But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.

(Micah 5:2)
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(Featuring the poetry of Elwood McQuaid)

“Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”
—2 Corinthians 9:15

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Many blessings to you this Hanukkah season!
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About This Issue
True or false is a test we learn to apply from our earliest days in grammar school. This issue of Israel My Glory answers the greatest true-or-false question in the universe. In this edition you’ll also meet some of the messianic wannabes who have deceived people who are looking for the Messiah. Charles McCracken and Peter Colón unmask these pretenders. Concerned about your religious freedoms being taken away? You should be. Craig Parshall’s insightful article on what’s happening in America and why we need to be alert to the growing war against the faith is essential reading. Bible studies, helpful charts, inspiration, and a lesson on how to discern truth from error—they’re all here, all centered in the true Messiah who is the Source, and all beautifully illustrated by Art Director Tom Williams. Enjoy! It’s our way of saying Merry Christmas. Our cover is an aerial view of a shepherd and his flock near Bethlehem (Yasha Mazur/Israelimages, digital enhancement, Thomas E. Williams).

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Before Benjamin Netanyahu began his current term as prime minister of Israel, he spoke about Iran at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. I’ll never forget hearing him declare with conviction, “There is no prime minister of Israel who wouldn’t do whatever is necessary to protect the Jewish people.” Today they need protection more than ever, as Iran’s new arsenal of weapons bolsters the country’s radical Shiite theology.

Some in the West dismiss Iran’s mullahs (religious authorities) and its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who boast they “can destroy Israel within a week” and that “annihilation of Israel should be a global goal.” However, these men are deadly serious. They believe a hidden Twelfth Imam will return to bring order to a chaotic world; so the more chaos, the better.

Iran’s arsenal now includes ballistic missiles that can carry nuclear or chemical warheads 1,500 miles, threatening not only Israel but also North Africa, Eastern Europe, the rest of the Middle East, and even most of India. And under development are missiles that could reach the United States.

In fact, on state television Iranians watch missiles rising from their desert sands into the air to chants of Allahu Akbar, “Allah is great.” Islamic suicide bombers in Israel shout the same mantra, as did the Islamic terrorists who destroyed the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001, and other chosen targets in the nation they call the “Great Satan.” With its delivery systems now in place, all Iran needs are the nuclear weapons.

Much attention has focused recently on Iran’s Russian-built nuclear power plant in the southern port city of Bushehr, which fired up in August. However, many believe the greater threat lies at undisclosed locations throughout the country where efforts to enrich uranium to nuclear-weapons grade are likely moving ahead with full steam, gaining Iran the ability to act on its threats to eliminate Israel, which is located well within range of Iran’s intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Unfortunately, the United States has responded almost lackadaisically. By emphasizing “engagement” and follow-up economic sanctions, the administration of President Barack Obama hopes to persuade Iran away from its nuclear intentions. While U.S. intelligence argues that Iran could be a year away from having “the bomb,” Israeli intelligence believes Iran could ratchet up its uranium-enrichment activities and have nuclear weapons within months.

We know Israel took out two other threatening reactors in the past: Iraq’s in 1981 and Syria’s in 2007. Israel’s response to the Iranian threat could include intercontinental ballistic missiles, air strikes, cruise missiles, or even strikes by drones. Meanwhile, Israel is watchful, attempting to assess the situation and also see if Iran makes any attempts to install antimissile and antiaircraft systems.

For us as Christians, Iran is more than a current-events or political issue. It is important in Bible prophecy. According to Ezekiel 38, Persia (present-day Iran) is part of a coalition of forces that invade Israel. Others in the coalition include Russia, Turkey, and the Islamic republics of Central Asia. It appears we are witnessing the alignment of nations according to the pattern of Ezekiel 38. Yet we know with absolute confidence Iran will not destroy Israel. The prophet Jeremiah proclaimed the certainty of God’s protection of the Jewish state and the Jewish people from the unholy designs of the world’s hostile nations:

Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock” (Jer. 31:10).

The Lord is the One in control—not Ahmadinejad, the mullahs, or any of Israel’s enemies. And He will protect His people.

If or when Israel strikes Iran to remove the immediate nuclear threat, we can expect the world’s reaction to be swift—against Israel. That’s when Christians with a biblical heart for God’s Chosen People will need to stand together against the vicious tide of world opinion and, with faith in our God, express our support in word and deed of Israel and the Jewish people.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
Whenever Washington, the Quartet (UN, U.S., EU, and Russia), or others pressure the Israelis and Palestinians to show up for pleasantries, photo-op grins, and handshakes, it is solely for the purpose of etching the appearance of progress—whether such is the case or not. And, more often than not, the participants already anticipate the impending failure and insignificant movement on substantive issues. Whatever the reality, what counts is an image creating the impression of forward motion.

And why, you may ask, are we so brash as to question the legitimacy of the banter regarding no preconditions? Because the idea of no-precondition negotiations is fantasy. Here’s evidence, as reported by IMRA (Independent Media Review Analysis).

On August 22, Saeb Erekat, chief negotiator for the Palestine Liberation Organization, delivered a message from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to the Quartet relating to meetings planned for September. In Erekat’s and Abbas’s dictionary, the words no preconditions actually mean the following nonnegotiable conditions:

1. Peace with Israeli settlements is not an option. All settlement activity must stop.
2. The shortest way to peace is to end all “Israeli occupation” of all territory Israel captured since June 4, 1967.
3. The Golan Heights, Lebanese territories, and East Jerusalem must be surrendered.
4. Talks must be predicated on the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.
5. Final-status issues must include the return of Arab “refugees” and release of all prisoners and bodies of the “martyrs” as an “entry point” to ending the conflict.

In a world that no longer understands the meaning of illegal and no-precondition negotiations, one must wonder if words any longer mean more than what those who recraft them to their advantage want them to mean.

Two conclusions are appropriate. First, America’s illegals will somehow be jury-rigged into permanent, legal status to benefit politicians vying for new constituencies.

Second, no-precondition negotiations will never become a reality. The term seems rigged to regale the international movers and shakers who seek acclaim as paragons of a Middle East peace, albeit one that will be neither a true nor lasting solution for Israelis or Palestinians.

In the end, a two-state solution, although a much-fondled objective, has no means available with which to cobbled together. Truth is, the Palestinians, as well as radicals in the Arab world, have no interest in two states living side by side in peace. Their oft-stated determination to take everything remains on the table.

Radical Islam’s goal is Israel’s surrender; Israel’s determination is to survive. And for the foreseeable future, the twain is not about to meet. But for the time being, the illusion of progress is an irresistible siren call, as are the photo ops.

by Elwood McQuaid

U.S. Middle East special envoy George Mitchell (left) waves to the press as he is met by Saeb Erekat, a chief Palestinian negotiator (Jim Hollander/EPA/Corbis).
No One To Talk To?

British scientist Stephen Hawking is one more atheist trying to tell us there is no God. In his new book, *The Grand Design*, Hawking contends, “Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing. Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist.” For him, the “Big Bang” was an inevitable result of the laws of physics. Thus “spontaneous creation” did the job without any need for God.

For the professor, there is a choice: to believe a God caused creation “for reasons we can’t understand” or that “a law of science,” which he presumably does understand, fused the creation. Thus we have the basic formula of the evolution theory: science is God. Moreover, a personal Creator God is the fantasy of dimwitted crackpots.

Most interesting in Hawking’s manifesto is a conclusion more explosive than the spontaneous-creation nonsense: “If you like, you can call the laws of science ‘God,’ but it wouldn’t be a personal God that you could meet, and ask questions.”

And there’s the rub. Here we are, mired in confusion and surrounded by enigmas, with no one to talk to. In the current swamp of political correctness, politicians and big thinkers are taking a crack at proffering their own, somewhat subtler, variations of the Hawking formula that are just as deadly.

Truth is, if a Higher Authority were not available, there would be compelling evidence that the creation inhabited by men of vastly differing convictions and agendas would self-destruct. If we were, in fact, alone on an orbiting molten mass covered by a thin carpet of clay—a Godless void—we would be doomed. If that scenario is the best the scientific elite can deliver, they can give us nothing at all—certainly not a better, enlightened world. The good news is there is an alternative to despair and a dead-end view of our existence.

Several years ago, an Orthodox Jew surveyed the seemingly endless struggle for Middle East peace and declared, “If God does not step in and save us, there is no hope for the future.” He was correct.

As I’m writing this, the main players in the Mideast peace talks are meeting in Washington, DC, in the hope of starting negotiations that could lead to a settlement. As they began their low-expectations deliberations, loud protests were already coming from Arab and Islamist elements declaring there would never be peace with Israel; and Hamas terrorists made their point by murdering four innocent Jewish residents of Judea.

Furthermore, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas declared that, should Israelis resume construction of living quarters in what Arabs call the “occupied territories,” including Jerusalem, talks would immediately end. In the whole fabric of conflict visible everywhere on this planet, there is no evidence a humanly devised, spontaneous eruption could provide the answers we desperately need.

The good news is there is a Power outside of ourselves—someone with whom we can meet and talk and from whom we can get answers to our most perplexing questions. The first answer comes from the affirming Word:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). And that’s merely the start. Every created wonder, great and small, confirms that indisputable fact. So much so that, contrary to all no-God theories (including the delusion of a spontaneous bang), the psalmist could say with accuracy and confirmable authority, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1).

Moreover, God is (contrary to Hawking’s thinking) someone we can meet and, by prayer, legitimately ask any questions we want to ask. That intimate relationship became available to all who believe because of the deliverance brought to us through the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The issue is not the existence of God but, rather, the exclusion of Him. Here’s the picture:

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20).

A preacher friend frequently used to say the message was not “the theories, guesses, and speculations of men but the sure Word of God.”

In or out. That’s the choice.
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A More Perfect Union

by Craig L. Parshall

Julea Ward was getting A’s in her classes. She had completed all of her required work for a master’s degree in counseling at Eastern Michigan University, but problems arose during her practicum. Julea was assigned a client who was suffering from depression. After reviewing the file, she recognized he had also sought counseling regarding his homosexual relationship with another man.

Julea spoke with her supervising professor and asked that the client be assigned to another counselor. She had been outspoken about her Christian worldview in the counseling program and told her supervisor she could not in good conscience affirm homosexual behavior in a counseling setting. Her stand cost her a master’s degree. The university barred Julea from graduating.

On July 27 George Steeh, U.S. District judge for the Eastern District of Michigan, issued an opinion in the case of Julea Ward v. Roy Wilbanks (and other Eastern Michigan University officials). He ruled in favor of the university, saying none of Julea’s First Amendment rights of religion or conscience had been violated. This case is a powerful illustration of what may lie in store for followers of Jesus who take the values of Scripture seriously.

The university’s wafer-thin basis for its outrageous treatment of an excellent student was that Julea had supposedly violated the ethical standards of the American Counseling Association (ACA) by refusing to counsel a homosexual. The disingenuous nature of Eastern Michigan University’s argument becomes shockingly clear when we realize that, rather than violating the ACA code of ethics, Julea was actually complying with it.

The ACA holds that a counselor should refrain from counseling a client whenever he or she determines an “inability to be of professional assistance” to that person. In fact, a 2003 counseling study found that some 40 percent of all counselors in practice had to refer a client to another professional because of a conflict between their sexual values and those of the client. But the university was undeterred. It insisted on enforcing a politically correct standard of “non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.”

A similar case is pending in federal court involving Augusta State University in Augusta, Georgia. That school has required a Christian student in its counseling program to undergo classes to reorient her opinions about homosexuality, or face expulsion. These cases show not only the homosexual movement’s influence in our American institutions, but also academia’s deep-seated bigotry toward Bible-believing Christians.

One piece of evidence in the Julea Ward case was a 2003 professional counseling textbook titled Interviewing and Change Strategies for Helpers: Fundamental Skills and Cognitive Behavioral Interventions. This standard counseling reference text declares, “In interactions with clients, it is impossible to be ‘value free’” and states that, if the counselor experiences a values conflict with a client, that counselor has the right to refer the client to another therapist. In light of these two cases, however, perhaps the textbook will now have to include a footnote: “This right of referral does not exist if the counselor is a Christian.”

If we extrapolate the ruling in the Julea Ward case to other contexts, here is what we see:

- Christians will be denied the right to receive advanced degrees in philosophy because they have made up their minds on the matter of “truth.”
- They will be barred from receiving medical degrees because of their position on abortion.
- They will be stripped of law degrees because they might be unwilling to represent atheists who want to remove religious symbols from our national landscape.

Christians can always be barred from full participation in American life if all it takes is an allegation that we are “closed-minded” on matters of values, moral behavior, or religious truth. Having accepted the Bible as the ultimate, inspired guide in all these areas, Christians become vulnerable to the tyranny of those who impose the edict of cultural “tolerance” in the most intolerant of ways.

While we must continue to argue vigorously against the result in cases like Ward, we should also be encouraged. These attacks are not new, and in them we share great company. John Bunyan, in his book Pilgrim’s Progress (written in the 1600s), fictionalized the idea of vicious political correctness in the character of Mr. By-ends, a thoroughly modern fellow who hailed from a town called Fair-speech, where “we never strive against the popular tide.”

Bunyan, interestingly, wrote much of his book about the Christian experience while in jail, where he had been incarcerated because his gospel preaching had been deemed illegal by the ruling establishment. And then there is Martin Luther who took his famous stand for biblical truth before the papal council at the Diet of Worms. “It cannot be right,” he cried out, “for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”

Amen indeed.
Hope We Can Believe In
man who says ‘trust me’”—a fact often borne out in politics, business, investing, personal relationships, and even some sectors of religion. Today’s Congress is a textbook case, passing bills into law without knowing the content while telling us, “Trust us. We’ll find out what’s in it after it’s passed.”

The major effects of undefined change are constant uncertainty and the sense of having been “had” when the anticipated change turns negative. And if you take a look at the entire Western world today, you’ll find extreme uncertainty about the future and great ignorance about where to look for hope. Here in America, a huge problem is diminished stability caused by a relentless war against Christians that grows more volatile by the moment.

Examples are too well-documented to repeat, but the message cannot be missed or, for that matter, ignored. Let me take you on an excursion into the bizarre that illustrates the obvious.

A federal judge ruled it unconstitutional to offer a prayer in Jesus’ name at opening sessions of the Indiana Legislature. However, he felt prayers in Allah’s name would be constitutionally acceptable. Why? Because, according to him, Allah is a generic term for God and there are so few Muslims in Indiana that calling on Allah could not be deemed an establishment of religion, unlike praying to Jesus. Judge David Hamilton’s decision was reversed by the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals, on which he now sits for life.

If you have trouble wrapping your mind around that one, try this one: Jesus is being kicked out of the public institutions of the very nation He undergirded from its infancy to its spectacular rise as the model of freedom and justice that is the envy of the world.

In the book The Zion Connection, I briefly discussed what a world without Jewish people would look like if genocidal anti-Semites and historical-revisionist perverters of truth had their way. My conclusion 14 years later remains the same: It would be “a world with the lights out.”

And an integral element in the Jewless-world scenario would be the elimination of Jesus. Secular elitists and their groupie brigades determined to stamp out Jesus and Christianity would have no one to attack and no one to defend their right to do so. The cost would be devastating and the consequences very likely terminal for life on this planet.

A world without Jesus would be a world that stepped back in time to the chaos and vileness of pagan hopelessness, brutality, and decadence that strangled ancient civilizations. It defies explanation that societies, such as radical American minorities and much of the self-proclaimed “post-Christian” West, would choose to return to the damning paralysis that Christ and Christianity brought deliverance from.

The root cause of this conundrum must be a condition of the human heart that, in and of itself, is incurable. Ask virtually anyone ensconced among the “politically correct” if there might be a depravity problem within the human soul and you’ll be laughed out of the room. In the minds of such pseudo intellectuals and social dabblers, the “divine spark” that liberal theologians so adored a century ago translates into “enlightenment.”
And despite all evidence to the contrary, they still insist that people who commit the most heinous crimes are merely deprived victims who, given an environmental, upward push, would have become model citizens.

A long time ago I was required to take a philosophy course—a study designed to broaden my perspective of the deeper issues confounding mankind and to enrich my life view. In the end, I was encouraged to believe philosophy is actually a search for truth that never seems to arrive at a conclusion. You're always searching, but you never find the mother lode of wisdom you seek. For me, it was like running but never getting anywhere or searching for something I was unable to find—like where I parked the car.

A world without Jesus would be a quagmire of uncertainty, having no assurance of life beyond the grave and nothing we really could count on.

**Hope We Can Believe In**

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).*

A man named George Cutting (1843–1934) wrote a booklet well worth reading titled *Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment*. In a few short pages, he captured the essence and fullness of life in Christ, which delivers what a Christless world would not be able to articulate in the collective libraries of the entire universe. What makes Cutting’s work unique is that it directs readers to the single source of life-changing information relevant both here and in the hereafter: the Bible. He then moved on to the One who alone can deliver both the life and change we so hunger for: Jesus Christ.

Not many decades ago we moved through a time when, with Satan’s hearty approval, the fashion was to trivialize Christmas into a festival of commercial extravagance, emphasizing everything that too often ended in a mountain of wrapping paper and children crying, “Is that all?” Loosed by higher critics from a firm footing on the Scriptures, theologians were telling folks the Bible wasn’t all as written; and they relegated the Incarnation to myth and story.

What has followed is an orgy of anti-Christian antagonism, both within and without so-called mainstream denominations. A culture has arisen that denies, even detests, the thought of the Nativity being anything more than the birth of an impoverished, Middle Eastern child who was merely one more mouth to feed.

Such a view is a declaration of war on those who hold to the inerrancy of the Book of Books and believe it to be the authentic, accurate way to salvation and fulfillment of Jesus’ promise of an abundant life through redemption.

The wonder of the Incarnation is the very simplicity fashioned by the hand of God as only He could. Imagine, a plan and transaction brought down to a level that even children in diapers can sing and, in their own way, understand:

> Jesus loves me, this I know / For the Bible tells me so.

> Little ones to Him belong / They are weak, but He is strong.

There is no “uncertain sound” (1 Cor. 14:8) in the certainty of the hope found in Christ, delivered in the context of a gift available to everyone who will believe and accept it. Think of it: a treasure so rare it is beyond human appraisal, yet given as a gift to rich and poor alike—no exceptions, no restrictions, no discrimination. Only the God who so loved could or would do this.

Though there may be little or no acknowledgement of God’s entrance into time by way of a manger in Bethlehem of Judea, there is a jubilee celebration that resounds around the world.

On my many trips to Israel, I always found great pleasure in going near Bethlehem and looking down on the Shepherds’ Fields over which the angels announced to the band of shepherds that the Savior had been born in Bethlehem. And whether our vantage point was in the cave behind the YMCA, at the tower that provides a wonderful panoramic view of the fields, or on the town walkway overlooking the terraces, we always started to sing.

Something about the experience brings together everything embodied in the message of Christ and its application to the individual human heart. In singing the Christmas carols, we grasped something genuine, intensely personal, and pristinely certain. Every one of us came face to face with true hope, change, and an undeniable sense of eternal triumph. Like us, countless millions upon millions the world over have, in reality, experienced a change we can count on—one that encompasses “yesterday, today, and forever.”

What Christmas embodies in the hearts, minds, and souls of true believers is articulated in Edward Mote’s 19th-century hymn:

> My hope is built on nothing less / Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;

> I dare not trust the sweetest frame, / But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.

> On Christ the solid Rock I stand, / All other ground is sinking sand;

> So, do you want to possess or do you now possess the hope you can count on? It’s the one hope that can be offered with full assurance that it will not change and cannot be taken away or erased from the calendar. My recommendation: Let’s all make a stop at the manger and sing a carol. Merry Christmas.

*Elwood McQuaid is executive editor for The Friends of Israel.*

**Merry Christmas.**
On August 6 Afghan police discovered the bodies of 10 Christian-aid workers in a remote village in northern Afghanistan. Six of the slain were Americans. All were members of the International Assistance Mission, a humanitarian group that has brought medical relief to poor Afghans since 1966. Muslim Taliban terrorists quickly took credit for the slaughter, claiming the medical workers were spies attempting to proselytize Muslim Afghans. The claim was nothing more than an excuse to commit the execution-style murders in the name of Islam because the 10 were Christians.

Although there was no public statement from U.S. President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke, spoke out on the killings.

Mrs. Clinton correctly said, “With these murders, the Taliban have shown us yet another example of the lengths to which they will go to advance their twisted ideology. Their cruelty is well-documented. Members of the Taliban have assassinated tribal elders, thrown acid in the face of young girls on the way to or from school, and earlier this summer, they accused a 7-year-old boy of being a spy and then hanged him.”

Such actions, however, are not the exclusive province of fanatical factions in Afghanistan. World Vision reported that seven of its staff members were killed in Pakistan in March. Its workers were also murdered in Kenya and Sudan and recently were expelled from parts of Somalia by the al-Qaida-related al-Shabab.

“Terror has no religion,” said Mrs. Clinton, “and these acts are rejected by people all over the world, including by countless Muslims here in our country.”

While we agree the type of terror with which Islamists tyrannize Christians in countries the world over cannot be justified by any human standard as consistent with any rational religion, it is true, however, that the Taliban’s atrocities are deeply rooted in its perception of Islam and justified by its reading of the Qur’an. In other words, the conflict is about religion.

Religion is the inhuman driving force behind the compulsion to destroy Israel; bring down the West; defeat Christianity; and establish a global, Sharia-compliant, Muslim caliphate. Unfortunately, because Western politicians, academics, and their ideological cellmates so loathe to consider the religious component, it is ignored completely. Thus we miss the fundamental element we are fighting in this war of civilizations, to the peril of entire cultures.

Consequently, a disturbing refrain is rising that blames Christians for their own deaths by accusing missionaries and humanitarian Christian-aid workers of invading countries where they supposedly have no right to be. Thus the counsel, “Stay out of societies where radical religious fanatics might put a price on your head because you exercise Christian compassion and help the helpless.”

Interestingly, Mrs. Clinton declared that atrocities are rejected by “people all over the world, including by countless Muslims.” If you ran a quick check on how many Muslims, inside or outside America, condemned the murders in Afghanistan, you would come up with an almost blank page. One must wonder where all of the oft-referenced “peace-loving Muslims” have their umbilical cords attached.
The Greatest Mystery of All

by Richard D. Emmons

(John Romans/iStockphoto; digitally modified by Thomas E. Williams)
The world is full of mysteries. In fact, several Web sites claim to list the top 10, which include “rare antimatter”; consciousness; how the world began and will end (no mystery to Bible-believing Christians); time; and black holes. No site, however, lists what is perhaps the greatest mystery of all: the Incarnation.

Christmas will soon be here; and though many view it as merely a time of gift-giving and good cheer, those of us who know the Lord will always see it as a celebration of something wondrous—when God the Son “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7).

He Emptied Himself

Jesus existed in the form of God, and yet He was God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. And the Word became flesh” (Jn. 1:1, 3, 14).

The Word is Jesus before He became Jesus. The Bible teaches that God the Son existed from eternity past. There is only one God, yet He is triune in nature, composed of three persons. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equally God, equally eternal, and existent in and of themselves.

Jesus existed “in the form of God” but “did not consider it robbery to be equal with God” (Phil. 2:6). He did not grab hold of His equality and refuse to relinquish it. Instead, He “made Himself of no reputation” (v. 7). The New American Standard Bible reads, He “emptied Himself.”

Some say Jesus emptied Himself of some of His divine attributes—that He laid aside His omniscience or omnipresence, for example. However, if He had laid aside any divine attributes, He would have become less than what He was before. The Bible is clear that such was not the case: “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). In His Incarnation, Jesus was still fully God.

So what did He empty Himself of? He emptied Himself of God’s form—the outward manifestation of His deity.

The Hebrew Scriptures teach that Moses saw a bush “burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed” (Ex. 3:2). Then “God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, ‘Moses, Moses! . . . Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.’” (vv. 4–5).

Why was the bush not consumed? Because it was not really burning. The glory of God had filled it and made it appear on fire. The same was true with the Tabernacle in the wilderness: “The glory of the L ORD filled the tabernacle. . . . For the cloud of the L ORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night” (40:34, 38). God’s glory caused the tent to glow at night as though a huge lantern were in it.

Jesus, however, looked like an ordinary man. He emptied Himself of the outward manifestation of His glory, which He had before the world began (Jn. 17:5). There was no blinking light on His forehead that said, “Son of God.” There was no neon sign. There was no halo around His head that made people around Him say, “Oh, you must be God.” There was nothing about Him externally that communicated deity; and yet He told His disciples, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (14:9).

He had emptied Himself of the form of God, took on “the form of a bondservant,” and came “in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7). The eternal Son of God took humanity upon Himself.

Foretold by the Prophets

The Jewish prophets Isaiah and Micah clearly foretold of the Messiah’s deity:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting (Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2, emphasis added).

Yet Isaiah said the Messiah would be a servant of God here on Earth (Isa. 53:11), and nothing about Him physically (externally) would set Him apart (v. 2). He would look like an average person.

The Incarnation is the process of God becoming flesh. God the Son took humanity on Himself by means of the virgin birth. This One who dwelt with the form of God for all of eternity laid aside the outward manifestation of His glory, which would have destroyed...
people had they actually seen Him, and took on humanity in the womb of a Jewish virgin.

This is the greatest mystery of the universe. How can the One who is by definition “life” experience death? How can the One who never sleeps, sleep in a boat? Psalm 121 says the God “who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (v. 4). Yet Jesus slept in a boat. How can the One who never hunger, who is not dependent on anything or anyone, become hungry and thirsty? How can the One who is the eternal Word be born as a baby who cannot speak? How can the One who, according to Hebrews 1:3, “uphold[s] all things by the word of His power,” be unable to utter a word?

Furthermore, because of the Incarnation, Jesus will possess a body forever. When He was resurrected from the dead, He was a physical human being, as well as the second Person of the Trinity. He is the God-Man forever.

I have no clue how these things could happen. It is a mystery. But the Bible says God the Son became flesh. Though His name was Logos throughout all the ages past, at a moment in time in a manger in Bethlehem, He received the name Jesus the Messiah. And He did so because He loves you and me (Jn. 15:13; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 5:2). That’s what Christmas is all about.

We cannot explain these things. We must accept them by faith. Jesus humbled Himself to be born as a human being, then became obedient to death so that we could have forgiveness of sin and everlasting life through faith in Him.

—Gary Rosenblatt in The Jewish Week, commenting on TIME magazine’s September cover story, “Why Israel Doesn’t Care About Peace.”
Nehemiah 1—2 when Persian King Artaxerxes issued a decree giving Nehemiah the authority to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls in March 445 B.C.

Wrote Bible scholar Alva J. McClain: “The Jews had a “seven” of years as well as a “seven” of days. And this biblical “week” of years was just as familiar to the Jew as the “week” of days. It was, in certain respects, even more important. . . . Upon a multiple of this important week of years—“seven Sabbaths of years”—there was based the great jubilee of social and economic adjustment every fiftieth year, when debts were wiped out, estates returned to the original holders, and slaves went free (Lev. 25:8–9). Nothing could be so important to the Jew as this week of years.”

So we are looking at 490 prophetic years. They are divided into three parts: (1) “seven weeks,” or 49 years (Dan. 9:25), followed by (2) “sixty-two weeks,” or 434 years (v. 26), followed by (3) “one week,” or seven years (v. 27).

The seven weeks plus 62 weeks (69 weeks) pinpoint when the long-awaited Messiah would be present: exactly 483 years from the decree to restore and build Jerusalem. Verse 26 says, “After the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.” Consequently, He would also be “cut off,” or die, during that time.

Isaiah, who died more than a century earlier, also spoke of the Messiah’s death: “For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken” (Isa. 53:8).

Only one person presented Himself as the Messiah during the correct time frame: Jesus. When He entered Jerusalem to people hailing Him as King (Lk. 19:37–38), He told the religious leaders who failed to acknowledge Him, “You did not know the time of your visitation” (v. 44). They should have known; they had Daniel’s prophecy.

Today many view the Messiah as a myth, an age, or a human deliverer whose arrival lies in the distance. But God’s Word reveals His program. The Messiah has come, and truly He will come again. Maranatha!

**ENDNOTE**


by Thomas C. Simcox, Northeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.
The Peace Only Jesus Brings

Murder

War

Hate

Robbery
“Jesus failed!”
“Ever since He came there’s been nothing but wars and more wars.”
“If He was the Messiah, where is the peace?”

So go the arguments. Some even view the angel’s declaration, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Lk. 2:14), as hollow. But to those of us who know Him personally, no words could be truer.

When Jesus first came to Israel, He preached that the Messianic Kingdom was at hand (Mk. 1:15). But the Jewish leadership rejected Him as Messiah, and the Kingdom’s arrival was postponed. Had they accepted Him, the Kingdom would have been realized; and the world would have known peace. Fortunately, He will return again to establish His Kingdom; and the earth will experience true, universal peace (Rev. 19:5–6).

**First-Coming Peace**

Modern Judaism emphasizes living for the *olam ha zeh*, meaning “this world.” Biblical faith offers us the opportunity to have a unique relationship and personal peace with God. Through the death and resurrection of Messiah Jesus (as prophesied in Isaiah 53:10–12), peace with God is now possible: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). The admonishment is to approach God in prayer and receive peace through Jesus, “through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (v. 2).

This world system cannot comprehend the inner peace He supplies. God tells us, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6–7).

It’s so easy to blame God when troubles come. But, in part, worldly trials and tumults are a result of human sin. The good news is that Jesus promised, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).

**Second-Coming Peace**

A rabbi once declared the ideal structure of the world rests on three foundational principles: truth, justice, and peace (Mishnah Aboth 1.18). He based his views on Zechariah 8:16: “These are the things you shall do: speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace.”

These ideals have never been fully achieved. Many in both the Jewish and Bible-believing communities anticipate them in the *olam ha ba*, meaning “the world to come.” Christians know this time to be when Jesus returns and establishes global peace. Although the coming Kingdom on Earth primarily involves Israel, the entire world will be affected.

A Hasidic rabbi once said, “Peace without truth is a false peace.” In the Kingdom, the world will honor the true God of Israel:

Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day (Isa. 2:3, 11).

It has been said in Judaism, “In the hour of Messiah’s appearance, the Holy One will don the robe of justice.” In the world to come, knowledge of God will fill the earth (11:9). Even God’s solution to school violence will be implemented: “All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children” (54:13).

Such evil acts as murder, robbery, jealousy, hatred, oppression, and war will all cease: “He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (2:4; cf. Ps. 46:8–9).

World hunger will end: “Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us” (Ps. 67:6; cf. 72:16).

As part of His universal peace program, all human governments will be torn down: “And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these
kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Dan 2:44; cf. Ps. 2:2–9).

The Jewish people will experience eternal joy and gladness, and many nations will turn to them for spiritual guidance (Isa. 51:11; Zech. 8:23).

There will be no illness, death, or tears (Isa. 25:8; 35:5–6). Even predatory animals will no longer seek prey: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox” (11:6–7; cf. Hos. 2:18).

The ancient rabbis taught that Israel’s redemption would come through peace (Debarim Rabbah 5, 14). To maintain this redemption anticipation, the Temple priests ended the day with the following prayer: “The L ORD bless you and keep you; the L ORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the L ORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Num. 6:24–26).

Later, in some modern synagogue services, the closing prayer, known as the Sim Shalom, meaning “Grant Peace,” was uttered with much anticipation:

Grant peace, welfare, blessing, grace, lovingkindness, and mercy to us and to all Israel your people. Bless us, O our Father, one and all, with the light of your countenance; for by the light of your countenance you have given us, O Lord our God, a Torah of life, lovingkindness and salvation, blessing, mercy, life, and peace. May it please you to bless your people Israel at all times and in every hour with your peace. Blessed are you, O Lord, who blesses his people Israel with peace.

In an ancient rabbinic text it was said that, when Messiah comes, His first message will be “Peace!” Consider: Jesus came the first time to Bethlehem to bring His peace to the world: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (Jn. 14:27).

He will come again a second time to Jerusalem and usher in world peace: “For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa. 65:17). Jesus did not fail. As the Jewish Union Prayer Book (siddur) says, “Grant us peace, thy most precious gift, O Thou eternal source of peace.”
According to the USCIRF, the new language signals “concrete policy implications” for religious freedom because freedom of worship is “a much narrower view” of religious liberties. This is a critical point because the new phrase follows an international trend that differs radically from the religious-freedom principles in the First Amendment.

continued on page 27
Down through history many have claimed to be the promised Messiah. This chart is designed to show the biblical requirements necessary to be the One God promised. Each of these Scriptures requires 100 percent fulfillment. In all of human history, only one Person has fulfilled these prerequisites. His name is Jesus.

(Panel 1: Kathy Morris/FOI Image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>LINEAGE</strong></th>
<th><strong>BIRTH</strong></th>
<th><strong>NATURE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob</td>
<td>Born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14)</td>
<td>He is deity (Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Mic. 5:2; Jer. 23:5–6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Gen. 12:3; 26:3–4; 28:13–15)</td>
<td>Born as a human (Isa. 9:6; 49:1, 5)</td>
<td>He is human (Isa. 9:6; 49:1, 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the tribe of Judah</td>
<td>Born in Bethlehem Ephrathah (Mic. 5:2)</td>
<td>He is righteous and sinless (Isa. 53:10; 11:4–5; Jer. 23:5–6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Gen. 49:10)</td>
<td>Born at a predetermined time (Dan. 9:24–26)</td>
<td>(&quot;One&quot;).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descendant of David</td>
<td></td>
<td>The Mosaic of Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2 Sam. 7:4–17; Isa. 11:1–2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Everlasting Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Foundation of Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Risen Lord and Messiah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### NAMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immanuel (“God with us”)</th>
<th>The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father</th>
<th>The Rod, The Branch</th>
<th>The Holy One of Israel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Isa. 7:14)</td>
<td>(Isa. 9:6)</td>
<td>(Isa. 11:1)</td>
<td>(Isa. 48:17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### DEATH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would be betrayed by a friend (Ps. 41:9)</th>
<th>His death would be substitutionary (Isa. 53:4–6; Dan. 9:26)</th>
<th>Would be buried in a rich man’s tomb (Isa. 53:9)</th>
<th>Spectacular and visible worldwide (Mt. 24:29–30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>His bones would not be broken (Ex. 12:46; Ps. 34:20)</td>
<td>His body would not see physical corruption (Ps. 16:10)</td>
<td>He will stand on the Mount of Olives, which will split in two (Zech. 14:4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>His body would be pierced (Ps. 22:16)</td>
<td>Would be delivered from the grave (Ps. 49:15)</td>
<td>He will have marks of crucifixion (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Will “see His seed” and “prolong His days” (Isa. 53:10)</td>
<td>He will protect Israel and defeat Antichrist (Rev. 19:11–21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In the late 1970s, Benjamin Creme of Scotland began announcing the coming of Lord Maitreya, calling him the “world teacher” and “cosmic Christ” awaited by all major religions. In 1979 the Nation of Yahweh set up shop in Liberty City, Florida. Hulon Mitchell Jr., founder and leader of the black supremacist movement, conferred on himself the title Yahweh ben Yahweh (Hebrew for “God son of God”).

Although many would scoff at these messianic wannabes, others have flocked to them. Outlining events that would take place prior to His Second Coming, Jesus warned, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mt. 24:24).

**Lord Maitreya**

Benjamin Creme studied art and esoteric philosophy, particularly the writings of Helen Blavatsky and Alice A. Bailey, before joining a UFO cult. In 1959 he claimed to have been contacted by an “ascended master” who supposedly outlined Creme’s possible role in the disclosure of Maitreya’s identity. Creme claims he is Lord Maitreya’s mouthpiece today.

Recently Creme, now 87, began announcing that Maitreya—whom he calls the “cosmic Christ”—has “stepped forward into the open arena of the world and has appeared several times in full view of the television cameras.” Purportedly, he “will declare Himself openly to the world when sufficient of humanity has responded to His message for justice, peace and sharing, and are bringing these into effect.”

Members of Share International, a religious organization Creme founded, point to Raj Patel, whom they say is “the living embodiment of Maitreya.” However, Patel, author and self-proclaimed food activist, categorically refuses the job and hopes Creme’s group “will leave him alone so that he can get back to normal life.”

Unlike Creme, who claims to be announcing the coming messiah, others actually think they are the messiah.

**Sung Myung Moon**

Sun Myung Moon established the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity in Seoul, Korea. Known today as the Unification Church, the organization grew rapidly from its inception in 1954 to 30 church centers by the end of 1955. Within four years, Moon began sending missionaries to Japan and the United States; and by 1975, they were in 120 countries.

A professed communication from Jesus to Christians, replicated on the church’s official Web site in 2001,
Christ” or “Jesus Matayoshi,” he established the World Economic Community Party in 1997.

His platform is a mix of pseudo-Christian eschatology coupled with moralistic conservatism. Aspiring to be the world’s savior, his first goal is to be prime minister of Japan, although he has never won an election. After reforming Japanese society, he expects the United Nations to offer him the position of secretary general, through which he plans to rule the world both religiously and politically.9

Yahweh ben Yahweh

Perhaps one of the most frightening messianic pretenders was Oklahoma-born Hulon Mitchell Jr. who served prison time for racketeering and was implicated in more than a dozen murders. “All so-called Black people of America, who are descendants of slaves,” he said, “are the tribe of Judah.”10

According to the Nation of Yahweh Web site, Yahweh ben Yahweh “has restored our remembrance of our common history, culture, language, and our common surname Israel, as found in the King James Version of the Holy Bible.”11

Although he took a vow of poverty, his organization amassed a $250 million empire in seven years, with “disciples, followers, and supporters in over 1,300 cities within the U.S. and 16 foreign countries.”12

Yahweh ben Yahweh taught, “The Kingdom of Heaven is when Yehuwdah (Judah)—the so-called Black people of America, descendants of slaves—become [sic] the ‘chief’ ruler (1 Chronicles 5:2). He stressed that until Yehuwdah becomes the ‘chief’ ruler, there will be no heaven on earth . . . and we cannot have heaven without the King of heaven making it happen.”13 His followers agreed, “He alone is the king of heaven.”14

In his writings, Mitchell routinely replaced the word Christ with the Hebrew letters for Yahweh ben Yahweh when quoting Scripture; and on the Nation of Yahweh Web site, he is pictured before a backdrop of the Greek symbols alpha and omega. The caption under his photo reads, “Yahweh ben Yahweh The Prince of Peace” and “Isaiah 9:6.”15

A hero to some, Hulon died in 2007 at the age of 72, but not before journalist Sydney P. Freedberg won a Pulitzer Prize for her book Brother Love: Murder, Money and a Messiah that reported on the beheadings, beatings, and sordid activities associated with Mitchell.

Father Divine

Although baby boomers may not have heard of George Baker Jr., their parents would be familiar with his alias—Reverend Major Jealous Divine—aka Father Divine. He created the International Peace Mission; formulated its

Mitsuo Matayoshi

In contrast to the flamboyant Reverend Moon, Mitsuo Matayoshi is an obscure Japanese politician who campaigns from a minivan outfitted with oversized loudspeakers. Promoting himself as “the only God Mitsuo Matayoshi Jesus
divine; and took it from a small, ethnic congregation to a multicultural, international movement claiming millions of adherents around the world.

Divine’s eclectic theology asserted that Jesus failed to effect the “universal emancipation” of man during His First Advent, so He had to “come yet again in the power of the FATHERSHIP Degree of expression for this universal resurrection and complete redemption of all mankind.” His followers believe “HE is that One come again”; he never disputed the claim. His goal was the “amalgamation of all religions and the amalgamation of all organizations by scientifically working cooperatively and working in unison.”

Baker is hailed as an incarnation of God; and his widow and remaining followers always refer to him in the present tense, although he died in 1965.

**Mother Ann Lee**

Ann Lee founded the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearance—the American Shakers. Because their worship involved ecstatic dancing or shaking, they were dubbed the Shaking Quakers.

Lee taught the Holy Spirit caused this shaking while purging sin from the body. Maintaining she had a vision of Adam and Eve’s transgression, she preached that sex was the original sin and “lust has been the root of all evil.”

She fanatically taught that life with God begins with confession and is perfected by denial of the lust of the flesh through celibacy. Referring to herself as Mother Ann or Ann the Word, she professed to be the female successor to Jesus and the incarnation of Christ’s Second Coming.

**Bahá’u’lláh**

Headquartered in the land of the Bible on the slopes of Mount Carmel, the Baha’i espouse the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, acknowledged as “the Promised One foretold in all the world’s religions.”

Bahá’u’lláh claimed royal Persian lineage through the Sasanian Dynasty, while also asserting he was a descendant of Abraham through Keturah. He presented himself as a messenger from God purportedly fulfilling the eschatological expectations of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism.

He advocated “mutual understanding and fellowship among nations, cultures, and peoples” and developed a strategy for world peace, which included new social structures designed to eliminate conflict and strife disunity. His utopian dream envisioned an international court system, a world legislative body, and a universal leader.

In 1992, 100 years after his death, followers of Bahá’í commemorated the “centenary of His ascension [death].” They believe Bahá’u’lláh fulfills the promise of the everlasting Davidic kingship and that he is “the second coming of Christ in the potency of the Everlasting Father seated upon the throne of David.”

Today He is regarded by millions as the manifestation of God or divine teacher for this age who will ultimately usher in a new society of tolerance, love, and world peace.

**Don’t Be Deceived**

These individuals differ from one another; yet they all cried out for global unity, the amalgamation of religions, social justice, and economic equality. But are these qualifications for messiahship?

The historical landscape is littered with people claiming to be the Messiah. But take heart. Identifying Him is not that complicated! When Jesus ascended into heaven, the attending angels declared, “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Jesus said, “If they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it.

For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mt. 24:26–27).

Anyone proclaiming to be the Messiah without the distinguishing physical scars and spectacular, visible return in the clouds is merely a wannabe (Mt. 24:29–30). Jesus will return with the nail prints in His hands and feet, along with the spear wound in His side (Zech. 12:10; Rev. 19:11–16). And His return will be so spectacular no one on the planet will miss it.

ENDNOTES

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10 Ibid.
11 <yahwebenyahweh.com>.
12 “Mother Divine’s Concept of God” <libertynet.org/ldpmm/mdbook/goths.html>.
13 “Mother Divine Ann Lee” <answers.com/topic/ann-lee>.
14 Ibid.
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16 “Mother Ann Lee” <answers.com/topic/ann-lee>.
17 Ibid.
19 “Abandoning Prejudice” <info.bahai.org/article-1-3-2-14.html>.
20 “Bahá’ú’lláh: Manifestation of God.”
21 “Bahá’ú’lláh—The Return of Christ” <ruh.net/bahaullah.html>.
Tampering With Freedom of Religion
from page 21

Under international law, worship is a limited right within a church body; it fails to include public evangelism. Article 18 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights articulates this “right.” It protects “teaching, practice, worship and observance” but overtly and explicitly fails to protect public preaching.

The UN’s 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance uses the same approach on matters of religion. Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms allows evangelism to be banned to protect “public order.” In 1997 the European Court of Human Rights used Article 9 to forbid evangelical Christians in Greece from certain efforts to share the gospel.

Mistreatment for Faith-Based Groups

Along with changing freedom of religion to freedom of worship comes the stifling of faith-based organizations.

Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) has introduced a bill (HR 5466) dealing with substance abuse and mental health programs. It would prohibit all religious charities dealing with such matters from receiving federal grants “unless the applicant [faith-based group] agrees to refrain from considering religion or any profession of faith when making any employment decision.”

So a Christian drug-rehabilitation center for troubled youth, for example, could not partner with the federal government to turn those lives around unless the organization agrees never to consider the faith of prospective employees when hiring. This approach is exactly what then-U.S. Sen. Obama (D-IL) was talking about during his 2008 presidential campaign when he said any religious group—such as a Christian social service or humanitarian charity—“cannot discriminate” on the basis of religion in hiring practices if it applies for a federal grant.2

The position starkly contrasts that of the George W. Bush administration. Under Bush, the Department of Justice said that, under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act passed in 1993 and amended in 2000, faith groups are entitled to apply for federal grants without being forced to hire unbelievers. This was done to counteract the dwindling protections for free exercise of religion afforded by Supreme Court decisions. Sen. Obama promised this policy would change under his presidency, and it is a promise that may well be kept.

Lest there be any question about where his administration stands, here is testimony from U.S. Atty. Gen. Eric H. Holder Jr., Obama’s choice for that job. In a hearing May 14, 2009, before the House Judiciary Committee, Holder was questioned by Rep. Robert C. Scott (D-VA) and gave the following answer on behalf of the administration:

Mr. Scott. . . . How can we therefore have a policy allowing people with Federal money hiring people and denying opportunities solely based on religion?

Mr. Holder. . . . I think that we want to have Federal contracting done on a basis of ability, need, and without respect to religion. . . . That is the kind of America I think this Administration wants to have.3

Helping to fashion that “kind of America” is Sonya Sotomayor, who replaced retiring Supreme Court Justice David H. Souter. She recently provided the all-important fifth vote that helped to create the slim majority that favored restricting the First Amendment rights of the Christian Legal Society (CLS) in Christian Legal Society (CLS) v. Martinez.

CLS had been denied official recognition as a student organization on the campus of Hastings College of the Law, a public institution that is part of the University of California. For faith-based reasons, CLS refused to allow unbelievers (practicing homosexuals in particular) to hold positions of leadership in the group. CLS said the action would violate its Bible-based mission and statement of faith. Hastings would have required CLS to bow to atheists, Muslims, and active homosexuals who wanted to run for officer positions in the ministry.

On June 28, 2010, the Supreme Court ruled against CLS. Justice Samuel Alito Jr., in his dissenting opinion, was blunt about the consequences of the majority ruling: The decision, he wrote, really means there is “no freedom for expression that offends prevailing standards of political correctness in our nation’s institutions of higher learning.”

Restrictions Against Religious Employers

In 2009 both houses of Congress introduced the Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2009 (ENDA), which may mean that Christians who refuse to hire homosexuals, lesbians, or transvestites would face lawsuits that could cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. ENDA prohibits all but our nation’s smallest employers from refraining to hire people based on the “actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity” of any job applicant or current employee. These bills have been a major agenda item for the homosexual movement and are still pending in Congress.

What about religious employers? A supposed “exemption” exists; but after analyzing the language, I am thoroughly convinced it provides little or no protection for faith-based employers. It fails to give any deference to the religious beliefs of any for-profit Christian employer, such as a Christian bookstore or Bible-based counseling center, and would also end up regulating many nonprofit Christian ministries as well.

During his campaign, Obama supported the ENDA model and endorsed it. And his support has not waned. In 2009 I testified against ENDA in both houses of Congress on behalf of my organization, the National Religious Broadcasters, reiterating my opinion that the religious freedoms of Christian

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He is the one." That was the conclusion of Morpheus concerning Neo in the fictional story *The Matrix*. Morpheus believed the prophecy of the one who would come to save an enslaved humanity in a computerized world called the Matrix. And he was right.

During the last U.S. presidential campaign, many “experts” dubbed Barack Obama “the one.” Some attributed godlike, messianic qualities to him. Others, such as an editorial writer for the Danish newspaper *Politiken*, called Obama “the practical savior of our times,” declaring, “Obama is, of course, greater than Jesus.” We, of course, disagree.

Looking for “the one” is not a practice confined to theatre or politics. Almost immediately after the fall of man, God promised someone would come. Beginning with the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15, numerous Scriptures point to “the One”—the Anointed, the Messiah of Israel. He would be the ultimate Redeemer of mankind, able to transform a world ravaged by sin into a glorious, everlasting Kingdom. Such a one is the hope of many Jewish people and Christians today.

**Who Is Like Moses?**

As the Jewish people approached their 400th year as slaves in Egypt, a Jewish baby was born among them. He was named Moses and was miraculously kept safe by the daughter of the very Pharaoh who had ordered the murder of all newborn Jewish boys.

Moses grew to become “the one” who led his people out of slavery. Other prophets came after him, but none would have his prestige. They served the Lord faithfully and heard God speak to them in dreams and visions, but only Moses spoke to God “face to face” (Num. 12:6–8).

Moses climbed to the peak of Mount Sinai to receive God’s commandments and was forced to cover his face to shield his people from gazing at the glory of God that rested on it. Most Jewish people regard Moses as the greatest of all prophets; and some even suggest he is “the one” promised, the Messiah Himself.

As great as Moses was, however, Scripture does not teach he is the Messiah. He was a great prophet,
The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, “Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.” And the Lord said to me: “What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.” And if you say in your heart, “How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?”—when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

The passage, which clearly describes the One whom God would raise up, brought hope to the Jewish heart concerning the Messiah. It indicates the Messiah must:

- Be Jewish (v. 15).
- Be raised up by God (v. 15).
- Be heeded. People must obey Him or receive judgment (vv. 15, 20). When Pharaoh did not listen to Moses, he and his people were punished.

- Speak God’s words (v. 18). He is not a pundit providing expert opinion but, rather, God’s opinion.
- Be error-free in His predictions (vv. 21–22). He must be correct 100 percent of the time.
- Be like Moses, who met all these requirements and thus qualified as a prophet of God (Num. 12:6–8). He also was a redeemer of his people Israel (Ex. 3:10), a mediator between his people and God (20:18–21), and an intercessor on their behalf (chap. 32).

High Expectancy

Messianic expectancy was high in the first century A.D. Out of the wilderness came a fiery John the Baptist who caused such a stir the Jewish leaders sent a delegation to ask him if he was the Messiah, Elijah, or the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15. He denied being any of the three but said he was preparing the way for “the One” to come. So the search for the One intensified (Jn. 1:19–23).

Shortly afterward, Jesus came on the scene. Early in His ministry He took meager bits of fish and bread and fed 5,000 men (6:11–12). As His disciples collected the leftovers, their thoughts no doubt turned to Moses and the miraculous feeding of the Israelites with manna from heaven.

“This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world,” they said (v. 14). Calling Him “the Prophet” was the acknowledgment of Him as the One described in Deuteronomy 18:15.

After all, like Moses, Jesus was Jewish. Like Moses, He proclaimed God’s words to His people. Like Moses, He authenticated His ministry with many miracles. No doubt, many wondered, “Is Jesus the One?”

Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus turned to His most trusted companions, His disciples, and asked, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Mt. 16:13).
“Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets,” they answered (v. 14).

“Who do you say that I am?” Jesus asked (v. 15). Peter, enabled by the power of God, alone responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16).

Peter recognized the One. He knew Jesus not only was like Moses, He was superior to Moses (Heb. 3:3). Jesus was the One of Deuteronomy 18:15–22. He not only was the Prophet to come but also the One to fulfill God’s redemptive plan for mankind.

After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, Peter quoted the Deuteronomy passage when he preached in Jerusalem. As “sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with [their] fathers” (Acts 3:25), they all should have recognized Jesus as the One who came as their Messiah and Savior.

He was the Prophet in word and deed. Jesus was “the One.”

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ENDNOTE


Steve Herzig is the director of North American Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
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organizations would be radically assaulted by this legislation.

ENDA supporters elicited the position of the Obama administration through the testimony of Thomas Perez, Obama’s new assistant attorney general in charge of civil rights. He boldly urged passage of ENDA. He also tried to allay fears about it by inaccurately downplaying its effect on faith groups. “Nothing in ENDA,” he claimed, “infringes on an individual’s ability to practice his or her faith, to hold and adhere to religious beliefs, or to exercise First Amendment rights of free speech on these or other issues.” Nothing could be further from the truth.

Super Bowl Halftime

What are the prospects for reversing these disastrous policies over the next two years? Slim indeed.

I see the struggle over religious liberties as the Super Bowl of constitutional issues. We are at the halftime in this great conflict, and the score is against us.

In July 2010, the administration backed a gay-rights group for international acceptance (the first ever), helping the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission gain UN approval as an officially recognized, international, nongovernmental organization (NGO). This organization is reportedly so radical it has been supported by money from a source that far transcends Washington politics or earthly power: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9).

END NOTES


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Farid Castro told an American journalist in September he despises anti-Semitism and said Iran’s President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad should admit that the Holocaust of World War II took place.

In a September article in The Atlantic, Jeffrey Goldberg said the ailing 84-year-old Cuban dictator invited him to Havana to discuss Iran and Israel. Castro excoriated anti-Semitism and said Iran should acknowledge anti-Semitism’s “unique” history and try to understand why Israelis fear for their existence.

Castro said when he was a boy, people “would say, ‘The Jews killed God.’ They blamed the Jews for killing God! . . . I don’t think anyone has been slandered more than the Jews. I would say much more than the Muslims. They have been slandered much more than the Muslims because they are blamed and slandered for everything. No one blames the Muslims for anything.”

He said the Jewish people “were expelled from their land, persecuted and mistreated all over the world, as the ones who killed God. . . . The Jews have lived an existence that is much harder than ours. There is nothing that compares to the Holocaust,” Castro said.

Wrote Goldberg: “I asked him if he would tell Ahmadinejad what he was telling me. ‘I am saying this so you can communicate it,’ he answered.”

The entire article can be read at <theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/09/fidel-to-ahmadinejad-stop-slandering-the-jews/62566>.
There is perhaps no virtue more central to who God is and how He works in the course of human history than that of justice or righteousness. A small constellation of concepts and terms in Scripture, taken together, conveys this attribute of the triune God—the ineffable purity and righteousness of His character, the unsullied integrity and perfection of all of His purposes for His creation, and the unpolluted equity and justness with which He deals with the universe at all times and in all ways.

The two most basic Hebrew terms in the Old Testament are *tsedek* (usually translated “righteousness,” conformity to a right standard) and *mishpat* (“judgment,” in the sense of a right sentence in a court of law). In the New Testament the prevailing Greek term is *dikaiosune*. All three describe that which is physically straight or plumb. In the moral realm they speak of that which entirely conforms to a moral or ethical standard, activity that is unerringly consistent with what is morally demanded and/or legitimately expected.

The phrase often employed to gather together all that is at stake in these terms is *divine rectitude*: the perfect “rightness” of God in all that He is and does. The concept permeates and shapes Scripture, and Jesus the Messiah demonstrates that perfect divine rectitude.

**Divine Rectitude and the Cross**

God’s Justice in Redemption. The Scriptures affirm that in a day gone by, Jesus’ sacrificial death demonstrated God’s justice in redemption. The apostle John exulted, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). Perhaps the biggest word in that last phrase is and. John knew well that God was gracious, and he knew that God was true—that He would...
always act in perfect consistency with His just and righteous character.

But the believer under the Old (Mosaic) Covenant, no matter how mature, could not grasp how a thrice-holy, all-knowing God could “justify” (“pronounce righteous,” a term built on the word for “righteous” or “just”) one as fallen and wicked as himself. In other words, how could God be gracious to accept fallen human beings into fellowship with Himself and, at the same time, be true to the perfect righteousness and justice of His character? The answer was finally revealed in the life and death of Jesus the Messiah. In this sense, the living Word was “full of grace and truth.”

Though there was much mystery in the economics of God’s saving act, there was no ambiguity in His promise, which is perhaps most clearly and substantively expressed in the verse that might be termed “the John 3:16 of the Old Covenant”: “The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11). All through the ages before Christ, people who simply believed that promise—and thus, in faith, accepted the provision of an innocent animal dying the death they deserved—could be confident the God whose Word cannot be broken would, in fact, accept them. But the mystery was this: How can a holy God do that?

According to the apostle Paul, that grand mystery was solved by the sacrificial death of Jesus:

**Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus** (Rom. 3:24–26, emphasis added).

Paul’s argument is that only with Christ’s death was God’s righteousness declared. Only when Jesus, the God-Man, died a death of infinite capacity to cover the perfect righteousness of a thrice-holy God could the world understand how God could be just (absolutely true to the righteous standards of His own character) and the justifier (pronouncing those who are “in Christ” to be absolutely in conformity with those standards) of those who believe in Jesus. In short, Jesus’ sacrificial death demonstrated God’s justice in redemption.

### Divine Rectitude and the Crown

**God’s Justice in Retribution.** The Scriptures make it clear that in a day yet to come, Jesus’ sovereign dominion will demonstrate God’s justice in retribution. The time is coming when Jesus will reign as King over all the earth: “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). Then every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11).

That reign will be inaugurated as the eschatological Messianic Kingdom is established (Rev. 11:15), and it will endure in its initial stage for 1,000 years (20:1–7). The prophet Jeremiah exulted in Yahweh’s promise regarding that reign’s righteousness: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, ‘that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment [justice] and righteousness in the earth’” (Jer. 23:5).

Indeed, the absolute equity of King Jesus’ rule (Isa. 9:7; 16:5; 28:5–6), as well as the security and abundance He will provide (Mic. 4:4), are central to what might be termed the “forensic function” of the Millennial Kingdom. For 1,000 years people will enjoy universal, uncorrupted justice. There will be work and provision for all, Satan’s destructive influence will be (temporarily) checked, and the utopian society humanity has longed for will be a reality. And all of it provided by King Jesus.

Then, at the end of the 1,000 years, Satan will be loosed “for a little while” (Rev. 20:3). In almost no time, Satan will gather a vast army of unsaved people to rebel against the Sovereign who has provided all of the justice, abundance, and security they have enjoyed. And thus, in the final, awful act of human rebellion, the bottomless depravity of unregenerate men will be undeniably demonstrated. The conceit of humanity is and always has been to insist that people cannot be held morally accountable for their wicked actions and that some sort of deprivation or unfairness in their experience is to blame.

After 1,000 years of uninterrupted peace and plenty, the unregenerate masses will revolt against the One who proved so wise and good for all of that time. Thus is the final nail hammered into the coffin of fallen humanity; thus is mankind’s spiritual deadness rendered incontestable.

This dynamic in God’s dealings with mankind is squandered by those systems of biblical interpretation that deny an end-times Kingdom as described throughout the Bible. But such a Kingdom is clear and central in Scripture. God will work to ensure that “every mouth may be stopped” (Rom. 3:19), that no possible excuse remains, and that man’s guiltiness is established beyond any challenge. And, according to Scripture, the Millennial reign of King Jesus—a reign of perfect righteousness and justice—is pivotal to that divine effort. In short, in a day yet to come, the sovereign dominion of Jesus will demonstrate God’s justice in retribution.

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Judas of Galilee (A.D. 6) is mentioned in Acts 5:37. Ten years before Jesus, Judas led a tax revolt. The Romans crushed the movement and killed him. He founded the Zealots (Antiquities 18.1.6; 20.5.2).

A Jewish Egyptian is mentioned in Acts 21:38. To attack the Romans in Jerusalem, he brought his followers to the Mount of Olives, promising the walls would fall by his word; but he fled before the Romans (Josephus War of the Jews 2.13.5).

Simon of Peraea (c. 4 B.C.) was a former slave of Herod the Great. He crowned himself king of the Jews and led a revolt but was captured. His head was cut off (Antiquities 17.10.6).

Athronges the shepherd (c. 4 B.C.) crowned himself king and led an insurrection against Archelaus and the Romans. As expected, they were defeated (Antiquities 17.10.7).

“A certain impostor” (c. A.D. 59) promised his followers freedom from all their miseries. As they traveled into the wilderness, the Romans attacked. Freedom came by death (Antiquities 20.8.10).

Shimon Ben-Kosiba (died A.D. 135) is remembered as the messiah-like leader of the second Jewish revolt against Rome. A rabbi named him Bar Kokhba, “son of a star,” based on Numbers 24:17. After the Romans crushed him, the Jewish community gave him a new name: Bar Kozeba, “son of disappointment.”

Outside the Land

“Moses of Crete” (A.D. 448) viewed himself as Moses in Exodus. He promised to lead his followers through the Mediterranean and

For many will come in My name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and will deceive many (Mt. 24:5).

History is filled with people who envisioned themselves to be greater than they really were. Here are a number of Jewish men who either saw themselves as God’s promised Redeemer or who were touted as such by their followers. None met the biblical criteria.

In the Land

Theudas (died A.D. 46) is mentioned in Acts 5:36. He led his followers to the Jordan River, promising to divide the water by his word. A Roman cavalry attacked. Theudas’s head went on display in Jerusalem as a victory trophy (Josephus Antiquities of the Jews 20.5.1).
back to Israel. At his command many cast themselves into the sea, believing it would divide before them. Nearby fishermen desperately tried to rescue the perishing. Many drowned. The wannabe Moses was never heard from again.

David Alroy (c. 1147) fooled people by performing “miracles.” His goal was to be king of a liberated Jerusalem. While planning an attack, his group was ambushed. Alroy got his head lopped off and sent to the Baghdad sultan as a prize.

Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676) said a voice told him he was the Messiah. His teachings were not received. Then an individual claiming to be a reincarnation of Elijah began to promote him. Sabbatai’s influence took off. But he was discredited when he embraced Islam. He was appointed as the sultan’s doorkeeper. Eventually he was banished to Constantinople and died there in isolation.

Jacob Frank (1726–1791) claimed to be the reincarnation of King David and Sabbatai Zevi. To him, salvation was through a mixture of Christianity, Judaism, and Sabbataism, which he called the “religion of Edom.” He lived in wealth until his death in 1791. His daughter became the “holy mistress” and leader of the sect.

Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994) was the spiritual leader of the Chabad Lubavitch (ultra-Orthodox) movement in New York City. Before his death, members believed he would announce his messiahship. He never did. Yet many books and pamphlets have been written as “proof” of his status as Judaism’s Messiah.

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What Christmas Is Really About

More and more people today fail to understand the meaning of Christmas. It isn’t about presents, cards, carols, warm family gatherings, or lots of good food. Christmas is about the Incarnation, when God became Man. Angelic messengers conveyed the world-changing message to lowly shepherds huddled in a field watching their flocks by night:

Behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them. . . . Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:9–11).

It doesn’t matter that we likely do not celebrate the Incarnation on the precise day Jesus physically came to Earth or that December 25 was probably a pagan holiday. The important thing is that there is a day each year that we dedicate to the reality that God came to Earth and that humanity’s greatest need was about to be met, as the Lord promised in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Christmas is about the arrival of “a Savior who is Christ the Lord” (v. 11). And that’s definitely worth celebrating. Merry Christmas!

by Thomas C. Simcox
A Lifestyle of Faith

To this point, the book of Hebrews has been doctrinal in nature. Using comparison, the author has shown Christ’s superiority over angels, Moses, and the Levitical priesthood. He has also shown that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was sufficient to remove sin and provide eternal life to all who believe.

Building on this knowledge, he then set forth the type of life each believer is to live—one of faith, hope, and love.

The Christian’s Faith

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh” (Heb. 10:19–20). The word therefore looks back to the doctrines taught about Christ in 1:1—10:18 and provides a transition into the practical applications and exhortations in the remaining chapters of the book.

The author addressed his readers as “brethren” (v. 19), indicating they were true believers in Jesus Christ; and he exhorted them to go directly into God’s presence with “boldness,” meaning freedom of speech and confidence to express their personal needs.

This authority has been granted to every believer on the basis of his or her relationship in Christ. Through His death, Jesus opened for the first time a new and living (life-giving) way for people to come into God’s presence (v. 20); “new” because no one could directly enter God’s presence under the Law of Moses, and “living” because the way provides life for believers and continual access to God.

Such access was accomplished through the “veil” of Christ’s “flesh” (v. 20). At the exact time of Jesus’ death on the cross, at the ninth hour (3 P.M., Mt. 27:45), the heavy Temple veil was rent in two. Hundreds of people were in the Temple area, as the priests were busy in the Temple preparing the evening sacrifice. Every eye there witnessed this event. Awe and amazement must have struck the priests as they heard and viewed the divine stroke of God tearing the huge veil in half from top to bottom. The empty room of the Holy of Holies stood wide open before them, as if bidding them to come in.

It was at this point that God proclaimed to the Jewish people (and the world) that the ministration of the Jewish priesthood had ended. No longer was a high priest needed to atone for sin annually. Through His atoning blood, Jesus, the true High Priest, had opened the way for mankind to come into God’s presence (Heb. 6:19; 9:3–15; 10:19).

The torn veil is a picture of the “torn” body of Christ, who made it possible for us to worship at the throne of God. The same hand that tore the veil in the Temple, from top to bottom, “tore” Jesus’ body on our behalf (Isa. 53:10). Although His sacrifice for our sins was (once and for all) offered almost 2,000 years ago, it never grows old but is always fresh and current for all who accept it. His shed blood is a continual fountain, cleansing all who appropriate it for their sin. It provides both a “new and life-giving way.”

Christ, who is the only way and life (Jn. 14:6), has made it possible for us to enter God’s presence through the “veil” of His flesh. The Temple veil closed off access to all but the high priest who could only pass through once a year. But now, through Jesus’ sacrifice, the passage is open to everyone who comes to God by faith in Christ. He changed the veil from a spiritual barrier to a spiritual gateway.

We are also invited to come into God’s presence because we have a “High Priest over the house of God” who bids us to come (Heb. 10:21). The original Greek text actually says “great Priest,” recalling the phrase great High Priest (4:14) and all that has been said about Christ’s exaltation at God’s right hand (10:12). Jesus Christ is more than a High Priest; He is the greatest High Priest in history over the actual house of God. No high priest in Israel was ever exalted to such a position.

For Christians, the rent veil means we have a great mediating High Priest who has opened the way for us to have access to the throne of God (1 Tim. 2:5). It also means that, as believer-priests, we can come into God’s presence at any time through Jesus Christ with the confidence that we will obtain mercy and find grace to help us in times of need. Since we have this high and holy privilege, we are exhorted to exercise it in four ways.

In a Proper Way. “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22). This verse reveals four conditions believers must meet before...
coming into God’s presence: We must come with (1) a true heart and (2) assurance, following (3) appropriate preparation and (4) cleansing.

A “true heart” means to come in purity and with truthful motives, gladness, openness of speech, and bold expectation of appropriating all the privileges we have as believer-priests.

“Full assurance of faith [conviction and certainty of faith]” means putting firm trust in God’s ability to provide what we ask of Him, without doubting. In other words, we continually are to come before God’s throne ready to appropriate an answer to our petition.

Third and fourth, we are to draw near, “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” These two concepts are to be understood in the light of the purification rituals required for the high priest on the Day of Atonement. He needed to be properly prepared before approaching God for both service and worship. The high priest had to shed animal blood at the brazen altar and wash his body at the laver before entering the Holy of Holies. Only then could he enter with a pure conscience.

Believer-priests must also experience cleansing—but through Christ’s blood, which frees them from an evil conscience of sin. This event takes place when we receive the Lord, wherein we are justified, or declared righteous once and for all, and finally freed from the guilt of sin.

The phrase bodies washed with pure water does not refer to water baptism, as many interpret it, but indicates a thoroughness of cleansing through the ongoing process of progressive sanctification after one has been redeemed. At salvation a believer is “washed” and then is progressively being washed through Christ’s Word throughout his or her pilgrimage on Earth. The same Greek word is used in the Septuagint for washing the priest for service (Ex. 29:4; Lev. 8:6).

### The Christian’s Faithfulness

**In a Careful Way.** Second, we are exhorted to walk carefully before others: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:23). We must “hold fast” (with a tight grip) our confession of Christ, or our Christian commitment, to keep from slipping into sin, coldness of heart, or false doctrine.

Believers are not to waver or bend in their hope as Christians when faced with severe persecution. We must not rely on our own strength but on God’s strength through the Holy Spirit, who will give us the stability and immutability to remain strong and committed. The Lord is always near to provide what we need in order to stand. For He said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (13:5). God has promised He will not abandon us under any circumstance. Thus we can take great comfort and encouragement in God’s promises, which provide strength to stand with a consistent life before a world that opposes our faith.

### The Christian’s Fellowship

**With Concern for Others.** Third, believers are exhorted to have a proper concern for other Christians. We are to encourage one another to live a life of commitment: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (10:24). The word consider means to be especially and continuously attentive to the welfare of other believers.

We are continuously to pay close attention to caring for the spiritual, moral, and physical welfare of fellow Christians and stir up, or stimulate, them to lives of love and good works in their walk before fellow believers and the world.

It is clear from this passage that Christians perform a major role in enabling fellow believers to manifest “love” and perform “good works.” This task is accomplished through Spirit-filled believers who stir one another to exercise the spiritual gifts given them by the Holy Spirit.

**By Assembling With Others.** Fourth, we are exhorted not to forsake assembling with other believers: “Not forsaking [abandon completely] the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner [custom] of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (v. 25). This verse has both a negative and positive command.

Negatively, Christians may have abandoned the church because of persecution or because they falsely assumed Christ had delayed His return. Or perhaps they stopped attending in order to return to synagogue and temple worship. Whatever the reason, they are told not to do so; such a departure would discredit their faith.

Many commentators say the words the Day refer to Christ’s Second Coming, and that well could be. But an argument can be made that the words refer to the coming judgment that would soon fall on Israel when Rome destroyed Herod’s Temple and scattered the nation in A.D. 70. Jesus referred to this judgment numerous times near the end of His ministry (Mt. 24:1–2; Lk. 19:41–44; 21:20–24).

Positively, no matter what the conditions might be, believers are to stick with the local church. They are to exhort one another to continue attending faithfully as they “see the Day approaching.”

Because of our position in Christ, we have the great and glorious privilege of approaching God directly. This awesome opportunity is not to be taken lightly; it should produce humbleness, a renewed commitment to Christ, and a heart full of praise for what God has granted to us. Come, surrender all, and give Christ the adoration and worship due Him.

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previously we focused on God’s anger and wrath. But the Bible also reveals Him to be a God of love, mercy, and grace.

God’s Love in the Old Testament

The primary Hebrew word for “love” in the Old Testament is aḥāb. Together with its derivatives, it is used to express different types of human affection within various relationships, such as husband-wife (Gen. 24:67), parent-child (25:28), in-laws (Ruth 4:15), teacher-student (Prov. 9:8), servant-master (Ex. 21:5), people and military hero (1 Sam. 18:16, 22), and men with men (1 Sam. 18:1–3). Its use also includes “the concept of God’s love for man and man’s love for God.”

Old Testament language scholar Gerhard Wallis wrote,

The word aḥāb and its derivatives in the OT have a strikingly pragmatic character. Not only does love presuppose a concrete inner disposition which is based on experiences and events, but it includes a conscious act in behalf of the person who is loved or the thing that is preferred.

He also said, “Love is not passive, but is active in the highest, most passionate degree.”

These concepts indicate God’s love involves a confirmed, inner, favorable disposition toward the objects of His love and a high, passionate degree of action on behalf of them. They also imply man’s love for God must involve a confirmed, inner, favorable disposition toward God and a high, passionate degree of action on behalf of Him.

Objects of God’s Love

Israel’s Fathers. Moses told the people of Israel, “The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them” (Dt. 10:15). Historical background sheds light on the significance of that statement.

After God destroyed the wicked segment of humanity through the flood (Gen. 6—8), He gave a new commandment to mankind: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (9:1). He wanted people to spread out and populate the world.

Several generations later, however, people rebelled against God’s commandment by purposely beginning a major building project in order to make a name for themselves and not “be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (11:4). This project began in what later became known as Babylon.

God responded by saying, “Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them” (v. 6). He stopped the rebellion by causing them to speak different languages. Because they could not understand one another, they scattered (vv. 7–8) and formed nations based on language.

The first false religion after the flood began in the same area as the rebellion. It involved the worship of a mother-goddess named Ishtar, eventually called “The Holy Virgin,” “The Virgin Mother,” and “Queen of Heaven and Earth.” This religion spread to the nations.

In light of these perversions, God focused on one specific line of human descent that led to a man namedAbram (11:10—12:1). God commanded Abram to move to a land He would show him, and He revealed the purpose for His attention on Abram and the land. Because of the nations’ perversions, God intended to bring a new, “great” nation into existence through Abram and his biological descendants (12:2). That nation would be great in that, through it, the Lord would bless all mankind (v. 3).

Consequently, God made Abram, the original father of that nation, a special object of His love. That love involved a confirmed, inner, favorable disposition toward Abram and a high, passionate degree of action on behalf of him and his biological descendants. Thus, on behalf of Abram and his descendants, God established an everlasting, unconditional covenant that gave them possession of the land of Canaan forever (vv. 6–7; 13:14–15; 15:20–21; 17:7–8).

Abram fathered two sons: Ishmael through his wife’s Egyptian maid, and Isaac through his wife, Sarah. Historians claim Ishmael fathered the Arab people. God distinguished between these two sons of Abram. He blessed Ishmael and promised to make a great nation of his biological descendants (17:20), but He refused to establish with Ishmael and his descendants the covenant He had established earlier with Abram (v. 21). God declared it would be established as an everlasting covenant with Abram’s other son, Isaac, and his biological descendants (vv. 19, 21).

The distinction between these two sons prompts several conclusions.

The Love of God
First, the great nation God promised to make from Ishmael’s biological descendants is not the great nation God promised to bring into existence through Abram and his biological descendants for the purpose of blessing all of mankind. Second, God made Isaac a special object of His love as the next father of that great nation. Thus He later told Isaac, “Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (26:3–4).

Isaac fathered two sons, Esau and Jacob (25:21–26). When they became adults, he pronounced the following blessing on Jacob: “May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to make you as the dust of the earth; that you may inherit the land in which you and your descendants with you, your name.” So He called his name Israel. “The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land” (35:10, 12).

Jacob fathered 12 sons (29:31–30:24; 35:16–19). They became the heads of the 12 tribes that constituted the great nation descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—through which God promised to bring blessing to all families, or nations, of the earth.

Thus Jacob became the last father of that great nation (Ex. 3:15). Since the name of the last father was changed to Israel, the nation became known as the children and nation of Israel (vv. 11, 13).

Psalm 47:4 indicates God loved Jacob. Long after Israel became a nation, God said, “I have loved you.” Israel asked, “In what way have You loved us?” God answered the nation’s question by pointing out He loved Jacob, but hated Esau (Mal. 1:2–3; Rom. 9:13). That statement, plus the significant ways God dealt with Jacob, indicates He made Jacob a special object of His love as the last father of the great nation of Israel.

God’s dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob reveal God’s confirmed, inner, favorable disposition toward them and His high, passionate degree of action on their behalf. Thus Moses could honestly tell the people of Israel, “The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them” (Dt. 10:15).

The Nation Israel. The Hebrew Scriptures reveal the nation Israel was a primary object of God’s love. After God delivered the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt, Moses told them, “You are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth” (7:6).

The root meaning of the word translated “holy” is “to divide.”” To be holy is to be divided from other people or things by being different, distinct, or unique in contrast with others. Thus Moses indicated God divided the Israelites from all other people in that He set them apart to have a unique relationship with Him—one not given to any other nation or people.

God chose Israel for this unique, privileged relationship because He “set His love on” that nation (7:7). The word translated “set” indicates this love was not prompted by “qualities inherent” in the nation or by “a sudden surge of emotion.” Instead, God’s love for Israel resulted from a “reasoned and unconditional decision” of the “past” to love that nation faithfully, “even under stress.”

This fact implies God intended His love of Israel to consist permanently of a confirmed, inner, favorable disposition toward it and a high, passionate degree of action on Israel’s behalf. That permanent type of love guaranteed Israel would have this unique relationship with God forever.

King David verified this truth when he wrote, “Who is like Your people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself. . . . You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever” (2 Sam. 7:23–24).

2 Ibid., 105.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 106.
5 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 235.
8 Ibid., 236.

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Hamas sells aid for profit

_Arutz-7_— Journalist Mitchell Prothero said Hamas is confiscating humanitarian goods donated by the international community and forcing Gaza Arabs to pay for them.

Prothero spoke to a commander of Islamic Jihad who complained about being forced to purchase for his son donated medicine clearly labeled “Not for resale.” “I had to go to a Hamas pharmacy to make sure the pills weren’t fake or made from poor materials in Egypt,” he explained. “If you want real medicine, you have to buy the aid Europe sends us.”

A Gaza businessman said, “If you’re not in Hamas, you get nothing.”

Give us a state or it’s war!

_Arutz-7_— Senior Palestinian Authority (PA) negotiator Nabil Shaath said recently the PA will never accept Israel as a Jewish state and threatened war if the PA fails to obtain its demands through negotiations: “A Palestinian state will arise, either through negotiations or through armed resistance.”

The Arab League voted in September to support PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas’s refusal to recognize Israel as Jewish.

Shaath said recognizing a Jewish state would undermine the PA’s demand for the “right of return,” which would grant Israeli citizenship to all the millions of descendants of Arabs who fled Israel during its War of Independence.

The PA has demanded that no Jews remain in the territory it wants. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak backed the PA view: “I say to Israeli citizens, including Jews, Muslims and others, that there is no such thing as a state in which all the citizens are Jews.” However, many Arab League nations—among them Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Libya—are officially Muslim. In Syria the president is required by law to be a Muslim, as is the prime minister of Lebanon.

**PA labels Jewish worship “sin and filth”**

_Arutz-7_— The Palestinian Authority (PA) labeled Jewish worship at the Western Wall “sin and filth” in a television program broadcast in Arabic after the first round of peace talks in Washington, DC.

The documentary aired on Fatah’s PA TV, run by the faction headed by PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. It was translated by the Palestinian Media Watch. The program showed Jews praying at the Western Wall, Judaism’s holiest site. As the camera panned the scene, the narrator said, “They [Israelis] know for certain that our [Arab] roots are deeper than their false history. We, from the balcony of our homes, look out over [Islamic] holiness and on sin and filth [the Jews praying at the Western Wall].”

Denial of Jewish history in Jerusalem and the existence of the Temples is a central component in the PA’s ideology. Islamic clerics constantly claim Israel plans to destroy the al-Aqsa mosque, perched where the first and second Jewish Temples once stood.

More virgins for shahids

_Arutz-7_— Palestinian Authority Hamas official Ahmad Bahr has updated from 72 to 2.5 million the number of virgins awaiting _shahids_ (“martyrs”) “in the Garden of Eden.”

In a recent speech translated by the Middle East Media Research Institute, Bahr said the “palace” where the virgins are waiting can be entered “only by prophets, by the righteous, and by martyrs.”

Most Muslim preachers and politicians have used the expression “72 virgins” to encourage Arab youth to die in anti-Israeli terrorist attacks and suicide bombings. According to Bahr’s new arithmetic, “In the Garden of Eden, there is a palace . . . with 500 gates. At every gate, there are 5,000 black-eyed virgins. Brothers, 500 multiplied by 5,000 is 2.5 million.”

In his speech, aired on Hamas television, he said men “should be praying for a son who would wage jihad for the sake of Allah . . . As long as we continue on this path, nobody on Earth will be able to confront the resistance or the mujahedeen, those who worship Allah and seek martyrdom.”

U.S. universities urged to study in Israel

_The Jerusalem Post_— Eight of America’s top universities will launch study-abroad programs in Israel in 2011 and 2012, the Jewish Agency has announced.

Eight institutions will receive $50,000 each in seed grants from the Jewish Agency’s Masa program to develop study programs with Israeli institutions.

They include Washington University’s Olin Business School with IDC Herzliya, Columbia’s Barnard College with Hebrew University, and the University of Maryland’s Smith School of Business with the University of Haifa. Others are Arizona State University, Case Western Reserve University, Michigan State University, the New Jersey state university system, and the University of Florida.

Harvard already partners with Hebrew University, and the University of Miami partners with UGalilee. They receive a combined $85,000 from Masa Israel.
ZOA Leader Challenges TIME to Debate

A T U T-Z—Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) President Morton Klein has challenged TIME magazine's managing editor to a debate over its September cover story, “Why Israel Doesn’t Care About Peace.”

Calling the article “wretched,” Klein accused writer Karl Vick of “falsely claiming Israel doesn’t care about peace, while ignoring the reality of Palestinians having repeatedly rejected every extraordinary peace deal Israel has offered. Not only do they reject peace offers, they also responded with terror and more incitement against Israel and Jews.”

He challenged Vick or TIME managing editor Richard Stengel to a public debate. TIME has not responded.

Klein charged, “The cover and the article are a malicious depiction of Israelis as a people more interested in making money and enjoying material pleasures than in concluding a peace agreement with the Palestinians. To prove its bogus thesis, TIME magazine primarily relied on the words of two Israeli real estate agents, a left-wing columnist, a left-wing academic, and a few others, while totally ignoring Palestinian Authority (PA) lack of interest in peace.”

Klein said Vick “unsubbly” introduced “traditionally anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jews being preoccupied with money at the cost of human virtues. The article shows picture after picture of Israelis enjoying themselves in cafes and lying on sunny beaches.

“This anti-Semitic and misleading cover and article plumbs new depths in TIME magazine’s long-running, historic bigotry towards Israel. The ZOA demands an apology and retraction of this story, which ignores all the concessions Israel has made to the Palestinians, including giving away half of Judea and Samaria, all of Gaza, and agreeing to the recent 10-month construction freeze.”

He said Vick “didn’t tell his readers that in January, when Fatah terrorists murdered an Israeli in a roadside assault, the PA praised the terrorists as martyrs and heroes,” and PA leader Salam Fayyad paid condolence calls on the terrorists.
We live in a special situation in Israel. Most of the world is against us, particularly the Muslim countries that surround us. I have lived in this part of Jerusalem for more than 35 years, and my children grew up playing with their Arab neighbors. They were friends, and there was no hatred.

But as we say here, where there is no truth in faith, there is great hate. Today my children’s Arab friends are adults. And they have blind hatred for Israel.

Recently, after many years, I ran into some of them. They recognized me and asked about my sons. "Where are they?" one asked. "Your sons were good friends of ours. Now they hate us."

I replied, "They do not hate you. We do not keep hatred in our hearts. I have taught them not to hate, but to love."

"Even to love those who hate you?" one asked.

"You see," I replied, "we have believed in the living God. And the Lord teaches us not to hate but to love one another. Take a good look at yourselves. Hatred takes first place in your lives."

"What books do you read that you speak such nice words—even to your sworn enemy?" one asked.

"Would you like to see the Book?" I replied.

"Yes," they all agreed. "We want to read it. And we want to know who wrote it."

I told them that, if they read it, in time they will come to know for themselves the One who wrote it. So I showed them the Holy Bible. They were very surprised.

"You know," one told me, "we want to read this book. But our parents are Muslims and are fanatic. They would kill us if they saw us reading the Jewish Bible."

I told them the Bible was given to all people on Earth, not only Jewish people. We had a long conversation, and they wanted to know if our sons believe the Bible.

"Yes," I replied. "It is the most important foundation of their faith."

"Do you have a Bible in our language, Arabic? And how do you know our language?" one asked.

"The Lord blessed me," I said. "I have never studied languages, but I can speak 10 because God has enabled me to do so. And here we are together, speaking nicely to one another. Why? Because we speak about the things the Lord wants us to speak about."

While we were talking, two of their Arab friends were listening. "We, too, know your sons," one said. "Many years ago we played football [soccer] together. We also want one of those books—but only in Arabic." They also asked how I came to know Arabic.
“I have never studied languages,” I told them. “But the Lord blessed me, so I can come to people like you and bring them His salvation, as it is written in this Book. This is the Holy Bible. And here it is not written to hate your friends. No. It tells us about faith and love. And those of us who have believed in the Lord no longer hate but have found love because God gives us the ability to love.”

Now they all wanted a Bible. “Can you give us this Book?” they each asked. “Are you sure this Book is not only for Jews?”

“I am sure,” I replied. “This Book is for everyone on the earth.” They asked me many, many questions. They even asked in what language they must go to Him. “What matters is that you go to Him with your heart. Pray to Him, and He will answer you.” I showed them Isaiah 49:3–8, where it is written, “And now the Lord says, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him . . . “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to Him whom man despises, to Him whom the nation abhors, to the Servant of rulers: “Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen You” (vv. 5–7).

They wanted very much to read what was written there. “This is the beginning,” one said. “We will come one day and speak with you about what we have not spoken about. Are you ready?”

“It is my duty before the Lord to be ready,” I replied.

Please pray for these men. We know that in prayer we see the mighty power of God.