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As I sat in church a few weeks ago, a friend I hadn’t seen in a long time turned around to tell me how cute my grandchildren are. My first thought was, “How would you know what my grandchildren look like? They live 600 miles away. And then it dawned on me: Facebook!

My daughter the social-media maven is always posting photos and comments on a variety of social-media platforms and even runs a small business on them. She belongs to a local Facebook “market” where she buys household items and sells clothes and toys my grandchildren have outgrown.

She also joined a slew of Facebook groups to learn and share information about subjects she’s interested in; and to build up her business, she teaches seminars on Facebook and markets her products.

Welcome to the interconnectivity of social media, where the universe has become the size of a cellphone screen; you can live stream your entire life, if you feel like it; and you can post videos, photos, and comments that people everywhere can read seconds later.

It’s a whole new world (and often a helpful one) for billions of people—literally. But it can also be a dangerous new world. Bullies can now ridicule their victims online in front of hundreds or even thousands of people. “A 2016 report from the Cyberbullying Research Center indicates that 33.8% of students between 12 and 17 were victims of cyberbullying,” enough.org reported.

In less time than it takes to cook a pot roast, you can amass a mob that either invades a mall to rob a store or to hand out tracts and sing the Hallelujah Chorus.

Truth and lies and good and evil travel like lightning through cyberspace. One subject that generates much traffic on both sides of the spectrum is Israel. So in this issue of Israel My Glory, we’re examining social media and Israel. We also look at Israel turning 70 in Steve Herzig’s article, “Happy Birthday, Israel!” which discusses the Jewish nation’s unlikely yet divine rise from the ashes to the thriving country it is today.

Dr. Renald Showers’ outstanding piece, Five Facts You Should Know About Israel, explains why the Jewish nation is unique. We think everyone should read it. It’s also available for purchase. And we coaxed our former executive director, Elwood McQuaid, into writing the editorial. His books Zvi: The Miraculous Story of Triumph Over the Holocaust and Halina: Faith In the Fire, make him particularly suited to comment on the importance of what’s happening in Poland today.

This is an important, relevant issue, and we hope you enjoy it.

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
Nowadays, trying to discern between truth and fake news is a full-time job.

Such is also the case with the distinction between Israel and the church. I believe God’s Word clearly teaches Israel is not the church, and the church is not Israel. But many Christians do not see it that way.

They believe the church has superseded, or replaced, Old Testament Israel. This position is often referred to as Replacement Theology, and it dates back to the second century AD when the church grew exponentially and church leadership transitioned from being predominantly Jewish to Gentile.

Many Gentile church fathers began to resent the Jewish people, primarily because most refused to turn from Judaism to Christianity. After all, the fathers claimed, the AD 70 destruction of the Temple proved God had rejected the Jewish people for rejecting Jesus as their Messiah.

Soon church leaders began preaching that if God punished the Jewish people, the church should do likewise. They argued that God’s statement to Rebekah in Genesis 25:23 that her older son (Esau) would serve her younger (Jacob) meant the older Jewish people would serve the younger church.

Although we don’t see evidence that the apostles or the first- and second-generation church leaders held to Replacement Theology, it eventually became a core church belief. Since they argue that the church replaces Israel, Replacement adherents conclude Israel has no future in God’s redemptive program.

Church theologians began to interpret the Scriptures that refer to Israel’s future as applying to the church, rather than to the Jewish people. Consequently, there is no need for a literal, future Millennial Kingdom on Earth—yet the Bible clearly speaks of such a time.

To solve this dilemma, church fathers began to view the references to a Millennial Kingdom as allegorical; that is, they will be fulfilled spiritually, not literally. They accepted past, fulfilled history as literal but argued that prophecy about the future was not literal.

I have always found it interesting that Replacement adherents believe the church, often called the “new” or “spiritual Israel,” supposedly inherits Israel’s promised blessings; but ethnic Israel keeps all of the covenant curses. In Old Testament days, God’s covenants with Israel contained both blessings and curses. If the church claims it has replaced Israel in the covenants, it must accept both. It cannot pick the good and leave the bad for the real Israel.

Recently some theologians have tried to put a softer spin on Replacement Theology, calling it Fulfillment Theology. The idea is the church is fulfilling everything God promised to accomplish through Israel. In the end, this is the same position as Replacement Theology.

The existence of the State of Israel is problematic for Replacement theologians because it aligns with God’s promises of a divine future and purpose for the Jewish people. Its existence makes no sense if God has replaced Israel with the church.

Anti-Semitism also makes no sense if God is finished with Israel. Why would Satan waste his time trying to annihilate the Jewish people if they are irrelevant? It seems Satan believes God has not rejected His Chosen People.

So is Replacement Theology true or fake? The answer can be found only in God’s Holy Word. It is not for us to choose whether Israel has a future; it is God alone who makes that choice. Either God has rejected Israel, or He has not. Both positions cannot be true.

In Jeremiah 31:35–36, God promises Israel will exist as long as the sun, moon, and stars exist. He also says, “If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done” (v. 37). In other words, He will never cast off the Jewish people.

The church is important in this period of history and in the future. But the church is not Israel, and Israel is not the church. It’s good to remember that distinction because it speaks the truth of God’s Word.
SCRBUNG THE NAZI STAIN

Someone who stands before a faucet many times a day scrubbing up for fear of germs and general contamination suffers from mysophobia. The condition, which can lead to extreme anxiety, disrupts normal contact with others and is described as “hard to live with.”

The government of Poland has officially put a law on the books, duly signed by President Andrzej Duda, which smacks of political mysophobia. It attempts to scrub the Nazi stain off the country by fining or imprisoning for up to three years anyone who accuses Poland of involvement with or responsibility for the atrocities that took place there during the Nazi occupation of World War II.

The crux of the legislators’ angst revolves around references to “Polish death camps,” which is a technical misnomer. It is, of course, well known that the Germans (not the Poles) built six concentration and death camps throughout Poland. The worst were the extermination camps they built solely to kill Jewish people and so-called undesirables after they liquidated the ghettos. Two of the most notorious were Auschwitz-Birkenau, where 1.1 million people were killed, and Treblinka, where people went directly to the gas chambers at the rate of approximately 2,000 every few hours.

Reaction to the new Polish law came swiftly. Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared it baseless. “One cannot change history and the Holocaust cannot be denied,” he said.

Then-U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson expressed dismay. “Enactment of this law adversely affects freedom of speech and academic inquiry.”

Netanyahu was correct: History cannot be changed. Its inviolability is undeniable. To attempt to corrupt it for political advantage is the real crime here, and it’s a dangerous one. There were German “death camps” in Poland; and to impose a prison sentence on anyone, in Poland or abroad, who uses the term is a preposterous overreach. Even more consequential is the threat to incarcerate anyone accusing the Polish state or people of involvement with the Holocaust.

This law exempts people who have long been identified as Nazi collaborators from being exposed or brought to justice. No one knows the number of Polish people who took advantage of the Nazi offer of a bag of sugar or bottle of vodka for turning in a Jew. No one knows how many Polish people turned in their fellow Poles for harboring Jewish people.

But we do know about the courage and compassion of thousands of Polish citizens who risked their lives to provide safe havens for Jewish families whom the Nazis were hunting down for execution. The number honored by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem, as “Righteous Among The Nations” exceeds 6,700—more than that of any other country. Another certainty is these 6,700 Poles are merely a token of those unnamed Polish heroes who quietly risked everything to save Jewish people.

If we are tempted to think that what happens in Poland is of little consequence to those of us sheltered a few thousand miles away, we must think again. The party in power in Poland, the Law and Justice party (PiS), is a right-wing populist movement representative of a growing anti-democratic wave in Europe. Since taking power, PiS “has come under fire for truncating democratic norms and institutions through policies set up to neuter judicial independence, weaken civil liberties, politicize the civil service, and exert control over media,” reports Foreign Affairs magazine.

Germany is experiencing the same political tremors from a resurgence of right-wing nationalist movements. Along with this turn to the right in parts of Europe has come a surge of anti-Semitism. In December, thousands of protesters in Berlin burned Israeli flags to protest U.S. President Donald Trump’s announcement that he plans to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. A long-time Jewish resident exclaimed, “I thought that it could never happen in the middle of Berlin.”

Are we witnessing an ominous turning back of the clock to the 1930s when truth, justice, and precious freedoms were being snatched away? Of greater consequence is the haunting question, Do we care? We had better care, or we may end up confronting our own version of mysophobia, and our freedoms in America may be the next to disappear.

by Elwood McQuaid
In a dramatic escalation of tensions along Israel’s northern border, an Iranian attack-drone recently violated Israeli airspace. Israel shot down the drone and then sent warplanes into Syria to take out the command center that launched the drone. Syria shot down one of those planes, an F-16. Israel retaliated with air strikes on 12 Syrian and Iranian military targets within Syria. The clash marks the first time Iran and Israel have engaged in direct military confrontation.

The Israeli military called the Iranian infiltration a “severe and irregular violation of Israeli sovereignty” and said Iran will be held accountable. “Iran is dragging the region into an adventure in which it doesn’t know how it will end,” the Israeli military said. “We are prepared for a variety of incidents. . . . Whoever is responsible for this incident is the one who will pay the price.”

Israeli Air Force Chief of Staff Brigadier General Tomer Bar described the Israeli counterattack in Syria as “the biggest and most significant attack the Air Force has conducted against Syrian air defenses” since the 1982 Lebanon War. It remains unclear, however, whether Israel has succeeded in boosting its deterrence.

The escalation, which the Iranian proxy Hezbollah said heralded “a new strategic era,” offers a glimpse of what lies ahead as Iran works to establish a permanent military presence in Syria that Israel vows it will never accept.

Iran is estimated to have deployed more than 70,000 Iranian and non-Iranian forces in Syria. It also pays monthly salaries to more than 250,000 militiamen and agents. Iranian-backed militias have taken up positions in Syria less than 10 kilometers (six miles) from the Israeli Golan Heights.

In addition, Iran is attempting to establish missile production facilities in Lebanon through Hezbollah, the Shiite terrorist group believed to be building underground facilities in Lebanon for manufacturing missiles and other weapons. Hezbollah already has an arsenal of at least 100,000 short, medium, and long-range missiles and rockets, including many that can hit central Israel.

Brigadier General Ronen Manelis said Iran’s extensive support for Hezbollah has turned Lebanon into a “branch” of the Islamic Republic of Iran: “Lebanon is becoming, by default and by the failure of the Lebanese authorities, one big missile factory. . . . In every place where instability prevails we discovered Iran’s fingerprint, and in every place, we discover Hezbollah’s involvement. . . . Billions [of dollars] flow from Iran through Beirut to everywhere in the Middle East where there is evil and terror.”

Israel recently conducted a large-scale exercise in preparation for a potential war with Hezbollah. The 11-day drill, the largest in 20 years, involved tens of thousands of soldiers from all branches of the Israeli military. They focused on countering Hezbollah’s increased capabilities and carried out simulations of evacuating civilians close to the border with Lebanon.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly sought to persuade Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has established a significant foothold in Syria and views Tehran as a strategic partner, to prevent Iranian expansionism. According to Middle East analyst Ben Caspit, “The message that Israel has been trying to get through to the Russians for quite a while now . . . [is] that Iran has gone from being an asset operating on behalf of Russian interests into a burden. Israel effectively made quite clear that it would not hesitate to ruin Putin’s party in Syria if Israel’s own interests are harmed.”

In a speech at the annual Munich Security Conference, Netanyahu brandished a piece of the Iranian drone that Israel downed and warned Iran “not to test” Israel’s resolve. “We will act, if necessary, not just against Iran’s proxies that are attacking us, but against Iran itself,” he said.

by Soeren Kern, a senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, a nonpartisan foreign-policy think tank based in New York City
CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION is the worst it has ever been, according to a recent study by Christian persecution watchdog Aid to the Church in Need (ACN). “In terms of the numbers of people involved, the gravity of the crimes committed and their impact, it is clear that the persecution of Christians is today worse than at any time in history. Not only are Christians more persecuted than any other faith group, but ever-increasing numbers are experiencing the very worst forms of persecution,” ACN reported.

Today more than 200 million Christians in 60 countries experience imprisonment, torture, and death for their faith. The nation in which Christians experience the worst treatment is North Korea, which ranked number one for the 17th year in a row on Open Doors’ most recent list of countries where Christians are persecuted.

“Christianity is not only seen as ‘opium of the people’ as is normal for all communist states; it is also seen as deeply Western and despicable. Christians try to hide their faith as far as possible to avoid arrest and being sent to a labor camp,” Open Doors reported. North Korean Christians face horrors, such as being hung on crosses over fire, forced into labor camps, crushed under steamrollers, imprisoned, herded off bridges, and trampled underfoot.

In such Middle Eastern countries as Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Pakistan, Christians face daily torment from Muslims enforcing Islamic Sharia law, which calls for jihad (war) against non-Muslims. Christians in these countries suffer under heavy taxation, imprisonment, torture, and beheading. In Iraq and Syria, ISIS (Islamic State) has almost completely obliterated the area’s Christian population.

Christian persecution is nothing new. Though the number of believers affected is higher than ever, Christians have faced persecution since the birth of the church. Under wicked emperors Nero and Diocletian, early Christians were stoned to death, crucified, burned at the stake, torn apart by wild animals, sawn in two, skinned alive, and more.

Jesus’ words to the persecuted church in Smyrna encouraged many early believers to endure, and they continue to provide hope to persecuted Christians today: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). The crown of life is a special heavenly reward the Lord will give to those who endure persecution (Mt. 5:11–12).

Despite persecution, however, the church continues to grow. Today there are hundreds of thousands of Christian converts from Islam in Iran’s underground churches, up from only 500 in 1979; more than 60 million Protestant believers in Communist China, despite growing government hostility and destruction of churches; and more than 200,000 evangelical Christians in Somalia, which ranks third on Open Doors’ 2018 World Watch List of countries where Christians experience the worst persecution. Such statistics enforce the truth of Jesus’ statement that even the gates of hell will not stop Him from building His church (16:18).

Although we may never understand completely why God allows His people to suffer so horribly, we can trust He loves us; knows our pain intimately since He, too, suffered by enduring the cross; and that He won’t allow us to endure any trial greater than His grace enables us to bear (1 Cor. 10:13).
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For years I had a dream. I wanted my hometown baseball team (the Cleveland Indians) to play the Chicago Cubs in the World Series. I had adopted the Cubs when I lived in Chicago. Both teams excelled at losing. Cleveland’s last World Series championship was in 1948. It was worse for the Cubs, who last won in 1908. The likelihood of the Cubs and Indians winning their leagues at the same time was more than a longshot; it was nearly impossible.

Then, in 2016, the impossible happened. Cleveland and Chicago faced each other in the World Series, and the Cubs ended their 108-year championship drought by beating Cleveland 8 to 7 in the final of seven games, in the 10th inning. My dream had come true.

In 1896, another man had a dream—one far more significant and far less likely to come true than mine. His name was Theodor Herzl, and his dream was the State of Israel.

That year Herzl wrote the pamphlet Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State), which made the case that a Jewish state in the Promised Land, then under the control of the
Ottoman Empire, not only would benefit the Jewish people but also the world. A year later, the Austrian-Jewish journalist organized the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland. Herzl was so sure of his dream that he wrote in his journal, “In Basel I founded the Jewish State. . . In five years, perhaps, and certainly in fifty, everyone will know it.”

Today everyone does know it, as Israel celebrates 70 years of independence. Earlier this year, Culture Minister Miri Regev promised 70 hours of amazing festivities that would bring Israelis together from around the country “in varied and joyous events.”

And why not? No other people group that has been exiled from its land has returned as Israel has. Not only has Israel been reborn and survived against all odds, but it is thriving. Israel is a leader in innovation. Its pioneer work in the medical field alone has produced less invasive treatments for a multitude of conditions, including cancer. The ISRAEL21c.org website is filled with information about Israeli medical advances. The country’s drip-irrigation technology has helped turn deserts into gardens, and its computer technology is used daily around the world by people who have no idea it was invented in Israel—including the facial-recognition feature in the new iPhone X.

American billionaire Warren Buffett, who has invested millions in Israel, declared, “If you’re going to the Middle East to look for oil, you can skip Israel. If you’re looking for brains, look no further.”

THE LONG HAUL

Israel has come a long way in 70 years, but the journey has not been easy. From 1517 to 1917 the land God gave the Jewish people lay in the hands of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled from Constantinople. In 1917, Britain defeated the Ottoman Turks in World War I and gained control of the area, which it ruled under a mandate from the League of Nations and then the United Nations until May 1948.

On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the partitioning of what was then British Palestine into two states: one Arab and one Jewish, with Jerusalem as an international city. Although the League of Nations had tasked Britain with the job of preparing the region as a homeland for the Jewish people, Britain gave 77 percent of the land to the Arabs and created the country of Jordan.

Since international Jewry was still reeling from the Holocaust of World War II in which the Nazis exterminated 6 million helpless, innocent Jews, the Jewish leadership in British Palestine was willing to accept whatever it could get.

The next step would be acquiring international recognition. But what countries would recognize the Jewish state?

Certainly not the United States, at least not if then-Secretary of State George Marshall had his way. Marshall was highly regarded by President Harry Truman, who called him the “greatest man of WWII.” Marshall authored the European Recovery Program, referred to as the Marshall Plan; and his White House team, dubbed the “wise men,” set a standard for foreign policy that lasted decades. When it came to recognizing Israel, Marshall and his wise men said no.

According to the 1991 memoirs of Clark Clifford, Truman’s political advisor and a supporter of recognizing Israel, Marshall gave Truman three reasons he opposed recognition a mere two days before the British were to vacate:

1. He did not like the odds in the likely event war would erupt: 30 million Arabs against 600,000 Jews.
2. He did not like the fact America would be opposing the side that controlled the world’s oil supply.
3. He did not like the idea recognition probably would
further exacerbate an already volatile Middle East.

Clifford’s memoirs say Marshall became so irate during the meeting to discuss recognition that he vowed he would not vote for Truman for reelection.

Despite his deep respect for Marshall, Truman issued the order to recognize Israel. America became the first country to do so—11 minutes after Israel declared its independence. A contributing factor in the president’s decision may have been the fact he was raised on the knee of a mother who read the Scriptures to him. He wanted to emulate King Cyrus of ancient Persia who issued the decree for the Jewish people to return to their land in 539 BC.

As it turned out, Marshall’s assessment was partially correct. Israel’s chances for survival were slim. The country was fiercely outnumbered and out-supplied. In fact, that would be the case in the next seven wars, as well.

Yet Israel survives. It has weathered two intifadas and ongoing terrorism, including regularly defending its citizens from the thousands of rockets launched against them. Groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, al Qaeda, and ISIS work tirelessly to destroy Israel, and many countries are trying to strangle its economy through the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement (BDS), which is spreading around the world.

Israel is unjustifiably hated. A BBC survey measuring public opinion in 22 countries found Israel ranked as one of the world’s most negatively viewed nations—equal with North Korea and slightly ahead of Iran and Pakistan. In the European Union, negative perceptions of Israel exceed 60 percent among countries like Spain, France, Germany, and Britain.

Yet Israel thrives. As the only democracy in the Middle East, Israel stands as a testament to the reality of Theodor Herzl’s impossible dream. Its rule of law protects all its citizens, Jewish and Arab. Whereas in 1948 Israel had virtually no weapons, today it has the most powerful military in the Middle East. In 1948 its total economy was about $3 billion; today it exceeds $300 billion and is listed third on NASDAQ, behind only the United States and Canada.

Israel had a single radio station in 1948 and no television until 1966. Today Israel is a top five high-tech and cyber power. In 1948 the nation had to import all its needed energy. Today it is drawing close to exporting natural gas.

Israelis are world leaders in recycling waste water and producing computerized irrigation, among many other things.

For many Bible-believing Christians, Theodor Herzl’s dream coincided with God’s promises in His Word. On December 6, 2017, MSNBC’s Chris Matthews said evangelicals have “crazy ideas about Israel,” calling the ideas “mythical.” Crazy? Mythical? Hardly. Christians know something Chris Matthews doesn’t: God’s Word and His promises are sure.

In his book Altneuland (Old New Land), Herzl penned his famous statement, “If you will it, it is no dream.” God willed it. And today Israel celebrates 70 years back in its own land. Congratulations! And happy birthday, Israel!

Steve Herzig
is the director of North American Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
It rarely snows in Washington, DC. So when the big North American blizzard known as Snowmageddon dumped more than two feet of snow in the U.S. capital in February 2010, shutting down the federal government for an unprecedented four days, Michael Lipin and Ami Greener decided it was a good time for a snowball fight.

Using Facebook and Twitter, they spread the word. In two days, their Facebook group skyrocketed from 33 members to 5,000; and on February 6, approximately 2,000 people descended on Dupont Circle for a snowball-fight extravaganza.

They now have 8,000 followers, which may seem like a lot. But it’s a drop in the bucket, considering 2 billion people actively use Facebook each month—more than one quarter of the world population. Facebook dramatically eclipses all other social media. Two other extremely popular platforms are Twitter, with 330 million monthly users, and Instagram (owned by Facebook), with 800 million.

Like it or not, social networks are the new titans, and they are here to stay. Some call them the Devil’s playground. Others find them places to share their lives with friends and family. No matter how we look at them, they have become a force to be reckoned with—a powerful and effective form of worldwide, electronic communication.

Big Numbers

It is estimated that more than 78 percent of the U.S. population has at least one social-network profile.

There are days I wish social media did not exist. They can be time-wasters and downright discouraging. But they can also be helpful, comforting, and supportive. For instance, I was able to raise money for our son’s adoption through social media from people I’m connected to all over the world.

Social networking is having coffee with friends who live far away or watching a video with your grandson on the other side of the globe. According to a report from Small Business Trends, around 2.67 billion people use social media—more than eight times the entire U.S. population.

Social media also involve big money. From 2014 to 2016, advertising revenue grew from $16 billion to $31 billion; and in 2016, 60 million businesses had a Facebook presence.

The smartphone’s growing popularity has forced social-media platforms to adapt to them. Approximately 80 percent of all social-media use occurs on cell phones. In fact, some platforms cannot be used on anything but a smartphone.

I use Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter almost every day; and The Friends of Israel is active on all three sites. Each one is different and attracts a different crowd.

Facebook

Facebook was created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his roommates on the Harvard University campus as a way for Harvard students to connect. Eventually, it expanded to embrace everyone, and in 2012 Facebook became a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange.
In less than 15 years, the site grew from 1 million active users to 2 billion. Most people use Facebook to see what others are doing. They share photos and videos (both personal and from sites like YouTube) and update their status to tell their friends what they are thinking, doing, or feeling. Privacy settings enable individuals to choose who can see their updates and activity.

Ten percent more women than men use Facebook, and Generation Xers (ages 36 to 49) use it the most. Statistics show that 80 percent of all GenXers have a Facebook account, as do 70 percent of people ages 20 to 35, 60 percent of people ages 50 to 65, and 45 percent of people 65 and older. Only 26 percent of people 13 to 19 use Facebook.

Interestingly, Facebook announced in December it was creating a kids messenger app that purports to be a safe environment parents can easily oversee. Evidently, Facebook is trying to attract younger people to secure its future viability.

The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry posts daily on Facebook. Our page provides inspirational Scripture, links to articles featured in Israel My Glory, informative videos produced at our headquarters, and a list of our Bible and prophecy events.

Approximately 38,000 people have “liked” or decided to receive FOI’s Facebook content; and many have shared it with friends, introducing them to our ministry.

Instagram

Instagram is a photo- and video-sharing social-media platform that launched in 2010. Eighteen months later, its creators sold it to Facebook for $1 billion.

However, unlike Facebook, users can only place content on Instagram with a mobile device containing a camera, such as a cell phone or iPad. But they can view content using a desktop or laptop. Users follow friends, businesses, and celebrities, much as they do on Facebook. Scrolling through Instagram opens up a worldwide picture album of families, food, and activities.

Instagram is most popular among teenagers and millennials. More than 50 percent of all 18- to 29-year-olds in the United States use this platform.

In 2016 Instagram added Instagram stories, letting people post content that vanishes after 24 hours. Users can watch videos and view photos as many times as they wish in 24 hours, then the material disappears.

If you have children or grandchildren on Instagram and own a smartphone, I would recommend joining Instagram and following them. Studies have shown that many young people on social media, especially Instagram, tend to battle depression.7 Talking with your children and grandchildren about what they post and who they follow can be a wonderful teaching tool.

Twitter

In 2006 a group of young web developers created Twitter, a mobile and desktop-friendly social-media platform. For years each post, status update, or tweet (as most people call them) was limited to 140 characters—including letters, spaces, and punctuation. In November, Twitter expanded the number to 280.

Seventy-nine percent of Twitter’s users live outside the United States. Millennials use Twitter the most. Many people use it to interact with businesses and to keep up with breaking news, which appears almost instantly on their mobile phones.

For example, after a terrorist attack in a Tel Aviv market in 2016 that left four people dead and 16 wounded, CNN put the word terrorists in quotation marks on its Facebook page and refused to acknowledge the attack as terrorism, provoking outrage, according to The Jerusalem Post. It then used Twitter to issue a quick apology.

The Friends of Israel has more than 1,400 followers on Twitter and regularly tweets a link to “The Friends of Israel Today” radio program, where people can listen directly on Twitter. We also tweet when major news breaks in Israel and when we have produced new informational videos.

Social networks can be the Devil’s playground. But they are also wonderful places to connect with others, grow in our faith, teach our children balance, and keep in touch with friends around the globe.

Today snowball-fight aficionados Michael Lipin and Ami Greener keep their followers informed via their Washington DC Snowball Fight Association Facebook page, providing photos and videos and tracking the weather to determine the best time and place to hold what has become a much-anticipated, annual snowball event.

At The Friends of Israel, our media team continues to post informative videos, articles, blogs, and Scripture that will strengthen our social-media community and teach biblical truth about Israel and the Messiah, while fostering solidarity with the Jewish people.⦁

ENDNOTES

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Sarah Fern
is the media content manager for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
USING THE NEW WORLD OF CONNECTIVITY

HOW PEOPLE ARE USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO HELP ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

BY CHRIS KATULKA
Pastor David Lemming logs onto social media almost every day. He stays in touch with his people by encouraging them with a Bible verse, linking last week’s sermon so they can watch it online, and sometimes giving them a glimpse into the sermon he’s preparing for the following Sunday.
“Social media is just another discipleship tool,” he said. “It’s another platform to keep truth before my people.”

Between 700 and 1,000 people attend Pastor Lemming’s church in West Virginia. It’s impossible for him to interact with all of them on Sunday. So several years ago, he embraced social-media platforms like Facebook when he saw the potential they had to strengthen his relationship with his congregants and their relationship with God. “I saw it as an opportunity to redeem the forum,” he told me.

For many pastors, redeeming the forum means using social media to connect with their people to make every day more like Sunday and enhance the church dynamic. They use social networks to help shepherd their flocks, keeping the truth of God’s Word flowing through their congregants’ social-media feeds to combat the noise of this world that clutters their lives during the week.

A whopping 40 percent of the world’s population spends about 50 minutes each day on social media like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. That figure shouldn’t surprise us, considering God has created us to be relational beings.

Even before the creation of the world, the three Persons of the Godhead coexisted in a perfect, harmonious relationship, as they do today. God Himself is relational, and we have been created in His image (Gen. 1:26–27).

We need community. We need to feel accepted, wanted, appreciated, and needed by others. A recent Forbes magazine article that discussed the emotional and physical effects of loneliness (“Loneliness Might Be A Bigger Risk Than Smoking Or Obesity”) states that loneliness can actually affect a person’s health and mortality.

God has fashioned us to desire fellowship with one another. Perhaps that is why people of all ages use social media, much like previous generations used the telephone. Digital interaction, of course, can never replace human interaction. But it has made it possible to stay in touch with people who live both far away and next door, and it has opened up a whole new world of connectivity.

NOW WE CAN DO SOMETHING
Facebook connects unbelievers with the gospel every day. Messages they read online have convinced some to attend church when they normally would have stayed home.

Social media can spread news and raise awareness faster than journalists can write, radio can broadcast, or television can air. In fact, television even reports news that viewers have read on social media earlier in the day.

The Pew Research Center reports that, as of August 2017, 67 percent of Americans get at least some of their news via social networks, while two in 10 actually rely heavily on them for it. As news is posted, readers convert to active participants in raising awareness by commenting, posting, and sharing what they deem important. These shared-values communities end up motivating people to give of their energy, time, and resources.

For example, in the summer of 2014, Muslim extremists from the Islamic State (ISIS) ordered the 3,000 Christians in Mosul, Iraq, to leave or convert to Islam. If they stayed and refused to convert, they would be forced to pay a fine or be killed. ISIS further pressured them by marking their homes and businesses with a red Arabic letter “N” that stands for Nasara or Nazarenes, a derogatory designation for Christians in Arabic.

Word of the persecution in Mosul spread like wildfire when the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama refused to intervene on the Christians’ behalf. Christians around the world took to Facebook, Twitter, and
Social media can spread news and raise awareness faster than journalists can write, radio can broadcast, or television can air.

than $5 million to help resettle those who fled.
Social media can motivate people to do good, helping Christians fulfill Hebrews 13:3: “Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.”

GETTING THE WORD OUT ABOUT ISRAEL
The news media has a dark history when it comes to Israel, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict. Professional journalists once controlled the story from beginning to end, usually skewing the facts to make Israel look like an evil aggressor. Today social networks have disrupted that landscape. Voices in support of Israel that were once neglected or silenced are now being heard loud and clear through pro-Israel, social-media activism.

Hananya Naftali, a young Israeli believer in Jesus, is a case in point. Frustrated with the many lies being told about his country, he started producing short videos communicating the truth. Hananya once defended his country as an Israeli soldier. Today he defends it using a small camera and social media.

Hananya’s audience is so large and influential he was permitted to interview Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. When he asked Netanyahu how he and others who advocate on social media can help the State of Israel, Netanyahu replied, “Just tell the truth.” Several of Hananya’s videos have been viewed a million times.

Conservative talk-radio host Dennis Prager founded PragerU, a social-media educational resource teaching conservative and common-sense ideas through five-minute videos. One of its most popular videos is The Middle East Problem, which teaches viewers that Israel has embraced peace with the Palestinians from the beginning, while the Palestinians don’t want Israel to exist.

This one video has been viewed 6.2 million times. According to statistics found on PragerU’s website, 60 percent of its audience is under 35, and 70 percent have changed their minds about an important issue after watching a video. That means viewers who once viewed Israel unfavorably are open-minded enough to change their opinions.

The mainstream media do not control the story anymore. More and more pro-Israel, social-media activists are combating the lies about Israel with truth you can watch on your smartphones and computers.

Social-media technology is the newest tool in humanity’s long history of connectivity. The apostle John used the technology available to him to connect with churches: He wrote letters that were read aloud. But he knew technology wouldn’t be enough: Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full” (2 Jn. 12). It’s still better to connect face to face. But doing so is not always possible.

God has provided a tool that lets us reach places we would never reach otherwise. Through social media we can raise awareness of those suffering and in need, stand for causes that have eternal value, combat evil with good, share the Good News of the gospel, support those who need encouragement, and give to organizations that teach God’s Word.

Pastor Lemming receives notes and questions from people who have read his social-media posts, and he is able to disciple them from afar. Hananya’s videos from Israel help those of us halfway around the world defend the Jewish state. As with many things, social networks themselves are not inherently good or bad. It’s how we use them that makes the difference.

ENDNOTES
1 Brett Williams, “There are now over 3 billion social media users in the world—about 40 percent of the human population,” mashable.com, August 7, 2017 (goo.gl/kk8B/j) and James B. Stewart, “Facebook Has 50 Minutes of Your Time Each Day. It Wants More,” nytimes.com, May 5, 2016 (goo.gl/4Iku/P).
4 Hananya Naftali, “I Interviewed Prime Minister Netanyahu,” YouTube, June 18, 2017 (goo.gl/XT1Gmg).
5 PragerU.com, homepage.

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THE CYBER WAR AGAINST ISRAEL

Not all armies are mobilized on the ground today. Some of the most dangerous ones are mustered on social media.

BY TY PERRY
Facebook. YouTube. Instagram. Twitter. For most of us, these sites serve as entertaining outlets where we post pictures, share opinions, and watch videos of cats (so I’m told) or of a deer eating a snowman. (That one was viewed several hundred thousand times.) But for Israel, social-media platforms have become the front lines of an incessant, international war against the Jewish state and its supporters.

One of Israel’s most virulent online enemies is Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), a campus organization with ties to both Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. SJP does not hide its pro-terror agenda. In 2013, Yafee Dizzel, then president of SJP at Temple University in Philadelphia, posted on social media a call to free Samer Issawi, an imprisoned terrorist convicted of manufacturing pipe bombs and shooting Israeli civilians during the Second Intifada.1

On August 2, 2017, the New York City SJP posted to Facebook information about a farewell event for convicted terrorist Rasmea Odeh, who was involved in a 1969 Jerusalem supermarket bombing that injured nine Israeli students and killed two. Above the terrorist’s picture, the SJP group wrote, “Rasmea should be honored—not deported!”

Students for Justice in Palestine not only uses social networks to advocate for terrorists but also uses them to promote the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement that is working to cripple and delegitimize Israel through boycotts of and divestments from Israeli businesses and products. BDS also calls for sanctions against the Jewish state.

On September 23, 2014, the eve before Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year), SJP founder Dr. Hatem Bazian, a lecturer at the University of California at Berkeley, posted on Facebook a call for an “International Day of Action” against Israel. His calls included, “No to Academic Complicity with Israeli Occupation,” “No to University Presidents’ Visits to Israel,” and “No Joint Research or Conferences with Israeli Institutions.” Bazian’s targeting of the only Jewish state on Earth is nothing more than repackaged anti-Semitism—which is in vogue today, especially on college campuses.

Another case of academic anti-Zionism involves Ryerson University lecturer Valentina Capurri, who recently came under fire for her anti-Zionist, anti-Semitic remarks on Twitter. Capurri often posts using the term zio, a pejorative term for Zionist. She has called supporters of Israel “zio-trolls,” “zio-murderer[s],” and “zio-fanatic[s].”

Capurri has also used her social-media platforms to promulgate the classic libel that the Jewish people are planning world domination. One article she shared claimed the “Rothschilds and their minions” were planning a “planetary hostile takeover operation.”6 In other words, the Jewish people plan to take over the world.

Sadly, those sitting under the indoctrination of people like Capurri and Bazian regurgitate their venomous lies. On February 6, 2017, for example, 22-year-old Igor Sadikov, a member of the Student Society of McGill University’s legislative council in Montreal, Canada, tweeted, “punch a [Z]ionist today.”

Commenting on Sadikov’s tweet, Jerusalem Post columnist Gil Troy wrote, “Garbage in,
garbage out. In the twisted world of radical campus politics, illiberal liberals forget that ‘liberal’ and ‘broad-minded’ once were synonyms."

Unfortunately, anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist attacks are becoming part of mainstream life, even in America. In 2012, Linda Sarsour, Palestinian-American political activist and organizer of the 2017 Women’s March in Washington, DC, tweeted, “Nothing is creepier than Zionism. Challenge racism, #NormalizeJustice.” Sadly, Glamour magazine named Sarsour as one of its “Women of the Year” award recipients in 2017, despite her advocacy of Muslim Sharia Law and her anti-Semitic views.

In Sarsour’s opinion, Zionism—the belief the Jewish people have a right to live securely and independently in their historic homeland—is a racist ideology.

For Sarsour and her comrades, it doesn’t matter Israelis can’t enter Libya, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and a host of other Muslim countries. It doesn’t matter Israel gives Arab citizens the same rights as Jewish citizens. It doesn’t matter Arabs serve in Israel’s parliament (the Knesset) and on Israel’s Supreme Court, even though Arab nations would never extend such privileges to Jews. None of these things matter, because—well—“Israel is racist.”

Then there are those who hide behind a computer screen, with their avatars and ambiguous screen names protecting them from bearing personal responsibility for their anti-Semitism. A casual scroll through the comments of people who reacted to pro-Israel activist Hananya Naftali’s YouTube video “Why I’m a Zionist and So Should You,” reveals statements such as the following:

➜ “You tellin me that Palestinians have no right to defend themselves, after all the discriminations since 1948[?] Did you really expect to just take the land and live in it? Well of course they will resist[.] [T]hey won’t accept you taking the land and throwing them out of their homes. Again, you are so stupid.”

➜ “The [H]olocaust wasn’t real but it should have been. You [P]alestinian baby killing, land stealing parasite vermin.”

➜ “Also, your people brought Communism and Marxism into Europe and caused Holodomor (Ukrainian Genocide by Bolsheviks) more killings in Russia by Bolsheviks, and killings of Germans in Poland as well, you are not victims. This is why the world dislikes Jews, because you always want to play victim when you were very evil in the past, and still in the present infiltrating European governments and pushing Globalist agendas to destroy what’s left of Europe. Knowledge of history is the power of truth.”

A Bigger Disappointment
The fact the world is largely against Israel—though saddening—is not surprising. More troubling and disappointing is the fact the professing church—including many evangelicals
—hold anti-Israel views and errant beliefs concerning God’s plan for the Jewish people.

The Christ at the Checkpoint conference is a case in point. Held biennially at Bethlehem Bible College in Bethlehem, Israel, its purpose is “to challenge Evangelicals to take responsibility to help resolve the conflicts in Israel/Palestine by engaging with the teaching of Jesus on the Kingdom of God.”

In addition to a faulty understanding of Christ’s teachings on the origins and nature of the coming Kingdom of God, Christ at the Checkpoint teaches blatant anti-Israel ideology as biblical theology.

Then there is Hank Hanegraaff. In a 2016 video posted on the conference’s YouTube channel, Hanegraaff, popularly known as the “Bible Answer Man,” said “the promises that God made to Abraham have been fulfilled” and “God has only one chosen people, one covenant community, beautifully connected by the cross and illustrated by the apostle Paul by a cultivated olive tree.”

Hanegraaff is partially correct. Many of God’s promises to Abraham have, indeed, been fulfilled (cf. Gal. 3:8). But Hanegraaff is wrong in claiming they have all been fulfilled and that the church is the “one chosen people, one covenant community.”

Scripture clearly states God has only temporarily paused His program for Israel during the Church Age (Rom. 11:25). Hanegraaff fails to distinguish between Israel—the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom the biblical covenants belong (9:4)—and the church, the body and bride of Christ, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, which began at Pentecost (Acts 2). Unfortunately, on this issue, the “Bible Answer Man” has the wrong answer.

Christ at the Checkpoint also produced and posted a video on Facebook about Israeli settlements in the West Bank (biblical Judea and Samaria), claiming “Israeli settlements are illegal under international law and “the illegality of the settlements is a consensus position.” These assertions are simply not true.

No consensus exists on the illegality of Israeli settlements. In fact, many scholars believe Israel legally occupies Judea and Samaria, since the international community never recognized Jordan’s seizure and annexation of the area from 1948 to 1967; and the League of Nations’ Palestine Mandate of 1920—which gave Israel the legal right to settle the land—remains in effect.

At the end of the video, the Christ at the Checkpoint representative claims the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (no friend of Israel) “declared that Israeli policies in the West Bank, with the settlements front and center, violate the prohibition of segregation and apartheid.” Appealing to such a one-sided organization reveals that Christ at the Checkpoint’s mission, far from its claimed purpose to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict with Jesus’ teaching, is to demonize and delegitimize the Jewish state and sway evangelical Christians away from supporting Israel—the only position that emerges from a consistent, literal understanding of Scripture.

From Students for Justice in Palestine to university professors to evangelical organizations, those seeking to teach lies about Israel and express blatant animosity toward the Jewish people are increasingly using social media to disseminate their anti-Semitic, anti-Zionistic views. This fact should motivate believers who love Israel and the Jewish people to lovingly and firmly confront such falsehoods and hatred with the truth of history and, especially, of God’s Word.
ECHO CHAMBERS OF HATE

Social-media networks have become echo chambers of anti-Semitic hatred. How did it happen? And why does it continue?

by Jennifer Miles
Every 83 seconds, someone uploads an anti-Semitic post to social media. In 2016 alone, more than 382,000 anti-Semitic posts appeared on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram—many of which were never removed—denying the Holocaust; portraying the Jewish people as genetically inferior; expressing hatred of them; calling for violence against them; and accusing them of such conspiracies as controlling Hollywood, elections, and world affairs.

These figures do not even account for posts demonizing or delegitimizing Israel. More than 2.6 million anti-Semitic Twitter posts, including those aimed at Israel, were viewed an estimated 10 billion times from August 2015 to July 2016, according to a study by the Anti-Defamation League. Posts such as “Hitler For President 2020 Seig Heil #Hail Hitler #KillJews” and “The Jewish [people] are responsible for every bad thing that has ever happened in this world. They all deserve to die. #Holocaust #killjews” have become common themes on social media. Unfortunately, social-media algorithms have created echo chambers for rampant, viciously anti-Semitic content that social-network giants refuse to remove.

MULTIPLYING EVIL
A metaphorical echo chamber is a place where one's ideas and opinions are reinforced, or “echoed,” by people sharing the same opinion, unchallenged by competing viewpoints. The worlds of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube make it easy for anti-Semites to find one another and form closed communities—echo chambers—of like-minded people. They share information and support and strengthen one another’s beliefs.

In a 2016 study of Facebook users, researchers from two Italian institutions and Harvard Law School found that such polarized Facebook users share similar information-consumption patterns and social-network structures. “The more active a polarized user is on a specific content, the
higher the number of friends who display the same behavior. … Users with similar polarization tend to aggregate together,” the report said.4

Thus social media let anti-Semites congregate with one another online to spew their anti-Semitic hatred.

Furthermore, social-media algorithms learn users’ preferences and tailor their news feeds and advertisements accordingly, so people see only information they agree with and like.5 As a result, social networks help to reinforce even the most hardcore anti-Semitic beliefs and make people less likely to receive or consider opposing information or change their minds.

The study also found that these online communities welcome only information that supports their opinions and resist any data that challenges them. When fed false information that conformed to their beliefs, 80 percent of polarized users liked and commented on it. Less than 1.3 percent bothered with posts with which they disagreed.6

In a spring 2017 study at Indiana University’s Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism, students interacting with anti-Semites on Twitter and Facebook found that most of them ignored critical responses. Few felt the need to justify their views, and most of them grew aggressive. It proved impossible to change their opinions.7

WHY ONLINE ANTI-SEMITISM PERSISTS

Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube all have rules against hate speech. So why do they allow such hardcore anti-Semitic hatred on their platforms?

True, it’s impossible to block every objectionable user and remove every anti-Semitic post. In addition, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that flag anti-Semitic content for social media often lack necessary funding and personnel.

But a deeper, disturbing reason lies beneath the surface. Social-media sites manifest an inherent bias against Israel and the Jewish people. They quickly censor pro-Israel content and refuse to remove anti-Israel and anti-Jewish content—all the while promptly removing hate speech aimed at Arabs and other non-Jewish groups.

In 2016, The Times of Israel reported an experiment by the Israeli legal NGO Shurat HaDin that clearly revealed Facebook’s anti-Israel bias. The group posted calls for violence on two existing Facebook pages—“Stop Israelis” and “Stop Palestinians.” On the pro-Palestinian page it posted inflammatory messages like “Revenge against the Jewish enemy that threatens Al Aqsa! Death to all the Jews!” On the pro-Israel page it posted “Revenge against the arab enemy. Death to all the Arabs.”

After several days, Shurat HaDin reported the pages to Facebook. Facebook quickly removed the pro-Israel “Stop Palestinians” page, claiming it contained threats of violence and violated the network’s community standards. The “Stop Israelis” page, however, remained.

“With over 30 Israelis killed in terror attacks since October [2015]—with many of the murderers receiving encouragement and motivation from social media—it is shocking that Facebook would continue to ignore instances of incitement against Israelis, while quickly fulfilling its obligation to remove other instances of incitement when it sees fit to do so, as we showed in this experiment,” said Shurat HaDin Director Nitsana Darshan-Leitner.

Twitter is even worse. According to a study by The World Jewish Congress, 63 percent of all anti-Semitic posts online occur on Twitter,9 and Twitter is more unwilling than Facebook to remove them. “Among social media platforms, Twitter has been the most stubborn one to refuse to cut off its service to terrorists, taking the position that ‘the tweets must flow,’ even if it means assisting in mass murder,” Darshan-Leitner said.10

What makes the social networks’ refusal to remove anti-Semitic content especially troubling is the fact that social media—particularly Facebook and Twitter—are the number-one news sources for young Arab-Palestinians. “The incitement on the social networks is what is causing the wave of terror,” said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.11

More than 7 million people on Facebook and 191,000 on Twitter follow the Hamas-affiliated Shehab News Agency, and more than 175,000 people on Facebook and 20,900 people on Twitter follow the Islamic Jihad-affiliated Quds News Network. These sites glorify Palestinian terrorists, encourage violence against Jewish Israelis, and even provide detailed instructions on “how to stab a Jew.” They reach millions of people instantly and can incite violence faster than ever before.

Lawyers at Shurat HaDin are working on lawsuits against Facebook and Twitter for letting terrorists use their platforms to promote violence. One case involves 20,000 Israeli plaintiffs who blame Facebook for its part in the surge of terror attacks in Israel in October 2015.12

YouTube (owned by Google) is no stranger to anti-Israel bias and ideological discrimination. Though it boasts of being a platform for free speech, YouTube repeatedly censors the pro-Israel, conservative videos uploaded by Prager University (PragerU), a politically conservative think tank founded by best-selling author and radio talk-show host Dennis Prager.

YouTube has restricted at least 50 PragerU videos, including “Why are there still Palestinian Refugees?” “Israel: The World’s Most Moral Army,” and “Israel’s Legal Founding.” When PragerU filed a complaint, YouTube claimed the videos were “not appropriate for a younger audience.”

However, YouTube does nothing to censor the vicious, anti-Semitic videos that pour into the homes of Arab-language speakers of all ages. “From London to Riyadh, Arabic speakers from all over the world are exposed to extreme forms of anti-Semitic hate on YouTube,” reported the World Jewish Congress.13

PragerU’s videos contain no inappropriate content or hate speech. Since Google has failed to act, PragerU has filed a lawsuit against the Internet giant. “YouTube insists that it is
committed to fostering a community where everyone’s voice can be heard,” said PragerU’s attorney Eric George. “Google and YouTube use ‘restricted mode filtering’ not to protect younger or sensitive viewers from ‘inappropriate’ video content, but as a political gag mechanism to silence PragerU.”

Perhaps PragerU and Shurat HaDin’s legal cases will help end the ruthless anti-Semitic hatred allowed in social-media echo chambers. However, if they do not and the situation deteriorates further, social media probably will play a major role in turning the entire world against Israel and the Jewish people.

ENDNOTES

1 “An anti-Semitic post is uploaded to social media every 83 seconds, WJC research finds,” worldjewishcongress.org, March 24, 2017 <goo.gl/GQssIz>.
3 “An anti-Semitic post is uploaded to social media every 83 seconds, WJC research finds.”

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THE BEREA N BOX

What does Christ “coming in His Kingdom” mean? Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Mt. 16:28).

This statement was fulfilled at the Lord’s transfiguration, when He gave three of His disciples a foretaste of His glory and power in advance of His Second Coming:

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. . . . Suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid (17:1–3, 5–6).

Jesus was not predicting He would establish His Kingdom on Earth in the disciples’ lifetime because the Old Testament prophecies about the Kingdom were never fulfilled during Jesus’ lifetime.

Nor was Matthew 16:28 fulfilled when the disciples saw Jesus in His glorified state for 40 days after His resurrection and before His ascension. Jesus did not establish His Kingdom on Earth at that time, and He refused to answer the disciples’ question concerning when the Kingdom would be established (cf. Acts 1:6–7). Some believe Jesus’ prediction was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. But Jesus did not establish a physical Kingdom then either. At Pentecost, He sent the Holy Spirit as promised to comfort and indwell His disciples (Jn. 14:15–18, 23; cf. Acts 1:4–8).

Still others believe Matthew 16:28 predicted Jesus would return to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. However, this view does not address the context: (1) The verse says nothing about Jesus showering judgment on Jerusalem and the Temple, (2) there is no historical record of Jesus’ physical return in AD 70, and (3) Jesus never predicted His Second Coming would occur before the disciples died. Scripture clearly teaches that at Christ’s Second Coming, everyone on Earth will see the Lord return in power and great glory (Mt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7).

The transfiguration was a preview of that glory. The apostle Peter understood this fact (cf. 2 Pet. 1:16–18).

Jesus’ transfiguration reassured His disciples that His upcoming death would not hinder His later reestablishment of God’s Kingdom on Earth (cf. Mt. 16:21). Furthermore, God confirmed what the disciples witnessed when He declared, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (17:5).

BY DAVID M. LEVY
GOD DOES NOT VIEW ANY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD THE WAY HE VIEWS ISRAEL— AND HERE IS WHY.

Five Facts You Should Know About Israel

by Renald E. Showers
why the Jewish people have been scattered throughout the nations of the world more consistently than any other people? Why anti-Semitism persists in rearing its ugly head repeatedly throughout history? Why Nazism specifically targeted the Jewish people for genocide in the Holocaust of World War II? Why the Jews have endured despite all their persecutions? Why they tenaciously hold on to the land they presently occupy in the Middle East? Why the modern State of Israel, despite its small size, is repeatedly the focus of the world’s attention?

The answers to these questions are found in certain basic facts about the nation of Israel. And knowledge of these facts is essential if you want to understand not only these issues, but God’s plan and purpose for history.

**FACT ONE: Israel Has Had a Unique Relationship With God**

Early in Israel’s history, God placed the nation into a relationship with Himself that no other nation was privileged to enjoy. In conjunction with that relationship, Moses made the following statements:

*For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God; the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people who are upon the face of the earth (Dt. 7:6; cf. 10:15; 14:2).*

*And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, . . . And to make thee high above all nations whom he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour, and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken (26:18–19).*

This unique relationship involved a number of special privileges. First, it involved Israel’s adoption as God’s firstborn son (Ex. 4:22–23; Rom. 9:4). Second, Israel was permitted to hear God’s voice at Mount Sinai (Dt. 4:10, 12, 32–33). Third, Israel saw and enjoyed a unique association with the Shekinah Glory of God (Ex. 24:16–17; 40:34–38; Dt. 4:36; 1 Ki. 8:10–11; Rom. 9:4). Fourth, God established covenants with Israel that He never established with any other people (Rom. 9:4). Fifth, God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel alone (Dt. 4:5–6, 8, 13; Ps. 147:19–20; Rom. 9:4). Sixth, only Israel had the worship structures (the Tabernacle and Temple) where God dwelt in a unique sense and the divinely ordained priesthood and sacrificial system of those structures (Ex. 25:8–9; 29:43–46; 1 Ki. 6:11–14, 17; Rom. 9:4; Heb. 9:1–10). Seventh, God made promises to Israel that He made to no other nation (Dt. 1:11; 6:3; 12:20; 15:6; 19:8; 26:18; 28:1–68; Rom. 9:4). Eighth, Israel had unique, intimate access to God (Dt. 4:7). Ninth, God intervened into history in an unparalleled, supernatural way to deliver Israel from its slavery in Egypt (Dt. 4:32, 34). Tenth, God gave Israel permanent ownership of the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:7; 13:14–15; 15:18–21; 17:8). Eleventh, God made Israel’s land and capital city (Jerusalem) holy, or unique, because He dwelt there in a unique sense (Neh. 11:1; Zech. 2:10–12; Rev. 11:2). It is important to note that God established His unique relationship with Israel forever. He intended that relationship to be permanent. King David declared, *And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, Lord, art become their God (2 Sam. 7:23–24).*
FACT TWO:
A Unique Reason Exists for the Special Relationship Between God and Israel

God did not choose Israel to be His special people because they were better than any other people. They were not better. They were descendants of Adam and Eve as were all other people; thus they were born with the same corrupt human nature and tendency to rebel against God as were the Gentiles. Even David, Israel’s great king, recognized that he was shaped in iniquity and conceived in a state of sin (Ps. 51:5). Moses repeatedly warned the people of Israel that they would tend to stray from God and His ways, and he told them, “The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people” (Dt. 7:7).

If God did not choose the people of Israel because they were better than other people, why then did He choose them for a unique relationship? According to Scripture, He did it based on His own sovereign will. On the basis of His sovereign will, God performed two special deeds for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Israel’s ancestors (Rom. 11:28).

First, He made those ancestors the special objects of His love (Dt. 4:37; 10:15); and second, He established a special covenant (the Abrahamic Covenant) with them (7:7–9).

The fact that God chose Israel, not because that nation was better than any other but because of two special deeds He performed based on His own sovereign will, seems to imply that God had a sovereign purpose for the nation.

FACT THREE:
God Has a Unique Purpose for Israel

At least two details indicate that God indeed has a unique purpose for Israel. First, God declared that He created Israel for His glory (Isa. 43:7). The word glory refers to what is impressive, demands recognition, or gives a person influence. Thus God’s declaration indicated that, in a unique sense, He has purposed through Israel to impress the world with Himself, to obtain the world’s recognition, and to gain influence in the lives of His human creatures.

Second, when God established the Abrahamic Covenant, He not only promised to make a great nation (Israel) of Abraham’s physical descendants (Gen. 12:2), but He also vowed that all families of the earth would be blessed through that nation (12:3; 22:18; 28:14). God thereby indicated that He purposed Israel to function as a unique channel of His blessing to the whole world.

How does God, through Israel, bring blessing to the world and glorify Himself before it, thereby fulfilling His unique purpose for that nation? He does so in several ways.

Through His Historic Dealings With Israel. Early in Israel’s national history, Moses promised the Israelites that if they heeded God’s Word and obeyed Him, He would do the following for them:

The Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: The Lord shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath (Dt. 28:1, 7, 13).

Moses also promised that if the Israelites rejected God’s Word and disobeyed Him (v. 15), then the following would happen to them:

The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, . . . Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, . . . the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; . . . And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have no assurance of thy life (vv. 20, 48, 64–66).

The result of God blessing Israel above all other nations if it heeded and obeyed His Word would be as follows: “And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee” (v. 10). The result of God chastening Israel more

These statements indicate that God intended to make Israel an object lesson to the rest of the world.
severely than other nations if it rejected and disobeyed His Word would be this: “And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the Lord shall lead thee. And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder” (vv. 37, 46).

These statements indicate that God intended to make Israel an object lesson to the rest of the world. His dealings with Israel are designed to impress the world with two facts about God: (1) God blesses those who heed and obey His Word; and (2) God will severely judge those who reject and disobey His Word.

**Through a Unique Book.** A second way God brings blessing to the world and glorifies Himself through Israel is through the unique book He has given to the world. The Bible is the only book that has been divinely inspired. In it God has revealed ultimate reality, the purposes of history and life, the origin and destiny of man, how sinful man can be made right with a holy God, and how people are to live. Over the centuries, God’s book has brought untold blessings to great multitudes of people. God gave the Bible to the world almost exclusively through the nation of Israel (4:5–6; 8; Ps. 147:19–20; Rom. 3:2). This fact indicates that God purposed Israel to be the instrument through which He would give the world its most significant book.

**Through the Messiah–Savior.** A third way God has glorified Himself and brought blessing through Israel has been through the Messiah–Savior, Jesus Christ. When Adam, who had been appointed by God to function as His representative to administer His rule over the world, yielded to Satan’s temptation to rebel against God (Gen. 1:26–28; 3:1–6), Satan thereby usurped the rule of the world system away from God (Lk. 4:5–6). This angelic enemy of God has been dominating the world system ever since (Jn. 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Jn. 5:19). In addition, man’s original sin of rebellion against God brought tragic consequences for the earth and himself. For example, man experienced a radical spiritual change (spiritual death) and became subject to God’s eternal judgment (Gen. 2:16–17; Jn. 3:18; Eph. 2:1–3).

Immediately after man’s original sin of rebellion, God announced that the key to His crushing of Satan and his evil rule in the world would be the coming and work of a special Redeemer who would be born of a woman (Gen. 3:15). Through the Old Testament prophets, God revealed two major lines of truth concerning this coming Redeemer (1 Pet. 1:10–12). First, the Redeemer would be the Savior of the world (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 22:1–18; Isa. 52:13—53:12). Second, the Redeemer would crush Satan and his world rule; would reestablish God’s rule over the world system; and would be God’s Messiah–King. His last representative to administer His rule over the entire earth (Gen. 3:15; Ps. 2; Isa. 9:6–7; 11; Dan. 7:13–14; Zech. 14).

Since the Messiah–Savior was to be born of a woman, He obviously would come into the world through the nation the woman belonged to. Through the Old Testament prophets, God revealed that Israel was the nation through which the Messiah–Savior would come (Gen. 49:10; Isa. 9:6–7; 11; Mic. 5:2). The Messiah–Savior, Jesus Christ, did indeed come through Israel (Acts 13:22–23; Rom. 9:4–5). He was born of Mary, a young, righteous Jewess (Lk. 1:26–38; 2:1–7). Through His suffering and death on the cross, He took away the sin of the world and thereby provided salvation for man (Mt. 1:18–21; Jn. 1:29). At His Second Coming, He will crush Satan and his rule (Rom. 16:20; 1 Jn. 3:8; Rev. 19:11—20:3); reestablish God’s rule over the world system; and be God’s Messiah–King, the last Adam to administer God’s rule over the entire earth (Mt. 19:28; 25:31–34; Acts 3:19–21; 1 Cor. 15:23–25, 45; Rev. 20:4–6).

Thus God purposed that Israel would be the channel through which the key figure of all time would come—the Messiah–Savior through whom God fulfills His purpose for history and brings great blessing to the world.

**Through Repentance.** There is a fourth way God will glorify Himself and bring blessing through Israel. The Scriptures indicate that the Messiah will not crush Satan and reestablish God’s rule over the world system until the nation of Israel repents of its rebellion against God. (This repentance involves reconciliation with Jesus Christ as the Messiah–Savior: Dt. 30:1–10; Jer. 31:16–40; Ezek. 36:32–38; Hos. 3:4–5; 5:15—6:3; 14:1–8; Zech. 12:10—13:1, 9; 14; Acts 3:12–21.) For this reason, the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles preached the gospel of the Kingdom (“Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”) to Israel only (Mt. 3:1–2; 4:17; 10:5–7; 15:21–26; Mk. 1:14–15). These facts indicate that God has purposed Israel to be a significant key to the future fulfillment of His purpose for history.

**FACT FOUR:**

**Israel Has a Unique Future**

According to the Scriptures, Israel’s unique future will have a twofold nature. First, it will be characterized by unequalled suffering. Satan has attacked Israel many times throughout history. Because the Redeemer (God’s key to crushing Satan) was to be born through Israel, Satan repeatedly stirred up anti-Semitism against that nation in Old Testament times, hoping to prevent the Redeemer from coming. Because Messiah will not crush Satan and reestablish God’s rule over the world system until Israel repents, Satan has attacked that nation ruthlessly since Christ’s First Coming, trying to destroy it before it can repent. (The Holocaust of World War II is one such example.) Despite how terrible these past assaults have been, Israel’s worst days are still ahead. During the last three and one-half years prior to Christ’s Second Coming, Satan, realizing his time is growing short, will try to annihilate Israel in a manner unparalleled in history (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 12). This period will be so bad that Scripture calls it “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), describes it as an unprecedented time of great tribulation.
will enjoy unique blessing. The nation will be in a right relationship with God and obedient to Him (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–27). Israel will be the spiritual minister of the world, leading the Gentiles in the worship of God (Ex. 19:5–6; Isa. 61:6; Zech. 8:23). A magnificent Temple will be built in Jerusalem as a center of worship (Ezek. 40—46). All nations will come to Jerusalem to worship God, receive instruction, and have judicial matters settled (Isa. 2:1-4; 60:14; Zech. 8:20–23; 14:16–21). The people of Israel will be restored permanently to their homeland, and God will prosper them abundantly (Ezek. 34:11–14, 22–31; 36:24, 28–38; 37:21–28).

**FACT FIVE:**

**Israel Has Been Given Permanent Ownership of a Unique Land**

In light of God’s unique purpose for Israel (to glorify Himself before the world and to bring blessing to the world through Israel), it was essential that God place the nation in a unique location where it would have attention and influence out of proportion to its size. God did exactly that. He gave Israel the land of Canaan, perhaps the most strategic location in the world for attention and influence. Canaan is the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe; and for centuries the major trade and military routes of the ancient world passed through that land. Because of Israel’s location, the major world powers have had to deal with that nation.

Moses clearly taught that God gave Israel the land. It belongs to the Jewish people. He gave it, not because the nation deserved it, but because of His own sovereign purposes (Dt. 9:4–6). Therefore, Israel’s ownership of the land does not depend on the nation’s merit.

Moreover, the fulfillment of Israel’s unique, God-ordained future requires that it own the land of Canaan forever. This is so because that future involves Israel’s permanent restoration to that land. And, in line with this requirement, God, through the Abrahamic Covenant, solemnly guaranteed Israel’s permanent ownership of the land (Gen. 12:7; 13:14–15; 15:18–21; 17:8).

**Editor’s Note:** All Scripture in this article is taken from the King James Version of the Bible. This article is also available in pamphlet form. See the enclosed order form for details.

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WHAT IF ABRAHAM HAD NEVER EXISTED?

“Abraham never existed, but his cousin did!” said one of my professors during a graduate course on Israel’s early history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He believed Abraham and all the biblical patriarchs were fictional characters with colorful relatives in Canaan who produced urban legends about their lives.

Recently, a Reform rabbi conducting a Passover seder on national television stated, “The Bible is not history; it is a book of ideas.” Though some might praise his statement as nontraditional thinking, such false ideas attack the foundational argument for Israel’s right to exist.

If the Bible were false and Abraham never existed, what basis would remain for Israel’s legitimacy as the nation of promise? What basis would remain for the Jewish people’s millennia-old claim to the land of Israel? If there had been no Abraham, there would be no Jewish people and no Abrahamic Covenant—the unconditional promise God made to Abraham and his descendants to give them the land of Israel as an eternal possession (Gen. 15:18–21).

Without the Abrahamic Covenant, Israelis must compete for their land on strictly political and humanitarian grounds. Moreover, Gentile believers have no foundation for their faith (Rom. 11:17–18). Thus the historicity of the Jewish patriarchs is important for Bible-believing Christians, as well as Zionists.

Evidence from the archaeological record of the Middle Bronze Age attests to the historicity of the patriarchs in three major ways:

1. Ancient texts from this period contain proper names with theophoric elements (words for “God,” such as ya or el) that match those of the biblical patriarchs, such as Ya’akov (Jacob) and Rahel (Rachel). Since names tend to be unique to a given period, this evidence helps confirm the historicity of the biblical record.

2. This period saw the development of law codes and social contracts like those the patriarchs followed. Such texts include the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi; Egyptian and Hittite legal texts; and social and religious texts from the Amorite city of Mari, the Assyrian city of Nuzi, and the Syrian kingdom of Ebla.

In the pre-Mosaic biblical narratives, local laws and customs governed the patriarchs’ social behavior. This fact is illustrated in Genesis 49, where Jacob blessed his 12 sons and gave each an equal share of the inheritance—a practice that followed a law code like that of Lipit-Ishtar (2000 BC).

By contrast, Mosaic Law mandated the firstborn son receive a double inheritance (Dt. 21:15–17). A thousand years later, Neo-Babylonian laws decreed fathers give the sons of a first wife a double portion of the inheritance and secondary sons only a single portion. Thus the changing social customs reflected by these laws indicate Abraham observed laws specific to a certain time and place.

3. The migration patterns in the archaeological record match those of the patriarchs as described in the biblical record. The Bible describes the patriarchs’ lifestyle as nomadic, frequently migrating between Canaan and Egypt. The Bani Hasan tomb painting from around 1890 BC provides evidence for such a geographical migration pattern at that time. It shows a parade of 37 Asiatics from southern Canaan, led by their chief, going to trade with the Egyptians—as did Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 12:10), Jacob and his sons (42:5; 43:11; 46:5–7), and Joseph and his family (chaps. 37–50).

Though no archaeological inscriptions connect to a specific patriarch, Israeli archaeologists at Tel Dan in the Golan Heights have uncovered an ancient structure that can be connected to Abraham. Israeli Professor Avraham Biran and his team found the remains of an arched, mud-brick gate of the city of Laish (later called Dan) through which Abraham passed on his way to rescue his nephew Lot (14:14).

Overall, archaeological finds from the Middle Bronze Age—though sparse—demonstrate that the biblical record of the patriarchs is historically accurate. The Bible records details about that period that could have been known and preserved only by those who actually lived and experienced them. Abraham, then, did exist and remains the father of the Jewish people and the source of blessing to all who believe (Gal. 3:9).
THE DAY OF THE LORD

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1–3

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, we saw that Christians (both dead and living) will be raptured to be with Christ when He appears to receive His church. But what about those left behind? The only One who can truly tell us about the future is God, and the only place He has revealed His plan is in the Bible.

Almost a third of the Bible is prophecy. In fact, some entire books are prophetic. Neglect prophecy and you neglect a third of what God has revealed about the future.

What is prophecy? It is simply God’s prewritten program for the human race. The Lord said, “For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand’” (Isa. 46:9–10).

In 1 Thessalonians 5, God tells us, via the apostle Paul’s instructions to the Thessalonian church, what we should know about the Day of the Lord (vv. 1–3) and how we should live prior to the Rapture of the church.

THE APPROACH OF DESTRUCTION

Paul reminded the Thessalonians, “But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you” (v. 1). The word but indicates Paul was shifting from answering their questions about the Rapture to a new subject: the Day of the Lord. The Thessalonians already had Paul’s instruction on “the times and the seasons” because he said there was “no need” that he should write to them.

The word times (Greek, chronos) refers to the successive ticking off of seconds or time each day. Seasons (Greek, kairoi) is an epoch or period, such as an age. Times speaks of chronology, whereas seasons refers to characteristics within the age that were specifically ordained by God. Paul had dealt thoroughly with teaching the church about what happens at the Rapture. Christians did not need to speculate or try to set dates for when these events would take place.

Jesus warned us not to set dates, particularly concerning His Second Coming: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Mt. 24:36). In fact, when the disciples asked the risen Savior, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He told them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:6–7).

People who set dates on prophetic events disobey God’s teaching. God determines times and seasons, and we should never speculate. We are admonished to wait and watch, preparing for the revelation and fulfillment of God’s prophetic plan.

THE ARRIVAL OF DESTRUCTION

Paul reminded the Thessalonian believers what they already knew about the Day of the Lord: “For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (1 Th. 5:2).

The word for reinforces the reason he did not need to restate his teaching: “You yourselves know perfectly” means they had full knowledge because they had been diligently taught about all things pertaining to the Day of the Lord. Apparently, whenever Paul planted a church, he and his associates taught prophecy and, specifically, prophecy about the Day of the Lord—something seldom done in the ministry today.

Paul, of course, never provided a date for the Day of the Lord but simply said it “comes as a thief in the night,” using the present tense. That is, the Day of the Lord will come without warning. When a thief comes, he does so quickly, suddenly, and stealthily. He gives no warning. His coming brings tragedy or misfortune to his victim. The Rapture is never associated with a thief’s coming; but unbelievers who experience Christ’s Second Coming, when He returns to judge unrepentant humanity, will be shocked at the event.

What is meant by “the Day of the Lord?”

First, it is when God intervenes directly in human affairs and unleashes His vengeance and fury on a world of wicked nations and individuals during seven years of unparalleled tribulation. His judgment will cause global, cataclysmic destruction on an unprecedented scale. Unlike the Rapture, which is a signless event, the Day of the Lord has many
biblical signs.

Scripture clearly reveals that this terrible time does not involve the wrath of men or the wrath of Satan. It is when God pours out His wrath on Earth (Rev. 14:7, 10, 19; 15:7; 16:1, 19). Matthew 24:4–31 presents many of the events that will take place during the Day of the Lord, which will be a time unlike any other in its character, intensity, and severity. Many Old and New Testament Scriptures speak of the severity of the Day of the Lord.

Second, this day also includes a time of blessing, both for Israel and the church, during Christ’s Millennial reign on Earth.

THE AGONY OF DESTRUCTION
The world will be completely unprepared for the Day of the Lord: “When they say, ‘Peace and safety!’ then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape” (1 Th. 5:3).

No specific group is identified by the word they. We know the word brethren refers to saved people in verse 4: “But you, brethren, are not in darkness.” The contrast probably means they refers to everyone who does not know Jesus Christ as Savior.

Jesus indicated as much when He said, “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. 24:38–39).

Those people had no clue God’s judgment was about to fall on the world and destroy every living thing not in the ark of safety. They lived as they always had, with no concern for God or His agenda.

Likewise, people living during the Day of the Lord will be deceived by a false sense of security. They continually will reassure each other by saying, “Peace and safety!” Yet they will have received ample warnings of impending judgment. Many will have deliberately dulled their minds and hearts to God’s message because they had no love of the truth. So God will give them a strong delusion, and they will believe the Antichrist’s lie (cf. 2 Th. 2:10–12).

What a surprise! While they talk about peace and safety, “Then [at that very moment] sudden destruction comes upon them” (1 Th. 5:3). The word sudden (Greek, aiphn-idios) means this judgment catches them completely unaware.

Destruction (Greek, olethros) does not mean annihilation. It means “ruin” and speaks of a person’s well-being or purpose ending abruptly. The word comes connotes destruction hovering over the people of that day; and when it strikes, people are surprised and are overwhelmed as it falls.

The judgments that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah in Lot’s day and the universal flood that destroyed all the people of Noah’s day, apart from Noah and his family, clearly illustrate the type of calamities that will afflict people living during the Day of the Lord.

Also, in Lot’s and Noah’s days, people laughed at the idea of preparing for God’s judgment. So, too, those living at the beginning of the Tribulation will be unprepared and overcome by God’s wrath. The word them refers to these people, who continually reject warnings to repent and mock the opportunity to receive Christ. They will be lost.

Judgment will come “as labor pains upon a pregnant woman” (v. 3). “Labor pains” connote suddenness and inescapable anguish.

Paul concluded the verse with this sobering comment: “And they shall not escape” (v. 3). The word escape means “flee” and emphasizes the futility of trying to avoid judgment. The word not reinforces the thought, meaning, “no, never, under no condition are they able to escape.” The unbelievers are doomed when the Day of the Lord arrives.

The apostle Peter revealed the Day of the Lord’s culmination: “The heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). Ultimately, the Lord will dissolve the physical elements of Earth, along with all its sinful deeds. In its place will appear the “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (v. 13).

This message also applies to today’s generation because most people are unprepared for the judgment that awaits them. Are you?

by David M. Levy, director of Education and Ministry Relations and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
UNEXPECTED GRACE

Harry was one of those unforgettable characters. We were climbing a mountain during a thunderstorm when he said he needed to tell me something. No sooner had he spoken than a loud clap of thunder pierced the air, accompanied by the blinding flash of a nearby lightning strike.

We immediately hit the ground. But some of our neophyte adventurers unwisely headed for cover under the trees. Harry’s booming voice instantaneously directed them away from danger.

That was Harry. He knew the hazards of the trail, but he was even more adept at recognizing the hazards of this sin-saturated world and was passionate about guiding people away from the Devil, who “walks about like a roaring lion” ready to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8).

After we resumed our climb and got above the clouds, Harry quietly told me where he carried his medication and emergency contact information. It turned out Harry had heart problems. Shocked, I asked the obvious. “Why did you come?”

He looked at the rain-soaked young men dragging up the trail behind us, nodded his head toward them, and replied, “For them.”

A MAN LIKE THAT

The apostle Paul knew a man like that. His name was Philemon. Over and over in his prayers, he thanked God for Philemon’s faith in the Lord and his love of fellow Christians. His positive influence on others was widely known.

Although Philemon’s reputation and legacy endure forever in the short book of the Bible bearing his name, we know relatively little about him. But the 25 verses disclose a few facts.

First, Philemon and Paul had a personal relationship. Paul called him a “beloved friend,” “fellow laborer,” “brother,” and “partner” (vv. 1, 7, 17). Second, although we don’t know how or where this friendship began, we know it changed Philemon’s life forever. Perhaps the men met when Philemon visited Ephesus, the business capital of Asia Minor, while Paul was ministering there.

The opening verses imply Apphia was Philemon’s wife. Archippus, a church leader, may have been his son. Philemon probably was wealthy because the church at Colossae met in his home, which had guest rooms; and at least one indentured slave served the family.

When Paul told Philemon he “refreshed” the hearts of his brothers and sisters in Christ, he implied his friend dispensed more than kindness and hospitality (v. 7). Philemon’s deep love for the Lord and other Christians motivated him, and his life and practical actions touched others deeply. He provided “great joy and consolation” to both the apostle and the saints (v. 7).

REFRESHERS OF THE HEART

Paul often used the word refresh to speak of personal interactions that nurtured the inner spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 16:18; 2 Cor. 7:13; 2 Tim. 1:16; Phil. 7, 20). The Greek word for “refresh,” anapauo, is translated various ways in the New Testament. In Mark 6:31 it refers to bodily rest. But it most commonly defines the concept of personal refreshing, as used by Paul in his letters.

Practically speaking, the word refresh points to the role Christians play in strengthening and energizing one another:

1. Refreshing may involve encouraging someone. A heart refresher like Philemon encourages others to seek, follow, and rest in the Lord in the midst of troubles and the sometimes-weary journey of life. Encouragement revitalizes people and lets them know they are not alone in the storm on the mountain they are climbing.
2. Refreshing may involve helping someone increase in skill or knowledge. There is always something fresh to learn in the Bible (Col. 1:9–12), and heart refreshers take every opportunity to point people to God’s Word, teaching them how to grow and increase in their knowledge of Him whose mercies are new every morning. Refreshers nudge God’s children to walk closer to the Savior to keep their relationship with Him from growing lukewarm.

3. Refreshing may involve jogging someone’s memory with a simple reminder. Sometimes we need to be reminded of who we are in Christ and what we possess in Him. When we forget these things, we can lose our hope. Refreshers come alongside us with the promises of God that provide the map for our journey on Earth.

4. Refreshing can fill up a half-empty cup. King David said, "In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). David’s heart was full and his cup running over. Some believers are skilled at refreshing half-empty hearts. The touch of a hand, a simple prayer, or even a well-timed smile can supply consolation for past heartaches or fortification for future obstacles.

PAUL’S PERSPECTIVE

Paul understood what it meant to be refreshed in spirit by his fellow Christians. They had strengthened him with their care, affection, obedience, spiritual growth, and personal commitment. It was deeply personal and impactful.

Even though the Corinthian church was plagued with controversy, the delegation it sent to Paul refreshed his spirit (1 Cor. 16:18). The visit showed the church’s concern and love and invigorated Paul’s heart, refreshing his spiritual strength to continue the ministry despite great difficulties.

On another occasion, fellow believer Onesiphorus went out of his way to find the apostle when he was imprisoned in Rome. Though helping Paul may have jeopardized Onesiphorus’s freedom and possibly his life, he unashamedly pursued his association with the apostle, whose heart he touched and whose spirit he refreshed. Onesiphorus takes his place alongside Philemon on Paul’s eternal list of Christian heart-refreshers (2 Tim. 1:16).

REFRESHING RELATIONSHIPS

Jesus used the word refresh when He called the weary and heavy laden to Himself (Mt. 11:28–29). He invited them to a “rest” that would touch their souls and unite them to the Son of God.

Even today, the yoke He offers promises an end to our labor to attain personal righteousness. Free from fear or care, we can enter the blessed rest and peace of salvation. Our sin-debt has been paid. Our souls can be refreshed and free from the burden of working to earn God’s favor.

Rest is a refreshing gift of grace, and grace is the key that unlocks our ability to refresh someone’s heart. Ephesians 4 outlines the divine pathway for Christian maturity through relationships that build up others in truth, love, and grace (vv. 15–16, 29).

Unhealthy relationships suffer from a lack of grace that makes people earn the privilege of being loved based on unspoken criteria. True refreshers love others as Christ first loved them, with no conditions—a rarity in today’s world. Such unconditional love is unexpected, encouraging, motivating, and restful. It is refreshing on a profoundly deep level.

We all need to be refreshed with grace wrapped in love. Even the apostle Paul welcomed both named and unnamed refreshers who ministered to him in good times and bad—refreshers like Harry.

A few years after our mountain adventure, Harry’s journey on this earth ended. He was relatively young when, without warning, his heart stopped while he was working at a children’s camp. At his memorial service, a long line of men waited to show how Harry had energized and encouraged their walks with the Lord as fathers, sons, and even grandfathers. Men laughed, wept, and praised God for Harry’s life, his love for Christ, and his love for them. Harry left a lasting legacy.

Philemon’s legacy is recorded for us in the Bible. He loved God, he loved the saints, and he refreshed their hearts. We all need to ask ourselves if we will leave a legacy of refreshing others and if our words give grace to those who hear.

Rest is a refreshing gift of grace, and grace is the key that unlocks our ability to refresh someone’s heart.

Clarence Johnson

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A wave of anti-Semitism has been washing over Poland after the country banned all speech that suggests Polish complicity in the Holocaust, and the nation's Jewish community is worried, The Algemeiner has reported.

At a conference in Munich, Germany, recently, the Polish prime minister claimed the Jews themselves were partly to blame for the Holocaust, where more than 6 million Jewish people perished. More than 3 million were murdered in German death camps in Poland alone during World War II.

To make matters worse, Polish legislators have now introduced a new bill calling for the criminalization of kosher meat slaughter. If the law passes, anyone slaughtering animals in accordance with traditional Jewish practice will face a prison sentence of up to four years.

The proposed bill also bans exporting kosher meat, which will impact Israel since some of Israel’s kosher meat comes from Poland. The bill was introduced a mere week after Poland criminalized speech indicating Polish complicity in Holocaust crimes.

Anti-Semitic activity is also increasing in the form of “threatening phone calls and emails to the Jewish community, urination in front of a historic synagogue, and racist graffiti,” The Algemeiner reported.

The newspaper also said many more Jewish people are inquiring about moving to Israel. “Hanna, who asked that her last name be concealed, expressed her new understanding of her mother’s fear of antisemitism. ‘I always thought she was crazy,’ she said. ‘Now I see that maybe my mom isn’t crazy. Maybe this is the circle of life and history is repeating.’”

From news reports

In response to public pressure, Amazon, Walmart, and Target all have pulled Cards Against Humanity’s new anti-Semitic extension pack, “Jew Pack,” which mocks Anne Frank and the Holocaust and includes jokes about torturing Jewish people. “Torturing Jews until they say they’re not Jews anymore” and “Can’t you see? The Jews are behind everything—the banks, the media, even ______!” are just two of the many anti-Semitic cards included in the pack.

Cards Against Humanity, a popular card game known for its off-color humor and offensive nature, began receiving criticism after a Twitter user posted a picture of the new extension pack he had found in Target, commenting “Available at your local @Target. Despicable beyond.”

Target’s guest service Twitter account responded, “We are aware of this extended card pack of the game Cards Against Humanity and are in the process of removing it from our stores. We apologize for any disappointment as it is never our intention to offend our guests with the products we carry. Thank you!” Target promptly removed the item from its stores, with Walmart soon following. Amazon reluctantly removed the product after further backlash.

Cards Against Humanity, however, continues to sell the anti-Semitic card pack on its website. Its description of the product reads, “Fun fact: 100% of the Cards Against Humanity writers are Jewish. Can you believe it? A Jewish comedy writer! Anything is possible in 2017. 30 cards from our big brains full of facts and sadness.”

From news reports
DANON SLAMS NEW UNHRC REPORT AS ‘DISGRACEFUL’

 Israeli Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon slammed the recent United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) decision to publish a controversial, anti-Israel interim report hours before the UN marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day at its headquarters in New York.

 Both Israel and the United States have claimed the document is a “blacklist” that will encourage boycotts of the Jewish state. It accuses but does not name 206 companies of doing business within the disputed territories.

 Danon said, “We will continue to act with our allies and use all the means at our disposal to stop the publication of this disgraceful blacklist.”

From news reports

EGYPT TO BUY $15 BILLION IN NATURAL GAS FROM ISRAEL

In a deal that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called “historic,” the partners in Israel’s Tamar and Leviathan natural gas fields have signed two accords with Egypt’s Dolphinus Holdings Ltd. for $7.5 billion each for the sale of natural gas over 10 years. The partners include Delek Drilling LP and a unit of Noble Energy Inc., according to the Times of Israel.

“The deals with Egypt are the first for the fields, and come on the heels of two other accords the partners signed with neighboring countries: Natural gas from Tamar has been exported since the start of 2017 to a Jordanian chemicals manufacturing plant on the Dead Sea, while the Leviathan partners have also signed a deal for the sale of gas to the Jordanian electric company NEPCO,” the Times reported.

Netanyahu said the landmark deal will provide billions of dollars for health, education, and welfare. Noble Energy is an American company headquartered in Houston, Texas.

From news reports

ISRAEL REOPENS EMBASSY IN JORDAN

Israel has recently begun implementing the reopening of its embassy in Amman, Jordan. The embassy has been closed since July 2017, when an Israeli security guard fatally shot two Jordanians in self-defense. The guard, Ziv Moyal, shot a Jordanian who attacked him with a screwdriver, while a second Jordanian was killed by a stray bullet.

Israel apologized for the incident and offered financial compensation to the families of those killed as part of a compromise to restart full diplomatic relations with Jordan. Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty in 1994 and maintain significant security and economic cooperation, despite Jordan’s large Palestinian population that largely disdains Israel.

JNS.org

NEW ISRAELI DRUG MIGHT TREAT INFLAMMATORY DISEASES

 Israeli research scientist Prof. David Naor may have discovered a new drug to treat incurable inflammatory diseases and neurodegenerative maladies such as Crohn’s disease, ulcerative colitis, rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis. “It will take several million dollars to start clinical trials of Naor’s novel, IP-protected peptide—a synthetic protein snippet that significantly reverses the damaging effects of inflammatory diseases and Alzheimer’s disease in mouse models and restores the learning capacity of Alzheimer’s mice,” Israel21c.org reported.

Naor has spent the last 10 years researching and developing the drug at the Lautenberg Center for General and Tumor Immunology at Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical School in Jerusalem. “I believe that within two years we would know for certain if our academic product can translate into a therapeutic drug to combat inflammatory and neurodegenerative diseases,” Naor said. “Once you control the inflammation, you can control the disease.”

From news reports

TERROR GROUP ESTABLISHES NEW BASE IN GAZA

The al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, a coalition of Palestinian terror groups in the West Bank, has announced its plans to establish its first-ever military base, called the Yasser Arafat Military Base, in the Gaza Strip. The brigade plans to use the base to train Arab-Palestinian fighters to make war against Israel and against Palestinians who don’t agree with its cause.

“This [the base] is in order to complete the project of expelling the occupation [Israel] from all the lands of occupied Palestine. Today we pledge to our people [that we will] continue [the struggle] until the complete liberation of our holy places,” the terror group posted on Facebook.

Although the group claims links to Fatah, it doesn’t accept Fatah’s current leader, Mahmoud Abbas, and instead supports Abbas’s political rival Mohammad Dahlan.

From news reports

JEWISH GROUPS CONTINUE HURRICANE RELIEF EFFORTS

A new coalition of Jewish organizations has issued a call to Jewish communal groups throughout the United States to continue sending volunteers to help relieve the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Harvey in Houston, Texas. Israeli aid workers were among the first to lend humanitarian support in the hurricane’s aftermath last August, and in January the Israeli government finalized a $1 million donation to Houston’s Jewish community.

The Leadership Coalition for Jewish Service, which includes BBYO (B’nai B’rith Youth Organization), Hillel International, and other Jewish groups, has partnered with the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston on #ActNowHouston to recruit thousands of mobilized volunteers from national and local agencies to continue the relief work. “We know young Jews across the country are passionate about taking into their own hands the challenge of meeting important needs in our society,” CEO of BBYO Matt Grossman said.

Hurricane Harvey resulted in the flooding of nearly 200,000 homes, including more than 2,000 Jewish households; and thousands of residents remain in temporary housing. The volunteers will help to remove damaged household items, sanitize homes, package food and deliver essentials to the elderly, and help families get back on their feet through the rebuilding process.

JNS.org
It is written in Isaiah 49:6, “I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” People are coming to Israel from the ends of the earth, especially now in this time of high tension.

One day while I was in line at the post office, several Roman Catholic UN soldiers stood behind me. When I noticed their clothes bore the Swedish flag, I began to speak with them in their language.

They were so surprised. “Where are you from?” one asked.

“I am from Jerusalem,” I told them.

“Then how did you come to speak Swedish?”

“The Lord has blessed me with the ability to speak 10 languages,” I explained. “Since I have never studied them, my grammar is not good. But it is good enough to hold nice conversations.”

“Are you a Jew?” one asked.

“I am,” I said, “but I believe in Christ as my Savior.”

“You are starting to become interesting to us,” one replied. “We want to speak with you more. Where should we start?” I told them, “Here we are in the land where the Word of the Lord went out and spread throughout the world. As it is written in Isaiah 2:3, ‘For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.’ So you see, it is our obligation as the Chosen People of Israel to bring His salvation to everyone from Jerusalem.”

“So what do you want to do—make us good Jews?” one asked.

“No, you have made a big mistake. I want you to believe in the Lord according to the Bible,” I said. Then I opened my small pocket Bible and read 1 Corinthians 12:12–14:

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so...
also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks [Gentiles] . . . —and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

This view seemed strange to them. They wondered how a Jewish person could believe in Christ. I told them to take a good look at the New Testament. “Who were all of Jesus’ apostles? Were they Christians? No! All of them were Jewish. Who took the Good News about Christ to people? Peter, Paul, and the other Jewish apostles.

“Everyone can come freely before the Lord, regardless of nationality. It is faith that matters. King David said, ‘To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in You’” (Ps. 25:1–2).

“How did you as a Jewish person come to believe in Christ?” one asked. Many people here in Jerusalem ask me the same question.

“I became a believer in the Lord after I read the Holy Bible,” I said. “I believe what is written in it, unlike you, who read the catechism and many other books written by people. It is clearly written in the Bible, ‘You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you’ [Dt. 6:14]. What are you doing when you go to St. Peter’s Square in Rome? Before whom do you bow down? Not before God, but before a man. Yet you are so confident. You should not be confident. You are making a big mistake. Many people are like you, even from among our people here.”

Then I explained why the Lord had to come to Earth and be crucified. I read John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Then I recited Isaiah 2:3 again.

“This has been the most interesting conversation we have had in Israel,” one said. Everyone agreed. We must pray for them. We have done our duty; now the Lord must do the rest through His Holy Spirit.

——The Friends of Israel Archives

Zvi Kalisher (1928–2014) was a Holocaust survivor who was known for his unswerving faithfulness to the Lord and his bold witness in Jerusalem. He was with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry for more than 55 years.

CORRECTION

In the chart “When Do People Receive Their Resurrected Bodies?” on page 23 in our January/February issue, Daniel 12:2 was accidentally placed in the incorrect column. It should appear under “Old Testament Saints,” rather than “Tribulation Saints.” We regret the error.
Jesus’ disciples were as anxious as we are today to know the timing of His return as King. “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’”

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

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