Israel My Glory

A MINISTRY OF THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL GOSPEL MINISTRY, INC.

March/April 2011
Isr. 43:18

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, “I would rather teach one man to pray than ten men to preach.” This issue of Israel My Glory explores different types of prayer, including what to do when prayers seem to go unanswered. The cover is of the beautiful, reconstructed Hurva Synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem. Built in the 1700s, it was destroyed in 1721, rebuilt, and demolished again by the Jordanians in 1948. The dedication of the restored Hurva in 2010 heralds a revival of worship in Jewish Jerusalem. Arabs howled in anger, deeming Hurva’s presence a threat to Islamic shrines on the Temple Mount. Should the Palestinians win a state that includes East Jerusalem, the Hurva will be within its boundaries. (Menahem Kahana/AFP/Getty Images)

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In 1950, a mere two years after the birth of the modern State of Israel, a historic conference was convened by then-Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion in Jerusalem’s King David Hotel. It led to the founding of State of Israel Bonds. As a vital participant in Israel’s economic growth, Israel Bonds has generated $31 billion in worldwide economic support for the tiny Jewish state.

According to State of Israel Bonds President and Chief Executive Officer Joshua Matza, “Accomplishments of Israel Bonds would astound the organization’s founders. . . . Decades after its creation, Israel Bonds remains an essential catalyst for economic growth. . . . Israel Bonds will continue to raise funds, connect more individuals with Israel, and promote solidarity—all with the efficiency and dedication that has been the hallmark of the organization for 60 years.”

After careful consideration, The Friends of Israel became an investor in Israel Bonds by including them in our charitable-gift-annuity reserves portfolio. These invested reserves are required by the state of New Jersey in support of regular payments we make to our friends who hold Friends of Israel charitable-gift-annuity contracts. By investing in Israel Bonds, we honor God’s blessing on Israel while maintaining dependable investments.

Proceeds from bond sales have built highways and harbors in Israel and pipelines and power plants. They also have created new jobs and industries; helped fund advancements in medical and scientific research; established many industrial, agricultural, transportation, communications, and hi-tech projects; and converted sea water to fresh water to help make the desert blossom, as prophesied in Isaiah 35:1–2: “And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice.”

Funds raised by Israel Bonds have also played a vital role in the return of Jewish people to their ancestral homeland. These monies have supported programs to absorb, train, and resettle more than 1 million immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, Argentina, France, and other countries. These efforts remind us of God’s promises in Ezekiel 34:13: “And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country.”

Looking ahead, Israel Bonds is focused on supporting infrastructure developments that will connect cities and towns throughout Israel, create state-of-the-art communications systems, and accelerate technological innovation, thereby providing new opportunities for Israelis in all walks of life.

By investing in State of Israel Bonds, The Friends of Israel joins more than 65 states and municipalities, as well as thousands of banks, insurance companies, corporations, universities, foundations, and endowment funds. These investments are supported by Israel’s perfect record of making every payment of principal and interest on time and in full.

Individual investors, too, have played a major part in the success of Israel Bonds. A wide variety of bonds are available to the general public to help meet an individual’s personal investment objectives. For generating income with semiannual interest payments, three-year to 10-year Jubilee Bonds and two-year to five-year Maccabee Bonds are available in minimum amounts of $25,000 and $5,000 respectively.

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For more information about investing in Israel Bonds, visit one of the official Web sites: israelbonds.com (United States), israelbonds.ca (Canada), or www.israelukbonds.com (United Kingdom). Or contact customer service directly in New York by telephoning 888–519–4111.

We at The Friends of Israel understand that, because of God’s promise in Genesis 12:3, “I will bless those who bless you,” we can rightly refer to Israel Bonds as “bonds of blessing.” As the Israel Bonds motto says, “Not just a bond. A bond with Israel.”

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
Students at Princeton University voted last fall on a referendum combining politics and cuisine. The issue raised by The Princeton Committee for Palestine wanted students to approve a boycott on hummus. Not just any hummus. The hummus distributed by Sabra, an Israeli company. The committee charged that Sabra “serves the occupation” by supporting soldiers from the Golani Brigade, a part of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

Unfortunately, examples of such action against Israel are not limited to one college or one Israeli company. It has become increasingly chic internationally to boycott Israeli goods. Examples are legion.

South African activist and cleric Desmond Tutu came out in support of the Olympia, Washington, Food Co-op’s boycott of Israeli products last summer. In Ireland, members of the Dublin Food Co-op voted overwhelmingly at a special general meeting in November to boycott Israeli goods. Union workers in South Africa voted against unloading an Israeli ship, while workers in Great Britain endorsed a plan to boycott all goods from “occupied lands.”

The appeal to boycott Israel even captured the attention of American actress Meg Ryan who cancelled a film-festival appearance in Jerusalem in protest of Israeli policy.

These international actions are fueled by a growing global campaign called Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions for Palestine (BDS), begun in July 2005 and supported today by nearly 200 nongovernment organizations. According to its Web site, bdsmovement.net, BDS seeks to pressure Israel to end what it claims is Israel’s occupation and colonization of Arab lands. It also wants Israel to dismantle the separation wall that has helped keep terrorists from entering Israel and to return property to the descendants of Arabs who fled their homes during the 1948 War of Independence.

While the clarion call rings loudly to boycott big bad Israel, the under-the-radar reality goes unnoticed. When Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was pressured to institute a 10-month building freeze in Judea-Samaria (the “West Bank”), it was the Palestinian construction workers who felt the pain. When Sabra hummus is boycotted, many of the people hurt are premature Serbian infants and children with cancer, whom the company supports in a myriad of important ways.

Oh, yes. Sabra does support Israeli troops by providing—of all things—free hummus for the mostly teenage Golani Brigade.

Other examples of Israeli “brutality” involve Israel’s daily distribution of humanitarian aid and development assistance to the Arab population of the Gaza Strip. You can access the IDF Web site (idfspokesperson.com) and read about the millions of liters of heavy-duty diesel fuel transferred regularly to the Gaza power plant, the thousands of truckloads carrying hundreds of tons of commercial goods into Gaza, and the hundreds of individuals taken from Gaza into Israel for medical treatment.

Last year the Palestinian labor minister told the Associated Press his government plans to establish a $50 million fund to help thousands of Palestinians quit their jobs in Israel. What is wrong with this picture? Thousands of Palestinians will be forced to quit working and instead live off aid sent to them by the West.

At times—even to the most upbeat, positive thinker—Israel’s situation seems hopeless. Then a glimmer of sanity emerges. Princeton students turned down the referendum to boycott hummus 1,014 to 699. The result was a victory for the Strauss food conglomerate, Israel, the students, and common sense. As believers, we look for the Lord to someday set things right and restore Israel to its rightful place in the world.

by Steve Herzig

Pro-Palestinian activists in Paris (Bertrand Langlois/AFP/Getty Images).
The Heart of Prayer

Early on New Year’s Day a car bomb exploded outside a church in Alexandria, Egypt, killing 21 worshipers and seriously injuring dozens more. The next day was Sunday, and Christians throughout America took their places in church pews to greet the New Year. But something was missing, and the deficiency reveals a malady that has infected congregations far too long to go unnoticed.

During this particular service in an evangelical church of significant size, the pattern of worship rightly followed the usual course. When requests for prayer were announced, the list was basically dedicated to intercession for church members or their families afflicted with physical ailments or related temporal and economic situations. Why was no mention made of, or prayer offered for, those who suffered from the terrible, tragic attack in Egypt only hours earlier? Granted, the bomb did not go off in America; but why should that make a difference? These were Christians marked for death by the same hate-filled radicals who wish us all dead. The only difference was distance and opportunity.

When these horrific and all-too-often massacres occur, wouldn’t it be appropriate for church leaders to address the situation with worshipers and pause to pray for survivors and fellow believers in the affected country? After all, there is no biblical admonition to condone doing otherwise. Along with other scriptural calls to intercede for fellow believers, the very reports on persecution that we publish in this magazine lift up the standard bearer, Hebrews 13:3: “Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.”

Jesus said that “treasure” and “heart” are interrelated. The subject in context was riches, but the principle is universal. If you treasure your Christian brothers, wherever they happen to be, you manifest an extremely God-pleasing condition of the heart. And so it should be.

This issue of Israel My Glory is dedicated to prayer. Why pray, how to pray, when to pray. It is, therefore, profoundly important that we include our persecuted brethren in our public and private practices of prayer. Unfortunately, at this juncture, they seem to have been shoved down the deep chasm of Western neglect.

Can it be that we have become so seduced by the spirit of contemporary “feel-goodism” that the disturbing news of suffering and tragedy is an unwelcome downer at our uplift-seeking sessions? If so, it is a foreboding preamble for the future because the facts warn us that the tide of jihadist fanaticism and hard-line, secularist God-hating is rapidly coming our way. The issue is whether we can be prepared as a people to face all aspects of the future with biblical discernment and a balanced, practical sense of spiritual maturity.

Filling the void of intercessory union with brethren outside our immediate vicinity, culture, or social circle can bring the balance and perspective demanded by living in the last days. This subject is not a matter of bowing to morbid, debilitating pessimism. It is, in a positive way, a road to reality. Our brothers need us. They need our prayers, our encouragement, our assistance, our support, and our voices where speaking up on their behalf can make a difference.

Of major importance in today’s world is the primacy of prayer that is based on accurate information transmitted through trustworthy sources and compassionately disseminated by our leaders to those of us in the pews. Together, through prayer, we can and must make a difference.
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Clarence Johnson Heads Institute of Jewish Studies

Veteran pastor-educator Clarence Johnson has been named the new director of The Friends of Israel Institute of Jewish Studies (IJS). He will be responsible for leading the daily administration and development of the IJS program while maintaining its vital distinctive of teaching God’s Word from a uniquely Jewish perspective.

“We had been asking the Lord for just the right person to carry forward Friends of Israel’s vision for taking IJS teaching to the world,” said Bill Sutter, executive director for The Friends of Israel. “Now He has answered with Clarence Johnson who brings to the director’s position both a wealth of experience and a high level of energy.”

Clarence comes to IJS with 30 years of experience as a gifted pastor and teacher. For the past seven years he has worked for Philadelphia Biblical University (PBU) in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, as director of alumni and church relations. He has taught in PBU’s undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as in Moody Bible Institute’s program in Florida.

His longtime connection with The Friends of Israel and his ability to use his gifts and calling to teach God’s truth and to disciple, encourage, and equip others to live productively for the Savior make him a perfect fit for IJS.

Clarence said he looks forward to serving the Lord through The Friends of Israel and the Institute of Jewish Studies: “It is an adventure filled with the privilege of being a part of God’s eternal plan to touch the lives of others.”

Clarence Johnson is the third full-time director of the Institute of Jewish Studies since its inception in 1986. In 2009 the school transitioned from a limited, traditional classroom program in a fixed location to an online school that now crosses oceans and reaches all seven continents.

For more information about the Institute of Jewish Studies, log on to foi.org/ijs.

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A More Perfect Union

by Craig L. Parshall

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness

The timing was striking. The article appeared in the December 5, 2010, issue of The New York Times. Harvard philosophy professor Sean D. Kelly wrote about what makes a “life worthy of . . . admiration.”

He noted that today’s religious believers are no longer fixed on the idea that only those lives lived in accordance with a particular view of God can be successful. In other words, he said, “God is dead, therefore, in a very particular sense. He no longer plays his traditional social role of organizing us around a commitment to a single right way to live.”

Regarding those of us who insist that only lives lived consistent with a certain view of God can be truly fulfilled, Professor Kelly wrote, “Society now rightly condemns them as dangerous religious fanatics.” In other words, God is no longer a necessary part of the equation of what makes a happy life. Those who disagree with that thinking are apparently enemies of the State.

The following day, the consequences of Professor Kelly’s faulty logic were played out in a federal courtroom in California. A three-judge panel in the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit was hearing arguments in the Proposition 8 case dealing with the future of traditional marriage in that state, a case that will determine whether same-sex “marriage” will be converted into a constitutionally protected institution.

As I watched the live television coverage of the oral arguments, I observed one of the judges make a telling comment to the lawyer arguing for traditional marriage. The judge indicated that marriage itself seemed to be a mere “word,” implying that the bestowing of official marital status on homosexual relationships was of no real consequence.

Meanwhile, when their turn came up, the attorneys for the gay-rights movement argued that homosexuals should be entitled to marriage with persons of the same sex primarily on two bases. First, equality demands that homosexual couples be treated the same as heterosexual couples. That assumption, though, begs the question: Is a homosexual relationship equivalent to the marriage between a man and a woman after all?

In measuring these two kinds of relationships, however, sameness and difference become a servant of the second argument. For everyone, even the homosexual advocates, agrees that there are differences. The point is whether those differences are significant enough to deny the “happiness” of homosexuals.

And here is where we see the second train of reasoning advanced by the gay lawyers. They argued that their clients should have the same right to marital happiness as heterosexuals do and that happiness in the context of the institution of marriage ought to be judged almost exclusively by the subjective desires of citizens. It is the hurt feelings, the outrage felt by same-sex couples that ought to weigh heavily, rather than an objective, fixed, moral standard.

But what is forgotten is the source of that oft-used phrase pursuit of happiness. It comes from the Declaration of Independence, where we are reminded that our “unalienable rights,” chiefly “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” come from our “Creator.” When we view it in the modern culture-war context, it is “happiness,” not “marriage” that has become a mere empty shell of a word when it is divorced from God, the source of all true happiness.

The gay-rights lawyers and their clients have committed what C. S. Lewis once called the fallacy of “naturalism,” the tendency to view all of life as contained entirely within the visible, the empirical, the experiential. Transcendent values become meaningless unless connected to a modern appetite that can be satisfied only in sensate, physical terms.

I was reminded how wrongheaded this current, politically correct definition of happiness is when I was glancing through a recent book by pastor and masterful preacher Stuart Briscoe. Flowing Streams: Journeys of a Life Well Lived is a retrospective on his life of ministry. In the preface, he shares the true secret to a successful, fulfilled life. It comes from John 7:38, where Jesus tells His listeners that “whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him” (NIV).

In verse 39, we also learn that the “living water” is the Spirit of God who flows through people who receive His Son. The Bible reminds us that a life well-lived does not come from the natural order of things, but from God’s supernatural order lived out in the lives Jesus Christ has transformed.

This is the message America needs to hear. Until our nation hears this truth and receives it, we will continue to hear happiness defined in the kind of shabby, shallow terms that were debated in a California courtroom.
An Unsought Exodus
The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?

—Mark Twain, September, 1899

Mark Twain asked the inevitable question. And he was not alone. Thousands of rational people—from the academic elitists to the less sophisticated commoners—have uttered the same query: “What is the secret of the Jewish people’s immortality?” By every human reckoning, they should be extinct.

They were repeatedly crushed by great empires; scattered among hostile Gentiles; reviled by perpetually radical, anti-Semitic pogromists; and incinerated by Nazi hordes in the fires of the Holocaust. Yet they remain a presence unique to the whole of human reality. And like it or not, they cannot be ignored.

I raise Mark Twain’s question because, despite all that has gone before us and all that we should have learned from the past, anti-Semitism is rising again. Evidence appears everywhere—even within mainstream Protestantism. There, in particular, where the Jewish people and Israel should be understood and respected, the anti-Semitic tenets of Replacement Theology have spread like a plague. Proponents have marshaled forces dedicated to replacing the Jews as the Chosen People and displacing Israel using the spiritually felonious claim that the church is the “new Israel of God.”

In the UN, Israel is constantly pummeled. It is called a dangerous, apartheid pariah; and delegates constantly question whether statehood should be rescinded in favor of creating a Palestinian haven for terrorists and their anti-Western supporters who demand everything and return nothing. All this despite the fact that little Israel has contributed more to the welfare of humanity—medically, technologically, militarily, and economically—than most of the Western nations combined.

Europe, with its overload of militant Muslims, has in large part acquiesced to jihadist rage. Not only are European nations themselves imperiled, but they also must suspend virtually all cooperation with Israel to avoid the wrath of radical Muslims. So far along is the process of alienation that Israeli military personnel avoid travel to Great Britain because they may be arrested as war criminals.

Most obvious is the new crusade by the Muslim Middle East to drive Jews from the region (ethnic cleansing) and co-opt everything Jewish—historically, materially, and personally. Encouraging the new march toward a Jewless Middle East is the Islamist perception that U.S. weakness, indecision, and tilt toward the Palestinian cause will facilitate pushing Arab militancy as far as it can go.

In short, in the works is an attempt to phase in a new Jewish dispersion and a State of Israel in terminal isolation.

The mood of the moment is for unprincipled, unlawful, and hate-inspired anti-Jewish outbursts that are perhaps best summarized by now-discredited veteran American journalist, Helen Thomas. When asked how she felt about Israel in May 2010, Ms. Thomas replied, “Tell them to get the hell out of Palestine. Remember, these people [Palestinians] are occupied. And it’s their land.” Asked where the Jews should go, she said they should “go home” to “Germany and Poland.”

Her tirade cannot be brushed aside as merely the comments of a 90-year-old journalist beyond her prime. Judging by the accolades she received, she evidently expressed the vitriol intrinsic to the growing animosity toward Israel and the Jewish people.

The Not-So-Secret Immortality of Jewry

Credit Mark Twain for the perception that generated his question. However, if he sought an answer in human resources, he was destined to come up short. To learn the secret of the Jewish people’s preservation, their past and present purpose on this planet, and their irrevocable centrality to climactic future events, there is only one place to look: the pages of the Word of God.

Unfortunately, the bulk of humanity is loath even to broach the possibility that the Bible has a shred of credibility. Yet this Book of all Books holds the key to understanding the Jews and gives life to Jehovah’s affirming promises that, through this numerically insignificant people, He will eventually introduce true peace and establish His people as a universal blessing to the nations.

Ezekiel 11 prophetically draws together the virtues of the great mass of God’s good intentions—what He promises to perform among His people and how He will use them as His instrument of blessing and health to the nations. In the midst of raging Gentile hostility that drove the Jews from their own land, He assures their protection, reassembling, restoration, reconciliation, and reunion:

Therefore say, “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone [protection].’” Therefore say, “Thus says the Lord God: ‘I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered [reassembling], and I will give you the land of Israel [restoration].’” And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart...
of flesh [reconciliation], that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God [reunion] (vv. 16–20).

This is the big picture, a portrait of fruition. And it can only be found in its fullness in the pages of the Bible.

History Proves What God Proclaims

Among the clarifications that Scripture provides about events preceding the final chapter in God’s program for Israel is the growth of militant anti-Semitism. The current clamor in the UN for the elimination of the Jewish state is a harbinger of the future. Eventually, the finishing touches will be put on the obsessive fantasy of a Jew-free world and will lead to the catastrophic gathering of “all the nations to battle against Jerusalem” (Zech. 14:2). The current rush to line up with Israel’s would-be dismantlers appears to be a precursor of more to come.

Award-winning journalist Caroline Glick reported recently,
The PA [Palestinian Authority] announced it will ask the UN Security Council to pass an anti-Semitic resolution defining Jewish building in Judea, Samaria and Jerusalem as illegal. This move dovetails nicely with Abbas’s statement over the weekend that “Palestine” will be Jew-free. As he put it, “If there is an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, we won’t agree to the presence of one Israeli in it. When a Palestinian state is established, it would have no Israeli presence.”

Meanwhile, the Hamas terrorists in control of the Gaza Strip continually bombard Israeli communities with rockets while quoting from their jihadist, annihilation-of-Israel playbook. Ahmed Jabari, leading commander of Hamas’s military, said recently Israel’s Jews have two choices: “death or departing Palestinian land.”

Clearly, the PA, often mislabeled as America’s and Israel’s “peace partner,” shares the Hamas dream, yet with slightly different shading. “Its goal,” wrote Ms. Glick, “is clearly to proceed with its plan to declare [Palestinian] statehood [along 1949 armistice lines] with maximum international support within the next nine to 12 months.”

The lengths to which Israel’s adversaries will go to disenfranchise the Jewish people from any attachment to the Holy Land are extraordinary. These people even make the ludicrous claim that there was never a Jewish presence or Temple on Mount Moriah. Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, the former PA-appointed mufti of Jerusalem, has long denied the Jewish connection to the Western Wall. “No stone of the Western Wall has any connection to Hebrew history,” he said. All these events are in preparation for an eventual Jewless Palestinian state extending, in Arab words, from the Jordan River to the Sea.

However, this situation is only a reflection of what increasingly godless nations have aspired to from time immemorial. We hear it every day in one way or another. A widely distributed anti-Semitic handbill depicts a photo of Adolf Hitler over the caption “What if I had won?” Underneath, in large capital letters, it reads, “THERE WOULD BE NO ISRAEL AND NO PALESTINIAN’S BLOOD SHED.”

The idea: if there were no Jews and no Israel, there would be peace. Think about that next time a Western politician or diplomat joins jihadists in insisting the key to a lasting peace in the Middle East is the expulsion of every Jewish person from his own land. They are really saying that the Jewish people’s very existence is the hindrance and that finding a “final solution to the Jewish problem” will open the gates to Utopia.

Exodus on Two Fronts

Last Christmas many news commentators offered their wisdom as to why so many Christians in the Middle East held muted or secretive celebrations of Christ’s birth. Their reasons included economic deprivation and the harshness of the Israeli “occupation.” The fact is, however, Muslims are waging a relentless campaign to purge the Middle East of Christians. And their success rate has been high.

The Jewish Virtual Library asks this question:
What happened? Why has there been a great—and little reported—Christian exodus from the Middle East, with some 2 million fleeing in the past 20 years alone? Why have perhaps fully half of all Iraqi Christians clandestinely emigrated in the last 10 years? Why have hundreds of thousands of Egyptian Copts left their homeland, with the famous Antioch community collapsing from 15,000 Christians a couple of decades ago to a mere handful today? The single greatest cause of this emigration is pressure from radical Islam. In the wake of the New Year’s bombing outside a church in Alexandria, Egypt, French President Nicolas Sarkozy said Christian minorities in the Middle East are victims of “religious cleansing.” He is correct.

Muslim extremists are determined to create a Muslim-only Middle East by any means available. Thus an unsought exodus is taking place. The world wants Christians and Jews out—but God has other plans.

Mark Twain posed the question. God’s Word gives the answer. And history is proving the point.

Conclusion: Never give up on truth.

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid.

Elwood McQuaid is consulting editor for The Friends of Israel.
Somali Girl Shot to Death for Embracing Christ. A 17-year-old girl in Somalia who converted to Christianity from Islam has been shot to death in an apparent “honor killing.” Nurta Mohamed Farah, who fled her village to live with relatives after her parents tortured her for leaving Islam, died November 25 after two men believed to be relatives shot her in the chest and head with a pistol.

Sources said her parents beat her severely for leaving Islam. They shackled her to a tree by day and kept her in a small, dark room at night since May 2010 when they learned she had embraced Christ. They also forced her to take medication for mental illness, thinking she had gone crazy. But the drugs could not sway her from her faith. Nor could the twice-weekly recitations of the Qur’an, which many Somalis believe cure the sick, especially the mentally ill.

Muslims in Pakistan Burn, Beat Evangelist Unconscious. Rev. Wilson Augustine, 26, is still recovering from burns after six Muslim men beat him with clubs and belts and set him on fire in November for distributing pamphlets and proclaiming Christ door-to-door among Christian families.

Augustine said the Muslim men “kept pursuing me everywhere I went, as they harbored a grudge against me for imparting the good news of the Holy Bible.” At about 10 P.M. Augustine walked to a bus stop, singing hymns and reciting psalms in the cold night air, when riders on three motorcycles blinded him with their headlights; but he recognized their voices. They beat him with clubs and belts, threw a cold liquid on him, lit a match box, and set him ablaze.

“After setting me on fire, they started thrashing me again,” he said. “Because they were beating me with clubs the fire was extinguished, and they dragged me to some nearby shrubs.” Augustine passed out. Several Christians later found him and brought him to a hospital. Augustine’s father told Compass the police would not file a case against the Muslims because they were sons of a wealthy, powerful landowner.

Muslim Mob in Egypt Firebombs Christian Homes, Businesses. Hundreds of Muslims in November rampaged through a Christian community, firebombing houses and businesses over rumors of a romantic relationship between a Christian and a Muslim. At least 23 homes and many businesses, all Christian-owned, were damaged or destroyed. Five people were injured, two seriously.

The attack devastated the Christians, said Badier Magdy Demetry, 22. “It has affected us in every way, financially, physically, spiritually—everything. . . . Everybody is living in sadness and desperation.”

The Muslims poured into the streets chanting “God is great!” while brandishing swords, knives, meat cleavers and shooting rifles in the air. “People started to run away from their houses, from the top of their roofs to the house next door, so they could escape with their wives and children,” Demetry said.

The mob pelted the homes and businesses with rocks, looted them, then torched them with Molotov cocktails and bombs made out of propane tanks.

Afterward, it was the Christians who were rounded up and taken to a police station. Police did not let the victims report the names of their assailants, nor did they take any information about the men who were injured.

Compiled from reports filed by Compass Direct News.
Lake-effect snowstorms arrive suddenly, depart quickly, and usually leave several inches of the white stuff in a limited area. Several years ago I was en route from Chicago, Illinois, to Cleveland, Ohio, to attend a family wedding. The unexpected storm arrived around 3:30 A.M. With my wife and daughter serenely asleep in the car, I clench the steering wheel and drove ever so slowly in zero visibility. My wife soon awoke due to the cold air streaming in through my open window, rolled down to ensure sight of the guardrail on the left side of the road. Soon we were both frightened.
Total darkness surrounded us as millions of snowflakes collected on the windshield. It was then that we asked the Lord to get us safely to an exit. “Lord,” I remember praying, “I promise I will get off at the first exit I see and not leave until the snow stops.”

All was quiet except for the windshield wipers swishing vainly back and forth. Within moments after that prayer, headlights appeared in my rearview mirror. As far as I knew, I was the only one on the road. I could tell the driver of the car wanted to pass me, and as I moved over I noticed he was driving a Jeep. He then slowed down in front of me, creating a buffer to the storm. I followed that Jeep for about 10 minutes until I saw a very welcome exit sign. Then the Jeep seemed to vanish as I exited the expressway.

Neither my wife nor I said anything until we found a 24-hour restaurant and pulled into the parking lot. We sat in the car, motionless. We knew we had just experienced an immediate, amazing, life-saving answer to prayer. To this day (nearly three decades later), we believe God sent either an angel or a really good driver to guide us. We prayed in our time of need, and He answered us promptly. By the time we had finished our early breakfast, the storm had passed; and true to the word of my prayer, we left that parking lot on what had become a clear, sunny morning.

Should people who pray expect such a wonderful and immediate response? What if a Jeep had not appeared? What if, instead of finding an exit, I had hit a patch of ice and crashed? Would God be any less than who He is because I received no help? Would my prayer have been meaningless?

Historically, God gives three answers to His people: yes, no, and wait. As the absolute Sovereign of the universe, He does what He wants when He wants for whatever reason He wants and for His own purpose.

Throughout history, devout, praying people in horrendous situations did not receive their desired answers. Today millions of deeply distressed people pray fervently to God in their times of need. They may be in difficult relationships, have disastrous finances, or suffer painful health problems. Yet they see no evidence of an answer to their prayers. Even the Lord Jesus Christ prayed specifically to His Father, “If it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Lk. 22:42).

So why pray at all? If God does what He wants to do, what purpose does praying serve?

We pray because it demonstrates our relationship with God. Christians often describe themselves as having “a personal relationship with God.” Such a relationship revolves around communication. God speaks to us through His Word, and we speak to Him through our lips and mind. If we don’t listen (read His Word) or speak (pray), the relationship breaks down.

We pray because God commands it: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Th. 5:17). Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6–7).

Complying with Jewish tradition, the prophet Daniel prayed three times a day regardless of the circumstances (Dan. 6:12–13). God wants His people to pray.

We pray because it demonstrates our position under Him and our dependence on Him:

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help?
My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber” (Ps. 121:1–3).

We pray because it is a way to serve God. The prophetess Anna “served God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Lk. 2:37). When we pray we admit that life is not “all about me.” The apostle Paul wrote, 

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

We pray because it strengthens our faith. Seeing firsthand God’s provision through answered prayer strengthens our inner man. Jesus said, “When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Mt. 6:6). We pray to the one “who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

We pray because it is worth doing: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jas. 5:16).

We pray because He always answers, one way or another:

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him (1 Jn. 5:14–15).

When my wife and I called out to God in our need, we did not know what His answer would be. When the Jeep emerged out of nowhere, pulled in front of us, and directed us to the exit, we certainly felt a great relief. Later, as we sat in the parking lot meditating on what had happened, all we could do was pray again—this time praising the Lord who saw fit to answer us.

And that is another reason we pray: to praise God for who He is and to thank Him for His blessings.

Steve Herzog is the director of North American Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
Worship should be an essential element of prayer. The modern-day word worship comes from the old English word weorthscipe. It referred to “worthiness, respect, reverence paid to a divine being.” These meanings indicate that worship prayer should consist of expressions of worthiness, respect, and reverence offered to God.

The word holy relates significantly to expressions of worthiness, respect, and reverence offered to God. The root of the biblical word translated “holy” means “to divide.” A holy person is divided from other people and things in the sense of being different, distinct, or even unique from them. Thus, when the Bible declares that God is holy, it means He is different, distinct, or unique from everyone and everything.

After God delivered the people of Israel safely through the Red Sea, they said, “Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness?” (Ex. 15:11). They associated God’s holiness with the fact that He is unique from all other gods.

In declaring, “I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst” (Hos. 11:9), He signified that His holiness involves His being different or distinct from mankind. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, asserted that, just as the gods of other nations could not rescue those nations from His strong hand, so Israel’s God would be unable to rescue Jerusalem (2 Ki. 18:28–35; 19:8–13). This insinuation that Israel’s God was no different from the gods of other nations was a verbal attack on the uniqueness, or holiness, of God.

God responded to Sennacherib as follows: “Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice, and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel” (19:22). He warned Sennacherib that Israel’s God is different from all others. God demonstrated His uniqueness by killing 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night (v. 35).

The angels above God’s throne cry out, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:3); and those around God’s throne do not rest day or night, saying, “Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty” (Rev. 4:8). These facts seem to indicate that God’s uniqueness means more to Him than any other attribute. His holiness is absolutely essential to His being who He is. God’s people are commanded to “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 29:2). The word translated “beauty” means “adornment.” In private and public worship, believers are to adorn God with His holiness by declaring how different, distinct, or unique He is in contrast with everyone and everything else.

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid.

by Renald E. Showers
The Prayer of Cyrus Brown
by Sam Walter Foss (1858–1911)

"The proper way for a man to pray,"
Said Deacon Lemuel Keyes,
"And the only proper attitude
Is down upon his knees."

"No, I should say the way to pray,"
Said Rev. Doctor Wise,
"Is standing straight with outstretched arms
And rapt and upturned eyes."

"Oh, no; no, no," said Elder Slow,
"Such posture is too proud:
A man should pray with eyes fast closed
And head contritely bowed."

"It seems to me his hands should be
Austerely clasped in front.
With both thumbs pointing toward the ground,"
Said Rev. Doctor Blunt.

"Las’ year I fell in Hodgkin’s well
Head first,” said Cyrus Brown,
"With both my heels a-stickin’ up,
My head a-pinting down;
An’ I made a prayer right then an’ there—
Best prayer I ever said,
The prayingest prayer I ever prayed,
A-standin’ on my head.”

(Tony Marven/iStockphoto)
When God Seems Silent
Pick up, pick up!” you shout into the phone as your loved one lies unconscious on the floor. You’ve frantically dialed 911. It rings and rings, but no one answers. How long, God, how long until they answer my call? Nothing.

Imagine your desperation. Seconds turn into minutes, but still no response from the emergency dispatcher. You are calling out for help but receive silence in return.

Have you ever called out to God and received no response? Have you felt as though God has turned a deaf ear toward you? King David of Israel did. In Psalm 13 David recorded his intense frustration with God’s silence during a time of deep need and gave us a model of prayer to follow when we feel as he did.

Interestingly, David did not provide the specifics of his emergency call to God, so we don’t know if it was precipitated by illness or another form of trouble. We do know that God’s unresponsiveness was agonizing. One writer commented, “Time itself becomes a destructive force, wearing down a man’s ability to hold out and intensifying the suffering to an inhuman level.”

The Lament

Psalm 13 is an individual lament, “a genre of psalm in which the speaker in the poem defines a crisis and invokes God for help.” It “concludes on a note of hope and confidence.” David confided in God about his predicament, and the psalm candidly and sincerely highlights David’s threefold reaction to God’s unresponsiveness. First, David revealed his problem—which had become the unresponsiveness of God Himself.

How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul [wrestle with my thoughts], having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted [triumph] over me? (vv. 1–2).

David pleaded with God four times, asking “How long?” You can sense the intensity of emotion in David’s rhetorical questions. He felt ignored and forgotten by God—alienated, alone with his thoughts. Like the 911 caller, David was deeply distressed.

He then verbalized his inward turmoil as he wrestled with his seemingly never-ending, all-encompassing problem. David’s raw emotions may be unsettling for some readers. However, as Kenneth Barker and Waylon Bailey noted, “God is the friend of the honest doubter who dares to talk to God rather than about him. Prayer that includes an element of questioning God may be a means of increasing one’s faith. Expressing doubts and crying out about unfair situations in the universe shows one’s trust in God and one’s confidence that God should and does have an answer to humanity’s insoluble problems.”

When faced with your own frustrations with God, confide in Him—like David—expressing your struggle and distress.

The Petition

David then transitioned from questioning God to praying to God. He petitioned Him, asking for a response: Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed against him”; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved [when I fall] (Ps. 13:3–4).

The psalmist used a threefold prayer (look, answer, and give light) to implore God. He sought an answer—preferably the positive response of God’s blessing and favor. David then appealed to God and His reputation (v. 4). Wrote a commentator: “Before more trouble comes, and before the godless have reason to rejoice over the defeat of the godly, God must act to protect His honor.”

David imploratively asked God, essentially saying, “Please give me cause to rejoice. If nothing else, please do not give my enemies (and your enemies) cause to rejoice.” Like David, we must pray to God amid difficult circumstances and ask Him for a response.

The Praise

After David expressed his problem and prayed, he praised God for His goodness and past blessings:

But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me (vv. 5–6).

What a contrast from David’s earlier emotional appeal to God (vv. 1–2) as compared to these calming verses of confidence and trust. David verbalized his intentional choice to trust in God despite his difficult circumstances. He expressed his trust in the Lord’s unfailing love—resolving to rejoice and sing to the Lord because “He has dealt bountifully with me.”

It has been said of David, “Though he has experienced deep despair, the psalmist does not give up. . . . He held on to the promise of God’s covenant love.” David was not overwhelmed by his troubles; in his challenging situation, he said, “I trust.” Martin Luther once stated, “Hope despairs and yet despair hopes.”

Interestingly, all lament psalms (with the exception of Psalm 88) end with praise to God for His past deliverance and faithfulness. Claus Westermann described David’s outcome: “The one who laments his suffering to God does not remain in his lament.” David resolutely placed his trust in God’s sovereign care despite God’s unresponsiveness. He determined to put confidence in what he knew to be true about God’s character and faithfulness rather than give in to his feelings of discouragement and disillusionment.

Dr. Mark McGinniss has said, “The silence of God does not mean the absence of God.” David resolved
to trust that the sovereign God whom he served was at work behind the scenes, despite His perceived absence.

How long, Lord, do I have to live with this chronic illness? How long, Lord, before you bring back my wayward grandson? How long, Lord, will I have to remain unemployed? How long, Lord, before you give us a child? When we, like David, are faced with what seems to be unresponsive silence from God—the unanswered 911 call as we call on His name—we should follow David’s example: Pour out to God the details of the problem; pray, asking Him for a response; and praise Him for who He is, despite how we feel in the midst of our circumstances.

God has a purpose for everything, even what appears to be His silence. Yet He promises He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Calling on His name is only a “911” call away.

ENDNOTES
2 “Glossary of Literary Terms and Genres,” The Literary Study Bible (ESV), <esvLiteraryStudyBible.org/glossary#lament>.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid, 139.
8 Dr. Mark McGinniss, personal interview on January 19, 2007.
9 Westermann, 69.

If You Believe the Bible Is No Longer Relevant, Be Prepared to Change Your Mind!

BY DAVID M. LEVY

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It was to be a day of trouble, rebuke, and blasphemy (2 Ki. 19:3). Assyria, the most powerful military force on Earth, invaded Judah. King Sennacherib demanded Jerusalem’s surrender, all the while mocking King Hezekiah and insulting the God of Israel (2 Ki. 18; 2 Chr. 32; Isa. 36). Then, if that wasn’t terrifying enough for Hezekiah, the Jewish king was told he soon would die. Overwhelmed, he poured out his heart in serious supplication.

The Hebrew word for supplication is *chalah*, which connotes being worn, weak, sick, or afflicted. It describes the burning, impassioned sentiment of a heart that prays fervently to God.

Most people face numerous problems in this world: illness, bereavement, loss of income, family pressures, loneliness, and much more. Difficulties are always present, as reflected in an old Yiddish saying, “Trouble is to man what rust is to iron.” It’s inevitable.

But God has given us the privilege of supplication to receive comfort and help. Scripture tells us, “Pour out your heart before Him” (Ps. 62:8). It also assures us He hears: “The LORD has heard my supplication; the LORD will receive my prayer” (6:9).

Upon hearing the blasphemous Assyrian message, Hezekiah, emotionally worn and weak, tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, entered the Lord’s Temple, and prayed:

Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see, and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, for you shall die and not live’” (Isa. 38:1).

God responded with full deliverance for Jerusalem. Hezekiah’s supplication was viewed as so powerful that, from a human perspective, it appeared to change God’s mind. But God does not change (Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17). He always glorifies Himself and does what is right in His eyes.

Later Hezekiah was sick and near death. The prophet Isaiah visited him and broke the bad news: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live’” (Isa. 38:1).

The ancient rabbis taught that no matter how bad the circumstance, one should always pray. This position supposedly was based on Hezekiah’s response. He prayed to the Lord, and God prolonged the king’s life by 15 years (v. 5).

Whatever be our darkest moments in life, God is always there. As followers of Jesus, we should always remember that God works everything out for good in accordance with His purpose (Rom. 8:28). There will be days of trial and trouble. So many, in fact, that even Bible-believing Christians will be worn down and afflicted. But God hears the passions of the heart. He may not always answer in the way we desire or expect, yet His ways are always perfect. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6).

The ancient rabbis understood this concept, as they commented, “What is service of the heart? You must needs say, Prayer” (Talmud Taanit, 2a).

by Peter Colón, Southeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.
### PRAISE/WORSHIP OF GOD

**Judean King Hezekiah asking deliverance from Assyria:** “O Lord God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.”

*(2 Ki. 19:15)*

**Nehemiah on hearing Jerusalem’s walls were in shambles:** “[I] confess the sins of the children of Israel. . . We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances.”

*(Neh. 1:6–7)*

**Moses after the golden calf incident:** “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self. . . ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.”

*(Ex. 32:13)*

**Lp Moses after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea:** “Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”

*(Ex. 15:11)*

**David after his sin with Bathsheba:** “For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight.”

*(Ps. 51:3–4)*

**In God’s throne room in heaven:** “Worthy is the Lamb! . . . Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

*(Rev. 5:12–13)*

### CONFESSION OF SIN

**The apostles following persecution:** “You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: ‘Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things?’”

*(Acts 4:24–25)*

**The prophet Daniel in Babylon:** “We have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled. . . Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets.”

*(Dan. 9:5–6)*

### AFFIRMATION OF GOD’S WORD

**A prayer of Moses:** “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed . . . the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”

*(Ps. 90:1–2)*

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Prayer is a vital part of the Christian life. It enables us to communicate directly with God through our great High Priest, Jesus. In this age, faith in Him privileges us to “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). God tells us, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jas. 5:16). Above are examples of the
### Thanksgiving for God’s Blessing

**A Psalm:** “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is the great God, and the great King above all gods.”

*(Ps. 95:1–3)*

**The virgin Mary rejoicing at God’s promise that she would bear the Messiah:** “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. . . . For He who is mighty has done great things for me.”

*(Lk. 1:46–47, 49)*

**A Psalm:** “Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works.”

*(Ps. 107:21–22)*

### Intercession for Others

**The apostle Paul asking the church to pray:** “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ.”

*(Col. 4:2–3)*

**Jesus for His disciples:** “I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me. . . . The world has hated them because they are not of the world. . . . Keep them from the evil one.”

*(Jn. 17:9, 14–15)*

**Stephen asking forgiveness for those who stoned him:** “Then he knelt down and cried. . . . ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’”

*(Acts 7:60)*

### Supplication for One Self

**Hannah requesting a son from the Lord:** “If You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life.”

*(1 Sam. 1:11)*

**Jonah from the belly of the great fish:** “I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice. I will look again toward Your holy temple.”

*(Jon. 2:2, 4)*

**Jesus in Gethsemane shortly before His crucifixion:** “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”

*(Mt. 26:39)*

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by Thomas C. Simcox
Each year in November we anticipate the Thanksgiving holiday here in America. A good barometer of how Thanksgiving is viewed can be found by flipping through the television channels. Every show has a Thanksgiving episode where busy individuals prepare frantically for the big day. Love and family are exalted, and everyone has a newfound appreciation for the people in their lives. God, of course, is left out.

With Easter approaching on April 24, retailers are now stocking their shelves with pastel-colored merchandise, stuffed bunnies, and mountains of candy in hopes of cashing in on a holiday when Christians celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Again, God is absent.

So many people today fail to thank the one who “gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). Yet the Lord tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 that a portion of His will for our lives is to give thanks.

How Things Should Be

Rather than setting a day aside to give thanks, Christians should give thanks every day because our lives are not our own. We were “bought at a price” with “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:19). As believers, we belong to Him, and He works all things for our good. So we can give thanks, not only in times of plenty but also in times of want, struggle, trial, and testing.

George Matheson, a 19th-century Scottish minister and hymn writer who was practically blind at 18, once prayed, “My God, I have never thanked You for my thorn. I have thanked You a thousand times for my roses, but never once for my thorn.”

The apostle Paul was an example of someone who knew how to be grateful:

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil. 4:11–13). In 2 Corinthians 4:17, after Paul recapped instances of the suffering he endured, he referred to it all as “light affliction.” Why? Because the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in his life allowed him to experience and express joy and gratitude in the midst of heartache. His personal relationship with the living Lord produced all manner of fruit resulting in praise and thanksgiving.

Many people today search for God’s will as if it were an elusive treasure that He hides from them. Yet He tells us clearly what a portion of His will is
for our lives: “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Th. 5:18).

His will is also tied to the previous two verses: “Rejoice always” and “pray without ceasing” (vv. 16–17). James wrote, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (Jas. 1:2). We are not to let circumstances determine our heart attitude. Our situations are to have no bearing on whether we have joy that produces heartfelt thanks to God. Practice all three (rejoicing, praying, giving thanks) and you will lead a life characterized by the contentment Paul experienced.

The Flip Side

By contrast, Romans 1:20–21 teaches that unsaved people tend to be characterized by ingratitude to God:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Scripture gives a sweeping indictment of the unregenerate by listing some despicable characteristics of their lives (vv. 22–32). Because they refuse to glorify God and thank Him for their very existence, they spiral into sinful indulgence and ungodliness. That’s why it is such a glorious day when people turn to the Lord in repentance, ask for forgiveness, and receive God’s gift of everlasting life (Jn. 3:16, 36).

I think the two attributes that characterize a new believer most are joy and thankfulness. Thankfulness, in fact, is a recurring theme of Scripture. The psalmist wrote, “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name” (Ps. 100:4).

Ephesians 5:3–4 tells us, “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.”

Verses 17–20 state,

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Doing these things fulfills God’s will for your life. Philippians 4:6 exhorts us, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” The result will be a God-given peace that surpasses all understanding and that “will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (v. 7).

Colossians 2:6–7 says, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”
The Right Perspective

One of my privileges with The Friends of Israel is to meet with many folks who make this ministry possible through their prayers and gifts. My purpose in visiting them is first and foremost to thank them for coming alongside as colaborers. We are so grateful for the many friends who share our mission and vision.

Although it is my intention to thank these people and see how I can minister to them, so often it is I who am ministered to. Not long ago I visited a couple and learned the wife had undergone radical surgery to slow the progression of cancer. She also is undergoing a five-year chemotherapy treatment. Before I left I asked how I could pray for her. She replied, “Just rejoice and give thanks to the Lord with me. I am thankful for each day He gives me, and if those days end, then I will be with Him, which is far better.”

Now that is a perspective only a committed follower of Jesus Christ can enjoy. Only the Spirit of the living God working in a thankful heart can generate such an outlook. If you are looking for God’s will in your life, start by giving thanks in all things. You may be surprised where such an attitude of thankfulness will take you.

Thomas Geoghan is vice president of Ministry Development for The Friends of Israel.
Did you ever wish you could speak with Jesus face to face? Many times I’ve longed to see His face, hear His voice, look into His eyes, and simply share what was on my mind. Of course, that’s not possible; we “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).

However, God has given us the privilege of prayer as a way to communicate with our gracious and loving heavenly Father. Christian prayer is always directed to God in Jesus’ name and offered in the power of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever wondered what Jesus’ prayer is for you?

Jesus’ Prayer for Himself. Jesus began by acknowledging, “The hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You” (v. 1). “The hour” was the time for our salvation to be secured. Jesus was born to die; that was His ministry. He came to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10) and “give eternal life” to many (Jn. 17:2).

Jesus’ Prayer for His Disciples. His prayer shows His deep love for His disciples: “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours” (v. 9). Judas, “the son of perdition,” is the only one of the 12 disciples who would ultimately be lost because he betrayed the Messiah (v. 12).

Jesus’ Prayer for You. “I do not pray for these alone [the disciples], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (v. 20). That means you and me. We are the direct result of the ministry of the 11 remaining disciples, along with the apostle Paul. These men were used to communicate the life-transforming gospel message that still changes lives today. All who have embraced Jesus as Savior since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are “those who will believe in Me through their word.”

Jesus’ desire for all His followers—from the disciples’ day to now—is “that they also may be one” (v. 21). Unity implies harmony or agreement. Jesus’ desire for His followers is that they would be of like heart and mind (Phil. 2:4–5).

Satan’s plan, on the other hand, is to separate and conquer. He works to fracture the Lord’s flock, causing believers to disagree even over such issues as sanctuary paint colors. Jesus wants His followers to “be one just as We [Father and Son] are one” (Jn. 17:22).

Why is unity so vital to the Lord? Because it is through the harmony of believers “that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (v. 23). Apparently the love of believers for one another impacts souls for Jesus and gives many a desire to possess the deep and permanent love, peace, and joy that can only come from knowing Christ.

by Thomas C. Simcox, Northeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.
Elliott and Intercessory Prayer

(Group: Christopher Futter / Stockphoto. Inset: Photo Alto/Fotosearch. Composition and enhancement: Thomas E. Williams.)
Like any 7-year-old boy, Elliott loved to climb. Trees, dirt piles, bunk beds—he climbed them all. He especially enjoyed climbing on the shelves at his parents’ restaurant where I used to work part-time while pastoring my church.

Despite repeated warnings from both parents, Elliott climbed on racks of utensils, ingredients, and canned goods. One day we heard a tremendous crash that sent Elliott’s mother, two waitresses, and a busboy running to the shelves.

Elliott lay under a rolling rack, a pool of blood forming around one of his feet where the big toe appeared to be hanging by a thread. His mother dialed 911 and then phoned her husband. He arrived just as Elliott was wheeled from the restaurant to the ambulance. He walked near Elliott, tenderly holding his hand and assuring him everything would be fine. As the ambulance door closed, he turned to his wife. “How could you let this happen?” he asked.

Mom left for the hospital. Dad remained to run the restaurant. Both were scared. Everyone returned to work in that dim atmosphere, waiting for the phone to ring with news about whether Elliott’s toe could be saved.

The father was sullen and quiet. He stared blankly across the dining room and out the window. I passed behind him and placed a hand on his shoulder. “I prayed for him,” I said softly. “And for your wife and you, too.”

As I let him release his anger and fear, Proverbs 18:10 came to mind: “The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.” I had memorized this passage; it was as if He said to me, “They don’t know where the tower is. You must run there for them.” It was a privilege to petition the Lord on their behalf. In a small way, I was showing them the way to the tower. God pointed the way through me. Prayer took them there, and they were safe.

Practicing Philippians 2:4

This type of praying is known as intercession or intercessory prayer. The word intercession comes from a Latin word meaning “to intervene on behalf of another.” In intercessory prayer we pray for one another. We plead the cause of others before God. We pray for their needs to be met and for God to bless them, looking beyond our own situation to the well-being of others, as the apostle Paul encouraged us: “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4).

The Bible is filled with examples of intercessory prayer. Moses prayed for his nation. Abraham prayed for a city. Others prayed for individuals. Isaac prayed for his wife to conceive a child. David prayed for his sick child. The early church prayed for Paul in his ministries, as well as for the apostle Peter to be released from prison. Probably the greatest example of intercession is found in John 17:9 when Jesus prayed for us.

History, too, is full of examples of intercessory prayer. Gen. George Washington prayed for his troops at Valley Forge. Scottish clergyman John Knox (ca. 1505–1572), deeply desiring the Protestant Reformation to reach Scotland, prayed, “O Lord give me Scotland, or I die.” Similarly, John Hyde (1865–1912), an American missionary serving in India, prayed, “Give me souls or I die.”

These prayers follow the example of the intercessory prayer of a young King Solomon in 1 Kings 3:9: “Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil.”

Intercessory prayer is a vital part of spiritual life. Husbands pray for their wives. Mothers pray for wandering children. Pastors pray for the needs of their congregants. Congregants pray for the needs of others—both within the fellowship and outside of it. Many needs have been met, bodies healed, much money supplied, guidance given, wisdom acquired, answers received, and comfort enjoyed through intercessory prayer. Intercession for others has yielded amazing results.

Learning Not to Quit

The phone in the restaurant rang at last. Elliott’s mother phoned from the emergency room to report that the toe had been saved. The injury was far less serious than anyone anticipated. The boy would be fine. In fact, that same afternoon Elliott was back playing at the restaurant—but no climbing.

I wish every intercessory prayer yielded such positive results. We know that God, in His infinite wisdom, often answers our prayers differently than we expect. There are times when He says, “No” or “Wait” or “I have a better plan.” When we receive answers that differ from our expectations, we must not quit praying. We must continue to intercede for others and trust God for the best answers to those prayers. We must obey the biblical command, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Th. 5:17). And we press on.

Some view intercessory prayer as the most important ministry of God’s children. In all we are called to do and through all we attempt to do to serve God, the most important task may be intercessory prayer. The greatest results are not produced through our own accomplishments. Perhaps the greatest accomplishments are the result of quiet prayer on behalf of others.

ENDNOTES

2 “John Hyde” <theoldtimegospel.org/studies/preach23.html>.

Robert Stahler is the pastor of Great Commission Baptist Church in Cape May Courthouse, New Jersey.
Some sat on the floor, others in camp chairs, and a few reclined on the stairs. The students, ages 14 to 22, listened curiously as I posed five simple survey questions. In true text-messaging fashion, they recorded their answers using y for “yes,” n for “no,” IDK (“I don’t know”), and other abbreviations used daily in the texting and instant-messaging world.

All my questions were about prayer, and the answers were brutally honest and personal.


Why pray? evoked the standard answers, as well as more in-depth responses born in the souls of youths looking for more than ritual. Words like intimate, communication, and relationship were underscored by one 15-year-old’s inscription: “To grow closer to God and share my thoughts.” I was impressed, to say the least.

I asked one last question: Would you like someone to teach you to pray biblically? Out of nearly 300 responses, all but two were “Yes.” Parents and youth leaders have an incredible opportunity, if not a mandate, to help students know how to pray.

In Luke 11:1, the disciples asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray.” The students I surveyed are a microcosm of today’s generation conveying the same request, “Teach us to pray.”

Perhaps you’re thinking, I would love to help them, but not one teenager has...
Several core truths leap from the verse. For example, Jesus was praying with His disciples; and as they heard Him pray, they wanted to have the same connection with God the Father.

Also, Jesus was in that “certain place,” implying His action was not random but planned. He demonstrated that both private (Mk. 1:35) and corporate prayer (Mt. 26:36–37) are vital parts of a biblical lifestyle. His disciples knew He spent time privately with the Father. I am not suggesting we flaunt our personal devotional life. But if we desire to kindle a fire in their souls, we must first show teens that spending devotional time with God is a part of our lives.

Jesus not only prayed for the disciples, He prayed with them, as indicated by their request immediately following His prayer. As they prayed together, they were overtaken by a desire to have the same intimate relationship with God. Can you imagine praying with teens and having them plead with you to teach them how to pray?

Jesus not only established how to get their attention but also gave us clear direction on what to teach our students about this spiritual dynamic. In almost a matter-of-fact fashion, He said, “When you pray” (Lk. 11:2) and then imparted several core concepts of prayer. Many have referred to this section of Scripture as the Lord’s Prayer, but it is really the disciples’ prayer because it is a guideline for praying to God.

Worship of God. “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name” (v. 2). Prayer should begin with worship, not with a grocery list of requests. One of the most misunderstood elements of prayer is worship. Somehow we have forgotten what several students in the group I surveyed understood. Said a 16-year-old: “We pray to be intimate with Christ.” A 17-year-old said we pray “to draw closer to God and get to know Him.”

If we can awaken the hearts of our teens to the intimacy of worship, we will create a foundation for more than prayer. We can build a life platform upon which all Christian experience should be erected. Once people learn to unite their hearts with God through worship, the potential of their relationship with Him is limitless. If we want to have a generation of teenagers who worship God, then we are compelled to demonstrate that pattern in our own lives as an example.

Will of God. “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (v. 2). The heart that truly worships will merge naturally into alignment with God’s will. Prayer is not about getting God on my page but about me getting on His page. It’s about becoming part of His agenda and plan. Each day as our students come to God, they should seek His direction for the choices, pressures, and personal encounters of the day. This is probably a change of paradigm from the way many of them (and many of us) operate.

Walk With God. “Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (vv. 3–4). In these verses Christ provided a strategy for our daily walk. He covered some of the issues that confront all of us each day. Verse 3 reminds us we are dependent on Him. It speaks of trusting Him to give us what we need and to keep us from unnecessary excess in our lives. A puritan writer said it this way: “I thank thee that many of my prayers have been refused.”

Verse 4 deals with forgiveness, which begins in our personal lives as we confess sin and again acknowledge dependence on God to cleanse us. We need to instruct our teens to keep short accounts with God. In other words, they need to confess and forsake sin frequently. We can talk about purity with them, but purity begins with recognizing sin as defined by God’s Word.

Humanly speaking, forgiveness is difficult; but if our teenagers are willing to begin with personal sin, the realization of the forgiveness of Christ can serve as motivation to pardon others. Many harbor anger, hatred, bitterness, or jealousy toward ever directly asked for help with his or her prayer life. Sometimes teens ask their most fervent questions without words.

Jesus’ Guideline for Prayer

Jesus created an environment that elicited the question from His disciples: “Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’” (v. 1).
others, and it eats away at their souls like a cancer. Forgiveness is not only biblical; it is healing and liberating.

**Warfare for God.** “And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (v. 4). Jesus concluded His instruction by reminding the disciples and us about our warfare. Sin is no longer gray in the world in which our students live: It is camouflaged. It has been redefined, reimagined, and reinvented. Teens are being seduced by sin in a pluralistic society that trumpets the absence of absolutes. Helping them to ask God daily for protection and wisdom is a great way to equip them for the spiritual battle.

The disciples were not super Christians who mastered the spiritual discipline of prayer merely because the Lord gave them this one lesson. They continued to struggle, fail, and fall. But they also moved out for God, withstood persecution, and helped change the known world with the gospel.

I believe that in the hard moments of life and in times of victory, they remembered the Lord’s teaching; and it secured their hearts.

I leave you with a few more student responses to my question “Why pray?”

“To meet Christ individually.”

“To develop intimate fellowship with our heavenly Father.”

“To strengthen my relationship with God.”

“To keep in touch with Jesus.”

Can you hear the passion of a generation saying, “Teach us to pray”? Will you embrace the challenge?

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Mike Calhoun is senior vice president of Word of Life Fellowship in Schroon Lake, New York, and speaks to thousands of students and student leaders each year. He is the author of a number of books, including *Pushing the Limits: Unleashing the Potential of Student Ministry* and *The Greenhouse Project: Cultivating Students of Influence*. He can be reached at mikecalhoun.wol.org.
I Knew That—Or Did I? 
explains how Steve Herzig, now North American Ministries director for The Friends of Israel, put his faith in Christ after growing up in Orthodox Judaism.

The Search is the brief testimony of Lorna Simcox, now editor-in-chief for The Friends of Israel, who gave her life to Christ after growing up in Conservative Judaism.

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The New York Times, flagship of the liberal American media, has never been a friend of the Jewish state. But the newspaper’s aversion to Israel turned to open hostility in December when its top editors ambushed and tore into an unsuspecting senior official from the Israeli Consulate in New York City.

The Israeli official was invited by the Times editors, among them rabid columnist Thomas Friedman, to meet with them at their office. Being a veteran at dealing with the American media, the official assumed the invitation was for a friendly discussion and perhaps an interview regarding the peace process and other matters of importance to Israel.

The Israeli had no idea he was being invited for what he described as a lynching.

As the meeting started, the Times editors—most of them Jews, and one of them a former Israeli—began to attack the Israeli diplomat and refused to give him even a moment to respond. They blamed Israel for everything, the diplomat told Israel Today.

According to the Israeli, the Times editors responded: “Yes, yes. Of course you are going to start telling us about how Israel’s security needs are not being met. You just don’t get it that we are sick of hearing about that.”

There is little doubt that this ambush was led by Friedman, whose hostility toward Israel in his recent columns has surprised even his liberal friends in the Jewish state. In recent articles, Friedman has accused Israel of being a spoiled child, crazy and extremist. He insisted that the U.S. stop being Israel’s “enabler” and pointed out that the rest of the world is fully on the side of the Palestinians, so why not America?

Wrote Friedman in one of his columns: “Israel, when America—which has given you billions over the past 50 years and defended you in the international arena—asks you to stop building settlements for three months in order to jump-start peace talks, there is only one correct answer, and that is ‘yes, whatever you say.’”
In his latest article on Israel and the Palestinians, *TIME* magazine’s Karl Vick prejudges matters almost from the outset in his reference to “Israel’s 43 years of occupation of Palestinian territory.” Of course, no one—not even Palestinians—spoke of “Palestinian territory” in 1967, when Israel captured these areas (the West Bank and Gaza) from their unlawful occupiers, Jordan and Egypt respectively.

These territories were legally earmarked for Jewish statehood as long ago as the 1920 San Remo conference. Israel is not “occupying” the sovereign territory of another state, let alone as the result of aggression. Rather, it acquired the areas in a war of self-defense from unlawful occupiers and aggressors.

Arabs refused to conclude a settlement on the basis of these territories becoming Arab in 1937, when the Peel Royal Commission recommended it; in 1947, when the UN General Assembly endorsed a partition plan; and in 2000, when U.S. President Bill Clinton put forward his peace plan. Israel’s present offer of peace negotiations without preconditions—an offer Mahmoud Abbas’s Palestinian Authority (PA) spurned—does not alter the fact that today, 98 percent of Palestinians live under PA, not Israeli, rule.

Mr. Vick makes lots of claims: that “young Palestinians . . . know Israelis only as soldiers and settlers, the newly installed Wall having barred exposure to any other kind”; that Israel’s security fence, which he calls “the Wall” (only a small portion is actually a wall) “has created a separation of the mind” between Israelis and Palestinians; that “the uprising
that began in 2000 . . . ended after an iron curtain was drawn across the occupied territories."

The problem is that Vick uses these claims to buttress a false argument that this state of affairs is due to Israel. It is, in fact, due to precisely the things Mr. Vick won’t discuss—Palestinian nonacceptance of Israel and the incitement and terrorism that flow from it.

Vick says nothing of the sermons in PA mosques, the speeches of PA leaders, the incitement in Palestinian textbooks, and the honoring of terrorists living and dead—all of which dehumanize Jews, delegitimize Israel, and rationalize terrorism and “martyrdom.”

In recent months alone, the PA has produced an official “study” that denies any Jewish connection or claim to Jerusalem’s Western Wall. PA TV has broadcast children’s programs showing indoctrinated Palestinian children claiming Jewish people poisoned former PA leader Yasser Arafat and teaching them that Israeli cities are “occupied Palestine.”

On the very day in September 2010 that talks between the sides commenced (briefly) in Washington, DC, the PA ambassador to Iran said Palestinians will continue their war on Israel until “the complete eradication of the fabricated regime in due course.” A PA minister presented awards to the families of dead terrorists and accused Israel of harvesting the body parts of deliberately murdered Palestinians. Abbas’s Fatah party, which controls the PA, named its fifth party convention in honor of Munich Olympics terror mastermind, Amin Al-Hindi.

But Mr. Vick never found space in this or any other recent articles to mention these facts that would have disturbed his preoccupation with what he considers Israeli culpability.

If Palestinians accepted Israel, if their media and schools were free of blood-curdling indoctrination and jihadist incitement, if Palestinians did not laud and support terrorists that murder Jews, there would be no Israeli soldiers in PA-controlled areas, no checkpoints, no roadblocks, no security fence, and no “separation of mind” that Mr. Vick so decries.

Palestinians may indeed be separated psychologically from their Israeli neighbors, whom they only know as soldiers. If this situation is to change, however, Palestinian terrorism, as well as the nonacceptance of Israel and the incitement that feeds it, will have to end—not the Israeli security measures they prompted.

By ignoring the causes and decrying the effects, Mr. Vick follows in the long, undistinguished line of shoddy, superficial, jaundiced, anti-Israel journalists.

Morton A. Klein is national president of the Zionist Organization of America.

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The Bedrock of Faith

The author of Hebrews revealed in chapter 10 that salvation is established on the bedrock of Christ’s sacrifice and not through the Levitical system. Christ’s death for sin and His abiding priesthood opened a new and living way for all believers to acquire direct access to God without going through an earthly priesthood (10:1–21).

Having come to Christ, believers are to persevere in their new faith. They are to do this by focusing all their attention on Christ. Earlier in the epistle, the author had encouraged them not to be apathetic in their faith, but to imitate others who demonstrated great faith in God’s promises and endurance, especially during times of trial.

To maintain a strong faith commitment, these Jewish believers would require encouragement from others through fellowship in the local church. For this reason, the author issued a strong warning to his readers not to abandon assembling together in their local church (v. 25).

He knew that some Jewish believers were thinking of leaving the church and returning to Judaism because of the severe persecution they were under. Such a decision would trample Christ underfoot, counting the blood of the New Covenant as common and insulting the Spirit of grace. Such a decision would also subject them to God’s judgment (vv. 29–31).

To encourage his readers, the author exhorted them to remain strong in their faith by remembering a major persecution they had endured at the time of conversion. Since they were able to stand strong at that time, they could now exercise the same boldness of faith in their present crisis.

He challenged them not to cast away their confidence in Christ, for the Lord will reward their faith and endurance at His Second Coming. What they needed was not more faith, but to exercise the faith they already possessed, which would give them strength to endure. He reinforced his point by quoting from Habakkuk 2:4: “The just [righteous] shall live by faith” (Heb. 10:38). Righteous people must live by faith in the midst of persecution and not draw back in disobedience.

Having exhorted and warned these Jewish believers, the author now parades a host of men and women from the Old Testament as examples of great faith. He did so to illustrate how their forefathers exercised the same faith in the midst of great persecution; hopefully, this generation of Jewish believers would be encouraged to do likewise.

The voluminous testimonies from the lives of these Old Testament saints should speak to the heart of each reader. Many of these Old Testament saints who were faithful to the Lord did not live to receive their rewards, but will receive them in the future. Likewise, these believers must patiently live lives of faith until the Lord rewards them.

Essence of Faith

The author began by describing the distinctives of faith, not by defining its meaning. He was not specifically referring to the faith one exercises at the time of salvation, although that is included, but faith as a general principle exhibited by a believer as he trusts God for unseen future events in his life.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (v. 1). The word now looks back to Hebrews 10:38, which functioned as an introduction to the subject of faith in this chapter.

Faith is described by two words, substance and evidence. The word substance (Greek, hypostasis) literally means to “stand under,” referring to something supporting a foundation, like solid ground standing beneath a foundation. In this context, Christ is the solid ground on which one builds the foundation of his or her faith and hope.

The word evidence can also be translated “assurance.” The Greek term was used in reference to signed papers that gave grounds to prove a person’s ownership of a property, thus a legal title-deed giving one assurance and proof of ownership. Therefore, faith functions as the title-deed that gives existence, confidence, or assurance to future events that are “hoped for” from the time of salvation and onward in a Christian’s walk. In other words, the act of putting faith in Christ functions as the title-deed that guarantees and assures the believer that God will fulfill all the benefits He promises Christians.

The word evidence (Greek, elegchos) means to have proof of something through testing it to be true. It can also mean that a believer is inwardly convinced of a thing’s reality (i.e., something already finished), which gives him an inner conviction of its certainty although it is a thing “not seen [i.e., not visible to the physical eye].”

Although there are many things concerning God’s promises that have already been done for us or are yet to be completed—that we cannot see in our Christian experience—the exercise of faith makes them real to us in the present. These include all the Christian’s benefits of salvation, Christ’s high priestly ministry, access to God in prayer, understanding how God works through believers’ prayers, and how we grow spiritually in our walk with the Lord. The angelic beings in heaven, who are at the beck and call of God to serve and minister to humans on Earth, are another example of things we cannot...
see (1:14). People of faith believe all these things do exist.

The words substance and evidence are not to be thought of as independent from each other, but they work together in describing how biblical faith works in a believer’s life. True faith, as presented in the Bible, has the inner assurance and conviction that God’s Word is true and should be believed and appropriated.

Elders of Faith

In verse 2 the author provides a summary statement of men who, in the past, exhibited great faith in the Lord: “For by it the elders obtained a good testimony” (11:2). The word for is used to connect what has been said about faith in verse 1 with upcoming examples of the nature of faith that are to follow throughout the chapter. “By it” literally means “in this,” or “by means of this,” referring to the sphere and exercise of faith. The word elders (Greek, presbuteroi) does not refer to old men or men in places of official position, as in a church, but to these believers’ Jewish forefathers who were men of faith mentioned in the Old Testament. As the author moves through the chapter, he chooses outstanding men of faith as examples to study and follow for the believers he is addressing. These are the great cloud of witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 12:1.

These elders “obtained a good testimony” (11:2). Scholars have interpreted this phrase in different ways. Some believe it refers to the elders receiving approval and praise from God. Others believe that by demonstrating their faith, they experienced the inner witness within themselves that God’s Word and promises are true. Still others believe that the faith these forefathers expressed bore testimony to their generation and beyond. This third interpretation is correct: The life these forefathers of faith lived was observed by others, testifying that their faith was genuine.

Evidence of Faith

Although the author might begin by enumerating a list of Old Testament men as examples of faith, he does not. He first takes readers back to before the universe was created, providing one more example of faith: creation itself. This creation illustration helps believers grasp what it means to believe in things that are invisible: “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (v. 3).

The word understand means to perceive by intellectual reflection, not by physical senses like sight. That is, we perceive with our spiritual intelligence that God created the world although we see neither Him nor the act of His creation.

The word referred to as “worlds” literally means “ages” and encompasses much more than the material universe that was created. “Ages” takes in all of time and space; things invisible and visible; the past, the present, and what is eternal. This word includes God’s administration of all that exists from its inception to its termination.

God “framed” or outfitted and prepared the universe by making all its parts fit and work together in a harmonious, organized system for His purpose; and He will continually maintain the world throughout the ages. Creation was all done “by the word of God.” The term word is not the Greek word logos, which is used with reference to the Son of God (Jn. 1:1), but rhema, which means “utterance.” That is, God simply spoke; and creation appeared in six literal days (Gen. 1:1–27). In other words, God didn’t create the material universe with anything that previously existed but created it ex nihilo, out of nothing.

Since God spoke the material universe into existence out of nothing, it follows that “things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Heb. 11:3). A literal Greek translation would be, “so that not out of things which appear hath that which is seen been made.” This phrase means that nothing in creation we see today evolved into existence, not even matter; but God simply spoke all things into existence.

The author is arguing, “Had the visible world been formed out of materials which were subject to human observation, there would have been no room for faith. Science could have traced it back to its origin. Evolution only pushes the statement a stage back. There is still an unseen force that does not submit itself to experimental science, and this is the object of faith.”

There are only two positions one can take on creation: Embrace the speculative theories of philosophy or science on how the material world came into being, or accept the explanation from the revelation of God’s Word on how the world was created. Whatever position a person chooses to believe, he must accept it on the basis of faith.

All philosophy and science can do is put up plausible theories on how the world was created; but throughout the history of mankind, they have been proven to be false or, at best, pure speculation. God has warned through His Word, “Beware [be on your guard] lest anyone cheat you [carry you off captive or enslave you] through philosophy [vain speculation] and empty [vain, devoid of truth, futile] deceit [trickery or artful deception], according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

If a person wants to know what happened at creation, he must by faith totally rely on the invisible God to reveal it to his understanding as presented in Scripture. Is it not a matter of the will to believe or not believe the Bible’s revelation on creation? Yes, it is. It’s the only way to learn the ultimate answers to life’s questions on creation and man’s destiny.

ENDNOTE

The Love of God (Part 3)

God’s Love in the New Testament

Two key words are associated with God’s love in the New Testament: agapao, which appears 266 times, and phileo, which appears 15 times.1

Language scholar Robert Trench explains the distinction in meaning between these two words as follows: agapao “expresses a more reasoning attachment, of choice and selection,” and continually implies “the notions of respect and reverence.”2 By contrast, phileo expresses what “is more instinctive, is more of the feelings or natural affections, implies more passion.”3

Object of God’s Love

The New Testament indicates that God has focused His love on several objects. This article explores one: God’s love for the world. No doubt the best known expression of God’s love is found in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

The word translated “for” indicates that verse 16 continues the train of thought introduced in verses 14 and 15 and expresses its cause.4 Thus, in order to understand the significance of John 3:16, it is necessary to examine verses 14 and 15.

Verse 14 presents an analogy between something that happened to Israel in the wilderness and what would happen to the Son of Man: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”

The word translated “must” “expresses a necessity which lies in the very nature of God and which issues in the execution of His plans.”5 This definition indicates that, because of God’s holy nature, it was absolutely necessary that the Son of Man be lifted up on a cross in order to execute God’s divine plan for mankind.

In the Bible, the term son signifies a son who has the same nature as his father. In the Old Testament and postbiblical Judaism, the Hebrew words for “son” were “often used to denote the relationship which determines the nature of a man.”6 Thus the designation the Son of Man indicated that the person who “must” be lifted up on a cross “must” be a human being with all the attributes of humanity.

It is interesting to note that the Greek text describes the individual who must be lifted up on the cross as “the Son of the man.” The definite article the before the word man draws attention to one specific man of whom the person lifted up on the cross was a human descendant. Jesus, whom the Bible identifies as the Son of Man, derived His humanity through conception that did not involve a human father. However, He did have many male ancestors through His mother’s lineage, as described in Luke 3:23–38.

In light of this fact, the Greek text’s description of Jesus as the Son of one specific man prompts this question: Which of His many male ancestors is that specific man, His life of the bitten people would be spared if they looked at that uplifted serpent, and Moses did so (vv. 8–9). Note that physical life was spared for the people who looked, not at one of the fiesty serpents that inflicted death, but at a substitute representative that would not inflict death.

The verse 14 analogy indicates that, as Moses lifted up on a pole the substitute representative of the fiery serpents that caused physical death, “even so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (Jn. 3:14). The word translated “must” “expresses a necessity which lies in the very nature of God and which issues in the execution of His plans.”5 This definition indicates that, because of God’s holy nature, it was absolutely necessary that the Son of Man be lifted up on a cross in order to execute God’s divine plan for mankind.

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In light of this fact, the Greek text’s description of Jesus as the Son of one specific man prompts this question: Which of His many male ancestors is that specific man, His
primary human father from whom He derived His human nature? It would appear that the answer is “Adam,” the one specific man who is the father of all mankind from whom all human beings derive their human nature. In line with this identification, Jesus’ genealogy through His mother traces His human line of descent back to Adam (v. 38).

The identification of Adam as that specific man relates significantly to the analogy in John 3:14. As the fiery serpents inflicted physical death on the Israelites in the wilderness, so Adam, through his original sin as the first man, inflicted spiritual and physical death on all his human descendants conceived through a human father. Thus the apostle Paul declared, “through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

As physical life was spared the Israelites who looked—not at one of the fiery serpents that inflicted death, but at a substitute representative serpent that would not inflict death—so spiritual and eternal life are granted to all human beings who look, not to Adam who inflicted spiritual and physical death on them, but to Jesus Christ, the last Adam, who was lifted up on the cross as the substitute representative of man (1 Cor. 15:45). Thus Paul asserted, “by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many” (Rom. 5:15). And by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ (v. 17).

The word translated “that” at the beginning of John 3:15 introduces the “purpose, aim, or goal” of Jesus Christ, the substitute representative of man, being lifted up on the cross “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” The word translated “eternal” refers to what exists “without end.”

As noted earlier, John 3:16 expresses the cause of the Son of Man being lifted up on the cross: God’s love of the world. In this context, the word translated “world” refers to “all mankind.” And the word translated “loved” “expresses a more reasoning attachment, of choice and selection,” rather than “feelings or natural affections.”

God loved mankind to the extent that He gave His only begotten Son. Language scholar Friedrich Buchsel made the following observations concerning the expression “only begotten Son.” The word translated “only begotten” indicates “the uniqueness of Jesus in His divine sonship.” Christ has a unique relationship with God the Father. As Father, God has “a special relation to Jesus which excludes the same relation to others.” “As the only-begotten Son Jesus is in the closest intimacy with God.”

Jesus’ statements to the Father in John 17:5 and 24 indicate He was “aware that He was with God, and was loved by Him, and endured with glory, before the foundation of the world.” “Because Jesus is the only Son of God, His sending into the world is the supreme proof of God’s love for the world.”

Since, as noted earlier, the term son signifies a son who has the same nature as his father, one must conclude that the only begotten Son of God has always had the same divine nature with all the attributes of deity as God the Father.

John 3:16 indicates that God’s purpose for sending His unique, divine Son into the world to become the Son of Man with a human nature was so that, as a result of His substitutionary death on the cross, “whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” In line with this purpose, Hebrews 2:14–15 states: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that
PLO raises flag over Washington

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) flag now flies in Washington, DC. PLO officials hoisted their banner over their U.S. mission for the first time in January.

Said mission chief Maen Arekat: “It’s about time that this flag that symbolizes the struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination and statehood be raised in the United States.”

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), head of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, criticized the Obama administration’s willingness to allow the flag to go up. “Raising this flag in DC is part of the Palestinian leadership’s scheme to manipulate international acceptance and diplomatic recognition of a yet-to-be-created Palestinian state while refusing to directly negotiate with Israel or accept the existence of Israel as a democratic, Jewish state,” she said.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has been working to convince the international community to recognize a new Arab state in all the territory between the 1948 armistice line and Jordan in an attempt to circumvent talks with Israel. Israeli leaders have repeatedly rejected the PA’s demand for all land east of the armistice line, saying that Israel plans to keep control of Israeli population centers in Judea and Samaria, and of Jerusalem, Israel’s capital. (Israelnationalnews.com)

America, Russia implicitly OK Palestinian state

The United States and Russia in January followed the example of a growing number of South American countries by taking steps to openly recognize a Palestinian Arab state on the ancient Jewish lands of Judea and Samaria.

Speaking to the press in Jericho during his visit to the Palestinian Authority (PA), Russian President Dmitry Medvedev noted that Russia had already recognized a Palestinian state when Yasser Arafat first declared independence in 1988. “We have supported the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital since the last century, and we still support it,” said Medvedev.

Hours later, the Obama administration allowed the Palestinians to raise their flag over the Palestinian Authority diplomatic mission in Washington for the first time ever, symbolically transforming the location into a national embassy. (www.israeltoday.co.il)

Arabs honor child-killer

Skull-bashing child-killer Samir Kuntar recently was the honored guest of Syrian leader Bashar Assad and gave Assad an advance copy of his book, My Story, detailing his decades in Israeli prisons.

Kuntar is a celebrity because in 1979 he led a team of Palestinian terrorists in an amphibious infiltration of the Israeli coastal town of Nahariya. After landing on the beach, the terrorists executed an off-duty police officer and then entered a nearby home. That’s when the horror truly began.

Inside the house, Kuntar and his team found Danny Haran and his four-year-old daughter, Einat. Kuntar took the two down to the beach and executed Danny in front of his mortified little girl, then personally bashed in little Einat’s skull with the butt of his rifle.

Kuntar has been a rising star in the Arab Middle East since his release from an Israeli prison in 2008 as part of a prisoner exchange between the Jewish state and Lebanon’s Hezbollah terrorist militia. (www.israeltoday.co.il)

PA recognition spreading fast

Ireland has upgraded the status of the Palestinian Authority (PA) diplomatic delegation in Dublin, starting what many in Israel fear will be a domino effect leading to the unilateral recognition of a Palestinian Arab state.

Irish officials stressed the PA delegation was not being upgraded to a full embassy, but rather a diplomatic mission, and that Dublin was not recognizing “Palestine” as an independent state. Still, the move does mean the head of the PA delegation will be referred to as “ambassador” and will present credentials to the Irish president just like a real ambassador. So while Ireland is playing a game of semantics, the reality is that the PA will be represented as an independent, national entity in Europe.

Israeli officials were furious. Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon warned that these de facto recognitions of a Palestinian state were putting bilateral peace further out of reach and are actually advancing another onset of violence.

“Unilateral steps are creating a bubble of expectation for the Palestinians. We can see an obvious connection to the recent spate of recognition and a hardening of the Palestinian position,” said Ayalon. Ayalon was referring to the new trend in Latin America to recognize a Palestinian state in all of Judea and Samaria. Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, and Paraguay all have done so over the past few months. (www.israeltoday.co.il)
MTV Romanticizes Stealing Israeli Cars

A recent episode of The Vice Guide to Everything, the newest reality show on MTV, dives into the world’s most popular foreign affairs topic, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, by romanticizing the widespread Palestinian theft of Israeli cars.

The episode, titled “Ramallah Racing,” opens with the host’s narration stating that, “since legally importing car parts is such a hassle, some enterprising young Palestinians came up with a clever alternative—sneak into Israel, steal a nice car, then drive it back into the West Bank and chop it up for parts.”

Viewers are then introduced to “Adam,” a Palestinian man who claims he no longer actively steals cars but has volunteered to demonstrate how it’s done. Adam asks the understanding host, “Someone who steals our land, why shouldn’t we steal his car?”

Adam is then shown smashing the window of an Israeli vehicle and struggling to break into the steering column. The show’s host helps Adam to break the column’s cover and start the car. The two then race away while giving approving nods to one another.

Nearly 50,000 Israeli vehicles are stolen every year. It is one of the worst criminal plagues the nation deals with. Prior to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), car theft in Israel was at normal levels. But it has more than doubled thanks to Palestinian thieves being able to reach a safe haven quickly in PA-controlled areas.

Israeli authorities do not dare enter the Palestinian areas to reclaim the vehicles because repeatedly doing so would cause an international uproar against Israel. The Palestinians know this and use it to their advantage.

In turn, the rampant theft is a major reason Israeli Jews distrust Palestinian Arabs. Promoting and romanticizing that theft can only serve to further drive a wedge between the two sides.

by Israel Today, www.israeltoday.co.il

Each day we are given opportunities to glorify God. Using our time well, exercising the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, and making wise use of our finances are a few of the many ways we can honor Him. Another way is by making sure what the Lord has entrusted to us remains His when we no longer need it.

Sadly, if you have no legal will in force, the laws of your state will intercede and make a will for you when the time comes. Does your state know how you want your estate handled? Unfortunately your desire to see the Lord’s work benefited is likely to go unfulfilled.

If you would like to have a will written but don’t know where to start, let us help. We would like to send you our informative brochure Making a Will That Works at no cost and without obligation. It is our way of helping you become a wise steward over all the Lord has entrusted to you. To receive Making a Will That Works, simply check the appropriate box on the envelope in this magazine; or write to Tom Geoghan at The Friends of Israel, P.O. Box 908, Bellmawr, NJ 08099.

OUR DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Tom Geoghan
Bob Duarte
LeRoy Gardner
Harold Summers

PARTNERS FOR LIFE

69.2
Never has anyone come to our church to investigate those attending. Yet so it was recently. An elderly woman came because she had heard about me and that I am a Holocaust survivor. After the service, she sought me out and asked, “Are you the one who went through the Holocaust? Is your name Zvi?”

I told her yes, and from that point she was not so nice. “I want to speak with you!” she declared. The first question she asked was interesting. I had never been asked it before. “Tell me, please,” she demanded, “why have you betrayed your God?” Now I began to understand with whom I was speaking. She was upset because I have placed my faith in Jesus.

“I have heard much about you,” she said. “You are a survivor of the Holocaust. How could one like you betray our God? How could you do it?”

I replied, “I believe in one mighty God only, not as you. You have believed in many gods. You believe the Jewish people are the Chosen People. Yet you are among those who have left the true God to follow other gods.”

She looked at me with great surprise. “How can you say such a thing?” she asked. “Do you know what you are talking about?”

“It is not I who say such a thing. It is written in the Holy Bible,” I said. She wanted to know where it was written, and I was happy to give her a good, clear answer. I showed her Deuteronomy 6:13–14: “You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him. . . . You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you.”

“This is also written in our prayer book,” she said. “How do you know about this passage?”

“I know it because it is written in the Holy Bible in which I believe—not like you who believe in the many fictional stories told by your teachers. What do you do? You follow ‘other gods’ because you do not follow the God of the Bible. You are going against the will of the Lord.”

“All that you said to me, that we do not worship God according to what is written in the Bible, you must now show me,” she replied. “Can you show me?”

“Yes, I am ready to show you.” This time I gave her a Bible and asked her to read Deuteronomy 6, which most Orthodox Jews read several times every day. There it is written, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (vv. 4–5).

“We have only one God,” she said. So I began to explain to her that many Orthodox people spend most of their
time reading the stories and teachings of their rabbis. They place their faith in rabbinical commentaries rather than in the living God and what is written in His holy Word.

“I have spoken to many people like you,” I told her. “They do not realize what they are doing. Have a good look around you and see whom you are following. Are you following God, or are you following your rabbis? You are the one who has betrayed the true God.”

“But you follow This One,” she protested. By “This One” she meant Jesus. “How can you follow This One who is not received by our people? Following Him is much against our faith. Can you show me where it is written about Him in the Holy Bible?”

It was for this question I was waiting. I asked her, “Have you ever read Isaiah 53? It is a most important chapter in the Bible.”

“We never read that,” she replied. “Why do you ask?”

“Because here it is clearly written about This One. And if that were not enough, there are many other places in the Bible where it is written about Him, such as Micah 5:2, which says, ‘But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.’”

After she read all the passages, she said, “This is the first time in my life I have read these things. Now I am beginning to understand about whom it is written here. How long have you been coming here?” she asked.

“I believed in the Lord according to the Bible many years ago, when I was a young man,” I told her. “This church started with a few people. And now you can see with your own eyes that we have nearly 300. We do not study stories written by men, but the Bible written by the Holy Spirit of God.”

She was very happy by the time she left our church. “This is only the beginning for me,” she said. I pray she is right.