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As services at the Jerusalem Assembly in Israel came to a close recently, I realized that those of us in attendance had witnessed the compelling truth of Galatians 3:28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

We had experienced the wonderful unity that is a living reality for people whose faith is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Word of God was proclaimed from the pulpit with power, first in Hebrew and then in English, reflecting the two main languages spoken within this diverse congregation. Off to one side of the church, the message was simultaneously translated into a third language for the Russian-speaking congregants. Meanwhile, in another room, children were taught from the Bible in Hebrew while someone translated into English.

Jewish leaders of the Jerusalem Assembly pointed with special joy to one of their newer involved families—Palestinians: a mother, father, and their children. Love for the Lord was the stimulus drawing people together. We could not help but praise God as we witnessed the character of Christ in the lives of His people.

Further evidence of how the divisions of the world melt away at the feet of Jesus Christ also came from another part of Israel. From the Tel Aviv area came a report on a Passover seder that was a great success. More than sixty-five people attended, both saved and unsaved, Jewish and Gentile, including ten people from a Christian-Arab congregation. Many testified to the great blessing it was for brethren to fellowship together in unity. These Christians were, in the words of Paul, “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Another account thrilled our hearts. A chartered bus took forty people from an Israeli congregation of believers to the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem. They joined in worship with a group of Arab Christians, some of whom had participated in the seder earlier. One of the Israeli women shared her testimony in English, and it was translated into Arabic. She spoke about how blessed she was to join with “our Arab brothers and sisters in love.”

After the service the Jewish believers gathered with several Arab congregations for a friendship meal. It was a blessed time of fellowship for those whom God sees, not for their differences, but as believers clothed with the righteousness of His Son. United to Christ, they understood how they were therefore united to each other. As equals in Messiah, their oneness was truly genuine.

The nations of the world make much of their search for peace and harmony. Yet Isaiah the prophet noted their plight: “The way of peace they have not known” (Isa. 59:8).

And also the apostle Paul: “And the way of peace they have not known” (Rom. 3:17).

Nations fail to achieve peace because they do not recognize the God of peace. Today the Arab-Israeli conflict is analyzed with increasing pessimism. Out of frustration, people commonly describe the situation with terms like unsolvable and hopeless. Without the Lord, mankind’s best attempts at conflict resolution are doomed.

The true, biblical unity that is found in Jesus Christ transcends national and social differences. It disregards class distinctions, race, and rank. It places people on an equal footing and forges a bond of faith that will endure throughout eternity.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
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School’s Out for Aviel

Three-year-old Aviel Atash was excited as he boarded the bus with his mother headed for his first day in school. Aviel never made it. A short distance from where he and his mom boarded the bus in downtown Beersheva, an ear-splitting explosion tore the vehicle to shreds. Within minutes, another bus was attacked by a suicide bomber. Total killed: 16. Total wounded: more than 80.

It was not until the next day that Aviel’s mother, Rachel, in the hospital with serious injuries, learned that her son was dead. The following day, the child’s father, grandfather, relatives, and friends carried his remains to the Beersheva cemetery.

We could recite many such stories. When a child’s life is snuffed out, the tragedy is immense. Aviel’s story was repeated more than 400 times in Russia, where parents mourned their children murdered in the carefully planned Chechen terrorist attack on a school in Beslan in September. Hundreds more were injured.

A Russian pastor said the terrorists were affiliated with al-Qaeda, and they boasted that the operation was “one part” of the global Islamic war.

It is no secret that al-Qaeda and its cohorts intend to kill as many children as they can. The operation in Beslan was planned over many months, with explosives and weapons planted at the school while the building was undergoing repairs for the fall term.

It is well documented that international terrorists believe there are no noncombatants in their war with Israel, America, and the West. Every person is seen as a target; no one is a civilian.

When Saddam Hussein decided in 1988 to test his chemical weapons, he chose the Kurdish village of Halabja. The dictator was pleased to learn that his poison gas had killed more than 5,000 people, among them hundreds of small children, many still clutched in their mothers’ arms.

In the war between Iran and Iraq (1980–88), thousands of Iranian children were used in wave after wave of assaults on the Iraqis. Few of them survived the war, which was best described as a monument to futility and barbarism.

Add to these horrors the fact that Palestinian leaders have declared it noble to desire to die a shahid (martyr) for Allah and the Palestinian cause and have made that outrageous goal a central element in the education of their children. Their success can be seen in the number of scattered body parts of those who succumb to the deadly fantasy.

We submit these facts to illustrate the immense chasm between the worlds of Christianity, Judaism, and radical Islam. For Islamists, there is neither sanctity nor sanctuary for children anywhere in their jihadist worldview.

Consider the words of Jesus:

But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” But whoever causes one of these little ones who believes in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea (Mt. 19:14; Mk. 9:42).

Scripture says, Behold, children are a heritage from the L ORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward. Hear, O Our Bible sets a high standard for our attitudes about children and our training and guidance of them. They are to be cherished as a grace gift from God; instructed diligently in the absolutes of God’s Word; and given, by example, admonition, education, and direction in becoming godly, productive adults who hand down what they have learned to the generation that will follow.

In a report by the American School Board Journal, 95 percent of school-based police officers say their schools are vulnerable to attack. Unfortunately, such attacks send a strong message, produce mass fear, alter the ways people conduct their lives, and dissipate confidence in government.

Recent reports that strangers have been seen photographing and ostensibly “casing” some American schools warn us to do everything possible to safeguard them.

We have received yet another lesson in understanding an enemy that does not value life. It is up to us, and to every public official, to see to it that there are no Aviels boarding buses headed toward an encounter with education that will never happen.
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Expecting a Call at Any Moment

(Digital collage, Thomas E. Williams).
Christ’s return is always imminent; we must never cease to watch for it. The first Christians thought it so near that they faced the possibility of Jesus’ return in their lifetime. Paul thinks he too may perhaps be alive when it happens.

—Gaston Deluz

Many novel theological twists are appearing these days on a variety of subjects, including the timing of the Lord’s return; whether the church is the new, “true” Israel; who will suffer the pangs of the Great Tribulation—and for how long; when, or if, there will be a literal, future Kingdom; and whether we are in the age of an ethereal, celestially supervised Kingdom of sorts now.

Some people wonder, Is this all there is? What, after all, can we be confident of? Is it acceptable for Christians, along with the new breed of flippant theological semicynics, to declare themselves blissful “pan” dispensationalists who don’t know or care about a firm prophetic position? Their idea is that it will all “pan” out, so why bother with the details.

Let me tell you a story.

The cemetery was bitterly cold that day. Several inches of snow covered the ground and was being whipped around the open grave by aggressive gusts of wind. Because the grief-stricken mother could not bear to part with the body of her infant daughter, she insisted that the tiny coffin be opened several inches of snow covered the ground and was being whipped around the open grave by aggressive gusts of wind. Because the grief-stricken mother could not bear to part with the body of her infant daughter, she insisted that the tiny coffin be opened. Because the grief-stricken mother could not bear to part with the body of her infant daughter, she insisted that the tiny coffin be opened. Because the grief-stricken mother could not bear to part with the body of her infant daughter, she insisted that the tiny coffin be opened. Because the grief-stricken mother could not bear to part with the body of her infant daughter, she insisted that the tiny coffin be opened. Because the grief-stricken mother could not bear to part with the body of her infant daughter, she insisted that the tiny coffin be opened.

As a pastor for some twenty-four years, I officiated at scores of funerals. The details of most of them are blurred in my memory or have been completely forgotten. But this one refuses to fade. After more than four decades, the heartrending picture still appears vividly before me. Seeing devastated young parents on their knees looking into the tiny face of one gone far too soon, a cruel winter wind ruffling the white satin dress she wore, is not a memory I care to cherish.

So what could I have said to the stricken couple in the cemetery that day?

“It’s okay kids, don’t worry about it. It will pan out all right”?

Hardly. Whether preacher or parishioner, you’d better have more in your spiritual arsenal than a murky attempt to brush off the questions plaguing broken lives and shattered dreams. And although human phraseology never seems to quite make the grade in such situations, there is a sufficient source that will minister to grieving hearts in the still small hours when friends, family, and pastors are no longer on the scene. It is, of course, the Word of God, that blessed fount of peace, solace, and expectation that the Spirit imparts in all seasons of life.

Simplicity or Complexity?

I have found that in the basic matters of life and death in our sin-battered society, the divine provision comes to us garbed in simplicity. Certainly there are theological complexities that must be examined by competent scholars who use the Bible rather than personal prejudice as a guide to truth.

At the grass roots, however, there are millions of people who are not really equipped to grapple with theological complexities. These are believers who operate in the realm of the daily, practical, stuff-of-life issues. And for those of us who occupy these regions, the Word is communicated in a kind of simplicity and certainty no human being can deliver.

Simply put, God simplifies. We tend at times to complicate and, in effect, obscure the obvious. Such is never the case in heaven’s communication with us. A case in point:

We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

Absent from the body, present with the Lord. This statement answers, in eight short words, all the grieving saints who ask, “Where is my loved one now?” Furthermore, it puts to rest the notion of soul sleep, which teaches a works-righteous, end-times general resurrection to determine whether you go to heaven or hell. It also wipes out the purgatory prerogative of paving the way to heaven by praying and paying the way out of partial perdition.

Are you a true believer? Then when you exit this frail tabernacle of flesh, you will be immediately transported into the presence of the Lord.

And what of our bodies, deposited like shriveled seeds into the earth while our spirits inhabit the realms of glory?

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Th. 4:16–17).

The Lord will descend. Saints’ bodies will be raised. And all living believers will be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air. Yes, He promises there will be a meeting in the air, and no born-again believer will be left behind. Is this concept difficult to understand? No! Rather, the question we can legitimately ask is, How can it be missed or muddled? The apostle set the record straight in clear and simple terms.

We might address a final word on the subject of simplicity. Just how did the Lord handle matters that were buffeting the hearts of His inner circle of disciples when He made the stunning announcement that He had an appointment with a Roman cross rather than a kingly throne?

He had alluded to it on previous occasions; but they, like us, were listening for what they wanted to hear instead of what they needed to consider. They concentrated their expectations on the kingly aspects of the Messiah’s mission to earth. Their focus was understandable. Unlike some of our theological contemporaries, they had no misgivings about the clear, biblical teaching of a coming, literal Messianic Kingdom set in Jerusalem with Jesus occupying the regal seat of Davidic authority. What
they did not comprehend was how long the Kingdom phase was to be postponed or that the capstone on the divine plan for the fulfillment of sacrificial redemption necessitated a cross before a crown.

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:1–6).

What the Messiah said was crystal clear:
1. Don’t be troubled.
2. Believe in Me.
3. I’m going ahead to prepare a place for you.
4. I will return and take you up to be with Me.
5. The way home is through faith in Me alone.

To be sure, there was truth here for these troubled and confused followers. But what they needed also was something for their grieving hearts. In this setting, explanation encumbered by complexity was not appropriate. Compassion transmitted in simplicity was enough.

Prophecy in a Word

For those of us who may be bedazzled or dazed by the current blizzard of alternate theories, positions, and prophetic perspectives blowing our way, there is a simple test we can use to check for truth. It involves one word: Imminence.

What does the purveyor of a new, novel, or absurd approach to endtimes events have to say about the imminent return of Christ, which the Scriptures declare to be the watchword for the church? Any proposition that ignores, delays, or mutilates the clear meaning of the word and the way in which the early church understood imminence—the any-moment return of Christ—should be immediately discredited.

Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Ti. 2:13).

First-century saints were instructed to revere the blessed hope as a constant companion and comfort. These believers were not looking for the dismal prospect of seeing the Antichrist or catastrophic upheavals of the Great Tribulation. Their focus was ever and always on the certainty of His coming for them.

The simple fact is that Paul did not know when Christ would return. He was in the exact position in which we are. All that he knew, and all that we know, is that Christ may come at any time.

—R. C. H. Lenski

Paul did tell us something of his own expectation concerning the catching-away of believers, commonly referred to today as the Rapture: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (emphasis added, 1 Th. 4:16–17). The “we who are alive” tells us that the apostle included himself in the band that might be alive should the catching-away take place in his lifetime.

Furthermore, he added a directive that has endured in the hearts of sincere believers for two millennia: “Therefore comfort one another with these words” (v. 18).

And so they did. Christians of the first century greeted one another in much the same way as the apostle Paul ended his first epistle to the Corinthians: “O Lord, come!” (1 Cor. 16:22). Or, as expressed in Aramaic and more commonly known to us, “Maranatha!”

Three Comforts

In these days, when it seems virtually everything in our culture is taking a turn for the worst, we must stay on course and retain an understanding of the biblical order of the end times: (1) the Rapture, (2) the Tribulation, (3) the Second Advent of Christ with His saints, (4) the national reconciliation of the Jewish people with the Messiah, (5) the Kingdom and 1,000-year reign of Christ, and (6) eternity’s new heavens and new earth. There are, of course, exciting ancillary events related to each of these major distinctions, but these are the premier segments set forth in God’s Word.

For those of us today among the band of believers who are, in the imagery of Paul’s words to the Thessalonians, the alive and remaining remnant awaiting His return, the Holy Spirit leaves us three great sources of comfort.

First, we are to be comforted in our faith as the Thessalonians were by Timothy, “our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage [comfort] you concerning your faith” (1 Th. 3:2).

Then, we are to find comfort in the reality of the Rapture: “Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Th. 4:18).

Finally, we are to find comfort in the fact that we will not face the traumatic events of the coming Tribulation. In speaking of it in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Paul told us God has not appointed us to wrath. In view of this wonderful prospect, we are told to “comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (v. 11).

Thus the sum of all of these comforts is the motivation to serve one another and further the cause of Christ in an ever-needier world. And when all is said and done, we can echo the words of a saintly, elderly black preacher of the post-Civil War era who said of his imminent ejection from this world, “I’m standing at the water’s edge, waiting further orders.” Maranatha!

Elwood McQuaid is editor-in-chief for The Friends of Israel.
Covenant Theology (as opposed to Dispensational Theology, which is what we believe) is a system that attempts to develop the Bible’s philosophy of history on the basis of two or three covenants. It represents the whole of Scripture and history as being covered by these covenants.

Covenant Theology did not begin as a system until the 16th and 17th centuries. It did not develop in the early church or the Middle Ages. Kaspar Olevianus (1536–1587) was the founder of a well-developed Covenant Theology “in which the concept of the covenant became for the first time the constitutive and determinative principle of the whole system.”

The system started in the Reformed churches of Switzerland and Germany and spread to the Netherlands, Scotland, and England. In 1647 the Westminster Confession of Faith in England became the first confession to refer to Covenant Theology.

Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669) portrayed the whole of biblical history as being governed by the covenant idea. Herman Witsius (1636–1708) connected the covenant idea with the eternal decrees of God. This prompted the idea that in eternity past, God determined to govern the entire course of history on the basis of covenants.

The Covenants

Most Covenant theologians believe that three covenants relate to the Bible’s philosophy of history: the covenants of redemption, works, and grace.

They claim that in eternity past, a covenant of redemption was established between God the Father and God the Son. Knowing that mankind would fall away from Him, God determined to provide redemption for the elect during the course of history. The Father covenanted to grant the Son to be the Head and Redeemer of the elect, and the Son covenanted to provide redemption for the elect by becoming incarnated in human flesh and dying a substitutionary death for them.

According to Covenant Theology, a covenant of works was established between the triune God and Adam.
between creation and the fall of mankind. God required Adam’s “implicit and perfect obedience.” Adam was placed on temporary probation to determine if he would voluntarily subject his will to God’s will.

God promised eternal life (not natural life) to Adam and his descendants in return for Adam’s perfect obedience. But because God appointed Adam to be representative head of the human race, he and his descendants would be penalized with death, “including physical, spiritual, and eternal death,” if he disobeyed God.

Covenant Theology also maintains that God established a covenant of grace because Adam broke the covenant of works. Louis Berkhof defined the covenant of grace as “that gracious agreement between the offended God and the offending but elect sinner, in which God promises salvation through faith in Christ, and the sinner accepts this believingly, promising a life of faith and obedience.” Thence God is the first party of the covenant of grace.

Covenant theologians claim the second party is either (1) the sinner, (2) the elect, (3) the elect sinner in Christ, or (4) believers and their seed. Some Covenant theologians believe the covenant of grace was established immediately after Adam’s fall, while others claim it was not established until God’s covenant with Abraham. Once established, it continues throughout time as the unifying principle of history.

Covenant Theology’s Inherent Problems

Unfortunately, space restricts the number of problems I can address.

Is Too Limited. Covenant Theology’s ultimate goal of history, the glory of God through the redemption of the elect, is too limited. During the course of history, God not only has a program of redemption for those people who get saved, but He also has a program for those who never get saved and programs for nations, rulers, angels, Satan, and nature. The ultimate goal of history must be large enough to include all of God’s programs, not just one.

Denies Distinctions. Covenant Theology denies or weakens some of the distinctions in the Bible by insisting that distinctions are different phases of the same covenant of grace.

For example, it claims that the Abrahamic Covenant and Mosaic Covenant (the Law) were essentially the same. But Paul emphasized their distinctiveness in Galatians 3. It also teaches there is no essential distinction between the Mosaic and New Covenants. But Jeremiah 31:31–34 indicates that the New Covenant would be different from the Mosaic Covenant, and Paul signified several major distinctions between them (2 Cor. 3:3–9).

Covenant Theology denies the distinction between the nation of Israel and the church. It believes that the church, which it claims could also be called “the Israel of God,” existed in Old Testament times and that the nation of Israel was a major phase of the church in those times. It defines the church as the continuing covenanted community, consisting of all people throughout history who have been in the covenant-of-grace relationship with God. Thus it asserts there is only one people of God throughout history.

But if the church existed in the Old Testament and Israel and the church are the same, why did Jesus place the building of the church in the future (Mt. 16:18)? And why did Peter call Pentecost (Acts 2) “the beginning” (Acts 11:15)?

Covenant Theology denies the distinction between the gospel of the Kingdom and the gospel defined in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4. Believing the ultimate purpose of history is God’s glory through the redemption of the elect and that there is only one people of God, it teaches there is only one gospel throughout history.

But the gospel of the Kingdom (“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” Mt. 4:17, 23) said nothing about Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Christ commissioned the gospel of the Kingdom to be preached exclusively to Israel (Mt. 10:5–7).

By contrast, the 1 Corinthians 15 gospel consists of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Christ commissioned this gospel to be preached to the whole world (Mk. 16:15). In addition, only after the apostles had preached the gospel of the Kingdom for some time did Christ begin to tell them that He must be killed and resurrected, prompting Peter’s negative reaction (Mt. 16:21–22).

Violates a Principle. Covenant Theology teaches that each biblical covenant is a continuation and newer phase of the covenant of grace. For example, it claims that the Mosaic Covenant was a newer phase of the covenant of grace established earlier. But the Mosaic Covenant instituted conditions not previously introduced. If it were a newer phase of the covenant of grace, it would be adding new conditions to that covenant. That action would violate the principle that no new conditions may be added to an established covenant (Gal. 3:15).

Is Inconsistent. Covenant Theology employs a double system of interpretation. Although it recognizes that the historical-grammatical method of interpreting the Bible is normal and that using another method can lead to disaster, it uses another method primarily in areas related to the future of the nation of Israel and the future Kingdom of God. There it employs the allegorical method, in which words are not given the common, normal meaning they had in the culture and time of a passage.

According to this method, the word Israel could mean the church, not the nation of Israel; and the promises of future blessing for Israel are to be fulfilled with the church, not the nation of Israel. But the fact that the prophetic Scriptures fulfilled thus far have been fulfilled according to the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, not the allegorical, seems to indicate the manner that God intends all prophetic passages to be interpreted.

Rejects Israel’s Future. Many Covenant theologians teach that, because
Israel as a nation did not accept Christ as its Messiah during His First Coming. God has rejected Israel as a nation forever and replaced it with the New Testament phase of the church. Thus God has no future program for Israel.

However, Samuel said to national Israel, “The LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name’s sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people” (1 Sam. 12:22). Concerning the nation of Israel that God redeemed for a people to Himself from Egypt, David wrote, “You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, LORD, have become their God” (2 Sam. 7:24).

God promised that even if He were to make a full end of all nations where He had scattered Israel, He would never make a full end of Israel (Jer. 30:11).

Furthermore, the apostle Paul indicated that even while the Israelites are enemies of the gospel, God’s election of them to be His people is irrevocable (Rom. 11:28–29).

Is Amillennial. Because Covenant Theology believes that the ultimate goal of history is the glory of God through the redemption of elect human beings, most of its advocates see no need for a 1,000-year, political reign of Christ on Earth. Thus they hold an amillennial view of the future Kingdom of God foretold in the Bible.

That view claims the Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, consisting of the church or the rule of Christ in human hearts, and that it was established by Christ when He sat down on the throne of God in heaven. Therefore, it equates God’s throne with David’s throne, which the Bible promises will be given to the Messiah when the future Kingdom of God is established.

There are several problems with this view. First, several decades after Christ sat down on God’s throne, He drew a distinction between that throne and His throne, which He will sit on in the future (Rev. 3:21).

Second, the prophetic dreams recorded in Daniel 2 and 7 indicate the future Kingdom of God will not coexist with Gentile world dominion. By contrast, the church has coexisted with Gentile rule for centuries.

Third, the Daniel 7 dream revealed that the future Kingdom of God will be established when the Messiah comes as the Son of man with the clouds of heaven (vv. 13–14). Christ indicated He will come in that manner at His Second Coming after the Great Tribulation (Mt. 24:21, 29–30) and that He will then sit on His throne, rule as King, and send believers into the Kingdom (Mt. 25:31–34).

Fourth, Zechariah 14:4 and 9 signify that the Messiah will be King over all the earth after His feet touch down on the Mount of Olives at His Second Coming.

Fifth, Jesus will sit on His throne as the Son of Man when the earth is regenerated through the lifting of the curse (Mt. 19:28) once Israel has repented as a nation and Christ has returned from heaven (Acts 3:19–21). This event hasn’t happened yet.

A minority of Covenant theologians, called historic premillennialists, believe in Christ’s earthly Millennial reign after His Second Coming. Another minority advocates a postmillennial view called Christian Reconstructionism or Theonomy. It claims the church will gain control of every institution and administer God’s Mosaic Covenant legislation over the world for an extended time before Christ returns on the last day of history.

Endnotes

3 Ryrie, 179.
5 Ryrie, 182.
6 Berkhof, 269–271.
7 Ibid., 215.
8 Ibid., 216.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 217.
11 Ibid., 277.
12 Ibid., 273.
13 Ibid., 295.
Turn a few Americans loose anywhere in the world and what do you get? Baseball!

While most of the media in Iraq were chasing blood-and-guts stories in other parts of the country, soldiers from the Hawaii-based 25th Infantry Division’s 2nd Brigade were writing a new page of Iraqi history. A dusty soccer field that lay between a huddle of squat buildings from the Ottoman era was turned into a baseball diamond, and the ring of baseballs leaping off aluminum bats sent from America filled the air.

The teams were made up of 13- to 17-year-old boys from a village in northern Iraq. And with Humvees parked on both foul lines as flack-jacketed American GIs stood by and supervised, the game went on.

To most Americans, the contest between the gray-shirted Brusiks and the red-shirted Nawruz would seem a strange affair. Oh, there were kids raising clouds of dust as they slid into bases, chased balls, and lamented strikes called by the American umpire. Perhaps what was most interesting was the crowd of spectators standing around the edges of the field. Parents cheered wildly at the tagouts, base hits, and fly balls—whether or not they had a shred of an idea about what was going on.

Most of them did not. And the reason was simple: As far as anyone knew, this was the first ever game of baseball played in the country of Iraq.

“We’d like to welcome you to the first Iraqi baseball game,” U.S. Army Capt. Deron Haught, who also served as umpire, told the crowd of curious onlookers. With that announcement, the town’s mayor, in true baseball tradition, threw out the first pitch; and the fun began.

“We’ve never seen this before,” said a father who had one son on each team. When the game was over, he had to have been a happy man. He went home a winner no matter which team won. Incidentally, the Nawruz beat the Brusiks 10–7.

When all was said and done, hand-wringing parents and overly eager ballplayers walked off the field just as they do at youth-league games in thousands of ballparks across America. But that is precisely what made this game great. It was normal. A bunch of kids doing what they should be doing at this stage of their lives. For these young men, life had been more attuned to death, to seeing parents and relatives disappear in the night, than to chasing fly balls and swinging at pitches. And had the Americans and coalition forces not courageously intervened, these youngsters were destined, one way or another, to fall into Saddam Hussein’s killing machines.

People who have come to expect a steady diet of bombs, murder, and mutilation via the nightly news need to be exposed to such positive developments as functioning hospitals; reopened schools; voting booths for free elections; and, yes, a field of sweaty kids enjoying a baseball game.

Is it worth it for free people to liberate the downtrodden from torture chambers, rape rooms, shredders, mass murders, and constant fear? If you value the freedom you and yours enjoy, it is. If you can see past the political demagoguery that calls it a mistake to take down the butchers of rogue regimes, it is. If you have an iota of compassion for innocent men, women, and children who daily live on the wrong side of the guns or food supplies, it is.

Which brings us back to a baseball game in a dusty backwater village in Iraq. It was a significant event—a story that should be told. Why? Because the ring of those bats in the evening air proclaimed a message of hope—of a different future than any of those youngsters had known possible. At long last, they have a future.

And when Capt. Haught yelled, “Strike three, you’re out!” one could speculate that he was actually saying something far different: “Strike three, you’re safe! And we’re here to see to it that you stay that way.”
Suppressing news by threatening reporters with violence or death is one of the dirty little secrets of Middle East journalism,” So wrote Jeff Jacoby last year in The Boston (MA) Globe. And unfortunately, nothing has changed.

Several months ago CNN producer Riad Ali Ghanem was abducted by a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization’s (PLO) Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. He was returned about twenty-four hours later. But while in captivity, he was videotaped making a statement completely uncharacteristic of his Druze Arab background. As reported by CNN, Ghanem called for the Druze not to serve in the Israeli military (his father and other family members did so) and said the Druze cause is the same as that of the Palestinians.

Most Druze, however, are extremely loyal to Israel, reject identification with the Palestinians, and willingly serve in the Israeli military.

What happened to Ghanem in captivity? He has not said. But according to journalists who dare speak up, the PLO routinely suppresses the truth and manipulates the news by threatening reporters with violence or death.

Last summer masked men in Ramallah severely beat a photographer with Agence France-Presse and broke both his arms. Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade claimed responsibility.

Wrote Jacoby, “On Sept. 11, 2001, Americans were shocked by footage of Palestinians dancing in the streets to celebrate the terrorist attacks on the United States. But those scenes disappeared from the airwaves soon after—not because they weren’t newsworthy, but because the Palestinian Authority [PA] gave orders to suppress them. “An Associated Press cameraman was summoned to a PA security office and warned not to release the material he had filmed. A top aide to Arafat told the AP’s Jerusalem bureau that if the footage were aired, ‘we cannot guarantee the life of the cameraman. Other news outlets were likewise ordered not to use any images of the 9/11 revelry. Most of them caved, and the images dried up.”

In an article published in the Middle East Forum, Khaled Abu Toameh, an Israeli-Arab correspondent for The Jerusalem Post and U.S. News and World Report, wrote, “When Arafat returned to the West Bank and Gaza from his exile, his security forces ignored pursuing terrorists and instead arrested independent journalists not loyal enough to the PLO. Over 38 journalists were forced out of their jobs or the country. . . . The first thing Arafat did when PLO returned to the territories was to restrict freedom of speech.

He said the late Yasser Arafat had complete control over the Palestinian media. “Almost all Palestinian newspapers are financed by the PLO and serve as a mouthpiece for the organization, which is basically Arafat’s office. . . . The lack of freedom at these papers is a big disappointment for Palestinian journalists; they were freer to write what they wanted under Israeli occupation before the PLO returned from exile.”

Toameh also said the journalists must be members of Arafat’s terror organizations in order to get work. Worse still is the fact that foreign journalists often depend on these Arafat lackeys as sources and translators. Consequently, Westerners receive decidedly slanted news, wrote Toameh.
Progressive Dispensationalism was introduced publicly through the 1992 publication Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church by Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock. Two more books, Progressive Dispensationalism by Blaising and Bock and The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism by Robert Saucy, were published in 1993.

The slogan that expresses the basic teaching of Progressive Dispensationalism is “Already/Not Yet.” It represents the view that claims there is a sense in which the future Kingdom of God foretold in the Old Testament is “already” here. But there also is a sense in which it is “not yet” here.

The Primary Teaching

Progressive dispensationalists claim the Kingdom is “already” here in a spiritual sense. When Christ ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father on the throne in heaven, He assumed spiritual rule over the corporate body of saints, the church. He thereby established a spiritual form of the future Kingdom of God foretold in the Old Testament, they say.

But the future Kingdom of God foretold in the Old Testament is “not yet” here in a political sense. That form of the Kingdom will not be established until Christ returns to the earth at His Second Coming to administer God’s rule over the earth.

The Old Testament reveals that Messiah will sit on the throne of His ancestor David when He establishes the future Kingdom of God. That revelation, and the belief that Christ established a spiritual form of the future Kingdom of God when He sat down at the right hand of the Father on the throne of heaven, prompt the progressive dispensationalists’ conclusion that the throne of heaven is David’s throne.

This view is essentially the same as that of historic premillennial Covenant theologians. In that respect, Progressive Dispensationalism has moved one step toward Covenant Theology and away from traditional Dispensationalism (what we believe), which holds that no aspect of the future Kingdom of God foretold in the Old Testament has already been or ever will be established until Christ returns to the earth in His Second Coming after the Great Tribulation.

Inherent Problems

Problem 1. The location of David’s throne is critical to the progressive dispensationalists’ argument. They say it is in heaven. However, the throne of David cannot be equated...
with the throne of God in heaven. First, several descendants of David have sat on his throne; but only one descendant of David, Jesus Christ, ever sits on the throne of heaven (Heb. 12:2).

Second, David’s throne was established in his lifetime (2 Sam. 3:9–10). By contrast, since God has always ruled over His creation, His throne in heaven was established long before David’s throne (Ps. 93:1–2).

Third, God’s declaration to His Son, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever” (Heb. 1:8, emphasis added), seems to indicate that God recognizes Jesus’ throne to be distinct from His throne in heaven.

Fourth, David’s throne was on Earth, not in heaven. David and his descendants who sat on his throne exercised an earthly rule and never ruled in or from heaven. Thus David’s throne is also called “the throne of Israel” by David (compare 1 Ki. 1:30 with 2:4) and Solomon (Jer. 33:17; compare 1 Ki. 3:6 with 8:20, 25). By contrast, the Bible indicates that God’s throne is in heaven (Ps. 11:4; 103:19).

Fifth, Scripture describes the throne in heaven as God’s throne (Lam. 5:19; Acts 7:49; Heb. 8:1; 12:2; Rev. 7:15; 12:5; 14:5). The Bible never calls God’s throne in heaven “the throne of David.”

Sixth, by contrast, the Bible’s description of David’s throne indicates that it belongs to David. When God talked to David about his throne, God referred to it as “your throne” (2 Sam. 7:16; Ps. 89:4; 132:12). When God mentioned David’s throne to others, He referred to it as “his [David’s] throne” (Ps. 89:29, 36; Jer. 33:21), “David’s throne” (Jer. 13:13), and “the throne of David” (Jer. 17:25; 22:2, 4, 30).

Seventh, Revelation 12:5 indicates that in His ascension, the Messiah was caught up to God’s throne, not David’s throne.

Eighth, several decades after Christ sat down on God’s throne He drew a distinction between that throne and His throne that He will sit on in the future (Rev. 3:21).

Problem 2. At the end of the article on Covenant Theology (see page 11), I gave several reasons why no form of the future Kingdom of God foretold in the Old Testament was established when Christ sat down on the throne of God. An additional reason is the parable Jesus spoke to His disciples (Lk. 19:12–27) “because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately” (Lk. 19:11).

Through this parable, Jesus indicated that He would go away to heaven for an extended time to receive the future Kingdom of God foretold in the Old Testament. Once He received it, He would return to Earth to establish it. Thus the future Kingdom of God would not be established until His Second Coming, a long time after His ascension.

by Renald E. Showers

About the Coming Kingdom

Christ must reign in every realm into which sin has entered. He came once and offered to be Israel’s king and savior, but the majority turned a deaf ear to his offers. He will come again in glory and take charge of this world by force. As the son of David, he will institute an earthly kingdom. Israel will be the center of that kingdom and Jerusalem will be the capital.

—Henry C. Thiessen
Have you ever wondered whether you made that important decision in your life or whether God made it? Whether you have the “freedom” to decide for yourself or you make the choices God has already determined for you? If you have, then you have experienced the tension that has produced Open Theism—a relatively new theological view that enlarges the scope of man’s free will and claims that God does not know the future.

Initiated in 1980 (The Openness of God by Richard Rice), Open Theism emerged on the scene of evangelical theology in the 1990s, hitting center stage in 1994 with the publication of The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God. Clark Pinnock, one of the authors, espouses Open Theism “because [God] gives liberty to his creatures, is happy to accept the future as open, not closed, and a relationship with the world that is dynamic, not static.”

But is “openness” biblical?

Historical Backdrop

For hundreds of years, people have wrestled with two seemingly incompatible teachings of the Bible: God’s overarching, omniscient determining of all that happens in His creation (called “providence” or “foreknowledge”) and man’s freedom and responsibility to choose his own path (called “free will”). The biblical antimony presents divine sovereignty and human responsibility as a both/and situation. But human reasoning seeks an either/or.

The Scriptures depict God as a totally sovereign and all-knowing Creator “who works all things according to the counsel of His will, . . . to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:11–12) and for His own good, as well as that of His creation. Those who emphasize these elements are usually identified with French Protestant reformer John Calvin (1509–1564).

However, the Scriptures also clearly depict human responsibility: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). Consequently, others believe that a deterministic view of the Creator and His cosmos reduces the responsibility of man and the significance of God’s glory. These people lean toward what they perceive to be a fairer position, which emphasizes the autonomous nature of human choices. They are usually identified with Dutch theologian James Arminius (1560–1609).

Open Theism is a recent attempt to find an acceptable middle ground.

The Arguments

Clark Pinnock argues that Open Theism is necessary for God’s creatures to be significantly free personal agents. Openness means God does not determine, indeed, does not even know, an outcome until free personal agents make their choices. Advocating openness as the best solution to the tension of divine sovereignty versus human responsibility, Gregory Boyd sees “the openness of God to the future as one of his attributes of greatness,” because “a God who . . . is willing to engage in an appropriate element of risk is more exalted than a God who faces an eternally settled future.”

Boyd insists that openness does not reduce God’s foreknowledge; rather, since the future actions of free personal agents have not yet happened, nothing exists in that realm for God to know.

However, Open Theism poses a serious threat to the biblical view of God, who knows everything—actual
or Veiled Heresy?

and possible—effortlessly and equally well. The issue, in fact, is central and detrimental, rather than peripheral and incidental, to evangelical theology. Bruce Ware, an opponent of Open Theism, wrote,

"Our conception of his providence will necessarily impinge upon everyday Christian life and experience in a multitude of ways. . . . To get it wrong here is to create a thousand related problems, both theological and practical."

Classical Theism (what we believe) teaches that God’s sovereign omniscience, hence His foreknowledge, takes precedence over man’s freedom; that God’s nature must not be diminished by overemphasizing man’s responsibility. The fact that the traditional view of God is sometimes misstated or caricatures God as “an aloof monarch, removed from the contingencies of the world, unchangeable in every aspect of being . . . an all-determining and irresistible power, aware of everything that will ever happen and never taking risks,” does not mean that classical evangelicalism ignores the tensions created by biblical revelation.

Openness does not actually solve this biblical antinomy. It simply pushes the discussion to another point on the spectrum. The issue now becomes, What constitutes a future free action as opposed to a future nonfree (determined) action?

According to open theist William Hasker, “An agent is free with respect to a given action at a given time if at that time it is within the agent’s power to perform the action and also in the agent’s power to refrain from the action.”

However, open theists espouse an improper, virtually libertarian, concept of man’s freedom. John Frame, in his book No Other God, explained:

"Libertarians maintain that only if we have this kind of radical freedom can we be held responsible for our actions. Their principle is simple enough: if our decisions are caused by anything or anyone (including our own desires), they are not properly our own decisions, and we cannot be held responsible for them."

In truth, only God is truly free. Man’s freedom is relative. Ultimately, the relationship between God’s sovereign and omniscient foreknowledge...
and man’s freedom and responsibility is beyond the scope of creaturely (human and angelic) comprehension. Since creaturely freedom is obviously limited (gravity, for example), it is more appropriate to admit the antinomy, exalt God’s character, and allow human autonomy to be diminished to the biblically decreed responsibility.

The Dangers

1 Open Theism diminishes divine glory.

It credits God’s creativity and resourcefulness when He successfully “entices” free moral agents to act in keeping with His ways and plans.

Asking what happens “if God’s success rate turns out to be low,” Ware noted that open theists acknowledge, “Freedom makes it possible that horrible and pointless evil can occur. While God may try to avoid such horrendous suffering, they say, there simply are many times when he cannot do so.”

God, then, must accept responsibility for the failure of His plans.

Instead of an awesome God who effortlessly controls and directs all that comes to pass, we must settle for a God who works overtime to stay ahead of all the previously unknown and non-existent free, moral decisions that are made every minute of every day.

2 Open Theism diminishes human hope.

Our precious Romans 8:28 must now read, “most things work together for good, if God can successfully entice the men around me,” instead of “And we know that [God causes] all things to work together for good to those who love God.”

We will not be able to say, as did Joseph, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

If God is only partially successful in effecting His purposes, as open theists imply, then He may not be successful in accomplishing His purposes for my life. But the apostle Paul affirmed exactly the opposite: “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

Rather than having a God who does not know what has not yet happened, it is comforting, if a bit fearful, to know “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13).

3 Open Theism diminishes prophetic confidence.

Gone are the love for God’s Word and His promises for the future, which we love to read and ponder. Said one critic, “Just imagine the hymn writer trying to lift up the downcast—I know not what the future holds, but I know Who also doesn’t know much about it either.”

4 Open Theism diminishes Israel’s future.

Having repeatedly rebelled against and frustrated God’s plan for her, could Israel have any shred of hope that He could fulfill His promises to her? One would have to acknowledge the repeated failure of God’s creativity and coaxing in the past and to despair of His ability in the future.

The inevitable direction this thinking takes is that ownership of the land of Israel is up for grabs because God does not know the future and did not predetermine the end result.

On the other hand, Paul said Israel’s current spiritual condition is part of God’s inscrutable plan to glorify Himself: “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens” (Rom. 9:16, 18).

Open Theism is an attempt, at the expense of Classical Theism’s view of God, to craft a more acceptable form of human freedom. But in the end, it diminishes God’s glory in order to elevate man’s freedom. It is an attempt to reason out a biblical antinomy that is completely beyond creaturely comprehension. And, in its attempt to do so, it diminishes the believer’s confidence in both God’s beneficial providence and His prophetic Word.

ENDNOTES

1 Bruce A. Ware, God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 31.
5 Ware, 13.
6 Pinnock, 103.
9 Ware, 222–223.

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Getting It Right

God is infinite in knowledge. He knows himself and all other things perfectly from all eternity, whether they be actual or merely possible, whether they be past, present, or future. He knows things immediately, simultaneously, exhaustively, and truly. . . . From man’s standpoint God’s knowledge of the future is foreknowledge, but from God’s standpoint it is not, since He knows all things by one simultaneous intuition. . . . Free actions do not take place because they are foreseen, but they are foreseen because they will take place.

Henry C. Thiessen
In recent years a system of interpreting biblical prophecy known as Preterism has invaded the church, bringing confusion and division to many congregations that have historically held to the future return of Jesus Christ.

Promoted by popular radio teachers, such as Reformed scholar R. C. Sproul, whose book *The Last Days According to Jesus* advances the moderate preterist position, Preterism has made inroads into evangelical seminaries and stimulated public debates on Bible college campuses. Although most Christians have never heard of the teachings of Preterism, its approach to prophecy diminishes the prophetic hope of the church while undermining the basis of the prophetic promises for Israel.

**What Is Preterism?**

Derived from the Latin word *preter* (“past”), Preterism holds that most, if not all, of the prophetic events of the Old and New Testaments have already been fulfilled. Like historicism, which interprets the book of Revelation as symbolic of church history, Preterism spiritualizes prophecy to make it fit historical events in the Church Age. However, unlike historicism, Preterism seeks to fit certain, if not all, prophecies relating to Christ’s Second Coming and Israel’s restoration into a specific historical event in the past.

As moderate preterist Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., explains, “Matthew 24:1–34 (and parallels) in the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. In Revelation, most of the prophecies before Revelation 20 find fulfillment in the fall of Jerusalem.”

Preterists contend that Jesus’ use of the phrase *this generation* in His Olivet Discourse requires fulfillment in the first century; R. C. Sproul, in particular, argues that Christ’s words failed unless this interpretation is adopted.

By contrast, Futurism (what we believe) maintains that the literal fulfillment of Messianic prophecy in Christ’s First Advent confirms that His prophetic teaching must also be interpreted literally. Thus the Olivet Discourse and the Revelation will find fulfillment in the future, particularly during the Tribulation and Christ’s Millennial reign.

Two types of Preterism today contend with each other for primacy. Partial, or Moderate, Preterism is the most popular version. Although it argues that most prophecy (such as the events of the Tribulation) was fulfilled in A.D. 70, it still understands that some prophetic teachings, like Christ’s Second Coming and the bodily resurrection, have a future fulfillment.

Partial Preterism, therefore, holds to two Second Comings: one that occurred in

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_A.D. 70: Preterism’s Prophetic Dead End_

(Digital composition and enhancement, Thomas E. Williams).
Preterism teaches that Christ came in A.D. 70 to judge Israel and end the Jewish age. Like historicists, preterists argue that the promises made to Israel were misunderstood as national promises. Therefore, when Israel rejected Christ, these “spiritual” promises passed to the church, the “true Israel.”

Preterism, however, which forces the fulfillment of most prophetic texts, particularly the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple, into the events of the First Jewish Revolt, views the destruction of the Jewish people as the central focus of prophecy.

As preterist David Chilton stated, The Book of Revelation is not about the second coming of Christ. It is about the destruction of Israel and Christ’s victory over His enemies in the establishment of the New Covenant temple. . . . Revelation prophecies the judgment of God on apostate Israel; and while it does briefly point to events beyond its immediate concerns, that is done merely as a “wrap-up,” to show that the ungodly will never prevail against Christ’s Kingdom. For preterists, the Jewish people are the true enemies of Christ; and their overthrow by the Roman army, sent by Christ to do His bidding, is the triumph of Christ over Antichrist. In fact, they say, Christ came spiritually in the judgment by the Roman army (hence, a judgment-coming), fulfilling His promise “to come quickly.”

The Jewish Temple is likewise seen as the center of spiritual apostasy and its destruction as the fulfillment of the abomination of desolation, which was God’s holy judgment for the wicked crucifixion of Christ by the Jews.

Preterists, therefore, reject any aspect of a future for ethnic Israel (apart from the church) and contend that any eschatological system that looks for a restoration of Israel and its Temple is heretical, for such would be tantamount to rejecting Christ and restoring blasphemy.

Preterist Gary DeMar explains: There is nothing in Jesus’ teaching in this Gospel [Matthew] which suggests that after this period of judgment there will be a restoration. . . . The Apocalyptic Discourse (ch. 24) moves away from Jerusalem. . . . Does the Bible, especially the New Testament, predict that the temple will be rebuilt? It does not. . . . To make the temple of stone a permanent structure in the light of Jesus’ atoning work would be a denial of the Messiah and His redemptive mission.

Preterism’s Problems

(1) The Date of the Book of Revelation

For the prophecies of Revelation to fit into the Roman conquest of Jerusalem, it is necessary to date the composition of the book before A.D. 70.

Preterists understand the necessity of dating the book early in Nero’s reign (A.D. 64–67), confessing, “If the book was written after A.D. 70, then its contents manifestly do not refer to events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem.”

However, if dating the book was so crucial to its interpretation, why did not the apostle John clearly indicate somewhere in its 404 verses the time of its writing? However, as Mark Hitchcock, who wrote a doctoral dissertation on the subject, concluded, “I do believe that the case for the late date (A.D. 95) can be proven at least by a preponderance of the evidence, if not beyond a reasonable doubt.”

This evidence includes the external testimony of the most reliable early church fathers, such as Irenaeus (A.D. 120–202), who made the unambiguous declaration, “For if it were necessary that the name of him [Antichrist] should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been told by him who saw the apocalyptic vision. For it [the Revelation] was seen no long time ago, but almost in our generation, toward the end of Domitian’s reign.”

In addition, the internal evidence favors the late date in the time of Domitian. This support includes (1) the condition and description of the seven churches in Revelation 1—3, which make no mention of Paul’s missionary journeys; (2) John’s banishment to Patmos, rather than execution, as with Peter and Paul under Nero; and (3) the prophecy of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:9—22:5), which implies that the old Jerusalem has already been destroyed.

(2) Lack of Historical Agreement With First-Century Fulfillment

If Preterism’s interpretation of prophecy were correct, the historical record should support details. However, the opposite is the case.

For example, the direction of Christ’s advent to Jerusalem (Mt. 24:27) is compared with lightning flashing from east to west. But the Roman army, which preterists interpret as fulfilling this prophecy, advanced on Jerusalem from west to east. Even if we take this simply to mean the Roman army advanced “like lightning” (i.e., quickly), history reveals a very slow assault on Jerusalem; the war lasted several years before Jerusalem was even besieged!

In many cases a “correlation” can only be made through the eschatologically biased interpretation of first-century historian Flavius Josephus, such as (1) associating divine signs with the Roman army’s...
The Rise of Preterism

Preteristic interpretation first appeared in a commentary on Revelation by the Spanish Jesuit Luis Alcazar (1554–1613). He interpreted symbols in Revelation as the victory of the Roman Catholic Church over paganism and especially over the Jewish people, whose divine rejection he believed was finalized in A.D. 70.

However, leading Jesuit commentator Cornelius Lapide (1567–1637) rejected Alcazar’s Preterism as “new and against the usual interpretations,” “mystical rather than literal,” “allegorical,” and “makes assertions without proof.”

The first Protestant preterist was Hugo Grotius (1538–1645), a Dutch Arminian who also originated the heretical governmental view of the atonement, while Henry Hammond (1605–1660), who followed Grotius’s approach, introduced it to British soil. However, both of these men were more historicist than preterist, and their views were largely ignored, although post-Reformation groups, such as the Huguenots, denounced their views. One of their leaders, Pierre Jurieu (1637–1713), said Preterism “dishesonor its authors” and constitutes “a shame and disgrace not only to the Reformation, but also to the name Christian.”

Even so, this form of Preterism was mild. Although English Protestant scholar John Lightfoot (1602–1675) also adopted a mild Preterism, the preterist interpretation was not seen in Protestant scholarship until the 1800s when it emerged as a product of German rationalism. This liberal school, which rejected supernatural revelation and originated biblical higher criticism, adopted Preterism to avoid predictive prophecy and give a naturalistic interpretation to the book of Revelation through a comparison with the apocalyptic literature of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

As German rationalism spread, the preterist interpretation became established in Protestantism in the British Isles and United States and influenced later evangelical academics, such as J. Stuart Russell (1816–1885) and Moses Stuart (1780–1852), whose works represented the modern forms of Preterism.

The popular rise of partial Preterism among American Protestants of the Reformed tradition can be traced to the 1970s and the Christian Reconstruction movement through the influence of the late Greg Bahnsen and its popular promotion by his students David Chilton, Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., and Gary DeMar, as well as R. C. Sproul (who became a preterist in the 1990s).

The rise of full Preterism can be credited to the Churches of Christ and specifically to one of their pastors, Max R. King, whose disciples include present full preterists Don K. Preston, John L. Bray, and John Noe.

by Randall Price

End Notes


About Interpreting Prophecy

The spiritualizing interpretation of prophecy is contradicted by the prophecies that have already been fulfilled. Hundreds of prophecies throughout the Old and New Testaments are recorded as fulfilled prophecy. . . . The messianic kingdom of Christ, so clearly predicted in many Old Testament passages and also in the New Testament, should be accepted at face value. . . . The promises of Jeremiah 31 state explicitly that Israel will not be cast off nor lose its identity as a nation, and it will continue as a recognized entity in the world as long as the sun and moon endure (vv. 35–36).

—John F. Walvoord

[Image: Church in Mannheim, Germany (Cees Van Leeuwen; Corday Photo Library Ltd./Corbis).]
Most Christians would agree that the apostle Paul was a man on a mission. In Acts 20:20–21 he said, “I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” No matter whom he met, he proclaimed the same message: repentance and faith in Jesus, the Messiah of Israel.

Today, however, some of the same people who extol Paul’s teaching repudiate this scriptural truth in favor of a new message: Jewish people need not understand, embrace, or profess faith in Jesus because Jesus is only for Gentiles.

This new heresy to confront the church is often identified as Dual Covenant. It maintains that Jewish people need only keep the laws and traditions of Judaism to be assured of a place in heaven.

Dual Covenant can best be defined as the belief that the New Testament, or covenant, applies to Gentiles only. Thus Jesus Christ is not the Savior of the Jewish people, who should relate to God through the Old Testament covenant of the Mosaic Law.

Christian preacher David R. Reagan says this un-biblical position is infiltrating Bible-believing Christian churches:

The Scriptures speak clearly to the fact that all people, including the Jews, need a Savior and that Jesus of Nazareth is that Savior—the one and only (1 John 5:1–5).

Yet, this gross apostasy... is beginning to spread within the Evangelical community.¹

God’s Way

Two ways to God? Is that possible? Not when we study the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Bible is clear that there has always been only one way to please the Lord—through obedience. In the Garden of Eden man received a single command: Don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, “for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17).

God could not have been clearer. But Satan tempted Eve, and she ate. Then she gave the fruit to Adam, and he ate. Realizing they were in trouble, they attempted to hide from the Lord when He came to speak with them, refused to take responsibility for their disobedience, and sought to blame others for their actions.

God had a single way: Don’t eat from the tree, and you shall live. They chose another way, which cost them the garden and brought hardship and death to all mankind. The Bible is clear: “In Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15:22).

When Israel was trapped in Egypt and the Lord worked through Moses to deliver the Jewish people from their enemies through the plague of death of the firstborn, the Lord made it clear that death would visit every home, Jewish and Egyptian, unless the occupants did exactly as He instructed.

They were to choose a lamb on the tenth day of Nisan, observe it for three days, kill it at twilight on the fourteenth of Nisan, and apply its blood to the doorposts and lintels of their houses.
At long last the book has been closed on the life and times of notorious terrorist kingpin Yasser Arafat. In the years ahead historians will mull over the impact and legacy of the life of the perpetual survivor and killer of thousands of innocent people—the man who is rightly called the father of modern terrorism.

Boston Globe columnist Jeff Jacoby expressed dismay at the unwarranted fawning over Arafat by some in the West. Praising the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Palestinian Authority was “a grotesque idea,” he wrote. Praise a man “who sent his agents to slaughter athletes at the Olympics, blow airliners out of the sky, bomb schools and pizzerias, machine-gun passengers in airline terminals? Who lied, cheated, and stole without compunction? Who inculcated the vilest culture of Jew-hating since the Third Reich? Human beings might stoop to bless such a creature so evil . . . but God, I am quite sure, will damn him for eternity.”

God’s Message

God has always been concerned about the whole world. Be it the Hebrew Scriptures or the New Covenant (Testament), God’s concern for all is evident.

In 1 Kings, at the dedication of Israel’s first Temple, Solomon finished his dedicatory prayer with these words:

“And may these words of mine, . . . be near the LORD our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant [Solomon] and the cause of His people Israel, . . . that all the peoples [Gentiles] of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other” (8:59–60).

Then they were to roast the lamb with fire and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

The Lord told them, “The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Ex. 12:13).

The choice was obvious. Both Hebrews and Egyptians needed to take God at His word. In fact, the previous nine plagues had caught the attention of many Egyptians

(Ex. 9:20). Some probably followed the Lord’s instructions to the letter because a number of Egyptians even left Egypt with the Israelites (Ex. 12:38).

The point is that the Lord was going to judge both Jews and Gentiles and that He provided only one way for them to avoid judgment. It was not a Gentile way or a Jewish way. It was His way.

Later in the nation’s history, Israel found itself in trouble due to sin. The Lord sent “fiery serpents,” or poisonous snakes, among his people, and many died (Num. 21:6). Scripture says, “The people came to Moses, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us’” (v. 7).

So Moses prayed for the people. Then the Lord instructed Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it [the brazen, or bronze, serpent], shall live” (vv. 7–8).

The people of Israel had to obey the Lord’s command. He provided the way of escape, the way of life: Look to the brazen serpent and live. There was only one way—God’s way.

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impending conquest; (2) reinterpreting the text to fit the preferred historical data, such as taking “the clouds of heaven” as the dust kicked up by the Roman army’s advance; or (3) taking statements that do not fit the historical events, such as the unprecedented and unsurpassed nature of the Tribulation, as hyperbole in order to claim first-century fulfillment.

Even the central concept of Preterism—that Christ’s judgment-comeing was to end the Jewish nation—cannot stand in light of Judaism’s continued vitality and the modern state of Israel.

The historical consequences for Israel in the aftermath of A.D. 70 were indeed critical. But the Jewish people and Jewish nationalism not only survived, but hope for the restoration promised by the prophets increased. Moreover, the “Temple consciousness,” perpetuated through rabbinic Judaism’s spiritual transference to the synagogue, also expressed itself in tangible ways.

Whenever circumstances favored rebuilding the Temple, there were Jewish activists who returned to Jerusalem to attempt it. Today the Roman Empire is long vanished; but the Jewish people are again in the Promised Land, in control of the Holy City and its Temple Mount, and making plans to rebuild the Temple.

Is it reasonable to accept the events of A.D. 70 as a fulfillment of God’s program for the Jews but not accept these subsequent events as also part of His ongoing divine plan? A futurist interpretation agrees much better with Jesus’ statement in the Olivet Discourse that, when He comes, the Jewish nation—cannot stand in light of Judaism’s continued vitality and the modern state of Israel.

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It was early in the day. Yet Governor Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect, was already facing a busy docket. He really didn’t want to be bothered with the political intrigues of the Jewish high priest and his Sanhedrin council. The heat always rose early in Judea, and Pilate was hot, sweaty, and irritated even before the council members came to see him, dragging with them this Jewish prophet or desert preacher or whatever he was.

Pontius Pilate was staying in Herod’s palace, as was his custom on visits to Jerusalem. It so happened the Jews were celebrating one of their religious festivals, and he was getting the feeling this was one case he couldn’t dodge. Yes, he hated Jerusalem, and he hated the Jews and their insufferable religious customs and observances and their intractable defensiveness about that Temple of theirs. But he knew that he could not risk offending the Sanhedrin, certainly not now. After all, a large contingent of Jews had gathered outside the praetorium, including the chief priests and their cadre of religious lawyers. And they weren’t going away until he dealt with this Jesus fellow.

As Pilate eyed the accused, who was standing before him quietly, his hands tied, he noticed that “rough justice” had already been administered. Jesus’ robe was torn, and he obviously had been beaten.

Nothing special about that, Pilate thought. Except there was something else. Something about the man’s demeanor. He could hardly call it dignity, could he? A wandering preacher, dressed in rags. Well, whatever it was, it was beginning to unnerve Pilate. The prefect was feeling increasingly pressed to make a decision. And this man’s serene, implacable stare as he stood there, without a tinge of fear or
anxiety even though bloodied and facing possible execution, was not making it any easier.

Pilate couldn’t help but think back to his failed track record in Jerusalem. He had been called into Judea to regain control of the region. His predecessor, Archelaus, one of the sons of “Herod the Great,” had failed miserably trying to rule the area after his father’s death. The Herodian ruler had sent his own troops into the Temple courts to control a riot and ended up slaughtering three thousand people. A few weeks later Archelaus blithely left on a trip to Rome and another riot broke out. The Romans ended up crucifying two thousand locals around the city walls to quell the disturbance.

Pilate thought he could do better. After all, he had mused to himself when he had first arrived in Jerusalem as prefect, Caesar demands peace and control in his occupation territories—and I am going to give it to him.

But then reality set in. In order to stop a disturbance, Pilate had to send troops into the Temple area, killing a number of Galileans, their blood spilling over the stone floor, mingling with the blood of the animals that had just been sacrificed.

Then there was the debacle with the standards. Wanting to make a show of force in Jerusalem and gain control through intimidation, Pilate, in the darkness of night, ordered his troops to erect a perimeter of Roman flags all bearing the likeness of Caesar. Never mind that he had erected “idolatrous” images in the shadow of the Jewish Temple. Another riot broke out.

This time a huge contingent of Jews marched all the way north to Pilate’s headquarters in Caesarea and demanded that the Roman standards be removed. Then, when he ordered his soldiers toward the mob, every last one of the Jews bared their necks, daring him to kill them. Even the centurions were impressed.

Pilate still cringed when he remembered how he had to back down. But what else could he do? Political survival in this forsaken territory of Judea obviously required diplomatic delicacy, something he found offensive. He preferred blunt force. It was quicker—more direct. But Rome wanted stability in the region. Pilate now wondered whether that would ever be possible.

He gazed over at Jesus again. The man had just confessed that he was a “king.” But Pilate was smart enough to know the itinerant rabbi was talking about some kind of religious kingdom—not a political one. The chief priests were urging him to use his authority to execute capital punishment, claiming Jesus had committed treason. But Pilate knew that under strict Roman law, the man posed no risk of sedition.

Then he heard one of the scribes (or was it one of the priests? or maybe both) yelling something about how Jesus had stirred up the people in Galilee.

Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee, is here in Jerusalem for the festival, Pilate thought. This Jesus is from his jurisdiction. Let Herod handle the case. Why should I have to decide?

And now, as he glanced again at Jesus of Nazareth, the Roman prefect finally started to manage a smile. But it soon faded when he saw Jesus gazing at him like a torch burning dry papyrus, searing right through the thin veneer of Pontius Pilate’s political motives.

**History Speaks**

This dramatic scenario may or may not accurately reflect Pontius Pilate’s inner thoughts. But it is consistent with the four Gospel accounts and the considerable ancient history that corroborates Jesus’ Roman trial.

After all, to doubt the historicity of Christ’s trial before Pilate is like questioning whether the American pre-Civil War Supreme Court ever decided the Dred Scott case.

The existence of the Sanhedrin is clear. And the Herod family is firmly established in the writings of ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who also wrote of Jesus’ trial before Pilate. The identity of the Roman prefect is proven even outside the biblical accounts and those of Josephus.

In the 1950s an excavation in Caesarea, Pilate’s official residence, uncovered a stone inscription. Although part of it was missing, it clearly read, “Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judea.”

I have heard those who doubt the Bible and point to the unusual and, they argue, unhistorical practice mentioned in all four Gospels, where Pilate gave the crowd a voice-vote choice between Jesus and Barabbas. Yet this practice of pardoning criminals through a popular vote did exist. A first-century papyrus (Papyrus Forentinus) from Roman-occupied Egypt revealed the same practice was used in A.D. 85.

**A Mysterious Friendship**

But there is an intriguing question that neither Scripture nor history has answered. Why, after Pilate sent Jesus to Herod for further proceedings, does Scripture say, “That very day Pilate and Herod became friends” (Lk. 23:12)? They had been enemies. Was Herod simply being cordial? That seems unlikely. Ancient writer Philo recorded that Pilate once set up his own golden shields in the Herodian palace in Jerusalem. Herod Antipas was outraged and filed a complaint with Tiberius Caesar, who then ordered Pilate to take them down. With that bitter enmity between them, only an extremely strong, self-serving motive that promised to benefit both of them could have healed the breach. So, was there an actual conspiracy between Herod and Pilate? And if so, against whom?

There is one possible explanation. Before Herod, Jesus stood mute. Herod returned Him to Pilate because he could find nothing against Him “deserving of death” (Lk. 23:15). Yet according to Acts 4:27, both Herod and Pontius Pilate turned against Jesus. Combining these verses yields the following possibility: Herod, while secretly wanting to rid himself of anyone (particularly Jesus) who threatened his political ambitions, may have thought he could use Jesus as a pawn in his master chess game—with the ultimate goal of checking the ever-expanding power of the high priest and...
In a new book, The Seventh War, journalists Avi Yisacharov of Voice of Israel Radio and Amos Harel of Haaretz report that Hamas terrorists told them outright that the liberal left actually encourages terrorism. Yisacharov's remarks on Israel's Channel 1 Television were quoted by Arutz-7:

"Yisacharov said he was told [by Hamas] as follows: 'We tried, through our attacks, to create fragmentation and dis sention within Israeli society, and the left-wing's reaction was proof that this was indeed the right approach. When we heard about the 'Pilots' letter' [written and publicized in 2003 by 27 Israel Air Force pilots who refused to take part in bombing missions against terrorist leaders in Arab towns] and the elite soldiers who refused to serve [in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza], it strengthened those in our camp who promoted the idea of suicide bombers. . . . The disengagement from Gaza is proof of our victory. The fact is that Sharon is willing to withdraw unconditionally, and is essentially raising a white flag and retreating. Only by force can we teach the other side what to do.'

Craig Parshall is a successful author and trial attorney in the Washington, D.C. area. He is married to nationally syndicated talk-show host Janet Parshall.

The basis of ancient Roman justice was reflected in a popular maxim, (it was later codified in the Institutes of Justinian) that Pilate undoubtedly knew but chose to ignore: “Justice is a set and constant purpose giving to everyone his due.”

So then, here is the personal decision before each of us: Considering Jesus' claims to have been the Messiah, the Son of God incarnate, the Savior, the perfect and final offering for sin, have we—you and I—given Jesus “His due?”

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Regardless of their motives, neither Herod nor Pilate were successful. Herod was later deposed by Caligula in A.D. 39. And Pilate, after his many failures, was relieved of his command by Rome.

Yet Jesus, wrongly convicted and cruelly crucified, was buried in a rich man’s tomb and three days later, arose triumphant.

Pilate's last recorded question to Jesus, one that must have been uttered in a tone of frustration and outraged arrogance, was, “Do You not know that I have power [authority] to crucify You, and power to release You?” (Jn. 19:10). But Jesus’ answer must have cut Pilate to the quick, as He reminded the prefect that God was the ultimate Grantor of authority (v. 11). Pilate then doubled his efforts to avoid the legal and political debacle unfolding before him, but to no avail (v. 12).

Yet Jesus was not killed because of Pilate’s failure to administer justice or because of Herod’s conspiracy or the bad faith of His Sanhedrin accusers. Jesus’ blood was willingly and purposely “shed for many for the remission [forgiveness] of sins” (Mt. 26:28).
Israel's Wickedness Removed

Zechariah’s first five visions greatly encouraged and comforted the Jewish remnant returning from Babylon. They revealed that the Lord would return to Jerusalem with mercy, give Israel victory over its enemies, reestablish and enlarge Jerusalem, purify and reinstate Israel’s high priest, and assure completion of the Temple.

However, the last three visions in this series take an abrupt turn. Instead of foretelling blessing, they sternly warned against wickedness. Before Israel could experience the blessings mentioned above, the land of Israel had to be purged from individual and national wickedness. Two of the last three visions are recorded in this chapter and address the issue of individual and national wickedness within the nation of Israel.

The Sixth Vision

A sixth vision was revealed to Zechariah as he contemplated his previous visions:

Then I turned and raised my eyes, and saw there a flying scroll. And he said to me, “What do you see?” So I answered, “I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits and its width ten cubits” (vv. 1–2).

What the prophet saw was a huge, unrolled scroll, thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide, flying swiftly through the sky like a long banner, inscribed with God’s Law on each side. Commentators compare the scroll’s size to the holy place in the Tabernacle (Ex. 26:15–25) and the porch of Solomon’s Temple (1 Ki. 6:3). But no comparison is alluded to in the text. The angel told Zechariah what the flying scroll represented:

“This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth: ‘Every thief shall be expelled,’ according to this side of the scroll; and, ‘Every perjurer shall be expelled,’ according to that side of it” (v. 3).

The “curse” was a message of judgment addressed to Israel and destined to fall on all who broke the commandments. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are often called the blessing and cursing chapters of the Mosaic Law. There Moses set forth the blessings the Israelites would experience by obeying God’s commandments (Lev. 26:1–13; Dt. 28:1–14) and the curses that would befall them if they disobeyed (Lev. 26:14–46; Dt. 28:15–68).

In this context, God’s curse will fall on “Every thief . . . and, Every perjurer” (v. 3). In other words, those who break the eighth commandment (Ex. 20:15) by stealing and those who break the third commandment by swearing falsely in God’s name (Ex. 20:7) will be “expelled” (v. 3), or rooted out and removed from Israel.

Notice that in the Ten Commandments, swearing falsely is a sin against God, mentioned in the middle of the first tablet of five commandments; and stealing is a sin against men, mentioned in the middle of the second tablet. The first is a sin against the holiness of God, and the second is a sin against one’s neighbor.

God probably chose these two commandments because they represented sins against both God and man at that time. Those who break God’s law will not be able to hide from His curse or escape His judgment. Zechariah continued, “I will send out the curse,” says the Lord of hosts; “It shall enter the house of the thief And the house of the one who swears falsely by My name. It shall remain [literally, “take up lodging”] in the midst of his house And consume it, with its timber and stones” (v. 4).

God’s curse moves throughout the households of Israel, looking to apprehend offenders. When an offender is found, he will be judged surely, swiftly, and severely. Even the offender’s dwelling will be destroyed. The curse spends the night in the house of the guilty party, consuming the materials the house was built with—the timber and stone. This metaphor is reminiscent of the fire sent down from heaven on the prophet Elijah’s altar. It consumed the offering, wood, stones, dust, and water (1 Ki. 18:38).

The message in this sixth vision is that God will judge all persistent wickedness committed by the returning remnant. No Israelites will be able to conceal their sin or escape God’s retribution. Sin will ruin the individuals and their families, especially those who steal and swear falsely. God’s judgment will abide on both the house and family of all who commit wickedness until they are totally destroyed.

The Seventh Vision

In verse five, the interpreting angel instructed Zechariah to lift up his eyes and identify something. Unable to identify what he saw, Zechariah answered, “What is it?” (v. 6).

The angel replied, “It is a basket [ephah] that is going forth.” He also said, “This is their resemblance [literally, “eye” or “appearance”] throughout the earth: Here is a lead disc [talent] lifted up, and this is a woman sitting inside the
In the sixth vision, Zechariah learned that God would permanently eradicate all wickedness from the land. The “basket” (Hebrew, ephah) mentioned in verse 6 was a large measuring container, slightly larger than a bushel, which could hold ten omers (Ex. 16:36), or approximately five gallons of dry material. The text does not say what the basket represents, but many interpreters teach that it symbolizes commercialism or trade being carried on in Israel.

The Judeans were an agrarian people before their captivity in Babylon; but while in exile, say some interpreters, they learned commerce and became astute businessmen. The generation born in Babylon then picked up a spirit of secularism with a desire for material gain; and upon returning to the land, they brought these sinful practices with them. Scripture clearly shows that such practices were manifested among the returnees (Neh. 5:1–13; Mal. 3:8–9).

These interpreters believe the text further supports their position when it says, “This [the basket] is their [the Jewish people’s] resemblance [eye or appearance] throughout the earth [or land]” (v. 6). That is, resemblance or eye represents the returnees’ insatiable self-centered look and desire for material gain through wicked practices learned in Babylon.

Such an interpretation reads into the text a depiction of the returnees that is not taught in vision seven. Thus it is best to interpret this vision as a general banishment of wickedness from Israel, rather than as a caricature of the returnees.

Next, the angel lifted the round covering from the basket to reveal a “woman sitting inside” (v. 7). She is identified as “Wickedness” (v. 8), that is, the personification of wickedness that was being manifested throughout the land of Israel.

Evidently the woman tried to escape her confinement, but the angel “thrust her down [violently hurled her back] into the basket, and threw the lead cover over its mouth” (v. 8). The woman’s incarceration limited her activities, preventing her from spreading further evil throughout Israel until she could finally be removed from the land.

The ultimate removal of wickedness in Israel, and in the world, will take place before Christ’s Millennial reign. In that day, wickedness will not be manifested because Satan will be chained in the bottomless pit, unable to roam the earth and tempt men to do evil (Rev. 20:1–3); and Christ will rule Earth with a “rod of iron” (Ps. 2:8–9; Rev. 19:15).

Again Zechariah looked up. This time he saw “two women, coming with the wind in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven” (v. 9). The women are described as having wings like a stork. Storks are migratory birds whose wings are large, broad, strong, and able to carry the stork for a long time over great distances without tiring. The word stork in Hebrew means “faithful one.” The wind assisted the women as they swiftly and faithfully removed the basket of wickedness from the land of Israel and flew it to a chosen destination.

Some identify these women as Satan’s demonic agents seeking to remove the woman of wickedness from God’s judgment in Israel. They fly the woman to Babylon and enshrine her there to be worshiped during the Great Tribulation.

Others identify the women as God’s agents removing wickedness from Israel. There is no hint in the text as to the women’s identity, but the second view seems more plausible. As the basket is lifted off the ground and flown away, Zechariah asks, “Where are they carrying the basket?” (v. 10).

The interpreting angel informed the prophet, “To build a house [abode] for it in the land of Shinar [Babylon]; when it is ready, the basket will be set there on its base” (v. 11). Wickedness is to be removed from Israel and returned to Babylon, where it originated. Some teach that, after the basket is firmly on its base, the woman inside is worshiped as an idol; but nothing in verse 11 leads to this conclusion or justifies this interpretation.

Shinar is where the cities of Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh were located (Gen. 10:10; 11:2). In Babylon, under the guidance of Nimrod, the people said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4). This activity was in disobedience to God, who instructed Noah and his descendants after they left the ark, “fill the [whole] earth” (Gen. 9:1).

In open rebellion to God’s command, the people built a tower and placed a temple at its top. Their rebellion manifested itself in unity, strength, and pride as they developed a pagan religious system. In response, God confounded their language and scattered them over the face of the earth, which ended the construction on the city of Babel.

But the people did not cease their idolatry. They spread their religious practices across the earth, and the ungodly beliefs of many religions today can be traced to the idolatry of Babylon.

How will the wickedness mentioned throughout chapter 5 relate to Babylon in the future? This wicked religious and commercial system will again flourish during the Great Tribulation in a rebuilt Babylon as described in Revelation 17 and 18. Babylon’s diabolical religious system, personified by a woman carried by the beast (Antichrist), will be destroyed by ten “horns” (kings) that give total allegiance to the Antichrist (Rev. 17:7, 16).

Immediately prior to Christ’s Second Coming, rebuilt Babylon, with its extensive commercial center, will be suddenly and swiftly destroyed (Rev. 18:2, 18, 21). Afterward, all wickedness will be removed from the earth in preparation for Christ’s Millennial rule. What a day of glory that will be for both Israel and the world!
The associations of the words true and truth with God have significant implications for mankind. This article will consider those implications.

**The Source of Knowledge Concerning Ultimate Truth**

Divine revelation to mankind is the source of knowledge concerning ultimate truth and, therefore, ultimate reality. God’s Word, the Bible, is God’s most significant means of revealing truth to mankind. Thus Jesus, who is “the truth” (Jn. 14:6), told His believers they would “know the truth” if they continued in His Word (Jn. 8:31–32).

It is the Bible that presents the significant implications for mankind of the associations of true and truth with God.

**People’s Responsibilities to the Truth**

To be people of the truth. The Bible refers to “men of truth” (Ex. 18:21) and people “of God” (Jn. 8:47; 1 Jn. 4:6). They are people who have the following characteristics:

- They fear God, meaning, they acknowledge God’s existence and awesomeness, have a reverential respect for Him, and concern themselves with what concerns Him (ex. 18:21).
- They know God, meaning, they know and accept the truth concerning Him and have a personal relationship with Him through the new birth (1 Jn. 4:6).
- They hear “God’s words” that He delivered to mankind through Jesus Christ, His prophets, and apostles; meaning, they accept those words as coming from God, regard them as having divine authority over them, and submit to them in a life-changing way (Jn. 8:47; 18:37; 1 Jn. 4:6). For example, they hate covetousness (ex. 18:21).

To understand, choose, and be established in the truth. Daniel expressed the need for people to understand God’s truth (Dan. 9:13).

The psalmist chose “the way of truth”; therefore, he laid God’s revealed words before him and clung to them (Ps. 119:30–31). A son is to choose permanent commitment to truth: “Let not . . . truth forsake you” (Prov. 3:3). “Buy the truth, and do not sell it” (Prov. 23:23).

The apostle Peter referred to people established in the truth (2 Pet. 1:12).

To petition and praise God for the truth. “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him . . . in truth” (Ps. 145:18). David petitioned God to lead him in His truth (Ps. 25:5) and let His truth continually preserve him (Ps. 40:11). In Psalm 43:3 the writer petitioned God to send His truth to lead him.

The psalmist claimed that he would praise God’s truth (Ps. 71:22), and David stated that he would praise God’s name for His truth (Ps. 138:2).

To walk in the truth. To walk in the truth means to obey God’s revealed truth by bringing one’s life and practice into conformity with it.

God declared that, for David’s descendants to continue ruling Israel, they must “take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul” (1 Ki. 2:4).

God showed great mercy to David because David walked before Him in truth (1 Ki. 3:6). David promised to walk in God’s truth (Ps. 86:11) and claimed that he did so (Ps. 26:3).

King Hezekiah declared that he had walked before God in truth (2 Ki. 20:3).

The person who practices the truth does so in relationship to God (Jn. 3:21).

The apostle John rejoiced greatly when he found or heard about believers walking in truth (2 Jn. 4; 3 Jn. 3).

To speak the truth. A person who truly maintains fellowship with God honestly speaks what is in his heart. He doesn’t mislead people with speech that gives the opposite impression of what he harbors in his heart (Ps. 15:2).

David did not conceal God’s truth from the people of Israel. He declared it to them (Ps. 40:9–10).

The psalmist asked God not to take “the word of truth” totally out of his mouth (Ps. 119:43).

A person who speaks truth shows forth righteousness (Prov. 12:17).
A father is to make known God’s truth to his children (Isa. 38:19).

God stated that every person is to speak the truth to his neighbor (Zech. 8:16).

“The law of truth” was in Levi’s mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips (Mal. 2:6).

The apostle Paul spoke “the words of truth” to King Agrippa and Festus (Acts 26:25) and spoke all things to the Corinthians in truth (2 Cor. 7:14).

The truth is to be spoken in love (Eph. 4:15), and every person is to stop lying and speak truth with his neighbor (Eph. 4:25).

At times, speaking the truth may create enemies (Gal. 4:16).

To avoid mixing error with the truth. God hates a lying tongue (Prov. 6:16–17). The psalmist begged God to deliver his soul from lying lips (Ps. 120:2). John asserted, “No lie is of the truth” (1 Jn. 2:21).

Christians are to avoid “leavening” the truth by mixing it with anything untrue (1 Cor. 5:8). Paul indicated that false teaching had hindered the Galatians from obeying the truth (Gal. 5:7), and even a small amount of “leaven” (error) “leavens the whole lump” (Gal. 5:9). The only way a message can be true is if its entire content is true. The introduction of even a small amount of error changes the nature of a message from complete truth to error.

To serve in the truth. Joshua exhorted the people of Israel to serve the Lord in truth (Josh. 24:14). Samuel exhorted them to serve God’s work (3 Jn. 5–7).

Christians are to serve by being “acquaintances with the truth” (3 Jn. 8). They do so by aiding those who are devoted to God’s work (3 Jn. 5–7).

To relate love to the truth. God commanded the people of Israel to “love the truth” (Zech. 8:19), and He forbade them to love any “false oath” (v. 17).

John exhorted believers to love “in deed and in truth” and thereby know that they “are of the truth” (1 Jn. 3:18–19). John and “all those who have known the truth” loved “the elect lady and her children . . . in truth” (2 Jn. 1). They did so “because of the truth” that dwelt in them as believers (v. 2). John also declared that he loved Gaius “in truth” (3 Jn. 1).

Paul stated that love “rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor. 13:6).

Benefits of the Truth

Those who walk in the truth receive many benefits: great mercy (1 Ki. 3:6); preservation from evils (Ps. 40:11–12); the Lord’s nearness (Ps. 145:18); security (Ps. 91:4); purging of iniquity (Prov. 16:6); freedom from sin and results of sin (Jn. 8:32); sanctification (Jn. 17:17, 19); steadfastness against spiritual attack (Eph. 6:14); hope, fruitfulness, and grace (Col. 1:5–6); discernment concerning what God has ordained and permits (1 Tim. 4:3–4); purification of soul (1 Pet. 1:22); and grace, mercy, and peace (2 Jn. 3).

Lack of the Truth

It is possible for people to talk as if they are related to God; but they don’t know “the way of the Lord,” are hardened against Him, are not in the truth, and don’t seek it (Isa. 48:1; Jer. 5:1–5).

There are people who lie, “are not valiant for the truth,” and don’t know God (Jer. 9:3).

Jesus indicated that people who reject God’s Word as the truth are of the devil, not of God (Jn. 8:44–47; cf. 1 Jn. 4:6).

Men of corrupt minds are “destitute of the truth” (1 Tim. 6:5). Some people are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7).

People who say they have no sin do not have the truth in them (1 Jn. 1:8). A person who says, “I know” Jesus but does not obey Him does not have the truth in him (1 Jn. 2:4).

Animosity Toward the Truth

Some people refused to believe Jesus because He told the truth (Jn. 8:45). Some purposely suppress God’s revealed truth and exchange it for a lie (Rom. 1:18, 25). False teachers bewitch people into disobeying the truth (Gal. 3:1), while they themselves “resist the truth” (2 Tim. 3:8) and speak evil of “the way of truth” (2 Pet. 2:1–2). Some people will not endure sound doctrine, will “turn their ears away from the truth,” and turn “aside to fables” (2 Tim. 4:3–4).

Judgment and the Truth

God will judge people with His truth (Ps. 96:13). People who do not obey God’s revealed truth but obey unrighteousness will receive “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish” on “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5, 8–9). All people who receive not “the love of the truth” and believe not the truth “that they might be saved” will be judged (2 Th. 2:10, 12).
God’s Desire and the Truth

God wills (“wish of desire”) all people “to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

The Church and the Truth

God intends the church to be “the pillar” and “ground” (“foundation”) of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). A pillar provides support; and a foundation keeps a building grounded to one location, preventing it from shifting or moving from its original location. God intends the church to fully support His revealed truth against all antagonistic attacks and to prevent His truth from being shifted or moved from its original content as revealed by God.

Nations and the Truth

When Israel was “without the true God” for a long time, it was troubled, vexed, and had no peace (2 Chr. 15:3–6). During Isaiah’s time Israel suffered when none pleaded for truth; truth was fallen in the street, and truth failed (Isa. 59:4, 14–15). During Jeremiah’s time Israel obeyed not “the voice of the LORD their God” nor received “correction”; truth was “perished” and was “cut off from their mouth” (Jer. 7:28). During Hosea’s time God had a controversy with the nation because there was “no truth, or mercy Or knowledge of God in the land” (Hos. 4:1). Israel will be blessed in the future when it is “the righteous nation which keeps the truth” (Isa. 26:2).

Endnotes


2 Ibid., “edraioma,” 217.

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expressly religious elements. For example, church-state separation in the United States does not preclude the recognition of Christmas as a holiday.

Israel has no state religion, and all faiths enjoy freedom of worship. Yet it is attacked for its Jewish character, whereas the Arab states that all have Islam as their official religion are regarded as legitimate. The Jewish people are a nation with a shared origin, religion, culture, language, and history. And why shouldn’t the Jewish people have a state? No one suggests that Arabs are not entitled to a nation (and they have not one, but twenty-one) of their own or Swedes or Germans, or that Catholics are not entitled to a state (Vatican City) headed by a theocrat (the pope). To suggest that Zionism, the nationalist movement of the Jewish people, is the only form of nationalism that is illegitimate is pure bigotry. It is especially ironic that the Jewish nation should be challenged, given that Jewish statehood preceded the emergence of most modern nation-states by thousands of years.

It is also not unusual that one community should be the majority within a nation and seek to maintain that status. In fact, this is true in nearly every country in the world. Moreover, societies usually reflect the cultural identity of the majority. India and Pakistan were established at the same time as Israel through a violent partition, but no one believes these nations are illegitimate because one is predominantly Hindu and the other has a Muslim majority, or that these nations shouldn’t be influenced by those communities (e.g., that cows in India should not be treated as sacred).

In the United States, a vigorous debate persists over the boundaries between church and state. Similar discussions regarding “synagogue and state” are ongoing in Israel, with philosophical disagreements over whether Israel can be a Jewish and a democratic state, and practical arguments over Sabbath observance, marriage and divorce laws, and budgets for religious institutions.

Nevertheless, most Jews take for granted that Israel is, and must remain, a Jewish state. Arab citizens also understand that Israel is a Jewish state and, while they might prefer that it were not, they have still chosen to live there (nothing prevents Arabs from moving to any of the 180-odd non-Jewish states in the world). Both Jews and Arabs realize that if Jews cease to be a majority in Israel, Israel will no longer have a Jewish character or serve as a haven for persecuted Jews; and that is one of the elements underlying peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

FROM MYTHS & FACTS ONLINE—A GUIDE TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT BY MITCHELL G. BARD [WWW.JEWISHVIRTUALLIBRARY.ORG]. USED BY PERMISSION.
A Look at the Persecution of Christians Around the World

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

There are many national success stories in the Western Hemisphere. Unfortunately, Haiti isn’t one of them.

Haiti has been an independent nation since 1804. In the West, only the United States is older. The tragedy of Haiti is that it has been ruled and ruined by unscrupulous dictators, the worst of them being Francois (“Papa Doc”) Duvalier (1957–1971), who terrorized the people with his murderous secret police and brought the country, already the poorest in the hemisphere, to financial ruin.

The average per capita income among Haiti’s 8 million inhabitants is about $310 a year; the average lifespan, only about fifty. Although most Haitians are Roman Catholic, voodoo, spirit worship, and idolatry are rampant.

The devastating floods and property damage caused by the tropical storm Jeanne left 1,500 dead and virtually the entire country destitute and desperate. The situation has caused looting, violence, and even murder.

On September 13, a well-known Baptist minister who hosted a Christian radio program was murdered as he was on his way to work.

According to an article by journalist Deann Alford, a Haitian pastor now living in the United States commented, “Crime is something they don’t have control over in Haiti. Everybody in the church is affected, including evangelicals because we’re part of society. You’re dealing with spiritual warfare, and the devil will do anything to stop us. You
have to be on your knees all the time and constantly in the word of God.”

The experiences of another pastor, Enoc Lucien, a church planter and minister of the Cap Haitien Evangelical Free Church, are prime examples.

“Sometimes it gets scary,” Lucien said. “It’s unpredictable, it’s frustrating, but that’s life in Haiti.”

Lucien estimates he was mugged by street gangs a dozen times in 2003, most often with a gun held to his head, Alford reported. During one week alone, he was assaulted three times.

“In Haiti,” the pastor said, “if you’re not killed, it isn’t a crime.” A thief is considered “somebody trying to find a way to survive.”

Alford reported that veteran missionary Boxley Boggs, international director of UFM (formerly Unevangelized Fields Mission), believes the root of the problem is voodoo: “Spiritism is very real and very powerful, and one doesn’t have to live in Haiti very long to notice that. It’s very fatalistic.”

Wrote Alford, witch doctors tend to be the most respected people in the Haitian villages “because their drums have the power to conjure spirits.” Many Haitians, as well as foreigners, view voodoo as the country’s “cultural heritage.”

Consequently, it is not difficult to understand that believers there are engaged in intense spiritual warfare. It is a battle for the soul of Haiti, which for centuries has seemed to be firmly in the clutches of Satan and his human emissaries.

Yet, in spite of the suffering, extreme hardship, deprivation, and persecution, the church is growing. Enoc Lucien believes individuals are responding to the gospel despite the risks, and he told of a congregation he planted in August that had two hundred people in attendance by late September, Alford said.

“As we are preaching the gospel, people are coming to Christ and people are changing.”

Such growth amid oppression should not surprise us; it’s been happening for more than two thousand years.

### Moses for You, Jesus for Me?

*from page 25*

The God of Israel wanted the Gentiles to know that there was only one God and they were responsible to Him. He desired to have a relationship with them and bless them. A key part of the Abrahamic Covenant is where the Lord declares for all to see, “And in you [Abraham and his Jewish progeny] all the families [nations] of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3).

Since there was only one way to God in the Old Testament, why would there be a dual covenant, or two ways, to God in the Church Age?

Paul had much to say about the Law during his ministry. He taught that the gospel (the good news about Messiah) was first given to the nation of Israel. In Romans 1:16 Paul said, “It [the gospel] is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek [Gentile].”

He also made it clear that the Law could not save or deliver anyone from sin (Rom. 7:13–25) and that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4).

Yet it was to the church in Galatia that he wrote his strongest defense of his gospel message:

> I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6–8).

Thus there was no dual covenant for Paul, who was himself Jewish, taught in the synagogues, and condemned anyone who preached salvation through any means other than faith in Jesus Christ. He also taught the church of Galatia that the Law was “added because of transgressions, till the Seed [Messiah] should come” (Gal. 3:19). Ultimately, the Law was to be “our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). In fact, Paul told the Galatians, “If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (2:21).

Consequently, if a Christian preaches salvation for anyone through any other means, he is preaching heresy.

### Man’s Stubbornness

Down through history man has always sought his own way. The author of Proverbs captured this human flaw when he was inspired to write, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (14:12). Jesus confirmed the same concept in the gospel of Matthew:

> “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (7:13–14).

Man always has a choice: Follow God’s plan, accept God’s way, and live; or follow your own plan and suffer the consequences. Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6). Preaching any other message would make Jesus a liar.

Christians are required to make Christ known to all they meet. We answer questions and declare the life-changing truth of the gospel message. But we cannot, nor should we try, to force anyone to believe. All individuals must decide for themselves.

As believers in Jesus, we must be faithful to the message. That’s what Paul said he did in his ministry as he declared “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

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World War II was a little before my time—a very little. But I don’t recall a day in my life that I didn’t know about it. Growing up Jewish, and being a first-generation American with family who died in the Holocaust, it feels as though I’ve known the name Adolf Hitler from the cradle.

By the time I was in third grade, I was already reading books about how the Nazis had hunted down my people like animals and tortured them in concentration camps before finally herding them into ovens and gassing them alive. By the time I was twelve, I probably knew more about the Holocaust than most Gentiles knew at fifty.

I also knew that if it hadn’t been for the “righteous Gentiles” who had risked their lives to hide Jewish people, far fewer of us would be alive today.

I never met Nina Katz. But my editor-in-chief, Elwood McQuaid, did. She was a Jewish Holocaust survivor who shared with him her memories of Corrie ten Boom, a deeply committed evangelical Christian from Holland, whose family hid many Jews from the Nazis until, one day, they, too, were arrested. Corrie’s father died in custody in Holland; her sister, Betsie, died in a German labor camp.

Nina met Corrie after the war and asked her a poignant question:

“We Jews, because of who we were, had no choice. You and your family did. You knew that if you were caught hiding Jews, it would cost you your life. Still you did it. Why?”

[Corrie replied] “Oh, my child. My father felt that he too had no choice. As a good Christian, he had to do what he could to save God’s Chosen People.”

Most people would say that everyone has a choice: do right or do wrong. But people like the ten Booms, who truly loved the Lord Jesus, believed there was no choice. If you serve the living God, you must always do right. To do otherwise is to serve the Devil.

Unfortunately, the Devil is a powerful adversary; and Israel’s history is filled with rulers who didn’t do right. During one such bloodcurdling, horrendous period, the house of David was almost obliterated. Had it not been for a lone woman who risked her life to hide the only remaining heir to the Davidic throne, Satan would have succeeded in destroying the entire Messianic line and preventing the Redeemer from being born.

The woman, a righteous Jewess from the tribe of Judah, was Jehoshabeath (also called Jehosheba). Her family tree looks like a worst-case scenario of what can happen when godly people unite with those who hate the Lord.

Jehoshabeath was the daughter of Jehoram, king of Judah (2 Ki. 11:2). However, Scripture never refers to her as Athaliah’s daughter. Athaliah was probably her stepmother, since Jehoram had more than one wife (2 Chr. 21:17). Bible scholar Alfred Edersheim wrote, “Every probability attaches to the statement of Josephus (Ant. 9.7, 1), that Jehosheba was the daughter of Jehoram [Joram] . . . by another mother than Athaliah.”

Neither Jehoram nor Athaliah were anything to write home about. Both were evil, selfish, power-hungry idol
worshippers who murdered people more righteous than they. Of Joram, the Bible says, “And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for he had the daughter of Ahab as a wife; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Chr. 21:6). It is probably a wonder Jehoshabeath was given in marriage to the Israelites’ godly high priest, Jehoiada. In fact, she was the only princess in the nation’s history to marry a high priest. Bible commentator C. F. Keil believed Jehoshabeath’s marriage was actually proof that her mother was not Athaliah, “as this worshipper of Baal would hardly have allowed her own daughter to marry the high priest.”

Sadly, Jehoshabeath saw much of her family murdered. First came her uncles. Soon after Joram became king, he decided to remove any chance that his brothers might usurp the throne, and he killed all six of them “and also others of the princes of Israel” (v. 4). The word princes probably refers to his nephews and cousins. The only direct heirs he left were his own children.

Although the Lord was greatly displeased with Joram, He “would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that He had made with David, and since He had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever” (v. 7). But He destroyed Joram. First He warned him through a letter from the prophet Elijah; then, as He always does, He destroyed Joram. First He warned him through a letter from the prophet Elijah; then, as He always does, He made good His promise.

Next Jehoshabeath saw the Philistines and Arabians raid Jerusalem and carry off all her brothers and possibly even her mother. The Bible says the marauders took all the king’s sons but the youngest and all his wives (but Athaliah) (v. 17). Then her father died when God struck Joram himself (vv. 18–20).

Consequently, the Davidic kingdom fell to Jehoshabeath’s youngest and only surviving brother, Joram’s child by Athaliah: Ahab’s grandson Ahaziah (22:2). Not surprisingly, Ahaziah was no better than his parents. And to make matters worse, because Ahaziah followed his mother’s advice and that of Ahab’s family, the Davidic kingdom was bonding with Samaria under a satanically driven rule.

It was not long before Jehoshabeath was faced with a choice: do right or do wrong. Had it not been for people like the ten Booms, Hitler would have come close to exterminating all of European Jewry. Had it not been for Jehoshabeath, the entire Davidic dynasty would have been exterminated. It was the end of the line. And like the ten Booms, Jehoshabeath probably felt she, too, had no choice. So she did right—at the risk of her own life.

Continued next issue

Endnotes

2 Alfred Edersheim, Bible History: Old Testament (1890; reprint, 7 vols. in 1, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 836 n. 6.

Lorna Simcox is senior editor for The Friends of Israel.

Closing the Book on Arafat from page 25

And what can be said of his legacy? For Israelis it is the somber memory of terror and the deaths of thousands of their people. A recent poll shows that nearly 25 percent of Israel’s Jewish population has suffered the terror-related loss of a friend or relative since the second intifada began in 2000. That’s well over one thousand dead and thousands more injured.

Then there is the daunting matter of rehabilitating a generation of young Palestinians scarred for life after being brainwashed in Arafat’s schools to believe that life’s highest calling is to die a martyr (shahid) for Allah. Arafat’s tomb in Ramallah should not be a shrine beckoning adoring pilgrims; it should be a monument to what not to become.

by Elwood McQuaid

Getting It Right

A Tree For A Loved One

D id you know there’s a very special way you can express your condolences, thanks, or respect for someone? For only $10 per tree, you can have trees planted in The Friends of Israel Forest in Jerusalem. You’ll receive a beautiful certificate that you fill out yourself and can then send as a tangible expression of your gift. Won’t you take this opportunity to provide a living memorial for a family member, friend, or associate? You may even wish to plant one or more trees in their honor or on your own behalf. It is a thoughtful and meaningful way to say “I care,” and you will share in helping to make the desert of Israel bloom.

(Use the enclosed envelope to order.)

Theology

About the Rapture

T he Rapture was revealed to the grieving Thessalonians with the words, “Therefore encourage each other with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18). Paul held before them the bright prospect of seeing their loved ones, possibly soon, for the Rapture here, as elsewhere, is presented as an imminent event without any prophetic events taking place first.

—John F. Walvoord
How blind can you get?

As Palestinian mortar shells and rockets continued to pound the Jewish settlement of Gush Katif at the rate of over three per day, destroying homes and sending people to the hospital, an American delegation of Presbyterians met in Lebanon with leaders of the global terror group Hezbollah and declared, “relations and conversations with Islamic leaders are a lot easier than dealings and dialogue with Jewish leaders.”

Anti-Defamation League Director Abraham Foxman called it “irresponsible” and “deeply disturbing” that Presbyterians would seek to meet “members of a terrorist organization that is directly responsible for attacks against both Americans and Israelis and that has repeatedly denounced America and Israel as enemies of Islam.”

Foxman objected to comments by Rev. Ronald Stone, a retired social ethics professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, who also was quoted on Hezbollah’s satellite TV network as saying, “We treasure the precious words of Hezbollah and your expression of good will towards the American people,” the Associated Press reported.

Meanwhile, Arutz-7 reported that Arab terrorists fired an antitank missile recently at an Israeli school bus in the Gaza region. In what was described as a “miracle,” the missile totally missed the bus. Simultaneous with the missile strike, the terrorists opened fire with automatic weapons. No Israelis were injured.

Fence working

There has been an 84 percent decrease in the number of Israelis killed in terror attacks since the completion of the first portion of the security fence in August last year, according to a Shin Bet report released in October.

The report revealed that since the completion of the 134-km.-long [83.5 miles] portion of the fence between Elkana and Salem, terrorist organizations operating in Samaria carried out six suicide bomb attacks in Israel, killing 30 Israelis, compared with 73 such attacks and 293 deaths since the outbreak of violence in September 2000.

A total of 1,107 Israelis and foreigners have been killed in terror attacks in the past four years.

More mosques

Jordanian Waqf officials plan to build a fifth minaret on the Temple Mount, and Israel has not objected, a senior Jordanian official said recently.

Dr. Raief Najim, vice president of the Jordanian Construction Committee, who is overseeing the renovation of the southern and eastern Temple Mount walls, said the planned minaret was the brainchild of Jordanian King Abdullah II and would be constructed near the eastern wall of the Temple Mount this year. Three minarets exist near the Western Wall and one near the northern wall.

Najim said construction is estimated to cost $350,000.

Leading Israeli archaeologists, who have been decrying the lack of archaeological supervision at the site for the past four years, lambasted the plan.

Dr. Eilat Mazar, a Temple Mount expert, said, “In the past, Waqf requests for small structural changes on the Temple Mount were actually an excuse for large-scale Islamization of the site, which caused massive antiquities damage.”

Figuring out Israel

According to the latest figures, there are 13 million Jews living worldwide, including 5.2 million in Israel.

According to Jewish Agency figures, 5.6 million live in North America, 1.2 million in Europe, 413,000 in the former Soviet Union, 401,000 in South America, 84,000 in Africa, 107,000 in Australia and New Zealand, and 19,000 in Asia.

Meanwhile, Israel’s 5.2 million Jews and some 287,000 immigrants and their families not registered as Jews make up 81 percent of the country’s 6.8 million population, while the Arabs comprise 19 percent.

During 2003 the Arab minority grew at a rate of 3 percent compared to the 1.4 percent among the Jewish majority. The median age of the Jewish population is 30.4, while the Arab median is 19.7.

Hamas makes weapons in Gaza

In the first admission of its kind, a senior Hamas official has admitted that the movement has a number of factories in the Gaza Strip for manufacturing.

Nizar Rayyan, a Hamas leader from Jabalya refugee camp, said the factories were busy manufacturing different types of mortars and rockets to be used against Israel.

Although he is considered one of the prominent political leaders of Hamas, Rayyan was seen wearing military fatigues and armed with a rifle during a recent 17-day Israeli Defense Forces operation against Kassam rocket squads in the northern Gaza Strip.

“Thank God, the weapons of the Hamas fighters are manufactured locally,” Rayyan said. “For several years now we have had our own weapons factories and we are working round the clock to improve the fighting capabilities of our fighters. We first made hand grenades and rocket-propelled grenades, mortar rockets and their launchers, and then Kassam and Yassin rockets.”

In another development, Hamas gunmen killed a Palestinian suspected of helping Israel in the assassination of the movement’s Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.
The man, Hassan Mohammed Musallam, 28, was kidnapped from his home in the Tal Al Hawa neighborhood of Gaza City. His bullet-riddled body was found near a garbage dump in the city.

To be a free people in our land,
The land of Zion and Jerusalem.

No pain, more gain

The International Jerusalem Post—A portable device that uses ultrasound to painlessly deliver medications, including local anesthesia, through microscopic pores in the skin, has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and put on the market.

Developed by researchers at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Sonoprep offers future applications for continuous and painless testing of blood sugar in diabetics, speed administration of pain medications to cancer patients, and influenza vaccines to the general public. It could eliminate needles from medical practice by applying ultrasound waves to the skin for 15 seconds, disrupting a protective membrane to allow fluids to enter or exit.

Israel developing airborne car

Arutz 7—An Israeli pilot, who is also an aeronautics engineer, has developed an aircraft called the X-Hawk that is able to land in places currently impossible for both helicopters and airplanes.

The Hebrew daily Yediot Aharonot reported that Dr. Raffi Yoeli’s aircraft has no wings. This, together with the lack of exposed propellers, will enable the X-Hawk to get close to the windows of skyscrapers and fly low in populated areas without endangering either passengers or bystanders. Its appearance is that of a car.

The X-Hawk is causing excitement in law enforcement and rescue forces circles as it promises to revolutionize many existing methods. Some of the new prospects include enabling rescue from high-rise buildings and aerial police pursuit of ground targets.

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

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

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

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

Indeed, a gift annuity is a gift with benefits both lifelong and eternal, allowing you to maximize the impact of your financial stewardship. For specific details about how a gift annuity can work for you, complete the form and mail it in the return envelope in this magazine. There is
Wherever you go in Jerusalem these days, you see many pictures of the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of New York City, who led the Lubavitch movement of Hasidic (ultra-Orthodox) Judaism for forty-four years. In 1992, at age 90, the “rebbe,” as he is called, suffered a stroke that rendered him speechless the rest of his life. He died two years later, and his grave is in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York.

Now, ten years later, we see his face everywhere—in the newspapers, on television, and on posters in the streets. His followers dance and rejoice over him. Why? Because they say he is the messiah. They call him Melech HaMoshiach (King Messiah) and place Isaiah 53:5–6 with his picture: “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.”

It is written in Ezekiel 36:26, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.” But sometimes I wonder, How will you do this, Lord, because these people are so blind? They do not even want to see.

The Lord Himself came here to bear our iniquities; but when I come among the ultra-Orthodox and try to show them this great truth, they do not want to hear it.

Recently I came across a group of Schneerson’s followers. They were having a big celebration and telling people, “The messiah has come!” so I began to talk to them. “Why do you come here?” one asked me. “Here we are so happy and celebrating this great day of joy because our messiah has come. And you come here to take from us this great joy.”

So I began to talk to them. “Why do you come here?” one asked me. “Here we are so happy and celebrating this great day of joy because our messiah has come. And you come here to take from us this great joy.”

Just then their rabbi arrived. He was full of dissatisfaction. “You must be happy with us,” he told me.

I said, “I will be happy with you. But only if you will show me where it is written that this messiah you are so happy about came and saved you from all your sins. Can you show me?” He pointed to Isaiah 53.

“I, too, believe what is written here,” I told him. “But I do not believe in Rabbi Schneerson, who was so helpless and sick and is now buried in New York. If you will show me Rabbi Schneerson’s name in the Bible and that the Messiah came from New York to save us, I, too, will rejoice with you.”

Then I opened my Bible to Isaiah 53. All of his Hasidic pupils became very interested in our discussion, wanting to know what their rabbi would say to me. I asked several questions, then asked, “Tell me, what is more important regarding our faith? The overabundance of advice we receive from many rabbis, or what is written here in the Bible?”

All the students turned immediately toward the rabbi, and they saw that he was confused and disappointed. Then one of the students asked me, “If you know the Bible so well, what do you think the correct answer is to all the questions you have asked?”

This time I read to them Proverbs 19:21: “There are many plans in a man’s heart. Nevertheless the Lord’s counsel—that will stand.”

“You should know,” I continued, “that even though you are a great rabbi, you do not have the right to boycott those words, which were written by the Holy Spirit of God. You try to make yourself holy, but only God is holy.”

Now the conversation began to heat up. “Who are you? Who sent you here to speak with us? And why do you speak so much about this chapter in Isaiah?” a pupil asked.

“I speak,” I answered, “because I have seen what you are doing. You are taking a man who was sick himself, this Rabbi Schneerson, and you call him Messiah.”
him the messiah and write about him in all these many books. You say that he is the one who has taken on ‘the iniquity of us all.’ How did you come to such a wrong conclusion?”

One of them then thought hard about what we were saying and spoke up: “You know, many of those Christians we encounter believe in This Man [Jesus]. Can you show me where it is written about this one, if it is in the Bible? If it is, we want to see it. You believe in This Man who was born in Bethlehem.” When he said this, he did not even know that the Bible says the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Rabbi Schneerson was born in the Ukraine and never even came to Israel.

So I quickly showed them Micah 5:2 and Isaiah 7:14. They were utterly shocked. “Here it is written about the true Messiah,” I said. Sadly, they did not want to speak with me anymore. But as it is written, “The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light” (Isa. 9:2).