Securely anchored to the Rock against every storm of trial, testing, and tribulation
(Psalm 61:2,3).

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Ever have a desire to know some of the most extraordinary people in history? Well, in this issue you will meet some of the most intriguing, courageous, and unforgettable individuals who lived through one of the greatest periods of suffering in modern history. Yet, despite all the Devil and his minions could throw at them, they emerged triumphant and leave us with a legacy that must never be forgotten. The biblical backdrop for such heroic exploits is found in the exposition of Peter’s first epistle to the church. It provides us with a road map through the tough times we are told to expect in the last days. In addition, you will meet the liberal opposition party in the religious world and see how it tries to take the high ground against Bible believers who have faith in God’s enduring promises to Israel. All in all, it’s a must-read issue. (Cover: Allan Davey/masterfile.com)

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We recently received a personal invitation and media advisory from international Muslim leaders calling for a meeting at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. This Muslim-Christian event was billed as an “historic olive branch.” Media outlets were urged to cover it for an “important announcement promoting interfaith understanding and cooperation.”

The initiative by 138 Muslim clerics, theologians, and academics was heralded as an opportunity for “highlighting the theological synergies of the two faiths.” It read, “Muslim leaders are calling Christians to finally recognize historical and theological ties between the two faiths to build towards future collaboration.”

Our response was immediate. We at The Friends of Israel will not succumb to the fantasy of supposed “theological synergies” and fabricated “historical and theological ties.” Our commitment can be only to the revealed Word of God.

When I began discussing this invitation with friends of our ministry, their responses were swift and overwhelmingly supportive of The Friends of Israel’s stand. The following comments reflect the letters, e-mails, and phone calls we received:

I’m so happy to see that you not only see it, but expose it for what it is without fear of compromise.

How proud my wife and I are of your unwillingness to compromise your commitments to Israel, to your brothers and sisters in Christ, and surely above all, to Him.

So many are being led by false feelings of what is the Christian thing to do, not realizing the cunning and craftiness of the enemy of our souls.

Following the original meeting in Washington, the same Muslim leaders targeted Christians again, this time with “An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders.” Their letter was issued with great fanfare and another attempt to secure media coverage. Their communication was bathed in platitudes, including “The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians,” and “The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: Love of one God, and love of neighbor.”

Further, “We as Muslims invite Christians to come together on the basis of what is common to us, which is also what is essential to our faith and practice: The Two Commandments of love.”

The propaganda we hear from Islamists is one thing. But more telling is the extreme Muslim violence we see in numerous venues worldwide, which is light-years removed from the platitudes of love proclaimed in the letter.

More recently the Barnabas Fund, a Christian ministry of hope and aid to the persecuted church, has provided a well-reasoned response to the call from Muslim religious leaders. It noted the diversity of Muslim leadership represented by the 138 signatories, some known for their moderation and others known for their extremist inclinations. Disturbingly, signatories included Wahhabists and members of the Muslim Brotherhood who are on record for making radical, aggressive statements against Christians and Jews and in support of global jihad.

Wrote the Barnabas Fund: “On the surface the letter looks like a well intentioned and urgent plea for a better understanding between Muslims and Christians, so as to avert an apocalyptic war between the two largest religious blocks in the world. . . .

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
Eleven Things Christians Should Know

1. “Bethlehem will become a town of churches devoid of Christians if you transfer the area to the Palestinian Authority,” predicted the late mayor of Bethlehem, Elias Freij, pleading—in 1993—not to transfer the area to Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) control. The heads of Bethlehem and Beit Jallah monasteries begged the U.S. and Israel—in 1993—to refrain from transferring the area to the Palestinian Authority (PA). Their request was denied in order to advance the Oslo Process.

2. Christian Arabs shrank from a sizeable 15 percent minority to a 1.5 percent splinter group in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. Their plight has intensified since the 1993 establishment of the Palestinian Authority, which has supported/tolerated physical, social, economic, legal, and political harassment/terrorism against Christian minorities.

3. There are more Christian refugees from Beit Jallah (contiguous to Bethlehem) in Belize, Central America, than Christians left in Beit Jallah. There are more Christian refugees from Ramallah in Michigan and in South America than Christians remaining in Ramallah. Bethlehem was transformed from a Christian—to a more than 80 percent Muslim—majority.

4. Islam considers Christian minorities as dhimmi guilty of rejecting Muhammad, tolerated as long as they are submissive, inferior to Muslims, handy scapegoats, and therefore subjected to legalized persecution. Legalized persecution has been employed since the seventh century in order to assert Islam over other peoples, most of whom have either vanished or severely shrunk. A Muslim who converts is subject to capital punishment.

5. Bethlehem’s Church of the Nativity was hijacked in April-May 2002 by 200 Palestinian terrorists fleeing the Israeli Defense Forces. Nuns and priests were held hostage and the church was looted. Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) pressured Israel to allow the return of the hijackers—who were previously deported by Israel—to his territory.

6. “After we do away with the Saturday People, we shall take care of the Sunday People” has been a regular feature during anti-Israel PLO/PA rallies.

7. During 1970-1982, PLO terrorism in Lebanon accelerated the flight of Lebanese Christians, reducing them from the ruling sector to a precipitously dwindling minority. In 2007, the Palestinian Authority-supported/tolerated oppression has intensified the flight of Christians from Judea, Samaria, and Gaza.

8. Egregious violations of human rights by all Arab regimes have been a core cause for the lack of inter-Arab peace for the last 1,400 years.

9. A great deal of suspension of disbelief underlines the assumption that peaceful-coexistence could be achieved with a regime (the PLO/Palestinian Authority) that is the role-model of human rights violations, hate education, conventional terrorism, hijacking, homicide bombing, abrogation of commitments, and oppression of Christian minorities.

10. President [George W.] Bush (Sept. 20, 2001, Joint Session of Congress): “They [the Taliban] want to drive Christians and Jews out of vast regions of Asia and Africa . . . What is at stake is not just America’s freedom. This is the world’s fight. This is civilization’s fight.”

11. Ignoring the plight of Christian minorities in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza and overlooking the oppressive nature of the Palestinian Authority (Abu Mazen since 1993 and Hamas since 2006) for the sake of the “peace process” guarantees repeated failure, a setback to peace, and a boost to radicalism and terrorism at the expense of vital U.S. values and national security interests.
Religion and Politics: Who’s in the Game

An interesting contest seems to be heating up as the world paves a road to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The religious left has felt compelled to issue a series of documents slanted toward the Arab and Palestinian points of view, urging the powers that be to muscle Israel to accede to demands that will place Israelis in a virtually untenable position regarding their future security.

Signatories to these documents propose that they speak for the majority of evangelical Christians and, therefore, are in a position to pontificate on the direction the United States and other Western powers should take in (1) determining the future shape of the new Middle East and (2) correcting what they claim are the egregious malefactions of the Israeli government and its friends in the Zionist evangelical camp.

Their criticisms are based on the concept that Israel’s day is over, both biblically and historically. Consequently, Israelis have no more right to the land than their Muslim/Arab antagonists. Theologically, this position is popularly known as Replacement Theology, which claims that God’s promises to the heirs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were conditional and therefore abrogated by Israel’s disobedience. So the church stepped in as the true “Israel of God” and possesses the spiritualized, redefined covenants of promise.

From this lofty, self-ascribed position, modern Israel is seen as a squatter on property it seized from militarily inferior Palestinians who should receive it back, so much so that Israel has been called an apartheid state equal to South Africa, which practiced legal racial segregation and suppressed human rights from 1948 to 1994.

Zionist Christians (those of us who believe the land promises to the Jewish people are irrevocable—biblically, historically, morally, and legally) are written off as an illegitimate theological mutation, unworthy of serious consideration. Furthermore, we are accused of being anti-Palestinian political meddlers who say, “Israel right or wrong.”

This point of view elicits a number of responses that are perfectly in order, considering the seriousness of the accusations.

First and foremost, on the matter of believing God’s biblical promises regarding Jewish rights to a homeland in Eretz Yisrael, we are guilty as charged. The birth of the church as God’s grace gift to the Gentiles did not contain a deed to property in the Middle East. Nor does it give Christian leaders, as some have wrongly concluded, a mandate to dictate what land is actually His land.

Second, the accusation that we are anti-Palestinian is totally without foundation. The Palestinians are caught in the middle of a conflict created and maintained by the manipulative mismanagement of their leaders who act in their own behalf, disregarding the needs of their people. The most unfortunate are Palestinian Christians. Witness the exodus of Christian Arabs to the West and Europe in recent years. Some have gone so far as to blame this evacuation on Israel and economic oppression and despair caused by the continual “occupation.”

Hardly mentioned is the fact that the Christian exodus from the Middle East is a response to the Islamic drive to exterminate Christians and Jews from the region.

Criticism of Israel’s 8,000 settlers in Gaza was a popular theme for many years. If the Jewish infiltrators were eliminated from Gaza, the mantra went, Palestinians could elevate their social and economic status, which would change their lives and lifestyles. So the Jews left, at great cost. The result? Gaza became a staging area for terrorists; Hamas rules the street; and Christian Arabs are hunted, assassinated, and forced to find safe haven somewhere other than Gaza.

With regard to the charge of meddling in politics, let it be said that Christian Zionism is not primarily a political action movement. It is not the legitimate province of outsiders, however benevolently motivated, to dictate the political policy of a foreign government. The Israeli people are perfectly capable of determining the course their nation should pursue. That said, there is a point where politics and biblical, prophetic realities converge. This is not a matter of dictation but observation; and there is no doubt that current events, when compared with scriptural predictions, help us discern where we are and where history is heading.

For Israelis and the Jewish state, the issue is survival within secure, recognized borders. And for Palestinians, Christians, and others, it is the right to pursue productive and tranquil lives without fear of radical Islamist discrimination.
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GOT A JEWISH HEART?
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If you live long enough, you will likely discover that life takes us through stages designed to produce the maturity we are urged to attain as Christians. At the core of the process are the people we encounter along the way. Some become examples and encouragers, leaving indelible imprints that increase in value with time and experience. Then there are those who might be categorized as friends, acquaintances, or people you'd rather forget. Yes, even some of our Christian brothers and sisters enhance our growth by giving us strife and controversy; and over time, one learns that with spiritual growth comes the knowledge that no one is perfect. That's just the way life is.

However, sometimes we are touched by a few saints whose friendships we treasure and who exemplify the best of what being a Christian is about. They may be few in number, but they are there; and we are the better for it.

Looking back, I've been privileged to meet some exceedingly extraordinary people who have enriched my life and immeasurably influenced the course of my personal ministry. Most of them have not stood in the white lights of popularity or fame. In fact, most have names you've probably never heard. But they are there, nonetheless.

I've told the story of our Zvi, whose experiences many of you read regularly in this publication and in the biography on his life, Zvi: The Miraculous Story of Triumph Over the Holocaust. So extraordinary has his life been, from a war-wracked childhood in Hitler's Europe to an exemplary life on the streets of Jerusalem, that some have questioned the truth of his story. Yet truth is often stranger than fiction. I've walked through Zvi's life and certified the facts.
through the testimonies of individuals from the Knesset to the Israeli army to the back alleys of Jerusalem. The result being that a man deprived of academic credentials and status in this world’s self-absorbed race to riches has truly influenced, by life and example, thousands of people. And, thankfully, his story is not yet fully written.

It was Victor and Lydia Buksbazen, another pair of extraordinary people, who introduced me to the story of Zvi and his family. For 33 years the Buksbazens led The Friends of Israel (FOI) in a compassionate, biblical, and relief-oriented ministry that reached out to Jewish and Gentile people alike. And through their unselfish self-sacrifice, FOI today reaches millions around the world. You’ll hear more of their story in our next issue when we celebrate The Friends of Israel at 70.

Every time I walk down the Street of the Righteous Gentiles at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, I am acutely aware of journeying through a veritable memorial to seminally extraordinary people. The names on the plaques beneath the shading carob trees are virtually all unknown to me—strange names with an array of befuddling consonants. But two are familiar, and I never fail to stand before them for a bit and think of what they represent.

Fresh flowers, neatly bunched, always adorn the tiny plaque memorializing Oskar Schindler. The German industrialist was popularized in book and film because he literally purchased 1,200 Jewish men, women, and children from the Nazis during the Holocaust. Far up the street is the inscribed tribute to Corrie ten Boom who, along with her family, willingly risked everything to rescue Jewish people being hunted by agents of the megalomanic Adolf Hitler.

A name that, in all probability, will never be numbered among those at Yad Vashem belongs to a woman who is, in every sense of the word, extraordinary. Her name is Halina, known for years here at FOI as Mrs. Alice because of the Communist threat to Christians in Poland during the Russian occupation following World War II. She still prefers that we do not use her full name. Halina lived through Hitler’s rampage of terror from 1939 until 1945 with two missions in mind: (1) to liberate her beloved Poland from the Germans and (2) to help Jewish people survive the Nazi campaign of annihilation.

During the war she served as a nurse, helped scores of Jewish people escape the Germans, was a member of the Polish underground resistance, served in the Polish uprising against the Nazis, and was held as a prisoner of war after the collapse of the resistance. In her heroism through wearying years of hunger, personal deprivation, and daily danger of death, Halina stood as a model of Christian fortitude and commitment to the truth while everything around her seemed to be held by Satan. She could never be accused of forgetting the Polish people (her brother was killed by the Nazis), her country, or the suffering of the Jewish people.

Years after the war Halina tells of joining Jewish organizations that came to Warsaw from many countries to commemorate the heroic 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Famous Jewish sculptor Nathan Rappaport crafted a monument that was unveiled in 1948 in the former Jewish ghetto. It was made from stone originally quarried for a Nazi victory monument. Each block commemorates an individual or event in the ghetto.

“They who do not know the Bible,” Halina observes, “look at it and do not understand the meaning. For me, it is very clear. The monument represents a huge furnace. In the middle of the furnace we could see an opening. And in the opening we could see flames of stone, and among the flames we saw a young woman with a baby in her arms. We could also see two young, brave warriors looking upward, not afraid, with courage on their countenances.

“As I looked on their faces, seeing their eyes looking up, I remembered Psalm 121: ‘From whence comes my help?’ The answer is, ‘From above.’ And so it seemed to me that these young warriors in the flames were looking to the God of Israel. From Him only could help come for their nation. This remarkable monument shows the undaunted spirit of the Jewish people and their hope, which nothing could extinguish.

“This memorial, for me, was the most significant and beautiful monument of all that I saw after the war. And as I stood in front of the sculpture, awaiting the celebration of the Jewish Uprising, a thought came to me. Why was this blood shed by Jewish people and the ashes left by the crematoria where millions were burned to death in vain? And why was it necessary? Why would God permit this terrible slaughter of innocent people?

“Then, as we came to lay our wreaths as the Gentile friends of Israel beside those of the Jewish organizations, the answer came to me: Because the conscience of the world is so hard. And I understood. It was not God, but the inherent evil in the hearts of depraved men who brought the slaughter about.”

Halina’s message is the lesson for us all. Vicious, persistent anti-Semitism is a manifestation of the satanic obsession to destroy God’s Chosen People. The faces of the perpetrators are many, but every one of them is driven by the same master and devoted to the same cause.

Yet God raised up extraordinary people, some whose names we will never know. Those who witnessed their deeds, however, leave a legacy of courage and determination that seems to be missing in the affluent West’s current moral morass and passion to forget.

There was the man from Praga who managed to secure work in the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw. His reward was a life-sustaining bowl of soup for his efforts. One day, driven by a rash act of compassion, he accepted a newborn baby from a mother whose life was destined to end in the gas chamber. How to get the child past the ghetto guards was a problem he solved by placing the baby in a large suitcase he carried to and from his work. Fortunately, the baby slept and was taken into his home. The man completed this dangerous mission repeatedly, and today the beneficiaries of his courage revere his memory.

Then there was a 14-year-old Jewish girl who was hidden in a pigsty while her parents received safe haven in another town. She had such a desire to see her parents that she ventured out...
people were hiding. Fortunately, the couple had a small dog that drew the attention of the German shepherd. When the Gestapo dog approached the little pooch, the spaniel bolted and ran out of the house with the police dog in hot pursuit. So the search ended, and both the Polish family and Jewish fugitives were saved.

Such stories are endless. People were secreted in boxes built under coal bins, behind false walls hiding refuge rooms, and in other ingeniously designed hiding places. Hundreds of Gentiles, many of whom were Christians, willingly faced death to save Jewish people. These are the faces of the extraordinary coming to us as examples of courage and doing the right thing at the right time.

Why did they do it? A gutsy little nun was asked that question when someone observed that she had not been awarded a medal by the Yad Vashem Memorial. “We were saving lives not for a reward,” she answered. “We did not want any reward. It was far too dangerous to do it for a reward. We wanted to save lives, and God helped us to do it.” It was as simple as that.

You may have read of my interview with a prominent Jewish senator years ago. When I asked how he felt about possible persecution in America, this was his comment: “Elwood, I believe that every Jew from time to time looks around at his circle of friends and associates and asks himself a question: If an Adolf Hitler would rise in America, who among these people would give me a place to hide?”

Now, let me ask you a question. As a Christian in a world where rising antievangelical militancy may soon threaten your safety, who in your circle of friends would give you a place to hide? Perhaps it’s time we asked God to raise up extraordinary people.

In another instance, a courageous Polish couple dug out an area under their kitchen floor to provide a hiding place for Jewish families. Whenever the Gestapo was in the area, the Jewish people would slip into the dugout and wait until the danger passed. One day suspicious agents entered the house accompanied by a large German shepherd trained to sniff out secret places where Jewish people were hiding. Fortunately, the couple had a small dog that drew the attention of the German shepherd. When the Gestapo dog approached the little pooch, the spaniel bolted and ran out of the house with the police dog in hot pursuit. So the search ended, and both the Polish family and Jewish fugitives were saved.

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Media producers and conservative Christians have long argued about whether film and television fare can so affect people, especially youth, that it influences their actions. Secularists in the celluloid industry have loudly claimed that there is little or no perceptible relationship between the steady stream of violence and licentiousness passing for theatrical art and what happens in real life.

However, it doesn’t take a certified genius to understand that the great majority of purveyors of violence and perversity defend their sleazy productions solely in the interest of profit and that the media can greatly influence human behavior.

A case in point was on display recently in Turkey. Although it is 99 percent Muslim, Turkey has a secular provision that allows Muslims to convert to other religions. According to a report by Compass Direct News, on December 16, 2007, a Catholic priest was stabbed while conversing with a young Muslim who claimed to be interested in converting.

Then, on December 29, 22-year-old Murat Tabuk admitted to planning the assassination of Ramazan Arkan, 30, pastor of the Antalya New Testament Church. A former Muslim from the town of Sivas, Arkan became a Christian 11 years ago and has been a pastor for the past eight years. Since the planned killing was discovered, Pastor Arkan has been under police custody to insure his safety.

In both instances the perpetrators said they were inspired to kill Christians by the popular, ultra-nationalist Turkish television serial Valley of the Wolves. Compass Direct reported that the series depicts Christian missionaries as political infiltrators who pay poor families to convert to Christianity and shows Christians selling body parts and participating in mafia activities and prostitution. Christians are also portrayed “as working as enemies of society in order to spread their faith,” the news service said.

Arkan signed a formal complaint with the Istanbul state prosecutor’s office protesting the weekly show. The complaint says the show has fomented “innumerable direct threats, attacks against places of worship and eventually, the live slaughter of three innocent Christians in Malatya.”

Church leaders have demanded that the producers be prosecuted for spreading false information and inciting violence against Christians, but thus far no legal action has been forthcoming.

In the wake of the attacks and renewed threats of violence against believers, Pastor Arkan told Compass Direct News, “I’m not afraid, but I do have some anxieties, of course. We have come to the point of being a target. That is uncomfortable, but we will see how this affects us all.”

Unfortunately, Christians in the Middle East are also becoming targets. In actuality, two wars are being fought in the region. One is the military conflict waged by Islamists to drive democracy, the West, and Western influence out of the region in order to install an Islamic caliphate under which any remaining religions would be tolerated only as second-class, or dhimmi, entities. The other is leveled against Christians in the hope of purging Christianity entirely from these countries.

In reality, it is a war of annihilation. And a potent weapon in that war is inflammatory media productions like Valley of the Wolves.

Turkish protestors in Istanbul hold a banner that reads, “All together against fascism, we are all Christians” during a demonstration in 2007 against attacks on minorities (Mustafa Ozer/AFP/Getty Images).

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).
The greatest gift ever conceived and bestowed on humanity is redemption. Only an omniscient, omnipotent God could plan and perform the redemption of mankind. In chapter 1 of 1 Peter, the Lord reminds us through the apostle Peter that our redemption is based on God’s truth, grace, and sovereignty.

Peter wrote this epistle to Jewish and Gentile Christians, called “pilgrims of the Dispersion [Diaspora] in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (v. 1). They were pilgrims (foreign, temporary residents) because their true home was in heaven.

Although the definite article (the) appears before the word dispersion in the New King James and King James Versions of the Bible, it does not appear in the original Greek. Without the definite article, the construction indicates qualities or characteristics, rather than pointing out a particular identity.

Though the word diaspora often refers to Jewish people scattered throughout the world, it does not do so here. Peter omitted the definite article in verse 1, revealing he was not referring specifically to Jewish believers but to all Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

Selected to Salvation

Using a careful selection of words, Peter revealed how the triune God undertook salvation.

**ELECTED.** First, God the Father selected those who would be saved. They were “elect[ed] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (v. 2). Election refers to the sovereign act of God whereby He unconditionally chose men and women for Himself. God’s unconditional choice was not based on any merit within the individuals but was according to His grace and the good pleasure of His will.

**SANCTIFIED.** Second, believers are sanctified by the Holy Spirit (v. 2). That is, the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice to each one, whereby he/she is cleansed from sin and positionally set apart for the Lord’s service.

**SPRINKLED.** Third, the “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” makes it possible for people to be saved and cleansed from sin and enables them to live in obedient submission to the Lord and His Word.

Suffering Saints

These new believers greatly rejoiced over their salvation and inheritance in Christ. At the same time, they were “grieved by various trials” they faced because of their faith (v. 6). Yet God allowed those trials to reveal “the genuineness [proof] of [their] faith”:

> that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love (vv. 7–8).

Just as gold must be heated in fire to be refined and purified, so the refining fire of testing purifies our faith. A faith that endures the flame of persecution is truly genuine. The result brings the believer “praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ”—that is, recognition and reward at Christ’s return for His church (v. 7).

Although Peter had seen the Lord Jesus physically, he was writing to believers who had not. Yet they loved Christ because of what He had done on their behalf (v. 8). A Christian’s faith is not sustained by physically seeing the Savior but through a personal relationship with Him.

Furthermore, they rejoiced over their salvation “with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (v. 8). That is, their joy was so great that words were inadequate to express its depth and the full glory they were experiencing. Because of this loving relationship with Jesus Christ, they were already receiving the goal of their faith, which was the salvation of their souls (v. 9).

Searching the Scriptures

Peter encouraged these suffering believers by referring to the Hebrew prophets: “Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully” (v. 10). Centuries earlier, the Holy Spirit had revealed to the prophets (1) “the grace” of God that would come to believers (v. 10); (2) the “sufferings of Christ” at the time of His crucifixion (v. 11); and (3) “the glories that would follow” through Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and enthronement (v. 11).

The prophets diligently and carefully sought to understand their own
Wiser beings than the Old Testament prophets, namely angels, have a “desire to look into” various aspects of salvation (v. 12). The phrase look into depicts a person bent forward, neck extended, intently examining something closely. Thus the holy angels have a continual, overpowering longing to comprehend fully the mystery surrounding man’s redemption, which is outside their realm of understanding because angels do not experience salvation.

Stewardship of the Saints

After setting forth a doctrinal foundation for the faith of these new believers, Peter then unfolded the responsibility they have in living for Christ. Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy” (vv. 13–16).

First, they were to have hope, referring to the patient expectation of Christ’s coming and all the blessings, rewards, and joy that Christ will dispense to believers at His return. In writing “gird up the loins of your mind,” Peter told us to have a scriptural mindset of preparedness to serve the Lord. Second, he said to be sober, meaning we should exhibit self-discipline and self-control. The redeemed are to live “as obedient children” and steer clear of their former, sinful practices.

In addition, we are to be holy. God’s people are to pattern their lives after God (v. 15). He is infinitely holy, and His redemptive purpose is to deliver depraved humanity from every form of ungodliness so that people everywhere can be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

Also, we are to honor God. Christians should give God the awe and reverence due Him and live out their pilgrimages on Earth in fear because He will judge their works (service) without partiality at the Judgment Seat of Christ: “And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear” (1 Pet. 1:17).

Sacrifice for Sin

Peter then enumerated the great cost of our salvation: You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold,
Security in Salvation

Just as you must have a plan to achieve your goals in life, so also God has a plan. From the world’s foundation, God’s goal to glorify Himself included a plan to redeem lost humanity. And those on whom God has bestowed mercy are born again to a living hope and are eternally secure through Jesus Christ.

What do we mean by eternal security? Bible scholar Charles Ryrie defined the term succinctly: “Eternal security is the work of God that guarantees that the gift of salvation, once received, is forever and cannot be lost.”

The apostle Peter clearly stated that believers are “kept by the power of God through faith for salvation” (1 Pet. 1:5). The word kept is a military term that means God has placed a divine garrison around believers to guard and protect them. In other words, if you are born again, your security does not depend on anything you do, but rather on the triune God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The triune God plays the major role in our eternal security of all who receive salvation in Christ.

The Father’s Role: It is God the Father who, through the good pleasure of His will, chooses you to be saved (Eph. 1:4–5). Those whom God has chosen and predestined will, without question, eventually be glorified, indicating their destiny is eternally secure (Rom. 8:30).

Jude stressed God’s glorious and mighty power to preserve Christians: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling” (Jude 24). The Lord is sovereign over all things; and in His omnipotence, He is able to deliver you through your pilgrimage on Earth. The word keep means “to preserve” and assures us that we are eternally secure in Christ.

The Son’s Role: Jesus Christ guarantees our security in salvation: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life” (3:36). Nothing can separate us from Christ’s love (Rom. 8:35–39). Therefore, we are eternally secure. Neither can anyone (not even we ourselves) pluck us out of God the Father’s hand (Jn. 10:28–29). Jesus said, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life” (3:36, emphasis added). That is, if you are born again, you received eternal life at the moment you put your faith in Christ, thereby making you eternally secure.

The Holy Spirit’s Role: The Holy Spirit plays a key role in our eternal security. It is He who regenerates, or plants within us a new nature that is a new-life relationship with God (2 Pet. 1:4). The Spirit indwells Christians forever at the time of their new births (Jn. 14:16). He also baptizes believers, placing them into the body of Christ at the moment of regeneration. We also are “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:13–14). The indwelling Spirit is a down payment, or pledge, of our complete redemption, indicating that we are eternally secure.

God’s Word provides the proof of eternal security in Christ. This truth should give Christians security and assurance of our position in Christ. There is a slight difference between the words security and assurance. Assurance is based on God’s faithfulness to fulfill His promises of redemption. Assurance refers to the inner confidence believers have based on God’s Word, not on one’s feelings.

Finally, the apostle John revealed that believers in Christ can know with certainty, from the authority of God’s Word, that they are eternally secure: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (1 Jn. 5:13). Jesus said, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’” (Jn. 3:7). And Scripture teaches that once you are born again, you remain so forever.

Endnote


DML
Our 2007 Israel Youth Adventure was such an enormous success that we’re making plans to bring another group of young people to Israel for four weeks this summer.

Last summer we took 16 young people from across America with us for 28 days in the Holy Land. They worked on a kibbutz and in a hospital, washed dishes, pruned trees, painted walls, and cleaned air-conditioner filters. Plus they swam in the Mediterranean Sea, floated in the Dead Sea, trudged up the snake path at Masada, and touched the Western Wall in Jerusalem. They even helped archaeologists look for artifacts by sifting through rubble taken from the Temple Mount. And they ministered to and encouraged Israeli believers in a local congregation.

But best of all, they sensed God’s life-changing hand on their lives. “I’m still amazed at the people I was able to meet, the friends that I’ll have for a lifetime, and the blessings that I received!” said one participant.

Said another, “We saw God work in just a matter of two weeks, and it was just flat out amazing.”

Many participants said the trip strengthened their faith and enabled them to develop friendships with Israelis. “I would recommend this trip to anyone who’s thinking about it. It’s a great experience. And it will change your life for sure,” one said.

And here’s a comment we heard frequently: “It was the best month of my life.”

If you are between the ages of 17 and 28 and would like to consider coming with us on our 2008 Israel Youth Adventure, please call us for more information at 800-257-7843. Or write to The Friends of Israel, P.O. Box 908, Bellmawr, NJ 08039. Please put “Attention: Israel 2008 Youth Adventure” on the envelope.
Many believers today love to sing worship choruses about holiness, but most have no idea how to achieve the holiness of which they sing. Our churches today are experiencing a huge disconnect between sentiment and reality, between Sunday emotion and weekly fulfillment. How does one become holy?

Writing to believers undergoing severe testing of their faith, the apostle Peter exhorted Christians to holiness as the proper means of enduring their trials. Rather than letting them off easy, he urged, “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1 Pet. 1:15). How does one accomplish that, you ask? In 1 Peter 1:22—2:10, Peter explained.

**Love Earnestly**

(1:22–25)

Peter did not start with the mind. Instead, he began with the heart: “Love one another fervently” (1:22). Loving means putting someone else’s welfare above your own. Many years ago when my sons were little, they found two mangy stray kittens in the neighborhood. Although my mother, who was visiting us, detested cats, her love for her grandsons compelled her to help them bottle-feed the kittens back to health. I was amazed at what love did.

God is holy, completely unique, in His ability and propensity to love: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). God’s children become holy, set apart to Him, when they emulate that love for one another.

**Fervently** indicates the strenuous nature of loving as God loves. This same adverb, translated “earnestly” in Luke 22:44, pictures the intensity involved: “And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

There are three reasons to love fervently. First, that’s how God loves. Second, these believers had made a commitment: “Since [because] you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, . . . love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Pet. 1:22). Since they had already turned from selfishness, Peter urged them to flesh out that commitment.

Third, it is why they were born: “Having been born again, not of corruptible [perishable] seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (v. 23). One might say we were born
Why did Peter start with love? Because love is relational. Knowledge without love produces arrogance (1 Cor. 8:1). Obedience always paves the way for instruction. Love must precede learning for us to grow in holiness. This exercise is spiritual, rather than academic, which may explain why there is so much immaturity in our churches despite the abundance of Bible teaching and Bible study materials. Maturity depends not only on learning but on loving.

Learn Eagerly (2:1–3)

Next Peter told his readers to learn eagerly:

*Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire [long for] the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby* (1 Pet. 2:1–2).

Nothing creates hunger like hard work. Strenuously loving our brothers should produce hunger for additional teaching. But why would Peter have to command this longing for the Word? Apparently some look elsewhere for answers to the hardships involved in loving their brothers. Perhaps some look to human psychology, interpersonal manipulation, or worldly ideas of self-preservation.

But Scripture tells us to rely on our natural sustenance. The image of a nursing mother is strong here. Mother’s milk is to an infant as God’s Word is to a believer. A hungry baby lets everyone know it. No malice, deceit, or hypocrisy. We have been born of God’s Word (an imperishable seed) and should long for the milk of that Word. We are to be like those newborns.

Second, that longing must replace wrong attitudes. Some no doubt responded inappropriately to the challenges of loving one another. The phrase *putting aside* is always used in the New Testament for removing one thing in favor of another. *Malice* and *deceit* suggest that ill will and deception crept into the brethren’s interpersonal relationships. *Hypocrisy* and *envy* indicate the presence of jealousy and absence of transparency. The words *evil speaking* reveal these feelings were vocalized publicly, as in a typical family when love is stretched to the breaking point.

Third, Peter commanded this longing for the Word because the taste for a healthy diet must be nurtured. With all unholy behavior put aside, God’s Word—our natural sustenance—should now be consumed like milk in a house full of youngsters.

Our appetite for God’s Word must be cultivated. Believers who have tasted and seen that the Lord is good must not let the junk food of life destroy their longing for true nourishment. If you have lost your appetite for God’s Word, recultivate it by reading your Bible regularly. Obedience (loving fervently) and spiritual hunger (learning eagerly) produce holiness.

Labor Enthusiastically (2:4–10)

The third step to holiness is exercise. “Coming to Him as to a living stone, . . . you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house” (vv. 4–5). The context suggests a mild command. Some read the phrase *are being built up* as “let yourselves be built up,” while others render it “build yourselves up.” Clearly, this building up results from believers “coming to Him.” So we must make ourselves available for service as part of the royal priesthood that Jesus is building.

Moses’ Law established the Levitical priesthood to serve the nation of Israel in a physical house (Temple). The new economy recognizes every believer as a priest in a spiritual house. But this “priesthood of believers” does
The world today ignores many traditional beliefs, values, and mores. But none has endured as much erosion as the concept of submission. Years ago most people respected and submitted to the authority over them. But all too many no longer do.

An airline pilot I spoke with recently defined the problem: “People are just not willing to obey anyone. There is no respect for any kind of authority. They won’t listen to flight attendants or pilots. They act like they are a law unto themselves.”

The workplace is infected with the same malady. Many employees don’t feel they have to obey their bosses. Some steal materials and often pilfer time from their employers by conducting personal business on company time. Yet they feel justified because the corporation is big and powerful and ostensibly can afford the loss.

Neither has marriage escaped this serious affliction. Many people have stood before ministers and pledged their lives to each other, vowing to “love” and “submit to” each other as long as they both shall live. Once an integral part of the
Submission to Government

The Word of God speaks of submission not as a suggestion but as an obligation. The apostle Peter stated, “Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, . . . submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (emphasis added, 1 Pet. 2:11, 13). Believers should be model, law-abiding citizens. We are required to submit to “every ordinance of man,” not merely to the ones we agree with. Respect and submission to authority are compulsory.

Now, submission does have limits. We are never to obey any law or authority contrary to the revealed Word. The Bible is extremely clear on this subject. When the apostles faced persecution for preaching in the name of Jesus, “Peter and the other apostles answered and said: ‘We ought to obey God rather than men’” (Acts 5:29).

God ordained and instituted government. Governments enforce laws, collect taxes, and in turn provide stability and protection. The child of God is to submit to government and its God-given authority, “whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him [the governor] for the punishment of evildoers . . . for this is the will of God” (1 Pet. 2:13–15). God expects submission to such authority. Although doing so is not always easy, we are to submit “as bondservants of God” (v. 16).

Submission at Work

Christians are also expected to be the finest employees—the best workers possible: “Be submissive to your masters [employers] with all fear [respect], not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable” (vv. 18–19).

The Lord expects us to be diligent, hard workers who submit to the authority over us while on the job. Most work is not easy, and we repeatedly face tough choices and sometimes harsh conditions. Many Christians labor in difficult, insensitive surroundings. The Lord understands. Nevertheless, we are to submit and do the best job possible.

Conditions may be adverse and the authority may be unsympathetic, but the Bible says to “take it [suffering] patiently, this is commendable before God” (v. 20). Why should we submit, especially when it is difficult? Because “to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow” (v. 21).

We are to be followers of Christ. That is what a Christian is—a follower of the Messiah of Israel. And He set the example of complete submission: submission to His Father and submission even to death, as He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (v. 24).

Jesus is our example, our standard. He was willing to submit. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant” (Phil. 2:5–7).

Jesus was 100 percent deity and 100 percent humanity, in a single human body: “In the beginning was the Word [Jesus]. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:1, 14). Yet Jesus—the Second Person of the triune Godhead—did not clutch onto His uniqueness but willingly submitted to the will and plan of God the Father.

We are to follow His example. And though submission often seems the hardest word, it is God’s Word. And believers are to obey it.

Highway to Holiness from page 17

not mean we are priests in isolation. Each believer is a “living stone” in a “living house,” which is a holy priesthood. We must labor enthusiastically because the integrity of the house depends on each stone.

The living house of this dispensation is the church. Israel has stumbled temporarily over the manner in which its Messiah came the first time. So, until He comes again, Jesus is the Cornerstone of a spiritual house—His church—which He said He will build (Mt. 16:18).

This living and holy temple is the means by which God glorifies Himself in this world until the day He reconstructs Israel’s Temple for Messiah’s Kingdom. All genuine believers, both Jewish and Gentile, should work together “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5).

This highway to holiness is essential, then, for the church because this interim “chosen generation” that Peter also called “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His [God’s] own special people” is intended to “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (v. 9).

Until the “natural branches [the Jewish people], be grafted into their own olive tree” (Rom. 11:24), the wild olive branches (Gentiles) must live and labor together in such a way as to reflect God’s glory and holiness to the world around them.

So don’t let your trials distract you from the highway to holiness.

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The Blessing of Suffering
(1 Peter 3:13–4:19)

Turkish police officers guard the coffin of Tilmann Geske, one of three Christians whom Muslims savagely tortured then killed one year ago in April in a Christian publishing house in Turkey. Now on trial for murder, the defendants have outrageously slandered the Christians in an attempt to justify the murders (AP Photo/Serkan Senturk). Inset: Semsa Aydin at the funeral of her husband, Necati Aydin, who was murdered along with Geske and Ugur Yuksel (STR/AFP/Getty Images).
On April 18, 2007, German missionary Tilmann Geske, Turkish pastor Necati Aydin, and Turkish Christian Ugur Yuksel met at the offices of Zirve Publishing in Malatya, Turkey, for a Wednesday morning Bible study. Attending the study were 10 young men, five of whom had attended an evangelistic service on Easter Sunday the previous week. As Pastor Aydin began the study, praying no doubt that God would work in the hearts of these people, the men’s intentions became apparent.

Prepared with knives, ropes, and towels, they interrupted the study; bound the three Christian men; tortured them unspeakably; and ultimately slit their throats. When the police arrived and arrested the group, the men proudly declared that they had murdered the Christians to protect Islam.

Tilmann Geske, a 46-year-old father of three, was buried in an Armenian cemetery in Malatya. His wife, Susanne, told reporters she did not want revenge and quoted Luke 23:34: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

Another Turkish pastor told the church at large, “Don’t pray against persecution, pray for perseverance.”

When we in the West think of suffering, we think of illness, tragedies, and the horrors of war, not the intentional targeting of Christians simply because they are Christians. But the persecution of Christians today stems from the same reason it did in ancient times. They were able to separate themselves from the evil of this world and thus set themselves apart as followers of Christ.

How are believers to view this suffering? And, as God’s children, how should we respond? Peter essentially comforted his brethren with the reality that their suffering reflected God’s blessing on them, which should lead them to persevere in their faith and face persecution with joy.

The Defense of a Godly Life (3:13–22)

Peter accepted the fact that Christians will be persecuted, because Christ Himself died unjustly at the hands of men. Peter’s concern was that Christians suffer for the sake of righteousness, meaning “unjustly,” not because they broke a civil law (4:15).

By responding to unjust treatment with gentleness and reverence, believers demonstrate the truth about Christianity in the face of the lies that motivate our persecutors.

Unfortunately, a witness to Christ without a righteous life to back it up does not go far. Living for Christ requires a sure trust in God’s sovereignty and goodness on behalf of believers who are suffering. Citing Isaiah 8:12–13, Peter exhorted Christians not to fear men but rather to recognize Jesus Christ as the ultimate Judge. By so doing, we are blessed. The example is Jesus Christ Himself who, in obedience to God, “suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18).

To encourage suffering believers with Christ’s ultimate victory over evil, Peter introduced an analogy using Noah and the ark. This section has caused interpreters much trouble over the centuries:

*Also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (vv. 19–21).*

The passage, along with Ephesians 4:9, seems to imply (1) that Christ descended into hell and (2) that Christians are saved by baptism.

Concerning the first problem, it seems best to understand the preaching to the “spirits in prison” as Christ’s postresurrection declaration to the demons of His victory over evil and death, proclaimed as He ascended to take His position at the right hand of the Father in heaven as Lord of all. In this sense, the message to believers is that honoring Christ now, despite suffering, is not in vain because Christ’s victory over evil portends that we also will be delivered from evil at the end of the age.

Concerning the second problem, Peter compared Noah and his family’s deliverance through water to Christians ultimately being delivered from this evil world, as illustrated by baptism through water. Baptism visualizes the change that has already taken place in our hearts.

Again, the analogy seems to focus on the period of suffering that Noah had to endure before God judged the world and saved Noah’s family. The exhortation to believers is that we also are to persevere, looking forward to our final deliverance (1:9).

Suffering Separates One From Sin (4:1–11)

Peter made it clear that those who have identified with Christ to the point of suffering for their faith also have separated themselves from the lusts of the flesh and the world. Just as Christ suffered by doing God’s will, so, too, will believers.

In other words, Christians are those who separate themselves from the evil of this world and thus set themselves apart as followers of Christ. This separation often leads to persecution. In the first centuries of the church, before Christianity became a legal religion in the Roman Empire, the pagans’ primary complaint about Christians was that they were “antisocial,” meaning they did not engage in Roman society’s pagan revelries. Consequently, their neighbors distrusted them and spread all sorts of rumors about them, resulting in slander and persecution.

But by identifying with Christ, believers were able to separate themselves from the evils of the world. As a separated group, they were able to care for one another in true, divine love. Just as tragedies often bring families or communities together, so persecution should bring believers together since they belong to God’s new family. By sharing material goods, as well as by preaching and exhortation, believers do God’s will and glorify Him in the midst of a dark world.

Rejoicing in Suffering (4:12–19)

Like Job’s friends, we often associate suffering with divine retribution. The biblical teaching is, rather, that trials
In the meantime, believers are to “suffer according to the will of God” (i.e., righteously) and “commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (v. 19). Enduring suffering is the greatest demonstration of our faith in God’s righteousness because it shows the world our faith in God does not depend on our circumstances. We do not follow God for our present good; but rather, as repentant sinners, we follow Christ because we want to glorify God in righteousness and holiness.

It is appropriate that Peter was the disciple who wrote about suffering. He no doubt never forgot he was the one who denied knowing Christ out of fear of men. Yet a few years after writing this epistle, Peter himself was martyred in Emperor Nero’s persecution in Rome. So Peter learned personally what it costs to follow Christ.

We Westerners rarely pay such a price. But is this circumstance for our good? In a pluralistic society, it usually is easier to blend in, become indistinguishable from everyone else, and join in the civic religion. But if we do so, how will we be distinguished from unbelievers or the church from the world?

Peter’s answer was that those who honor Christ as Lord and live accordingly will depart from evil. But in doing so, they must expect recrimination. Are we willing for such persecution to come to us?

Our brethren around the world truly suffer for their faith in Christ. And we must pray, as the Turkish pastor said, not that persecution ceases but that through it, believers are able to testify abundantly to the Lordship of Christ in love and righteousness. We may also pray the same for ourselves because in suffering, Christians receive God’s blessing.

ENDNOTE

1 "A Letter to the Global Church From the Protestant Church of Smyrna," (updated version), May 1, 2007 <izmirprotestan.org/docs/Letter_to_the_Global_Church.pdf>.

Herb Hirt is dean of the School of Biblical Studies at Philadelphia Biblical University.

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The apostles Peter and Paul had much to say regarding submission to governmental authority, employers, and spouses. But the underlying point—the bottom line—is that all people, particularly believers, should willingly and readily submit to God.

After God completed His creation, He declared that submission to His authority was mandatory: “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Gen. 2:16–17). God made his position absolutely clear: If Adam didn’t want to die and experience punishment, he and his progeny needed to submit to God’s authority. Since mankind was created by God and for God, it was to submit willingly to Him.

But from the beginning, people refused. Eve was deceived; and Adam, with his eyes wide open, willingly rebelled against the Creator’s authority and thus plunged all humanity into a lost, rebellious state. Submission to God brought life; rebellion brought death.

Later God gave His Law, His commandments, to His chosen nation Israel. God made clear what He expected from them: “So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments . . . and Moses wrote all the words of the LORD” (Ex. 24:3–4). The Israelites understood what was required to experience blessing from the hand of God: submission to His laws, statutes, and judgments.

And Israel accepted the arrangement: “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient [submissive to His authority]” (v. 7). Israel promised obedience but could not keep its vow.

Young King Solomon, keenly aware of his insignificance in relation to the Almighty, understood the need to submit to God: “The fear [respect] of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. My son do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands” (Prov. 1:7; 3:1). Later, however, Solomon apparently rejected the very concepts he espoused and led his nation into sin.

Enticed by the pagans surrounding them, the Israelites sought other gods and abandoned their covenant with their beloved Deliverer—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Lord continued to beseech Israel to submit to His leadership and authority, reminding them, “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chr. 7:14).

It is amazing that today the followers of Allah worship their god by falling on their faces and prostrating themselves. They regularly humble themselves and pledge their lives to Allah’s book and to the worldwide spread of Islam. Yet many of us who belong to Christ struggle to humble ourselves before Him and to submit to His commands.

He told us to proclaim the gospel message: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Mt. 28:19). Yet many Christians keep silent. He told us, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15). Yet many of us in the West are as preoccupied with materialism as unbelievers are. God’s Word says we cannot love the Lord and the world at the same time.

Scripture also requires the followers of Messiah Jesus to be different, even as Israel was to be different. Israel was to be a holy nation, separated from the surrounding world, as believers are to be today:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1–2).

The Lord expects His followers to submit to His authority, as declared in His Word. The prophet Micah summarized the Lord’s position on submission as he declared, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8).

by Thomas C. Simeux
The first-century followers of Jesus Christ were a peculiar bunch. Or so thought the unbelievers of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Yet the apostle Peter encouraged the brethren to become even more peculiar in the faith. Despite their persecution, Peter admonished them to treasure the salvation provided by Christ, live holy lives, anticipate Christ’s imminent return, and shine in their testimony.

He concluded his Epistle of 1 Peter by telling the elders to feed (teach) the
assembly faithfully and encouraged everyone in the congregation to (1) be subject to one another, (2) be clothed in humility, (3) be vigilant against the Devil, and (4) remember others who were suffering just like them for the faith.

Peter also exhorted the brethren to know experimentally that they served a caring God: “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). Thus the conclusion of 1 Peter is a call for sincere, humbled Christians to lay all their worries on God. God is our constant CARE-giver. He is our Comfort, our Anchor, our Refuge, and our Encourager.

**God Our Comfort**

In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (Ps. 94:19; 2 Cor. 1:3–4).

When Jesus began His ministry, He made the small town of Capernaum, located on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, His home and headquarters (Mt. 4:13–16). Capernaum in Hebrew, Kafar Nachum, means “village or hamlet of comfort.” It’s an appropriate name because it was where Jesus brought comfort to many. A man in the synagogue who was possessed by an unclean spirit was set free ( Mk. 1:23–26). Peter’s mother-in-law was delivered from a fever (vv. 29–31). A leper, a paralytic, and many others plagued by sickness and torments were all healed and helped by Jesus (vv. 40–45; 2:1–12; 3:7–12).

The Lord God of the universe knows everything about you. He knows your situation and needs. He knows your heart, thoughts, and deep desires. Even when all seems dark and uncertain, we are never alone for He promised never to forsake us (Mt. 28:20).

Since God is a constant comfort, He admonishes us not to fret over troubles and tribulations: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).

There’s no need to faint under the weight of sorrow and suffering because the Lord has promised to be our strength, shield, and song (Ps. 28:7). We need not fear life’s countless challenges because the Lord has said, “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10).

God is our comfort. And we can confidently cast all our care on Him because He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7).

**God Our Anchor**

The Sea of Galilee is known for its sudden, violent storms. The best way fishermen fought a storm there was to throw an anchor deep into the water. In this world we will have endless “storms” and personal turmoil. But because God cares, He has provided a secure anchor to help us weather them.

That anchor is found in the word hope. In Scripture hope generally refers to having “confidence in the outcome.” Peter said our anchor of hope is found in the gospel; it is our “living hope” (1:3). Sin and Satan cause many waves of doubt to overwhelm us. But Christ is the guarantee of forgiveness and heaven. Peter encouraged the persecuted brethren to hope in Christ’s cross, resurrection, and return (vv. 2–13).

Such hope is not blind optimism but a confident certainty. An early church symbol for hope in Christ beyond this life was, in fact, the anchor. Featured on many Christian tombs found today in the catacombs near Rome, Italy, it was based on Hebrews 6:19: “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.”

The fisherman Peter would have made his own anchors. He would have carefully selected a heavy stone, then painstakingly hacked a hole through the middle to tie a rope through the opening. During a storm at sea, his trust rested in his anchor.

In his epistle, he presented Christ as a “living stone,” rejected by most people but chosen of God and precious (1 Pet. 2:4). Jesus Christ is our trusted anchor that can never slip or fail.

So when storms of doubt and despair assault, know that God’s anchor holds and that He cares. William C. Martin expressed this truth in his words to the hymn “My Anchor Holds,” written in 1902:

> Though the angry surges roll
> On my tempest driven soul,
> I am peaceful, for I know,
> Wildly though the winds may blow,
> I’ve an anchor safe and sure,
> That can evermore endure.

And it holds, my anchor holds:

> Blow your wildest, then, O gale,
> On my bark so small and frail;
> By His grace I shall not fail,
> For my anchor holds, my anchor holds.

**God Our Refuge**

Emperor Nero torched Rome in A.D. 64. To appease the enraged masses, he blamed a small religious sect called Christians.

Slowly but steadily, unbelievers began persecuting the followers of Christ throughout the empire. The apostle Peter saw the anguish looming for the church. In 1 Peter he instructed the faithful to be glad and joyful, even though they would suffer persecution for a little while. God’s mighty power would sustain them (1:3–6).

As Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe wrote, “God does not promise to protect us from trials, but to protect us in trials.”1 Peter wanted his brethren to realize that God was their only true refuge: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1).

The word refuge literally refers to taking shelter either from a storm or danger. But it is often understood figuratively as putting confident trust in God or in the “shadow” (protection) of His mighty power.
Using Passover imagery, the apostle reminded the persecuted brethren that God is a refuge from sin. Through Christ alone they were ransomed:

"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18–19).

God was also a refuge in their suffering: “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator” (4:19).

Finally, God was a refuge for their safety. Israel viewed the Temple in Jerusalem as a safe haven: “I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings” (Ps. 61:4). The safest place to be in the Temple was in the “secret place of the Most High, . . . under the shadow of the Almighty. Under His wings you shall take refuge” (Ps. 91:1, 4).

These verses probably refer to the Ark of the Covenant inside the Holy of Holies—specifically, to the mercy seat where the wings of two handmade cherubim extended over the Ark’s lid (1 Ki. 6:23–28). With the sprinkling of the blood sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, Israel learned that its safest sin refuge was under the cherub wings of the mercy seat (Lev. 16).

Spiritually, Christians are the “living stones” of a spiritual temple where God, through Christ, dwells (1 Pet. 2:5; Col. 2:9, 10). The physical Temple had a veil that prohibited access to the Holy of Holies. It was torn when Christ died on the cross, symbolizing that we now have direct access to God (Mt. 27:51; Heb. 10:20). Our inner “Holy of Holies” is always available. No other safe place exists. God cared enough to make Himself our constant refuge.

God Our Encourager

Peter also encouraged the persecuted brethren in Asia Minor to stand firm in the faith (1 Pet. 5:12). He admonished them to remember who they were in Christ: elected by and sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ and possessors of an incorruptible inheritance reserved for them in heaven (vv. 1–5, 9). Since they faced a season of severe trial, God would be there to encourage them through it.

God uses Scripture as His primary source to encourage: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). And God Himself is our prime encouragement: “Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus” (v. 5).

King David wrote, “I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread” (Ps. 37:25). God never forsakes us. He never abandons His own (Mt. 28:20). This enduring truth is based on the infinite love shown mankind at the cross.

In St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, England, there is a life-size marble statue of Jesus on the cross. The expression on His face depicts horrible pain and agony. What is interesting is the inscription at the base. It reads, “This is how God loved the world!” He loved you and me enough to bear all the physical, emotional, and spiritual agony required to become the once-for-all, final sacrifice for your sin and mine. His promises are sure and steadfast.

Our God is a God who will forever be our CARE-giver. He is our Comfort, Anchor, Refuge, and Encourager. So do not hesitate to cast “all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

ENDNOTE


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The Jewish ‘Doomsday Clock’

The Doomsday Clock (see doomsdayclock.org) has graced the cover of each issue of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists at the University of Chicago since the magazine's inception in 1947. Midnight symbolizes total nuclear destruction, while the minute hand—initially placed at seven minutes to midnight—represents the severity of threats on civilization. Scientists have frequently moved the minute hand, placing it as close as two minutes to midnight in 1953 and as distant as 17 minutes in 1991. As of January 2008, the clock stands at five minutes to midnight.

If the Jewish people had a doomsday clock representing their history, the minute hand would have stood at one minute to midnight many times over. When King David battled Goliath it was one minute to midnight. When the Israelites were taken captive by the Assyrians and later the Babylonians, it was one minute to midnight. When the Nazis worked to exterminate European Jewry it was one minute to midnight. When five Arab nations attacked the reconstituted State of Israel on May 15, 1948, it was one minute to midnight.

On March 21 Jewish people will gather in synagogues to celebrate the annual feast of Purim. They will read the entire book of Esther, booing, hissing, and rattling their noisemakers each time the Bible mentions wicked Haman’s name. And they will remember again that they were one minute to midnight away from extinction.

The Persian Empire at the time ruled over all the Jewish people in the world. Esther, the young queen who had kept her Jewish identity a secret, courageously interceded for her people when she discovered Haman’s plot. Haman had convinced King Ahasuerus to issue an immutable decree allowing the empire to kill all the Jews and seize their property. Esther went to her husband uninvited, an act punishable by death, and revealed her identity and exposed Haman. Enraged, the king hung Haman and his sons and issued another decree allowing the Jewish people to defend themselves. Noteworthy is that they did so without taking any Gentile property (Est. 9:15–16).

Not all the one-minute-to-midnight moments in Jewish history have ended as happily. In the book of Esther, God’s name is not even mentioned once. Yet for those who have eyes to see, Purim represents what believers know as reality in their lives: God was there all the time. And He will always be there for Israel, protecting them and keeping His promise that the Jewish people will never cease “from being a nation before Me forever” (Jer. 31:36).

by Steve Herzog,
director of North American Ministries
Hebrews is without question one of the greatest and most important books in the New Testament. In it the writer presented an in-depth study of both the deity and humanity of Jesus the Messiah, covering His earthly ministry to His exaltation at the right hand of God Almighty. This epistle explains the excellencies of Christ in His person, priesthood, preeminence, and purpose for coming to Earth.

The book’s human author is unknown and has been debated from the inception of postapostolic times. We do know, however, that he was Jewish and had a thorough knowledge of the Jewish culture and religion of his day. He addressed his epistle to a group of Jewish Christians whose exact location is unknown.

Nor is the date of authorship given, but it can be estimated with some certainty. Clement, the bishop of Rome, quoted from Hebrews, indicating the book had to be written before A.D. 95. Also, Timothy was still alive because he is mentioned in Hebrews 13:23.

The absence of any mention of the fall of Jerusalem or the end of the sacrificial system indicates Hebrews was written before the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Nero implemented an empirewide persecution of Christians in A.D. 64. This could be the persecution mentioned in Hebrews 10:32–34, supporting an early date for the book. Given these facts, we date the writing of Hebrews between A.D. 64 and 67.

This epistle was written primarily to Jewish believers. First, some had dropped out of the Christian community. They had compromised their faith and were considering a return to Judaism (Heb. 10:23–25). Second, others were babes in the faith whom the writer was encouraging to go on to maturity in Christ (6:1–2).

In addressing the abandonment of their new faith, the author showed that Christ is better than what Judaism had to offer (1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24). By contrast, he showed that Christ is superior to prophets, angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron, Melchizedek, the Tabernacle, sacrifices, priesthood, and the Old Testament saints. In other words, the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus (cf. Lk. 24:27, 44).

Even today, the book of Hebrews reminds and convinces Jewish believers that Christ is superior to anything they had in Judaism and that He is sufficient for every area of their spiritual lives. In the first three verses, the writer provided irrefutable proof that Jesus Christ is God and heir of all things.

The Prophets’ Revelation

The writer wasted no time in making his point. Without any salutation, he immediately began setting forth the progression of God’s revelation through the prophets: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets” (Heb. 1:1).

All we know about God came directly from Him. If God had not spoken, humanity would have no clue as to His person, nature, character, creation, or will for mankind. Thus, over time, God progressively revealed Himself through the prophets who accurately recorded the revelation, revealing God and His will for humanity.

God did not set aside the prophets’ personalities, languages, and cultures when He providentially guided each to reveal His Word. All Scripture is God-breathed, infallible, inerrant, plenary, verbal, and confluent as originally given. As the very Word of God, Scripture possesses the properties of authority, sufficiency, clarity, and efficacy.

The revelation from God came at “various times and in various ways” to the “fathers” (v. 1). From the time of Adam to the prophet Malachi, God progressively revealed His plan, program, and purposes. God also spoke in “various ways” to the fathers (v. 1). Often He gave the revelation directly to men like Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. God also spoke to the prophets through dreams and visions. At other times He spoke through a storm, fire, or an audible voice. The Old Testament was inerrant truth from God, but it is not all the truth that God was to reveal to man.

What was revealed in the Old Testament set the stage for unveiling the sufficiency and superiority of Jesus Christ, God’s Son. Four hundred years after the close of the Old Testament Scriptures, God would continue His revelation to mankind through Jesus Christ.

The Present Revelation

The revelation to the Old Testament prophets was only partial and periodic; the preeminent revelation was to come through Jesus Christ who would not only speak for God but as God Himself. The writer of Hebrews said succinctly that God “has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (v. 2).

The phrase these last days (literally, “in the last of these days”) means the time in which God will terminate His revelation to man. The phrase was a common rabbinical reference denoting a Messianic
period. When Jesus the Messiah came into the world, God—through Him—fully expressed the revelation of Himself and His Word to mankind. In other words, in the last days, the Messianic promises God gave the fathers in the Old Testament came to completion and fulfillment in and through Jesus the Messiah.

In the past, God spoke to mankind through the prophets; but now, in these Messianic times, God speaks exclusively “by Son.” (In the Greek, the word His is missing.) The absence of an article before the word Son speaks of the Son’s character and nature. In the past, God revealed Himself through prophets who were mere men; but Jesus the “Son” of God possesses the nature of deity and is the One through whom God is speaking in these last days.

The prophets spoke the Word of God, but the Son is both the Word of God and God (Jn. 1:1). Thus it is Jesus the Son who expresses the New Testament revelation of all that the Father is and wants revealed to mankind. The apostle John well said, “No one has seen God at any time.” The only begotten Son [literally, “God”], who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (v. 18).

God the Son, who is deity and equal with God the Father, has intimate fellowship with the Father because He is of the same nature as the Father. It is Jesus who has “declared [explains or exeges] Him.” In other words, Jesus interprets and explains the works and the will of God the Father.

The Preeminent Revealer

The writer then set forth seven reasons why Jesus qualifies to be the final communicator of divine revelation and is infinitely superior to the prophets of old.

(1) He Is Heir. God the Father “has appointed” Jesus Christ “heir of all things” (v. 2). It is only natural that He should become the heir if He is the Son. Behind heirship is the authority to be Lord over all the Father possesses (cf. Ps. 2:7–8). The “all things” include everything in the universe, both now and for eternity. Christ must be God in order to rule forever over the universe.

(2) He Is Creator. It was through Christ that “He [God] made the worlds [ages]” (v. 2). The Son of God is presented as the mediating agency in creation, not as a mere instrument or passive tool, but a cooperating agent. The apostle Paul wrote, “For by Him all things were created. . . . All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16). This means that all the laws, plans, programs, and purposes that guide and govern the created universe through the “ages” reside in Christ—whether they were unfolded in the past or will be unfolded in the future. The times and ages began with Christ and will culminate in Him (Rev. 22:13).

(3) He Radiates God’s Glory. Christ is the “brightness of His [God’s] glory” (Heb. 1:3). The word brightness means “radiance” or “effulgence,” referring to a light shining or flashing forth from a luminous source. God the Son is the outshining of the divine glory and majesty of the triune God. Jesus does not simply reflect God’s glory; He possesses it. This fact is best seen at the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus’ glory was unveiled to His disciples: “His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (Mt. 17:2).

(4) He Represents God. Christ is the “express image of His [God’s] person” (Heb. 1:3). The phrase express image means “impression” or “stamp.” It refers to an engraved character or impression produced by a die or seal that makes an exact reproduction. Paul wrote, “He is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). Therefore, Christ is the exact imprint of God the Father in His essence, attributes, and character. By studying the Son, we are able to understand the invisible Father.

(5) He Is Sustainer. Christ is “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3). The Lord made all things and will inherit all things. He not only sustains the world but also moves all things that have been created toward the goal that was established for them. In other words, the world’s coherence is maintained by Christ who holds all things together and moves them in their proper relationship to one another by “the word [spoken word] of His power” (cf. Col. 1:17).

(6) He Is Redeemer. Christ is the One who “by Himself purged our sins” (Heb. 1:3). This One who created the world, sustains the world, and will inherit the world also redeemed the world. All Jesus needed to do to create the universe was to speak it into existence. But to “purge our sins,” He had to go to the cross and die as our Redeemer and Sin-bearer. The Son’s ministry to provide purification from sin will become one of the major themes of this epistle. The work of redemption was accomplished totally by Christ, who gave Himself as a sacrifice for the purification of sin.

(7) He Is Ruler. Christ is positioned at God’s right hand. Once He finished His work on the cross He “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty [God the Father] on high” (v. 3). This verse speaks of far more than the Son’s finished work of revealing God and redeeming mankind. It speaks of Christ being enthroned in a solemn, formal act to a position of honor, dignity, glory, and authority—which He possessed before creation. Being seated at the right hand of God the Father authenticates His coequal status as God.

What a picture of the incomparable Christ! It is self-evident that the Son’s person and work supersede and are superior to any revelation given by the prophets or found in Judaism. Each of these seven characteristics confirms the deity of Christ. This epistle was a strong reminder to Jewish believers who, because of persecution, were ready to abandon their new faith and return to Judaism.

Those who deny that Jesus is the divine Messiah are accusing God of being a liar and His Word of being a lie. God has said in His Word that both Jews and Gentiles must put faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only hope for man’s redemption. Have you?
God Is Moral (Part 15)

**God Has Thoughts**

Our earlier study noted that God is a personal being, possessing intellect. As such, He thinks. In His Word, God refers to His thoughts and indicates they are different from and higher than those of unsaved people (Isa. 55:7–9). He signified that He has revealed some of His thoughts to mankind (Ps. 3:17) and that the many nations that will gather to destroy Jerusalem do not know He has thoughts to judge them (Mic. 4:11–12).

King David referred to the great sum of God’s thoughts (Ps. 139:17) and declared God’s “thoughts are very deep” (“unfathomable,” “unsearchable”), or incomprehensible (Ps. 92:5; cf. Rom. 11:33–36).

**The Relationship of Human Thoughts to the Heart**

We also noted that God created man in His image as a personal being, possessing intellect (Gen. 1:26–27). Thus He gave people the ability to think.

The Bible explains that human thoughts originate in the heart. It refers to the “thoughts” and “imagination of man’s heart” (Gen. 6:5; 8:21), a “thought in your heart” (Dt. 15:9), “the thought of your heart” (Acts 8:22), and “the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). It also says the Lord searches all hearts and understands “all the intent of the thoughts” (1 Chr. 28:9); a man “thinks in his heart” (Prov. 23:7); people think evil in their hearts (Mt. 9:4); and evil thoughts proceed “from within, out of the heart of men” (Mk. 7:21). It also speaks of people “reasoning” in their “hearts” (Lk. 5:22) and of “the inward thought and the heart of man” (Ps. 64:6).

Johannes Behm wrote that the Scriptures indicate the following:

The heart is the center of the inner life of man and the source or seat of all the forces and functions of soul and spirit. . . . In the heart dwell feelings and emotions, desires and passions. . . . The heart is the seat of understanding, the source of thought and reflection. . . . The heart is the seat of the will, the source of resolves. . . . Thus the heart is supremely the one centre in man to which God turns, in which the religious life is rooted, which determines moral conduct.

**God and Jesus See and Know Man’s Thoughts**

The Bible reveals that God and Jesus see and know our thoughts.

Genesis 6:5 indicates that before the flood of Noah’s time, “the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

David said, “The LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts” (1 Chr. 28:9) and that God understood his thought “afar off” (Ps. 139:2). Psalm 94:11 declares, “The LORD knows the thoughts of man” (cf. Isa. 66:18). First Corinthians 3:20 states that God “knows the thoughts of the wise.”

Jesus knew the thoughts of the scribes and Pharisees (Mt. 9:4; 12:25). The word translated “thoughts” in these passages refers to “the unexpressed and hidden thing in man which God’s omniscience sees and judges.”

**God, Jesus, and the Word Evaluate and Judge Man’s Thoughts**

**God’s Evaluation and Judgment.** God said, “Every intent of the thoughts” of unsaved man’s “heart” prior to the flood “was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). Immediately after the flood He declared, “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (8:21).

The word translated “intent” in Genesis 6:5 and “imagination” in 8:21 refers to something framed or devised in the mind. The word translated “youth” in 8:21 lays stress on the early, immature but vigorous, trainable stage of life. Thus Genesis 8:21 indicates “evil is innate in man” and becomes obvious “from the very time when” a child “begins to act with consciousness.”

In Jeremiah 4:14 God classified the thoughts of people to whom Jeremiah ministered as “evil” (deceptive thoughts that produce trouble). God judged as “evil” Gog of Magog’s thought to invade Israel in the future (Ezek. 38:10–12).

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People Evaluate and Judge Thoughts

David’s and Nehemiah’s Evaluations and Judgments. Concerning his enemies, David said, “All their thoughts are against me for evil” (Ps. 56:5). After claiming that enemies had devised iniquities and “perfected a shrewd scheme” against him, David said, “Both the inward thought and the heart of man are deep” (Ps. 64:6). The word deep indicates their scheme was the result of careful, thorough, in-depth thought.14 Nehemiah said, “Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, ‘Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono.’ But they thought to do me harm” (Neh. 6:2).

James’s Evaluation and Judgment. James accused believers who favor the wealthy as opposed to the poor of being judges with evil thoughts ( Jas. 2:4).

FRUIT OF THOUGHTS. God clearly indicates that evil thoughts can bring serious consequences. For example, He warned those to whom Jeremiah ministered: “Hear, O earth! Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people—the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words nor My law, but rejected it” (Jer. 6:19).

Positive Thoughts. In Philippians 4:8 Paul exhorted Christians to have positive thoughts:

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

The word translated “meditate” means “think (about), consider, ponder, let one’s mind dwell on.”16 Focusing their attention on this biblical form of positive thinking will help believers avoid evil thoughts.

Thought Guidelines for Christians

Captive Thoughts. In 2 Corinthians 10:4–5 Paul wrote,

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

The word translated “thought” refers to an evil “device.”15 In 2 Corinthians 2:11 it refers to the devices that Satan uses to get an advantage over Christians.16 In 2 Corinthians 10:5 it refers to the arguments of world-life views that oppose God’s revealed truth and are used to attack the biblical faith of Christians. Paul indicated that, in their spiritual warfare against these attacks, Christians must take these arguments captive and force them “into obedient subjection to Christ.”17

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ENDNOTES

7.2:586.
8 Werner Foerster, “bdelugma,” TDNT (1964), 1:598.
15Ibid.
16 Ibid.
Why I Love Israel

It seems as if the eyes of the entire world are continually upon the tiny State of Israel. And your eyes need to be there as well because the Jews are God’s people, and Israel is the land of destiny. Israel is God’s measuring rod and blueprint for what He is doing in the world. Let’s learn of God’s intimate love for this nation and His sovereign plan as described in Revelation 12.

Israel’s Special Favor

Now a great sign [wonder] appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth (vv. 1–2).

In this passage the wonder talked about is the nation of Israel. Three proof texts in God’s Word support this prophecy: Genesis 37:9; Isaiah 54:5–6; and Romans 9:4–5. God called and ordained Israel because it was through Israel that all of the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). Every child of God is blessed because of Israel.

A key verse that talks about God’s special favor on Israel is Deuteronomy 7:6: “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.”

Thank God Israel gave Jesus to this world! Israel is a God-ordained, God-called, God-protected, and God-blessed nation.

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**Israel’s Satanic Foe**

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born (Rev. 12:3–5).

In these verses we see the dreadfully strong and cruel. It is Satan himself. He is red because that symbolizes his murderous lust for blood. Satan’s seven heads symbolize his perfect, diabolical wisdom. His horns symbolize his complete earthly power.

Satan is the ultimate rebel. He has a tail so long he is able to sweep a third of the stars from heaven. These are not literal stars but symbols. Satan once was called Lucifer, “son of the morning,” and was considered one of God’s most beautiful angels; but he rebelled (Isa. 14:13–14). No sooner had he unsheathed his sword of insurrection than the thunders of Jehovah’s wrath rolled through heaven.

God judged Satan and cast him out of heaven. And when he fell, one-third of the angels fell with him.

Does that bother you? Well, let me encourage you that two-thirds of the angels didn’t fall, and therefore we have two angels for every demon. And Satan and every demon’s destiny is hell (Mt. 25:41). God did not make hell for you. God made hell for the Devil and his angels. If you go to hell, you will be an intruder, unless you choose to follow Satan.

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**Israel’s Spiritual Fight**

Israel’s real fight is not against flesh and blood; it is a spiritual fight against satanic forces in the heavenly and earthly realms (12:6–12).

**War in Heaven.** On one side of the war in heaven is the dragon, and on the other side are Michael the Archangel and his angels. The war is being waged to cast Satan out of heaven. “Well,” you ask, “I thought Satan was already cast out of heaven?” Yes, but in the providential plans of God, Satan has been allowed access to heaven and Earth. Though he has been disenfranchised, God still allows him to accuse all of the saints before God. Indeed, it is a mystery. Night and day, day and night, he accuses us; and he torments Israel. Thank God we have a defense attorney named Jesus. He is our Advocate before the Father (1 Jn. 2:1). Satan is on his way down.

**War on Earth.** “They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11). Jesus won the victory over Satan in His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave (Jn. 12:30–32). Satan’s back was broken at the cross. And since that time, Satan has been sailing a sinking ship. The blood of Jesus Christ conquers and cleanses us as we confess and repent (1 Jn. 1:7–9).

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**Israel’s Strategic Flight**

When Satan realizes that he can no longer accuse the saints before God, he will turn with intensity to the “woman” and begin to persecute Israel: “Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child” (Rev. 12:13). This is the Great Tribulation after the Rapture of the church. About three and a half years into the Tribulation, the Temple will be rebuilt. And when this happens, the Antichrist will move into that Temple and declare that he is God. Israel will realize it has been betrayed, and the Jewish people will refuse to serve him.

Revelation 12:14 says the wings of an eagle will carry them away.
When the Devil sees them flee, he will send a flood of persecution. But the Bible says, “So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him” (Isa. 59:19). What does all of this mean? God knows the future. God is still in control.

**Israel’s Saving Faith**

The time will then arrive when the Jewish people will recognize and receive their Messiah. God’s Word is full of verses that support this prophecy (Zech. 12:10; 13:1; Rom. 11:25–26).

Friend, it makes me shouting happy to know that God has not forsaken His ancient people. There’s going to be a fountain opened to them that is filled with the purifying blood of the Lord Jesus (Zech. 13:1). How can we go about our day-to-day lives without giving everything we have to Jesus Christ? How can we not love Him with a burning, blazing, passionate, emotional love? We are to love whom God loves, and God loves His Chosen People. He has made them a blessing that they might be a blessing to the world.

Thank God there is coming a day when all of this will unfold. I may not have every jot and tittle correct because we’re dealing with things hard to see and hard to interpret. But I have this much correct: Jesus is Lord, and He’s coming again. Praise His name!

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**Drama Around the Triclinium**

By Peter Colón

Reasonable, educated speculation based on an understanding of the Jewish seating custom can help us appreciate the drama in the Upper Room at Jesus’ final Passover more than 2,000 years ago.

He and the disciples would have sat at a triclinium—a low table around which people reclined on three sides. Excavations have revealed that many homes had them. The left side held the seats of honor. Moving clockwise around the table, the seats became less important. The last couch on the right was the servant’s seat. It is probable that Jesus occupied the second couch on the left, where the host usually reclined. He would have rested his left arm on a cushion and used his right hand to eat.

By tradition, John is the disciple “whom Jesus loved.” John may have reclined on the first couch on the left, to Jesus’ right: “Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved” (Jn. 13:23).

Earlier Jesus said one of them would betray Him. “Simon Peter therefore motioned to him [John] to ask who it was of whom He spoke” (v. 24). In seeking John’s attention, Peter may have been on the last couch on the right, usually reserved for servants who washed the feet of those around the triclinium.

Apparently, Peter did not or would not perform the task. So Jesus removed His garment, took a towel and a water basin, and washed the disciples’ feet. It is assumed that He would have started at the left side of the table and worked around toward the right.

John 13:6–13 gives the impression that Peter’s feet were the last to be washed. Jesus’ example taught humility and service. For Peter, often considered the leader of the group, reclining on the servant’s couch, the lesson must have been heart-piercing.

When John asked Jesus who was to betray Him, Jesus answered, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me” (Mt. 26:23). The couch to the left of the host was reserved as a chief guest couch. It is suggested that Judas was on it. This would have made it easy for Jesus to give him the sop, or food.

Later, choosing the darkness of unbelief, Judas left the triclinium (Jn. 13:30). Jesus then instituted what today is called communion. Jesus always invites us for fellowship and communion. But we can only come in faith, as we trust in Him.
Jesus’ resurrection confirmed and fulfilled two ancient prayers. Through them, the Jewish people were taught to believe in the hope of resurrection.

The first was an old morning prayer the people of Israel were to recite when they awoke from sleep:

My God, the soul which Thou hast placed in me is pure.
Thou hast fashioned it in me; Thou didst breathe it into me,
and Thou preservest it within me and Thou wilt one day
take it from me and restore it to me in the time to come. So
long as the soul is within me I give thanks unto Thee, O
Lord, my God, and the God of my fathers, Sovereign of all
worlds, Lord of all souls. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who
restorest souls to dead corpses.1

Then three times throughout the day, they recited a set of special prayers known in Hebrew as the Shemoneh Esreh. These 18 benedictions corresponded with the various offerings at the Temple.

The 120 men of the Great Assembly composed the original Shemoneh Esreh in the fifth century B.C. It beautifully frames the essence of Jewish expectancy by praising God for a Redeemer, resurrection, and Messianic Kingdom. Later, in the second century A.D., a prayer was added that condemned the heathen, or heretics, with the intent of weeding Jewish believers in Jesus out of the synagogue.

Nevertheless, that addition in no way diminishes belief in the resurrection as expressed in the second benediction of the Shemoneh Esreh:

Thou, Lord, art mighty to all eternity, Thou raisest the
dead, Thou art mighty to save. In kindness He satisfieth
the living, in great pity He raiseth the dead; He upholdeth

those that fall; He healeth the sick, and setteth free them
that are bound; He will manifest His faithfulness to
those who sleep in the dust. Who is like the Lord of
might, and who is like Thee, Thou King, Who killest and
maketh alive, and causeth salvation to spring forth?
Faithful art Thou to restore life to the dead: blessed be
the Lord Who restor eth life to the dead.2

Reciting these prayers kept the spirit of resurrection expectancy alive. Thus many Jewish people who knew Jesus as Messiah naturally believed He arose from the dead. It was anticipated and expected (Ps. 16:10).

As we celebrate Easter and our Lord’s resurrection from the dead, we would do well to remember that in our afflicted and troubled lives, Christ-centered prayer cultivates a confident expectancy in God’s promises, especially of resurrection hope: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades [grave], where is your victory?” (1 Cor. 15:54–55).

And we also should remember that, through the resurrection of Israel’s Messiah, we who believe in Him have been born again “to a living hope . . . to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for [us], who are kept by the power of God through faith” (1 Pet. 1:3–5).

1 The Babylonian Talmud, Berakoth 60b.

by Peter Colón
**EDITOR’S NOTE:**
God is Holy. He cannot allow sin in His presence. But God also loves you. So He did the unthinkable: He became a sacrifice and paid for your sins Himself. All He asks now is that you believe, and He will remove your sin and clothe you with His righteousness. “This is all New Testament teaching,” you say. Yes. But it did not originate in the New Testament. It was recorded first in the Jewish Scriptures. This article concludes our series on Isaiah 53, the Servant of the Lord.

In Isaiah 53:8 the prophet spoke of the distorted trial held for the Servant of the Lord and of His death: “He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.”

There was no one to stand in His defense or complain about His unjust trial (Mt. 27:1–26). The high priest and Jewish leaders were corrupt and plotted against Jesus because He exposed their great distance from God. Even the Gentile Roman ruler Pontius Pilate knew they had brought Jesus to him and accused Him out of envy (v. 18).

Daniel the prophet foretold the Messiah’s death: “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself” (Dan. 9:26). The expression cut off clarifies that the Messiah would not die of old age. He would be slain by an act of violence that would cut Him off from the land of the living.

Daniel also noted the date. A careful calculation leads to the month of Nissan A.D. 32 (vv. 24–27). This prophecy was fulfilled completely through Jesus Christ who was cut off from the land of the living in Nissan (Passover) A.D. 32.

### His Vicarious Death

The Servant of the Lord did not deserve the death penalty. He bore His people’s sins upon Himself and took their punishment. He paid for their sins—for all of humanity’s sins, in fact—with His life. But this was the only way He could provide everlasting life.

In verse 9 Isaiah described the Servant’s burial: “And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.”

The Servant of the Lord was executed as a criminal, but He was buried in the grave of a rich man.

Why? Because He did not sin. Isaiah described Him as the perfection of wholeness and purity, the Lamb of atonement. Yet Isaiah chapter 1 speaks at length of Israel’s sinfulness: “Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel” (v. 4).

And what is said of that generation of Abraham’s children could also be said of the millions of Gentiles who lived in the darkness of rejecting the God of Israel and the coming Messiah.

Jesus was crucified between two criminals. Crucifixion was considered an especially humiliating and contemptible death, suitable for the lowest of men. But after He was lifted off the cross, His body was laid in the grave of a rich man, Joseph from Arimathea (Mt. 27:57–60; Jn. 19:38).
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Why did the Lord want His Servant to suffer so? The answer is given in the same verse: “When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.”

The word asham in Hebrew, translated as “offering,” actually means “trespass offering” (Lev. 5:15; 6:5; 19:21). Thus the Servant of the Lord died as a trespass offering for sins, a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord. And whoever accepts His death as such will be greatly blessed.

God Is Satisfied

In verse 11 Isaiah continued to describe how pleased the Lord is with the works of His servant: “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.”

The Servant’s work bore fruit. It was not accomplished for nothing. The word satisfied indicates completeness and fullness. There is no need for anything further. The Servant of the Lord’s work has brought satisfaction. It is perfect.

Then Isaiah emphasized the importance of the Servant of the Lord: “By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many.”

The Servant is the only person who can justify us and acquit us from guilt before the Lord. How does He do it? “For He shall bear their iniquities.” He carried our guilt on Himself, so we can stand before the Lord blameless and innocent: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Rom. 5:19).

Whoever puts on the righteousness of Jesus is counted no less righteous than Messiah Jesus Himself in the sight of the Lord.

What must you do to partake in this great privilege?

You must believe that the Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ, is the perfect Sacrifice who carried your sins upon Himself and surrender your life to Jesus. True believers learn God’s Word and allow it to penetrate their hearts. A genuine believer is a dwelling place for the Spirit of God who works through us and helps us serve the Messiah and others.

Isaiah 53:12 continues with the idea of rising from the dead:

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

The Servant of the Lord was prudent and completely fulfilled God’s will. Therefore the prophet described His victory as that of a king at war. In ancient times, a victorious king took all the spoil and divided it as he pleased to his faithful subjects. The Servant of the Lord will do the same. The Messiah will divide the spoils of His Kingdom with those who love Him when He returns to reign for 1,000 years (Ps. 2; Isa. 2; Jer. 23:5–6; 33:14–16; Dan. 7; Mic. 4:1–8; Rev. 20:4, 6; 22:5).

Why did the Servant of the Lord win this great victory and glory? “Because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (v. 12).

The Servant of the Lord:

■ Was God Himself. Yet He came to Earth and sacrificed His life.
■ Was pure and holy. Yet He bore our sins, was considered an outlaw and sinner, and gave us His righteousness.
■ Prays for us that we might know the will of God and do it.

Isaiah 52:13—53:12 perfectly describes the purpose of the Messiah’s death for His people Israel and for all mankind (Jn. 11:49–51; 1 Jn. 2:2).

Jesus Christ is described as the Servant of the Lord, superior to all kings of the earth and to the high priest who served in the Temple. He is God Himself who came into the world in the form of a man to bear our sins.

When He appeared on the stage of history, the majority of the nation of Israel did not recognize Him as their Messiah and rejected Him. But when He returns again in glory and honor, all Israel will receive Him and be reconciled to Him (Zech. 12:10).

Jesus’ atoning death satisfied the righteous demands of God the Father, who must judge sin. This death opened the way for believers to enter into the presence of God. Every one of us can be saved from paying the price for our own sin. We can put on the righteousness of Jesus if we believe that He did satisfy the penalty for our sins.

Someday Messiah Jesus will return and establish His Kingdom, to rule and reign with His children. We need only ask the Lord to save us in order to be allowed to partake in that hope and to reign with Jesus Christ for all eternity.

by Mena Kalisher, pastor of the Jerusalem Assembly House of Redemption in Jerusalem, Israel.
A Tale of Two Holidays

Two Jewish holidays seem to have strikingly similar origins: A man arises who hates the Jewish people and decides they must be dealt with. One such enemy enslaved them, while the other sought to eradicate them from the face of the earth. Such is the case with the holidays being celebrated in close proximity this spring: Purim, which begins March 21 (on Good Friday), and Passover, an eight-day celebration that begins at sundown on April 19. Their festivities are dramatically different, but their origins are indelibly linked.

Passover falls second on the calendar but originated almost 950 years before Purim. Its roots go deep into Jewish history, after the Jewish people had relocated from the Promised Land of Canaan to Egypt due to a severe famine in the land.

Joseph, the patriarch Jacob’s beloved son, had been sold into slavery by his brothers and, in God’s wonderful plan, had been appointed the second-in-command in all of Egypt. The Lord placed him there to save many lives. Later, after his death, Scripture simply states,

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land” (Ex. 1:8–10).

Fear drove Pharaoh to enslave the Hebrews. That fear, coupled with pride and a refusal to humble himself and submit to the God of Israel, ultimately led to the death of his own son; the destruction of Egypt’s crops, trees, grass, and animals; an invasion of frogs that later died, rotted, and polluted the land; all the precious water of the Nile turning to blood; and the death and destruction of the majority of Pharaoh’s chariots in the Red Sea.

The 10 plagues God sent to force Pharaoh to let the Israelites return to the Promised Land must have devastated Egypt.

Pharaoh’s fear of the Israelites led to a hatred of them that ultimately placed his people, his land, and the future of his country in serious jeopardy. Israel left with great spoils and with a holiday—Passover—to commemorate God’s power and Israel’s great redemption from its house of bondage.

Later, in the 5th century B.C., the Jewish nation was again out of its Promised Land, this time due to its unbelief and rebellion against Almighty God. The Lord engineered the Israelites’ forcible removal from their homes via their deportation to Babylon. Eventually
head and made her queen instead of Vashti” (v. 17).

About the same time, Ahasuerus promoted an Agagite named Haman “and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him” (3:1).

Haman was a pompous, proud, arrogant man who expected and demanded that people bow before him and do homage as he performed his duties. Everyone complied but Mordecai.

Because this lone Jewish man refused to prostrate himself before him, Haman “was filled with wrath. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai” (vv. 5–6).

Haman casts lots (Hebrew, pur [singular]; purim [plural]) to decide when every Jewish person in the world would die. All Israel by now was under the thumb of the Medo-Persian Empire. Assyria, which had conquered the northern kingdom in 722 B.C., had itself been conquered by Babylon. Babylon, which captured the southern kingdom in 586 B.C., fell to the Medo-Persians. Thus all the world’s Jewish people were under the leadership of Ahasuerus.

Haman’s hatred of Israel ultimately led to his death and that of his family. Furthermore, his entire estate, including all his worldly possessions, was turned over to Mordecai who also assumed the position Haman quickly vacated. The Jewish people survived this plot, and they celebrate a festive and joyous holiday known as Purim.

Such a pattern would continue throughout Jewish history. Other enemies would rise and fall, but Israel would remain and celebrate yet another holiday.

Israel’s history has been saturated by suffering, tears, and anguish. Yet God has and will always protect and sustain His beloved people.

These holidays are a picture of the future that Israel will enjoy when it is elevated to the leadership of the entire world under King Messiah. Just as Pharaoh and Egypt were ultimately ravished, so, too, will be the fate of the nations that reject and deny the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And just as Haman died and all his possessions were turned over to his enemy, so will Israel “become radiant” and possess the world:

And your heart shall swell with joy; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you. Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, so that no one went through you, I will make you an eternal excellence, a joy of many generations (Isa. 60:5, 15).

In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:23).
Nightmare Continues

January was one of the worst months for Kassam attacks in Sderot. Arutz-7 reported many straight days of more than 40 hits per day. Parents keep their children home from school as many huddle in fear wherever they can find safety. Arutz-7 filed this report:

“Three thousand homes stand empty in what was once a vibrant western Negev city of almost 20,000 souls but which for the past seven years has been transformed into a city under siege.

“Public Security Minister Avi Dichter, confirming a figure often quoted bitterly by Sderot residents who still remain despite the danger, called on the government to allow the Israel Defense Forces to ‘change the rules of the game’ when responding to terrorist attacks from Gaza.

“If Sderot residents have to leave their homes or run for cover to dodge missile attacks, Gaza residents should have to do the same,” Dichter said.

“Located one kilometer away from northern Gaza, Sderot has been at the mercy of ceaseless mortar and Kassam rocket attacks fired by terrorists of all stripes since September 2000. The missiles are launched from small, portable setups that can quickly be erected and broken down and are often used to fire rockets from civilian yards and between homes in nearby Beit Hanoun.”

PA terrorists share funds

Arutz-7—The heavily funded, Fatah-headed Palestinian Authority (PA) seems to be preparing to reunite with the Islamist Hamas, effectively channeling international aid to a United Terrorist front.

Several Fatah leaders, led by PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas, visited Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar recently in Gaza City. Al-Zahar is one of the founders of Hamas and is known to support the killing of Jewish civilians.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has said he will not continue negotiations with Abbas if Fatah renewes attempts to forge an alliance with Hamas. Billions of dollars in aid money, as well as arms and training, have been supplied to Fatah on the condition that it act against Hamas and other Islamic terrorist groups.

However, Abbas’s regime intends to spend 40 percent of the recently pledged international aid in Hamas-controlled Gaza, according to a senior PA official. Of the $7.7 billion pledged by donor countries, 40 percent would be channeled to Gaza. Funding has already begun to flow into PA accounts from the European Union, Saudi Arabia, and France.

Iran to destroy Cyrus’s tomb

Arutz-7—Iran is planning on submerging the tomb of King Cyrus (Coresh), the Persian King known for authorizing the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Holy Temple.

According to a report by Omelia, an Iranian organization is demanding that the International Criminal Court take action against those responsible.

The Iranian ayatollahs are planning on destroying the tomb as part of a general campaign to sever the Persian people from their non-Islamic heritage; Cyrus was thought to be a Zoroastrian and was one of the first rulers to enforce a policy of religious tolerance on his huge kingdom. Journalist Ran Porat quoted a young Iranian who said that the measures being taken by the Islamic Republic’s regime include the destruction of archaeological sites significant to this heritage.

“The government is in the final stages of constructing a dam in southern Iran that will submerge the archaeological sites of Pasargad and Persopolis—the ancient capital of the Persian Empire,” the report states. “The site, which is considered exceptional in terms of its archaeological wealth and historical importance, houses the tomb of the Persian King Cyrus.”

Cyrus, who lived from 576 to 530 BCE (B.C.), liberated Babylonian Jewry from its exile in the famous Declaration of Cyrus (mentioned in the book of Ezra in both Hebrew and Aramaic).

Though the city of Pasargad is a ruin, Cyrus’s Tomb has remained largely intact and it has been partially restored to counter its natural deterioration over the years.

Olmert frees murderers

Arutz-7—Israel has acceded to a Palestinian Authority request not to demand the murderers of hikers David Rubin and Achikam Amichai, according to a Channel 2 report.

Rubin and Amichai were murdered in December 2006 while hiking in the Tellem Stream region near Hebron. They were ambushed by four terrorists, but managed to return fire and kill two of them before dying.

The two surviving murderers are Ali a-Hamid Rajeb Dandis, a clerk at Hevron’s Islamic Court and a member of Fatah’s intelligence wing, and Amr Bader a-Halim Taha, a member of the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority (PA) security forces. The two took refuge among their fellow PA security men shortly after the murders in an apparently successful attempt to avoid arrest by the Israel Defense Forces.

The Olmert government has agreed to let the murderers remain in PA custody, effectively confined to their places of employment. The terrorists are now being transferred to Jericho.

Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahal slammed the decision, saying, “The humiliating agreement of the government to give up on arresting the PA heads that murdered Achikam Amichai and David Rubin is yet another testimony to the weakness and loss of national honor on the part of this government.”
Israelis Wonder: What Is Wrong With Ehud Olmert?

Israel politics have always been something of a mystery to outsiders. And the mystery has only increased recently after several disturbing events.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert seems to have aligned himself with the far left and is courting people such as David Landau, editor of the daily newspaper Haaretz, who called Israel a “failed state” in need of being “raped” by the United States through imposed intervention.

Outraged by Landau’s remarks, the Jerusalem Post’s Caroline Glick wrote, “Olmert has worked overtime to woo the Landau crowd. To this end, he courts Syria; advocates Israel’s withdrawal from Judea, Samaria, and parts of Jerusalem; and refuses to act against either Iran or the burgeoning Iranian-trained Hamas army in Gaza.”

Glick said he sounds “more like a Palestinian spokesman than the leader of Israel.”

Meanwhile, Avi Dichter, Israel’s public security minister, refuses to allow Jewish people to pray on the Temple Mount even if they only move their lips, while Hamas broadcasts daily Islamic prayers from the Mount’s al-Aqsa mosque. Dichter and Olmert both belong to the Kadima party.

Rabbi Chaim Richman, a spokesman for the New Jewish Congress, a group of religious Zionist leaders, told World Net Daily, “The government of Ehud Olmert has ceased to be a Jewish government altogether, having not the slightest connection with the Jewish people.”

Glick said Olmert wants Israel to withdraw to the 1949 armistice lines “with minor modifications, not because doing so will ensure peace with the Palestinians, but because if we don’t we’ll lose our Jewish majority.”

Glick disagrees. “First, the 1949 lines are not demographic borders but cease-fire lines. Second, the cease-fire lines are indefensible. So while not solving any demographic problem, withdrawing to the 1949 lines would imperil Israel militarily.

“Beyond that, there is the fact that Olmert’s dark demographic projections are based on falsified census data published by the Palestinian Authority in 1997. . . . Although demography is a problem, Israel is in no immediate danger of losing its Jewish majority.”

Olmert also wants Israel to relinquish Jerusalem and claims Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas accepts Israel despite the fact that he refuses to recognize its existence and demands the “right of return” for millions of Arabs whose ancestors fled in 1948.

Wrote Glick sarcastically, “Olmert’s not worried, because he can see into Abbas’s soul.”
I live in a neighborhood in Jerusalem where many Russian immigrants live. I have lived in this home 34 years, but many of them arrived recently and do not go to synagogue. So the rabbis teach volunteers how to go door-to-door to encourage these immigrants to attend synagogue.

Most of the people here know me. But these volunteers do not. So they come to me also. Several knocked on my door recently, and I invited them in. The first question they ask is always the same: “Do you pray every day?”

I said, “Yes, I do.”

But my answer did not satisfy them. “We can see for ourselves that this is not so because you do not even cover your head,” one said. “How can you worship God without covering your head?”

This attitude was nothing new to me. The ultra-Orthodox always wear yarmulkes (skullcaps). “Is it so important to cover the head in order to worship God?” I asked. “Many of those who cover their heads in Israel are in jail.”

They also asked me if I keep kosher and have a prayer book. “Why do you ask these things?” I replied. “Because they are most important in our faith. Do you have a prayer book? How can you pray without a prayer book?”

I listened to all their questions and then decided it was time to give my answers. I asked them if they were ready to listen, and they said yes. So I began.

“Where is it written in the Bible that you cannot pray without a prayer book? It is clearly written in Deuteronomy 6 what we must do when we come before the Lord and how to be holy before Him.”

“You want to teach us how to be holy!” one declared. “You? You? You do not even have a prayer book at home!”

“I read the Bible,” I replied. “And I believe what is written there. And it is not written that you must come before the Lord with your prayer book. It is clearly written how you must come before the Lord: ‘with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.’ The Lord said, ‘These words which I command you today shall be in your heart’ [Dt. 6:5–6].

“And it is our obligation to teach these things to our children. These prayer books that the rabbis have written, do they enable you to enter heaven? You say you are holy, but you do not follow what is written in God’s Holy Word. Instead of telling people to read the Bible, you tell them they need prayer books and lead them far from the right way to the Lord. God’s Word is eternal. It is written in Psalm 119, ‘Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven’” (v. 89).

Then the men became nervous. “You are not like the others we speak to,” one said. “How do you know all these things?”

“I do not read Jewish commentaries,” I said. “I read the Bible. It is very clear. It is written in Deuteronomy 6:13, ‘You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him.’” They became inquisitive and wanted to know more.
“How did you come to all this? You do not even have forelocks [ultra-Orthodox men wear side curls called payis], but you say you are faithful to the Lord.” These men could not understand how someone like me knew what is written in the Bible.

“First of all,” I said, “you go to people and do not teach them what is right. You do not bring them closer to the Lord but make them more distant from Him. Look here in our home. We do not have a big stack of commentaries; many of them even contradict the Bible.”

Now they became extremely serious and wanted to know more. So I read Deuteronomy 6:14: “You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you.” I tried to explain that doing what others around you do is not always right. We must do what God says. Others may be wrong. But God’s Word is never wrong.

Then one asked, “Do you go to Christians and tell them the same as you tell us?”

“Christians,” I replied, “do not need me to say such things because they do not put their faith in commentaries. They believe only what is written in the Holy Bible.”

“You must believe as they do,” one replied. “Do you also believe in This Man [Jesus]?”

“I certainly do not believe as you do, that everyone who comes with a long beard and with his head covered is holy.”

“Now we know with whom we have spoken!” one said. They understood that I believe in Jesus.

“Our home is always open to you, and you will always be welcome,” I replied. Before they left, I read them Isaiah 53. “What do you think about it?” I asked.

Sadly, I received the same answer I always receive: “We will have to ask our rabbi.”

I pointed to my Bible and replied, “Here I have the answer. This is enough for me. And if you will believe the Lord according to the Bible, this will be enough for you too.”