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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

We commemorate it once each year, but the celebration of the Incarnation is perpetual—conceived in eternity past and delivered to us by way of a rustic stable in Bethlehem of Judea 2,000 years ago. In this issue of Israel My Glory, we reach back into the Scriptures to rediscover the supreme act of divine intervention that altered history and made the hope men spoke of for millennia—and yearned for—a reality. We suggest that these articles—which take us from genealogies and promises of the past, through the shepherds’ fields, to the stable with the Christ Child, and then to the cross and beyond—be read slowly and reverently, all the while remembering that everything was done for you. (Cover: top right, IIC/Axiom/Getty Images; others, FOI Archive. Digital enhancements, Thomas E. Williams)

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Lisa was on the job only two days when the call came. But she was ready. Sixty intensive hours in the classroom, including written instruction and practical training, had prepared her. She rode in the ambulance as part of an emergency response team and soon arrived at the scene of a serious car accident outside Jerusalem where she treated an Arab child bleeding profusely from severe injuries.

Lisa Arking is a 19-year-old American from Brooklyn, New York, whom I met while visiting the emergency response facilities of the Magen David Adom (MDA) Jerusalem Station. The visit was a highlight of my recent trip to Israel. Explaining her desire to serve with MDA, Lisa declared, “I have a real love for Israel and wanted to find a way I could contribute.”

The Jerusalem Station is MDA’s busiest dispatch center, one of 11 such facilities that serve Jews, Muslims, Christians, and international visitors. It was from the Jerusalem Station that ambulances and mobile intensive-care units were dispatched to treat the victims of last summer’s bulldozer and tractor attacks in Jerusalem. Emergency services were on the scenes within minutes.

We learned how the 2006 Lebanon War with Hezbollah presented unusual challenges for Magen David Adom. Working double-time throughout the war, MDA teams evacuated buildings and populated areas under heavy rocket attack; treated trauma victims; transported the elderly and infirm out of harm’s way; and delivered much-needed supplies to people living in bomb shelters throughout northern Israel. It is no small wonder that Magen David Adom workers are frequently called “Israel’s heroes.”

Often MDA’s professional and volunteer heroes serve under extraordinarily difficult conditions. Jonathan Feldstein, Israel representative of American Friends of Magen David Adom, and volunteer Lisa Arking explained: “Israel is the only country in the world where life-support ambulances and mobile intensive-care units are hit by terror attacks.” MDA has outfitted many of its vehicles with armor to withstand bombings and bullet-proof glass to protect emergency workers from sniper fire.

Feldstein, who coordinated and hosted our Magen David Adom Jerusalem Station visit, detailed MDA’s nationwide network of services provided by 1,500 employees and 12,000 volunteers serving with 100 emergency medical stations and 11 dispatch centers. He explained how MDA collects and processes more than 97 percent of Israel’s total blood needs and provides 100 percent of the Israel Defense Forces’ blood requirements. The 700 ambulances used for basic and advanced life-support treatment were donated by friends in the United States and other countries.

Our tour included an unforgettable visit to the Jerusalem Station’s response dispatch room, which receives more than 50,000 emergency telephone calls annually. We witnessed highly trained personnel fielding calls non-stop using state-of-the-art technologies to dispatch ambulances to people in need.

Unfortunately, MDA workers face another disturbing difficulty: crank calls, many from cell phones stolen by enemies of the Jewish state. Such calls are intended to hinder Israel’s efforts to provide life-saving services—to both Jews and Arabs.

Our experience at MDA’s Jerusalem Station confirmed Israel’s amazing compassion. The tiny Jewish nation is committed to caring not only for its Jewish population but also for its Arab residents, as well as visitors from around the world.

More information about Magen David Adom’s around-the-clock services is available online at www.afmda.org.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
equivocate will do nicely. But when all seems to be at risk, liars can always seek safe haven in the prefix mis and say they were misquoted or quoted out of context.

With increasing frequency, Arabs claim that it is a lie of colossal proportion to say Israel had Temples on Mount Moriah or that there even was a Jewish presence in Jerusalem in ancient times. Never a week goes by without some Islamic imam, political figure, or publication spinning this fictitious theme. On October 5, 2002, no less a light of the Palestinian cause than the late Yasser Arafat joined the chorus in an interview with London’s Arabic-language daily, Al-Hayat:

For 34 years [Israelis] have dug tunnels [around the Temple Mount] . . . They found not a single stone proving that the Temple of Solomon was there . . . . They are now trying to put in place a number of stones so that they can say “We were here.” This is nonsense. I challenge them to bring a single stone from the Temple of Solomon.

It never ceases to amaze me that people who obviously know better prevaricate so grandly. They provide a textbook case of making untrue statements with deliberate “intent to deceive.” The sad fact is that they succeed. Their strategy is to prevaricate long enough that the illiterate will begin to believe them even when biblical, historical, and incontrovertible archaeological evidence has long testified otherwise. It is an exhibition of the preposterous being turned into the plausible: rewriting history.

A few weeks ago, an amazing discovery was made in the ancient City of David in Jerusalem. It is almost as though the prophet Jeremiah were rising up to expose the no-Jews, no-Temples lie. Famed archaeologist Eilat Mazar and her crew unearthed a 2,600-year-old seal, or bula, bearing the name Gedaliahu ben Pashur, Hebrew for “Gedaliah, son of Pashur.” Gedaliah served as a minister in the court of Israel’s King Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.).

Gedaliah was one of the king’s advisors who demanded Jeremiah be killed for telling the king the truth about the nation’s impending defeat by Babylon (Jer. 38:1–4). Professor Mazar called the discovery “absolutely fantastic” and “complete and in perfect condition.” Perhaps unearthing yet another attestation of the reliability of the Scriptures and the accuracy of biblical history is another example of the Lord throwing down the gauntlet of truth. He has yet again exposed the insidious lies seeded by His enemies who intend not only to deceive but to destroy the place and people of God’s choosing.

Scripture says, “He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the L ORD shall hold them in derision” (Ps. 2:4). And God never prevaricates.

by Elwood McQuaid

EYE on the Middle East

Dr. Eilat Mazar holding the bula seal (Courtesy of Dr. Eilat Mazar).

Reading the dictionary can be an exhilarating experience. Not that an overwhelming number of young people might find it so. Nevertheless, it is an exercise in personal enlightenment that is well worth the time.

Look at the word liar, for example. Merriam-Webster’s 11th Collegiate Dictionary says to lie is to “make an untrue statement with intent to deceive.” Thus, in a bare-bones cast of the word, a liar is an intentional deceiver whose agenda doesn’t bode well for those who fall prey to it.

Liar and lie, however, are considered rather uncivil, unpolished words in this age of political and social correctness. One might retreat, therefore, to prevaricate, which means the same but doesn’t cut in quite the same manner. Or, if a person wishes to say one thing while giving the impression of meaning another,
Russia Is Back in Business

When Communism crumbled in the 1980s and the USSR was no more, the impoverished leaders of what remained were happy to receive aid and comfort from the West. As a result, many Americans believed Russia’s installation of McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and other arches of Western ways heralded Russian democracy. Then came Vladimir Putin, a cold-eyed product of the former Soviet Union’s KGB secret police. He turned back the clock and reorganized the imperialistic, expansionist entity long the scourge of people wanting no more than peace and a decent way of life.

When Russian tanks rolled into the hapless Georgian republic last summer and Putin demanded Georgia’s pro-Western president, Mikheil Saakashvili, resign, more was at stake than a bully’s chance to beat up on an inferior opponent. It was a message that the bear is back, and offending the Kremlin will again be viewed as a capital offense. Actually, it was an announcement of the Cold War’s resurgence, with the U.S. and Europe on one side and Russia on the other.

For Israel and some of its neighbors, Russia’s incursion was a morbid reminder of the days when Kremlin commissars funded, trained, and supplied a ring of bellicerent Arab regimes bent on annihilating the Jewish state. Russia’s close ties with Iran’s despot, militantly anti-Semitic mullahs reveal all that need be said. It’s the old story unfolding once again.

With Putin’s invasion, a dark specter has settled over the region, reminding us of the years when Jewish families in the old Soviet Union ran for their lives—when they could do so—or were entrapped by the State.

Defying the bombs and columns of Russian troops, an Israeli El Al plane landed in August at the Tbilisi airport to pick up some 600 Jews and implement their escape to Israel. Others took to the roads in an attempt to get out of Georgia before things got worse. Upon arriving in Tel Aviv, one of those rescued declared, “It’s great to be back home.” His words were significant because they reaffirmed that Israel is, above all, a safe haven for the Jewish people.

Dr. Michael Widlanski, author and professor of political communication and comparative politics at the Rothberg School of the Hebrew University, put his finger on the essence of the conflict that will continue to plague Israel, America, and the West. In an August 18 article for The Jerusalem Post titled “Neo-Coms Are the Threat,” he wrote the following:

Huge Communist dictatorships, like deadly viruses, have mutated, not died. Russia and China wear the trappings of capitalism when it suits them, but they are willing to bludgeon “naughty” neighbors and “delinquent” dissidents at will.

Unfortunately, this drive toward perpetual, imperialist supremacy is too often greeted by leaders more eager to appease than fight the threat to their own existence. When a despot tests their mettle to see what he can get away with, he rarely meets resistance. At heart is their conviction that mankind is basically good and that, given enough “carrots,” will choose the right path. If this fallacy was not laid bare in Europe more than half a century ago, it is unlikely to be understood now or in the future. Yet those who fail to learn from history are certainly destined to repeat it.

Ignoring evil will never satisfy tyrants. A worthy example is found in China’s suppression of Christians, which often takes a violent turn. Russia’s paranoia over a defensive missile shield for Poland bears this out. Widlanski made a cogent point by saying, “Nations do not mistrust each other because they are armed; they are armed because they mistrust each other.”

All of this to say once more that Israel must have the means at its disposal to ensure its survival. Misguided benevolence and concessions in exchange for paper promises are not in the game. Let’s have no more terrified Jewish people fleeing for their lives or beleaguered Christians in Arab or Communist lands exiting en masse. Safety comes only with strength and the support of democratic societies, including vast numbers of Christian Zionists willing to say no to impending aggression—and meaning it.
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Seeing things from the ground up gives life a very different perspective. It’s a small view of a big world, one with a sense of simplicity and permanence.

Elderly people seem to be as they have always been and will always remain: old. Unlike those who are worn by years and sliding down the other side of a life span, children feel time pass with the velocity of a snail scaling Mt. Everest. Summer seems as though it will never come, the bell for recess seems stuck on disability, Saturday is a tantalizing illusion that always seems just out of reach, and a birthday’s arrival takes forever. It’s another world entirely.

For us grownups, memories time has not erased still linger near the surface. We can easily recall the immature anxieties that held us in their perpetual grip—the very stuff of life for little tykes. And the most interminable wait of a young life was, without question, the span of time between January 1 and next December 25. Disappointment over not having received the gift of choice on the big day could be assuaged by the hope that, with enough hints and good behavior, the error in selection by parents (or you know who) could be rectified next time around.

In retrospect, however, we small fry had little to do with the selection process. In my day, parents had enough trouble just keeping food on the table and decent clothing on their children. For my two brothers and me, Christmas Eve was the crown jewel of the season. We were loaded up in the Dodge and driven into our small town on icy streets, then shooed away from the immediate proximity of the five-and-dime while the purchases were being made. The trip home meant a stop at the outdoor Christmas-tree emporium where spruces and pines, mere hours away from sliding into obsolescence, could be had at bargain prices.

Christmas Day was like all other Christmas Days, with small mountains of wrinkled wrapping paper, shiny objects, puzzles, and practical necessities disguised as gifts of the season. Afternoons brought in the relatives, and cousins flashed acquisitions they
Elements and Essence

Although we could discuss Christmas in terms of commercialism, covetousness, envy, misplaced emphasis, and the like, only two aspects of the holiday are of any real significance: elements and essence.

The elements, though perhaps somewhat obscure, are the anticipation of a great event, the giving of gifts, the receiving of undeserved demonstrations of benevolence proving that someone loves you (or at least cares), and the unifying aspect of a season of celebration quite unlike any other.

The essence of Christmas extends far beyond the dimensions of a calendar year. It even transcends time and delivers a drama only deity could produce. The tragedy of our day is our failure to transmit the essence of the miracle of the Incarnation as the heart and soul of what we pause to commemorate.

Unfortunately, modern society’s comprehension of this singular event seems to be buried somewhere in that pile of wrinkled wrapping paper on the living room floor. That may well be what the commercialization and diminution of the Messiah’s grand entrance has been reduced to; but beyond the world’s stunted spiritual understanding, the fact of it endures. God acted in a way only He could foreknow. And He had weighed both its cost and consequence before He hung the world in place:

He [Jesus the Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:15–17, 19-20).

Think of it. A teenaged virgin in Nazareth—such a backwater village that the great sages of her day avoided it—heard from the heavenly herald: Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His Kingdom there will be no end” (Lk. 1:30–33).

Comprehend it? No. Accept it? Yes! Every word. Why? Because of the facts in the case and the benefits accrued to every believer the world over for two millennia and more.

Think again of the essence of the Incarnation. There is a universal, human need for peace. Most people long for some intervention to assure them there is more to life than what they see and more than what 19th-century English poet William Ernest Henley saw when he wrote Invictus, his poetic diatribe of defiance:

Beyond this place of wrath and tears/Looms but the Horror of the shade,

And yet the menace of the years/Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,/ How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate;/I am the captain of my soul.

With all deference to Mr. Henley and his agnostic friends, their assessment of how straight the gate or how charged with punishments the scroll does not alter the facts. One of the greatest follies of our increasingly decadent society is the belief there are no absolutes and that everything conceived for self-gratification is legitimate. Such thinking is the fruit of the pseudotheological situation ethics of the ‘60s. However, there is an appointment we all must keep: “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

 Humanity cannot dictate the terms of this universal appointment. And only divine intervention provided the justification and liberation that today are available to all who will receive them. They came to us by way of an event transmitting the absolute wonder of the plan only God could conceive or communicate: the Incarnation:

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Lk. 2:8–12).

Conveyed within this declaration is the supreme embodiment of the eternal essence of giving and receiving. Furthermore, it reflects the revelation that there is, beyond all human comprehension, One who loves and cares for the undeserving and extends...
Let me tell you a wonderful Christmas story that says a great deal.

Tommy was the local blacksmith in a small town in Virginia. He was also the certified town drunk. Among church folk, Tommy was seen as a hard case at best and incorrigible at worst. His answer to those inquiring about his spiritual condition was always, “When I decide to change my life and get better, you’ll see me at church.”

One day the pastor patiently explained the way of salvation, Tommy got saved then and there. And for the rest of his days, he lived an exemplary Christian life and, yes, was at church every Sunday.

The first Christmas service after his conversion, Tommy called the pastor aside. “Preacher,” he confided, “this is the first Christmas I can fully remember since I was little more than a boy, and I can only thank the Lord for it.”

The joy of Tommy’s Christmas declaration expresses the eternal reality that became possible because of what took place in little Bethlehem the night the angels sang. Justification and liberation, full and free.

Merry Christmas!

Elwood McQuaid is executive editor for The Friends of Israel.
A look at the Persecution of Christians Around the World

Any excuse to kill Christians will do. Evidently, that’s how things are done in parts of Nigeria.

According to Compass Direct News, Muslims are murdering Christians because the leader of the radical Islamist group Tibliq died in May from injuries sustained in a 2006 auto accident. Ali Olukade’s followers now claim his death was the result of Christian prayers following an aborted 2004 evangelistic event.

During that event, Muslims launched a hate campaign that forced German evangelist Reinhard Bonnke to cut three days from his five-day meeting schedule.

Muslims are attacking Christians in Ilorin, the Kwara state capital, with machetes and other weapons. At least three Christians have died and others have been wounded. Motivation for this latest rampage goes beyond slaughtering, mutilating, and harassing local saints.

According to Rev. Cornelius Fawenu, secretary of the Kwara chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), “The members of his [Olukade’s] Muslim sect went on a rampage, demonstrating against America and the state of Israel, over claims that it was the prayers of Christians over the aborting of the gospel event of 2004 that caused their leader to be involved in an auto crash.”

The Kwara chapter of CAN has received 10 reports of Christians attacked by the Muslim extremists since the serial rampage began. However, many attacks and deaths go unreported. Rev. Fawenu, reported Compass Direct, “believes unreported assaults on Christians average about four daily.”

In June Pastor Habila of the Evangelical Church of West Africa was murdered. “The corpse of another Christian victim was found along stadium road, with his Bible beside him,” Fawenu said. A young girl living near the stadium was murdered in the same fashion.

As is often the case, those attacked were on their way to Christian church services. Now many stay away from their houses of worship out of fear.

Government officials have done little or nothing to stop this bloodshed. It was, in fact, government authorities who demanded the 2004 gospel meeting with Bonnke be shortened to three days because Muslim extremists complained.

These acts of violence cannot be, as is so often alleged, the result of mutual hostility from violent, religious factions on both sides. No Muslims have been attacked or killed as a result of Christian retribution.

Remember that the pretext for assaulting Christians was the false accusation that they were praying for the death of a radical Islamist leader. In reality, followers of Jesus are on their knees for quite another reason. They pray for their persecutors.

A world of difference exists between wielding machetes with intent to kill and offering intercession for one’s attackers. And this world of difference well defines the dichotomy between militants who delight to kill in the name of their god and those who present love and life to their enemies.

One thing is certain: While the world and much of what passes for Christianity turn eyes and hearts away from the suffering, He who never slumbers or sleeps will, in the end, bring justice.
I love Christmas, every single aspect of it. I enjoy all of the decorations, the music, the shopping, and even the crowded malls. But the part I love the most is reading the biblical account of the birth of the long-expected Jewish Messiah. It is in chapter 2 of the Gospel of Luke’s beautiful and warmly familiar text that God reveals His love for Israel and the world.

Most people don’t realize, however, that the Christmas story actually begins in Luke 1:

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron. . . . They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child . . . and they were both well advanced in years (Lk. 1:5–7).

Zacharias and his wife, Elizabeth, were both of the tribe of Levi; and Zacharias was “of the division of Abijah.”

When the appointed time arrived for a specific division to minister, Scripture says lots were drawn to see who in that group worked in which areas of the Temple:

So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense (vv. 8–10).

Incense in the Bible often represents the prayers of God’s people. David captured this idea in Psalm 141:2: “Let my prayer be set before You as incense.” And the beloved disciple John declared in Revelation 5:8, “The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”

As Zacharias served inside the Temple, the people prayed outside, probably asking God to bless the nation.

This might have been the priest’s only opportunity to minister in this capacity. Wrote a commentator, “The announcement of John’s birth comes at a high moment in Zechariah’s [sic] career. As one of about eighteen thousand priests, Zechariah [sic] serves in the temple twice a year, but only once in his life does he get to assist in the daily offering by going into the holy place.”

A Startling Announcement

While Zacharias was in the Temple, “an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him” (Lk. 1:11–12).

Rock-cut tombs of the Beni Hezir priestly family (left), and what is believed to be the tomb of Zacharias (Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY).
One can only imagine the terror that gripped this man of God. It had been 400 years since the Lord had communicated in any way with the Jewish people. Between the conclusion of the Hebrew canon of Scripture and the announcement to Zacharias, four centuries had elapsed. There had been no angelic visits or prophetic dreams or visions. Even the prophets of old had seemingly vanished. The Lord was silent.

For us today, a 400-year span would mean that the last time anyone received a word from the Lord would have been in 1608. The Ottoman Empire was in power in the Middle East; and Captain John Smith, president of the Jamestown Colony in the New World, was saved from death by the Indian princess Pocahontas. Needless to say, 400 years is a long time.

It is easy to understand why the priest was troubled. The angel quickly sought to allay his fear: “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John” (v. 13). Zacharias must have been mystified, amazed, and frightened—all at the same time.

The angel was Gabriel (v. 19) who would later appear to Mary and Joseph. He is one of only three angels named in Scripture. The other two are Michael the archangel, who is a protector and defender of the Jewish people (Dan. 10:13; Rev. 12:7), and Lucifer, the fallen cherub (Isa. 14:12; Ezek. 28:14) who rebelled against his Creator and became Satan, the enemy of God.

Gabriel’s words must have astonished the aged man. He was told that he and Elizabeth “will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his [son’s] birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord” (Lk. 1:14–15). Gabriel was announcing the birth of the man who would herald the long-prayed-for Messiah. John’s work had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah (cf. Isa. 40:3–5).

The angel announced that John would “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God” and “go before Him [the Messiah] in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Lk. 1:16–17).
thus describing the role that John would play. He would be the bridge between the silence of the preceding centuries and the Incarnation of the Savior and Redeemer of Israel and the world.

“How shall I know this? For I am an old man” Zacharias asked (v. 18). Since God had not manifested His presence for centuries, the priest’s skepticism might seem logical. But his question led to a divinely ordained nine-month muteness that might have been designed to communicate to those outside the Temple that he had been visited by the God of Israel. His inability to speak would substantiate the fact that God was actively involved in what was happening.

Furthermore, God knew His priest’s heart, and He probably wanted Zacharias to learn a lesson in faith and trust in the Lord. Often physical affliction drives us to our knees and teaches lessons that can only come through times of testing. This must have been the case for Zacharias, who did not speak again until his son was born. Asked what the child’s name would be, he wrote, ‘His name is John’. . . . Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God” (vv. 63–64).

John literally means “God is gracious.” And indeed He was gracious to His beloved priest, to the nation at large, and to the entire world.

“So the child grew and became strong in spirit . . . till the day of his manifestation to Israel” (v. 80). It was Jesus Himself who testified to the integrity and life of this very choice servant of God: “A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist” (7:26, 28).

ENDNOTE

1 “Announcing the Forerunner: John the Baptist” <biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=3&source=1&seq=1.49.1.3>.

Thomas C. Simcox
is the Northeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.

The Order of Abijah

The priestly order of Abijah to which Zacharias belonged originated with King David and his desire to build a Temple for the Most High God in Jerusalem. Not permitted to do so because he was a man of war who had shed much blood, David did the next best thing: He prepared for it with all his might (1 Chr. 29:1–5).

He gathered building materials, precious stones, gold, silver, and bronze in abundance to make his son Solomon’s task easier, since the new king was young and inexperienced. David gave Solomon all the plans for the Temple—“the plans for all that he had by the Spirit”—including “the division of the priests and the Levites, for all the work of the service of the house of the Lord” (28:12–13).

Previously the priests and Levites worked with the Tabernacle, which was a much smaller, portable house of worship. The Temple would be substantially larger and permanent, with stationary furniture.

Those Levites who were not physical descendants of Moses’ brother Aaron, Israel’s first high priest, had the unique responsibility of ministering “over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it” (Num. 1:50). David divided the descendants of Levi into smaller divisions so that each family would have an equal opportunity to minister. Likewise, the priests were also divided. There were 24 divisions, which allowed each division, or order, to serve for two weeks each year (1 Chr. 24:4–6).¹ The order of Abijah was the eighth order (v. 10).

The fact that the order of Abijah used lots to determine where one would minister indicates there must have been more priests than avenues of service. God’s people often used lots (Hebrew, purim) to discern His will and direction (Acts 1:26).

How amazing it is today that we have so many avenues available to encourage, teach, lead, and serve the Lord. Yet it often seems that, unlike the priests of old, so few actually desire to step up and minister.

¹ Charles C. Byrne, The Ryrie Study Bible, expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 659 n. 1 Chronicles 244.
Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night (Lk. 2:8).

In Jesus’ day, herdsmen were held in low esteem. Their honesty and integrity were often questioned, and apparently they could not always observe the rituals or keep the ceremonial laws. Because of these and other charges, people generally despised them.

But God does not care about the views of the world. Nor is He impressed with one’s status in society. And He chose to reveal the greatest event ever—the birth of Israel’s Messiah—to shepherds first.

God looks on the heart. Shepherds care for their flocks and willingly protect them with their lives (1 Sam. 17:34–35). This mark of high character is often overlooked.

Jesus, in fact, identified with shepherds. He is called the Good Shepherd because He gave His life for everyone (Jn. 10:11). He is called the Chief Shepherd because He oversees other ministering shepherds (1 Pet. 5:4). And He is the Great Shepherd because, through His sacrifice and shed blood, we are saved (Heb. 13:20). So it was only fitting and proper that shepherds would be the first to hear the Good News:

For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:11).

As part of their Jewish heritage, these shepherds, marginalized in society, knew the promise of a coming Messiah. It may have been a favorite subject of contemplation during many long and lonely hours watching the flocks. That evening in Bethlehem, their expectations were realized. The promised Savior had come.

It has been suggested that the flocks of these shepherds were destined for sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem. At that time it was the blood of animals that provided temporary atonement for sin. Little did they know that, with the angels’ announcement, a full and permanent redemption was now at hand.

The angels proclaimed the Good News and left: “So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us!’” (v. 15).

There was no expressed command to go. Yet the shepherds spontaneously set out for the stable where the baby Jesus lay. It was a response of faith.

Jesus’ birth was not announced to the religious, political, or military leaders. It was announced to ordinary people. The Good News is for everyone. As the angel declared, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people” (v. 10).

And they [shepherds] came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds (vv. 16–18).

After seeing the Christ, they returned, “glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them” (v. 20). And these simple, ordinary men returned to their flocks, probably transformed forever by the experience God chose to give them.

by Peter Colón, Southeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.
God never fails to fulfill His promises. Even though many people today reject the literal-historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture, the Bible teaches that God fulfills His promises literally, as He did His promise to bring a Redeemer.

In fact, had God not fulfilled the promise literally, there would be no such thing as Christmas.

Even as God pronounced the devastating consequences of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, He provided hope for humanity when He told Satan, “I will put enmity between . . . your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen. 3:15).

Over more than four millennia, God meticulously implemented His redemptive plan to bring forth the Savior. From Adam’s family God chose Abel, rather than the first-born, Cain. After Cain murdered Abel, God provided Seth in the line leading to the Redeemer (4:25). The chosen line threaded its way through Seth’s descendants Enosh, Cainan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and then Noah (Gen. 5).

By Noah’s day the world was filled with corruption, demonic influence, and unrestrained violence. God reiterated His promise of a Redeemer and established His covenant with Noah (6:18). Announcing His intention to destroy the rest of humanity with a global flood, God gave Noah a blueprint-like plan for an ark. At the appointed time, Noah, his wife, and his three sons and their wives went into the ark; and for more than a year, they floated on the waters of the Great Deluge.

Unbelievers like to claim the Bible’s account of a universal flood is fiction. However, thousands of worldwide flood legends are embedded in the folklore of cultures across the globe. Wrote Jonathan Sarfati for Answers in Genesis: “It is common to make legends out of historical events, but not history from legends.”

Then Came Abraham

After the flood, God chose Noah’s son Shem and his descendants (9:26). The line of the promise wove through Arphaxad, Salah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, and onto Abraham (11:10-27).

With Abraham God entered into a unique relationship, making four unconditional promises, including the Messianic hope that through Abraham’s descendants all families of the earth would be blessed (12:1-3).

When Abraham was 99 years old, God confirmed an earlier promise to give him a son through his barren and elderly wife, Sarah, instructing him, “You shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants [seed] after him” (17:19). One year later, when Abraham was 100, God made good on His promise.

God then chose Isaac (26:3). And before Isaac’s wife, Rebekah, gave birth to twins, God revealed His sovereign choice of successor to the promise. It would not be the elder, but the younger twin (25:23). Thus the promise passed to Jacob.

God changed Jacob’s name to Israel, who became the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob’s blessing on his son, Judah, distinguished Judah’s descendants as the line through whom the Savior would eventually come (49:10).

About 640 years later, God further narrowed the Messianic line to one descendant of Judah: David, the king of Israel. To David God promised, “I will set up your seed after you. Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever. . . . Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:12, 16).

The prophets narrowed the description of the promised Redeemer even further. Through Isaiah God said He would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) and would be none other than God Himself: “His name will be called Wonderful,
Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6).

Micah prophesied His birthplace as Bethlehem of Judea (Mic. 5:2). And the last prophetic revelation of the Hebrew Scriptures assures, “The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come . . . even the Messenger of the covenant. . . . Behold, He is coming” (Mal. 3:1).

Four hundred years later, God’s ancient promise became a reality. He fulfilled—literally—a promise made to Adam and Eve about 4,000 years earlier. In Bethlehem, as Micah had prophesied, a young Jewish virgin named Mary (Miriam, actually), from the tribe of Judah, gave birth to the Son of God.

With all the genealogies, covenants, and prophecies of the promised Redeemer converging in the infant lying in a manger, God celebrated the event with a spectacular announcement, as the night sky suddenly exploded into dazzling light. An angel, accompanied by the heavenly host, proclaimed the good news: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David [the] Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:10–11).


Charles E. McCracken is the Canadian director of FOI Gospel Ministry in Brampton, Ontario.
The angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary that she would bear the Son of God became the formal announcement of the Incarnation (Lk. 1:26–38). Beginning in Genesis 3, Old Testament prophecies unfolded of a coming Redeemer. Then, in Luke 1, God sent His messenger to tell an unsuspecting Jewish girl that the time had come for God the Son to become flesh (Gal. 4:4).

Jesus’ birth is a remarkable event from so many perspectives. But then, the Incarnation—God becoming flesh—is unlike any event in history. It demonstrates God’s willingness to become involved in the human condition. And ultimately, it reveals God’s love for sinful man.

Unlikely Nazareth

God chose every detail of the Incarnation according to His infinite plan. At His initiative and in His time, He sent Gabriel to make the announcement in a highly unusual location: the city of Nazareth in the region of Galilee (Lk. 1:26–27).

Since the Messiah was to be from the tribe of Judah and lineage of David, Judea would seem a more likely choice. Galilee was not known as a center of Jewish spiritual significance, but Jerusalem was located in the heart of Judea. And Judea, not Galilee, was where one would expect to find the heir to the throne of David.

In bypassing Jerusalem, God ignored the seat of Jewish worship and the most holy place in Israel: the Temple. In contrast, Nazareth was never mentioned in the Old Testament or rabbinical writings. Located about halfway between the Mediterranean Sea and Sea of Galilee, it was not on any major highway and was so unpopular in Jewish thought that, before Nathanael became a disciple, he asked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (Jn. 1:46). But by choosing a common, run-of-the-mill place to announce Christ’s birth, God established a basic principle of the Incarnation: Jesus was sent to ordinary people.

Nazareth became the perfect place to raise the Messiah. It was an out-of-the-way Jewish village that was not unduly influenced by political or spiritual corruption. The city connected Jesus to the Galilee area where He would work as a carpenter until age 30 and then conduct a majority of His earthly ministry.

Furthermore, Nazareth may have prophetic significance since the word in Hebrew means “branch.” This may be a connection to Isaiah 11:1: “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” The Messiah—a descendant of King David and David’s father, Jesse—grew up in a town named Branch. But more remarkable than where the Incarnation was announced is to whom it was announced. God chose Mary, who was not a person of position, wealth, or culture. She was a common Jewish girl and a virgin (Lk. 1:27). That fact is significant because the prophet Isaiah told Israel the virgin birth would be the sign of the Messiah’s birth (Isa. 7:14). Since it was humanly impossible for a virgin to bear a child, this birth was a unique sign. However, Mary’s situation was complicated by the fact that she was betrothed to Joseph.

Ancient betrothals were much more binding than modern-day engagements. A betrothed woman was considered legally married to her fiancé even though the marriage had not
22:20–24; Jn. 8:3–5). So the Incarnation placed Mary in a difficult position. Her marriage to Joseph was critical in order to legitimate the child’s birth and provide a good home for the Messiah.

The Favor of God’s Grace

Mary’s reaction to Gabriel’s message reveals God’s great wisdom in selecting her. Her youth and inexperience did not get in the way of the moment. She was a woman of great faith, humility, and character.

As Gabriel entered Mary’s room, he greeted her with the declaration, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” (Lk. 1:28). It was a message of grace. She, of all people, would be uniquely blessed. The great news of the Incarnation was coming to the humblest of women. As Mary declared in her prayer, “For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (v. 48).

The Bible records that Mary was troubled by Gabriel’s words and wondered about his greeting (v. 29). Literally, she kept pondering its meaning. Apparently she was scared and sought to comprehend the message of grace and honor and its implication. So Gabriel encouraged her not to fear; God had favored her. There is no better place to be than in the favor of God’s grace.

While it may have been every Jewish woman’s desire to become the mother of the Messiah, it is highly unlikely that most anticipated God would select them. What wonder must have flooded Mary’s soul as Gabriel explained the miracle of the Incarnation (v. 31). She would conceive and bring forth a Son who would be the Savior. Gabriel made five observations (vv. 32–33) about the Son she would bear, and each is supported elsewhere in Scripture.

He will be great [Ps. 2:7–9], and will be called the Son of the Highest [Lk. 1:32–33]; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David [2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:3–4, 28–29]. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever [Isa. 9:6–7], and of His kingdom there will be no end [2 Sam. 7:13–16; Isa. 9:6–7].

She would be the mother of the Messiah! Mary could only wonder how all of this could happen since she was a virgin (Lk. 1:34). Gabriel then shared how the miracle of the Incarnation would occur (v. 35). The Holy Spirit of God would come upon her. No man would be needed. God alone could bring the Messiah into the world in human flesh. This miraculous conception guaranteed the sinlessness of the Son of God.

To encourage Mary, Gabriel made one of Scripture’s greatest and most comforting declarations about God: “For with God nothing will be impossible” (v. 37). Mary’s response displayed her wonderful character. She laid aside all of her fears and doubts and accepted her call: “Let it be to me according to your word” (v. 38). As a humble servant, she courageously and completely submitted her will to God’s plan.

In the genealogy of Christ in Luke 3:23–38, we learn that Mary was in the line of David. As Luke traced Christ’s lineage all the way back to Adam, he connected the Messiah with the prophesied Seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15 that would destroy Satan. Mary was the woman, and Jesus was the Seed.

The purpose of the Incarnation was to bring the Redeemer who would bring salvation to fallen man, defeat Satan, and restore God’s theocratic Kingdom to earth. What better way for God to demonstrate His love for us than to give us Jesus!
The Incarnation of Jesus Christ should be the heart of the Christmas season. And foundational to it is the virgin birth. That a woman conceived a baby from God, and that God became flesh, are two nonnegotiable truths for Bible-believing Christians.

Rabbinic Judaism, however, rejects both doctrines. Carolyn Glick of The Jerusalem Post has stated the Jewish position clearly: “God is ineffable and thus without form.” Judaism sees the Incarnation as tantamount to paganism. And the very thought of a virgin having a God-baby is, for most people, simply absurd.

Growing up in a Jewish home, my understanding of Christianity was admittedly limited. My view of Christmas was simple: great time for families to get together. And my view of the virgin birth was equally simple: Mary got in trouble with Joseph and they needed an alibi. I believed it was a cover-up and found it amazing that anyone could believe the Incarnation was true. I had never heard of any virgin giving birth, nor had I talked to anyone who actually believed such a thing. It seemed illogical to me and impossible.

Yet contained within the pages of my Jewish Scriptures were many things that were illogical and seemingly impossible. Here are just a few:

1. Moses talked to a burning bush that was not consumed.
2. Moses struck a rock and water flowed out of it.
3. Samson possessed superhuman strength because his hair was long and uncut from birth.
4. Lot’s wife turned into a pillar of salt because she looked back to see the destruction of Sodom.

Although many Jewish people reject the possibility of miracles, it is contrary to the text not to believe in them. Of all the miracles in the Torah, one in particular profoundly affects Jews everywhere: the birth of Isaac.

In Genesis 18:10–14 God promised that, within a year, Abraham (age 99) would father a son with his wife, Sarah (age 89). Sarah’s reaction to the pronouncement indicated what she
thought of it: “Sarah laughed” (v. 12). Couples their age did not have babies. However, the next year, as predicted, baby “Laughter” (the meaning of the name Isaac) was born. The joke was on Sarah.

Judaism teaches that an extraordinary birth resulted in an extraordinary people: the Jewish people. How could such a thing come about? The answer lies in verses 13–14: “And the Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying, “Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?” Is anything too hard for the Lord?’”

Is anything too hard for the Lord? That was precisely the right question to ask in the face of such a laughable prediction. It is also precisely the right question to ask today.

The Jewish Text

If Judaism accepts Isaac’s miraculous conception, should it not allow for another extraordinary event, particularly one prophesied in the pages of its own sacred text? Are there Jewish Scriptures that indicate a virgin would conceive and give birth? The prophet Isaiah penned just such a passage 700 years before Jesus was born:

*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel* (Isa. 7:14).

This passage is foundational to the New Testament. The Gospel writers believed God fulfilled the words of the prophet when Mary (Hebrew, Miriam) gave birth to Jesus. Most Jewish apologists reject such teaching and insist Jesus’ birth means no such thing. There are three main points of contention:

1. The translation of the Hebrew word *almah*.
2. The identity of the person or group given the sign.
3. The significance of the name Immanuel.

Isaiah chose the word *almah*, “young maiden,” to describe the woman. The word does not really emphasize her sexual status, but rather, her age. In each of the six other instances where it is used, the *almah* was not married, thus implying she was a virgin.

Two hundred years before the New Testament was written, the Jewish translators of the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) chose the Greek word *parthenos* (“virgin”) when translating *almah*.

Rashi, probably the most famous of medieval rabbis, said the *almah* was a virgin. Modern Jewish apologists, however, insist that if Isaiah had intended to write *virgin*, he would have used the more precise word *betulah*. Yet Michael L. Brown wrote, “Of the fifty times the word *betulah* occurs in the Tanakh, the NJPS [New Jewish Publication Society] translates it as ‘maidens’—rather than virgin—thirty-one times!”

Alan A. Macrae wrote, “There is no instance where it can be proved that *alma* [*almah*] designates a young woman who is not a virgin.” The use of the definite article *ha-almah* indicates a specific young maiden. It is possible this word refers to the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15, where the Lord told Satan,

*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.*

Certainly that Seed would be a special child, which begs the question, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?”

A Sign for Whom?

King Ahaz refused the offer of a sign when the prophet Isaiah met with him. Yet the Lord Himself gave one to him and to the whole house of Israel. Bible scholar Victor Buksbazen explained it well:

*The disbelieving and idolatrous Ahaz was bound to understand the sign offered to him through Isaiah, in its most commonplace and literal sense, namely that he was being offered an assurance that he need not fear his two mortal enemies who were threatening his reign and the future of his dynasty.*

Ahaz was not interested, no matter what Isaiah said. So the prophet expanded the description of this Child, including His divinity and Kingdom (Isa. 9:6; 11:1–5), to assure God’s people they would be preserved, no matter the enemy.

The name Immanuel describes the Child as “God with us.” Not only would this Child be God with us, but He also would be the “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6). These names preclude the Child being identified as King Hezekiah’s son or Isaiah’s son. This man’s identity was unknown to the prophet. Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah without knowing He ultimately would be a miraculous Presence.

Anyone who views the virgin birth as ridiculous, as I did many years ago, is unconsciously admitting to ignorance of the miraculous existence of the Jewish people. Whether it is a geriatric couple or a virgin conceiving a miracle baby, the question remains, Is anything too hard for the Lord? The answer, of course, is no.

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by HERB HIRT

Many secular people mistakenly believe that, except for the story of Jesus in the Gospels, there is no historical record of the man Jesus Christ. This is not true. Jewish sources (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3) and Roman (Tacitus, *Roman Annals*, 15.44) not only record that Jesus existed but that He also was crucified under Pontius Pilate.

Of course, who Jesus really is and the significance of His death may be theological issues; but His existence as a person of history is not. And the Gospels place His birth historically and accurately in the Roman world.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The apostles Matthew and Luke placed Jesus’ birth during the reigns of Caesar Augustus in Rome and King Herod in Jerusalem (Mt. 1–2; Lk. 1–2). Both rulers are well known in history. Caesar Augustus (Octavian) was the great nephew of Julius Caesar.

After Caesar’s murder in 44 B.C., Octavian became part of the Second Triumvirate, along with Marcus Aemilius Lepidus and Mark Antony. After Lepidus fell from power, Octavian won the battle of Actium over Antony and Cleopatra (31 B.C.) and became Caesar Augustus, sole ruler of Rome. He ruled from 27 B.C. to A.D. 14 and ushered in the initial *Pax Romana*, a time of peace and stability under Roman rule.

Herod the Great took a different path. His father, Antipater, was an Idumean who ingratiated himself into power after General Pompey conquered Judea for Rome in 63 B.C. Antipater actually ruled Judea with the Hasmonae high priest Hyrcanus II for 20 years. The Hasmonaeans were descended from the Jewish high-priestly family of Maccabean fame.

After a struggle for power with the Hasmonae Antigonus, Herod found favor with Mark Antony and was proclaimed “King of the Jews” by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C. Herod then solidified his hold on the Jewish throne by marrying Mariamne I, Hyrcanus’s granddaughter.

He then ruled the Hasmonean kingdom until his death in 4 B.C.

It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus was born before Herod died. We must remember that the Western calendar of dating based on Christ’s birth was not instituted until the sixth century. (B.C. stands for “Before Christ”; A.D. stands for the Latin words *Anno Domini*, meaning “Year of our Lord.”)

The calculations for Herod’s death at that time were then four years off, which gives us the present anomaly of Jesus Christ being born around 6–4 B.C.

THE QUIRINNIUS CENSUS

Luke’s Gospel records that Mary and Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem because tax registration had to take place in one’s ancestral home. Since Joseph was of the line of David and Bethlehem was where David’s family originated, they had to go there.

There are several possible solutions to this problem. The first is that Quirinius played some role in a census that was taken before the one in A.D. 6. This is historically possible.

It is also possible to understand the word *first* in Luke 2:2 in the adverbial sense of “before” so that the verse would read, “The census took place before Quirinius was governor of Syria.”

THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

Mary and Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem because tax registration had to take place in one’s ancestral home. Since Joseph was of the line of David and Bethlehem was where David’s family originated, they had to go there.

This fact, of course, fits well with the prophecy of Micah 5:2, cited in Matthew 2:6, that the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem of Judah. Together these verses testify to the kingly role of Jesus, who fulfills the Messianic prophecies (cf. Lk. 1:46–55).

There were a number of routes Joseph and Mary could have taken on their journey. The shortest distance (75 miles) was due south along the mountain ridge that...
stands over the cave where a second-century tradition says Jesus was born.

Although skeptics today deny that the man Jesus ever existed, there is too much historical evidence for that view to be tenable. A more popular view among unbelievers is that a poor Jewish prophet named Jesus ended up at the wrong place at the wrong time and was crucified for political reasons. His disciples then fashioned Him into the Messiah and Son of God. This is the legendary Jesus. However, evidence from the first century militates against this view as well.

The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Galatia 16 years after Jesus’ death, explained things from God’s perspective: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4–5).

ENDNOTE

For You and For

I

t was worse than a nightmare. There Mary stood as her son Jesus hung on a Roman cross between two criminals. With her sister Salome, Mary the wife of Clopas (probably her sister-in-law), and Mary of Magdala, she watched the horror of the crucifixion play out before her.

Some 33 years earlier, the Jewish girl had presented her infant son to the Lord; and a man named Simeon accurately predicted her future anguish:

Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a

sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (Lk. 2:34–35).

Simeon’s poignant words gave insight into her Baby’s future, anticipating the life that would ultimately expose the wickedness of the human heart.

The Messiah’s death was not the abrupt end to a promising career. Nor was it a botched public relations strategy or cruel twist of fate. Rather, an omniscient, omnipotent God used depraved humanity’s evil intent to carry out His purpose of providing a final sacrifice for sin for you and for me.

That God would allow the crucifixion seems totally incongruous. Yet the Babe in the rustic manger of Bethlehem whom angels lauded at His birth was destined to die a humiliating, excruciating death.

From a human viewpoint, it seems a paradox; from God’s perspective, it is a gift of love and the key to our redemption.

After His resurrection, Jesus said,

These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which
Me

were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me (24:44).

All three divisions of the Tanakh (Old Testament), therefore, illuminate the truth that the Messiah was born to die.

Prophesied in the Torah—the Law

Following Adam and Eve’s sin, God began to outline His plan of redemption. Replacing the fig-leaf clothing they hastily had sewn, God made them coats from animal skins. These tunics necessitated the death of an innocent animal, depicting the substitutionary blood sacrifice required as atonement for sin (Gen. 3:21). Scripture stresses the importance of God’s sacrificial requirements when Abel and His brother Cain brought offerings to the Lord. Wrote Bible scholar John F. Walvoord: “Cain is plainly told that the way of forgiveness is through offering a bloody sacrifice. . . . Abel and Cain both knew that the sacrifice for sin should be a particular animal, a lamb; a particular lamb, the firstling; and a particular part of the lamb, the fat.”

However, Cain brought vegetables from his garden, which God rejected. Abel on the other hand, offered the first-born of his flock; “and the Lord respected Abel and his offering” (Gen. 4:4).

The institution of Passover during the Israelite Exodus from Egypt reinforced the Lord. Wrote Bible scholar John F. Walvoord: “Cain is plainly told that the way of forgiveness is through offering a bloody sacrifice. . . . Abel and Cain both knew that the sacrifice for sin should be a particular animal, a lamb; a particular lamb, the firstling; and a particular part of the lamb, the fat.”

Interestingly, history documents that Migdal Eder, located in the northern part of Bethlehem, was a watchtower built to protect the Temple flocks. During lambing season, the sheep were brought there from the fields, as the lower level functioned as the birthing room for sacrificial lambs. Prophecy teacher Jimmy DeYoung has pointed out that the priestly shepherds routinely “would wrap the newborn lambs in swaddling clothes” to keep them “without spot or blemish,” placing them in a manger “until they had calmed down.”

Clearly, Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God whose death was ordained before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:19–20). Following His resurrection, Jesus Himself explained:

Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:46–47, emphasis added).

Behold the Lamb

The great theologian Lewis Sperry Chafer wrote, “There is no point in human history where the divine sovereignty and human responsibility, or free will, come into more vivid juxtaposition than they do in the crucifixion of Christ.” The apostle Peter even declared that Jesus was delivered to His executioners according to the “determined purpose and foreknowledge of God” and that the executioners carried out what God had “determined before” was to be done (Acts 2:23; 4:28). He later taught that Jesus’ substitutionary sacrifice was “foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20).

Celebrating the Passover with His disciples the night before His crucifixion, Jesus alluded to His divine appointment when He said, “Truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined” (Lk. 22:22). This was no fatalistic call of destiny but a plan in which He participated by choice, as He told His disciples:

No one takes it [my life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father (Jn. 10:18).

Every event in Jesus’ life moved toward His prophesied death. On the night of His birth, an angel appeared to the shepherds who were “out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night” and instructed them: “You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger” (Lk. 2:8, 12). The shepherds immediately responded, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us” (v. 15).

Micah, the Jewish prophet who foretold Messiah’s birth in Bethlehem, also prophesied, “And thou, O tower of the flock [Hebrew, Migdal Eder], the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem” (Mic. 4:8 KJV). Although obscure and often overlooked, Micah disclosed that the Messiah, who embodied the hope of the Kingdom, “was to be revealed from Migdal Eder, ‘the tower of the flock,’” wrote Bible scholar Alfred Edersheim.

Interestingly, history documents that Migdal Eder, located in the northern part of Bethlehem, was a watchtower built to protect the Temple flocks. During lambing season, the sheep were brought there from the fields, as the lower level functioned as the birthing room for sacrificial lambs. Prophecy teacher Jimmy DeYoung has pointed out that the priestly shepherds routinely “would wrap the newborn lambs in swaddling clothes” to keep them “without spot or blemish,” placing them in a manger “until they had calmed down.”

Clearly, Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God whose death was ordained before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:19–20). Following His resurrection, Jesus Himself explained:

Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:46–47, emphasis added).

END NOTES


2 Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, bk. 2, From Bethlehem to Jordan (1883; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 131.

3 Ibid.


by Charles E. McCracken
the necessity for substitutionary sacrifice. God required of Passover lambs that none of their bones be broken and that their blood be applied to the doorposts of Jewish homes to protect Israel’s firstborn males from dying in a plague that God sent on Egypt (Ex. 12). Successive generations memorialize the fact that, on the first Passover, the blood of a lamb was shed so the firstborn of Israel could live.

The Mosaic Law teaches explicitly that atonement for sin requires the shedding of blood: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11).

It is no coincidence John the Baptist introduced Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29). The apostle John, an eyewitness of the crucifixion, also drew the connection:

**But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, “Not one of His bones shall be broken.” And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced” (Jn. 19:33–34, 36–37; cf. Ex. 12:46).**

### Prophesied in the Neviyim — The Prophets

In speaking of Jesus’ prophesied death, John quoted the prophet Zechariah who wrote, “Then they will look on Me whom they pierced” (Zech. 12:10). The Hebrew word translated “pierced” denotes thrusting someone through with a spear or sword. Interestingly, Zechariah told of a still future event in which the inhabitants of Jerusalem will look on Him, their Messiah, whom they had pierced.

While functioning as chief wise man in Persia, the prophet Daniel received revelation foretelling the Messiah’s death. Beginning with a royal decree to rebuild the ruined city of Jerusalem, the revelation outlined 70 weeks, each containing seven years. After 69 of those prophetic weeks (7 plus 62, equaling 483 years; Dan. 9:25), the Messiah would present Himself to the nation of Israel and then be “cut off, but not for Himself” (v. 26). The Hebrew word translated “cut off” means “to destroy.” At the precise time predicted, Jesus unmistakably identified Himself as the Messiah by riding into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey; and within the week, He was crucified, or “cut off” (Zech. 9:9).

The Hebrew Scriptures clearly foretell the Messiah’s death, and the prophet Isaiah explained why: But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:5–6).

The substitutionary nature of the Messiah’s death is obvious:

For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin . . . (vv. 8, 10).

The sin offering always died as a substitute for the sinner (Lev. 5).

### Prophesied in the Ketuvim — The Psalms

While the Law emphasizes the need for atonement, Psalm 40 explains the inability of ceremonial sacrifice to satisfy God’s justice (vv. 6–8). God never accepted or desired animal sacrifices for their own sake, but only as they foreshadowed the ultimate Sacrifice.

Quoting from this psalm, the author of Hebrews wrote the following:

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God’” (10:5–7).

The Messiah would not sacrifice an animal on behalf of sinful humanity; He would sacrifice Himself.

In addition, the details of His suffering, enumerated in Psalm 22 by King David at least 1,000 years earlier, mesh precisely with the record of the crucifixion in the Gospels. The words they divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots were literally fulfilled when soldiers gambled for Jesus’ clothing (v. 18; cf. Mt. 27:35).

I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; . . . My tongue clings to My jaws; . . . They pierced My hands and My feet are phrases consistent with the shameful and agonizing death of crucifixion (Ps. 22:14–16). Even the words My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? spoken by the Lord before His suffering ended were foretold in Psalm 22:1.

Like all Passover lambs, which are raised specifically to be sacrificed, Jesus was born to die to become the ultimate Sacrifice for our sin.

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4 Strong, “karat.”

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Charles E. McCracken is the Canadian director of FOI Gospel Ministry in Brampton, Ontario.
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November/December 2008

by STEVE HERZIG

Matthew 1: Certificate of Authenticity

For 132 years the Westminster Kennel Club (WKC) Dog Show has been held in New York City. Broadcast on cable television from Madison Square Garden, this fierce competition is considered one of the most prestigious in the world. Just to qualify, each contestant must be a breed champion. And each champion must be impeccably groomed and scrupulously examined.

Yet of all the prerequisites for Best in Show, the most important is proof of registration with the American Kennel Club (AKC). AKC registration certifies that the contestant is a pedigreed champion. Without proper credentials, no dog, no matter how good it might look, can ever become a WKC winner.

Credentials certify authenticity. That is why God provided a “certificate of authenticity” for His Messiah through His eternal Word.

Before Jesus was born, 400 years had passed since God had spoken of a future Redeemer through the prophet Malachi. The pedigree of that Redeemer was critical. He had to be a direct descendant of King David. No doubt that fact was uppermost in the apostle Matthew’s mind as he wrote his eyewitness account in the Gospel of Matthew. As a tax collector, Matthew (formerly called Levi) was concerned about detail. As a Jewish man, he was concerned about the Messiah’s credentials.

Matthew had heard Jesus preach convincing sermons. He stood amazed at the Nazarene’s ability to confound the elite teachers of His day and perform miracles. All these things convinced Matthew that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and rightful King of Israel. So convinced was he, in fact, that he left his job to follow Him. Wanting to reach others with this liberating truth, Matthew wrote an account of this Man Jesus.

Matthew knew that Jesus’ miracles and great teaching were not enough to convince people that He was the prophesied Messiah. According to D. A. Carson, the land “was rife with messianic...
expectation. Not all of it was coherent.”¹ Without proof of pedigree, nothing Jesus did would qualify Him as the long-awaited King. That is why Matthew’s first chapter is tedious but necessary.

Three sets of 14 names are listed, but it is the first line that is critical because it invokes three titles: “The book of the genealogy of [1] Jesus Christ, the [2] Son of David, the [3] Son of Abraham.”

**His Office**

Though some may think that Jesus was born into the “Christ” family, Christ was not a surname, like Jones or Smith. Matthew provided us with His given name—Jesus—which means “salvation,” and His title—Christ—the English form of the Greek word Christos, meaning “anointed.” In Hebrew the word for “anointed one” is Moshiach, or Messiah.

Anointed ones were people designated for specific functions, such as prophets, priests, or kings.

Thus Matthew intentionally linked the name Jesus with the office of Christ as the Son of David and Abraham. As the “Anointed One,” Jesus was entitled to be both Messiah and King.

**His Royalty**

Jewish readers of Matthew’s day would have known the many passages in the Tanakh (Old Testament) that address the Davidic line to the Messiah. Second Samuel 7:4–17 serves as the foundation, where God promises David’s progeny a land forever, a king forever, and a kingdom forever:

I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever (vv. 10, 16).

The prophets built on this foundation using the title “the Branch.” Later, this designation became a common Messianic term: ‘‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth’” (Jer. 23:5; cf. 33:15). The Lord of hosts said, “For behold, I am bringing forth My servant the BRANCH. Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH!” (Zech. 3:8; 6:12).

Isaiah wrote, “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isa. 11:1). The prophet spoke of an heir to David’s throne who will “decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His
loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist” (vv. 4–5). Psalm 89:29 promises David a seed forever and a throne “as the days of heaven.”


Jesus never disputed the title. Rather, He expanded on it. Quoting from Psalm 110:1, “The LORD said to my Lord,” Jesus asked the Pharisees, “If David then calls Him “Lord,” how is He his Son?” And no one was able to answer Him a word” (Mt. 22:44–46).

His Lineage

If the Messiah is a son of David, He is automatically a son of Abraham. So why did Matthew bother to trace Jesus’ lineage all the way back to Abraham?

Doing so reaffirms God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12. God promised Abraham that if he left Ur to follow Him, He would unconditionally provide a land, seed, and blessing (vv. 1–2). As a son of Abraham, Jesus would rule from the Promised Land, be the promised Seed, and be a blessing for His people.

Further, in Abraham “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (22:18). Wrote Carson, “Matthew is preparing his readers for the final words of this offspring from Abraham—the commission to make disciples of ‘all nations.’”

Thus the Messiah’s descent from Abraham ensures He is a blessing to all. And His descent from David ensures His royalty. If His lineage was questioned, the information was not recorded in the accounts of His life. With the Temple still standing at the time Matthew wrote, genealogies could be verified. That ability ceased with the A.D. 70 destruction of the Temple and all the Jewish genealogical records it housed.

Today only Jesus can verify that He has the credentials to be Israel’s legitimate King. Someday He will return to claim His throne and rule over a restored Davidic Kingdom.

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid, 8:62.
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It was the greatest miracle and turning point of all history.

Jesus also is the God/Man. Scripture says He “made Himself of no reputation,” meaning He “emptied Himself” (Phil. 2:7). The apostle Paul wrote, “Being in the form of God, [He] did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation [emptied Himself], taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (vv. 6–7).

Jesus, who possessed the glory of God from eternity past, set aside the outward manifestation of His glory and enrobed Himself in human flesh so that He appeared to be merely a man. No one could tell by looking at Him that He was deity.

To the eternal Logos now was added a human nature: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and

As Christmas approaches, many people concentrate on gifts and decorations and enjoying the season. Fewer think about who Jesus is and what it meant for Him to come to Earth. But without the Incarnation, humanity would be lost.

Jesus is the eternal Word of God. Technically, it is incorrect to refer to Him as Jesus prior to His birth. Before then He was the eternal Logos—the eternal Word—or the eternal Son of God: “In the beginning was the Word [Greek, Logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1).

He was the Creator of the world (v. 3). In addition, He was the Angel of Jehovah who appeared to Moses and Abraham and many others and who accompanied the nation of Israel as it wandered through the wilderness. He is the expression of God: the one who reveals God and manifests God to men.

Then, at a point in history predetermined by God, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (v. 14).

Forever a Mystery

The Bible teaches that Jesus is also the Son of Man. He is as real a human being as you and I. Scripture calls Him “that Holy One [“holy child,” NASB] who is to be born,” expressing His humanity (Lk. 1:35). He is also called David’s Son, referring to His position as direct heir to the throne of King David.

So what we have is a mystery. Gabriel said to the virgin Mary, “You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS” (v. 31).

The Incarnation is something we will never understand. The God who dwelt next to the Father in eternity past—God the Son, the Logos—took on human flesh, prompting the angels to declare to the shepherds the evening He was born, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (2:10-11).
No one apart from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can fully explain this truth. That’s where we embrace, by faith, the biblical teaching about the person of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that He will always be so. When we meet Him in glory, He will be glorified. Yet He will have a resurrected body because of the Incarnation, and He is that Person now and forever.

**The Final Lamb**

On the other hand, Jesus the God/Man is also God’s Lamb. Old Testament saints understood that “according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission [forgiveness]” (Heb. 9:22).

God had established a system of animal sacrifice to teach Israel how unacceptable sin is to Him. Each time someone sacrificed an animal at the Temple in Jerusalem, he was reminded that sin brings death. Death is necessary to atone for sin.

The animal’s blood, which represented its life, would be poured on the altar. Once a year, on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Israel’s high priest would put it on the Mercy Seat in the Temple’s Holy of Holies, signifying that God had, for another year, accepted that sacrifice in lieu of the payment that was actually due. As Scripture says, “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). Those who were close to God and carefully read the Hebrew Scriptures understood that fact.

So God provided another sacrifice: the Lamb of God, who is Jesus Himself. John the Baptist understood. When he was baptizing people beyond the Jordan and saw Jesus walking toward him, he declared, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29).

The author of Hebrews understood, too, from the Septuagint’s version of Psalm 40:6: “‘But a body You have prepared for Me.’ By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:5, 10). God prepared a human body for His Son to become the final atonement for sin.

As Isaiah prophesied, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).

Those who carefully read Isaiah understood a man was coming who would be the Lamb, whose blood would take away the sins of the world.

The apostle Paul, a Jewish scholar, wrote, “He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). God took your sin and mine and transferred them to Jesus.

The only way you and I can atone for our sin is to die and be separated from God forever. Atone means to “make reparation, to make payment for.” If, for example, you are convicted of violating a traffic law, you can pay the fine or do time in jail. Paying for sin, however, means spending eternity in the Lake of Fire, severed from God forever. That is the fine: eternal death.

Jesus came to Earth to be our substitute. We have two choices: pay for our own sin or accept God’s Lamb and receive forgiveness and His righteousness through faith.

The Jewish apostle Peter put it this way: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet. 3:18).

The Incarnation manifests to us the incomparable, incomprehensible love of God, who had compassion on us—a world of lost sinners—and sent a Deliverer.

As you prepare for the Christmas season, take time to ponder the great sacrifice God the Son made in coming to Earth. And give thanks to Jesus, remembering, “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Richard D. Emmons is a professor in the School of Biblical Studies at Philadelphia Biblical University. He is also senior pastor of Bible Baptist Church, Hamilton Township, New Jersey.
The Magi, sometimes translated “wise men,” came to worship the King of the Jews using a star and the Scripture as their guide. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Mt. 2:1–2).

The Magi were an old, powerful priestly caste that practiced astronomy as well as astrology. Naturally, they would have been familiar with the writings of Balaam the Mesopotamian (Dt. 23:4).

Balaam was a prophet whom the king of Moab hired to curse the Israelites on their way to Canaan. But Balaam could only speak what the Lord commanded. One of his interesting prophecies is found in Numbers 24:17: “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel.” The extraordinary star that led the Magi to the One who was born King could have been the manifestation of the glory of God, which Jewish people call the Shekinah.

Others believe the Magi followed a literal, physical star. Although a star coming near earth would be catastrophic, God can easily overrule the laws of science. After all, He is El Shaddai, God Almighty, meaning He can do the impossible. And He certainly could have used the general light of nature, along with the Magi’s understanding of astronomy, to guide them to the Christ.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork (Ps. 19:1).

Wrote Warren Wiersbe, “The revelation of God in nature prepares us for His revelation in the Scriptures. Ultimately, Jesus Christ reveals Himself as Savior. This was the experience of the Magi (Mt. 2). The light of nature led them to the light of the Word, which led them to the Light of the World.”

The Magi would have known the history about the Hebrew captive Daniel who rose to great prominence in Babylon and then Persia. Because the prophet was prominent among the wise men, his writings would have been studied. The Magi may have used the 70-weeks prophecy of Daniel 9 to estimate the time of Messiah’s arrival. (For more on this prophecy, see “For You and For Me,” page 24.)

Expecting a Jewish king to be born in a palace, the Magi came to Jerusalem. But instead of finding a child to be worshiped, they found King Herod. Troubled to hear about a rival king, Herod summoned the priests and scribes to acquire more information. They told him of Micah’s prophecy: 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 (Mic. 5:2).

Herod told the Magi about the prophecy. This may have been the first time they heard Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. So they left Jerusalem and continued on their journey of faith.

Encouraged by a general understanding of the wonders of God in nature and relying, by faith, on Jewish prophecies, they eventually found Jesus. So God announced the Good News to wise men by revealing a star that brought them to the Scriptures, which led them to the Savior.

ENDNOTE


by Peter Colón
If your church or Bible study has never held a Hanukkah party, you don’t know what you’re missing.

It’s not difficult, and it teaches both children and adults how God protects His people and how important it is to stand up for what you believe. Hanukkah also has prophetic significance because the murderous Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus IV (Antiochus Epiphanes), who tried to destroy Judaism, is a type of the coming Antichrist.

The joyous, eight-day celebration, also called the Festival of Lights and Feast of Dedication, begins on sundown December 21 and commemorates the cleansing of the Temple after Antiochus desecrated it around 167 B.C. by setting up a statute of Zeus—which looked like Antiochus—in the holy place and sacrificing a female pig on the altar. The heroes were a Jewish priest named Mattathias the Hasmonean, and his son Judah the Maccabee.

Legend goes that, after the Temple was recaptured, the Jewish people wanted to rededicate it but only found enough oil for one day. It took eight days to consecrate new oil. Miraculously, the little cruse lasted eight days, long enough for new oil to be consecrated and the Temple rededicated to the God of Israel.

Hanukkah is a fun time involving potato latkes (pancakes), menorahs, dreidels, games, songs, plays, and presents. Many churches use Hanukkah parties as educational outreaches. And you can hold a party anytime in November or December. Even making the latkes can be fun. Here’s an excellent recipe:

Peel five potatoes and grate them in a food processor. Squeeze out all the liquid. Then grate a small onion into the potatoes. Mix with two tablespoons of matzoh meal (or flour), two eggs, a teaspoon of salt, and a quarter of a teaspoon of pepper. Fry them like pancakes in vegetable oil, about five minutes per side. One batch makes about five latkes. Serve them with applesauce and/or sour cream.

More about the holiday can be found on the Internet. For tips on how to hold a Hanukkah party at your church or Bible study, e-mail Laura Coleman at The Friends of Israel; and she will send you the information. Her e-mail address is LColeman@foi.org.

Happy Hanukkah!

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Israel My Glory
Chapter 3 of Hebrews presents two types of rest: that of entering Canaan (the rest offered to Israel) and that which comes from a life of faith in Christ. All the Israelites 20 and older, except for Joshua and Caleb, were denied life and rest in the Promised Land of Canaan because they rebelled against God in unbelief after He redeemed them from Egypt (Heb. 3:18–19). Chapter 4 urges readers not to miss the rest God now provides in Christ.

Promise of Rest

The author warned Jewish believers in Jesus who were suffering severe persecution not to succumb to the same fate as their forefathers: “Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it” (v. 1).

Some considered returning to Judaism to escape persecution. But by doing so, they would fall “short” of the life of faith and rest that God had designed for them.

What does the author mean by rest? Some teach it speaks of the personal salvation that results in eternal life. This is doubtful because those redeemed out of Egypt and those addressed in Hebrews were believers, not unbelievers. No true believer can lose his or her salvation. Scripture clearly teaches that the lives of believers are hidden with Christ in God and that Christ will not lose one soul the Father has given Him (Jn. 6:37, 39; Col. 3:3).

Others teach that rest refers to the Millennial Kingdom rest at Christ’s Second Coming. Although both millennial and eternal rest will be granted to all believers, neither one was the rest promised to the Israelites when they took possession of the Promised Land under Joshua. Theirs involved security, protection, the guarantee of God’s presence, and rest from war (Dt. 12:9–11).

The rest promised in Hebrews is appropriated by faith in Christ and produces peace, harmony, and joyful fellowship with Him even amid opposition and conflict in the world.

Jewish believers delivered out of Egypt and those in Hebrews were given God’s message: “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Heb. 4:2).

The “gospel” proclaimed in Moses’ day was the good news of divine grace bestowed on Israel. It was good news that Israel was (1) delivered from Egyptian bondage, (2) given a sacrificial system that covered sins through blood atonement, and (3) given the Promised Land. The gospel heard by the Jewish believers addressed in Hebrews was salvation through Jesus Christ.

Both groups received God’s Word, but it did not profit those under Moses because it was not mixed with faith. Many Israelites rebelled in unbelief, desiring to return to Egypt. Hebrews warns Jewish people professing faith in Christ not to make the same error, for the gospel is of no profit unless it is believed and received by faith.

“For we who have believed do [now] enter that rest, as He has said: ‘So I swore in My wrath, “They shall not enter My rest,” although the works were finished from the foundation of the world’” (v. 3). In other words, today God’s rest is only obtainable through faith in Christ. Through Jesus, people can receive “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). Those who rebelled under Moses did not receive God’s promised rest because they died in the wilderness due to their unbelief.

Presentation of Rest

God’s rest for both Israel and believers in Christ was “finished” in eternity past, before God created the world.

For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all His works”; and again in this place: “They shall not enter My rest.” Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience (Heb. 4:4–6).

God rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2), signifying that He was satisfied with His creation; nothing more was needed. This does not mean God
became inactive, but rather, His purpose and plans for creation and humankind were completed.

The author boldly repeated his warning using Psalm 95 (cf. Heb. 3:10–11, 18–19; 4:3), driving home the seriousness of missing out on God’s rest because of disobedience. Although Israel failed to enter God’s rest, that rest remained available for future generations of believers. The author proved his point by using two Old Testament illustrations.

The rest offered to Israel in the wilderness was reoffered in David’s day: “Again He designates a certain day, saying in David, ‘Today,’ after such a long time, as it has been said: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts’” (Heb. 4:7; cf. Ps. 95:7–8, 11; Heb. 3:7–8, 15).

Since no permanent rest for Israel was established in Moses’ day, it was reoffered to David’s generation. But David’s generation failed to trust in God as well. Therefore, the permanent rest God offered in David’s day would be reoffered to the Jewish people and to all who received Christ through faith. Again, the author strongly warned his readers not to turn from the Lord in hardness of heart but to put faith in Christ quickly lest they suffer the same fate as their forefathers.

Nor did the Israelites find rest in Joshua’s day:

For if Joshua had given them rest, then He [God] would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest [literally, “Sabbath rest”] for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His (Heb. 4:8–10).

In other words, if Joshua had given Israel a complete and final rest when the new generation entered the Promised Land, then God would not have reoffered rest to Israel under David 500 years later, as recorded in Psalm 95. Since Israel under Moses, Joshua, and David did not appropriate the rest offered, there still remains a rest for the “people of God.”

The Greek word for “rest” (sabbatismos) in verse 9 differs from the word (katapauo) used elsewhere in chapters 3 and 4 and from the physical rest of Canaan that Israel anticipated enjoying. Sabbathmos refers to the rest God enjoyed after creating the universe (4:4) and pronouncing with satisfaction that it was “good.”

Furthermore, this rest does not involve keeping the Sabbath as practiced in Judaism. Neither is it acquired by works. Rather, this promise of rest is the joyful fellowship, peace, and harmony that believers experience now through faith in Christ and the solace they will enjoy when life’s pains and struggles are ended and they enter the eternal rest promised by God (Rev. 14:13).

Personal Responsibility

The author then challenged and exhorted readers to take personal responsibility and act on what he said: “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience” (Heb. 4:11).

The author concluded his argument by urging professing Jews not to return to Judaism because God’s Word will detect whether their faith in Christ is real. One might deceive himself and others, but not God.

He also made five statements concerning how God’s Word works in the life of a professing believer.

1. “The word of God is living” (v. 12). Like the short Roman sword of the day, sharp on two sides, it can deeply penetrate an individual, cutting in every direction (Eph. 6:17).

2. It is “powerful” (v. 12). Like a knife divides flesh from bone, God’s Word penetrates the soul and spirit, revealing what is deep inside an individual.

3. It is “sharper than any two-edged sword” (v. 12). Like the short Roman sword of the day, sharp on two sides, it can deeply penetrate an individual, cutting in every direction (Eph. 6:17).

4. It is “piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow” (Heb. 4:12). As a knife divides flesh from bone, God’s Word strips away the façade; delves deep into a person’s heart; and exposes his or her true thoughts, motives, attitudes, and intentions—good and evil.

Therefore, “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (v. 13). God knows (sees) everything in His creation, no matter how small or secretive. The deeds, thoughts, imaginations, and intentions of our hearts and souls are exposed to God for what they are, because God’s Word exposes them.

The word open pictures a wrestler bending back the neck of his opponent in a death grip—leaving him prostrate, powerless, defenseless, and defeated. Likewise, every heart is “open,” or powerless, defenseless, and defeated before God and His Word.

This is a graphic warning concerning one’s commitment and accountability before God. And it admonishes all people to make their salvation sure by accepting Jesus’ invitation, “Come to Me . . . and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt. 11:28–29).
defines avarice as “insatiable greed for riches; inordinate, miserly desire to gain and hoard wealth.”

The word pleonektes refers to “one who is greedy for gain, a covetous person.” Its counterpart, pleonexia, signifies “greediness, insatiableness, avarice, covetousness.” In ancient Greek these words originally meant, “having more,” then “receiving more,” and finally “wanting more.” They were used to refer to wanting more material possessions but also nonmaterial possessions, such as positions of power.

The combined meanings of these biblical words prompt the conclusion that covetousness is the “inordinate desire for gain or possession. COVETOUS implies especially excessive desire for what belongs to another.”

Numerous biblical passages refer to the sin of covetousness, which is of major concern to God. Consequently, it is important to understand the nature of covetousness, the issues related to it, and the implications for mankind.

The Nature of Covetousness

The Bible’s original languages (Greek and Hebrew) employed several words related to covetousness, revealing the nature of that sin.

Old Testament. The word avar means to “desire, lust, covet, crave, be greedy.” The term hamad refers to “inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire.” The verb basa means “cut off, get, gain.” It refers to cutting off “what is not one’s own, or in the slang of our day, to take a ‘rip-off,’ thus to be greedy, covetous.” The noun besa signifies “unjust gain, covetousness.”

New Testament. The verb epithumeo expresses “desire as impulse, as a motion of the will. It is, in fact, lust, since the thought of satisfaction gives pleasure and that of non-satisfaction pain.” It “is anxious self-seeking.” The noun philarguria means “love of money, avarice, miserliness.”

Objects of Coveting

People covet things that do not belong to them. God said, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s” (Ex. 20:17). Deuteronomy 5:21 adds a neighbor’s field to that list, and Proverbs 6:25 refers to lusting for a seductress.

Joshua 7:21 records Achan coveting and taking “a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels.” 1 Timothy 3:8 indicates that people are not to be “greedy for money.”

Motives for Coveting

The Bible presents at least two things that motivate people to covet: a desire for security and a desire for wealth. Habakkuk 2:9 states, “Woe to him who covets evil gain for his house, that he may
set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of disaster! The verb translated “covets” means to “cut off, get, gain.” In this passage it refers to cutting off “what is not one’s own.” Thus this passage describes a person who is motivated to take what belongs to another for the purpose of making his own household secure from disaster.

The apostle Paul wrote, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:9–10).

### Characteristics and Methods of Coveters

Some people covet what others have because they are too lazy to earn possessions honestly (Prov. 21:25–26). Some enjoy hearing God’s Word but fail to obey it because their hearts are selfishly devoted to pursuing their own covetous gain (Ezek. 33:28–33). Others become covetous because they do “not like to retain God in their knowledge” (Rom. 1:28–32). Some covet because they are ignorant concerning God (1 Th. 2:5). Some leaders are so consumed with greed for personal gain that they neglect the needs of their people and lead their nations into judgment (Isa. 56:10–12). Coveting causes some, who enjoy hearing God’s Word, to fail to obey it (Ezek. 33:28–33). Coveting can “plunge” some coveters into destruction and an “everlasting state” of judgment, cause them to stray from the faith, and inflict them with “severe and piercing self-acusations and pangs of conscience” (1 Tim. 6:9–10). Coveting defiles the coveters (Mk. 7:21–23).

The Bible also places coveters in the category of “the unrighteous” (1 Cor. 6:9–10). That category includes fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, the wicked, the malicious, enviers, murderers, strivers, deceivers, the evil–minded, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, the violent, the proud, boasters, and inventors of evil things. The category also includes those who are disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforbearing, unmerciful, lewd, evil-eyed, blasphemous, proud, and foolish (1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9–10; Rom. 1:28–32).

The Bible indicates that people in this category do not inherit the Kingdom of Christ and God (1 Cor. 6:9–10; Eph. 5:3–6). But they can be saved from that fate through personal, saving faith in God’s Son because “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin” (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Jn. 1:7).

### Effects of Coveting

Coveting has its side effects. One who is too lazy to act “covets greedily all day long” and gains nothing (Prov. 21:26). A wicked coveter boasts of his heart’s lust for unjust gain, blesses covetous people, and has contempt for God (Ps. 10:3). Some coveters want nothing to do with God’s Word (Jer. 8:9–10).

Some leaders are so consumed with greed for personal gain that they neglect the needs of their people and lead their nations into judgment (Isa. 56:10–12). Coveting causes some, who enjoy hearing God’s Word, to fail to obey it (Ezek. 33:28–33). Coveting can “plunge” some coveters into destruction and an “everlasting state” of judgment, cause them to stray from the faith, and inflict them with “severe and piercing self-acusations and pangs of conscience” (1 Tim. 6:9–10). Coveting defiles the coveters (Mk. 7:21–23).

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### Idolatry of Coveting

The Bible calls a covetous man an idolater and calls covetousness idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). Jesus shed light on why this is so: “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Lk. 16:13–14).
The UN is poised to insist that Israel pay Lebanon $1 billion to compensate for damages to Lebanon during the 2006 war against Hezbollah.

“Yes, you read that correctly,” wrote Michael Freund in a recent article in The Jerusalem Post. “The UN wants Israel to pay for having the gall to defend itself.”

“Even for a body with such a long and remarkable record of anti-Israel hyperbole,” Freund wrote, “the UN has outdone itself this time.”

Freund suggested Israel add up all the damage Hezbollah has done to Israel and force Syria, Lebanon, and Iran—which sponsor Hezbollah terrorism—to foot the bill.

“Even while we’re on the subject of liability,” he said, “the UN might wish to consult its lawyers. After all, UNIFIL [United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon] troops in southern Lebanon have lethargically presided over repeated Hezbollah arms buildups while doing little to stop them, despite the requirements of UN Security Council resolutions. Their hands aren’t entirely clean when it comes to preventing the outbreak of conflict.

“You can’t have it both ways. You can’t invoke principles of fairness and equity and then demand that Israel be made to pay while ignoring the other side’s culpability.”

More Israeli concessions?

Although trading land for peace has never worked, Ehud Olmert prepared to give away the store, as the saying goes.

While prime minister of Israel, he offered the Palestinian Authority (PA) more than 98 percent of Judea and Samaria—home to more than 360,000 Israelis. He also expressed willingness to allow 5,000 Arabs to take up residence inside Israel proper. These Arabs claim descent from those who fled when Israel became a state in 1948.

Olmert also negotiated dividing Jerusalem between Israel and the Palestinians and relinquishing key Jewish neighborhoods.

“The notion of a Greater Israel no longer exists, and anyone who still believes in it is deluding themselves,” he said, according to Arutz-7. Arutz-7 reported, “The Israeli position on Jerusalem has continually softened in the past year, especially since American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice declared that the Har Homa neighborhood, near Gilo in southern Jerusalem, is a ‘settlement,’ putting it on par with all Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria. By definition, all of the neighborhoods added to Jerusalem after the Six-Day War in 1967 have the same status as Har Homa. These areas include French Hill, Gilo, Ramot, Pisgat Zev and East Talpiot, among others.”

Arutz-7 also reported that Abbas “has asked Olmert for the large Jerusalem suburb of Ma’aleh Adumim, which is located on the edge of the Judean desert and is home to approximately 36,000 Jews, as well as Givat Ze’ev, named after Zionist leader Ze’ev Jabotinsky, located north of Jerusalem and home to approximately 11,000 Jews. . . . Abbas still wants to discuss the possibility of commanding the large Jerusalem neighborhoods of Gilo and French Hill.”

The PA’s strategy is consistent with a 2001 plan in Arab Strategic Report to obliterate Israel by changing its demographics. Arab migration into Israel, coupled with a high Arab birthrate, would make Arabs the majority by 2035, it said.

Muslims urinate near Torahs

Arutz-7—Muslims converged on the Cave of Patriarchs in Hebron recently, urinated next to Torah scrolls, and left behind Hamas flags.

The Cave of the Patriarchs is the tomb of the biblical founders of the Jewish faith, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their wives, Sarah, Rivka [Rebekah], and Leah. Hebron resident Asher Horowitz explained that he and others spotted the Hamas flags when they were returning holy books that had been taken into safe storage before the prohibition from Jews entering the Cave of the Patriarchs went into effect around Ramadan.

Ever since Muslims destroyed Torah scrolls in the Cave of the Patriarchs in the 1980s, Jews always remove holy books and lock the Holy Ark when they are prohibited from entering.

Noam Arnon, spokesman for the Jewish community in Hebron, said there is always some sort of damage discovered upon their return every time Jews are prohibited from entering the holy site.

“It is not all the Muslims,” he said. “But there always are a few who in the past have ripped mezuzot off the entrances to the rooms of worship or simply leave behind vandalism. Complaints have been filed with the police in the past, but no one ever has been arrested.”

Rifles for PA

Arutz-7—Defense Minister Ehud Barak arranged for a secret transfer of 1,000 Kalashnikov rifles and tens of thousands of bullets from Jordan to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in September, according to the Hebrew daily Ma’ariv. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had promised the arms to PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas.

“We cannot demand that they fight terror, riots, and terrorist groups without giving them the power to do so,” sources told the newspaper. Military commanders in the field objected, recalling similar cooperation in the 1990s that ended up with PA soldiers using the weapons to attack Israelis.

Barak approved approximately 20 new PA police stations for Judea and Samaria because of reports the PA is coordinating with Israel to wipe out Hamas money-laundering offices.

Earlier this year, PA policemen attacked Israel several times with newly acquired weapons that were transferred with the encouragement of the government.
**O SCARY TOWN OF BETHLEHEM**

Members of al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, to a Palestinian terrorist group active in Bethlehem (Hazem Bader/Getty Images).

The little town of Bethlehem where the Savior was born continues to be a dangerous place for those who follow Him. They are beaten, kidnapped, and tortured by Muslims under the ruling Palestinian Authority (PA). And many of them continue to flee from there and surrounding areas in Judea and Samaria.

“There are many examples of intimidation, beatings, land theft, fire-bombing of churches and other Christian institutions, denial of employment, economic boycotts, torture, kidnapping, forced marriage, sexual harassment, and extortion,” International human rights lawyer Justus Reid Weiner told the Jerusalem Institute for Global Jewish Affairs. PA officials are directly responsible for many of the attacks, and some Muslims who have converted to Christianity have been murdered.

Arutz-7 recently reported Weiner’s statements: In one case, a Muslim family appeared on the doorstep of a wealthy Christian family in Judea and Samaria and demanded that the Christian family’s daughter, known for her beauty, marry their son. The son was already dressed for the wedding, accompanied by the sheikh and 15 Muslim men. To protect his family, the girl’s father opened fire on the entourage, killing three and wounding 10. The girl’s family immediately abandoned their home and fled abroad, said Weiner.

Weiner also said the PA tortured two Muslim brothers from Samaria who became Christians. The first was arrested, interrogated, and forced to wear a cardboard sign reading “Najib the Christian.” Then he was told to curse Jesus. He eventually made contact with Israelis who hid him. He was finally granted asylum in Norway.

His brother spent 21 months in a PA prison, seven of them in underground solitary confinement. Weiner quoted his testimony: “I was beaten with sticks; they stripped me naked and made me sit on bottles, and on the legs of chairs that they turned upside down, and many, many other sadistic things that I am even ashamed to say. Many times they allowed lynch mobs like the al-Aqsa Brigades to come in and pull prisoners out of the cells. They were taken out and shot on the spot, their bodies then dragged through the streets for all to see.”

The young man was liberated by the Israeli Defense Forces. He lives in Israel, but his wife and eight children remain behind under constant threat of harassment. He hopes to find asylum in Norway.

Despite all of this, Weiner said, American Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, and Lutherans and the United Church of Christ blame Israel for the Middle East conflict.

**Gift Annuities**

Did you know it’s possible to give a one-time gift to The Friends of Israel—a gift annuity—that will reap spiritual fruit among God’s Chosen People?

In addition, that same gift can increase your personal income and reduce your future tax payments.

If your heart’s desire is to invest in the Lord’s work, yet at the same time you need to make the most of your current financial resources, then you may want to consider purchasing a gift annuity from The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.

If you decide to give appreciated property, such as stock or real estate, rather than sending a check, you will pay capital gains tax on only part of the appreciation. In addition, the capital gains tax will be spread over many years, rather than all being due in the year of your gift.

Indeed, a gift annuity is a gift with benefits both lifelong and eternal, allowing you to maximize the impact of your financial stewardship. For specific details about how a gift annuity can work for you, complete the form and mail it in the return envelope in this magazine. There is absolutely no obligation on your part.

Name __________________________________________
Address_________________________________________
City/State/Zip_____________________________________
Date of Birth (month/day/year) ________________________________
(Suggested minimum age of 60)
Name of Joint Annuitant _____________________________
Date of Birth (month/day/year)  __________________________
(Suggested minimum age of 60)
Relationship to First Annuitant ________________________
Phone (               ) _________________________________
Possible Amount of Annuity $_________________________
(Minimum annuity amount is $5,000)
Income to be paid:  
○ Quarterly ○ Semiannually ○ Annually
○ I would like a Friends of Israel representative to contact me.
We are approaching the great holiday of Christmas. At this time of year, people do not forget me. In fact, some of the ultra-Orthodox men to whom I have spoken about the Lord like to make fun of me. They know where to find me, and they come with their teachers to jeer me. This is their way. They do not like Jewish people who have placed their faith in Christ.

But the Lord promises never to leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). So I did not worry when they came one morning and greeted me sarcastically, “Congratulations to you, Zvi!”

I already knew what they would reply when I asked, “Why are you congratulating me?”

“You don’t know?” they mocked. “Your God is born!”

I did not need a lawyer to know how to argue with them. “You are going against yourselves,” I replied. “What do you mean?” one asked.

“You call yourselves the Chosen People of God. But you do not do right by God. It is written in Isaiah 2:3, ‘For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.’ But take a good look at what is going out of Zion! People like you do not spread the truth about God because you do not understand it, even though you read it every day in your synagogues.”

Now they wanted to know what I meant because they realized I was not speaking about the New Testament.

So I gave them my Bible and told them, “Please, read Deuteronomy 6:13–15.” There it is written,

You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.

They were now extremely surprised. “How do you read our Bible and yet believe in This Man?” as they call Him. They will not utter the words Jesus Christ.

“You study all your lives in those many yeshivas,” I replied. “Yet your hearts are empty, and you have no true knowledge of the Lord.”

“Show us where it is written in the Bible about your God?” one asked.

Now we had arrived at the point.

“He is not only my God but the God of all the people on Earth,” I said.

“Where is it written?” they asked again. So I opened the Bible to Isaiah 53.

“If you know enough Hebrew, then read! If not, I will read it for you,” I said. The ultra-Orthodox do not converse in Hebrew because they consider it a holy language. They speak Yiddish.

“Ut are born here!” one said. “We know how to read Hebrew!” So they began, growing thoughtful as they read: He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (vv. 3, 5–6).

Looking at one another, they asked, “About whom is this written? Who is this one?” Immediately the
older men tried to persuade the younger ones to leave. But the younger ones persisted: “About whom is it written here?” So they turned from one another, and they asked me.

“About This Man,” I replied. “And not only is it written about Him here but in other places of the Bible as well.” So I showed them Zechariah 9 and Isaiah 9:6–9.

The students turned to their teachers and asked, “Why have we never heard about this? Why have you never taught us what is in our Holy Bible?”

The older teachers were extremely unhappy and tried to find a way to discredit me. Confident they could trap me, they demanded, “Zvi! Show us where it is written about the Messiah born in Bethlehem? Can you show us this? But do not use any of those Christian books. Show us only from the Bible!”

I had been waiting a long time for this very question. I had not had the courage to bring up the subject. Now I replied, “Read Micah 5:2. But read aloud so that your young pupils will be able to listen well and know what you have hidden from them. Read, so they will know the truth.”

There it is written,

“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.”

The young men now had many more questions for their teachers, who were not happy. After a while, the students thanked me for speaking with them and giving them a clear picture about the faith. “We will come again and ask you more questions,” they said.

I pray they not only will ask questions but also believe according to the Bible so that they will know the Lord personally. Then they, too, will appreciate this wonderful time of year and celebrate the birth of the Jewish Messiah who came to redeem us from sin, as prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures.