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In January of this year, in an unusual event, Jerusalem virtually shut down as eight inches of white flakes blanketed the streets. Schools were closed, and children were out making snowballs. It was also a great opportunity for wonderful photographs, as you see here in this lovely photo of snow-covered Mount Zion by Israeli photographer Hanan Isachar. (issachar.photography.photoshelter.com)

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Every time I visit Israel, I see the modern miracle of the Jewish people. No other nation has ever been exiled and returned to its homeland to become a nation again.

First the Jewish people returned with Moses after 400 years in Egypt. Then God raised up Ezra, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah to lead them back following the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. The third rebirth came in May 1948, when the State of Israel was born following 1,900 years of dispersion.

The historically unique re-establishment of Israel should come as no surprise to us because God promised that unless the sun, moon, and stars disappear, the Jewish people will remain a nation (Jer. 31:35–36).

To traverse Israel today and see how this tiny country has developed into a modern society in merely 65 years is an amazing experience. Israel has a booming economy and is thriving when most countries are struggling. Certainly, it is far from perfect. Yet when I visit, I sense God’s hand at work, rebuilding the Jewish nation and protecting it from its enemies. Over the years, we have seen Israel’s remarkable victories against Goliath-sized odds. Israeli ingenuity leads the world in technology and science, and its humanitarian assistance is second to none.

Unfortunately, not everyone sees things this way. A friend told me recently he was disturbed to hear a dispensationalist say, “The modern nation of Israel has no prophetic significance.” This statement highlights the challenge we face in teaching future prophecy. How does one know when prophecy is being fulfilled? Dispensationalists don’t question Israel’s right to exist, but some doubt whether the modern nation is the one through which God will fulfill His prophecies. In other words, is it possible the Jewish nation could be exiled again?

In Isaiah 44:7, God says He is the One who appoints “the things that are coming and shall come.” Unfilled prophecy is part of God’s plan, and we are His witnesses (v. 8).

Modern Israel is a testimony to the faithfulness of God’s prophetic declaration, and we are witnesses to it. It is God who promised to bring the Jewish people home from the four corners of the earth where He scattered them (Isa. 11:11–12; Ezek. 20:33–38; 22:17–22; 36:22–24; Zeph. 2:1–2). These passages indicate they will return in unbelief.

Although Jewish people have lived in the land since the days of Joshua, the late 19th and the 20th centuries brought an influx from the Diaspora—from the four corners of the earth. When I travel around Israel, I hear Israelis speaking Russian, French, English, and the Ethiopian languages, for example, in addition to Hebrew.

Many future prophecies presume Israel’s presence in the land in unbelief. In Daniel 9, God says the “people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city [Jerusalem] and the sanctuary [Temple]” (v. 26) and will “confirm a covenant” with Israel for seven years (v. 27). This will be a future covenant the Antichrist will make with Israel, promising peace and protection. Such a covenant cannot occur unless the Jewish people exist as a nation in their land.

Likewise, Ezekiel 38–39 presumes Israel is living safely in “unwalled villages” in the land (38:11) when Gog and Magog attack.

The evidence supports the understanding that modern Israel is a prophetic reality and that prophecy is unfolding before our eyes. I’m reminded of Jesus’ rebuke of the religious leaders of His day: “You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times” (Mt. 16:3). He spoke of His presence being the fulfillment of God’s Messianic prophecy, but the religious leaders would not accept it.

I believe God is doing His masterwork right before our eyes through the rebirth and building of the modern nation of Israel. It is a prelude to the time when He will turn His attention back to His Chosen People in order to bring honor and glory to His name (Ezek. 36:16–38).

Modern Israel is prophetically significant; and when we see the Lord’s hand at work, fulfilling what He prophesied, we should discern it and testify to His mighty works.

James A. Showers is executive director of The Friends of Israel.
I t was merely a handshake. But it was no ordinary handshake. It was one of a kind, seen by millions around the world. It was proclaimed as the event that sealed the deal that would alter the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. Many thought it would finally bring peace.

Twenty years ago on the White House lawn in Washington, DC, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo accords. Since then, nothing has been the same.

The goal of the Oslo accords was to “put an end to decades of confrontation and conflict . . . and achieve a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace.” The formula was simple: Israel gave up land for the promise of peace and recognition as a legitimate state. So sure was the world it would work that both men received the Nobel Peace prize.

Did it work? The question is a sad joke. In the 20 years since Oslo, three American presidents, seven American secretaries of state, five Israeli prime ministers, and two Fatah (PLO) leaders have come and gone. Yet the two parties can’t even agree on a place to hold talks.

The fact is the peace initiative began to crumble almost before the ink had dried. On May 10, 1994, a mere eight months after the historic handshake, Arafat told worshipers in Arabic at a mosque in Johannesburg, South Africa, that the agreement was a ruse.

For Arafat, Oslo was a means to acquire land without war. It bought him time to grow stronger and bilk billions of dollars from the United States and Europe. His plan was to stall and wait, all the while screaming to his people in Arabic his actual goal: “And no, the permanent state of Israel—no! It is the permanent state of Palestine.”

In 2000, Arafat turned down Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s offer of an Arab state consisting of 97 percent of the West Bank and 100 percent of the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital. He then instituted the Second Intifada, killing more than 1,000 Israelis.

He churned out materials of hatred toward Israel, indoctrinating his people through radio, television, school curricula, and preschool songs and poems. This tactic insured a full supply of suicide bombers for generations to come.

Upon his death in 2004, his successor, Mahmoud Abbas, continued the ruse. In 2008, Abbas rejected Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s unprecedented offer to forego sovereignty over the Temple Mount and withdraw from 93 percent of the West Bank. In 2009 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu publicly accepted a two-state solution to establish a Palestinian-Arab state if the Palestinian leadership recognized Israel as a Jewish state.

Yet Palestinian chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat, said Israel would “have to wait 1,000 years before he [Netanyahu] finds one Palestinian who will go along with him.” The Arabs “would never recognize Israel’s right to exist.”

Conditions facing Israel today are so difficult that even if the Palestinians were a legitimate partner for peace, there still would not be peace.

To the north is Lebanon’s terrorist group, Hezbollah, possessing 70,000 rockets capable of striking the entire State of Israel. To the west is Gaza, where Hamas holds 10,000 rockets. Since 2005 terrorists have launched 8,000 rockets into Israel.

To the south, global-jihad terrorists are building a cache of rockets, some of which have already been launched into southern Israel. To the north and east, the regime of Bashar Assad in Syria has killed more than 100,000 people; countless others have been killed with chemical weapons.

And then there is Iran, which is funding Syria and Hezbollah while building nuclear capability.

Oslo was dead on arrival. The two-state solution advocated by Israel and the United States seems like no solution. Israeli leadership needs the wisdom of Solomon, along with the support of those of us who love the God who loves the Jewish people.

by Steve Herzig, director of North American Ministries for The Friends of Israel
It Is About Religion

The day held a unique significance for Egyptian President Anwar Sadat as he sat in a reviewing stand accompanied by a host of political, military, and visiting international dignitaries. It was October 6, 1981, and the parade he was watching was celebrating Egypt’s successful crossing of the Suez Canal exactly eight years earlier, starting the 1973 Yom Kippur War against Israel.

As military vehicles passed before Sadat, a truck stopped. Armed men dressed in army uniforms leaped from the vehicle and opened fire. In a matter of minutes, the 62-year-old president of Egypt was dead.

His assassins were disgruntled members of the Muslim Brotherhood, operating under the name “Islamic Jihad.” The driving force behind the murder was essentially twofold: (1) Sadat had followed a secular agenda that suppressed the radical religious elements craving an Islamist-dominated regime; and (2) Sadat had dared to shake hands with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Sadat had visited Jerusalem, negotiated a peace agreement, and in 1979 signed the Egypt-Israel peace treaty that ended Egypt’s perpetual state of war with Israel.

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The Brotherhood’s credo proclaims, “Allah is our objective; the Prophet is our leader; the Quran is our law; Jihad is our way; dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.”

Western political apologists and journalists can say what they will and remain in a bewildering state of denial, but all of their attempts to deny the Brotherhood’s declared intentions will not alter the facts. The catastrophic events following the “Arab Spring” that brought the Brotherhood to power in Egypt revealed the organization’s underbelly and should dispel any illusions that the Muslim Brotherhood is a lover of freedom and democracy.

Its ultimate goal is to establish a global Islamic caliphate that will install a Sharia-based autocracy. One stage is to destabilize any movement toward secular democracy in the Middle East.

In such a scenario, everyone but the imperialist jihadists lose—which includes truly moderate Muslims who have no desire to involve themselves in the overthrow of nations that offer freedom and a stable future for them and their children.

We are under a constant barrage of protests these days that we are not at war with radical Islam. But that does not alter the reality that radical Islamists are at war with us. The conflict is not an insurmountable that can be settled by conventional negotiations between parties sharing a sense of goodwill. It is about religious radicalism that tolerates no basis for agreement with those considered infidels: Its bottom line is subjugation or annihilation.

Israel is a capital case in point. While the West wages a campaign for a frustratingly illusive two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the unwavering position of the Muslim-Palestinian leadership is for one state only. At the root of that commitment is the Muslim belief that the land belongs exclusively to Allah and his devotees.

The 1967 conference of Arab leaders in Khartoum, Sudan, laid down a marker for future dealings with Israel: No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel. That platform of denial has endured for 46 years, buttressed today by radical Islam’s oft-stated potential option of using nuclear weapons to annihilate the Jewish state.

Coupled with Islam’s program to purge the Middle East of Israel and Jewish people is the genocidal campaign to rid the region of Christians, Christianity, and Christian institutions. Violent atrocities in Egypt and elsewhere across segments of the Muslim world confirm Islam’s stated intentions.

These are not eruptions of isolated, secular, nationalistic fervor or misguided, petty, tyrannical ambition. They represent an obsession bent on a triumphal mission in the name of religion.

It is imperative that people wake up. For the most part, the West, including a large segment of the evangelical Christian community, is either ill-informed or unconcerned. This is not a one-front battle. Foreign soil is not the only battleground. A campaign is being waged in America to eliminate the Christian presence. At the moment the tactics are ridicule, hate speech, and legally imposed bigotry. But tomorrow the tactics may be more like those used against Anwar Sadat.
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Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

David Horowitz Freedom Center, elaborated on raymondibrahim.com:

Muslim men . . . savagely attack them, strip their clothing, and try to gang rape them. Throughout, the women scream in terror while the men shout “Allahu Akbar,” . . . as well as chant the shehada, or Islamic profession of faith: la ilaha illa Allah (“There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah”). None of the many passersby intervene in any way.

Ibrahim then asked the poignant question, “What are we to make of Muslims screaming Islam’s two most distinct slogans . . . while raping Christian women?”

There is incident after incident of radical Muslims burning down Christian homes and businesses; attacking Christians on streets; and raping, murdering, and torturing Christians—all to shouts of “Allahu Akbar.”

Perhaps one of the worst occurred on April 18, 2007, when five young Muslim radicals stormed a Christian publishing office in southeastern Turkey, took the three Christians there hostage, bound them to chairs, methodically dismembered them alive, cut their throats, and then attempted to flee. It was an “Allahu Akbar” moment.

According to author Andrew G. Bostom in his article in pjmedia.com, “Educating John McCain on the Meaning of ‘Allahu-Akbar,’” the phrase “has been employed by Muslims as a jihadist war cry dating from its declaration by Islam’s prophet Muhammad.”

Writer Andrew C. McCarthy in nationalreview.com called McCain’s viewpoint “willful blindness” and “suicidally delusional.”

Wrote Islam expert Robert Spencer in jihadwatch.org:

The significance of this [phrase] is enormous, as it is essentially a proclamation of superiority and supremacism. Allah is greater—than any of the gods of the infidels, and Islam is superior to all other religions. Al-Islam.org states this obliquely: “Allahu akbar implies that God [Alkah] is superior to all tangible and intangible, temporal and celestial beings.” This may seem to be an innocuous theological statement until one recalls that Islam has always had a political aspect, and Islamic jihadists always shout “Allahu akbar” when attacking infidels. It is a declaration of the superiority of their god and their way of life over those of their victims. 9/11 hijacker Mohamed Atta also stated that it was meant to make the infidels afraid. He wrote instructions to jihadists that were found in his baggage: “Shout, ‘Allahu Akbar,’ because this strikes fear in the hearts of the non-believers.”

When was the last time you heard about Christians doing such things, much less shouting “Thank God” afterward?

In retrospect, it may be good that McCain said what he did. At least we know where he stands: in a place of dangerous ignorance.

U.S. Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) probably should have read Proverbs 17:28 before telling the world via Fox News in September that Muslims who shout “Allahu Akbar!” are no different from Christians who say, “Thank God.” Yes, he actually said that.

According to Proverbs 17:28, “Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace.” In the current vernacular, that means, “If you don’t know what you’re talking about, keep your mouth shut; and you might not look so ridiculous.” Or, as some have more eloquently paraphrased it, “It’s better to keep your mouth closed and be thought a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.”

We have run this column in every issue of Israel My Glory since July/August 2002; and in all that time, hardly a month has gone by where our research has failed to turn up vicious persecution of Christians accompanied by shouts of “Allahu Akbar,” meaning “Allah is greater.”

David Horowitz Freedom Center, elaborated on raymondibrahim.com:

There are videos of jihadist Muslims attacking churches in Muslim-run countries, shouting “Allahu Akbar.” There is a video of radical Muslims raping two Christian women in April on a crowded street in Egypt in broad daylight, shouting “Allahu Akbar.” Raymond Ibrahim, with the The candlelight vigil held at Fort Hood, Texas, in 2009 after Maj. Nidal Hasan killed 13 people there and wounded nearly three dozen others while shouting “Allahu Akbar” (LM Otero/AP Photo). Left: Nidal Hasan (Bell County Sheriff’s Department/AP Photo). Below: John McCain (J. Scott Applewhite/AP Photo).
It was a rather strange occurrence. The church was filled to capacity night after night to listen to Dr. J. Sidlow Baxter, one of the last great pulpit orators to have settled in the United States from the United Kingdom. His message was deep in biblical truth, expert in application, and laced with a humor that touched the lives of his listeners.

Who Weeps for the Children?

A Pakistani woman mourns as she holds the lifeless body of her granddaughter, a victim of a suicide attack on a church in Pakistan in September that was one of the worst assaults on the country's Christian minority in years (Mohammad Sajjad/AP Photo).
said on such a scale. C. Herbert Woolston’s song “Jesus Loves the Little Children” is much more than a folksy ditty; it is a proclamation of God’s unfathomable love and a testimony to the divine sanctity of life.

Therefore, when Jesus warned of the dire consequences of offending children who believe in Him (v. 6), He was not making an idle threat.

A Contrary Spirit
While the millennia have eloquently testified that there is every reason to follow the Messiah, who alone can provide peace and abundant life, many people rebel. Within two years of the incarnation in Bethlehem, opposition arose.

Herod the Great, who ruled the area, was paranoid and approaching madness in fear of losing his position as king. Determined not to let the Child “born King of the Jews” (2:2) grow up to replace him, Herod sent executioners to the village to slaughter all males two years old and younger. Matthew’s Gospel relates the tragic event to a prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15, which foretold the slaughter of these innocent children:

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

“A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more” (Mt. 2:17–18).

Inexplicably, the unnatural impulse to abuse the innocent and destroy the very segment of society Jesus drew to Himself has not diminished with the passing of time.

A chilling example of this sad truth took place in July in Nigeria. A notorious, radical Islamist sect attacked a school and set it on fire. As the youngsters ran from the building to escape the flames, the terrorists shot them dead. A total of 42 teachers and pupils were killed.

In Nigeria alone, the same jihadist terrorist organization, the Boko Haram, has reportedly murdered some 3,000 Christians, including scores of children—all in the name of its god. The Boko Haram is waging a war against Christian believers who wish to live in peace and rear their children to reflect the image of Christ.

The War on Children

Children were especially vulnerable during the dark years of the Holocaust (1938–1945). Ironically, these years were etched into a period of great advancement in virtually all social, scientific, medical, academic, and industrial arenas beyond anything previously known. Yet among the 60 million casualties of Adolf Hitler’s war to create a thousand-year Reich were one and a half million defenseless children. Well over one million of them were Jewish.

The Holocaust Encyclopedia of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum describes the systematic extermination of these children:

The fate of Jewish and non-Jewish children can be categorized in the following ways: 1) children killed when they arrived in killing centers; 2) children killed immediately after birth or in institutions; 3) children born in ghettos and camps who survived because prisoners hid them; 4) children, usually over age 12, who were used as laborers and as subjects of medical experiments; and 5) children killed during reprisal operations or so-called anti-partisan operations.

In the ghettos, Jewish children died from starvation and exposure as well as lack of adequate clothing and shelter. The German authorities were indifferent to this mass death because they considered most of the younger ghetto children to be unproductive and hence “useless eaters.” Because
children were generally too young to be deployed at forced labor, German authorities generally selected them, along with the elderly, ill, and disabled, for the first deportations to killing centers, or as the first victims led to mass graves to be shot.1

Although most post-Holocaust Westerners shrink in disbelief that atrocities of such enormity could still exist, the brutality continues. Some actions are even enshrined in U.S. law and tolerated by the morally anesthetized. According to statistics from the Guttmacher Institute, formerly a special research affiliate of Planned Parenthood, 1,212,400 unborn children were aborted in America in 2008 alone.2 From 1973, when the United States legalized abortion, through 2008, there were 54,559,615 reported abortions.3

On another front, the United States gave $239 million in 2011 to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which is twisting the minds of Arab children to hate Israel and the West and molding them to die as martyrs fighting the Jews. A video of UNRWA’s efforts at summer camp is available online.4

**Why the Silence?**

Among the great unaddressed questions is why, with all of the evidence and statistics at hand, is there no perceptible outrage?

Granted, America is deeply divided on the abortion issue. But what about indoctrinating Arab children to hate? What about the carnage of Christians and their children?

The attack on the Christians in Nigeria was not a one-time event. Savage violence against Christians is committed day in and day out in many countries. Yet no one seems to care.

U.S. officials and mainstream journalists are palpably silent. Because almost all of these atrocities are perpetrated by radical Islamic jihadists, many claim silence is preferable to exciting Muslim sensitivities. That may be the case. However, crimes against humanity are being committed here. Law-abiding Muslims are not the issue. They, of all people, should be speaking out against elements corrupting their way of life.

Christians in America and the West must also be called to account. Although there are notable exceptions, very little is being said about Christian persecution from speakers’ podiums and church pulpits.

**Who Weeps for the Children?**

Jesus stood outside His beloved city of Jerusalem and wept over the calamities He knew would befall it as a result of decisions being made there. Often, in light of the apparent degradation and disintegration of our culture and the rampant rise in godlessness, we express justifiable concern over our nation’s future. What will life be like for our children and grandchildren?

Powerful forces are making every effort to remove God’s hand from this land of ours. We must now ask ourselves if we have entered an “Ichabod” era where “the glory has departed.” In other words, has God already taken His hand off us? If so, we have legitimate cause to weep for our children, as Rachel of old.

However, there is more to the story. The first chapter was written in a stable in Bethlehem when God entered time in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. For more than 2,000 years, Jesus has fulfilled the promise of bringing life, peace, love, and joy to all who believe in Him.

Whatever changes there may be in the political, social, and moral landscape, Jesus still makes good on His promises. And someday, the second chapter will be written when Jesus will fulfill another promise: “I will come again” (Jn. 14:3). To that we say a hearty “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

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**END NOTES**

John 10:34, 37–38
I was watching a television talk show one evening that centered on a discussion between the host, a well-known skeptic, and a spokesman for the “evangelical” left. Political and social issues swirled throughout the conversation, and before long the religious fellow began back-tracking. He implied it is appropriate to ignore the politically incorrect parts of the Bible and focus instead on the more palatable principles that Jesus expressed in the Gospels.

Ignoring the fact that Jesus said some profoundly strong, even culturally incendiary things (see Matthew 23:27), the discussion illuminated an important fact: There are always forces that seek to erode the truth of God’s Word, discount its value, and twist its meaning. Yet we must be particularly alert when the compass of our entire culture seems to point toward a false north. Though it thinks itself tolerant, our society is exhibiting a growing intolerance toward historic Christianity.

Religious “progressives,” for example, assert that the true benchmark for biblical ethics is not the Bible, but only what Jesus uttered: His “red letter” sayings. This position creates the comfortable illusion that Jesus expressed palatable principles that the apostle Paul’s Greek text in Romans 1:27 reveals the biblical position: “Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” Paul used the same Greek word Mark used, which recorded Jesus saying, “God ‘made them male and female’” (Mark 10:6, emphasis added).

Second, the “red letter” approach avoids the uncomfortable fact that Jesus often referred to the Old Testament, never distanced Himself from its claims, and affirmed the authority of His apostles whose writings populate the New Testament. Jesus even said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Mt. 5:17).

A more frontal attack on the Bible comes from those who would rewrite it. Earlier this year, Tubi Publishing announced the release of its Golden Rule Bible, an outrageous new translation that, according to press releases, claims to reveal that Paul never condemned homosexuality. Keying into a supposed retranslation of the word homosexual, it is an obviously well-timed publication, considering the explosive debate in America over gay marriage.

As that announcement arrived, an article on theatlantic.com quoted President Barack Obama’s support for gay marriage as an example of “the golden rule.”

Yet any intellectually honest look at the apostle Paul’s Greek text in Romans 1:27 reveals the biblical position: “Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” Paul used the same Greek word Mark used, which recorded Jesus saying, “God ‘made them male and female’” (Mark 10:6, emphasis added).

Biblical fidelity and the belief in the authenticity and plenary inspiration of Scripture is becoming increasingly important for the church, particularly as America continues its downward slide from being irritable impatient to overly condemning those who take the Bible seriously. As things progress, the church will be tempted to avoid clearly teaching the Word.

Recently two influential court rulings have attacked the church. In the first case, a U.S. Supreme Court majority struck down the essential portion of the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which had defined marriage as being between one man and one woman. The court took an astonishing swipe at congressmen who had supported DOMA, specifically attacking those who voted for it because of its consistency with “Judeo-Christian morality.”

Justice Antonin Scalia, in his dissenting opinion, gave Americans fair warning that the decision unfortunately means followers of Judeo-Christian principles—those values located in the Bible—are now considered enemies of the human race.

Then the New Mexico Supreme Court ruled that a Christian photographer had no religious right to refuse to photograph same-sex ceremonies. As one of the justices noted, Christians must “compromise” in order to get along in our “multicultural, pluralistic society”; and that, the justice added, “is the price of citizenship” in America.

The question now before us is whether the church will boldly embrace an honest understanding of all of God’s Word, obey it, and faithfully communicate it to a confused, wandering world. But then, as Genesis 3 suggests, that has always been the real question after all.

Craig L. Parshall is senior vice president and general counsel for the National Religious Broadcasters and director of the John Milton Project for Free Speech. Friend him on Facebook at Craig Parshall, Author.
They are a minority. They always have been a minority. Moses, their first national leader, described them as “the least of all peoples” (Dt. 7:7); and that assessment remains true today, more than 3,500 years later. Among the world’s population of approximately 7 billion, they are a mere handful: 14 million to 15 million, a scant one-fifth of one percent.

In fact, they are so few in number that some cities have greater populations than there are Jewish people in the entire world.

Yet Jewish people have made an enormous impact on the world because of a legacy that began more than 4,000 years ago when God...
Unsolicited Love

Abraham’s relationship with God was not a modification or evolution of anything else around him. It was distinct from everything. When Abram (later called Abraham) obeyed God’s call, he not only walked away from a sophisticated, cosmopolitan city, but he also turned his back on the prevailing worldview and entered into a unique relationship with the one true God.

The apostle James in the New Testament recognized this relationship: “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God” (Jas. 2:23). No one else in Scripture can claim this title, and God’s enduring relationship with Israel is founded on His unsolicited friendship with Abraham.

On the basis of that friendship, God confirmed an unconditional, unilateral covenant with Abraham that would be reiterated to Abraham’s son Isaac and his grandson Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. Confirmation of the covenant followed the cultural protocol of the day. At God’s request, Abraham brought a three-year-old heifer, a she-goat, and a ram, along with a turtledove and a young pigeon. As prescribed, he cut the offerings into halves and laid them in a line with each half opposite the other (Gen. 15:9–10). The ceremony, referred to as “cutting a covenant,” required the responsible parties to walk the line between the halves of the animals spread before them.

After causing a deep sleep to fall on Abraham, God alone walked the line. The Bible says God “appeared as a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces” (v. 17). God thereby established Himself as the sole party responsible for keeping the covenant with Abraham and subsequently with the nation of Israel.

Unconditional Love

The Bible gives an honest account of Israel’s history—failures and all. Yet despite the nation’s waywardness, the Bible teaches that God’s love has remained constant. The prophetic book of Hosea, a chronicle of Israel’s infidelity, concludes with God’s plea, “O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me. O Israel, return to the Lord your God” (13:9; 14:1). God pledges, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely” (v. 4).

Both the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities were a consequence of national disobedience. Yet even while the Israelites were exiled in
Babylon, God reassured them through the earlier ministry of the prophet Isaiah, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10).

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God told them, “yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you” (Jer. 31:3).

The message of God’s love for Israel runs consistently throughout the Bible. He has vowed to fulfill His covenant to Abraham in the last days and initiate a new covenant: “I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (v. 34).

God cares so much about unsaved people—Jewish and Gentile—that He sent Jesus to die for them, that they might be forgiven and have everlasting life. People who think like this pastor tend to forget about God’s redeeming love. The fact that God is in the redemption business is the main message of Christianity. And it is why Israel’s past has not negated its future.

When I told him the modern State of Israel clearly demonstrates God is not finished with Israel, he snapped, “They’re all atheists over there! How could God care about a country like that?”

God’s love will continue to characterize His dealings with Israel in the future. Looking forward to that reality in the Messianic Kingdom, the prophet Zephaniah declared, “Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your judgments. . . . You shall see disaster no more. The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:14–15, 17).

A few years ago I had an awkward conversation with a pastor. The tension was palpable as I shared about the ministry of The Friends of Israel in the shade of his front porch. Finally, when he stopped examining his shoelaces, he squinted, looked me in the eye, and asked, “Why are you wasting your time on Jews? God gave up on them a long time ago.”

When I told him the modern State of Israel clearly demonstrates God is not finished with Israel, he snapped, “They’re all atheists over there! How could God care about a country like that?”

God cares so much about unsaved people—Jewish and Gentile—that He sent Jesus to die for them, that they might be forgiven and have everlasting life. People who think like this pastor tend to forget about God’s redeeming love. The fact that God is in the redemption business is the main message of Christianity. And it is why Israel’s past has not negated its future.

God explains the driving force in His dealings with Israel: “But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend” (Isa. 41:8).

Down through the centuries of Israel’s existence, regardless of the circumstances, God’s message to the Jewish people has been consistent. He tells them now—and will tell them forever—I love you.

ENDNOTE

1 David Baron, Israel in the Plan of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1983), 143.
As we teach the Bible, we’re always surprised to learn how many people don’t realize that Jesus’ name is not “Jesus Christ.”

The word Christ is English for the Greek word Christós. Christós is Greek for the Hebrew word Mashiach. Messiah is English for Mashiach. All these words mean the same thing: “anointed.”

Saying “Jesus Christ” is the same as saying “Jesus Messiah” or Yeshua (Jesus) Hamashiach (“the Messiah”) in Hebrew.

Christ is a title, not a name. Jesus is the Christ—the Messiah, the anointed One. Sixty-nine times in the New Testament He is called “Christ Jesus.” In today’s parlance, the title-name combination is the same as “President Lincoln,” for example.

Seeing the Messiah’s two advents in Scripture but unable to understand that both applied to the same Person, some Jewish scholars created a two-Messiah theory. The suffering servant they named “Messiah ben Joseph,” and the reigning and ruling Messiah they named “Messiah ben David.” The Hebrew word ben means “son.” Interestingly, Jesus’ actual name would have been Yeshua ben Joseph, meaning “Jesus son of Joseph.” Yet He is also “Jesus Son of David” because, in His incarnation, He was born a direct descendant of King David and the heir to the throne. So the names the rabbis picked both apply to Him.

by Thomas C. Simcox
It doesn’t take long for people to realize how much I love my little dog, Herbie. If I could, I’d take him with me everywhere. Herbie helped me understand how difficult it is for families to lose their beloved pets and why they sometimes make great financial sacrifices to take care of them.

He also helped me understand a story I once heard about a man who, without hesitation, paid an outrageous amount of money to buy back his dog from someone who had stolen it. His action was a wonderful illustration of redeeming love.

It is easy to see why someone would willingly pay a great price to redeem something for which he or she has a great love. Though unbelievers today are quick to denounce Christianity as exclusive or unfair or narrow in perspective, it is, in fact, the story of the greatest outpouring of redeeming love ever manifested on Earth and the result of the greatest redemption price ever paid in all of history. As the apostle Peter wrote,

“You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received...” (1 Peter 1:18-19)
19

ISRAEL MY GLORY

omnipotence (28:18), omniscience (Jn. 16:30; 18:4; 21:17), and more:

But [He] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:7–8).

The word for “bondservant” is the Greek word doulo, also rendered as doulos. The idea is that of becoming like a slave, devoted to another and disregarding one’s own interests. The eternal, self-existent Creator of the universe willingly became a man, and not just any man but a servant, a slave. He made the decision to be born as a human, face rejection and humiliation, and be crucified—all to pay to redeem us from the evil one.

That’s what the incarnation is all about. And if that isn’t love, I don’t know what is.

by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18–19).

Although Adam and Eve’s sin thrust the world God had created into the hands of the evil one, whom Jesus three times called “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself paid the price to redeem it. Speaking to believers, the apostle Paul wrote, “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13). If we place our faith in Jesus, He transfers us from Satan’s kingdom into His own.

But the redemption price was not cheap. The eternal God took on human flesh and human limitations. He willingly left the splendor that was His in heaven and entered time and space in a humble manger in Bethlehem.

Jesus, the God-Man, is the only One who chose when He would be born, who His parents would be, the race into which He would be born, and the country of His birth. Through the incarnation, Jesus became a Kinsman to you and me.

In the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures, God revealed the concept of the kinsman redeemer, or go’el in Hebrew. To be a go’el one had to be a close relative (near kinsman) of the person needing redemption. He had to be willing and able to pay the price, which could be expensive.

In the book of Ruth, Boaz willingly became a go’el and married Ruth. He paid to redeem a field and father a child for Ruth whom he then raised. It is an account of unprecedented love as Ruth the Moabitess embraced the God of Israel and submitted to God’s Word.

Jesus is our Kinsman Redeemer. He came to buy back a world that was lost due to sin in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1–7). As humans, we will never fully grasp what it cost God to take on a body and humble Himself to become one of us in order to become our Kinsman.

Messiah Jesus had all of the attributes of God: omnipresence (Mt. 18:20; 28:20), omnipotence (28:18), omniscience (Jn. 16:30; 18:4; 21:17), and more:

A delegation of 60 members of Israel’s Knesset, headed by Speaker Yuli-Yoel Edelstein, is scheduled to travel to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps in Poland on January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, for a tour and a unique discussion on the struggle against anti-Semitism.

Auschwitz was one of the Nazis’ most notorious extermination camps, where at least 1.1 million people—90 percent of them Jewish—died in the gas chambers, including more than 200,000 children.

The delegation will include Holocaust survivors, senior members of the Israel Defense Forces, Israel’s chief rabbis, and representatives of Israel’s student unions, representing a link between the past and the future.

To illustrate that anti-Semitism is not just a Jewish issue, senior government and parliamentary figures from around the world will be in attendance. Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, now 85, will be part of a delegation from the United States.

The event is the initiative of Jonny Daniels, a new immigrant to Israel from England, as well as founder and executive director of From the Depths, a nonprofit organization devoted to preserving the memory of the Holocaust and “connecting the Jewish past with the Jewish future.”
I will never forget the day I visited the infamous Dandora Dump on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya. The stench overwhelmed me as I witnessed young children scouring smoking mountains of toxic trash for something to sell or eat. Tragically, living in filth and pollution was their way of life. I plugged my nose and began to turn away, when I suddenly realized this ugly scene summed up a person’s sinful and hopeless existence without Jesus Christ.

The truth is that our holy God cannot tolerate sin. When we fully grasp the utter depravity of our condition, it becomes difficult to comprehend the fact that God loved us even while we bore the stench of sin (Rom. 5:8).
His great love for sinners prompted Him to send His only Son, Jesus, as a baby to a humble, smelly stable in Bethlehem. A stable seems an unlikely birthplace for the precious Son of God, yet it indicates the depth of God’s love and how far He was willing to go to reconcile sinners to Himself.

God sent Jesus to Earth on a search-and-rescue mission. He came to seek and save that which was lost (Lk. 19:10). Jesus carried out His mission all the way to the cross of Calvary, perfectly reflecting His Father’s love. Much to the discomfort of the religious leaders of the day, Jesus became widely known as a friend of sinners.

**What Did Jesus See?**

What did Jesus see in sinners anyway? He pursued those whom society had branded as undeserving and unlovable, whether it was dishonest tax collectors like Levi (5:27) and Zaccheus (19:1–10), the adulterous woman at the well (Jn. 4), or the demon-possessed Mary Magdalene (Lk. 8:2). Jesus saw potential in the most unlikely people. Ask yourself a critical question: How do you look at sinners?

I can vividly recall the first time I visited a rescue mission as a young child with my father. The atmosphere seemed chaotic, and I struggled to process all that I saw. Frankly, I was petrified. Filth and hopelessness were everywhere. My knees literally knocked as I struggled to perform a simple piano solo. When I returned to my seat, I wrestled with my thoughts: What in the world am I doing here? Is it possible that Jesus really loves these people?

If we are brutally honest, our natural tendency is to look at down-and-out sinners with disdain. We keep a safe distance and quietly assume the chance of entering into a personal relationship with Him to send His only Son, Jesus, as a rescue mission as a young child with my father. The atmosphere seemed chaotic, and I struggled to process all that I saw. Frankly, I was petrified. Filth and hopelessness were everywhere. My knees literally knocked as I struggled to perform a simple piano solo. When I returned to my seat, I wrestled with my thoughts: What in the world am I doing here? Is it possible that Jesus really loves these people?

If we are brutally honest, our natural tendency is to look at down-and-out sinners with disdain. We keep a safe distance and quietly assume the chance of entering into a personal relationship with Christ have unlimited potential because God’s great love changes everything.

**Where Did Jesus Sit?**

Jesus never missed an opportunity to interact with people He was trying to reach. He regularly dined with flagrant sinners. After Levi left his tax franchise to follow Christ, he immediately held a huge banquet in his home to introduce Jesus to his fellow tax collectors. The men must have wondered, Who is this Jesus, anyway? What power does He possess that changed Levi’s life?

Jesus sat with sinners on many other occasions throughout Scripture. Luke 5:19 records that Jesus sat down in the synagogue to speak to a hostile audience. Matthew 26:55 says He sat with people daily while teaching in the Temple, and Luke 7:36–37 records that Jesus sat down to eat in the home of a Pharisee and was joined by a woman with a sinful reputation. Jesus pursued opportunities to sit with sinners.

Why is this fact important? What do you normally do when face-to-face with those who need Christ? Contact typically takes place while we stand; and conversations tend to be awkward, hurried, and superficial. After all, we have places to go and people to meet. When was the last time you took the opportunity to sit down and spend time with someone who desperately needs Christ?

Not long ago, I found myself seated at a table across from a stranger in a local restaurant. The man was unkempt, and it was clear he had led a hard life. We engaged in light conversation for a few moments, and then I deliberately turned away for what I had hoped would be a quick and quiet lunch. Then unexpectedly, the man began to share his life story in detail, including his anger toward God. For a fleeting moment, I actually considered packing up my lunch. Then the Holy Spirit convicted me. This was exactly the type of man Jesus came to seek and save. Jesus loves this man, and I need to reflect the same type of love.

We should love sinners the way Christ loves them and seize every opportunity to sit and talk with them, sharing with them the good news that Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost. It is the least we can do since God sent His Son Jesus to rescue us—even while we were still sinners.

Don Lough, Jr.

is the executive director of Word of Life Fellowship, Inc., in Schroon Lake, New York.

“I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how a man could look up into the heavens and say there is no God.”

— Abraham Lincoln

ISRAEL MY GLORY 21
NFL Hall of Famer Raymond Berry Speaks of His Love for Jesus and Israel

by Steve Herzig

In football lore, it is the Greatest Game Ever Played. On December 28, 1958, in front of 64,185 freezing spectators who filled Yankee Stadium in New York City and another 45 million television viewers, the Baltimore Colts defeated the New York Giants 23–17 in the first sudden-death overtime game ever.

The Colts’ wide receiver was 25-year-old Raymond Berry, who caught a record 12 passes for 178 yards from football legend Johnny Unitas. It was a spectacular performance, made all the more memorable because the game was the first in professional football history to be nationally televised. But winning the championship was not the most significant thing that happened to Raymond Berry that day.

I know because in July, I sat with the NFL Hall of Famer, now 80, in his home in Tennessee as we talked about sports, faith, and Israel. I wanted to hear all about his days of playing professional football, of coaching the New England Patriots to their first Super Bowl in 1985, and of his induction into the Football Hall of Fame in 1973. But most of all, I wanted to hear how he became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and a vibrant lover of Israel.

He showed me around his office, which is a football lover’s utopia.

There’s a framed picture of Raymond Berry catching a pass on the last drive in regulation that tied the 1958 NFL championship game. Another of Berry with quarterback Johnny Unitas. Footballs and helmets signed by teammates, coaches, and rival players. A large poster from Super Bowl XX completely filled with signatures of the players and assistant coaches of the New England Patriots. The list goes on and on. With so much memorabilia around that football fans cherish, I couldn’t help but wonder what Raymond Berry would consider his most prized possession.

But what I really wanted to know was how he came to love Jesus and Israel. So I asked him to share his testimony. His answer took us back to 1958 and the Greatest Game Ever Played.

“After the game,” said Berry, “I was absolutely enveloped with an awareness that God had just done what had happened out there. God did it. What was the purpose of it? There’s got to be more to life than chasing a football.”

Two years later, at the beginning of preseason camp in 1960, his closest friend on the team, linebacker Don Shinnick, approached him. “He’d been watching me for about three years, and he’d decided it was time to talk to me. He had no way of knowing that in the three years that I’d known him, God was preparing my heart for this conversation. Don told me, ‘Raymond, I don’t think you’ve ever accepted Christ as your Savior.’

“I attended church growing up in Texas, but I had no idea what Don was talking about. I asked him how you go about doing it.”

Shinnick explained that he simply had to pray in faith.

“I admit I had no idea that the new birth had taken place. You don’t have to know a lot, you’ve just got to mean business about Christ. He knows the human heart. And when the trust is there, He comes in,” Berry said. “And that’s what I did.”

Gradually, he became aware that he had a whole new outlook on life.

“I began to see my sin nature for the first time. I began to understand the need of why the Lord Jesus Christ came to the cross. It really hit me hard that my life did not belong to me, and I had the feeling that I really had to turn it loose.”

Several months later, Raymond said, God spoke to him and asked Berry why he never asked what God wanted him to do with his life. Raymond said, “I told God He was right and asked Him what He had in mind. I basically turned loose what
was the most important thing in my life: playing football.”

Berry said he was willing to give it up and never play again, if that was what God wanted.

“And this is the most amazing thing about that experience,” he explained. “I turned loose what meant the most to me, what I loved the most, playing football. I had no idea if I’d ever play another game. A short time later, He spoke to me and said, ‘I don’t want you to get out of the game. I want to know you’re willing.’ I played another six years.”

When I asked Raymond about his interest in Israel, he laughed. “You know, this is one of the most significant things that ever happened to me as a Christian. Here I am in training camp. I had prayed with Don Shinnick in the car. I accepted Christ, and a week later I got a hamstring problem. So they sent me into Baltimore to see a doctor. In the doctor’s office I saw a magazine called The Jewish Hope. It was through that magazine that God introduced me to the Jews. I began to realize that He put in my heart a love for the Jewish people.

“I remembered reading that Napoleon called Jerusalem the hinge of history. Israel is key. It is one of the most significant little plots of land on the face of the earth. When God sees the world, Jerusalem and Israel are in the center. When you think about it, when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, where do you think His feet are going to hit? [He will stand on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4).] When I think about taking a trip to Israel, I wonder if I’ll be there when it happens. Somebody is going to be there!”

Raymond, who today reads Israel My Glory, has visited Israel once and is going again in February.

As we talked, the conversation turned to Replacement Theology, a brand of Christianity that seems to be sweeping the world these days, teaching that God is finished with Israel and the Jewish people and has replaced them with the church. According to Replacement Theology, which Jewish people call Supersessionism, all the wonderful promises God has made to Israel for the future now belong to the church.

Before I could explain the belief system, Raymond indicated he knew what it was and said, “They better get their Bible out and read it.” Asked if he believed in the Rapture of the church, he immediately replied, “It’s going to be instantaneous. If it happens right now, we’ll go through the roof. And we’re going to go up to meet the Lord in the air, and we will be with the Lord forever.” It was Raymond Berry’s personal affirmation of 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

His perspective of the United States?

“I’m a World War II kid. I saw America at its best. To defeat the Nazis in Germany and the Japanese in the Pacific was a massive accomplishment. It was done with a lot of economic power unleashed by the American people. To see where it [the United States] is today is just depressing and sad. Self-interest has taken over above national interest.

“I can’t help but wonder, in the wrap-up of human history, just where we stand. America had God’s blessing on it at the beginning. One of the main purposes was to be a safe haven for the Jews. They have been able to immigrate here and live a free life, using their gifts—which are considerable. They have never been persecuted, and now . . . the red light on the instrument panel is blinking. When the leader of the United States of America takes an anti-Israel stance, which [in Raymond’s opinion] he is definitely doing, he is an adversary. The Bible says, ‘I will bless them that bless thee and curse him that curseth thee’ [Gen. 12:3, KJV]. The U.S. has been
blessed because they blessed the Jews, and the instant they start cursing the Jews, we’re in trouble.”

Raymond’s message to our readers?

“Get out your Old Testament and start reading. Get your antennae up about Israel and the Jews and God’s eternal love for them. Be aware that He said, ‘I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee.’ It is written in stone.”

It is not surprising that Berry looks at the Christian life much like his football career. “This matter of living the Christian life is like carrying out your assignment. There is a very interesting angle that’s not found anywhere in the world other than the Christian experience. And that is, the less you bring to the table, the more the Lord can operate.”

Today Raymond Berry is carrying out the assignment God has given him. The career God provided for him in football has given him a platform to minister to an untold number of people. He still receives fan mail and responds to each letter personally with a witness for his first love, Jesus Christ, and a piece of literature he has written. It’s nothing high-tech. He just has a simple card table stacked with things he has penned over the years and chooses something he feels will bless that individual.

He still accepts some speaking engagements and has an official website, raymondberry.com, which is almost a necessity in today’s world. But his heart does not belong to football. It belongs to Jesus—and to his wife, Sally, his bride of more than 50 years.

Before I left, I asked Raymond what he considers his most prized possession. He thought for a while but had no answer. He said he would have to get back to me. A few days later, he sent me his reply.

With trophies too numerous to count and football memorabilia that could fill a museum, Raymond Berry’s most prized possession is a picture his oldest child drew when she was six, in the early 1970s. It reads, “The Berry Family is going to God’s church today. They love God. The daddy teaches the children about God.”

This is a man who knows what is important in life. Early in his Christian walk, his desire was to follow Jesus’ invitation, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Lk. 9:23).

Raymond Berry will be the first to tell you that he has not followed the Lord perfectly; he has made mistakes. But he is a sinner saved by God’s grace. And as long as God leaves him on this earth, he intends to keep “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).

Question: How do the Hebrew Scriptures say we should react toward God’s Son?

Answer: “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”

—Psalm 2:11–12
The Greatest Gift of All

by Robert J. Stahler

(Stan Stein/FOI Image Archive)
I still can’t believe I overslept on Christmas morning. I can’t believe any 8-year-old would oversleep on Christmas morning. I saw my father sitting near the Christmas tree, beam-
ing with anticipation. As I sped down the steps, my eyes fell on it for the first time. It was the best gift ever—a fire truck with a three-foot-long ladder that went up and down. To this day, I don’t think any child got more pleasure from a present than I got from that fire truck.

The story of Christmas is all about a gift, but one far more important and enduring than anything found under a Christmas tree. It’s the story of the greatest gift humanity has been given. Out of His great love, God gave the world a Savior more than 2,000 years ago. Christmas is the celebra-
tion of Jesus the Messiah coming to Earth. He came to a dark and sinful world as “the light [that] shines in the darkness” (Jn. 1:5).

His birth in Bethlehem was foretold by the Jewish prophet Micah 700 years earlier (Mic. 5:2). Bethlehem, in fact, dates far back in Jewish history. It is where the patriarch Jacob buried his wife Rachel (Gen. 35:19). It was the hometown of Naomi, spoken of in the book of Ruth (1:19), and it was where David was anointed king over all of Israel (1 Sam. 16:4–13).

In Jesus’ day, Bethlehem was a small village located about five miles south of Jerusalem. The Hebrew word Bethlehem means “house of bread.” The world received its greatest gift when Jesus, the “bread of life” (Jn. 6:35), was born in “the house of bread.”

The account of Jesus’ birth is found in the Gospel of Luke:

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered (2:1–6).

These were dark days in Israel. Under the heavy oppression of Roman rule, Jewish citizens were paying ever-
increasing taxes to support the armies, roads, and building projects of the Roman Empire. Surely, as Joseph and Mary made the arduous, 90-mile-long journey, they saw squads of Roman soldiers along the way that reminded them of their country’s occupation.

Unable to obtain lodging in the little town crowded with visitors due to the census, they found refuge in a humble stable where Mary gave birth to the heir to the Davidic throne. They named Him Jesus, as they had been told to do by an angel while still in Nazareth: “You shall call His name JESUS [Hebrew, Yeshua], for He will save [Hebrew, yeshu] His people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21).

Mary laid her newborn in a manger (Lk. 2:7), which was probably a feeding trough. He who would feed the masses was placed in a receptacle used to feed animals.

In the vast darkness of the hillsides surrounding Bethlehem, shepherds in a nearby field were guarding their sheep. Suddenly, the sky was ablaze with light. After 400 years of silence, God spoke to His people that night using an angel to proclaim the Savior’s birth: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (v. 11).

The light increased as the angel was joined by a multitude of angels praising God. The shepherds hurried into Bethlehem, where they found the Child and His parents, just as they had been told. They left heralding the good news that the Messiah had been born.

God was also at work outside the land of Israel. He placed a special star in the sky that led others to His Son: Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Mt. 2:1–2).

Herod was not “born” king. He had been appointed king of Judea by Rome and ruled over the Jewish people. The wise men’s revelation threatened him. Known for being a subtle and talented diplomat as well as being utterly deranged, Herod asked scholars of the Hebrew Scriptures where the Messiah was to be born. When he learned it was Bethlehem, he slyly told the wise men to find the Child and “bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also” (v. 8).

The star led them to the Child. But in obedience to a revelation from God through a dream, the wise men took a different route home, avoiding Herod. In a rage, Herod ordered all males in Bethlehem aged two and under killed. Unbeknown to him, God had warned Joseph to flee to Egypt, where Jesus was safe from Herod. After Herod died, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus returned to Israel. God had protected His Son, through whom He planned to bless the world.

The Christmas story is an account of God’s remarkable love for humanity. In love, He brought Joseph and Mary to exactly the right place at exactly the right time. In love, He provided exactly the right place for Jesus to be born; and in love, He preserved Jesus’ life.

In love, He also revealed the birth to shepherds and wise men and proclaimed His love through angels. In His love for humanity, God has preserved the story of the Messiah’s birth for more than 2,000 years. And in love, He gives the gift of everlasting life to anyone who repents of sin, stops trusting in good deeds, and comes to Jesus for forgiveness: “The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (Jn. 6:37).

Jesus said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into
judgment, but has passed from death into life” (5:24).

My parents gave me many gifts over the years. The fire truck is the earliest Christmas present I remember. Eventually, it lost its luster. The paint grew dull, and the ladder no longer went up and down. One day it was thrown away.

Nothing will ever diminish the glorious gift God gave mankind in Jesus Christ. One day the Babe born in the manger will return to Earth. But this time He will be the King of kings and Lord of lords—the Messiah of Israel who reigns and rules. And every knee will bow and every tongue confess “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11).

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In 1857 Rev. John Henry Hopkins, Jr., popularized the wise men who brought their gifts to Jesus when he composed the well-known carol “We Three Kings of Orient Are” for a Christmas pageant at the General Theological Seminary in New York City.

Scripture says the wise men brought Jesus gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Mt. 2:11). These were expensive gifts, which many commentators say provided the funds Mary and Joseph needed to flee to Egypt with the Baby when Herod ordered all males two years old and under killed in an attempt to destroy the rightful heir to the Jewish throne.

Who were the wise men, and what was the significance of their gifts? The gold, frankincense, and myrrh probably mean more than most people realize.

These wise men, also called magi, were probably part scientists, astrologists, and naturalists who served in the royal court in the “East” (v. 1), which could mean Babylonia or Persia (the region of Iraq and Iran). Magi is a Latin word based on the Greek word magoi and is the root word for “magician.” Their probable interest in astrology could explain their interest in understanding the star that led them to Bethlehem.

The Bible never says how many wise men followed the star, but the Gospel of Matthew reveals the magi traveled a significant distance over a long period of time and arrived to visit Jesus and His parents in a house, rather than a stable (v. 11).

The presents they brought told a story all their own. Gold is a gift befitting a king. It is mentioned more than 400 times in the Bible, more than any other metal. During Israel’s golden age, when King Solomon sat on the throne, the Queen of Sheba brought him a gift of more than 7,000 pounds of gold (1 Ki. 10:10). Gold speaks of Jesus’ position as royalty. He is the King of kings (Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

Frankincense is incense derived from tree sap. Through a costly process, the sap is refined into a powder that smolders and releases a pleasant fragrance.

Mentioned in the Bible as early as the days of Moses, frankincense was included in early Hebrew sacrifices. It may speak of Jesus’ role as a sacrificial offering for sin: “Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:2).

Myrrh is embalming fluid. It was used in the ancient world to preserve the bodies of the dead (Gen. 37:25). Until needed for a deceased loved one, myrrh was used
as a fragrance in the home or palace. The mummies of Egypt were smeared with myrrh. The gift may symbolize the fact that Jesus would taste death, and myrrh would be applied to His body in preparation for His burial (Jn. 19:39)—which never occurred because He arose from the grave.

Rev. Hopkins’ carol is a tribute to a Savior who was worshiped by the wise men, received gifts befitting a king, and who will be worshiped for all eternity:

Glorious now behold Him arise
King and God and Sacrifice
Alleluia, Alleluia
Earth to heav’n replies
O star of wonder, star of night
Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding
Guide us to Thy perfect light.

by Robert J. Stahler
And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn. 1:14).

At Christmas we celebrate what may be the single most remarkable and mysterious event in all of history—the incarnation of Jesus Christ. God sent his Son to be born of a virgin, that He might die for the sins of all mankind.

But sometimes we tend to overlook the fact that Jesus came for another reason as well: to reveal God. It has always been God’s desire that people know Him; and through the ages, He has gone to great lengths to reveal Himself to the human race.

After He created the first man and woman (Adam and Eve) in His own image, God walked with Adam in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). He was revealing Himself to Adam so that Adam and Eve would respond to Him in loving, worshipful submission. (He also walked with Enoch and revealed Himself to Noah.) God created humanity to live in knowledgeable fellowship with its Creator.

Unfortunately, many people are not interested in having a relationship with God and refuse to submit to Him. The apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in the first century A.D., but it reads as though it were written today: 

Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (1:21–25).

Paul added, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they [people] are without excuse” (v. 20). Though many “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (v. 18), all people have access to the knowledge of God because God has shown that truth to them through creation (v. 19).

In fact, He has always had ways of manifesting His glory—His person and nature—to the people He created. The first and most continuous way is through creation: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Ps. 19:1).

In addition to this general revelation, God has consistently provided special revelation to men. The God of glory appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2), calling him out of that country. Then God appeared to him at least four more times (Gen. 12:7; 15:17; 17:1;
told Moses to tell Israel, “The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared to me” (Ex. 3:16). Later Moses asked God for an even greater manifestation of His glory (33:18), and God accommodated him. At one point, God’s glory was manifested in Moses’ face for all Israel to behold. And so things continued throughout the 40 years the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness en route to their Promised Land (34:29–35).

When Solomon dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, “the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD” (1 Ki. 8:10–11).

Others also received personal manifestations of God’s glory from time to time (Isa. 6:1; Dan. 7:9–14). God continued to manifest His glory to the Israelites until they went into captivity in Babylon in the sixth century B.C.

The glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD’s house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them (Ezek. 10:18–19).

In Ezekiel 11:22–23, the glory of the Lord ascended from the Mount of Olives into heaven; and God essentially wrote “Ichabod” over Israel’s sanctuary, meaning “the glory has departed.”

Israel still had creation and the Scriptures, but God seems to have removed the personal manifestation of His glory for almost 600 years until the eternal Word stepped into history in the form of Jesus Christ.

Coming as Israel’s Messiah and Redeemer, Jesus was also commissioned to reveal God’s glory to humanity. Though He did not manifest the external brilliance of God’s glory (Isa. 53:2–3), He portrayed God’s character through a perfect balance of “grace and truth”:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who is the brightness of His glory and the express
not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works (vv. 9–10).

The message of Christmas is the message of God’s love. It is also the message of God’s desire for us to know Him and have a personal relationship with Him. Jesus kept inviting men to come to Him—to know Him and to know His Father. The sad news is that the incarnate Word “came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (1:11). Like many people today, they rejected Him because they were not interested in knowing God.

The good news is that “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (vv. 12–13). Jesus said, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (17:3).

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus returned to heaven from the Mount of Olives. Today Christians are to live as He lived: under the direction and control of the Holy Spirit and thereby manifest God’s glory. As God dwelt in the Tabernacle in the Old Testament, so He dwells in born-again believers today and uses them as the vehicles through which men and women might come to know God.
In 1096 in the city of Worms, Germany, Rabbi Meir Ben Isaac Nehorai composed a lengthy poem, Hadamut, extolling God. Tragically, that same year the Crusaders came to the city and murdered all the Jewish people, and probably the rabbi.

In modern Judaism, the poem is viewed as a beloved song, which some synagogues joyfully chant during the Feast of Shavuot (Weeks) in the spring.

The poem’s first 14 verses establish the greatness of God, which exceeds all ability to describe. It also praises God for His Law, His eternal love, and His concern for His people.

In 1917 a Christian minister named Frederick Lehman (1868–1953) came upon a portion of a revised form of the ancient Jewish poem and used it to add a stanza to a song he was writing. Later, whether Pastor Lehman was aware of it or not, he adapted some of the rabbi’s sentiments about God’s love when he composed more lyrics to his hymn, which he titled “The Love of God.”

Today “The Love of God” is a much-loved classic in Christian hymnology. What better time of year to ponder God’s great love than Christmas? Here are the first verse and refrain:

**The love of God is greater far**
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.

**Refrain**

O love of God, how rich and pure!  
How measureless and strong!  
It shall forevermore endure  
The saints’ and angels’ song.

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by Peter Colón, creative resource coordinator for The Friends of Israel
Psalm 103:11 is a marvel to meditate: “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him.”

Many people have expounded on this verse to show that God’s love is unfailing and steadfast toward all who follow Him faithfully and worship Him in reverential fear. The basic thought is that God’s great love is even greater than the distance between heaven and earth.

To appreciate that distance, especially in relation to God’s love, we might ask ourselves, “Just how much is so?”

Those who dabble in the legitimate science of stars and the universe have provided some interesting statistics. The sun is the closest star to Earth at 150,000,000 kilometers (km) or 93,000,000 miles. A kilometer equals 0.6214 miles, or 1,000 meters. To cover that distance, light from the sun takes 8.3 minutes to reach Earth.

Light moves at a velocity of about 300,000 km per second. That’s 186,282 miles per second, according to the late scientific genius Albert Einstein. The nearest star to the sun, called “Proxima Centauri,” is about 4.22 light-years away. That’s 24,807,799,784,068 miles away. It would take the fastest spacecraft more than 50,000 years to get there!

Wrap your brain around this mind-boggling thought, if you can: To reach the edge of the universe, which some feel is constantly expanding, would take about 15 billion light-years. Some people will disagree with these calculations, and that’s fine. The point remains the same: God’s love is so great that it is truly awe-inspiring.

The birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem is a manifestation of that love. As Scripture says, “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” (Jn. 3:16). There’s the word so again. This time it refers to the great love God has for sinners, whom He came in the flesh to save.

During these tension-filled days of troubles in the world and personal tribulations, it would be good this Christmas season to focus on the simple word so in regard to God’s great love for you: “For as the heavens are
high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him” (Ps. 103:11, emphasis added).

If you don’t have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ, there’s no better time than now to avail yourself of His great redeeming love.

by Peter Colón
The Test of Knowing God

It is possible to have assurance that we are in fellowship with God “if we keep [keep on keeping] His commandments” (v. 3). This conditional clause challenges believers to examine their behavior to see if they meet the conditions of keeping God’s commandments. The commandments referred to are not the Old Testament Mosaic Laws but, rather, the New Testament instructions, precepts, and directives Christ and the apostles taught that made God’s will known. Keep means to guard with reverence the precepts learned, not only observing and obeying them, but regarding them as precious. Christians who possess a growing love for Christ will have a passionate desire and determination to honor God’s precepts. Doing so will give them internal (experiential) knowledge that they walk in fellowship with God the Father through Christ.

If a Christian says, “I know Him [God]” but fails to obey His instructions, that person “is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (v. 4). If we really know and understand God’s character and what He desires of us, we inevitably will obey Him. But if there is a sharp contradiction between our profession to know God and the way we live every day, we lie about knowing God. Knowledge of Him cannot merely be academic. It must be woven into the fabric of a Christian’s daily existence. Otherwise the claim to know God is devoid of “truth.”

In contrast, the apostle John explained the positive results for one who obeys God: “But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him” (v. 5). If we obey the precepts and directives of God’s Word, then we will truly experience God’s love “perfected” (completed) in us. Obedience to God’s will results in experiencing God’s love, which is brought to fruition in the believer. The display of this love in a Christian’s life will be seen by others and becomes a witness to them.

The reality of God’s love completed in us provides the grounds, knowledge, and inner assurance that “we are in Him,” meaning we have fellowship with God the Father. Notice that knowledge of God will produce love for and obedience to His Word.

The Test of Abiding

Verse 6 says, “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just [even] as He walked.” “He who says” refers to someone who claims to abide in and maintain fellowship with God. Such individuals “ought” to be living as Christ did. They ought not drift away from fellowship with God or engage in practices that are inconsistent with or contrary and disobedient to the Bible. People who consistently obey God’s Word abide (dwell, remain, and continue) in an ongoing fellowship with Him and walk “just [even] as” Christ walked; that is, they pattern their lives after His.

Believers ought to act as Christ did while He was on Earth. Christ loved and obeyed God the Father. He loved righteousness and hated sin, but He loved sinners. That is what it means to love Christ and abide in close communion and fellowship with God throughout one’s daily walk.

John said these are old concepts: “Brethren [Beloved], I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had...”
from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning” (v. 7).

This commandment was not new in kind or quality to John’s readers. In fact, it went back to the inception of Christ’s ministry some 60 years earlier and was around before John’s readers became believers.

However, in the very next breath, John called the commandment new: “Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining” (v. 8).

Did John contradict himself? No. The word again continues the thought started in verse 7, but views it from a different perspective. The key phrase, “which thing is true in Him and in you,” gives credence to what John said was a “new commandment”—one that dealt with the subject at hand, which is the commandment of “love” (Jn. 13:34–35; 15:12).

This new quality of love was exhibited in Jesus Christ through His life, teaching, and death on the cross. John said this new quality was also true in the readers (“in you”) because they were in Christ. Thus believers should show another the type of love Christ manifested while on Earth.

The evidence that this new commandment of love already operates in the lives of true believers is that “the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.” “Darkness” refers to evil in the world, and rules. However, it will not be eliminated until Christ returns to Earth and rules.

The phrase “already [now] shining” emphasizes that the “true light” was removing darkness from the earth in John’s day, and the process continues today through all who accept Christ.

### The Test of Affection

The third test of whether a professing believer truly knows God has three aspects. Each involves a relationship to love:

- **A Professing Believer Without Love.** “He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now” (v. 9). These types of people do not consistently live up to what they profess to believe. They claim to be Christians, but their hatred for someone in Christ contradicts their claims. There is a flagrant disconnect between profession and practice. Jesus Christ commanded believers to love even their enemies (Mt. 5:43–47). Thus someone who hates a fellow Christian cannot be a true disciple and follower of Christ.

- **A Professing Believer Who Expresses Hate.** “But he who hates his brother is in [the] darkness and walks in [the] darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (v. 11).

John finalized his argument by contrasting the one who lives in the light of God (v. 10) with the one who “hates his brother.” Three phrases describe the condition of people who are filled with hatred.

First, their spiritual state “is in darkness.” Lacking God’s love and light results in being cut off from God’s fellowship (cf. 1:5).

Second, they walk “in darkness,” meaning their daily lives are permeated with and tainted by darkness, and over time the darkness will consume them.

Third, they have no knowledge of “where [they are] going.” Their spiritual blindness robs them of an understanding as to the road their lives are taking. Being dominated by darkness and hatred cuts them off from the light of God that would bring them to repentance and redemption.

People who think they are Christians should examine their lives in light of John’s words. Where do you stand? Do you pass the test of really knowing God?

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Paul recognized Christ’s commission required him to fulfill the ministry he received from Jesus. The Greek word translated as ministry in Acts 20:24 means “service.” According to language scholar Hermann W. Beyer, the word bears “a stronger approximation to the concept of a service of love.” It is “understood as full and perfect sacrifice, as the offering of life which is the very essence of service, of being for others, whether in life or in death.”

The fact that Paul “received” this commission from Christ indicates the ministry was instigated by the Lord Himself, not “self-elected” by Paul. Paul further said it was through Christ that he “received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name” (Rom. 1:5) and that “the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11–12).

Christ’s Commission to Paul

Paul’s required course was established through a commission delivered directly to him by Christ. Paul referred to it as “the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus” (v. 24). The fact that Paul called Jesus “Lord” indicates he recognized Jesus had divine authority over him. That recognition occurred when the resurrected, glorified Christ confronted, spoke, and blinded Paul while Paul was on the road to Damascus to persecute believers in Jesus. The experience radically changed his life (9:1–8).

Jesus revealed His authoritative plans for Paul to Ananias, a believer whom He sent to minister to Paul. The Lord told Ananias, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (vv. 15–16).

In 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, Paul recorded the content of the good news he affirmed as truth:

I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

Paul emphatically affirmed the truthfulness of this gospel message by reciting the multitudes of people who actually saw the Lord Jesus alive after He died and was buried:

He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (vv. 5–10).

Paul was originally Saul of Tarsus, who hated Jesus Christ; the gospel message concerning Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection; and people who believed in Jesus. Saul entered their houses, dragged them to prison, approved of their being killed, and made havoc of the church (Acts 7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:1, 13–14). He had originally believed that he was doing God’s work.

Nothing short of a supernatural encounter with the resurrected, glorified Christ could have transformed such a zealous, hardened, and unyielding opponent of Christ and all who believed in Him. Saul became an ardent, zealous proponent of both Christ and the gospel message concerning Christ’s...
death, burial, and resurrection. Saul’s transformation into the apostle Paul dramatically verified the truthfulness of the gospel message and convinced many people to believe it. If that message could radically change Saul, then it could change them.

Paul said Christ commissioned him to affirm the good news of “the grace of God.” The word translated grace “contains the idea of kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved." It sometimes refers to “a gift (freely and graciously given), a favor bestowed.”

Christ commissioned Paul to affirm that salvation is a gift from God. It cannot be earned. Jesus Christ, God’s Son, paid in full the penalty of our sins when He died on the cross and said, “It is finished!” (Jn. 19:30). A person appropriates that gift of salvation by placing his or her faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Paul’s Fulfillment of the Commission

Toward the end of his life, Paul recounted how he faithfully fulfilled Christ’s commission. He told Jews and Gentiles the necessity of “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

The word repentance refers to “a change of mind,” “turning about,” “conversion,” “a turning away from dead works,” and the beginning of a new spiritual and moral life “that leads to God.”

Bible scholar Johannes Behm said Paul “states the idea of conversion as a total refashioning of man’s nature and conduct by the grace of God.” He does so “in his own characteristic vocabulary of dying and becoming, i.e. the death of the old man and the rising again of the new man.” The “concept of a radical transformation effected by the revelation of God in Christ” became for Paul “the foundation of his whole theology. And this is precisely the thought of conversion as understood by Jesus.”

That transformation certainly is what happened to Paul when Christ personally confronted him on Paul’s way to Damascus.

Paul’s Persecution

Jesus said He would show Paul “how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake” (9:16). The book of Acts records many instances of Paul’s suffering as he fulfilled Christ’s commission:

- Damascus: Jewish zealots planned to kill him, but “disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket” (vv. 23–25).
- Jerusalem: Gentiles with whom he argued attempted to kill him, but believers took him to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus (vv. 28–30).
- Antioch in Pisidia: Jewish religious leaders and influential men and women expelled him (13:14–51).
- Iconium: Gentiles, Jewish extremists, and rulers decided to abuse and stone him; so he fled (14:4–5).
- Lystra: Jewish religious opponents came from Antioch and Iconium and stoned Paul, dragged him out of the city, and left him for dead. But he rose up and went to Derbe (vv. 6–20).
- Thyatira: A multitude rose up against Paul, tore off his clothes, beat him, and threw him into prison (16:19–40).
- Thessalonica: Jewish rabble rousers, and others rose up against him but did not physically abuse him (17:1–9).
- Berea: Some Jews came and stirred up the people: Believers sent Paul away (17:10–14).
- Athens: Paul was mocked but not harmed physically (vv. 16–33).
- Corinth: Jewish scoffers resisted Paul and blasphemed but did not harm him. He taught there a year and a half (18:1, 6–11). Later they brought charges against him and brought him to the political judgment seat. But the Roman deputy refused to judge the matter (vv. 12–17).

Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem in spite of the Holy Spirit’s forewarnings of trouble there. Paul declared, “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus” (20:24).

ENDNOTES

4 Ibid., 86.
7 Arndt and Gingrich, “euangelion,” 318.
11 Johannes Behm, “metanoia,” TDNT, 4:1,005.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.

Endnotes

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Quoteworthy

“The Bible says we’re to resist the Devil. It doesn’t say we’re to chase him.”

—Adrian Rogers
Jewish history unearthed again

Recent excavations near the southern wall of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem have unearthed a literal treasure trove, again confirming an ancient Jewish presence in the city.

Led by archaeologist Dr. Eilat Mazar of the Hebrew University, the excavating team found a total of 36 gold coins, gold and silver jewelry, and a special gold medallion containing the images of a menorah, a shofar, and a Torah scroll. Researchers believe the medallion was an ornament for a Torah scroll, perhaps the oldest such adornment ever found.

For Dr. Mazar, the discovery is sensational: “We have already made many discoveries in this area from the time of the first Jewish Temple. But the image of a seven-branched candelabrum has totally surprised us.”

Said Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, “This is a magnificent discovery. Nationally, it attests to the ancient Jewish presence and the sanctity of the place; this is as clear as the sun and it is tremendous. . . . This is historic testimony, clear as the sun and it is tremendous and its sanctity of the place; this is as clear as the sun and it is tremendous.”

Researchers believe the medallion was an ornament for a Torah scroll, perhaps the oldest such adornment ever found.

Gastric sleeve may replace bariatric surgery

To replace bariatric surgery in the fight against obesity, students from the Biodesign program of the Hebrew University (HU) of Jerusalem, working with gastroenterologists, surgeons, and clinicians from Hadassah University Medical Center in Ein Kerem, have developed a prototype for an insertable gastric sleeve called MetaboShield.

The sleeve can be inserted without surgery and is aimed at blocking the absorption of excess food in the intestines. But it could take five years until the device can undergo clinical testing and be approved for use.

Dr. Yaakov Nahmias, director of the HU Center for Bioengineering and cohead of the Biodesign program, stressed that MetaboShield could save lives, as users would not have to undergo general anesthesia and surgery, and many people who are very obese would be encouraged to undergo the safe insertion of the sleeve.

Facility turns garbage into fuel

Amid the aroma of garbage at the Hiriya Recycling Park, government officials and executives have laid the cornerstone for a refuse-derived fuel plant that will transform half of the Dan region’s waste into usable fuel.

To provide a solution to the waste problem in Israel, the refuse-derived fuel (RDF) plant will take in daily 1,500 tons of high-calorific waste—such as wood, plastic, textiles, cardboard, and paper—and transform it into a usable fuel through a dry combustion process known as RDF. The RDF process will be able to generate green energy through a method that does not emit any pollutants or toxins, the project’s leaders said.

“This is a project that is going to generate a whole revolution in the treatment of waste in the Dan area and the whole of Israel,” said Gila Oron, head of the Tel Aviv region at the Interior Ministry.

The RDF plant will receive 540,000 tons of trash annually, making it the largest RDF plant in all of the Middle East and one of the largest such facilities in the world.

Arabs get Jewish town

Eight years after Israel’s “disengagement” from Gaza and northern Samaria, when 9,000 Jews in dozens of communities, including Homesh in Samaria, were thrown out of their homes, the government is now preparing to turn the area over to the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Unlike the towns of Gush Katif in Gaza, the towns in Samaria were not handed over to the PA, and the IDF maintained a presence there. Since then, former residents and activists have sought permission to return, and dozens of Knesset members have signed onto a law that would allow the resettlement of the town by Jews.

But the office of the government’s legal advisor for Judea and Samaria announced that it would support transferring Homesh and other former Jewish towns over to the PA. Homesh is still in Area C of Judea and Samaria, meaning that it is under Israeli civilian and military control. But the government’s legal advisor said Israel no longer opposes the entry of PA Arabs into the town.

However, Israelis are still banned from the town, based on orders by the military government issued after the disengagement. Observers said that the move could be a precursor to the recategorization of the town as Area A or B, placing it under total or partial PA control.
More Trouble Brewing Over Temple Mount

The mufti of Jerusalem Mohammed Hussein (left) listens as Sheikh Raed Salah demands protection of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound at a press conference in Jerusalem (Mahmoud Illean/Corbis).

The armed wing of Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas’s Fatah party has promised a new wave of terrorism if Jewish visits to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem do not cease, Israel Today has reported.

Fatah’s al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigade calls Jewish visits to Judaism’s holiest site on Earth an “invasion . . . by settlers,” Israel Today said, and claims Israel is trying to lay the groundwork for rebuilding the Jewish Temple.

Sheikh Mohammed Hussein, the mufti of Jerusalem, claims Israel is trying to destroy the al-Aqsa Mosque that occupies the southern portion of the Temple Mount. Israel Today reported that Hussein labeled Israeli policy that says Jews have a right to visit the Temple Mount as “dangerous” and an “insult” to Islam.

Meanwhile, Arutz-7 has reported that Israeli Knesset Member Moshe Feiglin is challenging the Israeli government’s 1967 decision to hand control over the Temple Mount to the Islamic “Waqf” trust.

Arutz-7 said Feiglin objects to the preferential treatment Muslims receive at Judaism’s most important site. Jews are forbidden to pray or perform religious rituals there out of deference to an Islamic complex built on top of the ruins of the two Jewish Temples.

Feiglin said that, far from deciding to hand the site over to the Muslim authorities, a number of ministerial committees clearly stated the opposite was true, Arutz-7 reported.

He cited a statement from 1968 by Israeli Cabinet Minister Yaakov Shapira that says, “We [the government] never announced that the Temple Mount belonged exclusively to the Arabs. We did not announce that it was forbidden for Jews to pray there, [and] we did not announce that it was forbidden for Jews to erect a synagogue there.”

Arutz-7 said Feiglin called for an end to the “discriminatory” practices against non-Muslims on the Mount and an end to the presence of Waqf “stewards” who help police identify and remove Jewish people suspected of praying.
On Friday nights, when Shabbat begins, many people go into the Old City of Jerusalem to pray at the Kotel, the Western Wall. Some seem to spend most of their lives there because they believe God hears them better when they are close to where the Temple once stood.

Over the years I have spoken to hundreds of people at the Kotel. One day when I was there, I spoke to several Orthodox men, trying to tell them God hears them wherever they pray.

“Of course, you would think that! You are far from God,” one replied. “And you put a big responsibility on those of us who believe in God to pray for you, also.”

I let them speak for a long time. When they were finished, I asked, “May I say something?”

“What can you say to us?” one responded. “You do not even have payis [the long side curls ultra-Orthodox men wear]. How can you speak about faith! And we are certain you do not even cover your head. What can you possibly say to us that would be of value?”

I told them, “The most important thing is to worship the Lord with your heart. God does not play hide-and-seek. He knows where we are. He knows if we are at home or at the Kotel. And He hears us. Our duty is to come before Him with a clean heart, hiding nothing. We must be fair and honest and do what He tells us, as the people of Israel, His Chosen People.”

“How would you know?” one asked.

“These are not my words,” I replied. “I am only telling you what is written in the Holy Bible.”

This time they looked at me with great surprise. “You? You speak about what is written in the Bible and try to teach us?”

“Yes” I said. “Because you believe falsehoods and spend more time listening to men than to God. You revere your teachers and do not revere what is written in God’s Word. I am certain you know this prayer, which you pray every morning: ‘Shema Israel, Adonai Elohenu, Adonai Echad. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength’ [Dt. 6:4–5]. What you are doing here is against the will of the Lord. I come before the Lord without special clothing, without payis, but with a sincere and open heart, trying to do His will.”

They listened carefully. After a while, one said, “Show us where you have learned all these nice stories.” We finally had come to the point. I opened the Bible and showed them a verse they know well, Isaiah 49:3: “And He said to me, ‘You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.’”

“We are to do God’s will,” I told them. “We are not to follow people. We are to follow God alone. As it is...”
written in Deuteronomy 6, ‘You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him. . . . You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you’” (vv. 13–14).

I told them, “The Lord has given us a big obligation before the world.” The men then took the Bible from my hands and began to read it. Surprised by what they saw, they wanted to know where I learned so much about the Holy Scriptures.

“I have learned by reading the Holy Scriptures,” I said. “You spend your lives learning from men who teach the stories of ancient rabbis. You study stories instead of God’s Word.”

Then they asked what synagogue I attend every morning to pray. I explained I go before the Lord wherever I am, with a sincere heart. “And He answers my prayers,” I said.

When they wanted to know more about me, I explained I am a Holocaust survivor. “And you speak of faith, after what you went through?” one asked. “How were you able to have faith?” I told them that one day, an older lady gave me a Bible in Israel. “Read!” she demanded. I did not know anything about the Bible and did not know where to read. I opened the Scriptures and saw Psalm 27: “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me” (v. 10).

“He has taken care of me all my life,” I said. “I try to be faithful to Him and do what He says, to proclaim His salvation to the ends of the earth.”

This time one replied, “You speak like those who have believed in This Man [Jesus].”

The conversation finally arrived where I had intended. “I believe in what is written in the Bible. This is good, is it not? It is important that you, too, believe what is written here and not put your faith in men.”

Please pray they will see their errors and trust God alone for their salvation.

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