God Himself?” I asked. I also showed them Isaiah 41:14, where it is written, ““Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel! I will help you,” says the LORD and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.”

Then they became greatly interested in seeing where it is written that God gave the land of Israel to the Jewish people. So I had them read Genesis 35:9–13; 48:3–4; Exodus 3:8; and Deuteronomy 7:6–8.

They saw that I showed them from the Bible alone, where it says to whom the land of Israel belongs and why our enemies will never be able to destroy us.

“So now you can see who is on our side,” I said. “Now you can see that God does what He says. He has promised Israel, ‘I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries’” (Ex. 23:22).

Still confident they could prove me wrong, they began searching the Qur’an. But all they could find were verses that curse everyone who is not a Muslim. They could not disprove anything I had shown them from the Bible.

So I asked them, “What do you say to all you have seen with your own eyes? You know I did not write what you read. I showed you from the Bible, written by the Holy Spirit. His Word is eternal. This land belongs to Israel. It is also our duty to bring His salvation to the ends of the earth. It is written in His Word that Israel is His servant [Isa. 49:3].”

They read everything I showed them, and so we finished our conversation.
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