EXCLUSIVE:
Security on the island of grace—Page 8
Craig Parshall on the ghost of America yet to come—Page 24

Plus:
Is Jesus the only way?—Page 18
The IY A salvage project—Page 22
Invest in the future—Page 31

"you [Israel] shall be a blessing"
(Zechariah 8:13)
The symbol of trust

Israel My Glory

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IN THIS ISSUE

Security on the Island of Grace
by Elwood McQuaid  ......................... 8
When the qualities that made America great disappear, America may disappear as well. And one quality in particular overrides the rest. A secure America depends on it.

His Word Is Truth
by Richard D. Emmons  ...................... 12
Have you ever had trouble explaining inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility to someone who doesn’t believe in them? Here’s a little help.

Literal or Nonliteral? That Is the Question
by Douglas Bookman  ......................... 16
Six days or a thousand years? How long did it take God to create the world? What you believe about Genesis 1 is more critical than you may realize.

Is He or Isn’t He?
by Steve Herzig  ............................. 18
Is Jesus the only way to God? CNN’s Larry King seems to want to know—along with millions of other people, some of whom have rather interesting points of view.

The Ghost of America Yet to Come
by Craig L. Parshall  .......................... 24
The Netherlands is a small country with a big problem. And by the looks of things, America is heading in the same direction.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

If you’re looking for a magazine that tells it like it is, we suggest you put this issue to the test. Craig Parshall’s “The Ghost of America Yet to Come” is the indispensable lead into the theme of God’s absolutes. Never before has there been a greater need for solid, biblical footing and objective analysis. Even our cover, which reveals amazing Israeli technology, testifies to the truth of God’s Word. Top left: vacuum tubes used to collect solar energy that is not only converted into electricity but also into heating and cooling systems (Brian Hendler/Liaison). Top right: trays of solution to grow stem-cell colonies (David Silverman/Getty Images). Bottom: an unusual way to grow food in the desert (David Doubilet/National Geographic/Getty Images). We recommend you read on!

ALSO FEATURING

From Bill Sutter’s Desk  ....................... 4
Eye on the Middle East  ..................... 5
Editorial  ...................................... 6
They Cry in Silence  .......................... 11
Who Is Responsible?  ....................... 14
Jesus the God-Man  ......................... 15
The War in America  ......................... 20
The IYA Salvage Project  ..................... 22
Holy, Holy, Holy  ............................. 27
Not As Good As It Gets  ...................... 28
How Many Gods?  ............................ 29
Save the Date!  ............................... 30
Invest in the Future  ......................... 31
The Way We Are  ............................. 32
Jesus Is Coming Again!  ...................... 33
He Cannot Deny Himself  ................... 34
The Book of Hebrews  ........................ 36
The Foundations of Faith  .................... 38
Israel in the News  ........................... 40
Rabbi Bernstein Not the Only First-Amendment Casualty in N.J. .......................... 41
Zvi .............................................. 42

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From BILL SUTTER’S DESK

The prophetic significance of meeting Jewish people who have come home to their Land of Promise was not lost on those of us who recently went “Up to Jerusalem” with The Friends of Israel.

At Misgav Am, Israel’s northernmost kibbutz near the Lebanese border, we met Ari Ben-Yaakov. Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Ari came by himself to Israel from California as a young adult in 1961. After visiting Misgav Am in 1964, he knew that where he would live from then on was settled. “This is my home,” he said. Ari described his years of farming on the kibbutz as “an emotional experience—growing my food for my people.”

As an Israeli paratrooper in the 1967 Six-Day War, Ari saw 50 percent of his battalion suffer casualties in liberating the Western Wall in Jerusalem. He also fought for Israel in the 1969 War of Attrition, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and the 1982 First Lebanon War.

Located 2,700 feet above sea level, the kibbutz where Ari spoke to us is almost surrounded by Lebanon and is closer to Damascus, Syria, than to Haifa, Israel.

In this most dramatic of settings, with Ari standing only feet from the Israeli-Lebanon border and our group looking down onto several Lebanese towns, he declared with conviction, “Look! Everything you see is Hezbollah. They control the printing of books, the programming on radio and television, the teaching in the schools, everything. This is a Taliban-like society where everyone is forced to be a Shiite Muslim.” Then, with a note of sadness, he lamented, “There are no Christians left.”

Members of our tour commented on the eerie appearance of quiet and calm in the Lebanese towns. There was virtually no movement: no cars traveling the streets, no children playing outside the homes, no people coming and going. Ari explained that what appeared to be normal residences were actually storehouses for mortars and rockets. The dwellings were occupied by Hezbollah terrorists and their families in the midst of a countryside laced with bunkers.

As we said goodbye to Ari and others from the 200-member kibbutz, all living under Israeli military protection, we reflected on Ari’s statement, “This is my home.” Despite everything, God was fulfilling His promise to His ancient people:

For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land (Ezek. 36:24).

Our visit to the Ethiopian Absorption Center in Tiberias provided another stirring reminder of the prophetic, biblical ingathering that is a vital part of the Jewish state’s demographics. Israel has helped 50,000 Jews make the difficult transition from primitive conditions in Ethiopia to modern living in Israel. Fleeing anti-Semitism and abandoning their homes in Ethiopia, families typically arrive in Israel with no more than two suitcases and a plastic bag. Their tradition traces their Judaism to the Queen of Sheba who visited King Solomon and returned to Ethiopia with knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (1 Ki. 10). By coming to Israel, Ethiopian Jews are following their dream to return “home.”

At the Absorption Center, families are housed in small apartments where they receive food and clothing. Children attend school right away, with classes emphasizing Hebrew and math. We could only imagine how difficult it must be for these youngsters who are picking up a pencil or pen for the first time.

They participate in special programs each afternoon—crafts, games, sports, and even computer activities. Smiling brightly, they lined up to have their pictures taken and gathered around excitedly to view themselves on the small screens of those of us with digital cameras.

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu once said that Operation Moses in 1984, which brought nearly 9,000 Ethiopians to the Jewish state, represents the first time in human history that black people were carried to freedom, and not into slavery.

When God makes a promise, He doesn’t abandon it, change it, or replace it. He keeps it! In Israel, we experienced this truth dramatically as we visited with Ari Ben-Yaakov and as we witnessed the ingathering of Jews from Ethiopia.

Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you (Gen. 28:15).

The birth of the modern State of Israel in 1948 and the Jewish people’s continuing return to the Promised Land from countries worldwide assures us we are living in the most important time for the fulfillment of Bible prophecy in almost 2,000 years.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
According to the Farsi News Association (FNA), a top advisor to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said there will indeed be preconditions—set by the Iranians—before talks will be held. Iran, he said, will only consider negotiating with the United States if U.S. forces leave the Middle East and Washington ends its support for Israel.

As long as American forces remain in the region and America continues to back Israel, no talks will take place, he said. What he proposed is the equivalent of the terms the Allies insisted on from Axis leaders near the end of World War II: unconditional surrender, the operative word being *surrender*.

And no matter how the statement of Ahmadinejad’s underling might be spun when objections are raised, the meaning is clear: Israel must surrender, the United States and its allies must capitulate and relinquish all plans to encourage freedom and democracy in the region, and we all must then beat a hasty retreat from the entire Middle East.

Truth be told, the current position of radical Islamo-facists is a reassertion of the Arab response to the 1947 UN Partition Plan. That plan would have established two viable states on the land the British vacated when they left the Middle East: an Arab one and a Jewish one. Jewish people, fresh from the shadows of the Holocaust, accepted. Arab leaders, however, responded with the now familiar “all or nothing” attitude that began the long war of annihilation against Israel that continues to this day.

The irrepressible quest for success in the search for peace was most rationally addressed in a formula offered by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: the Doctrine of Reciprocity. When carefully considered, it contains the essential kernel of Reagan’s trust-and-verify prescription. That is, one side’s concession must be met by the other side’s verifiable grant in kind. It is a simple principle that will work—that is, if both participants are truly looking for a solution, rather than an advantage.

Increasingly, Israelis are being asked to make painful concessions for peace. Inexplicably, some of the nation’s own leaders have joined overeager proponents in the West clamoring for what amounts to a peace-at-any-price giveaway, as opposed to a two-way negotiation that might bring some semblance of enduring stability to Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Under the current terms of engagement, however, such an outcome is predictably impossible. A one-way approach to a settlement can only be termed *surrender*, which is what Islamic radicals continue to insist on. Reciprocity with verification will work. It alone embodies the absolute essential of sincerity of intent. And that is, after all, the acid test.
Who Holds the Future?

The conversation was between a militant, Russian Communist and a reserved, elderly Christian in the days before the collapse of the Soviet Union. A disciple of Marx and Lenin, the Communist proficiently argued his case against God and those who believed in Him. He expertly unloaded on the elderly follower of Jesus a barrage of Communist dogma and atheistic vitriol. Finally he paused to ask the old man what he had to say in defense of his beliefs.

The gentleman responded, “I can see that you are obviously a man of superior intellect and eloquence. Furthermore,” he replied, “I could never begin to compete with your ability to express yourself about what you believe about religion and politics. But I do have the advantage over you in one important aspect of life. I am assured of my future, and you are not.”

The old man expressed the material point when it comes to our situation following an American election that so clearly revealed the revolutionary moral and social convulsions that have developed in our culture over the decades. Belief in both the absolute authority of a divine Sovereign and the truth of His Word has been dismissed as myth and fable. The great masses apparently feel that only intellectual dwarfs cling to their “crutch” of faith and obstinately attempt to communicate their beliefs to others. Neopaganism is fast becoming a staple in America and the Western democracies.

Neopaganism travels in the same circles as “inclusivism,” which contends that every religion and cult possesses qualities equal or superior to Christianity and the biblical Judaism out of which the Christian faith came.

The truth, however, is that radical, liberal religionists have reintroduced the polytheistic worship of many gods, which our forefathers in the faith rejected. Also, I might add, some elements in evangelicalism are now moving away from the traditional one-God, one-way Christian position.

To make neopaganism palatable will require a concerted effort to emasculate “outsiders,” meaning Bible-believers who adhere to inerrancy of Scripture and the Great Commission to “go into all the world and preach the gospel” (Mk. 16:15). We will either have to be silenced or brought into the mainstream of contemporary religious thinking and practice.

Already some politicians are beating the drum to resurrect the slyly named Fairness Doctrine designed exclusively to suppress free speech in the news media. It would use intimidation and/or legislation to make conservative journalists and broadcasters pay a heavy price for bucking the enshrined secular system.

Charles Colson, eminent evangelical and founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries, cited a prime example recently when he spoke of California’s Proposition 8 that in November reversed a ruling allowing same-sex marriage. Californians overwhelmingly rejected gay marriage in 2000 (Proposition 22), only to have their will overridden by the California Supreme Court on May 15, 2008.

On Election Day, voters courageously rose up and reversed the reversal. You can be sure, however, that the matter is far from closed. Appeals will fill the courts. And the courts may well again declare that the majority doesn’t make the rules; judges and radical minorities do, particularly those harassing for change and promoting deviant lifestyles. It is worth noting that the California Council of Churches joined 250 other organizations supporting same-sex marriage.

In an October 27, 2008, New York Times article by Laurie Goodstein, Mr. Colson made this observation: “This vote on whether we stop the gay-marriage juggernaut in California is Armageddon... [If] we lose this, we are going to lose in a lot of other ways, including freedom of religion.”

Colson may be like a prophet. Far too few leaders today are as willing as he to speak out and warn people about what’s ahead. We are, like it or not, living in the vortex of a political, moral, and social revolution. Too many true evangelicals are content to believe “It can’t happen here.” Oh, it can, and it is.

The time may be near when you or your pastor will be behind bars for daring to articulate a clearly defined biblical issue that doesn’t mesh with what neopagans deem correct. It has happened before.

The obsession with change has become the shibboleth of our time. We are still waiting for what change means. From this vantage point, it doesn’t look promising.

But we do have, with absolute certainty, the same assurance the elderly Christian told the Communist about. Only believers have a grasp on the future; and that truth will forever be unintelligible to the masses.

We may not understand everything in this life. But we know who holds our lives. And that’s something to hold on to.

[If] we lose this, we
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Last July in Madrid, Spain, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia spoke before what many in the ecumenical world hailed as a glittering array of religious luminaries. The conference was termed historic, not only because it was convened by a Muslim king from the most religiously intolerant country in the world, but because it included (along with the usual World Council of Churches representatives) a mixture of just about everything.

There was a Jewish rabbi; some “evangelical” leaders and mainline liberal lobbyists for interreligious dialogue; and a cadre of Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, and the like.

The 300-plus boosters of religious “inclusivism” might have passed with no more than a nod and a “here they go again” had it not been for a defining statement by Abdullah in his opening remarks: “We all believe in one God, who sent messengers for the good of humanity in this world and the hereafter.”

Perhaps in the past, even that statement would hardly have been worth noting. But in the current bog of moral and religious incoherency, Abdullah’s point of view is now finding a home in what may loosely be termed evangelical circles.

The Not-So-New Social Gospel

What was coined the Social Gospel came on the scene in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when prominent liberals, such as Harry Emerson Fosdick, a Baptist minister, joined liberal theologians in the Presbyterian Church in New York City. Together they questioned the inerrancy of Scripture and the validity of such traditional doctrines as the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, and the literal Second Coming of Christ. In their view, modern scientific evidences pointed to the contrary.
This turn away from the fundamentals of the faith was embellished by the advocates of higher criticism and promoted by Charles A. Briggs, a professor of biblical theology who deduced “definitively” that (1) Moses did not write the Pentateuch, (2) the Old Testament prophets did not write the books ascribed to them, (3) King David wrote only a few of the psalms, (4) the Bible as a whole is riddled with errors, and (5) scriptural inerrancy “is a ghost of modern evangelicism to frighten children.”

The Bible, Briggs said, has no authority to transmit absolutes; and he called on fellow rationalists to join him in sweeping away the dead orthodoxy of the past and working for the unity of the entire church.

After nullifying the Scriptures as an unreliable relic, liberals had no viable biblical message to proclaim. So they turned to what they felt were the “profound concerns about the role of Christianity in the culture and how that role was to be expressed.” The result was the Social Gospel, described as an intellectual movement dedicated to ameliorating the social problems of poverty, inequality, crime, racial tensions, slums, bad hygiene, poor schools, and the dangers of war. In addition to being theologically bankrupt, Social Gospel leaders were also predominately liberal politically.

In the end, Christianity in America and the West became divided into two main religious categories thereafter designated as (1) “mainline Christianity” (liberal) and (2) “evangelical” or “fundamentalist” (orthodox/conservative).

Today’s growing propensity in certain segments of modern evangelicalism to turn away from the methods and message of the faith and become more assimilated into the culture, more intertwined with other religions, and less rigid in the interpretation of Scripture may be a blueprint of the future of the American church. But it most certainly will not be something that hasn’t been done before. This development is a return to the same Social Gospel that created the spiritual and moral morass we are currently in.

Before the new liberalism began to take root seriously here in the United States, it was in full bloom in many areas of the United Kingdom. In his book The Abolition of Britain, author Peter Hitchens documented the results:

*When there are no souls to be saved, only bodies ... there is only one object: to make their living conditions better; even if they then grow up—as they often do—in grave moral poverty. [And when the social agenda fails to be balanced with the spiritual, the sin issue remains intact; and the results are predictable.] If you do not believe in sin, then you can hardly be expected to use up much energy fighting against it. And if you do believe in sin, then you are “judgemental”, [sic] and automatically excluded from the debate.*

### Documenting National Success

Jewish people often ask, “Why has God chosen us as a special people?” Apart from the Bible, verified by history, there is no conceivable answer. But in the Book, there are many answers:

*For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were in number among any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Dt. 7:6–8).*

Why are these promises, given to Israel long ago, relevant to this generation? Because both the promises and the Jewish people’s preservation are historically true beyond any doubt. This is not the stuff of myth or allegory; it is documented history. A corollary deduction is that the Word of God is reliable, authoritative, and trustworthy—then and now.

In light of these truths, consider why America has become a great nation. It is certainly not because of a superior ability to create gadgetry, even though personal initiative and freedom have been boons to our society. No, there is a deeper, more profound reality: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance” (Ps. 33:12).

Of course, Scripture has the nation of Israel in view. But there is a principle here for us, too. The Almighty calls the nation “blessed” whose God is the Lord. There is no hint of “inclusivism” here. The God referred to is Jehovah exclusively: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This verse is not speaking of the gods of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or those of pagan nations of the world. It does not apply to ancient Athens, which had altars to every god of every shape, size, and fashion.

And whether or not you subscribe to the idea that America was forged as a Christian nation, it is undeniable that America’s foundations were laid and, for the greater part of 200 years, structured on Judeo-Christian moorings reflective of Christian values and commitments. We respected the God who delivered us from poverty, oppression, ignorance, and spiritual deprivation. And for these things, we can be eternally grateful.

### Island of Grace

Within this unique “experiment” of religious freedom and social tolerance called America, the church has been at liberty to proclaim its message to the entire world without impediment from hostile political and religious overlords. And though, as I write this article, I am fully aware these freedoms are in serious jeopardy, I also must conclude that they have been an outward manifestation of His favor upon us. In the future, these freedoms will be suppressed at incalculable cost to the nation that is aggressively turning its back on God and His people. God says in His Word,

*I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (Gen. 12:3).

Contrary to the assertions of those who embrace the Replacement Theology folly, America is not the true Israel of God. That legacy has been left to the Jewish people—His chosen nation. Our nation of repatriated pagans has been the beneficiary of that absolute, divine promise in Genesis 12:3 because we Americans have opened our gates and held out our
hands to welcome a displaced and often despised people whom God loves.

There has been no Kristallnacht (“Night of Broken Glass”) here, no dark ghettos, no yellow patches on Jewish sleeves, no murderous pogroms, and no death camps. America has been, in most respects, a safe haven for the Jewish people. And whom can we thank for that? God alone and His Word of promise.

There’s much talk today about whether America will turn from supporting Israel, as militant Arab leaders are demanding. It may come to that, even though we pray it will not. Already we can see the elements of anti-Semitism developing. But if these tragedies unfold, we will be the worse for it. All one need do is search the pages of history. The scrap heap is littered with the remains of countries and empires that have raised their swords against His chosen nation.

God has warned us. America and the West have no promise of prosperity and survival, even though we perceive ourselves as a deserving lot. We are here because of the forbearance of a long-suffering God. Indeed, we have much more than we deserve.

Scripture's prophetic truths provide the discernment we need in dealing with the future. And we can be certain that if (1) freedom of religion and the ability to disseminate God’s Word and minister unimpeded are taken away and (2) this nation forsakes Israel and the Jewish people, we will have no right to claim immunity from a fall from grace.

Recently, in the church we attend, a representative of the Gideons International reported on that organization’s distribution of the Scriptures around the world. The Gideons hand out hundreds of thousands of Bibles every few months. Gideons are all unpaid businessmen who give of their time to distribute the bread of life. And every Bible put in every hand everywhere in the world is donated by Christians who have experienced the transforming power of the Word of God.

As I listened to the statistics and the accounts of how the Word has worked in so many lives, I thanked the Lord that we live in a country where disseminating it is possible. And despite all of the negative elements that confront us at this time, we—Jews and Christians alike—can thank God for this island of grace we have been privileged to occupy.

ENDNOTE

1 Peter Hitchens, The Abolition of Britain: from Winston Churchill to Princess Diana (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), 176.
Read these statistics and then try to tell yourself that all is well in the world of Christianity.

According to the All India Christian Council (AICC), as reported by Compass Direct News, “at least 57 people were killed, more than 18,000 injured and over 4,300 houses, 150 churches and 13 educational institutions destroyed” since the outbreak of Hindu extremist violence in the State of Orissa, India, on August 24, 2008. The violence, which later spread to some 14 other districts in Orissa, left 50,000 Christians homeless.

Early in October, three Christians were killed by militants and nearly 400 homes burned. One victim, an influential pastor, was shot and then cut into pieces. In another incident, an 80-year-old man was axed to death and his brother riddled with 13 bullets. “In the attacks,” reported Compass Direct, “an 8-year-old boy miraculously survived after being hit by an axe in the middle of his skull.”

Meanwhile, a mob raped a nun. A priest who was trying to assist her was doused with gasoline and badly beaten.

It is pathetically understated to say that these “incidents” are only the tip of the iceberg. In many areas of the world, it has become the norm to rape, attack, murder, and set fire to Christians.

These heinous, barbarous crimes against the innocent are only amplified by the indifference they generate. Often they are ignored entirely or dismissed with an attitude that says, “Perhaps these Christians did something to deserve it.” The Western world’s refusal to acknowledge, let alone publicize, what is happening is deservedly contemptible.

When last fall’s financial crisis brought economies in the West and Asia to the brink of collapse, an air of hysteria set in that had not been seen since the Great Depression of the early 1930s. From the halls of great governments to financial institutions to people on the street, there was outrage and panic coupled with demands to do something immediately to avoid a complete crash of monetary systems and global markets.

The response was instantaneous. Bailout and rescue became daily buzzwords. Of course, this reaction came as no surprise. After all, money was at stake; and material comfort and security comprise the very stuff of life in secular societies.

Unfortunately, when there’s a choice between lucre and human life, lucre usually wins. Recent history has ushered in this sad but true verdict.

I read somewhere recently that there is no benevolence in greed. It’s a thought Western churches should seriously consider. Do we value the sanctity of dollars or euros more than the life of a pastor in India hacked to pieces because of his faith or an 80-year-old Christian lying dead from axe blows because he loved and followed Jesus? If we do, shouldn’t we speak up about it? And shouldn’t we be on our knees in prayer for those who suffer for His sake?

A young woman approached me after a church service recently. She was elated to tell me that she had just received a “Remember” lapel pin from The Friends of Israel and was proud to wear it. It was her personal reminder and challenge to others to pray and reach out to help those afflicted by the violence of bigotry. May her number increase by the millions. And may more people read the statistics and realize that improving the status quo and trying to elevate people’s standards of living will not stem the tide of hatred for Christ and Christianity.
It’s nice that the Bible is true for you, but I don’t necessarily agree.”

Has anyone ever said something like that to you? Where did you go from there?

Often Christians know what they believe, but they don’t know how to help someone else understand the nature and authority of the Bible. Here are some suggestions.

**God’s Self-Disclosure**

All people make assumptions. Some are reasonable; others are illogical. Without revelation, which is God’s disclosure of Himself, humanity’s knowledge would be limited to the material world.

When an atheist assumes there is no God, he goes against nature. God’s general revelation of Himself through the natural world communicates His existence:

*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 [divine nature], so that they [people] are without excuse* (Rom. 1:20).

This verse explains the pending internal collapse of evolution in favor of “intelligent design” among those who are intellectually honest. God’s invisible attributes are too clearly portrayed for evolution’s denials to continue forever.

Indeed, virtually all cultures create religions having an intelligent designer in one form or another. Denying God’s existence is completely illogical.

What if your friend concedes but then asserts, “We cannot know for sure there is a God.” When an agnostic assumes we cannot know God, he goes against reason. He must conclude that this intelligent designer has played a cruel joke on the highest form of his design. It is unreasonable to assume a designer sequesters himself and delights in anonymously watching his design fail.

Can a mother forget her baby? Can an intelligent designer reject his
design? Hardly. Total objectivity must acknowledge God.

Rejecting God is an issue of the heart and will, not a matter of the mind. Though you cannot reason someone into God’s Kingdom, your gentle and caring relationship with your friend may open the door to his or her mind.

Perhaps your friend is willing to admit there must be a God. Where do you go from there? The Bible. Theism is the only natural, logical conclusion.

God “is there, and He is not silent,” wrote the late Francis Schaeffer. Not only does this statement underlie the Christian’s pursuit of truth, but it is clearly claimed by the Bible itself. Concluding that the world’s Designer clearly claimed by the Bible itself. Concluding that the world’s Designer has revealed Himself to His design is logically consistent. And the only book that claims to be the inspired, authoritative self-revelation of God is the Bible.

Inspiration

Introduce your friend to the idea of inspiration. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. “God-breathed” is the meaning of a Greek word the apostle Paul used (2 Tim. 3:16). The apostle Peter added, “No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Pet. 1:20), meaning that no writer of any part of the biblical record ever recorded his own interpretation of what he saw, heard, or experienced. Peter taught that nothing in the Bible is merely human explanation. He emphasized this point by adding, “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (v. 21). Even though each writer used his own vocabulary, style, and experiences, the entire content of the Bible is “God-breathed” by the Holy Spirit.

There is a mysterious element to the origin of the biblical text. For the most part, God did not “dictate it.” Neither did He simply stamp His approval on what men had written. The Spirit of God “moved” men as the wind moves a sailboat, so they composed precisely what He wanted written. Well-known theologian Charles Ryrie provided an excellent definition of the biblical concept of inspiration: “God superintended the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded without error His message to mankind in the words of their original writings.”

Inerrancy

Next, your friend needs to consider the result of inspiration. Since God directed the biblical authors, it is logical the Bible would be inerrant. Inspiration is verbal and complete, extending to the very words of the biblical text—not merely to the concepts. Both Jesus and the apostles built theological truth on the words of Scripture (Mt. 22:32; Gal. 3:16). Paul taught, All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Jesus affirmed, “the Scripture cannot be broken” (Jn. 10:35). “Till heaven and earth pass away,” He said, “one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Mt. 5:18). The jot is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the tittle is the little tail that distinguishes certain Hebrew letters.

Infallibility

Then help your friend understand that inerrancy leads to infallibility. If the Scripture cannot be broken, then wherever it speaks, it must speak infallibly. Since the Holy Spirit enabled the human authors to record God’s message without error, the message must be trustworthy.

Conversely, if even one statement in the Bible is wrong, the entire Book falls under a cloud of suspicion. If any Scripture can be broken, then Jesus was wrong. But Jesus reminded men who attempted to break the Scripture, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God” (22:29).

Inspiration, rightly understood, communicates an inerrant, infallible self-disclosure of God and His truth for humanity.

Many have argued for a lower view of inspiration, which always elevates the mind of the reader/interpreter above the authority of the text. Natural and mystical views of inspiration attribute Scripture’s origin to the human authors, saying that the writers were inspired. Partial inspiration divides the credit between God and man. Karl Barth and Neo-orthodoxy define inspiration more in terms of what happens to the person who reads Scripture. Postmodernism embraces a full-orbed reader-centered inspiration. All these deficient views undermine the inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of the text itself as God’s self-disclosure.

Truth

Now your friend is ready for the bottom line. If the only logical assumption is “God is there, and He is not silent,” then inspiration—rightly understood—affirms that the Bible is truth. Truth is defined as that which conforms to reality. Not reality as people think they see it, but reality as it actually exists—as only God sees it. For the God-breathed Scriptures to be anything less than truth, God must have made a mistake or lied. By definition, God is omniscient, so there can be no mistake. Hebrews 6:18 asserts, “It is impossible for God to lie.”

Not only is the Bible truth, it is absolute truth. As an airplane pilot needs reliable instruments because his perceptions can prove fatal, so mankind needs God’s Word. God alone has an unobstructed, unbiased view of reality. His inspired Word provides that view of reality for all of us.

ENDNOTE


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Today’s world is full of scoffers. They don’t believe in God. They don’t believe they will have to answer for what they have done in life. And they don’t believe Jesus will return.

The apostle Peter predicted as much: “Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation’” (2 Pet. 3:3–4).

But not believing something doesn’t change reality. Judgment is coming: “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). And everyone will be judged by God.

The good news is that forgiveness is available through Jesus Christ: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7).

Several years ago singer Barbra Streisand publicly berated actress Patricia Heaton (Everybody Loves Raymond) for her adamant stand against abortion. Asked by Fox News’s Bill O’Reilly to comment, Heaton replied, “It will not be Barbra Streisand I’m standing in front of when I have to make an accounting of my life.”

Heaton is right. Like it or not, everyone will stand before God. For some, He will be the God they have served. For others, the God they have denied. And no one will be able to pass the buck.

Unfortunately, judgment will be a bitter pill for people who have been taught to lay responsibility for their actions on someone else. God makes it clear that He will judge individuals for their own sin (Ezek. 18:20). Every person will “give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (1 Pet. 4:5; Heb. 4:13).

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Soliciting is common in our neighborhood, especially on weekends. Answering the doorbell recently, I greeted a couple standing on our front porch. Their clothes and literature in hand identified them immediately; and before the door was fully open, they launched into their spiel.

When they paused for a breath, I quickly asked, “What do you believe about Jesus?” They were obviously uncomfortable with the question and haltingly described an imposter who resembled Jesus in name only. Conspicuously absent from their description were two historic events that reveal the uniqueness of Jesus the Messiah.

Jesus’ death and resurrection make Christianity inimitable. The apostle Paul categorically declared, “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (1 Cor. 15:14). Messiah’s death by crucifixion establishes His humanity; His resurrection verifies His deity. Together they underscore His unique identity as both God and man.

Although impossible to grasp with the limited capabilities of our finite minds, Jesus had to possess “a complete divine nature and a complete human nature inseparably united in one person.”

How this is possible is one of the greatest mysteries of all time. The theological term hypostatic union describes it. Hypostatic derives from the Greek, conveying the idea of “substance, essence, actual being or reality.” In this case, the essence (hypostasis) involves the perfect union of two distinct natures: one human, one divine—in a single person.

Jesus was “no less God because of His humanity and no less human because of His deity,” said theologian John Walvoord. Walvoord explained:

This union should not be defined as deity possessing humanity as this would deny true humanity its rightful place. It is not, on the other hand, humanity merely indwelt by deity. . . . In His unique personality He possessed two natures, one eternal and divine, the other human and generated in time.

Allowing the divine nature to function within the confines of finite humanity did not require relinquishing a single divine attribute. What it did require was giving up the independent exercise of those divine attributes. Jesus Himself said, “I can of Myself do nothing. . . . I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (Jn. 5:30).

Even though all divine attributes were available to Him throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus lived in complete surrender, never using them unless expressly directed by the Father.

Two separate, distinct natures—one divine and one human—are consistent with God’s promises about the Messiah, whose humanity identified Him with the lineage of King David but whose divinity guaranteed His government and throne would be everlasting. Only as a human being could Christ die as a substitute for man’s sin; but only as God could His death have efficacy in redeeming lost humanity.

Jesus’ humanity allows Him to serve legitimately as the High Priest who can “sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb. 4:15). And His deity allows Him to function in that capacity forever (7:24).

My front-porch visitors needed to understand that Jesus, possessing a complete human nature and an undiminished divine nature, is exceptional. He is unlike anyone who ever has or ever will exist. And because He is the one and only God-Man, He is able to “save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him” (v. 25).

ENDNOTES
4 Ibid.

by Charles E. McCracken, Canadian director of FOI Gospel Ministry in Brampton, Ontario.
For several decades it has been fashionable in many quarters to insist that the early chapters of Genesis, which describe the creation of the world, must not be considered a literal record of actual history. The claim is that the events are better understood as allegorical representations of grand metaphysical realities—cunningly devised fables that may be mined for spiritual truth but that are not historically viable.

Various alternative readings of the creation account reject the historicity of the narrative based on some supposed syntactical or theological insight. Among those alternatives are the Day-Age Theory; the Gap Theory; and, more recently, the Framework Hypothesis. All these nonliteral readings are motivated by a determination to reconcile the scriptural record of creation with the demands of uniformitarian scientism. That is, they seek to understand the Bible within the limitations of secular metaphysics that deny the possibility of supernatural/divine intervention.

How we view Genesis, however, is critical because, as the name suggests, the book is God’s clear and absolutely true instruction concerning the origin of all that exists in the physical and moral universe. And out of that truth arise all the issues of life.

John Gibson argues that Genesis 1 is to be taken as a metaphor or story or parable. He claims, “If we understand ‘day’ as equivalent to ‘epoch’ or ‘era’, we can bring the sequence of Creation in the chapter into relationship with the accounts of modern evolutionary theory, and so go some way towards recovering the Bible’s reputation in our scientific age.”

In similar fashion, progressive creationist Stuart Briscoe insists the following in his popular commentary on Genesis:

The natural scientist talks convincingly in terms of millions of years and evolutionary eras while the Bible believer looks at the six days and wonders what on earth to do. . . . It is not at all unreasonable to believe that “day” (Hebrew, yom), which can be translated quite literally as “period,”

refers not to literal days but to eras and ages in which God’s progressive work was being accomplished.

What Is a “Day”?

Basic to the entire debate regarding the historical integrity of the creation account is the question, “How is the word day(s) to be understood?” Genesis 1:5, for example, reads, “God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.”

The point is often made that the Hebrew word for “day” (yom) can be used in more than one sense. This is true. But that fact does not mean that, in any given passage, the word might have any one of several meanings and that the reader is free to use whichever meaning he prefers. It is basic to
grammatical-historical interpretation that the meaning of every passage is determined and fixed by the author, and it is the business of exegesis to arrive at that intended meaning.

It is hard to imagine how God might have provided any more definitive evidence to compel readers to conclude that, in Genesis 1, day means a literal 24-hour day and that the week of creation was a literal seven-day week. Two most basic arguments to defend this position are these:

1. A numerical qualifier and the phrase evening and morning occur with each of the six creative days (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). This fact is exegetically significant because the rest of the Old Testament uses yom 359 times with a numerical qualifier; and every one of those cases denotes a literal day. Again, throughout the rest of the Old Testament, yom is used in association with either evening or morning 23 times; and the phrase evening and morning is used without yom 38 times. Each of those 61 passages refers to a literal 24-hour day. There is no reason to make the text of Genesis 1 an exception to this remarkably well-attested-to pattern.

2. In Exodus 20 Moses traced the command “Remember the Sabbath day” (v. 8) to the historical reality that “in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, . . . and rested the seventh day” (v. 11). The one-to-one analogous relationship between the days of an ordinary week in the lives of the Israelites and the days of the week of God’s creative activity is basic to the way the Fourth Commandment is expressed in that passage. Indeed, if the days of the creation account are taken as eons of time, the statement recorded in Exodus 20:11—a statement spoken aloud by Yahweh Himself (vv. 1–21)—is reduced to a cosmic non sequitur. Yahweh then spoke illogical nonsense!

Old Testament scholar Gerhard Hasel concluded,

The author of Genesis 1 could not have produced more comprehensive and all-inclusive ways to express the idea of a literal “day” than the ones that were chosen. . . . The combinations of the factors . . . corroborated by the divine promulgations in such Pentateuchal passages as Exodus 20:8–11 and Exodus 31:12–17, suggest uniquely and consistently that the creation “day” is meant to be literal, sequential, and chronological in nature.3

What’s Really at Stake

Those who deny that Genesis 1 is literal history insist there are important metaphysical truths to be quarried from the supposedly mythical/metaphorical account. But once you abandon literal interpretation, determining what those truths are becomes the reader’s prerogative. The text becomes a wax nose to be bent into this shape or that, depending ultimately on the predilections of the one doing the bending.

On the other hand, if the historical integrity of the creation narrative is carefully honored, that narrative will confront the reader with truths at once undeniably valid and unanswerably important.

The omnipotence and omniscience of the Creator God who spoke the worlds into existence; the ineffable majesty of that Creator God by whom and for whom all things were created and who is thus perpetually worthy of worship and service; the unique, intrinsic, and ineradicable dignity of mankind based on the reality that man alone is created in the image and likeness of God; the wisdom and goodness of God manifested in His creation of male and female and in His crafting each to play the distinct role He has equipped them to embrace and enjoy; the reality of man’s sinful condition and consequent condemnation, as well as his responsibility for that moral corruption—all of these truths and many more are clearly promulgated in such Pentateuchal passages as Exodus 20:8–11 and Exodus 31:12–17, and we need to embrace them and let them confront us as literal history.

But if the divinely provided record is construed as mere myth and metaphor, all of these truths become subjective at best and suspect at worst.

Ultimately, alternative readings of the creation account do something else as well. If we take away the first Adam, we have no right to trust what God has told us about the Last Adam—Jesus Christ, His Son.

ENDNOTES


Douglas Bookman has taught at Bible colleges and seminaries for 30 years. Today he is busy in a ministry of itinerant teaching and preaching in America and abroad. He can be contacted through his Web site: bookmanministries.com.
However, Jesus is not the only subject
on which the Bible takes a narrow view.

Prior to the Jewish People

There was only one way for Adam and Eve to remain in the Garden of
Eden. Man, originally in complete communion with God, had to obey
God’s command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and
evil. God said, “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17).
They disobeyed God and were expelled.

There was only one acceptable sac-
rifice for Cain and Abel. Abel followed
God’s way, and his sacrifice was
accepted; his brother Cain’s was not.
Jealous of Abel, Cain killed him.
Isn’t He?

In the days of Noah there was only one avenue of deliverance from the worldwide flood: the ark. Once the door was shut, no one else could go in. To be sure, Noah had warned of God’s judgment; but no one listened. A week before the actual flood, God closed the ark’s door and sealed the only means of deliverance (7:16).

In Old Testament Days

In Egypt God gave Pharaoh one option: “Let My people go” (Ex. 5:1).

At the Passover in Egypt, only the blood of the lamb on the door saved the firstborn in each family from death (12:13).

When Jewish people sinned, there was only one way to approach God for forgiveness: through sacrifice at the Tabernacle or Temple. And on only one day of the year (Yom Kippur), only one man (the high priest) could enter the Holy of Holies (Lev. 16).

There was only one way to move the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chr. 13:9–10) and one way by which the Syrian commander Naaman could be cleansed of leprosy (2 Ki. 5:1–19).

The Old Testament, in fact, is filled with restrictions and instructions that show God had a precise way He wanted things done. Any other way was unacceptable to Him.

Why, then, does it seem strange that there is only one way today for people to come to God?

One God, One Messiah, One Bible

The best explanation for mankind’s unwillingness to accept God’s way is also found in the Bible. The prophet Isaiah said, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). King Solomon said, “There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Ecc. 7:20). And the apostle Paul wrote, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

In other words, people are sinners and do not want to believe God because it would mean believing the truth about themselves. They would rather believe they have the power to get to heaven through good works. God points out the narrow path that leads to Him, and many say they would rather travel a different road.

Here is the answer to your question, Larry. There is only one way to God. And contrary to what people think, Jesus is the greatest gift of love and grace this universe has ever seen. The God of Israel came to Earth in the person of Jesus the Messiah to pay for your sin and mine. He was our final Sacrifice. He bought our redemption and set us free. All we must do is believe Him, and He gives us the gift of eternal life. There is only one way to God, Larry. Through faith in Jesus Christ.

Endnotes

The United States is in the midst of an internal war. The news media claims it is a cultural conflict. But the cause runs much deeper. It is a clash of two worldviews and their concepts of wisdom.

The Biblical Worldview

The biblical worldview has as its source the personal, sovereign God of the Bible who created the universe. Its starting point is the belief that the God of the Bible exists, is ultimate reality, is the source of ultimate truth, and is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and all that is in it.

This worldview is also founded on the premise that God gave divine revelation to mankind concerning His existence, nature, authority, and will.

Three key words relate to this divine revelation: true, truth, and wisdom. Many biblical references indicate the God of the Bible is exclusively the true and living God and that His words are true, even from the beginning, and will endure forever. (A few examples are 2 Samuel 7:28; Psalm 19:9; 119:160; Jeremiah 10:10; John 17:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9.)

The primary Old Testament word translated “true” refers to what is firm, certain, and dependable—something all people should recognize and respect as reality. Thus the God of the Bible is reality. God actually exists, in contrast to other gods; and every word He has given to mankind from the beginning is true and will endure forever.

God also declared that He is “abounding in . . . truth” and “the God of truth” (Ex. 34:6; Isa. 65:16). Therefore, truth is an essential aspect of His nature. He is the fountainhead or ultimate source of truth. Jesus declared that God’s “word is truth” (Jn. 17:17), indicating it is reliable and dependable because it presents ultimate reality to mankind.

Proverbs 8:22 reveals that God created wisdom before He created all of the universe. So He is the source of ultimate wisdom, creating the heavens and earth by His wisdom (Ps. 136:5; Prov. 3:19; Jer. 10:12).

God created the universe with a fixed, unchanging, inflexible order that conforms to and embodies the ultimate wisdom He created in eternity past and that He used to bring the universe into existence. Human experience and scientific research both have demonstrated that a fixed, unchanging, inflexible order of natural law exists and that it is no respecter of persons, regardless of their positions or status in life. Furthermore, any violation of that order can exact a high price.

Proverbs 1:2—9:18 emphasizes that God, through wisdom, also created the universe with a fixed, unchanging, inflexible order of moral law that also is no respecter of persons. Anyone who challenges the fixed, unchanging law of sexual morality that God established will suffer such serious consequences as enslavement by sin, severe harm of soul, loss of honor, and even premature physical
Objective truth exists for mankind, whether or not people acknowledge it. The God of the Bible included moral absolutes in His revelation of truth to mankind through His Word. There is an objective standard by which to determine whether beliefs, practices, and lifestyles are right or wrong. People who turn their backs on God reject ultimate reality—the only God who actually exists—and inevitably will reap the consequences.

The Secular, Humanistic Worldview

The humanistic worldview has Satan as its source. He questioned God’s Word: “Has God indeed said . . . ?” (Gen. 3:1). He challenged God’s truthfulness: “You will not surely die” (v. 4). He perverted God’s motive, saying God doesn’t want mankind to be like Him, with authority to distinguish between good and evil (v. 5).

Satan prompted the first humans to reject God’s authority, asserting that doing so would make them like gods—sovereign, with authority to distinguish between right and wrong for themselves (vv. 1–7).

The starting point of this view is the belief that the God of the Bible does not exist and, therefore, is not ultimate reality, the source of ultimate truth, or the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and all that is in it. The universe is a closed system that came into existence exclusively through natural means.

This view is founded on the premise that mankind is on its own to discover ultimate reality and truth through a combination of the human senses, ability to reason, and the scientific method of research.

People holding this view believe no objective truth exists. Truth is subjective, determined by each individual for himself or herself.

They claim there are no moral absolutes binding on all mankind. Since there is no God who has established moral absolutes, the traditional moral absolutes are reduced to purely human inventions. And since they are human in origin, humans have the right to reject, change, or ignore them.

Furthermore, no objective standard exists by which to determine whether beliefs, practices, and lifestyles are right or wrong. So all religions are considered inventions of mankind and, therefore, equal. The claim there is only one true religion is viewed as intolerant bigotry. This view also contends that all attempts to convert a person from one religion to another should be abolished.

In addition, since there is no God who created mankind as male and female and revealed distinctive roles for the sexes, the traditional and distinctive roles may be rejected or changed because they were “merely manmade.”

An Awesome Implication

Today America is deeply divided. Once a nation that believed in God and prayer, it has fallen into the hands of secular humanists who reject the Almighty and His Word and work tirelessly to convince others to do the same. But with the decline in true, biblical faith also comes degeneracy.

People who reject the God of the Bible and His revelation to mankind reject ultimate reality and truth. Their worldview is contrary to reality, so they are building their lives—and that of their country—on lies.

They may insist they are wise to do so (Rom. 1:18–25); but in reality, they are blinded by God’s ultimate enemy, Satan, and are subject to his power of spiritual darkness (2 Cor. 4:3–4; Col. 1:13).

Satan also rejected the ultimate reality and truth of God. As a result, Jesus said Satan does not abide in the truth, and “there is no truth in him” (Jn. 8:44). Satan’s end will be the Lake of Fire, which is also the ultimate destination of all who follow him.
We woke up early Tuesday morning, grabbed our coffees, packed our lunches, boarded the bus, and headed for Tzurim Valley National Park located atop Mount Scopus, northeast of the Old City of Jerusalem.

Tzurim Valley National Park usually isn’t part of a typical tour to Israel. But for The Friends of Israel’s summer Israel Youth Adventure (IYA), it has become a regular stop. It is here we leave the daily touring routine in July to get our hands dirty sifting through 3,000-year-old rubble in search of artifacts dating back to Solomon’s Temple.

The park is home to the Temple Mount Salvage Operation where a group of archaeologists sift through tons of dirt that Muslims originally heaved into a local garbage dump in the Kidron Valley in 1999 after illegally excavating at the Temple Mount.

The Islamic Waqf (overseers of the holy places on the Temple Mount) had conducted an illegal dig on the southeast corner to create an emergency exit for worshipers of the mosque in the underground area called Solomon’s Stables. It removed more than 10,000 tons of dirt rich in historical Jewish artifacts.

Students from the Hebrew University saw the dump trucks exiting the Temple Mount and quickly moved truckloads of the precious dirt to the western side of Mount Scopus, where it provides a rare opportunity for the Israel Antiquities...
Authority because no archaeological digs are permitted on the Temple Mount.

The Temple Mount Salvage Operation is in its third year of proving the archaeological value of the rubble by daily discovering Jewish, Christian, and Muslim relics. With the help of volunteers like us, Israel is recovering artifacts from the late Bronze Age (1550 B.C.–1200 B.C.) to the Six-Day War in 1967. Many relics originate from the second-Temple period.

Every bucket we examined yielded a treasure. For eight hours we sifted through pails of rubble in search of anything that resembled pottery, bones, glass, metal, special stones, or mosaics.

Excitement filled the tent when Kevin, one of our very own, screamed, “I found a coin!” We all dropped our work and surrounded our amateur archaeologist as he held up the ancient mint. The coin could have been used to purchase a sacrifice for a Jewish family, or a worshiper may have used it to pay the entrance fee into the Temple area. Our imaginations ran wild.

By the end of the day the IYA found three ancient coins; a pottery shard with an inscription stamped on the handle; a Roman nail; a first-Temple period pottery shard; and containers full of glass, metal, bones, and mosaics!

For one day we became bona fide archaeologists, digging through the sands of time in search of treasure from the Temple Mount. We left Tzurim Valley National Park with our clothes covered in soot, our hands stained with mud, and our hearts full of joy knowing that we helped prove to the world that there was, in fact, a historical Jewish presence on the Temple Mount.

For information on this year’s Israel Youth Adventure, please contact Laura Coleman at 800-257-7843. Or e-mail her at LColeman@foi.org.

Christopher J. Katulka is a youth minister in the Church Ministries Department of The Friends of Israel. You may contact Chris at CKatulka@foi.org.
Sometimes traveling to an unfamiliar place differs significantly from what you had imagined.

That was the case last year when my wife, Janet, and I traveled to the Netherlands. The trip, graciously provided by a Dutch publishing house that had translated a number of my legal suspense novels into the Dutch language, was to be a tour to promote my books. But it ultimately proved to be much more.

In addition to the usual television, magazine, and newspaper interviews and some book signings, I addressed law students—many of them Christians—at Leiden University. I also debated a secular research historian on the relationship between church/state/politics and took questions from the crowd.

Not surprisingly, the event coordinators were also anxious to tap into Janet’s expertise as a nationally syndicated radio and television broadcaster, and she ended up joining me in the debate. We also jointly addressed students and faculty at two large Christian high schools.

Although I knew full well that the Netherlands sanctions homosexual marriage, euthanasia, hate-crime laws that threaten to intimidate the church into silence, and legalized prostitution and “soft drugs,” the vision I returned home with had less to do with that tiny Dutch nation and more to do with the future of the church in America.

So Small a Nation, So Large a Problem

In Amsterdam’s infamous “red light” district, prostitutes openly display themselves in front of plate-glass windows. Little cafes called “coffee shops” dot the streets of most of the cities, but they have little to do with coffee. They are the spots where legalized drugs are sold and imbied by customers who sit idly at tables surrounded by a constant haze of cannabis smoke. In addition, the Netherlands became the first nation to legalize so-called “mercy killing” after Holland informally fostered the practice for years.
But this small country is also a land of strange paradoxes. Although same-sex marriage (one of the newest political evidences of libertine decadence) is legal, Islam—an innately repressive religion—has become an increasing demographic reality. About six percent of the nation is now being categorized as Muslim. Large mosques are being constructed in most of the major cities.

These social factors add fuel to the hate-crime laws. By the time we landed there, a well-known Dutch cartoonist who goes by the pseudonym Gregorius Nekschot and who had published cartoons critical of Islam was under government investigation. Police had raided his home and seized his computer. If convicted of hate-mongering, he could spend a year in prison for what most of us would consider an exercise of free speech.

Christians, too, have been targeted. A Christian law student told me that when a Christian leader made “politically incorrect” statements about homosexuality during a news interview, he was turned over to the government and subjected to a criminal investigation. The student also confided to me the serious threats he has received for sharing his faith with a Muslim coworker. The threats came, by the way, not from the coworker but from the employer. He said such problems are not unusual in the Netherlands.

The parallels between the Netherlands and America are obvious. Both nations are democratic republics based historically on strong Christian foundations and heritages. The Netherlands housed the pilgrims in Leiden until they finally set sail for Plymouth in the New World. When America fought for its independence, the Dutch extended us essential economic credit. Our histories, in many ways, are inexorably connected.

But my use of the phrase is much simpler: Whenever the church retreats, a vacuum results. And it can be considered a veritable “law of nature” that the enemy of the cross will quickly fill that vacuum with his own hellish agenda.

A secular journalist who thinks the libertine laws in the Netherlands make sense explained how they came about. After noting that prostitution was legalized in 2000, homosexual marriage adopted in 2001, and full-blown euthanasia legalized in 2002, the journalist identified the strategic moment:

“It is not a coincidence that several of these laws have been passed in recent years. For the first time in a century, the Christian Democrats are not in the coalition government.”

The Christian Democrat party was populated by Christians, many of them from the Dutch Reformed Church. But the moment it failed to rally a presence in the coalition government, the tide rapidly turned. Admittedly, the Netherlands had been facing an onslaught of liberal legislation and cultural decay for some time. But the dike broke, so to speak, when Christians were silenced.

Dutch Christians told me the traditional church has lost its moral voice. Rather than focusing on its essential, prophetic role of preaching the truth of God’s Word, it became embroiled in disputes over worship styles and even experienced major schisms over which hymns to sing on Sunday services.
to an influx of born-again Christians who are establishing new churches in the large cities.

The Church’s Last Will and Testament

What positive message can we derive from all of this? I am reminded of the apostle Paul’s final sermon to the elders of the church at Ephesus. After nurturing and discipling that church for three long years, he felt the Holy Spirit’s call to leave and return to Jerusalem where, as he had repeatedly been warned, nothing short of arrest and persecution awaited him.

In Acts 20:28-32, we read Paul’s final warning to the church against the crippling, corrupting influences of the world:

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch,...* So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

The only real hope for America is a vibrant church of Christian believers who will be both “salt and light.” But at the same time, the only hope for the church is an absolute commitment to God Himself in a radical, transformational way and a total commitment to the absolute inerrancy, inspiration, and authority of the Word of God. Only then will Christian believers be able to resist the cultural and theological lies of our age—the “savage wolves” that are increasingly being loosed upon us.

If followers of Jesus Christ give themselves to God with abandon and dedicate themselves to understand—and then apply—the whole truth of the whole of the Scriptures, we cannot help but penetrate in a positive way our families, our churches, our communities, and our nation.

As Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (Jn. 8:12).

ENDNOTES


Craig L. Parshall is a leading trial attorney who argues cases involving civil liberties, constitutional rights, and religious freedoms. He is the senior vice president and general counsel for the National Religious Broadcasters, as well as a critically acclaimed novelist.
As Isaiah gazed into the vastness of God’s throne room, the reverberating praise of seraphim shook the very doorposts: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isa. 6:3).

Whether a vision or a glimpse into unseen reality, one thing is certain: the Jewish prophet was never the same. God’s holiness so deeply impacted him that, in the book of Isaiah, he referred to God as “the Holy One of Israel” 29 times.

The Hebrew word kadosh, translated “holy,” literally means “separate,” or “set apart.” God not only transcends everything in creation, He is the antithesis of all that is profane and evil. The late Victor Buksbazen, a theologian and Hebrew scholar, wrote, “The thrice repeated holy, holy, holy (trisagion) expresses emphatically the absolute holiness of God.” The apostle John captured God’s essence by stating, “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1:5).

There are, in fact, more references to God’s holiness in Scripture than to any other aspect of His being. The unmistakable message is that He is holy, and we are not. Only against this backdrop do we fully comprehend the reality of our fallen condition, and only from this vantage point can we wholly perceive the awesome privilege of having a relationship with the Almighty.

Understanding God’s holiness emphasizes that trifling with God is futile, and whole-hearted obedience is the only legitimate response. God is who He is because He is holy; holiness most effectively expresses His identity. Nothing in any way contravenes His infinite holiness because it governs His every attribute, attitude, and action.

The great Lewis Sperry Chafer explained: The holiness of God is active. As a primary motive, it incites all that He does; therefore He is righteous in His ways. . . . It is observable in every divine attitude and action. It embraces not only His devotion to that which is good, but is also the very basis and force of His hatred of that which is evil.

Consequently, the psalmist declared, “God is angry with the wicked every day,” yet “the LORD preserves all who love Him” (Ps. 7:11; 145:20). Isaiah described God as “the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy” (Isa. 57:15).

However, despite His holiness, God is not sequestered in some far-flung corner of the universe fearing contamination from His fallen creation. His relationship with humanity is not a “quiescent aloofness . . . but a vital, pulsating nearness.” The psalmist assures us, “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him” (Ps. 145:18). The apostle Paul said that God “is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:27).

It is astounding that the Creator of the universe, who is infinitely holy, is attentive to every facet of His creation and readily available to all who seek Him.

When we understand the awesome holiness of God, we, like Isaiah, can never be the same. Seeing God as He really is inevitably produces not only genuine reverence and passionate obedience, but also a profound sense of gratitude.

ENDNOTES

3 Ibid.

by Charles E. McCracken
The consequence of reading the Bible literally is the premillennial vision of a glorious end-times Kingdom established by the glorious return of Jesus to Earth.

Amillennialists—those who believe there will be no literal, 1,000-year rule of Christ on Earth—insist the Bible should not be taken literally. They say passages that foretell events yet unfulfilled must be read according to canons of interpretation that equip the reader to extrapolate meanings other than those derived from the plain sense of the words and syntax.

They insist the Kingdom promises made explicitly and emphatically to Israel have been discovered to be the exclusive property of Christians of this age; that the Bible knows nothing of a grand and culminating end-times drama to be played out on this earth; that human history is nothing more than the dark vestibule of eternity; and that whatever Kingdom was ever promised for this earth is here today in an entirely abstract, nonobjective form that can be reduced to the rule of Christ in the hearts of believers.

Perhaps the most melancholy aspect of this allegorized vision is that it posits that what we see in the world today is as good as God can do with human history.

Premillennialism, on the other hand, celebrates the biblical anticipation of a final stage of earthly history in which all things are set straight, to the glory of God.

It is curious that premillennialists are often accused of being morbidly pessimistic, of being so fixated on Jesus’ Second Coming to redeem the world that they have neglected His call to minister in the meantime. That is a canard.

But I will confess that if the question be, “Is there any hope that fallen men will produce a utopia on earth?” I am a pessimist. The better question is, “Do we serve a God so wise and so powerful that, despite the machinations and rebellion of fallen men, He is able to move human history inexorably toward that time when His Son shall reign over all the earth; when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father; and when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as water covers the seas?”

We do, in fact, serve a God who is that glorious in His wisdom and power. And our theology ought to be framed so as to cause His children to delight in the anticipation of that day.

by Douglas Bookman
How Many Gods?

“Don’t believe in God? You are not alone.”

So reads a billboard along Interstate 95 in Philadelphia, erected by PhillyCOR (the Greater Philadelphia Coalition of Reason). The coalition defines itself as a group of free thinkers, atheists, humanists, and secularists out to improve “the image of people who do not believe in God.”

Atheism, of course, is the belief in no god. The opposite end of religious thought is polytheism: the belief in many gods. Hinduism, for example, is polytheistic. In fact, an organization called the Association of Polytheist Traditions offers a full explanation on its Web site (www.manygods.org.uk) of what it means to be a polytheist. It candidly states, “Most of us practise [sic] Recon-structed European Pagan Religions. But we welcome all polytheists, including those who adhere to ‘world religions’ and those who simply have personal relationships with individual gods.”

Between these extremes stands monotheism: the belief in one God. According to the Bible, that one God is Jehovah (YHVH). And it is He who created the earth and He who will come to judge it (1 Chr. 16:33; Ps. 96:13; 98:9).

Islam is monotheistic. However, its god is Allah. Most of what we know about Allah is contained in the Qur’an, the highest source of information in Islam. Wrote expert Robert Morey: “The Qur’an’s concept of deity evolved out of the pre-Islamic pagan religion of Allah-worship. It is so uniquely Arab that it cannot be simply reduced to Jewish or Christian beliefs.” Thus the notion that the god of Islam is the same as the God of the Jews and Christians is false because Islam rejects the Bible as its sole source of information.  

Practicing Jews and biblical Christians look to the Hebrew Scriptures to support their belief in one God. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God.” He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The psalmist, desiring clarity on the topic of the existence of God, declared that the one who says there is no God is a fool (Ps. 14:1). Nevertheless, a fork in the road emerges between Judaism and Christianity at the interpretation of the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The L ORD our God, the L ORD is one!” (Dt. 6:4). The Shema is Judaism’s declaration of faith, the line in the sand concerning its view of monotheism: God is absolutely singular.

One God or Three?

Biblical Christianity is unique in its view of monotheism. It sees God as a plural unity with three distinct persons. Although a complex doctrine to understand, its origins come from the very words of the Hebrew Scriptures.

For example, the word *elo-him* in Genesis 1:1 is plural. And when God created man, He said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Even the *Shema* affirms this concept by using the word *echad* for “one.” *Echad* denotes a plurality within a unity.

Proverbs 30:4 refers to God’s Son: “Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son’s name, if you know?”

Isaiah records God saying, “Now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me” (48:16). God speaks, saying both He and the Spirit were sent by God.

The Jewish writers of the New Testament, familiar with their own Hebrew Scriptures, confirmed and clarified the biblical teaching of a triune God. And in His final words before departing the earth, Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples and baptize them “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19).

How many gods? There is only one God. It is He who said, “I am the L ORD your God . . . . You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:2–3).

ENDNOTES


3 Ibid., 57–65.

by Steve Herzig
When it comes to world events, it’s amazing how much information God has provided in His Word. He has told us about all the major world empires—in chronological order. He has revealed major battles and important rulers. He has even told us that another Jewish Temple will someday stand on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

If you want to know what lies ahead, according to God’s Word, we highly recommend you attend one of our exciting prophecy conferences. This year we will hold seven regional, daylong conferences, as well as our annual Winona Lake conference in July and our Willow Valley conference in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in September. Here are the dates, so you can plan ahead:

- February 6 (Friday), Tampa, Florida
- February 7 (Saturday), Boca Raton, Florida
- March 7 (Saturday), Augusta, Georgia
- April 18 (Saturday), Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- April 24–25 (Friday–Saturday), Richmond, Virginia
- May 2 (Saturday), Bakersfield, California
- May 16 (Saturday), Bloomington, Indiana
- July 26–31 (Sunday–Friday), Winona Lake, Indiana
- September 11–15 (Friday–Tuesday), Lancaster, Pennsylvania

For more information, please call The Friends of Israel at 800–257–7843, Monday through Friday, and ask for Lisa at extension 139.

Did you know there’s a special way you can express your condolences, thanks, or respect for someone? For only $10 per tree, you can have trees planted in The Friends of Israel Forest in Jerusalem. You’ll receive a beautiful certificate that you can send as a tangible expression of your gift. Won’t you take this opportunity to provide a living memorial for a family member, friend, or associate? You may even wish to plant one or more trees in their honor or on your own behalf. It is a thoughtful and meaningful way to say “I care,” and you will share in helping to make the desert of Israel bloom.

Save the Date!

What I see in America today is people painting their cabins while the ship goes down. Today in America we are witnessing a repeat performance of the tragedy of 1933 when an entire nation [Germany] let itself be led like a lamb to the Socialist slaughterhouse. This time, the end of freedom is inevitable unless America rises to her mission and destiny.”

—Hilmar von Campe, former member of Hitler Youth, now a loyal American and founder of the Institute for Truth and Freedom

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—Hilmar von Campe, former member of Hitler Youth, now a loyal American and founder of the Institute for Truth and Freedom
When the apostle Paul wrote his second letter to the church at Corinth, his health was declining. His body was aging, and persecution had taken its toll. He could say from experience, “Our outward man is perishing” (2 Cor. 4:16).

But he knew life was temporary and that, compared to eternity, affliction is “but for a moment” (v. 17). So he did not focus on temporary things but on serving Jesus Christ.

No doubt Paul took to heart Jesus’ words, “Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?” (Lk. 9:24–25).

As a result, Paul was willing to “spend himself” for the work of the Messiah and the blessings of life everlasting. He invested in the future reality of eternity, which does not pass away. And his desire was for the church at Corinth, and for us, to do the same.

A 50-year-old pastor in New Jersey understands the reality of outward things perishing and the truth of the Scripture that says, “The things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). He has been diagnosed with tongue cancer. After much prayer, he has elected to preach as long as he is able rather than have his tongue removed as the doctors have recommended.

A familiar refrain from an unknown poet reads, “Only one life, ’twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” How much better it is to invest in the future by seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness than to live for the world and one day discover that we have accomplished nothing for God.

by Steve Herzig
The world in which we live is crazy. Sometimes it seems as though societies have gone totally mad.

For example, on July 16, 2008, Israel returned four living, breathing terrorists and the remains of 199 others to Hezbollah, the Lebanese terrorist organization. What did they receive in return? The corpses of two Israeli soldiers who had been captured two years ago. One of the terrorists had murdered an Israeli policeman along with another man and his four-year-old daughter—all in horribly grisly ways. The four freed terrorists received a Palestinian hero’s welcome and vowed to continue fighting for the eradication of every Jewish person in Israel and ultimately the world.

Meanwhile, two young newlyweds from Wales enjoying a two-week honeymoon in Antigua were murdered when their cottage was invaded.

Each night on the news there are countless reports of murder, rape, child abuse, and heinous crimes too vulgar and disgusting even to describe.

Yet the world believes people are inherently good and that things are improving. After all, that is the premise of evolution. But the reality is, as science long ago stated, things left to themselves degenerate. They do not improve. They suffer entropy, or break down, and become completely unrecoverable. Such is the case with humanity. Scripture says that people who refuse to submit to God become degenerate in their thinking and perverse in their practices (Rom. 1:18–32). Consequently, they corrupt the political, social, moral, and ethical fabric of our society and produce the horrors we read of daily.

In the beginning, man was created in the image and likeness of the eternal God. This likeness has nothing to do with our appearance; rather, it addresses the intangibles: intellect, emotion, and will. Satan deceived Eve, and then Adam disobeyed the Lord’s direct command. Consequently, all of their descendants became corrupt (cf. Ps. 14:1–3).

There were at least two times in history when everyone knew God and His/her responsibility before Him. The first was at the creation of Adam and Eve. These two were the only people in the world, and they knew God intimately. They were totally cognizant of Him and His command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:3). Yet they chose to reject His word. Despite their knowledge, “their foolish hearts were darkened”; and they became fools (Rom. 1:21–22).

The second time was immediately after the flood of Noah’s day. A total of eight people populated the entire world. They knew God had kept His promise to punish sin and preserve righteousness, and they knew they had survived His worldwide judgment.

Yet their descendants rejected the truth, as recorded in the very next chapter of the Bible. In Genesis 11, humanity again rejects God, attempting to come together as a world power under the banner of the Tower of Babel. This pride and self-will come from mankind’s innermost being: the heart. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9).

So here we sit in a world filled with evil because it denies God and mocks those who believe in Him. Instead of worshiping and praising the Creator, much of humanity prefers to deify itself and revere pleasure, power, and material possessions. How far mankind has fallen from what God desired for it. He desired the best for His creation: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10).

That abundant life comes only from a personal relationship with the God of the Bible and accepting His Word as absolute truth.

by Thomas C. Simcox

Convicted murderer Samir Kuntar waves after his release from an Israeli prison. He was sentenced to five life terms for a grisly 1979 triple murder. Mideast expert Daniel Pipes calls Kuntar “a psychopath and the most notorious prisoner in Israel’s jails.” Kuntar has vowed to begin where he left off (Nabil Mounzer/EPA/Corbis).
Heaven is indeed a wonderful place. But I think that when Christians think of the future, they focus overmuch on heaven. Their longing is to be with Jesus in paradise, to be reunited with loved ones in a celestial home, to be freed from the burdens of this sin-cursed world.

I would certainly say amen to all of that. The hope of heaven is the birthright of every believer, a blessing beyond description. But when we depart this life to walk that street of gold, this fallen world will still be lying in wickedness (1 Jn. 5:19). The “prince of the power of the air” will still be working in the “sons [children] of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), and all that is sacred will still be profaned on this earth, even as all that is unholy will still be honored (Ezek. 22:26). And the name of God and of His Christ will be the object of derision in every quarter of a blighted world that despises light (Jn. 1:1–5).

Thus, I would insist that Christians should long the more passionately for that day when God finally dispatches the Son of Man to destroy all that is wicked (Dan. 7:13–14), to fulfill the marvelous covenant promises He has made with men (Ps. 89:24–29), and to satisfy the earnest expectations of the created order that groans under the weight of the futility to which it has been so long subjected (Rom. 8:19–22).

Indeed, Jesus is coming again! And in that regard, believers have been vouchsafed a double hope. The first is that, when we die or are raptured, we will indeed go to be with Jesus in a place of paradise. But the second is even more glorious. It is the hope that we will return with Jesus in a moment of unimaginable triumph, that moment when every eye shall see the victorious Lamb of God descend from heaven with a mighty host, having “on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:16).

Because of the glory of that anticipation, Jesus taught His disciples that the longing that ought to dominate their prayers and their lives is this: “Thy kingdom come.” The longing of every believer’s heart ought to be preeminently for that blessed day when “the kingdoms of this world” shall, in fact, “become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (11:15).

by Douglas Bookman
A popular song from the 1960s claimed that all the world needs is love. Love, of course, is fine. However, the world needs much more, such as godly wisdom; integrity; commitment; and faithfulness. Though these qualities are in short supply among men, God possesses them all in abundance. And one of His greatest attributes is faithfulness.

God’s faithfulness, in fact, is a major theme of Scripture. King David praised it repeatedly in the Psalms: “Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the clouds” (36:5). The apostle Paul assured us of God’s faithfulness when he wrote, “He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one” (1 Th. 5:24; 2 Th. 3:3).

Although many people today refuse to acknowledge the fact, the greatest proof of God’s faithfulness is the Jewish people. Scripture teaches that God blesses obedience and punishes disobedience, and history confirms that truth through the nation of Israel. Israel is God’s principal object lesson. And if He were to forsake Israel after all He has promised it, He would be neither faithful nor trustworthy; and there would be no assurance that He would not also forsake His church.

They’re Still Here

Today there are as many people living in the state of Florida (15 million) as there are Jewish people in the entire world. They are so small in number that, after everything they have suffered over the millennia, it is astonishing they are even here. The reason for their survival is the faithfulness of God.

In ancient times the prophets warned the Jewish people of the terrible judgments they would endure if they abandoned God’s law and the Mosaic Covenant that they had pledged to accept. Yet, in the midst of Babylon’s devastating destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the prophet Jeremiah declared, “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22–23). Through Jeremiah, God reminded Israel and the world that He is faithful, even if they are not.

Unlike the United States and other countries, whose abandonment of God may eventuate in their disappearance from the earth, Israel is guaranteed to survive forever:

“For I am with you,” says the Lord, “to save you; though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered...”
Today God’s faithfulness should be obvious to anyone who has toured Israel. It is a modern, vibrant, blossoming country adorned with beautiful farms and lush vegetation—just as God promised. He told the Jewish people they would one day return to their land, and they have (Ezek. 37). He also told them, “The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice” (Isa. 35:1–2). What became barren and desolate under the Gentiles has become beautiful and productive under the Jews. The world, particularly Bible-believing Christians, should recognize modern Israel as a partial fulfillment of prophecy, and give glory to God.

Unfortunately, most people pay scant attention to God’s Word and give Him anything but glory. As for what they think of Israel, many see it as an obstinate obstacle to peace. They feel it should simply commit suicide and let the Palestinians take over.

Ultimately, however, God will have His way. He is on record about the security of His nation. Israel will never be destroyed:

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord [YHVH] from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2–3).

The God whom we serve is always faithful. Just as He is faithful to His church, so is He faithful to His Chosen People. As Paul wrote, “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13).

Israel possesses a portion of the Promised Land today amid much turmoil. But someday it will possess everything God promised, amid peace.

Thomas C. Simcox is the Northeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.
The concept of a priesthood did not originate with the nation of Israel. During the patriarchal period, the head of each household functioned as a mediating priest on behalf of his family members, offering sacrifices to God on their behalf (Gen. 12:7–8; 13:18; 22:9; Job 1:5). At Mount Sinai, God informed Israel that if the nation obeyed Him, it would become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). The Israelites would have direct access to Him, along with the responsibility to demonstrate His holiness to the world.

But the Israelites sinned against God and broke the covenant He had made with them at Mount Sinai, forfeiting the privilege of becoming a Kingdom of priests (v. 5). Therefore, it became necessary for God to choose priests from among the people to represent the nation of Israel before Him. While Moses was on Mount Sinai, God said to him, “Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to Me as priest” (28:1). Thus God chose the tribe of Levi to function as priests (Num. 3:5–13). The term priest (Hebrew, kohayn) means “one who officiates.”

Christ’s Perfection

Although Christ returned to heaven to occupy His rightful position at the Father’s right hand, He is still very much aware of our plight and needs: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (v. 15).
During His earthly pilgrimage, Jesus Christ was fully aware of the problems that plague mankind. As He increased in wisdom and stature and grew in favor with God and man, He was tempted as we are. He became tired, hungry, and thirsty and experienced human limitations. He felt pain, love, rejection, joy, sorrow, peace, and fear. He endured poverty and persecution and was forsaken by His friends when He needed them most; even God the Father deserted Him on the cross.

Satan dogged Him throughout His life and with subtle cunning attempted to entice Him to sin. The Devil did all in His power to destroy Christ during His earthly ministry. No better words sum up His suffering than those of the prophet Isaiah:

*He is despised and rejected by men,*
*a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were,*
*our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him* (Isa. 53:3).

The types of temptations Jesus faced are recorded in Matthew 4:1–11. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by the Devil. At His weakest moment, after He had fasted 40 days, Jesus was approached by the Devil, who used the same ploy he used against Eve in the Garden of Eden: He appealed to the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (Gen. 3:6; cf. 1 Jn. 2:16). Satan’s entire purpose was to cause the Son of God to sin and, in so doing, destroy Him and His ministry.

First, the Devil appealed to the flesh, tempting the Lord to satisfy His physical desire for food by turning stones into bread (Mt. 4:3).

Second, the Devil appealed to pride, tempting the Lord to prove His deity by jumping from the Temple’s pinnacle, whereupon His angels would swoop down and miraculously preserve Him from injury (vv. 5–6).

Third, the Devil appealed to the eyes, tempting the Lord with power and dominion. He took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him the kingdoms of this world and their glory, promising to give all of them to Him in return for worship (vv. 8–9). If Jesus had succumbed, He would have made Himself subservient to an inferior, created being and moved totally outside of God’s will.

In all three temptations, Jesus did not argue with the Devil or resist Him in His own power. He overcame the temptations by accurately quoting passages from Deuteronomy.

Jesus was “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). The word *yet* is not in the original Greek text. So the passage should read “without sin,” that is, “apart from sin.” In other words, sin was not a temptation to Him because there was nothing in Him to respond to sin.

The fact that Jesus did not sin is confirmed by Scripture: He “knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21), “committed no sin” (1 Pet. 2:22), and was “apart from sin” (Heb. 9:28). Sin was not inherent in Him because He did not possess the Adamic nature. The Lord could be tempted because He was human; but as the God-man, it was impossible for Him to sin. If God can sin, then He is not God. The same holds true for the Son of God.

Some people ask, “Since Jesus was sinless and it was impossible for Him to sin, was His temptation real?” Yes, it was very real because it came to Him from outside His being. However, He could not, and did not, yield to it. For example, a man in a small boat might attack a battleship and try to sink it with a bow and arrow. The attack and intent are real, but it is impossible for arrows to sink a battleship.

Having been tested by temptation, Jesus was touched with the feeling of our infirmities; He knows, understands, and sympathizes with the human condition. We now have a Man in glory as our High Priest who triumphed over temptation and functions as our Mediator, Intercessor, and Advocate.

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**Christ’s Provision**

Knowing that Christ is their High Priest in heaven who completely understands their plight and persecution, Jewish believers are encouraged to take advantage of Jesus’ availability. The author closed this section with a call to prayer and a reminder of the Lord’s provisions: “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16).

Under the Mosaic Covenant, Israelites were unable to go before God’s throne. They obtained access through the High Priest who was only allowed into God’s presence once a year, on the Day of Atonement. And He entered with fear and trembling. In contrast, Jewish believers are continually bidden to come into God’s presence with boldness, confidence, frankness, and free and open speech to pour out their hearts at the throne of grace. Notice that believers come to a throne of grace, not a throne of judgment.

They receive mercy when they confess their past sins, and mercy to help them face their current miseries. Grace is how God dealt with believers in the past when they received Christ. Grace also provides God’s enablement to meet their needs. Believers undergoing persecution today can take great solace, hope, and encouragement in the Lord.

No matter what the need, whether it be for forgiveness, wisdom, self-control to overcome a sinful habit, strength in one’s walk with the Lord, food, clothing, or what have you, you can make your plea at God’s throne of grace. The admonition is to go boldly, and you will receive abundantly.

What a High Priest! What glorious promises! What a privilege for believers! God’s throne of grace is open. Have you availed yourself of it?

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David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
involved Babylon destroying Jerusalem and the first Temple, executing many Jewish people, and taking most of the others into captivity (Jer. 6:9–13; 8:9–10).

Because the eyes and heart of Judah’s King Jehoiakim focused on satisfying his covetousness by treating others unjustly, shedding innocent blood, oppressing people, and using violence, God declared He would severely judge him. The people of Judah would not mourn his death, and He would be buried like a donkey that was usually dragged from its place of death and cast outside the city (22:13–19).

God also judged ancient Babylon according to the measure of its covetousness (51:13).

He declared He would make the land of Israel desolate because the people covetously pursued personal gain. They enjoyed coming to hear the prophet Ezekiel proclaim God’s Word, and they outwardly professed much love; but they did not do what God told them to do. They failed to obey His Word because their hearts were selfishly devoted to pursuing covetous, personal gain “in direct opposition to unselfish devotion to God” (Ezek. 33:28–33).

Covetous people are listed among the unrighteous, or sons of disobedience, who do not inherit the Kingdom of God and on whom God’s wrath falls (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Eph. 5:3–6).

The apostle Paul declared that the Lord is the avenger of those who, through coveting, take advantage of and defraud a man by having an adulterous relationship with his wife (1 Th. 4:3-6).

People who are filled with covetousness are “deserving of death” as part of “the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 1:28–32).

False teachers who unjustly exploit others with deceptive words in order to satisfy their covetous greed are “accursed,” and their judgment is actively waiting to bring their destruction (2 Pet. 2:1–3, 14).

All of these biblical expressions of judgment strongly emphasize that God regards covetousness as an extremely serious sin.

Ministry and Covetousness

Scripture indicates that those who devote their lives to God’s ministry must avoid covetousness. Paul is an example of a servant of God who was determined to avoid compromising God’s ministry with the sin of covetousness. Toward the end of his ministry he stated, “I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel” (Acts 20:33). Instead of depending on material support from those to whom he ministered, he frequently practiced his trade to provide for himself and his companions (v. 34).

Paul was extremely careful that the Corinthians’ gift of money to the needy believers in Jerusalem be collected in a way that the Corinthians could not wrongly conclude he intended it to satisfy covetousness on his part (2 Cor. 9:5).

Paul was careful never to use deception to conceal covetousness: “For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness” (1 Th. 2:5).

Paul gave the following instruction to Timothy, his son in the faith, concerning those in ministry leadership:

A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober–minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous. Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double–tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money (1 Tim. 3:2–3, 8).
Those Who Do Not Covet

The Bible reveals the characteristics of people who do not covet. They hate covetousness (Ex. 18:21; Prov. 28:16), prevent their hearts from inclining to covetousness (Ps. 119:36), flee the love of money and pursue righteousness (1 Tim. 6:10–11), are loyal to God as their Master and despise the love of money (Lk. 16:13), do not keep company with covetous people who are considered to be believers (1 Cor. 5:11), never cause great harm to be identified as a covetous person (Eph. 5:5), put to death any tendency to covetousness (Col. 3:5), take heed of covetousness and recognize that their lives do not consist of the things they possess (Lk. 12:15), accept the fact that God’s will for believers is their sanctification, learn how to possess their own bodies in sanctification and honor (1 Th. 4:3–4), and are content with what they have (Heb. 13:5).

People who hate covetousness will prolong their lives (Prov. 28:16).

Stealing

Because coveting what another possesses often prompts stealing, the Bible addresses the subject.

Old Testament. The Old Testament uses three basic Hebrew words for “stealing.”

The first, gazal, means “to take that which belongs to another without his consent or knowledge.” It is restricted to acts of theft done secretly.8 It is the word used in the Eighth Commandment, “You shall not steal” (Ex. 20:15).

The second word, gazzal, means “to snatch away violently.”9 It “clearly describes the forceful tearing away of an object from its owner or its place by a person or persons who are stronger than the object or its owner.”10

Gazal was used for the violent snatching away of people: a fatherless child from a nursing mother (Job 24:9), daughters (Gen. 31:31), and wives (Jud. 21:23); animals: a donkey (Dt. 28:31), flocks (Job 24:2), and an animal to be sacrificed (Mal. 1:13); and things: a well of water (Gen. 21:25), fields (Mic. 2:2), and houses (Job 20:19).4 The Old Testament prophets indicated that God hates this type of robbery (Isa. 61:8).9

Some of the victims of gazal robbery were neighbors (Lev. 19:13), travelers (Jud. 9:25), the poor (Prov. 22:22), and fathers and mothers (Prov. 28:24).10

Frequently gazal was used together with the third word, ashag (Lev. 19:13; Dt. 28:29; Jer. 21:12; Mic. 2:2).11 This word is related to “acts of abuse of power or authority, the burdening, trampling, and crushing of those in lower station.”12 It carries the meanings of extorting or oppressing. “Those most likely to be mistreated or oppressed were those without adequate defense of their rights, i.e., the widow, the orphan, the sojourner and the poor.”13 (Zech. 7:10).

God forbade the Israelites to oppress a neighbor (Lev. 19:13), a hired servant, another Israelite, or a foreigner living temporarily in Israel (Dt. 24:14).14 Such oppression was sin against God (Lev. 6:1–7).15 Because many Israelites repeatedly oppressed others (Amos 4:1; Mic. 2:2; Mal. 3:5), God declared that the nation would be continually oppressed and robbery by others, and no one would help it (Dt. 28:29, 33; Hos. 5:11).16

New Testament. The New Testament uses three Greek words for “stealing.” The first, klepto, refers to stealing something in a secret or deceptive manner. Its noun counterpart, kleptes, identifies a thief “who acts with subterfuge and secrecy.”17 It is the counterpart of the Hebrew gazol.

The New Testament uses klepto in Jesus and Paul’s quotations of the Eighth Commandment, “You shall not steal” (Mk. 10:19; Rom. 13:9). Paul used klepto in his instruction, “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good” (Eph. 4:28). The apostle Peter linked thieves with murderers, evil-doers, and busybodies (1 Pet. 4:15).18

The second word, harpadzo, refers to taking “something forcefully (firmly, quickly or rapaciously).”19 The counterpart of the Old Testament word gazal, it is the New Testament word for “extortion.” Paul grouped extortioners with covetors, idolaters, revilers, drunkards, thieves, and the sexually immoral (1 Cor. 5:10–11); and he said they will not inherit the Kingdom of God unless they become saved (6:9–11).20

The third word, lestes, implies “a ruthless use of force in seeking the goods of others.”21 “In 2 C. 11:26 [2 Corinthians 11:26] Paul mentions perils of robbers among the many perils to which he was exposed in the discharge of his apostolic office. . . Paul is thinking of the bandits who in their thirst for the goods of others lie in wait for the traveller in lonely places.”22 This word is used for the two thieves crucified with Christ (Mk. 15:27).

Weights, Measures, Scales

One means of stealing is the use of dishonest weights, measures, and scales. The Bible declares that dishonest weights, measures, and scales and those who use them are an abomination to God (Dt. 25:13–16; Prov. 11:1; 20:10, 23). By contrast, it states, “Honest weights and scales are the Lord’s” (Prov. 16:11), an honest weight is His delight (11:1), and the days of those who use them “may be lengthened” (Dt. 25:15).

ENDNOTES


3 Ibid., 363–364.


7 Ibid., 458.

8 Ibid., 457.

9 Ibid., 363–364.


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 705–706.


17 Ibid., 755.

18 Werner Foerster, “harpadzo.” TDNT, 1:472.

19 Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “lestes,” TDNT, 4:258.

20 Ibid. 260.
Egyptian advises: ‘Sexually harass Jewish women’

Arutz-7—A female Egyptian lawyer has recommended that Arab men sexually harass Jewish women to force Jews to leave Israel. Egypt, which signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1979, is perceived among Western nations as a moderate Arab nation where secular Arabs are a majority.

In a video clip of the interview, which aired on Al Arabiyah television on October 31, 2008, Nagla al-Imam said, “In my opinion, they are fair game for all Arabs, and there is nothing wrong . . . this is a new form of resistance.”

According to a translation provided by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), which released the clip, al-Imam specified, however, that her “resistance” plan did not include rape.

“No. Sexual harassment . . . In my view, the [Israeli women] do not have any right to respond. The resistance fighters would not initiate such a thing, because their moral values are much loftier than that. However, if such a thing did happen to them, the [Israeli women] have no right to make any demands, because this would put us on equal terms. Leave the land so we won’t rape you. These two things are equal,” she said.

Al-Imam added that she did not want “young Arab men to be interrogated,” but rather, she wanted “these Zionist girls with Israeli citizenship to be expelled from our Arab countries. This is a form of resistance, and a way of rejecting their presence.”

Jerusalem Arabs boycott election

The Jerusalem Post—As in previous municipal elections, the overwhelming majority of Jerusalem’s Arab voters boycotted recent elections. The number of Arab voters in the city is estimated at 125,000. But since 1967, Arab residents of Jerusalem have boycotted municipal elections out of fear that their participation would be interpreted as recognition of Israel’s annexation of the Arab neighborhoods.

The Arabs in Jerusalem are entitled to vote and run in municipal elections. But because they aren’t citizens of Israel, they can’t vote for the Knesset.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) warned them not to participate in the election and threatened that any Arab who presented his or her candidacy or voted would be treated as a “traitor.” The PA’s top religious leaders also issued a number of fatwas (Islamic decrees) banning Arabs from taking part.

However, cars carrying posters of Nir Barkat and Arkadi Gaydamak could be seen in almost every neighborhood and village in the eastern part of the city. Gaydamak appeared to have run the largest election campaign in the Arab part of the city since 1967. Asked about the PA’s call for boycotting the vote, he replied: “What has the Palestinian Authority done for the Arab residents of Jerusalem? Absolutely nothing. I see no reason why we shouldn’t participate in an election that does not have political repercussions. These elections are about the municipal services and taxes more than political issues.”

Obama denies Hamas meeting

The Jerusalem Post—U.S. President-elect Barack Obama’s office has flatly denied a Hamas official’s claim that Obama’s advisers met with representatives from the terrorist organization while on a visit to the region. “This assertion is just plain false,” Obama’s senior foreign policy adviser, Denis McDonough, told The Jerusalem Post.

Earlier in the day, the London-based Al-Hayat newspaper published an interview with Hamas political adviser Ahmed Youssef in which he said that a secret meeting was held in Gaza ahead of the U.S. election on November 4. “We are maintaining contact with them [Obama’s advisers],” Youssef said. “We first made contact on the Internet and then met with some of them here in the Gaza Strip. They advised us not to reveal this information lest it influence the elections or become manipulated by [Republican candidate John] McCain’s campaign.” Youssef also said that he personally had friendly relations with a few of Obama’s advisers whom he had met when he lived in the United States.

Explosives found

Arutz-7—Security officials have discovered hundreds of pounds of explosives in Judea and Samaria, including naphtha- lene and fertilizers used to manufacture weapons and explosives. Israeli nationalists and many military officials have warned since the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza three years ago that it was only a matter of time until terrorists would smuggle explosives and weapons into Judea and Samaria.

Earlier in 2008, the Israel Defense Forces prevented several suicide bombing attacks by nab- bing terrorists at checkpoints that the United States has been press- suring Israel to remove.

More PA TV

Arutz-7—As first announced by a Hamas Web site, a new Arabic satellite TV station focused on the Palestinian Authority (PA) has begun full broadcasts. The Beirut, Lebanon-based station, called al-Quds TV, is a Syrian project.

It is dedicated to promoting Arab propaganda regarding Israel’s capital, Jerusalem. Analysts from the Israel and U.S.-based Institute of Terrorism Research and Response see al-Quds TV primarily as a vehicle to spread the message of those PA terrorist factions in Syria’s good graces, beyond what was possible through local broadcasts and Internet Web sites.
Rabbi Bernstein  
Not the Only First-Amendment Casualty in N.J.

While Rabbi Avraham Bernstein waits for his case to come up in court, another New Jersey resident has been forced to shut down the Christian meeting he held in his garage for eight years because the township received one e-mail.

Oscar Maia said about six families met in his detached garage on his three-acre property in Jackson. “We never had anybody parking cars in the street,” he said. “I have plenty of driveway space where we could put 30 cars if need be.” But the township told him he needs a permit, variance, engineering study, traffic-impact study, and said he will have to modify the garage to suit a “house of worship” if he wants to continue using it.

A permit alone, he was told, could run from $5,000 to $25,000. “We don’t have the money,” he said. “We’re waiting for God to work in our favor.” Meanwhile, the tiny congregation has split up. Maia now drives 60 miles to go to church.

Bernstein, an ultra-Orthodox rabbi, still holds Sabbath meetings in his home in Freehold, New Jersey. His case is due to be heard in U.S. District Court in January, Bernstein is represented by the Rutherford Institute in Charlottesville, Virginia, and Vincent Manning of Freehold.

The Freehold Zoning Board has declared Bernstein’s home a house of worship but is not citing the rabbi while the case is pending. Both Bernstein and Maia pay property taxes, whereas houses of worship are tax-exempt.

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S
ome days you can plan what to
do first and what to do second.
Other days, things happen that
you never expect. And so it was
recently when my wife sent me to
the supermarket with a list of things
to buy. As I was looking for what she
wanted, something happened that I
never could have planned.

A few months ago I had a long
conversation with an ultra-Orthodox
man about faith in Christ. Who
should be in the store but the same
man. And there, before my eyes, he
began pointing at me and shouting in
a loud voice to everyone in the
supermarket, “Beware of this man!
He is very dangerous!”

I have lived here a long time, and
almost everyone knows me. Over
the years I have helped many peo-
ple with home repairs and other
work they could not do themselves.
They know me as a friend who
would never harm anyone. So they
began looking at this man as though
he were a little crazy. The man tried
to fight with me, but I was not
afraid of him.

“If you are so strong in your faith,”
I said, “then tell these people who it is
that you worship. You put your faith
in teachers, rather than in God. And
you do not even realize it.”

A crowd began to gather in the
supermarket. Everyone was looking at
the man, thinking he had lost all his
wisdom. For half an hour we dis-
cussed faith, with everyone listening.

“All these people do not believe
me when I tell them you do not
believe in God,” he declared. “You
speak with people and try to per-
suade them to leave the pure faith of
Judaism and change to a different
faith. These people do not under-
stand this,” he said. “You want to
make them Christians.”

I gave him much time to speak.
What he does not understand is that
he is not practicing the pure faith of
Judaism. He is doing what rabbinic
tradition tells him to do, and he
believes only what the rabbis tell
him to believe. Sadly, the Orthodox
lean heavily on the Talmud, which
is extrabiblical, and the teachings
of their rabbis whom they believe
are holy.

After a while, people began ask-
ing me what I thought. “First,” I
said, “I want to thank you for giving
me an opportunity to reply.” So I
asked them, “In whom are we to put
our trust? In the Lord, about whom it
is written in the Holy Bible, or in
men? I put my trust in the Lord,” I
said. “I do not go to people with
books of fiction written by those who
call themselves holy. I go with one
book: the Bible. There it is written,
‘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 (for the LORD your God is a jealous God among you)” (Dt. 6:13–15).

I told them, “We must follow God with all our hearts.”

But the ultra-Orthodox man became even more agitated and screamed in a high-pitched voice, “He tried to make me a Christian!”

So I showed them my Bible, which I always have with me in a small bag, and told them, “Please read this and see if what I am saying is against the Jewish law.” Several people examined my Bible from beginning to end. “This is the true Bible,” one declared.

“Please,” I continued, “take this Book. It contains the important words of the Lord. It is these words we must follow, not the many laws the rabbis have written for you to follow—most of which they do not follow themselves. We are to fear the Lord and serve Him only. We are not to worship men who have long beards and wear black clothing and try to tell us what to believe.”

People had stopped shopping and were listening carefully. I always try to explain to people that they must read the Bible only. Unfortunately, many Jewish people have become so unsure of their own ability to understand God’s Word that they go to a rabbi and ask his interpretation; so again, all they hear is what the rabbis tell them.

Many people asked me how I came to know all this. I told them, “I read my Bible and worship God according to His Word. Is this against the Law?”

“We agree with you,” they all said. The ultra-Orthodox man was very disappointed. But I was happy that God had brought so many people to me. Even though I had not planned anything, I had a good opportunity to speak about true faith in the God of Israel, according to the Bible.

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