Angels, Angels, Angels:
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Plus:
The Ghettoization of Israel—Page 10
The Birth That Changed the World—Page 14
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D o not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” (Heb. 13:2). In a society obsessed with stories of warlocks, demons, evil spirits, and the occult, little or nothing is ever said about the host of angelic beings all about us who constantly minister to believers. In this issue of Israel My Glory, you will learn what the Bible has to say about these friends of the saints and, hopefully, be encouraged by personal testimonies. It’s an exciting theme, tastefully illustrated by our art director, Tom Williams. Don’t miss a word. Your spiritual understanding will grow—as will your confidence in the overwhelming depth of God’s love and care. The cover is artist Stan Stein’s depiction of the heavenly host (Digital composition and enhancement, Thomas E. Williams).

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Israel My Glory (ISSN 8755-402X) is published bimonthly for $18.95 per year by The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1179 Almonesson Road, Deptford Township, Westville, New Jersey 08093. Periodicals postage paid at Westville, NJ, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Israel My Glory, P.O. Box 908, Bellmawr, NJ 08099-0908.
Raslan Abu Rukun. His name is more Arabic than Jewish. Yet a few months ago, 33-year-old Raslan Abu Rukun was welcomed to his new post as Israel’s deputy consul general in the office of the Consulate of Israel in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Abu Rukun is an Arab-Israeli, a member of Israel’s Druze community, which is well-known for its loyalty to the Jewish state.

Israel’s Druze population of some 130,000 has a rich heritage dating back to the 10th century in Egypt. After separating from Islam, the Druze fled persecution and, for security reasons, settled in the mountainous regions of Syria and Lebanon and, today, in Israel as well. Israel’s Druze live in two major towns in the area of Mount Carmel near Haifa.

Since the birth of the modern State of Israel in 1948, when Druze volunteer units fought side by side with Israel’s Jewish defenders, the Druze have participated fully in Israeli life. Abu Rukun proudly proclaims, “We are 100 percent Israeli.” In fact, the Druze have been part of Israel’s compulsory military service since 1955. As one of our Israeli tour guides once said respectfully, “The Druze are good fighters.” They are the only non-Jews drafted into the military.

Abu Rukun assumes the number two spot at the Consulate of Israel in Philadelphia, which represents Israel in southern New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky. The Israeli Foreign Ministry assigned him here following his two years of earlier service at the Embassy of Israel in Nepal.

Reporting to Daniel Kutner, consul general of Israel in Philadelphia, Abu Rukun’s duties fall into three major areas: administration and budget, as head of the Consulate’s 18-member staff; political and commercial activity on behalf of the State of Israel; and consular matters, such as visas and other services to Israelis and non-Israelis living in the mid-Atlantic states.

Even though several Arab parties are represented in the Knesset, Israel’s parliament, the Druze vote mostly for mainstream Israeli parties. Three Druze serve in the Knesset—one each in the Likud, Kadima, and Israel-Our-Home parties.

Abu Rukun’s service for the State of Israel started with an intense, six-month cadet diplomatic course. At that time he was the only cadet from the Druze community. However, he expects many more to follow. Today about a dozen Druze serve as diplomats for the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

As we visited recently in his office at the Consulate, Abu Rukun’s eyes took on a particular sparkle when he learned of our Friends of Israel connection to his hometown of Isfia. It is there that many of our “Up to Jerusalem” tour participants have experienced legendary Druze hospitality, dining in Druze homes on genuine ethnic foods while hearing stories about Druze culture and traditions.

Freely expressing his warm appreciation for Israel, Abu Rukun told me, “There are a lot of good things, especially democracy and the freedom of religion.”

He also shared his feelings about Israel’s Christian supporters. “As a diplomat,” he said, “I have come to understand the importance of Israel’s Christian friends and the many ways they help tell Israel’s story. Today there is a lot of criticism of Israel all over the world, all of the time. It makes me angry to hear the lies. I encourage our Christian friends to visit Israel, see it with their own eyes, and respond to Israel’s critics with the truth.”

Concerning Iran, Abu Rukun became decidedly serious about the impending danger. “Israel is doing its best to avoid a nuclear Iran, which is a threat to Israel, the region, and the entire world.”

Any time someone attempts to brand Israel as racist or use the term apartheid to describe the Jewish state, they will get no sympathy from me. I will immediately think of Raslan Abu Rukun; and I hope you will, too.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
be unlikely to accept anything “contrary to the spirit of negotiations they’ve been undertaking.” The majority of Israelis and their friends abroad take a very different view of the “spirit of negotiations,” which seems like nothing more than another attempt to force Israel to surrender its legitimate rights.

Netanyahu’s announcement generated harsh reactions throughout the news media. The Times Online was representative of them as it pointed to “U.S. fury” over Israel’s “defiance” of the President’s demands. Cooler heads, however, stepped back to assess the parties that are sharing angst over Israel’s decision. The European Union’s anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian breast-beating was predictable. European Israel-bashing is always in vogue. What should give pause is the hand-holding between Washington and intransigent Palestinians who join forces in lamenting the fact that Israel agreed to put a few roofs over the heads of its families.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat joined America in blasting the Netanyahu plan. “The only thing suspended by this announcement will be the peace process,” he fumed, adding, “This is absolutely unacceptable,” as he accused Israel of responding to U.S. demands “with total defiance.”

There are at least two issues here that Israel’s ostensible allies should be astute enough to pick up on. First, the settlement freeze is a phony issue. The legally established communities linked to Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria will remain in place even with the advent of a Palestinian state. Therefore, expansion within those communities to make room for natural growth is a given. If the Palestinians are serious about peace, the settlement issue is a minute sidebar to the essentials of peacemaking.

Second, should the United States and its European collaborators force Israel to give in on the settlement situation, nothing will change. The Palestinians probably will then say something like, “A token, but not enough. We demand more.” That demand will most likely be followed by proclamations demanding all settlements be removed. The controversy is but a blip on the screen; Israel’s acquiescence will never bring peace or hugs and kisses and recognition from the Arab-Muslim world.

The persistent problem is that Western wishful thinkers never seem to get the point. Caving in to the demands of implacable enemies is never the way to play the game. An instructive example is the fact that Jerusalem is Israel’s capital, yet the U.S. Embassy is not in Jerusalem but in Tel Aviv. In fact, Israel remains the only country on Earth not allowed to choose its capital city and the rightful place for all international embassies. And though the ground is free of obstructions and not located in a disputed area, U.S. president after president has employed executive delays to defy congressional legislation to move the Embassy. Why? Because of the fear that moving it to Jerusalem will offend the Palestinians and our “friends” in the Arab world.

The hardest lesson of all may be to learn to do the right thing. So far, that road to peace has escaped our peacemakers.

by Elwood McQuaid

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The Financial Times headline read, “US Attacks Israel Over West Bank Settlements.” Startling on the surface, the article merely confirmed that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ruffled some feathers when he announced in September he would go ahead with construction of new housing units in Israel’s West Bank communities (Judea and Samaria). The units do not expand existing settlements and are permitted for what is termed natural growth.

However, the White House issued a press release condemning Netanyahu’s plan:

> We regret the reports of Israel’s plans to approve additional settlement construction. Continued settlement activity is inconsistent with Israel’s commitment under the road-map. As the President has said before, the United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued settlement expansion and we urge that it stop.

Kurt Hoyer, spokesman for the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, said Washington would not accept anything “contrary to the spirit of negotiations they’ve been undertaking.” The majority of Israelis and their friends abroad take a very different view of the “spirit of negotiations,” which seems like nothing more than another attempt to force Israel to surrender its legitimate rights.

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Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat joined
Mark Twain, the famous American author, humorist, narrator, and social observer, had great personal problems with the religionists of his day and many other aspects of the world he occupied in the 1800s. He was, however, fascinated by the Jewish people. To him, they were both an enigma and an inspiration. His description, in his book *Innocents Abroad*, of the Holy Land’s topography chronicled the land’s barrenness and apparent hopelessness and was a moving landmark in the Jewish people’s progression across the face of history and the Middle East.

His observations of the area as a sterile wasteland fit only for the habitation of “owls and jackals” had an almost mystic quality, much like the explanation once given of the melancholy strains of Jewish, minor-key music. “It’s as though, in the music of the Jewish people, that just beneath the pathos there is a joyful ebullience about to burst through.”

This refrain seems reflected in the words of Samuel Clemens when he wrote “Concerning the Jews” for *Harper’s Magazine* in 1898:

“If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one per cent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star-dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world’s list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers.

“He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished.

“The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?”

The secret of the Jewish people’s immortality is no secret. It’s written on every page of God’s eternal Word. Furthermore, it is confirmed on every successive Jewish march through history from the clouds of adversity. And when one views their situation in these troubled times, beleaguered by enemies and betrayed by friends, there is the vision of undeniable expectation. Israel is a nation in waiting, hanging on until the trumpet sounds to herald the entrance of a deliverer who will lead it into the light and bring an end to the anguish of the ages.

One of the great ironies is that the more there appears to be reason for depression, the more obvious it is that a great change is on the horizon. It is as though an inevitable, climactic consummation were on the way—an Armageddon-proportioned experience.

Biblically, the waiting will end with the promised Second Advent of the Son of Man, Messiah Jesus, in the day when “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26).

In a way, the expectation of those awaiting His first appearance was comparable to what goes on today. For the Jewish people and their little nation then, things could not have been much worse. Pagan Rome was master of the world, and its grip tightened inexorably with every passing day. But there was the promise; the virgin shall conceive.

“The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?”

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Too bad so many brilliant and gifted men like Samuel Clemens still discern the shadow and ask the question, “What is the secret of his immortality?” Yet they never grasp the reality.
STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP


1. Date of filing: September 12, 2009.
2. Title of publication: ISRAEL MY GLORY.
3. Frequency of issue: Bimonthly.
4. Location of known office of publication: 1179 Almonesson Road, Westville, NJ 08093.
5. Location of headquarters of general business and publishers: 1179 Almonesson Road, Westville, NJ 08093.
6. Names and addresses of publishers, editor, and managing editor:
   Publisher: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1179 Almonesson Road, Westville, NJ 08093.
   Editor-in-Chief: Lorna Simcox, 1179 Almonesson Road, Westville, NJ 08093.
   Managing Editor: Lorna Simcox, 1179 Almonesson Road, Westville, NJ 08093.

8. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding one percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities: None.
9. N/A
10. Extent and nature of circulation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months</th>
<th>Single Issue Nearest to Filing Date September 12, 2009</th>
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<td>A. Total No. Copies Printed</td>
<td>200,333</td>
<td>204,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Paid and/or Requested Mail Circulation</td>
<td>185,107</td>
<td>192,871</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation</td>
<td>185,107</td>
<td>192,871</td>
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<td>E. Total Distribution</td>
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<td>198,885</td>
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<td>G. Total</td>
<td>200,333</td>
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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

William E. Sutter, President

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Hollywood director Frank Capra created a Christmas-movie classic with his 1946 release of *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Who hasn’t sympathized with George Bailey’s incredulity as a novice angel guides him through a supernatural experience? And what first-time viewer hasn’t been a little delighted when the unexpected jingle of a Christmas bell signals George that the angel finally earned his wings?

“Pennies on the sidewalk, feathers in the air, the tinkling of bells, the flickering of electric lights” all are “signs,” according to purported experts, that “angels are always a heartbeat away from all of us.” How much of this “insight” is actually based on fact? Not much.

A fascination with angels materialized in the 1980s, generating an innovative genre for television and movies. The public’s growing interest spawned numerous books; and to meet the demand, sections devoted entirely to angels popped up in bookstores. So-called angel-awareness seminars promoting interest in angelic activity, psychics claiming to help people get in touch with guardian angels, and Web sites devoted to archiving angel encounters mushroomed into a trendy, new market.

A self-proclaimed authority describes angels as “non-threatening, wise and loving beings [that] offer help whether we ask for it or not. But mostly we ignore them.” The idea that angels can be ignored seems far-fetched, especially in light of biblical revelation. True angelic encounters, although not necessarily terrifying, were impossible to ignore.

Over the years, misinformation has inundated the marketplace. And, according to one writer, “the strong, relatively silent type [of angels] that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and saved Daniel in the lions’ den has given way to a more benign and bite-sized species, cuddly as a lapdog, who seem to spend a lot less time praising God than serving us.”

Unfortunately, most of the popular hype has little to do with angels as described in the Bible and often blurs the distinction between angelic and demonic activity. If you want to know the truth about angels, here is some suggested reading: Genesis 3:24; Psalm 68:17; Isaiah 6:1–6; Ezekiel 1:5–28; 10:1–22; 41:18–19; Daniel 7:10; Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 5:11; 12:7–9.

In reality, holy angels are awesome beings who do not acquiesce to popular opinion. Created by and devoted to serving God, they carry out His sovereign purposes as ministers to those who are heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:14).

---

1 George Howe Colt, “In Search of Angels,” *LIFE* 18, no. 14 (December 1955), 72.
2 Nancy Gibbs and Sam Allis, “Angels Among Us,” *Time* 142, no. 27 (December 27, 1993).
3 Colt, 65.

by Charles E. McCracken
Now that Sonia Sotomayor has been sworn in as the newest associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, some reflections are in order.

How much do we really know about how she is likely to rule on certain key issues that will come before the Court? In a New York Times blog on July 17, Times correspondent Adam Liptak said the hearings “were notable for how little they added to the public’s understanding of what sort of justice she would be.” Having watched the hearings daily, I don’t believe that fact was an accident.

One of the key issues is the sanctity of life. There, Judge Sotomayor showed an utter lack of candor. She had previously served as a long-time board member of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF), a group that advocates for extreme abortion rights. Her association with PRLDEF prompted Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) to ask her if it is true PRLDEF has advocated pro-abortion legal positions in every court brief it ever filed in every case where abortion was at issue.

Her answer: “I didn’t—I can’t answer that question because I didn’t review the briefs. I did know that the fund had a health care docket.”

To call her “response” a mere dodge of the question is far too charitable. I find it inconceivable that she would not have known as a general matter that the pro-abortion PRLDEF—a group where she maintained a leadership position as a board member—has advocated for unrestricted abortion rights in every abortion case where it has filed a brief.

Similar maneuvering was evident when Sotomayor was questioned by freshman Sen. Al Franken (D-Minnesota) about abortion and its so-called legal premise: the right to privacy. She avoided mentioning abortion altogether when waxing philosophical on that issue.

Sotomayor’s clever dodges and sleights of hand may well disclose her own recognition that she is deeply pro-abortion but dared not let the American people nor the Senate see the real depth of her judicial worldview.

But there is concrete evidence that Justice Sotomayor will be much more pro-abortion than David Souter, the justice she replaced. Souter upheld a state law requiring parental consent for most abortions by minors. Sotomayor’s PRLDEF has vehemently opposed both parental consent and parental notification laws. Souter never indicated that abortion (sadly, a constitutional right since the 1973 Supreme Court decision of Roe v. Wade) is an even higher, “fundamental” constitutional right. But Sotomayor’s PRLDEF argues that it is.

Supporters point out that, as a Court of Appeals judge, Sotomayor rendered a decision that upheld the Mexico Policy of the Bush Administration, which prohibited the use of U.S. funds for abortions overseas. But she really had little choice on the merits of the case; the exact issue had already been ruled on by other judges from her Second Circuit Court of Appeals. What isn’t widely known, though, is that, in her decision, she still granted unique legal standing to a radical pro-abortion group to bring similar meritless attacks against other pro-life laws in the future.

Warning signs exist on other issues as well. Senators pressed Sotomayor hard on whether she would follow the dangerous reasoning of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg who believes the legal ideas of foreign courts can, and should, influence how the U.S. Supreme Court interprets its own Constitution. Sotomayor used legal double-speak. She pledged not to use foreign law to decide American legal issues, yet almost in the same breath she quoted Justice Ginsberg’s idea that foreign law can be influential. As Adam Liptak pointed out, legal scholars have noted that Sotomayor’s comments were mere word-parsing and created a “false” distinction.

Here also, Justice Sotomayor will be far more liberal than Justice Souter who never jumped on the idea that our High Court should increasingly listen to what foreign courts have to say on legal issues that are fundamentally intrinsic to our own American Constitution.

There are many sobering lessons to glean from the Sotomayor confirmation. But one of them is clear: national elections have consequences. The person elected president chooses whom to nominate to the Supreme Court, and the politicians elected to the U.S. Senate have the power of confirmation.

As Christians, we have a responsibility to understand that, when we vote, we should count the consequences because we will have to live with them in a multitude of areas.

Craig L. Parshall is a leading trial attorney who argues cases involving civil liberties, constitutional rights, and religious freedoms. He is senior vice president and general counsel for the National Religious Broadcasters, as well as a critically acclaimed novelist. His newest legal thriller, The Rose Conspiracy, is now available.
Now let’s see if we have this right. Jewish people have been in the Holy Land since the days of Abraham, around 1800 B.C. Under Moses and Joshua, they entered their promised homeland, Eretz Israel, in 1312 B.C. Under King David and his son Solomon, a sizable, expansive kingdom was established beginning around 877 B.C.

David purchased the site of the Temple Mount (Moriah) from Arunah the Jebusite, and King Solomon erected the first Temple there, which was completed in 825 B.C. At that time Jerusalem was the indisputable capital city of the Jewish people and remained so until the Romans displaced the nation in A.D. 70. No other country—be it Arab, Palestinian, Ottoman, or anything else—ever made Jerusalem its capital. And over the past 2,000 years of the Diaspora (Jewish dispersion), there has always been a Jewish presence in Jerusalem and the land.

Fast forward to the 1900s. After World War I the British government recognized the primacy of the Jewish people’s rights to a national home in their ancient land and issued the famous Balfour Declaration in 1917. The grant covered the region from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River (43,000 square miles), including some of what is now Iraq. However, in 1922 the British altered their mandate to establish a Jewish homeland and excised approximately 76 percent of the territory (32,500 square miles), gifting it as a reward for past favors to the Bedouin Sheikh Abdullah to create the Kingdom of Transjordan.

Are you with me so far? In the aftermath of the bloodiest of wars (World War II), the British decided to forfeit their control over what they had termed Palestine and turn the matter over to the United Nations. In November 1947, the UN General Assembly voted to partition the remaining slice of land (10,500 square miles) granted to the Jews into two entities: one Jewish (5,500 square
miles), one Arab—a two-state solution. The Arabs had not yet retrofitted the term Palestinian to bolster their claim of exclusivity to the area. In fact, prior to the 1960s, the word was associated only with the Jews. The Arabs considered themselves part of the great pan-Arab nation.

So the Jewish allotment grew smaller and smaller. And today it threatens to grow smaller still, turning Israel into nothing less than a modern ghetto.

The 1947 division of the land was to be based on “demographic realities.” Areas with a majority of Jewish people would go to the Jewish entity; areas with a higher Arab population would be given to the Arabs. The division was to be made thusly:

To the Jews:

❖ A narrow cut of land along the Mediterranean coast, including Tel Aviv and Haifa.
❖ A strip of land surrounding the Sea of Galilee, including the Golan Heights.
❖ A large section of territory in the south, which was the uninhabitable Negev Desert.

To the Arabs:

❖ The Gaza Strip.
❖ Land to the north, including the city of Safed and the western Galilee.
❖ The entire central mountain region of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). Jerusalem was to be under international control.

The Jewish leadership took the deal. The Arabs refused and chose instead to make their own policy: the annihilation of the Jewish state. Consequently, before David Ben-Gurion ever declared Israel’s statehood on May 14, 1948, Arab armies launched what would become a succession of military adventures that has spanned 61 years, five wars, and two intifadas. The conclusion? The tiny State of Israel cannot be gunned off the map.

So, still in a state of war, the Arabs decided on another tactic: enter the “Palestinians” and the claim that the Jewish state was an illegitimate, colonialist-inspired confiscation of their country.

### About Those ‘Occupied’ Territories

In any reasonable frame of reference, the forces Israel overcame would have gotten the brush-off for their histrionics in demanding to be rewarded for waging wars they lost. How many times should any country be required to return land it won in its struggle for survival? If right and reason had any status in this incomprehensible jumble that is the Middle East, the defeated nations would be the suppliants petitioning Israel for whatever the Jewish state chose to return as a grace gift. Tyrants who initiate wars costing thousands of lives should not be calling the shots about who gets what in a future settlement. Losing a war is not an entitlement to go back and try it again another way.

And about the “rights” of Arab “refugees.” There is no justification for a massive Arab influx into Israel that will demographically alter the face of the nation and install a Muslim plurality. After Israel was established, there was an exchange of populations. Arabs left Israel, and an approximately equal number of Jewish people fled Arab countries where they had lived for centuries and, in some cases, millennia. The difference was that the fleeing Israeli state welcomed the Jewish refugees. The Arabs, on the other hand, refused to welcome the Arab ones and forced them into squalid refugee camps, hoping to use them as bargaining chips in their fight to destroy the Jewish state.

### Walking the Saudi Plank

It seemed improbable that the tidbit that would cause Western diplomats to salivate at the negotiating table would come from Saudi Arabia, a radically Muslim country still technically at war with Israel. But this is the Middle East, where good is made to seem evil; and evil, good. So naïve Westerners nod their heads insipidly and attempt to achieve something that will exude the illusion of progress, enhance their résumés, and assure their names on the legacy of solving the Arab-Israeli dilemma. The price Israel and its people will be asked to pay is incidental to the process.

Basically, the vaunted Saudi scheme is a retreat to the original UN partition plan that seems to look better to the Arabs with every military drubbing. The terms—which the current American administration says will be incorporated into its Middle East Policy—call for:

❖ An Israeli retreat from territories captured in the 1967 Six-Day War; that is, to the 1949 armistice lines.
❖ A full return of the Golan Heights to Syria.
❖ Ceding East Jerusalem as a Palestinian capital.
❖ Negotiating the return of Arab refugees to Israel and the envisioned Palestinian state.

In return Israel will receive:

❖ Arab states’ recognition of Israel’s right to exist.
❖ Arab states’ normalization of relations with the Jewish state.

The problem for Israel is twofold:

1. How can Israel exchange real-time survival for mere promises before facts on the ground have been permanently altered to show genuine Arab compliance? The Israelis have heard all of this before.

2. How can Israel return to borders that are impossible to defend? Israel would be nine miles wide at its waist, with Syrian gunners perched on the heights of the Golan. The late, great Israeli statesman, Abba Eban, Israel’s foreign minister from 1966 to 1974, described these lines as “Auschwitz boundaries” in order to illustrate the inherent dangers of their continued use or, we might say, incorporation into a final “agreement.”
God created angels with different degrees of ability, established them in ranks based on these differences, and organized them much the way armies are organized. The Hebrew word translated “hosts” in the phrase Lord of hosts actually means “armies.” God is “Lord of armies.”

Holy angels constitute powerful armies that obey God’s commands (Ps. 103:20–21), serve as His chariots (Ps. 68:17), and are divided into legions (Mt. 26:53). Some are even under the command of other angels.

Cherubim appear to have the highest rank since they seem to have the closest relationship with God and are referred to more than any other rank of angels (Ezek. 1:5–24; 10:1–22). Seraphim cover the unique presence of God and His throne and continually assert that He is holy (unique), Commander-in-Chief of the angelic armies of heaven, and glorified Sovereign of the earth (Isa. 6:1–7).

The “four living creatures” in the midst of and around God’s throne in heaven continually exalt God by declaring His holiness (uniqueness), omnipotence, and eternity (Rev. 4:6–9).

Archangel means “chief or ruling messenger” (1 Th. 4:16; Jude 9). Michael is the only archangel named in the Bible. He and angels under him wage war against Satan and evil angels (Rev. 12:7).

Princes are powerful angels assigned by God or Satan to positions of authority over nations to influence their decisions and actions (Dan. 10:13, 20–21; 12:1).

Thus the apostle Paul told believers, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). Yet, if the “Lord of armies” is for you, who can be against you? (See Romans 8:31.)

by Renald E. Showers

ARMY OF ANGELS

(Shan Stein/FOI Image Archive)
Think of the plight of a partially paralyzed 80-year-old Christian and his wife, Hanifa, 73, who were unable to flee their town in northeastern Pakistan as hundreds of Muslim radicals went on a Christian-killing spree. Stirred up by clergy from the local mosque, the Muslims ran amuck, looting and burning homes and murdering believers in Jesus.

“Our house is burnt and everything is gone,” said husband Baba Sharif Masih. During the melee, every Christian in the neighborhood was forced to run for his or her life. Compass Direct News reported that, in the aftermath of the August attacks, the only Christians left in the village were the Masih family, who were too infirm to flee. With their home destroyed and no Christian family or friends to come to their aid, they appealed to Muslim neighbors for assistance. But the appeals fell on deaf ears. “Muslim neighbors around are not willing to give us a loaf of bread or a sip of water,” he said.

It is difficult for those of us who live in a free society to imagine the scope of persecution against Christians in other countries. That these heinous crimes are so easily carried out within nations that profess fast friendship with America would be bewildering except for the fact that most American politicians and journalists are deaf, dumb, and blind when persecution of Christians is the story.

All too often the news media calls such Muslim aggression “Christian and Muslim rioting,” as it did recently in Pakistan when Muslims set fire to 50 Christian homes and fanatically murdered believers in Jesus. Christians like the Masih family are not statistics in an isolated, tit-for-tat religious ruckus. They are victims of premeditated attacks that are becoming standard fare in many countries. Here is the usual scenario:

- A bogus accusation of blasphemy or desecration of the Qur’an is circulated.
- The charge is taken to Islamic clergy at the nearest mosque where loudspeakers call Muslims to react to the allegation.
- Mobs gather and begin to attack the alleged offenders.
- The mobs burn and loot Christian homes and churches.
- Christians who escape death are forced to flee.
- The authorities do almost nothing.

This was the precise pattern in last summer’s attacks in northeastern Pakistan where Islamic extremists set ablaze more than 50 houses and a church after accusing Christians of blaspheming the Qur’an. Compass Direct reported at least 14 Christians died, including women and children.

In a number of nearby communities, out-of-control mobs overran police who attempted to restrict access to the towns under attack, and another 60 homes were torched and two churches ransacked. Crowd control became impossible as clerics in the mosques continued broadcasting inflammatory calls to action. “[Those] who love Muhammad and Islam,” they called out, “should gather . . . to defend Islam because it is in danger.”

Later, after the homes were destroyed and the Christians killed, an initial investigation reportedly concluded, “There has not been any incident of desecration.”

These episodes should serve as a warning to believers everywhere. Whether they will, however, is highly questionable. Meanwhile, people like the Masihs—Christians just like those sitting beside us in the pews—continue to suffer.
Hurry up! You’ve only got 10 minutes to get upstairs to practice with the choir.” I quickly acknowledged my teacher’s instruction, grabbed my guitar, and ran up the two flights of stairs to the auditorium of my public high school.

The choir was warming up as I arrived. The biggest role in the Christmas concert was always the lead-female solo of “O Holy Night.” But it was my senior year, and the choir director gave me the opportunity to sing a duet on “What Child Is This?” as I played my guitar. I was so excited!

Christmas was only a few weeks away, and our school was ready to celebrate this most wonderful of holidays. Christmas trees stood in almost every classroom.
Stockings, cards, small Nativity scenes, candy canes, and other festive decorations were taped to the drab metal doors of our lockers, transforming the sterile hallways into a veritable Christmas avenue. Even the bulletin boards were decked with Christmas cheer.

As Christmas grew closer, carols could be heard in the halls; and warm greetings of “Merry Christmas” passed from faculty to students and back again. Several teachers, each armed with a violin, stroll down the corridors singing and playing the hymns of Christmas. Even the lunchroom got into the festivities. My favorite must-buy lunch of the year was the Christmas feast of turkey and all the fixings. It was an absolutely fantastic time of year.

How different public school is today. Almost everything identified with Christmas has been eradicated, even the holiday’s name. “Christmas break” has given way to “winter recess.” Gone are the Christmas symbols, references to the Nativity, the beautiful carols, and often even the decorative trees.

The world in its ignorance wants to remove Christ from Christmas. In fact, it wants to remove Him from everything. But Jesus’ birth changed the world, and nothing will ever be the same.

More than 2,000 years ago, God the Son entered time and space, taking on a physical body, and was born in a manger in Bethlehem of Judea because God so loves a world that hates Him. He came for a predetermined purpose: “to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal. 4:5).

An angel told Jesus’ stepfather, Joseph, “You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21). Jesus was born for the express purpose of dealing with humanity’s number one problem—sin—by providing the one thing it needs most: redemption:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (Jn. 3:16–17).

Instead of thanking Jesus, the world rejects and denies Him and attempts to obliterate the entire reality of what Christmas is about. The biggest gift-giving season of the year came about because of God’s incomparable gift of Jesus who is the physical manifestation of God’s tremendous love for us. Love is the very heart of the Christmas story.

Despite the Adversary’s best attempts, he will never succeed in eradicating the meaning of Christmas or its wonderful message of forgiveness of sin. Every day someone somewhere is heeding the gospel’s call and giving his or her life to the Messiah of Israel. Scripture says, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Countless millions down through history have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and been saved.

I would venture to say there’s not a public school left in America where the most coveted concert performance is the singing of “O Holy Night.” Nor is there likely to be one where teachers roam the halls like troubadours, singing the melodious Christmas carols we have loved for years.

Yet nothing will ever alter the fact that Jesus’ birth changed the world. It made it possible for people everywhere regardless of color, creed, or national origin to have forgiveness of sin and a personal relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And one day, “at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10–11).

The Ghettoization of Israel
from page 12

say to the Jewish people, “You are forbidden to build or occupy facilities within your own country,” the term takes on an ominous proportion.

Will a two-state peace agreement actually become the world’s way of forcing deprivation and land restrictions on the Jewish nation, turning the free State of Israel into a truncated land ghetto where Jews have limited movement and are not allowed to enter areas they have relinquished to their enemies? It’s not a foolish question. How many Jewish people are welcome in Gaza today? How many will find a welcome mat in Judea and Samaria when it falls to Palestinian rule? How many synagogues will be built in Saudi Arabia? How many Jewish people will be allowed to remain on the Golan Heights after “liberation”? Far-fetched? Not so. The evidence of history confirms the dreaded prospect.

Tough love for Israel? Better to let the world know who our friends are and have the integrity to acknowledge that Israel is the best friend democracy has in the Middle East; and let our enemies and Israel’s take it or leave it.

To contribute to or countenance the placing of one brick in a ghetto wall, figurative or literal, around the Jewish people and their state will be tantamount to high treason of the first order and something that will one day be taken up on the highest of higher plains.

And, incidentally, I’ll tell you about “walking the walk.” It’s not about betraying your friends to placate those who aspire to destroy both them and you when they feel the time is right.

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

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THE NEW NATURE

BY RENALD E. SHOWERS

Even though we give our lives to Christ, we often struggle to live for Him. That’s because two opposing natures dwell within us. And understanding them is sometimes difficult.

This exceptional book removes the mystery of the new nature and gives you a fresh understanding of both it and the radical difference between regenerate and unregenerate people.

Originally published in 1986, The New Nature is the essence of Dr. Showers' doctoral paper . . . the most asked-for dissertation for the past several years in the library of Grace Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana.

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A crazed herd of screeching pigs plunging headlong down a hill into the Sea of Galilee may sound comically bizarre until you hear the rest of the story.

The account began when a madman greeted Jesus and His disciples as they landed on the eastern shore of Galilee in the country of the Gadarenes (Mk. 5:1). A composite of the Gospel accounts reveals the man was naked and could often be found wandering in a nearby cemetery. People from neighboring towns attempted to restrain him, even binding him in shackles and chains. But he had such strength that he would shatter the restraints immediately.

Day and night, his screams echoed among the tombs as he mutilated himself with sharp stones (vv. 2–5).

When he saw Jesus, he cried out, saying, “What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” (Mk. 5:7). When Jesus commanded the demons to leave, it was revealed that the number indwelling the man’s body was so large the demons called themselves Legion:

For He said to him, “Come out of the man, unclean spirit!” Then He asked him, “What is your name?” And he answered, saying, “My name is Legion; for we are many” (vv. 8–9).

The demons recognized Jesus as the incarnate Son of God and interacted as those subservient to Him. Despite their intellect and power, Satan and his evil angels are “finite creatures who can do nothing outside the permissive will of God.”

Satan’s limitations are evident in the book of Job. Before he could afflict Job, Satan required God’s permission; and God regulated the extent of Satan’s malevolence (Job 1:12; 2:6).

Legion recognized what Jesus could do and whined, “Have You come here to torment us before the time?” (Mt. 8:29). They pleaded with Jesus not to send them to the abyss, or bottomless pit, where Satan and his demons will be bound during the Millennium before being cast into the Lake of Fire (Lk. 8:31). No doubt, Legion feared this fate.

So seeing a herd of 2,000 pigs a short distance away, “all the demons begged Him, saying, ‘Send us to the swine, that we may enter them’” (Mk. 5:12). Jesus said, “Go” (Mt. 8:32).

Cast from the man, they entered the pigs, which immediately went berserk, charged down a slope into the Sea of Galilee, and drowned (v. 32; Mk. 5:13).

Most likely, this was not the outcome the demons anticipated. But they were compelled to submit to the Son of God. Jesus spoke; they listened; they obeyed!

ENDNOTE

1 Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 2:75.

by Charles E. McCracken, Canadian director of FOI Gospel Ministry in Brampton, Ontario.
Joseph of Nazareth

(Walter Homan/Digital enhancement, Thomas E. Williams/FOI Image Archive)
Greatness is usually not found where most people look for it—in the accoutrements of money, power, fame, and glory. Although these things rank high on the world’s scale, they could not be lower on God’s. He values humility, service, obedience, and a heart for others. High on His list was the heir to the throne of David who labored as a simple carpenter under Rome’s occupation of Judea. Joseph had little money, no kingdom, and no glory. But he loved mercy, walked humbly with God, and possessed a steadfast faith that enabled him to do a courageous work.

The Incarnation turned Joseph’s life upside down (Mt. 1:18–23). The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus’ birth from his perspective, opening with a plain declarative: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ” (1:1). Matthew traces Jesus’ Messianic lineage as the “Son of David” and “Son of Abraham” (v. 1). These two titles tie Jesus to the prophetic promises of King (2 Sam. 7:13–16) and Redeemer (Gen. 3).

Betrothed to Mary, a godly Jewish girl whom he loved, Joseph no doubt was greatly distressed to learn she supposedly had been unfaithful to him and was pregnant (Mt. 1:18). In those days, a betrothal was legally binding even though the couple did not live together. The betrothal period typically lasted for one year, after which the bridegroom would go to his bride’s house, claim his bride, and bring her back to his father’s home. There they would consummate the marriage, and guests would gather to celebrate with a feast that would last for several days.

The custom was designed to prove the faithfulness of the pledge of purity the bride gave to her husband.1 If she became pregnant while betrothed, she was shown to be unfaithful; and he could divorce her. At first, Mary’s pregnancy probably shattered Joseph’s expectations for a faithful and loving marriage.

So he faced a dilemma. At most, according to the Mosaic Law (Dt. 22:20–24; Jn. 8:3–5), Joseph could have demanded that Mary be brought to the city gate and stoned to death. At least, he could have brought her to the city gate, exposed her infidelity, and demanded a divorce.

However, God knew Joseph’s character and his kind and loving heart. Joseph was a man of mercy, not a man bent on revenge. He was just and did not want to humiliate Mary (Mt. 1:19). So he decided not to make her situation public and to “put her away secretly” (v. 19).

While Joseph “thought about these things,” God sent an angel to him in a dream, who told him, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins (vv. 20–21).

Mary was pregnant through the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. She had not been unfaithful. In fact, not only had Mary been faithful to Joseph, she had also been faithful to God. This pious Jewish woman’s Son would be named Jesus because, as implied in the Hebrew, He would save His people from their sins. This was no ordinary conception, and Jesus was no ordinary Baby.

Through the Incarnation, God was fulfilling prophecies He had given His ancient people Israel centuries earlier. The angel comforted Joseph and assured him that all that was happening to Mary was a fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” God would dwell with man in the Person of Jesus the Messiah.

The Bible teaches that no one can look on God and live (Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16). But through the Incarnation, God came near to man in a form that people could see, experience, and understand (Jn. 1:14, 18).2

Like Mary, Joseph believed God’s angelic messenger and willingly accepted and submitted to God’s plan. Mary could not rear the Messiah alone; she needed a husband, and her son needed a father. The Messiah also needed a father to give Him legitimacy and acceptance. And Joseph was the man. Joseph even submitted to God’s will by naming the Child Jesus, rather than following the custom of naming a son after a male relative.3

In the days to come, God would speak to Joseph three more times through dreams:

1. To warn him to flee to Egypt (Mt. 2:13–14).
2. To send him back to the land of Israel (vv. 19–20).
3. To direct him away from Judea and to settle in Nazareth (vv. 22–23).

Each time God spoke, Joseph listened and obeyed. The announcement of the Incarnation led a simple man to do a courageous work. Scripture does not record Joseph’s acceptance and obedience through Joseph’s words but, rather, through his actions. Upon being awakened by the angel, he disregarded customs and demonstrated great faith and honor by immediately taking Mary to live with him and having no relations with her until Jesus was born (Mt. 1:25). His concern was to provide for her and the miraculous Child she was carrying.

God turned distress into joy, which Joseph would experience firsthand at the Incarnation of Israel’s Savior.

Joseph had nothing the world would admire today. But throughout eternity he will be known as a man of honor, faith, mercy, humility, and service—qualities that constitute greatness in the sight of God.

**ENDNOTES**


**James A. Shouers is vice president of The Friends of Israel.**
Lazarus was among the righteous after he died.1

Interestingly, Hebrews 1:14 describes angels as “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.” In accordance with God’s will, they minister to Christians by protecting us from harm, affecting answers to our prayers, and attending to us at the moment of our deaths (Ps. 91:10–12; Lk. 16:22; Acts 12:5–16).

Though there is no shortage of opinion as to why angels might care for believers at the time of death, the Bible is silent on the subject. Yet we are assured of this: Christians have no reason to fear the “Grim Reaper.” According to Jesus, angels commissioned by God Himself will usher us into the very presence of Christ.

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by Charles E. McCracken
What better time of year than Christmas to relate a true story I heard on the radio in 1995. If you do not believe in angels, I strongly suggest you reconsider your position.

Well-known Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll broadcast a message called “The Ultimate Close Encounter” on his radio program, Insight for Living, as part of a series called “Continuation of Something Great.” I was in the kitchen fixing lunch and listening. When he was a student at Dallas Theological Seminary, he said, Dr. Charles Ryrie was one of his professors. Ryrie, whom most of us know as an eminent theologian, author of the incomparable Ryrie Study Bible, and former president of what was then Philadelphia College of Bible, is not given to exaggeration. Dr. Ryrie told his class the following incident that involved a missionary friend of his.

The missionary was home on furlough and visiting his supporting churches. He had finished speaking at one church Saturday evening and was under much pressure to drive all night through a terrible thunderstorm to get to the next church early Sunday morning.

Tired and alone, he asked the Lord to send someone he might talk to, preferably a Christian, so he could stay awake. As the rain beat down, the missionary glanced to the side of the road and saw a man with his thumb out, trying to hitch a ride. Although the missionary never picked up hitchhikers, he made an exception.

Soon he discovered his passenger was a Christian and even knew some of the people he knew. They prayed together and had a wonderful time of fellowship through the night. As morning broke, the man declared, “This is my destination. You can let me off here.”

The missionary suggested they stop for coffee at a nearby roadside café before going their separate ways. So they went inside, ordered coffee, and chatted a little while longer. The missionary picked up the tab, and the two men parted.

As the missionary drove off, he suddenly remembered he had forgotten to get his new friend’s name and address, so they could keep in touch. He quickly drove back to the café and looked for the hitchhiker, but the man apparently had left.

So he asked the cook, “The man I was with, can you please tell me which direction he went when he left?” The cook looked at him oddly, so the missionary repeated the question.

Finally the cook replied, “What other man? You were alone. I thought it was unusual that you would order two cups of coffee. As a matter of fact, the other cup is still sitting there on the table, hasn’t been touched. I thought maybe you were just sort of talking to yourself there.”

The missionary told Dr. Ryrie he returned to the car and only then realized that, even though he had picked the hitchhiker up in the pouring rain, the man wasn’t even wet.
On July 4, 1976, while the world was watching the U.S. celebrate its 200th anniversary, an intrepid group of Israeli commandos flew thousands of miles to Entebbe, engaged the Ugandan forces, and brought all the hostages back, except for one elderly Israeli woman who had been taken to a hospital where she was murdered by Amin’s henchmen. The photo shows the crowd lifting the squadron leader of the rescue planes on their return to Israel. Inset: 104 rescued hostages wave to crowds on the tarmac at Ben Gurion Airport as they disembark from an Israeli Air Force C-135 on their return home (Corbis; digital enhancement, Thomas E. Williams).
God and Satan assign powerful angels to influence rulers and nations. Behind the scenes of international events rages supernatural conflict invisible to human eyes.

We know this fact from the book of Daniel. When the Jewish prophet Daniel struggled because God revealed Israel would experience trouble for a prolonged time after the Babylonian Captivity, God sent a heavenly being to minister to him.

That being began to come to Daniel on the first day of his struggle; but an evil angel (the prince of the kingdom of Persia) detained him 21 days until Michael, one of God’s chief angelic princes, came to help him. The heavenly being was sent to give Daniel an understanding of what would happen to Israel in the latter days (Dan. 10:1–17).

He told Daniel that, after revealing to him what God had prewritten concerning the future, he would return to fight against Satan’s prince of Persia again. Then he would fight against the prince of Greece. Thus, when Medo-Persia would fall to Greece, the prince of Persia would be replaced by another evil, angelic prince—the prince of Greece, whom Satan would assign to that new kingdom of world dominion to influence its policies against Israel (Dan. 10:18—11:1).

The angel indicated that he and Michael, God’s angelic prince assigned to Israel, are supernatural beings who oppose such evil angels as the princes of Persia and Greece.

Thus Daniel 10 gives us a brief glimpse into an area of reality of which most humans are unaware.
Napoleon Bonaparte once said, “There are only two forces in the world, the sword and the spirit. In the long run the sword will always be conquered by the spirit.” Although he probably referred to his military campaigns in which the human spirit overcame many obstacles, Bonaparte’s statement is applicable to the biblical sphere of spirits, which is an invisible realm that can be good or evil. And the only reliable information about this real yet unseen world is the Bible.

**Believing Is Seeing**

**Jacob and the Ladder**

In Genesis the Jewish patriarch Jacob encountered angels. Jacob had to flee his brother Esau’s wrath (Gen. 27:41–43). His future uncertain, he faced a hostile world alone. He needed encouragement.

On his journey north from Beersheba toward Haran, Jacob stopped for the night. Finding stones to use as a pillow, he lay down to sleep. As he slept, he had a dream. He saw a ladder with angels going up and down between the realms of Earth and heaven. The Lord stood at the top and spoke to him:

*I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you* (28:13–15).

The Lord assured Jacob of His promises, presence, protection, and provision. Jacob also saw an active angelic world doing God’s bidding. According to Jewish thought, the angels in “Jacob’s ladder” were messengers carrying out God’s will in earthly affairs. Thus Jacob not only received encouragement but also got a glimpse into the heavenly realm.

**Elisha and the Chariots of Fire**

The prophet Elisha slept soundly as the mighty Aramean army surrounded...
Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus? (Mt. 26:52–54).

The size of a typical Roman legion varied throughout history. However, it has been estimated to contain as many as 6,000 soldiers. Jesus told Peter He had 12 legions, about 72,000 angels, at His disposal for His defense. The Jewish people who heard His statement may have thought of Psalm 68:17: “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands.” Or Psalm 104:4: “Who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire” (cf. Heb. 1:7).

There was a spiritual war taking place. The Roman cohort would have been no match for God’s angels. But at that moment in history, God held back His angelic army because Scripture needed to be fulfilled. The Messiah was to be arrested, beaten, crucified, and resurrected from the dead. And the victory in the great spiritual battle is when people receive salvation because they have placed their faith in what Jesus did for them when He took their sins upon Himself at the cross: “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Lk. 15:10).

Jesus did not lie. The spiritual realm exists at His bidding. Spiritually speaking, Napoleon was right. The spirit will always conquer the sword. A real but unseen world exists that is controlled by God. Though some maintain that seeing is believing, the opposite is closer to reality.

Isaiah and the Seraphim

Isaiah, too, saw angels. He also saw the Lord:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isa. 6:1–3).

Isaiah saw in a vision the awesome glory of God’s celestial Temple throne. It was a real yet unseen world that literally opened up before him. This amazing event reveals two facts: First, true protection and prosperity do not come from earthly kings but from the sovereign Lord of the universe. Second, God who dwells in the unseen world is Lord over all time and space in an unfailing eternity. Therefore, faith in a God who truly is there gives us confidence to live in an unstable physical world.

Jesus and His Legions

The flickering light of the lanterns and torches perforated the darkness. Led by Judas Iscariot, a detachment of armed Roman soldiers and Temple guards entered the walled grove of olive trees, determined to arrest Jesus.

As they prepared to seize Him, Peter, one of His disciples, swiftly drew his short sword and slashed off the ear of a servant of the high priest. But Jesus said to him,
Scripture clearly teaches that angels exist. Thirty-four of the 66 books of the Bible refer to them by the simple term *angel* (singular and plural), which occurs more than 300 times. Plus, Scripture also refers to them by other terms.

In addition, Jesus Christ referred to angels frequently, speaking about their relationship to children (Mt. 18:10); stating that He could have had more than 12 legions of angels to protect Him (Mt. 26:53); and explaining that angels will attend and serve Him at His Second Coming (Mt. 13:39–41; 16:27; 24:30–31; 25:31).

**Number and Nature**

Although the Bible does not tell us the total number, it indicates an enormous host of angelic beings exists. The apostle John saw hundreds of millions of holy angels around God’s throne in heaven, according to the Greek text of Revelation 5:11. The prophet Daniel saw a similar sight (Dan. 7:9–10). (These sights of holy angels did not include all the fallen angels who serve Satan.)

The writer of Hebrews indicated that angels are “all ministering spirits” (Heb. 1:14). Because they are spirit beings, several things are true of them all.

**Angels Do Not Have Physical Bodies by Nature.** Jesus clearly stated that a spirit does not have flesh and bones, and He implied that a spirit cannot be touched or seen (Lk. 24:39). So angels do not have physical bodies of flesh and bones. The apostle Paul indicated that evil angels are “spiritual” and, therefore, do not have “flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12).

However, there have been instances in which angels have temporarily taken on physical bodies that could be seen and touched when necessary. In Genesis 18—19, three “men” appeared to Abraham. They had feet that were washed, and they ate food. One was the Lord. The other two were sent to Sodom.

The Bible reveals that the two who went to Sodom were angels (19:1, 15). Abraham’s nephew Lot, who was in Sodom, thought they were merely men. He offered to wash their feet, and they ate food in his house. The men of Sodom thought they were men. Yet the angels demonstrated that they were not human by supernaturally inflicting blindness on the men of Sodom without touching them physically. Hebrews 13:2 speaks of people who “unwittingly entertained angels.”

**Angels Do Not Have Sexuality by Nature.** Sexuality is a very real part of humanness, and sexual relationships involve physical bodies. Because angels have no physical bodies, it should be evident they have no sexuality.
Furthermore, Jesus taught that, when people will be resurrected, they will be like angels in heaven in the respect that they will neither marry nor be given in marriage (Mk. 12:25). Jesus indicated that God instituted marriage because He created human beings with sexuality. Thus marriage exists because of sexuality. Consequently, the fact that angels never marry strongly implies they are not sexual by nature.

**Angels Do Not Die.** We die because we have physical bodies that are under a curse of sin (Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Rom. 5:12; 6:23). Angels do not have physical bodies, so they do not experience physical death. In fact, Jesus indicated that angels cannot die when He said of resurrected humans, “nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels” (Lk. 20:36). Thus He taught that resurrected humans will be like angels in that they will not be able to die.

It is impossible to kill an angel. Holy and evil angels wage war against each other (Rev. 12:7), but no angel can kill another.

**Angels Are Invisible by Nature.** As spirit beings, angels are invisible to mortals. In contrast with the visible things of Earth, angels in heaven are invisible (Col. 1:16).

There are two exceptions, however. On occasion, angels take on physical bodies, as was true of the two who appeared to Abraham and Lot (Gen. 18—19).

And sometimes God gives certain people a special vision of angels, as in 2 Kings 6:15–17. The king of Syria couldn’t capture the king of Israel because God kept revealing the Syrian king’s secret plans to the prophet Elisha, who would inform the king of Israel. The king of Syria sent a large military force to the city where Elisha was located. When Elisha’s servant became terrified on seeing that he and Elisha were surrounded, God opened the servant’s eyes to see what, by nature, could not be seen by mortals: “And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (v. 17). They were there to protect God’s prophet.

**Where They Come From**

God created angels. All of God’s angels are commanded to praise the Lord because He commanded and they were created (Ps. 148:2–5). Paul declared that angels were created (Col. 1:16).

**Nature of Their Creation.** Because angels by nature are not sexual, they do not reproduce. No angel has come into existence by reproduction. Every angel was created directly and individually by God. They are called “sons of God” (Job 1:6; 38:7), indicating God is their source of origin; they are never called “sons of angels.” Consequently, angels are not departed spirits of deceased people.

**Time of Their Creation.** Three biblical passages, taken together, indicate when they were created.

Job 38:6–7 indicates they existed before the earth was created. Exodus 20:11 reveals that God created the heavens (plural in the Hebrew text); the earth; the sea; and all the life forms that exist in the heavens, on Earth, and in the sea within the six days of creation of Genesis 1. Angels would be included here.

Genesis 1:1 states, “In the beginning God created the heavens [plural in the Hebrew text] and the earth.” Exodus 20:11 states, “In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth.” Thus the creative activity of Genesis 1:1 took place within the scope of those same six days, not before or after. A reading of Genesis 1:1–5 prompts the conclusion that those verses refer to the first day of the six days of creation.

Taken together, these three passages prompt the following conclusions. First, angels were created sometime before the earth (Job 38:6–7). Second, they were created within the six days of creation of Genesis 1. Third, God created the heavens and Earth on the first day of the six days of creation. Fourth, God created the angels on the first day of creation, after the heavens, but before the earth.

Consequently, people who deny that angels exist also deny the truth of Scripture and the reality that a spiritual world exists that they cannot see.
It was bizarre to see myself lying on the floor of my allergist’s office. I lay at a slight angle in the narrow hallway, flanked on all sides by the clinic staff. The fantastic blue and white shirt I had just bought from Limited Express was sliced up the middle and open like a jacket. My body was a lifeless shade of blue. Head tilted back, eyes blankly staring, I heard the panicked shouts of doctors. “We can’t intubate! We can’t get an airway! Start CPR! We’re losing her! We’re losing her!”

The day had started ordinarily. I was 22 and a first-grade teacher at a small Christian school in New Hampshire, where I grew up. My mother was the administrator. She gave me my first job out of college. My father is the pastor of the church that still houses that school today.

My mother gave me so much more than a job. When I was six years old, I sat on the stairs in my parents’ home, eavesdropping as Mom shared the story of Christ’s redemptive love with a dear friend. Perched on those steps, my eyes shut tightly, I prayed in earnest and gave my life to Christ. I grew up in that strong Christian home and graduated from Gordon College. My faith had deep roots, and I knew my hope and help lay in Christ alone.

I had finished teaching that day and got into my little red Colt hatchback (I had named it Rusty) to run errands. First stop, Dartmouth Hitchcock Clinic in Nashua to get shots that were supposed to desensitize me to the world I was allergic to. After the shots, patients wait in the office for a mandatory 20 minutes in case of a reaction. I waited 40 minutes, immersing myself in a book. I got up feeling a bit odd; but I cleared my throat, got a drink, and was off to errand number two.
My wedding day was only three months away, and I needed shoes to go with my wedding dress. I was going to marry my college sweetheart, Evan Jeanes. While in the store, the clerk commented, “You don’t look too good. Can I do something to help?”

“No, I uh. I don’t know. I guess I’ll just go,” I replied.

I got into Rusty feeling a little confused and got back on Route 3, a large stretch of which was under construction. Traffic was backed up and moving slowly. I didn’t feel right. I couldn’t catch my breath, and I felt a crushing weight on my chest. Something was wrong. I looked in my rearview mirror and saw myself. I was very, very blue.

I tried to drive back to the clinic. There were no cell phones for regular folks in 1995. I had one thought only: I need God’s grace and mercy. Silently I prayed four words over and over again as though they were the only ones that mattered: “Jesus, please help me!” He was my only thought and my only hope.

I drove to within a mile of the clinic and got stuck in traffic. There was no one with me and no radio playing when I heard a voice say with great authority, “Get out of the car.” So I did. I locked it, as Evan had taught me to do, and started for the side of the road.

Confused and waiting for further instructions, I swayed unsteadily for a moment. As if out of nowhere, a young man with blonde hair came running toward me. He was about six feet tall, around 18 to 20 years of age, wearing light-colored jeans and a T-shirt. He easily caught me up in his arms, just as I do with any of my five children today when they are hurt.

I don’t remember a car ride or being in a car. The next thing I knew, I was standing halfway down the long hall in the clinic. The man who had caught me up was on my left. He was supporting me so that my left arm was bent, elbow out, and my hand at my chest. He was tall, so my right was another man. He was about 5 feet 9 inches tall and had dark hair, a friendly face, and also wore jeans and a T-shirt. He had my other arm, his hand on my side. My right arm, too, was bent but was lower than my left arm, as he held my other elbow to support me.

Then I was on the floor, the clinic staff working feverishly to save me. I knew I was dying. I thought, Lord, I guess I am going to die. I am coming home. Please be with my dear Evan. Comfort him and send him someone who loves him as much as I do. He will be so sad. Be with my family. Comfort them, too. Lord. Help them. Father, forgive me for anything I have done that has offended you.

After I prayed, I experienced no fear, no pain, no worry. There was a peace that passes all understanding—a wonderful, quiet place where I was resting. I cannot say how much time went by or what happened, but I heard a voice in the darkness. It was a man praying, “Lord, help me. She is so young, and I see she is promised to another. Let me help her.”

Then there was nothing.

The Amazing Truth

Blazing light. My mother crying. My father’s cool hand on my head. Prayers on his lips. More chaos. “She’s in shock,” I heard someone say. “All the blankets we have are on her. We’ll have to wait and see.”

I hadn’t known the terrible things that had happened while I was at great peace. A test to determine my brain activity had been conducted. It was decided I would be buried in my wedding dress. My fiancé was told that, if I pulled through, I would not be the person he had fallen in love with. There would be brain damage.

I lay in bed absorbing that something bad had happened. My mother kept asking me a question to determine if I still had my smarts. As I croaked out that I had sent home from school a child who had chicken pox, my mom crumpled onto the floor, weeping for joy.

When I was stabilized, I was transferred by ambulance to Southern Regional Medical Center’s Intensive Care Unit for three days. I had been administered enough Epinephrine and Benadryl for a large horse, and now everyone was worried about my heart. I had lost my short-term memory and suffered a stroke, all due to a highly rare, delayed reaction to the allergy shots.

Finally out of danger, I was released into the care of my parents who brought me to see my allergist. There it became clear that God, who holds all things together, had extended His amazing grace to me.

The doctor inquired how I had come to the clinic since my car was found locked, with the engine still running, a mile away. I surely could not have walked because when I arrived, he said, my heart was only beating twice a minute and I was less than 60 seconds away from death.

I related my story and asked, “The boys who brought me in, do you know who they are?”

“Boys? Let me ask the receptionist who saw you come in.”

In came the receptionist, looking dazed and confused. She clasped my hands with tears in her eyes.

“I was wondering about the boys who brought me here. Did they stay to see what happened to me?” I asked.

“There was no one with you,” she replied. “It was the strangest thing. There is a bell on the door. Anytime anyone comes in, I know immediately. But the bell never rang. I was working and happened to look up; and there you were, halfway down the hall. One elbow was up like this, the other like this,” she said as she demonstrated the exact way I had been supported by the boys. “But there was no one with you. You were blue, and I ran down the back hall to get you help.”

You could have heard a pin drop as I told them about the boy who caught me up in his arms and how, suddenly, I was in the hall. They referred me to a neurologist who said my brain and body had been so shut down that I even lacked the capacity to hallucinate. If I believed I saw something, he said, I saw it.

Later I received a telephone call from a gentleman I had never met. He had been in an advanced life-support ambulance that was driving by the clinic precisely when the clinic put the call out for help. He asked me what I could remember about that day. When I told him I
heard a prayer in the peaceful darkness, he fell silent. “I said that prayer. I intubated you and was breathing for you with a bag for 45 minutes. I always pray for whom I’m working on, but I never pray out loud. You heard my prayer ascending to heaven.”

Since that day in May 1995, I have married my dearest Evan. He is a wonderful man who stood by my side while I recovered. God has blessed us with five beautiful children. Over the years, I have looked back and reflected on these events. My story ran in two large, local newspapers and on a syndicated radio talk show. No one has ever come forward with information on the boys. No one but me saw them.

As a child of God, I know who they were. They were angels whom God sends as ministers to those who are heirs of salvation. I was lifted up by angels and extended the grace of a loving God. God does not always deliver us from death and disease. My dear mother recently lost her battle with ovarian cancer; and I have friends who lost their children, parents, and niece in a horrible accident.

Yet God tells us, “I have loved you with an everlasting love,” and “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Jer. 31:3; Heb. 13:5). His ways are not our ways, but His ways are perfect. “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

God always has a plan. Today I volunteer for an organization called Global Benefit. I am the project manager for Abolition of Human Trafficking. As I read about the horrors of the modern slave trade and prepare to educate the youth of this nation in order to effect a change, I give thanks to God for letting me be part of a redemptive kind of love. I thank Him for saving me when I was sitting on the stairs at my parents’ home, for supernaturally delivering me from certain death, and for the gift of every day—no matter what that day brings.

My God is one who answers those who call on His name. In fact, He often gives us more than we could ever ask or hope for. And the wonderful thing about God’s grace is that it’s available to us all.

EDITOR’S NOTE: We serve a great and mighty God who helps us more than we will ever realize. I have known the Jeanes family for many years; and I remember when Erica had this experience, which was verified by a host of competent medical personnel. I asked her to write this article as an encouragement to those of us who belong to the Lord. Angels are as real today as they were when they spoke to Mary and Joseph about the birth of Jesus. And though most of us will never see one here on Earth, we will surely rejoice in their presence when we are with the Lord in heaven.

Merry Christmas from your family in the faith at The Friends of Israel.

—Lorna Simcox

Angels and Salvation

God created all the angels holy and free of sin. Yet not all remained that way.

Those who personally chose to stay holy became irrevocably confirmed in their state of holiness. Angels who chose to rebel against God lost their holiness and became locked into an irrevocably fallen state of evil from which they cannot be redeemed. Scripture indicates God does not provide salvation for fallen angels.

Hebrews 2:14–16 implies the only way salvation can be provided for fallen beings is by the Savior taking on Himself the nature of those beings. He must become the same type of being as they. Christ became a human being to provide salvation for fallen humans; but He did not become an angel, indicating salvation is not available for fallen angels: “For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham” (v. 16).

Furthermore, the apostle Peter said angels are intrigued by salvation (1 Pet. 1:9–12). They continuously desire to understand how God provided redemption for fallen human beings. It is a mystery, something they “desire to look into” (v. 12), because they themselves can never personally experience salvation.

In 1894 Johnson Oatman, Jr. wrote the words for the hymn “Holy, Holy, Is What the Angels Sing.” The chorus expresses this truth: Holy, holy, is what the angels sing, And I expect to help them make the courts of heaven ring, But when I sing redemption’s story, they will fold their wings, For angels never felt the joys that our salvation brings.

by Renald E. Showers
Their movements are instantaneous, darting with lightning speed in their service to Almighty God (Ezek. 1:19–21). The prophet Ezekiel described them as formidable beings radiating intense brightness and generating what appear to be flashes of lightning. With bodies similar to that of men—but with four faces oriented in opposing directions, two sets of wings, hands, and calf-like feet (vv. 5–13)—how is it they came to be recognized as baby-like creatures sporting dimply bodies and stubby wings?

The first mention of cherubim (Hebrew, plural of cherub) occurs shortly after Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden. God stationed cherubim with a flaming sword at the entrance to guard the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). In early Christian art, however, cherubim were often portrayed as bodiless heads with wings—their spiritual nature reflected by the absence of a body. With heads representing their intellect and ability to communicate with God, wings identified them with the divine or celestial.

Italian artists of the Quattrocento are primarily responsible for the visual depictions we commonly associate with angels. In the 1400s, Italian Renaissance painter Raphael borrowed and adapted a motif from Greek and Roman myth, applying it to the sacred in his widely known rendition of cherubs in The Sistine Madonna. Starting with the early Renaissance through the Baroque period and up to the present, artistic depictions of cherubs are erroneously interchanged with this motif known as putto. Taken from the Latin meaning “little man,” putti (plural) are not human babies but, rather, mischievous, winged creatures associated with profane activities or erotic love in classical themes. This motif became so entrenched that, by the Baroque Era, the only way to differentiate between cherubs and putti was the context of the art.1

Consequently, art may be a legitimate medium for expression, but it isn’t the best way to discover biblical truth.

ENDNOTE

by Charles E. McCracken
The Devil (the chief evil spirit) is an intriguing personality. The late comic Flip Wilson made audiences roar with his routine “the Devil made me do it.” Books, songs, and documentaries are devoted to the person and work of the Devil. More often than not, he is taken lightly. Doing so is a mistake, however, because he is a powerful adversary. Yet he will never defeat God.

To help people understand this enemy, the Bible reveals the Devil’s origin, work, and fate. Arriving on earth after creation—after “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen. 1:31)—he inhabited the body of a serpent and cunningly tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden (3:1).

Angels, from the Greek word angelos (Hebrew, malach), also called sons of God, were created by God (Ps. 148:2–5) and are His messengers. They were present when God laid the foundations of the earth, for “the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:4, 7).

The most beautiful of all God’s messengers was an angel named Lucifer (“light-bearer,” from the Latin Vulgate; Isa. 14:12). As the “anointed cherub who covers” (Ezek. 28:14), he was “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty . . . in Eden, the garden of God; . . . every precious stone was [his] covering” (vv. 12–13).

Sometime after God declared His creation perfect, Lucifer lost his place in heaven and became ha-satan, Satan, the accuser or adversary. The transformation was a result of pride. Not satisfied with his position under God, he wanted to be like Him: “I will ascend into heaven, I will
exalt my throne above the stars of God; I
will also sit on the mount of the con-
gregation; . . . I will ascend above the
heights of the clouds, I will be like the
Most High” (Isa. 14:13–14).

Yet God promised him, “You shall be
brought down to Sheol, to the lowest
depths of the Pit’’ (v. 15). This beautiful,
light-bearing creature was condemned
by his own pride (1 Tim. 3:6).

Satan’s fall tainted a sinless universe.
To make matters worse, Satan persuad-
ed one third of the angels to join him in
his sinful rebellion against God (Rev.
12:4). He then possessed the serpent and
tempted Eve, one of two innocent
humans living in the Garden of Eden.
After Eve disobeyed and ate the forbid-
den fruit, she gave it to her husband,
Adam, who did the same. Innocence dis-
appeared, and sin indwelt the human
race (Gen. 3). Satan usurped man’s posi-
tion as regent and ruler on the earth and
transformed a perfect universe into the
sin-cursed world we live in today.

In response to Satan’s evil, God
immediately promised to restore His
relationship with humanity by bring-
ing a Redeemer, first mentioned in
Genesis 3:15—the same chapter that
describes the Fall of Man.

Over the millennia, Satan has done
everything he can to try to thwart God’s
plan. Scripture describes him as a
tempter (Mt. 4:3); “ruler of the demons”
(9:34); a murder, liar, and father of lies
(Jn. 8:44); “the evil one” (17:15); a deceiv-
er (2 Cor. 11:3); the “prince of the power
of the air” (Eph. 2:2); a “great dragon”
and serpent (Rev. 12:9); and “the accuser
of our brethren” (v. 10).

Scripture records Satan winning
many battles, but he will be the ulti-
mate loser. With his demons and the
people who follow him, he will be
cast into the Lake of Fire where he
will be “tormented day and night for-
ever and ever” (20:10).
Unfortunately, Christmas has become a time of controversy over what can and cannot be done in terms of celebrating the holiday. To clear up much of the misunderstanding, the following 12 rules are offered.

1. Public school students’ written or spoken personal expressions concerning the religious significance of Christmas (e.g., T-shirts with the slogan, “Jesus Is the Reason for the Season”) may not be censored by school officials absent evidence that the speech would cause a substantial disruption.¹

2. So long as teachers are generally permitted to wear clothing or jewelry or have personal items expressing their views about the holidays, Christian teachers may not be prohibited from similarly expressing their views by wearing Christmas-related clothing or jewelry or carrying Christmas-related personal items.²

3. Public schools may teach students about the Christmas holiday, including its religious significance, so long as it is taught objectively for secular purposes, such as its historical or cultural importance, and not for the purpose of promoting Christianity.³

4. Public school teachers may send Christmas cards to the families of their students so long as they do so on their own time, outside of school hours.⁴

5. Public schools may include Christmas music, including those with religious themes, in their choral programs if the songs are included for a secular purpose, such as their musical quality or cultural value, or if the songs are part of an overall performance including other holiday songs relating to Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or other similar holidays.⁵

6. Public schools may not require students to sing Christmas songs whose messages conflict with the students’ own religious or nonreligious beliefs.⁶

7. Public school students may not be prohibited from distributing literature to fellow students concerning the Christmas holiday or invitations to church Christmas events on the same terms that they would be allowed to distribute other literature that is not related to schoolwork.⁷

8. Private citizens or groups may display crèches or other Christmas symbols in public parks subject to the same reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions that would apply to other similar displays.⁸

9. Government entities may erect and maintain celebrations of the Christmas holiday, such as Christmas trees and Christmas light displays, and may include crèches in their displays at least so long as the purpose for including the crèche is not to promote its religious content and it is placed in context with other symbols of the holiday season as part of an effort to celebrate...
the public Christmas holiday through its traditional symbols.  

10. Neither public nor private employers may prevent employees from decorating their offices for Christmas, playing Christmas music, or wearing clothing related to Christmas merely because of their religious content so long as these activities are not used to harass or intimidate others.  

11. Public or private employees whose sincerely held religious beliefs require that they not work on Christmas must be reasonably accommodated by their employers unless granting the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the employer.  

12. Government recognition of Christmas as a public holiday and granting government employees a paid holiday for Christmas does not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.  

For more information, e-mail The Rutherford Institute in Charlottesville, Virginia, at staff@rutherford.org. To request assistance, complete its online form or contact its Legal Department at 434–978–3888.

ENDNOTES


2 See Tinker, 393 U.S. at 506 (“It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate”). See also Tucker v. California Dep’t of Ed., 97 F.3d 1204 (9th Cir. 1996) and Nichol v. Arin Intermediate Unit 28, 268 F. Supp. 2d 536 (W.D. Pa. 2003).


5 Bauchman v. West High School, 132 F.3d 542, 554 (10th Cir. 1997); Florey v. Sioux Falls School Dist., 619 F.2d 1311 (8th Cir. 1980); Sechler v. State College Area Sch. Dist., 121 F.Supp. 2d. 439 (M.D. Penn. 2000).

6 Id. at 557.


8 See Capital Square Review and Advisory Board v. Pinette, 515 U.S. 753 (1995); Kreisner v. City of San Diego, 1 F.3d 775 (9th Cir. 1993); McCrery v. Stone, 739 F.2d 716 (2d Cir. 1984); Snowden v. Town of Bay Harbor Islands, 358 F. Supp. 2d 1178 (S.D. Fla. 2004).


10 § 42 U.S.C. 2000(e)(j); Warnock v. Archer, 380 F.3d 1076, 1082 (8th Cir. 2004); Tucker v. California Dep’t of Ed., 97 F.3d 1204 (9th Cir. 1996); Brown v. Polk County, 61 F.3d 650, 659 (8th Cir. 1995).


Christ’s Perfect Priesthood

Many first-century Hebrew Christians struggled to understand the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Growing up under the Levitical system of animal sacrifices, they had centered their faith in the Aaronic priesthood and Mosaic Law. Hebrews 7:11–28 shows why the Levitical priesthood had to be replaced for theological reasons and, in great detail, explains that Christ’s priesthood is superior.

Christ’s Priesthood Is Perfect

The Levitical system could not bring people to “perfection” (completeness or maturity):

If perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law (Heb. 7:11–12).

The Law was transitory, and it was abrogated at Christ’s resurrection. Christ was a Priest, not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek. (See “Who Is Melchizedek?” in the September/October issue of Israel My Glory.)

Since the priesthood was changed, “of necessity there is also a change of the law” in connection with the priesthood. The Law, being “holy and just and good” (Rom. 7:12), demanded perfect righteousness—something that sinful men who functioned as priests could never provide. Therefore, mankind’s hope for perfect standing before God had to be brought about outside the Aaronic priesthood and Mosaic Law. Thus Christ is the only one qualified to function as High Priest on behalf of sinners.

This was a new concept in the first century, and many Jewish people found it difficult to understand and accept; their faith had been centered in the Aaronic priesthood for centuries. Yet Jesus’ own words in Mark 2:21–22 state that their new faith could not be poured into old wineskins or used as a patch to strengthen their Jewish beliefs.

Christ’s Priesthood Is Permanent

Hebrews 7:13–19 provides a number of reasons why Christ’s perfect priesthood supersedes Aaron’s.

First, Christ was not from the tribe of Levi but from “another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar” (v. 13). Christ sprang from Judah, from King David’s seed (Isa. 11:1; Mt. 1:1; Acts 2:29–31; Rom. 1:3), “of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood” (Heb. 7:14). Although this concept was new to first-century Jewish believers, God graciously planned and foretold this development centuries before it occurred. Christ would be a different type of Priest, one in the “likeness of Melchizedek” (v. 15).

Second, the Aaronic priesthood was “according to the law of a fleshly commandment” (v. 16). The Levitical priesthood had to be done away with because it sprang out of the Mosaic Law. The Law stipulated that only the family of Aaron from the tribe of Levi could function in the priesthood (Num. 18:1–32). If Christ were to be a Priest, He would need to be from a different order.

Unlike the Aaronic priesthood, Christ’s priesthood was “according to the power of an endless [indissoluble] life” (Heb. 7:16). He is the eternal Son of God (Jn. 1:1); Creator and Sustainer of all things (Col. 1:16–17); and, unlike an Aaronic priest, has power to bestow eternal life (Jn. 11:25–26). Whereas the Aaronic priesthood eventually ceased, Christ’s appointment as High Priest will last forever because He is “a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:17; cf. Ps. 110:4).

Third, for the Aaronic priesthood to change, it was necessary to change the Law (Heb. 7:12). There needed to be the “annulling [putting away or making void] of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness [uselessness]” (v. 18). The Law was unprofitable because (1) it was unable to make people perfect, that is, to complete the process by producing eternal life; (2) it was not possible for the blood of animal sacrifices offered by the Aaronic priesthood to take away sins (10:4, 11); and (3) it was also impossible for the Law to provide or produce righteousness.

Consequently, “the law made nothing perfect [complete]” (7:19). It was incapable of bringing people into a right standing before God. In fact, the Law never brought people near to God; it kept them far from Him. The apostle Paul called the Law “our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). The Law was added because of sin “till the Seed [Christ] should come” (v. 19), enabling people to be justified by faith in Christ as the only way to be declared righteous before God (v. 23).

However, the Law did pave the way for a “better hope” (Heb. 7:19) through...
the new priesthood of Christ, who could bring people to a perfect (complete) standing before God. In other words, it was necessary that the Law and Levitical priesthood be put away for Christ to function as a perfect High Priest. The new priesthood of Christ opened a way of access “through which we draw near to God” (v. 19). Through Christ, all believers are encouraged to come boldly to God’s throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (4:14–16).

Fourth, Christ’s priesthood is sealed with an eternal oath by God; the Aaronic priesthood was not:

And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He [Christ] with an oath by Him [God the Father] who said to Him [Christ]: “The LORD has sworn and will not relent [change His mind], ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’”), by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant (7:20–22).

A key difference between these two priesthoods is that Christ’s is sealed with an eternal oath insuring its perpetuity and the Levitical priesthood was not. Thus Christ was made a Priest by an eternal oath providing “a surety,” or guarantee, that He will fulfill the promises made in the “better covenant” (New Covenant) that God inaugurated through His shed blood.

Fifth, Christ’s priesthood is superior to the Aaronic priesthood in that it is not interrupted by death. The Aaronic priesthood was temporary; its priests would die and be replaced (v. 23). In contrast, Christ’s priesthood will never be terminated “because He continues forever, [and] has an unchangeable priesthood” (v. 24). Unlike the Aaronic priesthood, Christ’s priesthood is incapable of being altered, passed on to a successor, or terminated—because He is eternal and His priesthood will abide forever.

Consequently, Christ “is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him” (v. 25). The word uttermost speaks of the comprehensiveness or completeness of our salvation. Christ saves the total person (body, soul, and spirit) from the power and penalty of sin, and at our glorification He will deliver us from the presence of sin.

Christ is able to provide such complete salvation because “He always lives to make intercession” for us (v. 25). The word intercession encompasses Christ’s entire ministry on behalf of believers, based on the merits of His sacrifice. He is an ever-living Priest who continually intercedes for the needs of all believers before God’s throne in heaven.

Christ’s Priesthood Portrayed

After describing the perfection and permanence of Christ’s high priesthood, the author culminated his argument by shouting, “For such a High Priest was fitting for us” (v. 26). In other words, because of His character, Christ is the only High Priest suitable to officiate before God on behalf of sinful mankind. In simplistic beauty, the writer now pulls together the salient features of what he presented, painting a final portrait of Christ’s great priesthood.

His Person: Christ is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens” (v. 26). Holy (Greek, hosios) speaks of the innate purity of Christ’s character. He is “harmless” (guileless) or free from malice and deceit of any kind. He is “undefiled,” free from any moral impurity. He is “separate from sinners”; though He ate and drank with sinners, Christ never sinned. He “has become higher than the heavens.” Christ has entered into God’s presence, being enthroned in the highest place of honor and power. His character makes Him a fitting High Priest to meet humanity’s needs.

His Provision: Christ “does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (v. 27). Aaronic priests continually had to offer sacrifices for themselves and others because the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin (Heb. 10:4). In contrast, Christ did not have to offer a sacrifice for His own sins, for He is sinless. Yet for the sins of mankind He offered Himself, once for all, as a blood sacrifice to expiate sins. His sacrifice makes Him a fitting High Priest to meet all the needs of mankind.

His Perpetual Priesthood: “For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever” (7:28).

To persuade Jewish believers of Christ’s sovereign priesthood, the writer pulled together the threads of all he had previously stated, contrasting the two priesthoods. Aaronic priests were ordained under the Law, but Christ’s perfect priesthood is since the Law (cf. Ps. 110:4), showing that He superseded them. Aaronic priests were ordained by the Law, but Christ was ordained by “the word of the oath, which came after the law” (Heb. 7:28). The Aaronic priests had infirmities (weakness of the flesh), but Christ is perfect. They served only during their lifetimes, but Jesus Christ the Son is a Priest forever. Christ’s consecration as High Priest is perfect and permanent in every detail and will continue eternally.

With great enthusiasm, the author shouted, “We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb. 8:1).

Friend, Jesus is an unchangeable High Priest who offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin once for all. He is an ever-living Priest whom we will someday see face to face and enjoy throughout eternity, a Priest who is able to save to the uttermost and is seated at God’s right hand, making intercession on our behalf. With the apostle Peter we exclaim, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn. 6:68).
God's Anger and Wrath

The Bible reveals that God experiences anger and wrath. Many words, both in the Old and New Testaments, express this fact.

Old Testament Words

In the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, nouns for God’s wrath appear some 375 times. The word chemah refers to divine wrath at least 85 times. It seems to receive its meaning from a root term that means “be hot” or “be ardent.” Deuteronomy 29:23 declares that God overthrew Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim “in His anger and His wrath.”

The word aph has the basic meaning “snort” and the related meaning “nose.” Thus Psalm 18:7–8 says, because God was “angry,” “smoke went up from His nostrils.”

The verb qasap and its related noun, qesep, involve “dismay, indignation, and resentment, as well as wrath and anger.” The noun refers to God’s “indignation, emotionally more or less explosive and often destructive.”

The word rogez usually means “disturbance” and less frequently means “anger.” Seven passages relate rogez to God’s revelation of power. For example, Isaiah 23:11 asserts that God “shook the kingdoms.”

Thirty times in the Old Testament the noun ebra means “anger, wrath,” or “expression of wrath”; and five times the verb abar means “be angered.” In most instances, the noun and verb “refer to divine wrath.” Isaiah 9:9 states, “Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts the land is burned up, and the people shall be as fuel for the fire; no man shall spare his brother.” Both words are often “combined with other words referring to anger.”

New Testament Words

In contrast with the Hebrew Old Testament, the Greek New Testament has only two words for God’s anger or wrath: orge and thumos.

Orge refers to God’s wrath 22 times. For example, Romans 1:18 declares, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”

Thumos refers to God’s wrath 10 times. One reference is in Revelation 15:7: “Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever.”

Language scholar Friedrich Buchisel claimed there is “no material difference” between these two words. W. E. Vine, however, said the following regarding thumos:

[It] is to be distinguished from orge in that thumos indicates more agitated feelings, an outburst of wrath from inward indignation, while orge suggests a more settled or abiding condition of mind, frequently with a view to taking revenge. Orge is less sudden in its rise than thumos, but more lasting in its nature. Thumos expresses more the inward feeling, orge the more active emotion. Thumos may issue in revenge, though it does not necessarily include it. It is characteristic that it quickly blazes up and quickly subsides, though that is not necessarily implied in each case.
Expressions of God’s Wrath

The Bible uses some terms as figurative expressions of the nature of God’s anger and wrath but also as literal expressions of ways God’s wrath is administered.

Fire. God’s anger is “kindled” (Ps. 78:21). Smoke is in His nose, and fire burns there “all the day” (Isa. 65:5). God’s name is “burning with His anger,” and His tongue is “like a devouring fire” (30:27). His wrath incinerates (9:19). He blows against targets “with the fire” of His wrath (Ezek. 21:31), and His breath is “like a stream of brimstone” (Isa. 30:33).

God used literal fire to consume 250 men who presumed to take upon themselves functions restricted exclusively to the Aaronic priesthood (Num. 16:35). God will use fire and brimstone to destroy the forces of Gog and his allies when they invade Israel in the future (Ezek. 38:21–22).

Storm. Isaiah 30:30 associates the indignation of God’s anger with “tempest, and hailstones.” Jeremiah 30:23–24 states, “Behold, the whirlwind of the LORD goes forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind; it will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD will not return until He has done it, and until He has performed the intents of His heart.”

In the days of Noah God literally caused an unparalleled storm of rain for 40 days and nights in order to destroy the wicked people of the earth (Gen. 7:4).

Pouring. Because the rulers of Judah were evil, God declared, “I will pour out My wrath on them like water” (Hos. 5:10). After asking who can endure the fierceness of God’s anger, Nahum asserted, “His fury is poured out like fire” (Nah. 1:6).

In the future, seven angels will be given “seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever”; and a loud voice from the heavenly Temple will tell the angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth” (Rev. 15:7; 16:1).

Drinking. The Bible uses the metaphor of people, cities, and nations being forced to drink God’s wrath. Job referred to a person drinking “of the wrath of the Almighty” (Job 21:20). Psalm 75:8 states, “in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down.” God commanded the prophet Jeremiah, “Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it” (Jer. 25:15). Drinking was “to make them a desolation, an astonishment, a hissing, and a curse” (v. 18). Isaiah 51:17 declared that Jerusalem had “drunk at the hand of the LORD the cup of His fury; you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling, and drained it out.” The consequence of the city drinking God’s wrath was “desolation and destruction, famine and sword” (v. 19; see also v. 22).

In Revelation 14:9–10 an angel shouted, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation.” In the future, the great city Babylon will be remembered before God “to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath” (16:19). “All the nations’ will “have drunk of the wine of the wrath of” that great city’s “fornication” (18:3; cf. 19:15).

Winepress of Wrath. In the future an angel will “thrust his sickle into the earth” and gather “the wine of the earth,” and throw it “into the great winepress of the wrath of God” (Rev. 14:19). The winepress will be “trampled outside the city,” and blood will come from it “up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs [200 miles]” (v. 20). When Jesus Christ will come from heaven in His Second Coming, He Himself will crush Satan and his rule of the world system by treading “the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (19:15).

A Rod. As Jeremiah witnessed the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, he lamented, “I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath” (Lam. 3:1).

Casting. Concerning the plagues that God inflicted on Egypt, the psalmist stated, “He cast on them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, and trouble, by sending angels of destruction” (Ps. 78:49).

Marching. God “marched through the land in indignation” (Hab. 3:12).

ENDNOTES

3. Ibid., 462.
6. Ibid., 90.
9. Ibid., 110.
10. Ibid., 109.
12. Ibid. 308.
15. Ibid.
Dutch hatred thrives online

Arutz 7—Virulent anti-Semitism thrives on a Dutch social media Web site used by nearly half of the entire population of Holland, according to a recent report. And many of the online instigators appear to be Dutch-speaking Arabs.

“Posts which call for killing Jews are quite common. Others contain calls to burn Israeli flags. We also noticed public calls for Hitler to ‘finish his job’ or ‘to gas the Jews,’” the report explains, adding that the forums also host various libels against Israel and Jews. Perhaps more seriously, a pro-Palestinian group called The Jihad Fighters openly praises suicide bombers who target civilians.

The report, produced by investigators from Yad Vashem, the Dutch-language Israel Facts Monitor group, and the Network on Anti-Semitism based in the Netherlands, was provided to all the political parties in the Netherlands, as well as to members of the Dutch government.

“Anti-Semitism and hatred toward Israel containing anti-Semitic content is a common phenomenon on the Internet in the Netherlands,” the report declares. “Remarks which were unthinkable only 10 years ago are now common practice and do not seem to raise eyebrows anymore.” In fact, after three months of regular monitoring, the investigators concluded, “The climate in which the public debate about Israel and the Middle East conflict is taking place on the Internet is deteriorating.”

The report presents examples and trends of anti-Israel blood libels, violent anti-Semitic hate speech and, simultaneously, Holocaust denial, smearing Israelis as Nazis and calls for returning Jews to the death camps. For the purpose of gauging online Dutch social media, the investigators monitored closed and open groups on the Facebook-like Hyves social networking Web site, which claims around 9 million members, and the talkback section of de Volkskrant, a leading newspaper in Holland.

Thirty-five groups on Hyves are defined as either “pro-Palestinian” or “anti-Israel.” The majority “are run by young Arab immigrants or descendants of Arab immigrants living in the Netherlands.” While the most popular anti-Israel or pro-Palestinian groups have several thousand members, the largest pro-Israel Hyves forum has 900.

Hamas trains in Judean desert

Arutz 7—A complex network of caves embedded in the Judean desert hills have become the latest venue for Hamas training programs. Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers have found a complex network of tunnels and caves, some of which contain empty bullet casings and cartridges, as well as other bits of evidence of military activity.

More than a year ago, IDF soldiers uncovered a 150-meter-long tunnel packed with explosives under the southern Judean city of Hebron. An entire network of tunnels used by terrorists to launch attacks against IDF soldiers was also discovered in 2007 in the Casbah, the inner part of the open air market in the Samarian city of Shechem.

Breath test detects cancer

Arutz 7—Scientists at the Technion in Haifa have created a device called the “breathalyzer” that has detected lung cancer with 86 percent accuracy. The new device was revealed recently in the journal Nature Nanotechnology.

In addition, the test can detect cancers that are not yet large enough to show up on X-rays or CT scans. It works by testing for chemicals that tend to be in cancerous lungs but not in healthy lungs. Researcher Hossam Haick and his team have patented their device and inexpensive enough to be used in day-to-day practice in hospitals and clinics.

U.S. poll supports Israel

Arutz 7—A majority of Americans support Israel and blame Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) for the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, according to a new poll commissioned by The Israel Project.

Americans blame the PA for the current problems in Gaza (56 percent to 18 percent) and “Hamas leaders who control Gaza” for the current humanitarian crisis (66 percent to 17 percent), the Public Opinion Strategies and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research poll of registered voters revealed.

Nearly half of Americans polled say they have seen, read, or heard “a lot” about the military conflict in the Gaza Strip and sided with Israel’s anti-terror efforts over the PA by a 57 percent to 8 percent margin. The figures are virtually unchanged from pre-Gaza War polling in November 2008 (57 percent to 6 percent).

Pollled voters said they believe the Israeli-PA conflict is about ideology and religion (73 percent), and peace can only be achieved by acknowledging each other’s right to exist. Only 19 percent said they think the conflict is really about land.

No to UN flag

Arutz 7—Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed that the Israeli flag will continue to fly over the Western Wall (Kotel), ignoring U.S. President Barack Obama’s apparent trial balloon that he wants to see the UN flag fly over the Old City holy sites.

Declared Netanyahu, “The flag that flies over the Kotel is the Israeli flag. . . . Our holy places, the Temple Mount—will remain under Israeli sovereignty forever.”
UNRWA Never Helped, Never Will

Recently we’ve seen refugees from Iraq successfully integrate in Iceland, Slovakia, Norway, and the United States,” said Israeli Initiative spokesman Gidon Yisrael. “None of them are among those under UNRWA’s care. UNRWA does nothing to rehabilitate the refugees, and the millions of Palestinians under its care are doomed to remain refugees forever—that is, as long as the State of Israel survives.”

UNRWA is the UN agency tasked with assisting Arabs (now, primarily their descendants) who fled Israel during the 1948 War of Independence. The agency defines any descendant of an Arab who considered his or her primary place of residence to be pre-state Israel during the 23 months before the 1948 war as a “refugee.” It runs programs throughout the Middle East to provide refugees with housing, food, and education; in Gaza, UNRWA gives aid to approximately 80 percent of the population.

UNRWA “is an agency that has yet to rehabilitate a single refugee, and will never do so,” says Israeli Initiative’s head, former minister Benny Elon. “UNRWA was not created to serve the Palestinian population but, rather, to serve the Palestinian national narrative. As such, it perpetuates the conflict and offers the refugees conflict and blood instead of wellbeing and life.”

The Israeli Initiative states, “UNRWA’s mandate is one that has perpetuated the refugee situation for more than 60 years (!) and continues to keep the Palestinian refugees in a situation of humanitarian catastrophe. Billions of dollars given to the agency throughout the years by Western governments and organizations have not led yet to the rehabilitation of even one family.”
In Psalm 94:3 it is written, “How long will the wicked triumph?” There are many wicked people in this world, but it is especially sad when one of them is your neighbor. We have lived in this neighborhood in Jerusalem for 35 years and are friends with everyone here. But a new family moved in recently, and the man sees himself as ruler over the rest of us. Because he is strong, he has tried to frighten us; and he decided to start with me.

One day he came to our home without an invitation. “What do you want here?” I asked as I opened the door. “I know who you are,” he said “and in whom you believe.” He told me he had information that we believe in Christ and that, if I did not pay him to keep quiet, he would make certain the newspapers printed an article exposing my faith. “So you have to pay me,” he said.

Someone else came to me a few years ago, trying to frighten me the same way. And I told him the same thing I told this man. “Well,” I said, “If you can get the newspapers to write about me, you will do me a big favor.”

He was surprised that I was not afraid. “What will you tell them?” I asked. “That I believe in Christ and that I go to people and try to teach them according to the Bible so that they will come to know the Lord and receive Him as their Savior? If they write about me for free, it will be the best favor you could do for me. Because, as you well know, most people must pay much money for such fine publicity, and you want to give it to me for free! So I am very grateful. Thank you very much. I will wait for the publications to come out.”

Seeing that his threats did not produce the results he wanted, he said, “We will speak in another ‘language.’”

I told him, “I have lived through the Holocaust. I am not afraid of ones such as you. You should know that I put my trust in the Lord. I am not afraid of extortion. If you want it, I will also sign a document saying I believe in the Lord. And how do I believe? According to the Holy Bible. So now you may give my story to any newspapers you want. Do it! It will be a big blessing for people to learn about the Lord.”

He had come to me with such confidence that he could make me
fall on my knees before him in fear. Now he did not know what to do. After thinking a long time, he said, “You know, I will not ask you to pay much money.”

I replied, “I will not pay even one piaster. And, if you want to know about faith in the Lord, I will be happy to give you even more information so that you can write a very long story.”

When he realized he would not prevail, he left and began speaking to many ultra-Orthodox people to encourage them to make trouble for me. But that did not work either because most of the ultra-Orthodox know me. The Lord has blessed me with the ability to make house repairs, so they call me to their homes when they need help; and I help them for free.

So they came to me as friends. And what did they want to speak about? About faith in the Lord! They were surprised I told the man I believed in the Lord according to the Bible. “Where is this written?” one asked.

They were extremely interested in having me speak with them.

For years I have wanted these people to come to me sincerely seeking information about faith in the Lord. What I could not do myself, the Lord did through this man who tried to make trouble for me.

So I told my ultra-Orthodox friends that I do not read commentaries on the Bible. I read the Bible. I do not trust in what is written in rabbinical books. I trust what is written in the Bible by the Holy Spirit of God. I showed them my Bible, and we had a wonderful talk.

At the end, one said, “It was very interesting speaking with you. We will come again and have a long conversation.”

“You are welcome,” I said. So I thank God for sending a man who tried to harm me. God turned his evil into a blessing. I am waiting to see how many more people will come to my home seeking information about the Lord because of him.

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