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ABOUT THE ISSUE

When Baptist Bible College approached us about running an article on a 300-year-old Torah scroll it has on loan, we were delighted. In fact, we structured this issue around it, taking you back to Jewry in the shetlts of the Old Country, then traveling even further, to the days of the Dead Sea Scrolls, to show you how carefully God has preserved His Word through the ages.

The cover of this issue, graced by our attractive new masthead, is a photograph taken inside the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem. It features a replica of the famous Isaiah Scroll found at Qumran in the Judean wilderness. The ancient scroll is a testament to the inerrancy of our Bible.

(Note: Art Resource, NY; background, compositing, and digital enhancement, Thomas E. Williams.)

Elwood McQuaid
Editor-in-Chief

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Israel My Glory (ISSN 8755-402X) is published bimonthly for $16.95 per year by The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1179 Almonesson Road, Deptford Township, Westville, New Jersey 08093. Periodicals postage paid at Westville, NJ, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Israel My Glory, P.O. Box 908, Bellmawr, NJ 08039-9900.
I was approaching the microphone to introduce Walid Shoebat as our prophecy conference speaker recently when a thought raced into my mind: The grace of God is a miracle!

But for the grace of God, Walid would not be telling his life story to Bible-believing Christians. Apart from God’s grace, it is inexplicable that someone who spent decades despising Israel would now be a strong advocate for the Jewish state and a loving friend of the Jewish people. The lesson for all Christians is that no one is beyond the reach of God’s grace.

An Arab by birth, a Palestinian by identity, a Muslim by belief, and a terrorist by activity, Walid Shoebat, now a Christian through his faith in Jesus Christ, is an example of the remarkable transformation that occurs when God changes a life.

Born in Bethlehem of Judea, Walid’s grandfather was the Muslim chieftain of Beit Sahour, a Palestinian town adjacent to Bethlehem and known as the Shepherds’ Field. His grandfather also was a friend of Haj Amin al-Husseini, the grand mufti of Jerusalem who befriended Adolf Hitler and collaborated with Nazi mastermind, Adolf Eichmann. Even Walid’s great grandfather helped the Arabs fight against the Jews.

Walid lived through the 1967 Six-Day War while in Jericho. As a young man, he joined the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and expressed his hatred for Israel by performing acts of terror against the Jewish state and was imprisoned in Jerusalem’s central prison for incitement and violence. After his release he continued rioting in Bethlehem and on the Temple Mount. Upon entering the United States as a student, he became a counselor for the Arab Student Organization at Loop College in Chicago. There he continued his anti-Israel activities.

In 1993 Walid began studying the Bible in a challenge to convert his wife to Islam. After six months of intense study, he realized that everything he had been taught about the Jewish people was a lie.

Shoebat testified, I was reading something very new, a Jewish Bible, and saw that the Jews have suffered the true refugee problem, not the Palestinians. My enemies accused me of being a racist and a traitor when I became a Christian and began loving the Jews. What is amazing is that when I was a terrorist, I was a “freedom fighter”; but for loving the Jewish people and their culture, I am called a racist.

Driven by a deep passion to proclaim the truth about the Jewish people and Israel, Walid’s life changed dramatically. He left his work as a software engineer and set out to bring the cause of Israel to people throughout the world, speaking to churches and synagogues, civic groups, government bodies, and the media.

Today Walid is still an activist, but in a radically different way. He has dedicated his life to sharing his testimony, explaining the truth about Israel, and exposing the jihadist threat to our civilization. He has appeared on many Christian and secular television and radio shows nationally and internationally, including The Friends of Israel Today with Elwood McQuaid. He is an extraordinary speaker, with knowledge and life experiences every person needs to hear to better understand the miracle of God’s grace through Jesus Christ in turning a terrorist and hater of the Jewish people into one of their champions and advocates. He is living proof that God’s redeeming mercy is without bounds.

Said Shoebat, “Joel 3:2 talks about the judgment of the nations for dividing the land of Israel and scattering God’s Chosen People. The Scriptures tell us we must actively support Israel and the Jewish people.” Shoebat noted, “The words of the people who lie about Israel are winning the argument in the media. We as Christians must be a voice for the Jewish people and stand up for Israel, but we must do it in a way that can effectively penetrate the media.”

For more information about his compelling testimony and outreach, log on to www.shoebat.com. To schedule Walid Shoebat to speak, to help with other aspects of this campaign for truth, or to give him a word of encouragement, you may e-mail him at walid@shoebat.com, or phone 877-832-7200.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
President Bush described the force behind terrorism as “evil Islamic radicalism,” “militant Jihadism,” and “Islamo-fascism.” In other words, he called out the bad guys—Islamist imperialists—and told us what they are all about. They are driven by a “murderous ideology” that poses “the great challenge of our new century.” The worldview of these crusading knights of Muhammad parallels Communism. And, like the old Soviet commissars at the Kremlin in years past, these Islamists, to quote journalist Daniel Pipes, are “elitist, cold-blooded, totalitarian, and disdainful of free peoples.”

Their “road map” is designed to accomplish three major objectives. Pipes stated them succinctly: (1) end Western influence in the Muslim world; (2) gain control of Muslim governments; and (3) establish, in Bush’s words, “a radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia.”

Thrown into the mix is the obsession to gain or develop weapons of mass destruction, annihilate Israel, intimidate all of Europe, attack the American people, and isolate the U.S. government. Their ultimate goal, said Bush, is “to enslave . . . and intimidate the world.”

This scathing exposé of the extent of the ambitions of radical Islamists will anger anti-American elements without and within the country. In actuality, the only question should be, Why has it taken so long to spell out facts that have been shouted from the rooftops by the Muslims themselves?

Islam is by nature and history an expansionist religion operating on two tracks:

(1) Infiltration and religious proselytizing. Muslims have had immense success recruiting converts in American prisons. It is known that some of the most militant, radical, and dangerous adherents to Islam were indoctrinated following conversion in U.S. prisons.

(2) Military conquest in the name of Islam. Islam commonly teaches that the planet is divided into two spheres: the House of Islam and the House of War. The House of Islam represents the greater Muslim world. The House of War exists in everything that is non-Islamic. Through one means or another, the inhabitants of the House of War must eventually be subjugated.

Therefore, to argue, as in the case of terrorist groups such as Hamas, that there are military and political wings of the organization with differing objectives, is a serious mistake. They all have a unified and unalterable objective: “to enslave whole nations and intimidate the world.” That means us, folks.
The teenagers were on their way to their Christian school in Poso (Sulawesi), Indonesia. As they walked through a cocoa plantation, none could have imagined the horror awaiting them.

Hiding beside the path, hooded jihadists relished their opportunity to attack innocent, unarmed Christian schoolgirls. Machetes in hand, they leaped on the girls and began slashing them. As their victims fell to the ground screaming, the men savagely hacked at their necks, determined to decapitate as many as possible. They achieved their objective. They beheaded three girls and slit the throats of two others. To make their point, they deposited one girl’s head at the door of a local church.

One week later two young Christian girls in the same area were shot in the head at point-blank range. Both, at this writing, are tenuously clinging to life.

These atrocities are but the latest in a grotesque trail of carnage that has become typical of reports coming out of Indonesia. Between 1998 and 2002, 10,000 Christians were murdered. Recently 40 violent attacks against Christians have taken place. Add to this the chain of assassinations of pastors and Christian leaders, along with the closure of hundreds of churches due to Muslim violence, and one sees in microcosm what is happening to Christians in many parts of the world.

The tragedy of what happened in October to these harmless Christian schoolgirls only demonstrates the dimensions and severity of the jihadist determination to achieve global supremacy.

It raises serious issues and, frankly, frightening prospects for the future of the Western democracies, which Islamists view as infidel Judeo-Christian enclaves that must either be subjugated or destroyed. And if matters are as serious as the evidence suggests, why the silence? Why is the West not producing a level of outrage commensurate with the Islamic crimes?

“How much more can we give to alleviate their suffering?”

A State of War That Must Be Reckoned With

Unquestionably, there is a war going on. But because a significant segment of it is directed against Christians—evangelicals, in the main—it remains unreported and un lamented by liberal secularists who control the media.

Listen to a voice heard around the world:

“Ramadan is not a month for indolence,” screams a Muslim imam in a mosque in Australia. “Ramadan is a month for jihad upon oneself and jihad upon the enemy.” It is a time, he contends, when followers must become more disciplined in adhering to the Qur’an and more willing to topple the enemy of Islam, namely, the West. And the beat goes on in the sinister predictions of the dark days that, “Allah willing,” will descend on America.

The imam’s message is heard every week in mosques from Jerusalem to Jakarta to America and across the world, inflaming young men and women to carry the torch or suicide belt into wedding celebrations and cocoa plantations to kill the infidels.

Sadly, one of the weakest links in the chain to restrain the Islamic holy war that beheads teenaged schoolgirls is Western Christianity, which seems more interested in the plight of television’s Desperate Housewives than in the desperate, real-life situations of victims of the Islamic, genocidal, international crusade. When that link snaps, it will be too late.
TIME TO RENEW?
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USA: $16.95 for 1 year, $25.95 for 2 years
Overseas: $19.95 for 1 year, $31.95 for 2 years
(U.S. dollars only) Single copies $4 each
Canada: $21.95 CAD for 1 year, $31.95 CAD for 2 years
Israel My Glory is also available in Spanish.

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Rabbis teach that God gave Moses not only the written Law of the Torah but also an oral law that was passed down verbally from Moses and began to be recorded in Hebrew around A.D. 200. This vast body of oral traditions, legal interpretations, and law is called the Mishna, from the Hebrew word "shanah," which means "to repeat" or "repetition." According to Jewish tradition, Judah haNasi codified the Mishna.

Gemarah means "completion." The Gemarah consists of rabbinic commentaries and discussions on the Mishna. It was written over a 300-year period and finished in A.D. 500.

Together, the Mishna and Gemarah form the voluminous library of Jewish thought known as the Talmud, which many Jewish people consider equal to the Holy Scriptures.

Unfortunately, Scripture does not confirm that Moses received any oral laws. Rather, it frequently asserts that "all the words" of the Law were recorded. Moses told the children of Israel to "carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book" (Dt. 28:58).

So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying: "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God" (31:24–26).

Many contemporary scholars believe that the concept of the Oral Law originated around 400 B.C., after the Israelites returned from the Babylonian Captivity. Ezra read the Law to them and interpreted it: "And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:6, 8). Later generations, however, began to study Ezra’s interpretations and revere them over the Scriptures.

by Thomas C. Simcox,
Northeastern States director
for The Friends of Israel.
for example, the prospect for continued stable relations with Israel would diminish substantially. Despite its status as a U.S. ally, Egypt has purchased Scud missiles from North Korea and is believed to possess chemical weapons (Center for Strategic and International Studies, United Nations [UN] Institute for Disarmament Research). Its army, air force, and navy now field a wide range of the most sophisticated Western arms, many identical to Israel’s own weapons. In 2003, for example, Egypt requested F15 jets armed with JDAM (joint direct attack munition) “smart” bombs. These sophisticated weapons were used by U.S. forces in the 2003 war with Iraq.

Such sales are a matter of concern for Israel because the principal threats faced by Egypt today are internal ones. No nation poses any danger to Egypt. So why has Egypt been spending billions of dollars to amass an arsenal that includes 3,000 tanks and more than 500 aircraft, especially when it has serious economic problems caused in large measure by an exponentially growing population that does not have enough food, shelter, or employment?

If Egypt’s military simulations are any indication of the regime’s thinking, Israel has good reason to worry. Egyptian forces have staged large-scale military training exercises that included simulated operations crossing into the Sinai against an unnamed adversary to the east (i.e., Israel). In fact, Israel is the “enemy” in all of Egypt’s war games.

In December 2003, Israel protested Egypt’s use of unmanned aerial vehicles, drones, to spy on Israeli military facilities. Israel reportedly threatened to shoot down the drones whose flights violate the peace treaty and prompted increased concern over Egypt’s military buildup (Jerusalem Post, December 21, 2003).

Israel is also worried about the looming succession crisis in Egypt. President Hosni Mubarak is 77 and has been the nation’s ruler since Anwar Sadat’s assassination in 1981. No one knows who will follow Mubarak. Given the strong Muslim fundamentalist movement in the country and the antipathy of the military toward Israel, it is by no means certain that Mubarak’s successor will maintain the “cold peace” that has prevailed now for nearly 30 years.

Character, in the long run, is the decisive factor in the life of an individual and of nations alike.

—Theodore Roosevelt

Amercia’s 26th president made a valid observation that stands in precise proximity to one in the Bible: “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance” (Ps. 33:12).

When a reputable corporation seeks business partners or employees, it wants to know something about their character. And, though character often takes a back seat in the mad pursuit of money for money’s sake, it nevertheless remains the bottom line in determining how relationships will ultimately end. Alliances with people of questionable character spell trouble and, more often than not, bring catastrophe.

In the realm of nations, character can be tested based on respect, or lack of it, for holy places, whether or not those places happen to reflect a nation’s dominant beliefs. A vivid case in point is the Israeli-Palestinian struggle.

On December 21, 2001, the late Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Yasser Arafat made this statement:

One of our cubs or one of our flowers [a Palestinian boy or girl] will wave the flag of Palestine, Allah willing, over the walls of Jerusalem, its churches, and its mosques, whether someone likes it or not, and whoever does not like it can drink the water of the Dead Sea.

Arafat also predicted, “I appeal to my beloved in Jerusalem: More determination, more strength, more resolve. And Allah willing, we will pray in the al-Aqsa Mosque and in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.”

Arafat’s flag-placing pronouncement has been repeated consistently by both his cohorts in the Palestinian Authority and his other terrorist allies; and it must not be taken lightly. It is a serious declaration of intent, with equally serious implications.

Arafat’s proclamation targets three elements: the walls of Jerusalem, the churches, and the mosques.

The Walls of Jerusalem

The phrase walls of Jerusalem alludes to everything in the Old City that is currently—historically or biblically—associated with Jerusalem’s Jewishness. As nonnegotiable slice of any peace agreement, the PA is demanding the entire Old City, which includes the Western Wall as well as the Jewish Quarter within the walls.

Synagogues, a word Palestinians seem loath to articulate, would fall under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian state.
Hurva had been built in the 16th century. It was later destroyed by the Ottoman Turks, then rebuilt in the 1850s. Hurva was reputed to be the largest, most majestic synagogue in the entire Middle East.

When the Jordanians captured the Old City in 1948, they systematically destroyed some 58 synagogues and Torah institutions, including the Hurva and Tiferet Israel. They also forced all Jewish people from their homes and forbade them entry into the Old City and access to the Western Wall. And so the situation remained until the Israelis took the city in June of 1967 during the Six-Day War.

Some may consider these atrocities ancient history, no longer applicable in this day of enlightenment. But such thinking is far from reality.

When Israel chose to withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip and portions of northern Judea and Samaria last year, it also decided that its houses of worship should not be destroyed, as were most other structures. As a result, 21 synagogues were left intact, and the Palestinians promptly began waving flags over them.

Then the predictable happened. And even media outlets not known for being kind to Israel were forced to tell the story. Jason Maoz of The Jewish Press assembled a synopsis:

The Washington Post: “Before dawn, thousands of jubilant Palestinians poured into the settlement areas, celebrating and setting fire to some of the synagogue buildings.”

The (London) Guardian: “Palestinian police plans to bar crowds from the settlements quickly disintegrated as militant groups hoisted flags, fired into the air and set abandoned synagogues ablaze.”

No synagogues will be rebuilt in the Gaza Strip or northern Judea and Samaria. It is an ugly fact of life that Gaza is now, to use a familiar term from Europe of the 1930s and ‘40s, Judenrein (“cleansed of Jews”).

When news of the wanton destruction of Jewish holy places got out, Israel’s former chief rabbi, Yisrael Meir Lau, issued a statement warning against retaliation directed at mosques: “It is not our way,” Lau said. “The country must do all it can to prevent any irresponsible actions that could spark off hatred and cause bloodshed and suffering.”

The difference, as Theodore Roosevelt so aptly put it, is a matter of national and individual character.

The Churches of Jerusalem

The future of churches located within the ethnically cleansed borders of Palestinian territory is an issue the secular media and Western politicians shroud with silence. Unfortunately, it is also one seldom raised in Christian circles outside the region. However, the Palestinians intend for churches to fall under their regime’s control.

In case you missed it, here is what Arafat said: “Allah willing, we will pray . . . in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.”

Was this a slip of the tongue? Based on an abundance of empirical evidence, it was a statement of intent; and one need only remember events in Bethlehem to confirm this commitment.

Bible and prophecy teacher Zola Levitt, commenting on events related to the Palestinian takeover of Bethlehem in 1995, sketched a bleak scenario of present and future events:

But in a peculiar way, it was not only the city [Bethlehem] that was given to the Moslems, but also the Savior who was born there. Yasser Arafat proclaimed Jesus to be a Palestinian in front
of the whole world, and the Moslems, the media and, most shamefully, the Christian church, scarcely objected. Before his death, Arafat effectively completed the Islamization of Bethlehem and the adjacent Arab-Christian villages of Beit Jalla and Beth Sakhur, once Christian enclaves in Judea and Samaria. He changed the area demographically, cleverly flooding it with Muslims by (1) redrawing boundaries to encompass 30,000 Muslims from three refugee camps, (2) encouraging Muslim immigration to Bethlehem from Hebron, and (3) persecuting Christians so that they would leave. Ironically, more Arab Christians from Beit Jalla reside in Belize, Central America, today than in Beit Jalla itself.

A consequence of the de-Christianizing of Bethlehem was the terrorist occupation of the Church of the Nativity on April 2, 2002. Fleeting from Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers who were searching for weapons, more than 150 Palestinian terrorists from various organizations shot the doors off the church and rushed the building and nearby monastery where more than 200 priests and nuns lived. For 38 days they held up on the premises, while Israelis, respecting the sanctity of the historic church, refused to enter.

Rather than urge the terrorists to surrender, Arafat charged the Israelis with committing an “atrocious crime” that “cannot be forgiven.” In the end, most of the terrorists received safe passage to Belize. Twenty-six of them, who were searching for weapons, more than 150 Palestinian terrorists from various organizations shot the doors off the church and rushed the building and nearby monastery where more than 200 priests and nuns lived. For 38 days they held up on the premises, while Israelis, respecting the sanctity of the historic church, refused to enter.

The third recipient of the Palestinian flag is to be the Muslim mosques of Jerusalem and, for that matter, the whole of “Palestine.” Little need be said on the subject because it is a foregone conclusion that wherever Islam is in control, Muslim mosques are destined for predominance. That fact was evident during the heated, five-year dispute over the construction of a mosque near the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth.

Muslims seized the property where a tourist plaza was to be built to celebrate 2,000 years of Christianity in Nazareth. They then demanded the property be deeded to the Islamic authorities for a mosque. Opponents argued that the spires of the proposed mosque would tower over the church and demean the basilica. Israel, under pressure, decided in 2002 to withdraw approval to build on the site.

What may seem a trivial incident illustrates a fundamental point: A tenet of Islam is that no Christian, Jewish, or other religious building be taller than Muslim sanctuaries. The issue is simple but revealing. Islam must dominate the landscape, indicating superiority over infidel religious pretenders.

How extreme can the situation become? Consider Saudi Arabia, where extreme Wahhabism rules the day. There are no churches or synagogues. As a matter of fact, Jewish people are not allowed in the country; and, among other things, Christians are not allowed any outward evidences of their faith. Here is what Daniel Pipes reported:

In November 1990, President George H. W. Bush went to the Persian Gulf region with his wife and top congressional leaders at Thanksgiving time to visit the 400,000 troops gathered in Saudi Arabia, whom he sent there to protect that country from an Iraqi invasion. When the Saudi authorities learned that the President intended to say grace before a festive Thanksgiving dinner, they remonstrated; Saudi Arabia knows only one religion, they said, and that is Islam. Bush acceded, and he and his entourage instead celebrated the holiday on the U.S.S. Durham, an amphibious cargo ship sitting in international waters.

So, what difference does a flag make? All the difference in the world! It’s a matter of character.

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid.

Elwood McQuaid is editor-in-chief for The Friends of Israel.
Mysticism—the pursuit of ultimate truth through mysterious rites and subjective experiences—has enchanted mankind for centuries. Claiming to offer insights into the deep, dark secrets of the universe, mysticism pledges inclusion into an elite group, entices with assurances of illuminating the meaning of life, and allures by promising a closer connection to God.

Throughout history, cultures have produced their versions of mysticism. The Jewish people are no exception. The most significant, influential form of Jewish mysticism developed from the 10th through the 18th centuries in Israel, Babylon, and parts of Europe. Much of it arose in reaction to the dry, philosophical Judaism of the day. It became known as Kabbalah (“tradition”). Rabbi Meyer Waxman described Kabbalah as “an unsystematic synthesis of all the elements of mysticism which ever found expression in Judaism.”

There are actually two streams of Kabbalah: practical and speculative. Practical Kabbalah focuses on using mystical formulas to perform miracles or supernatural deeds. By manipulating the names of God, angels, and the actual letters of the Torah, practical Kabbalah claims that certain combinations can be formed to produce whatever charm or outcome is desired, whether it be healing the sick or succeeding in business.

Speculative Kabbalah, which overshadowed and incorporated practical Kabbalah, is more theoretical. It deals with such issues as how an infinite, immaterial God can create and relate to a finite, physical world. The answer, according to Kabbalah, is through mediation. Mediation is accomplished through angels, as well as through 10 emanations from God called sephirot. These sephirot, wrote Rabbi Waxman, “are both manifestation of [God’s] substance and media of His will” on Earth. “It is by means of these that the world came into being and is preserved, ordered and governed.” The 10 united sephirot are symbolically illustrated either by the form of a human body, the tree of life, concentric circles, or light in its various gradations.

Another important doctrine of Kabbalah is the idea that everything has two inherent powers, or energies: active and passive, symbolized by male and female. The human soul itself is said to have both male and female parts. Being pre-existent, it is said to split into those parts as it descends from the upper worlds—the male part entering a man, and the female part entering a woman. If a man lives a righteous life, then he will marry the woman who has the other part of his soul, his “soul mate.”

The primary text of Kabbalah is the Zohar (“Splendor”), an enigmatic commentary on the Torah that emphasizes going beyond the literal meaning of the biblical text to a hidden or mystical meaning.

Jewish people have long studied Kabbalah, but in the last four decades interest in Kabbalah has increased significantly, especially with certain Hollywood entertainers, like Madonna, publicly identifying with it. Their “pop” form of Kabbalah, advocated by The Kabbalah Centre, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Los Angeles, has been condemned by traditional kabbalists for opening Kabbalah’s secret teachings to non-Jews and trivializing its doctrines. Traditionalists have also criticized the Centre’s lucrative commercialism (e.g., selling amulets, such as the fashionably popular red string or bendel bracelet, which purportedly protects against the “evil eye,” and marketing a new Kabbalah energy drink).

Kabbalah contrasts starkly with the teachings of the Bible. As to mediation, there is only “one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). As to secrets, the apostle Paul reminded the Colossian believers that no mystical secret was ever going to match God’s revealed secret, namely, the Messiah Jesus, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

Moses said, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Dt. 29:29). There are some things God has kept to Himself. But we need not be concerned with those. Instead, our attention and obedience should focus on what we know He has revealed in His written Word. The plain teaching of Scripture is what God intends for us, not some ethereal mumbo jumbo reserved for an elite few (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13).

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid., 362.

by Bruce Scott
With the exception of perhaps a handful of Tibetan monks living in the shadows of the Himalayan mountains or the isolated tribal groups of South America, it is hard to imagine people who have not heard something about Dan Brown’s novel, *The Da Vinci Code*. It has been on *The New York Times* Best Seller list since its release in 2003 and has been a best seller in some 150 countries. Film director Ron Howard and megastar Tom Hanks are teaming up for the movie version, set for release in May. The novel contends, among other things, that Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus and bore His children.

Because Brown’s fiction work not only deals directly with the life of Christ and the validity of the New Testament, but also creates a misleading aura of factuality, it needs to be addressed. Happily, a number of credible books have been published, exposing the novel’s multiple inaccuracies and myths parading as fact. May their tribe increase.

I will address only two of the vacuous speculations passed on to us from the *Da Vinci effect* (my phrase, for want of a better one). These are: (1) that the Dead Sea Scrolls are part of the “earliest Christian records” and (2) that the ancient, heretical documents found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, are a more faithful historical record of Jesus than the New Testament Gospels.

As to the first point, the “seer” of Brown’s book, a character named Sir Leigh Teabing, solemnly opines,

“These are photocopies of the Nag Hammadi and Dead Sea Scrolls, which I mentioned earlier,” Teabing said. “The earliest Christian records. Troublingly, they do not match up with the gospels in the Bible.”

Ah yes, but there is even nastier intrigue afoot. Teabing expounds that these two sets of ancient documents “highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda—to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base.”

So, let’s take a quick look at these two ancient sources, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the documents found at Nag Hammadi, and see what they do (or do not) prove about the New Testament record on the life of Christ.

In the Caves of Qumran

The Dead Sea Scrolls consist of, among other things, 225 Old Testament manuscripts, about 215 of which were discovered in 11 caves at...
Khirbet Qumran near the Dead Sea in Israel; the other 10 were found nearby at Wadi Murabba ‘at, Nahal Hever, and Masada. They contain every book of the Old Testament, with the exception of Esther. The latest dates from around A.D. 68; the earliest, from around 250 B.C.E. They represent the oldest version of the Old Testament in existence.

So, is Jesus mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls? No. The Qumran religious community during the first century was not Christian; it was a remote and separatist desert sect of Judaism. Most scholars believe it was a part of, or related to, the Essenes; and there is a virtual “consensus” among Dead Sea Scrolls scholars that those scrolls do not address Christ or the early church:

The Qumranites . . . existed during the time of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth (26–30 C.E.). But none of the Dead Sea Scrolls refer to him, and they do not mention any follower of Jesus described in the New Testament.

Even the ultraliberal and antiorthodox Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar must concede that, on the only possible New Testament-Qumran link (John the Baptist as a desert-dwelling, Qumran “Essene”), the evidence is simply not there. Funk founded the Jesus Seminar, which disputes most of Jesus’ miracles and contends He did not rise from the dead.

The bottom line is that the Dead Sea Scrolls are in no sense a “Christian record,” as Dan Brown’s novel suggests. Nor do they contradict the New Testament.

What these scrolls from Qumran do give us is added proof that the Old Testament we possess is eminently reliable. They document how tirelessly those books were copied, even under the harsh, unforgiving conditions of the desert region near the Dead Sea. For instance, in the book of Ruth, “all four texts [discovered] plus the one recorded in the traditional Masoretic Text exhibit the same language with only minor, unimportant variants.”

Regarding the book of Leviticus: “The text is similar to the Masoretic text, the traditional text of the Hebrew Bible, and it proves that little change occurred over the centuries.”

Several copies of the entire book of Isaiah were found. Amazingly, the differences between the version of Isaiah in your Bible and that scribed in the deserts of the Dead Sea from 120 B.C.E. to A.D. 60 are limited to minor variations of spellings or exclusions of some verses from some texts but inclusions in others—variations that are “insignificant for purposes of understanding or interpretation.”

Simply put, the Dead Sea Scrolls constitute one more piece of evidence that the Bible you read was faithfully transmitted, first from eyewitnesses, and then through the centuries by dedicated scribes and copyists.

An Ancient Heresy Uncovered

Quite different from the Dead Sea Scrolls are those ancient texts found at Nag Hammadi in 1945 by an Egyptian peasant who later sold them the following year to a dealer in Old Cairo. None of them are “New Testament”: they contain none of the books from Matthew to Revelation. In fact, they contain sayings and accounts of the life of Christ that resulted from Gnostic heresy in the centuries following the original New Testament autographs. That heresy sought to re-explain the meaning of Christ’s ministry from the philosophical perspective of speculation and paganism. Paul’s admonition against those who promote a “different gospel” and “pervert [distort] the gospel of Christ” (Gal. 1:6–7) reminds us that the truth of Christ has, from its inception, been plagued by those who would “cheat you [take you captive] through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the . . . world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8).

The Da Vinci Code, however, promotes these Gnostic gospels as more authentic than the four Gospels of the New Testament. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The “Gospel According to Phillip,” for example, which is at the core of Dan Brown’s novel, makes the preposterous claim that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. Its fragments were among the Nag Hammadi texts. It refers to Mary as Jesus’ “companion” (though never mentions the word marriage or married). And when was it penned? According to Bentley Layton, a scholar on the Gnostic gospels, it dates around A.D. 350. That was more than 250 years after the creation of the New Testament Gospels.

Or how about the most popular “Gnostic” text touted by modern-day heretics: the “Gospel According to Thomas.” To quote again from Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar (not exactly friendly to the evangelical view of Scripture), that text “contains one hundred fourteen sayings and parables, but lacks a narrative structure” regarding the life of Jesus. In other words, it contains little that we can use to evaluate the life and ministry of Christ from a historical perspective.

It is noteworthy that even the Nag Hammadi “experts” have concluded that those texts were “buried . . . by unknown persons, [for reasons] . . . not specifically known,” and we know nothing about the original source of the information contained in them; and what is true of the “Gospel According to Phillip” is also true of the other Nag Hammadi texts: their authorship and the identity of their compilers “are completely unknown.”

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From an objective, historical standpoint, to base any conclusions regarding the life of Jesus Christ on the “Gnostic” texts from Nag Hammadi, or to contend that they eclipse the New Testament record, is nonsense.

A Record Worth Relying On

The New Testament record of the life, ministry, miracles, death by crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ should be considered among the most documented facts of ancient history. Beyond the Christian record, the ancient Jewish historian Josephus mentioned Jesus. Tacitus, the great ancient Roman historian from the first century, wrote about Him and mentioned His crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. Another Roman chronicler, Pliny the Younger, also referred to Christ as someone worshiped “as God.”

The biblical Gospels were written during the first century, when many of the witnesses to Jesus’ actions and words were still alive; and one of the earliest factual recitations about Him dates around A.D. 54, in Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, written a mere 20 years after the crucifixion. It sums things up this way: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas [Peter], then by the twelve” (15:3–5). (See endnote 13.)

It is quite telling that we have no debatable, alternate explanations from that period disproving this bold claim of resurrection following a public execution. The logical explanation is that the fact of Jesus’ divinity and resurrection was amply clear to those who were actual witnesses, and His opponents could not convincingly concoct an alternate explanation that would hold water.

Rather than the early church concealing the truth about Jesus by suppressing the “Gnostic” versions discovered at Nag Hammadi (the theory of The Da Vinci Code), precisely the opposite is the case: the New Testament versions, written by eyewitnesses or from eyewitness sources, were more reliable and generally accepted because they were accurate. The heretical counterfeits penned much later were soundly (and wisely) criticized and rejected as deceptive, dangerous distortions of the truth.

The Weight of the Evidence

Lawyers, when they argue to the judge or jury, often talk about the “weight of the evidence,” that is, which way the scales tip based on the credible evidence from witnesses who have actual knowledge. You can trace the New Testament to the original apostles who witnessed the events and authored the documents during the generation of first-century Jerusalemites, who could have challenged the accounts if they had been inaccurate. The historical accuracy of these accounts is an independent verification of their reliability.

Paul wrote about “Erastus, the treasurer of the city” at Corinth (Rom. 16:23). When archaeologists in 1927 uncovered an inscription from that period, in that city, referring to that very person, the historicity of the New Testament was underscored yet again.16 The Gospel of John refers to healings Jesus performed at the Pools of Bethesda and Siloam (Jn. 5:1–8; 9:1–41). Archaeology has corroborated these sites.17 There are literally hundreds of archaeological verifications for the books of the New Testament.

Then, in the ages after the first century, a line of church fathers, such as Irenaeus and Justin Martyr, consistently validated the New Testament record in their writings for two more centuries. By the fourth century, the early church recognized (but did not “create”) the accepted canon of New Testament books because those books had been proven consistently to be authentic and accurate. The Da Vinci Code’s claim that the canon resulted from a political power play rests on bald and fanciful speculation, not on fact.

Obviously, this is serious stuff. The eternal future of human souls rests on this issue, because only by receiving the witness of the true Word of God (the “sacred writings”) is it possible to gain the wisdom that leads us to “salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

So, the evidence is in. The court awaits your verdict. What say you?

Endnotes

1 This “effect” first begins with a lesser-known theory (in this case, a book originally published in 1982 called Holy Blood, Holy Grail, by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln) containing a complex and wild argument for Jesus’ union with Mary Magdalene and that it led to children who supposedly can be traced to the unlikely lineage of the monarchs of France. Next, that theory is codified in a more popular form, The Da Vinci Code, which then explodes it into the mass culture and creates a “phenomenon” that often persuades the gullible and uninformed.


3 Ibid., 234–235.

4 Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, eds., The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible (San Francisco: Harper, 1999), 630.

5 Ibid., xiv.

6 Also discovered were regulations for the Qumran religious community and various “commentaries” on the Old Testament.


9 Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich, 607.

10 Abegg, Flint, and Ulrich, 268.


12 Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, 555.

13 Layton, 323.


Craig L. Parshall is a highly successful trial attorney and novelist in the Washington, D.C., area. His award-winning novel, Crown of Fire, coauthored with his wife, Janet, is now available in bookstores.
The sad fact is that, in this troubled region where militant Islamists and Russian forces have been at war for more than a decade, Christians and their children are caught in the middle and victimized by the fighting. All of which points again to the fact that we live in a time of international turmoil that Satan uses to assault believers and afflict churches, pastors, missionaries, and other workers in an effort to shut down the proclamation of the gospel.

Central to his strategy is hitting saints where it hurts the most: the death and maiming of children. In Beslan, an extremely happy event for children and parents was turned into a catastrophe that will plague the community forever. There will never be another Day of Knowledge free from the memories of that terrible murder spree.

We at The Friends of Israel continue to offer, without charge, the “Remember” lapel pin to anyone who will simply ask for it. These reminders are not a gimmick to gain support or attention for our ministry. They represent a seriousness of purpose that mirrors the turbulent times we live in. Christians, and their children, who love Christ as much as you and I, are suffering and dying. We must remember them with our prayers, influence, and material means. It is not an option. It is an obligation.
As the 18th century dawned, European Jews were trying to recover from decades of destruction and disillusionment. In 1648 a Ukrainian named Bodgan Chmielnicki led a revolt against Poland. In the ensuing violence, Chmielnicki’s forces slaughtered upwards of 100,000 Jewish people and destroyed 300 Jewish villages. Hundreds were left homeless and wandered about as refugees. Out of the ashes, however, came a ray of hope, a 38-year-old Jewish man named Shabtal Zvi.

In 1665 Zvi proclaimed himself the messiah. All of Europe and the Middle East buzzed with excitement. Zvi had the largest messianic following in Jewish history since the days of Bar Kokhba, the false messiah of the second century. But hope died quickly after Zvi converted to Islam a year later. The bad news spread rapidly, leaving the Jewish population completely dispirited.

Further, the condition of Jewish education did not help. Many traditional rabbis offered little spiritual sustenance because they focused on the art of pilpul, a method of exposition and debate that tries to solve religious controversies through crafty interpretations of talmudic minutiae.

Within this milieu, on April 23, 1720, in Vilna, Lithuania, a soon-to-be spiritual giant within the Jewish community was born. His name was Elijah ben (son of) Solomon Zalman. He became known as the Vilna Gaon (pronounced Gah-OHN, meaning “genius”), or simply HaGra (Hebraic acronym for “the Gaon Rabbi Elijah”).

The Vilna Gaon is such a revered figure in Jewish history that a body of legendary tales and epic deeds has grown up around him. Today it is difficult to discern what is fact and what is fiction.

We do know he was brilliant, apparently even a child prodigy, perhaps with a photographic memory. It was said that by age seven he had learned Hebrew, the Old Testament, and the Talmud well enough to deliver a talmudic homily. By age 13 he...
had also sufficiently mastered the primary works of the Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism). His mind must have been astounding, for stories abound of his ability to recall almost any sacred passage and even state the word that ended the previous one. He earned the reputation of being a diligent student of all the recognized, authoritative Jewish writings (collectively called Torah). He either isolated himself in the woods or hibernated in his room, always keeping the shutters closed to prevent distractions from his Torah studies. He slept only two hours a night, and then only 30 minutes at a time.

The Vilna Gaon also studied secular subjects, such as history, mathematics, and astronomy, but only to enhance his understanding of Torah. The same was true of studying Jewish mysticism. He believed the Kabbalah, known as the “hidden Torah,” only benefited someone grounded in the “revealed Torah,” meaning the biblical and talmudic writings. The Gaon denounced the study of speculative philosophy, thus opposing much of what the famous medieval rabbi, Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides, also called the Rambam [1135–1204]), had used as the basis for his teachings.

The Gaon did find time to marry. Around the age of 20 he wed a young woman named Hannah. During their 40 years of marriage they were blessed with seven children, whom Hannah raised almost exclusively because the Gaon spent the majority of his time studying.

In the early days of his marriage, the Gaon left his young wife and wandered throughout Europe for a number of years. It is not known why he did so. Some speculate that he believed it would enhance his study of Torah. At 28 he returned to his family and settled down to a life of study, prayer, and contemplation, supported by a small weekly stipend that his great-great-grandfather had set aside for Torah scholars.

Despite his reputation for Torah insights, the Vilna Gaon never accepted any public position of importance. He was content to instruct privately a small band of disciples who later disseminated his thoughts and teachings. The Gaon is known for at least 70 works, ranging from Old Testament commentaries to explanations of the Talmud. Almost half of his teachings dealt with the Kabbalah alone. His interpretations became so highly regarded that he is included among the great codifiers of Jewish law.

Sometime during his midlife the Vilna Gaon decided to immigrate to the Holy Land. He left his family behind with the intent of bringing them later. For some unknown reason, the Gaon did not complete his immigration and returned to Vilna. He never explained other than to say, “I did not have permission from Heaven.” The Gaon never made it to the Holy Land, but some of his followers did, promoting his teachings there.

The Gaon believed the way to overcome a poor memory is to learn with love and fear of Heaven. . . . That which is precious to someone remains in his memory.”

As remarkable as he was, however, he also erred. He was wrong to give the act brought merit and blessing to their lives.

As with any person, the Vilna Gaon’s life was multifaceted, punctuated by both strengths and weaknesses. For example, the Gaon rightly emphasized the importance of prayer, believing proper intent of the heart is what mattered. He also correctly concluded that the answer to man’s spiritual needs is found within God’s Word, and he taught that the key to memorization is right affections: “The way to overcome an evil tongue is to praise others, and the way to trust God and conquer fleshly desires is to learn to be content with what you have.

Where the Gaon excelled, of course, was in the realm of Torah scholarship. He wanted to demonstrate the absolute unity between the written and the so-called oral Torahs, proving they are but one, divinely given work.

As remarkable as he was, however, he also erred. He was wrong to give the same authority to extrabiblical writings that he gave to the Bible.
There is only one Torah; it does not include the Talmud, the kabbalistic writings, or any other noncanonical texts. Only the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the revealed Word of God.

The Vilna Gaon also erred in his principles of interpretation. As do many rabbis, the Gaon believed that each text of Scripture, even every letter, has four levels of meaning: (1) plain or literal, (2) hints or allegorical, (3) homiletical, and (4) secret or mystical. Biblical passages often become twisted or misunderstood as a result of this type of hermeneutic. Instead, the general rule should be the following: Unless figurative language is clearly intended, seek no other sense but the plain sense, otherwise you may end up with nonsense.

The Gaon’s endorsement of Kabbalah is perhaps his most glaring error. He strongly believed in the authority of the Jewish mystical writings and taught that one could not fully grasp the plain text of the Torah without studying the Kabbalah. He also believed that learning the Kabbalah was, in fact, necessary to bring the Messiah.

The Gaon’s mystical convictions included “practical Kabbalah,” the use of amulets and incantations containing the names of God or angels. Once, when a convert to Judaism was imprisoned, the Gaon offered to free him by using his powers of practical Kabbalah. The Gaon’s participation in Jewish mysticism also involved communion with spirits. The Gaon claimed to have had secrets revealed to him by the patriarch Jacob, Moses, the prophet Elijah, and dead kabbalistic rabbis. He even admitted that, before he was 13, he tried to create a golem (a soulless creature made of clay, brought to life by kabbalistic rituals). This acceptance of mysticism, with its accompanying distortions of Scripture and connection with deceiving spirits, mars the Gaon’s otherwise admirable reputation.

Most cultural heroes are bigger than life. The Vilna Gaon is no exception. Because of his knowledge of Torah and his piety, he is said to have possessed supernatural powers. His blessings on people supposedly came true. He purportedly healed the blind, predicted the future, and protected his community from ravaging mobs. It is said he even kept a cannonball from exploding.

In truth, these incredulous events are unnecessary for Jewish people to appreciate the legacy of the Vilna Gaon. In their eyes, he was a model of diligence, scholarship, and devotion. In almost every Jewish community, his impact is still felt today.

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The Mysterious Golem

One of the strangest teachings of Kabbalah concerns the creation of the legendary golem. Some kabbalists claim that, with the right ingredients (such as clay) and the pronouncement of proper formulas, pious kabbalists can create soulless, man-like creatures called golems and bring them to life.

Golem means “shapeless matter.” The term appears only once in Scripture, where the psalmist declared that God had seen “my substance, being yet unformed” (Ps. 139:16). The most famous golem in Jewish folklore is the one supposedly brought to life by Rabbi Judah Loew of 16th-century Prague. His golem was over 11 feet tall and is said to have protected the Jews of Prague from those who accused them of the infamous “blood libel.” Legend says that, when the golem continued to grow and began to run amuck, Rabbi Loew had to destroy him. Some believe the legend was the basis for Mary Shelley’s novel Frankenstein.

Bruce Scott is a field representative with The Friends of Israel in New Hope, Minnesota.

Quoteworthy

U.S. President George W. Bush, addressing the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington, D.C., in October 2005:

“We know the vision of the radicals because they’ve openly stated it . . . . The militants believe that controlling one country [Iraq] will rally the Muslim masses, enabling them to overthrow all moderate governments in the region and establish a radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia. With greater economic and military and political power, the terrorists would be able to advance their stated agenda: to develop weapons of mass destruction, to destroy Israel, to intimidate Europe, to assault the American people, and to blackmail our government into isolation.”
Nine years after the Vilna Gaon’s birth in Lithuania, another man was born whose influence opened the door to assimilation. He is known as the father of the Jewish Enlightenment, the Haskalah, which eventually helped birth the Reform and Zionist movements.

Moses Mendelssohn was born in Germany on September 6, 1729, the son of Torah scribe Mendel of Dessau. A contemporary of the Vilna Gaon, his life and education were far different. Although an Orthodox Jew his entire life, Mendelssohn sought to expose the Orthodox community to modern teaching and secular concepts.

Forced to live in urban ghettos (the first was established in Venice in 1517) or in small villages called shetels, the Jewish people were isolated from their Gentile neighbors. They studied only Torah and Talmud, spoke only Yiddish, and paid little or no attention to what was transpiring outside their world. Mendelssohn believed the only way to end their segregation was to open their minds to non-Jewish thought. Those who followed this philosophy believed Western wisdom and scholarship were the keys to entering non-Jewish society. Thus began the Haskalah, from the Hebrew word sechel, meaning “reason” or “intellect.”

Although Mendelssohn faithfully studied Torah, Talmud, and learned the writings and thoughts of the great Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides, 1135–1204), he also became proficient in German literature and philosophy. In fact, German intellectuals respectfully called him the “Jewish Socrates.”

In 1783 Mendelssohn translated the entire Torah and the book of Psalms into German, using Hebrew letters. Ironically, his descendants, including his famous grandson, composer Felix Mendelssohn, left Judaism for Christianity.

Felix was, in fact, a committed Christian. When he died in 1847, a 600-voice choir sang “Christ and the Resurrection” at his funeral. He is buried in Holy Cross Church Cemetery in Berlin, where a huge cross marks his grave.

Felix’s Christianity, however, meant nothing to the Nazis. Wrote Rabbi Samuel M. Stahl:

To them, he was always a Jew. Almost a century after his death, they besmirched his memory as a Jewish composer. They forbade his music to be played. They ordered that the huge statue of him in Leipzig be taken down and destroyed. They also closed the Mendelssohn banking house and ordered all the Mendelssohn descendants still living in Germany to leave the country.

by Thomas C. Simcox

ENDNOTES

3 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
Why preserve ancient words? I can hear the response of one of my Jewish professors from college days as clearly as if I were sitting in his classroom today: "Such a question!"

In those days it was assumed that college professors were repositories of the accumulated knowledge of the generations and that students were empty heads waiting to be filled. But that was two generations ago, and times have changed. Today students are more likely to ask questions like, “What is the relevance of this activity for me and for my career?” Or, “Shouldn’t we be more interested in changing the world we were given rather than preserving it?”

Fortunately for teachers of Hebrew, such as me, students who choose to attend a Bible college come because of their devotion to ancient words: the preserved words of the Holy Scriptures. These students understand that the words of the Bible are living, powerful, and able to change lives (Heb. 4:12). Our challenge is to make English-speaking students, who have always used English translations of the Bible, realize the value of working with the Hebrew words of the Old Testament. We must expose students to this heritage and to their debt to the generations of scholars who gave their lives to preserve these words for them.

The opportunity to take up this challenge in a unique way providentially presented itself when Baptist Bible College (BBC) in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, where I teach, was loaned a rare 18th-century Torah scroll. Experts at the Machon Ot, a scribal institution in Israel for repairing Torah scrolls, had declared this particular scroll pasul, that is, invalid for sacred use. An American foundation then acquired the scroll, believed to have come from Vilna, Lithuania, to make it available to institutions where the Hebrew Scriptures are honored as God’s Word and the Jewish people are loved and respected.

Although repaired many times in its three centuries of use in a synagogue, it could no longer be restored to the strict requirements of STaM. STaM is an acronym for Sifrei Torah (the handwritten Torah scrolls used in synagogues),

Teffilin (the handwritten Bible verses encased in phylacteries), and Mezuzot (the handwritten Bible verses encased in small containers displayed on the doorposts of Jewish homes and buildings).

The rabbinic rules for STaM require that each letter of each word clearly display its distinct form. In many portions of this scroll, the leather’s surface was too worn or damaged to see the letters distinctly, so the scroll was judged unfit for synagogue use. Ironically, it was the inability of the scribes, called sopherim, to continue to preserve this scroll for sacred use that made it possible for others to preserve it as a document of Jewish heritage for future generations.

When Gary Zimmerman, a representative of the foundation that loaned us the scroll, came to campus, he excited the students’ imaginations with lectures about scribal techniques and the meticulous way the scribes wrote and preserved Torah scrolls.
When you unroll a 300-year-old Torah scroll, show Christian students the beautiful and painstaking detail of the manuscript, and ask whether they would like to be part of a project to preserve the scroll for future generations, they, too, respond, “Such a question!”

The eventual goal of the Torah Scroll Project is to Internet publish photographs and a detailed report of the 18th-century Torah scroll for the benefit and blessing of anyone who accesses the site. The Internet has made it possible for documents and artifacts to be preserved in a format far more accessible than storage or display in a museum. Future generations of scholars will be able to work with facsimiles of the scroll and with the data gathered by the project.

The Torah Scroll Project is a vast undertaking, but the benefits are enormous. The project is a means to teach our students about the heritage of the Jewish scribes, improve their knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, and engage them in preserving this unique manuscript. Our college had a pool of students eager to work with the Torah scroll. BBC offers three years of Old Testament languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic, and Hieroglyphic Egyptian. Each semester we have anywhere from 60 to 100 students enrolled in these courses. We decided to allow second- and third-year Hebrew students to work on the project.

Unlike the Hebrew Bibles that college and seminary students use, Torah scrolls contain no vowels, chapter or verse markers, or even the name of the book at the top of the page. Working with unvoweled text requires a higher degree of fluency in Hebrew. Our second- and third-year Hebrew students showed a marked increase in their proficiency in biblical Hebrew because of the project. Also, Torah scrolls do not use the letter styles found in printed Hebrew books. The rules of STaM require they be handwritten in a special writing style so that each letter is distinct and cannot possibly be mistaken for another. This STaM font marks many letters with three tiny slashes, called taggim (literally, “crowns”) because they “crown,” or adorn, certain letters.

Our scroll was especially challenging because it was the product of a kabbalistic Jewish community. Kabbalistic Jews believe there is a mystical power in each individual letter. Kabbalistic scrolls use unique letterforms and flourishes to convey a deeper meaning to certain letters in specific words. Our students had to become completely conversant with the complex rules of STaM in order to recognize the differences in the kabbalistic letterforms.

When Bible students learn that the sopherim actually counted the words and letters of each book, they marvel at such dedication. After our students learned how to check the work of the sopherim, they understood the necessity for such rigid, pedantic procedures.

Each student was assigned two or three pages of the Torah scroll. To recognize and record each unique feature of the kabbalistic letterforms, every student had to prepare his or her own copy of the assigned pages in the standard STaM format for comparison with the scroll. To do so,
the students had to learn to work with a Hebrew word processor and to edit and print their sections of the Hebrew text in the exact order, column, and line of the manuscript.

In a curious way, the students had to enter the world of the ancient scribe and do the work of a sopher. This was no easy task. Today’s students are accustomed to reading rapidly and using lightning-fast, computerized instant-messaging. They come to college with software that checks their spelling and corrects (some of) their grammar. Students reported that the most difficult skill to acquire was learning to slow down and do careful, meticulous work.

After they had prepared a computer-generated copy of their assigned pages, they were ready to learn how to work with the 300-year-old Vilna scroll. The manuscript is made up of 53 leather pages of uneven size, sewn together into one scroll. Handling it with bare hands not only violates the convictions of many Jews, but it also endangers the preservation of the prepared leather itself; the smallest amounts of sweat from hands or fingers will eventually darken the scroll and make it illegible. So we all had to wear gloves.

The students had to examine every letter of the text, using a magnifying glass when necessary. Every unique or embellished letterform, every departure from STaM, had to be noted and identified. Every letter was compared with the STaM requirements. The minutest details were checked. For example, we found that many letters that were supposed to be marked with three taggin slashes were written with two instead; some letters were missing the required taggin completely; and some were marked with taggin that were not supposed to be there.

Every letter worthy of note was circled in the corresponding word on the computer-generated copy. Each form was circled and assigned a letter (a for the first instance in a line, b for the second, etc.). Then a description of the form was written in the margin of the computerized copy.

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Marginal notes also recorded where sopherim had erased the original letters in order to repair and restore the proper ones. Notations were made for blotches or water damage. Above all, the students had to record their work neatly and consistently. Writing neatly may be the second most difficult skill these students acquired!

The results will be entered into a computer database and added to the published pictures of the scroll on the BBC Web site. This semester we will recruit a new crop of students to design, publish, and maintain the Web site.

Tedious work? The students in the Old Testament Project Center didn’t think so. By the time they opened the scroll for themselves, they were able to look at it from a new perspective—that of the ancient scribe who had written it and the sopherim who had...
preserved it. The sopherim had labored so diligently to preserve this scroll for the use of a single Jewish community. Someday, Lord willing, our work will preserve their work, online, for the entire world.

Colin Smith is a professor of Bible and biblical languages at Baptist Bible College in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania.
lives in Crown Heights, New York, a major enclave for the Lubavitch Hasidim. He studies at a yeshiva (place of Jewish study) and performs his music across the country.

Although Matisyahu’s music may be unique, his journey to Hasidism is not. Hasidism (ultra-Orthodox Judaism) is growing. Though still only a tiny portion of the overall Jewish population, Hasidism is proportionately the fastest growing movement within Judaism, its numbers doubling every 15 years.3

Most people know very little about the Hasidic community because they aren’t exposed to it much, if at all. There are fewer than 1 million Hasidim in the world, and the majority of those live in Israel. In the United States, the majority lives in New York City, specifically, the Boro Park, Williamsburg, and Crown Heights sections of Brooklyn.

Patrons come to trendy clubs from New York City to Los Angeles to hear an instrumental mixture of reggae sprinkled with hip hop and jazz. But there is something different about the featured vocalist. His distinctive voice undulates with a haunting chant, while still inflecting an unmistakable Caribbean rhythm.

Audiences love his music, but his stage appearance elicits some confusion. In place of the usual flowered shirt, shorts, flip-flops, and dreadlocks, the young man wears a white shirt and black trousers; sports a long beard and wire-rimmed glasses; and tops it all off with a black yarmulke ("skull cap"). The artist’s name is Matisyahu (loosely transliterated, “Mattathias of the Maccabees,” of Hanukkah fame). And he is a Hasidic Jew.

His attire is a throwback to the dress of 18th-century Polish Jews. While the beat and sound of his music are not Hasidic, his lyrics certainly are. This cross between Bob Marley and Moses was born Matthew Miller in West Chester, Pennsylvania. His family later settled in White Plains, New York, where he was raised in an observant Jewish home. Yet he resisted formal Jewish practice and searched for a more “liberating” lifestyle, making his teen years tumultuous.1 It was during these times that he found great relief and comfort listening to and playing a wide range of music. Ultimately, a trip to Israel in high school compelled him to reconnect with his Jewish identity. At age 19 he returned to the States and enrolled in a music school in New York.

His biography, located on the Web site hasidicreggae.com, offers this insight: “During this time, he happened on the Carlebach Shul, a synagogue on the Upper West Side [of Manhattan], well known for its hippie-friendly vibe and exuberant singing. This encounter further fueled his soul-fire, turning him on to the mystical power of song in Hasidic Judaism.”2

Then, said his bio, he met a Lubavitch rabbi in a park. Soon Matthew Miller was gone, and Matisyahu, the Hasidic musician, was born. Matisyahu now
Significant Hasidic communities also exist in Chicago, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Baltimore, Detroit, Philadelphia, Miami, and Denver.

In Canada, Toronto and Montreal are Hasidic centers. Recently in Australia, the Hasidim sparked enough interest that a government television station helped finance a short, highly acclaimed feature film titled Jewboy, by Jewish writer-director Tony Krawitz.5

Hasidism is not only growing because people like Matisyahu embrace it, it is growing from within. It is not uncommon for Hasidic families to have eight to 10, even 12, children.

Their distinct dress, evangelistic fervor to win fellow Jews to their way of thinking, and large families set them apart. And binding them to one another throughout the world is their main language: Yiddish.

Born From the Shtetls

The name Hasidic (Hah-SE-dik) means “pious” and is used to denote a person committed to Judaism beyond what is expected. Most people associate the name with the practice and traditions of the devoted Jews of Eastern Europe.

The 13th and 17th centuries were particularly arduous for the Jewish people. Most of the Jewish Diaspora (Jews residing outside Israel after being scattered in A.D. 70) lived in Western and Central Europe. The “Christian” church (n nonevangelical) began accusing Jewish people of working with the Devil, stealing Gentile children and using their blood for Passover, poisoning wells, and spreading plagues. These accusations led to beatings, expulsions, and murders.

The Jewish people were forced eastward toward Poland and Russia, where conditions were no better. Politically, Poland was in a constant state of flux. Due to constant warring with her neighbors, her borders were often changing. Pogroms (violence against Jews) devastated the Jewish populations in Ukraine and Poland. Thousands of Jewish people were killed, and hundreds of towns were ravaged. Through these hardships, the children of Abraham believed a deliverer—a messiah—would arise and bring justice and peace to the whole world. He would transport them to their ancient homeland, Israel. And he would establish his Messianic Kingdom on Earth.

They longed for his appearing, but he did not appear to them. Along the way, many professed to be Him. Writing for Rav-SIG, an online journal specializing in rabbinic genealogy, Dr. Yehuda Klausner explained: “Out of this despair of the Jews false messiahs appeared: David Alroi (1160), David HaReuveni (1542), Shlomo Molcho (1500–1532), Shabbtai Zvi (1626–1676), Jacob Frank (1726–1791), and others.”5 Each messianic failure left the hopeful yet helpless Jews disenchant ed and disenfranchised.

Many of these Jewish people lived in shtetls, small Jewish villages scattered throughout Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Romania, and Russia. Survival alone was difficult, never mind the pursuit of Jewish learning. Though small in number, an observant, educated, and sophisticated Jewish population lived outside Eastern Europe. A dichotomy emerged between the poor, ignorant Jews and the more middle-class scholars.

During this time a leader arose whose impact on Judaism remains to this day. To understand Hasidism, it is essential to know of the life and works of this extremely influential man.

Continued next issue

Steve Herzig is the director of North American Ministries for The Friends of Israel.

“W e can have no ‘50-50’ allegiance in this country. Either a man is an American and nothing else, or he is not an American at all.”—Theodore Roosevelt, 26th president of the United States
The Dead Sea Scrolls’ True Treasure

Shrine of the Book, Jerusalem, Israel
(Art Resource, NY)
The law of the LORD is perfect. More to be desired are they than gold, . . . and in keeping them there is great reward. The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver (Ps. 19:7, 10–11; 119:72).

Muhammad was flustered. His mischievous goat was missing. Roaming far from the herd and friends, the Bedouin came upon a cave overlooking the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. Thinking the creature had strayed inside, he threw stones in to flush it out. When he heard the crack of pottery, he was baffled. Might there be a cache of treasure? He excitedly scampered down into the cave entrance to find no gold or silver, merely old, large clay jars along the wall, with tattered scrolls inside. At least the leather scrolls will make great sandal straps, he thought. Sadly, Muhammad could not appreciate the true worth of the moment. His naughty goat had led him to what has been called the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times: a priceless treasure hoard of the written Word—the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Bedouins do not keep time like Westerners, but like the ancients; they view time in connection with other events. So the exact date of the discovery is not certain. The new, revised date for the first scroll discovery is 1935 or 1936. From then through 1956, many more manuscripts were found. They are believed to date from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D. Most were found in the limestone caves in Qumran, just northwest of the Dead Sea. Most of the scrolls are in Hebrew; the rest are written in Aramaic and Greek. More than 900 documents, representing as many as 350 separate works in multiple copies, have been found. Many of the biblical and nonbiblical scripts are represented in tiny fragments. In one cave alone there were 520 texts in 15,000 fragments. As you can imagine, piecing them together for translation has been a gigantic task.

The discovery confirms what Bible believers have always known: Today’s Bible is a proven text. Regardless of the assaults against it, the Word of God stands forever.

As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him (2 Sam. 22:31).

There have always been some who have questioned the reliability of Scripture. Since the text has been copied and recopied over the centuries, critics claim it’s impossible to know with certainty what the biblical writers originally wrote or meant. The Dead Sea Scrolls void that assumption in regard to the Old Testament. Between 223 and 233 copies of the Hebrew Scriptures were discovered and compared with the present text. The only Old Testament book not found was Esther. Possibly it is still out in a desert cave somewhere.

Before the discovery, the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures dated from the ninth through the 11th centuries. These copies are referred to as the Masoretic Text, from the Hebrew word masorah, meaning “tradition.” Jewish scribes from Tiberias, called Masoretes, meticulously sought to standardize the Hebrew text and pronunciation; their work is still considered authoritative today. The Qumran scrolls are at least 1,000 years older than the Masoretic Text. In fact, the scrolls even predate the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament produced in Egypt around 200 to 300 B.C.

Careful comparisons have been made between the Masoretic Text and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Only insignificant differences in spelling and grammar were found. Critics and skeptics were shocked at how closely the text resembles today’s. They found no
direct challenges to the principal doctrines of Scripture. The biblical portion of the Qumran literature confirms the wording and meaning of our modern-day Old Testament:

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (Jn. 5:39).

Along with the copies of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Dead Sea caves also yielded other writings. These documents describe the lifestyle and beliefs of the mysterious community that lived in the Qumran area. Although nonbiblical, they are valuable for giving understanding to the times and culture of the New Testament era. Unfortunately, scholars focus more attention on these extraneous works than on the Scriptures, though the Bible texts are more relevant to life issues involving the Hebrew Scriptures:

These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me (Lk. 24:44).

Many more examples can be cited. The main fact concerning the Bible and the scrolls is what the great English preacher G. Campbell Morgan (1863–1945) once shared: “There is no life in the Scriptures themselves, but if we will follow where they lead, they will bring us to Him, and so we find life, not in the Scriptures, but in Him through them.”

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever (Isa. 40:8).

Endless arguments and debates have arisen over the scrolls. Nevertheless, believers can be confident that the ancient biblical scripts confirm, collaborate, and uphold the Bible today. God’s Word is still the only true source for faith and doctrine to all who seek eternal reward:

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward (Ps. 19:10–11).

So poor Muhammad, who had hoped for the treasures of this world, found only tattered leather scrolls, good for making sandal straps! Sadly, worldly gain is a self-absorbing priority. The world considers the Scriptures worthless, good only for occasional lip service, but never to be believed or practiced. Yet we know better. We know not to overlook the true, priceless treasure that is only found when digging into God’s Word:

Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God (Prov. 2:3–5).

Amazing Accuracy

The Isaiah Scroll found in Cave One at Qumran presents a great example of accurate translation transmission. This extraordinary manuscript is believed to predate the birth of Jesus Christ by 100 years. It was a scroll like this that Jesus used when he read the following in the village synagogue at Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor” (Lk. 4:18; cf. Isa. 61:1). He continued reading. Then He would have handed the scroll back to the attendant and sat down. While all eyes were fixed on Him, Jesus declared that portion of Scripture fulfilled in their ears. Thus He clearly declared Himself to be God’s Messiah, come to offer salvation to all who would receive it.

The same passage, translated into English directly from the 1,000-year-old Isaiah scroll discovered in Qumran, is nearly identical: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because YHVH has anointed me to preach good tidings to the weak” (Isa. 61:1). The integrity of the claim, as written in our Bibles, is confirmed.

Fascinatingly, the scrolls most commonly found, either whole or in tiny fragments, are the same Bible books frequently quoted in the New Testament: Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and the Psalms. This fact is intriguing in light of Jesus’ own words involving the Hebrew Scriptures:

These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me (Lk. 24:44).

Many more examples can be cited. The main fact concerning the Bible and the scrolls is what the great English preacher G. Campbell Morgan (1863–1945) once shared: “There is no life in the Scriptures themselves, but if we will follow where they lead, they will bring us to Him, and so we find life, not in the Scriptures, but in Him through them.”

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Endnote


Peter Colón is the Southeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.

From a November 11–17, 2005, International Jerusalem Post editorial following the Muslim riots in Paris that month:

“France, unlike the U.S., cannot be accused of a pro-Israeli slant. Nevertheless, its Muslim youth are rioting in the banlieues of Paris. . . . These rioters hate France . . . And this hatred of France has nothing to do with Israel. . . . French policy makers would be unwise to overlook the religious, ideological dimensions of the battle, and the way Islamic radicals preaching from the mosques and spewing out hatred via the Internet are able to prey on this disaffection and import a toxic ideology into France and the heart of Europe.”
Few Muslims these days have the courage to support Israel and condemn terror. Sheik Abdul Hadi Palazzi, a highly educated imam, professor, cofounder and cochairman of the Islam-Israel Fellowship, and a leader of the Italian Islamic Community, is an exception.

He spoke recently with Jamie Glazov, managing editor of FrontPageMagazine.com, who gave us permission to reprint Prof. Palazzi’s comments. Here are excerpts.

**Palazzi:** Israel exists by Divine Right, confirmed in both the Bible and Qur’an. I find in the Qur’an that God granted the Land of Israel to the Children of Israel and ordered them to settle therein (Qur’an, Sura 5:21) and that before the Last Day He will bring the Children of Israel to retake possession of their Land, gathering them from different countries and nations (Qur’an, Sura 17:104). Consequently, as a Muslim who abides by the Qur’an, I believe that opposing the existence of the State of Israel means opposing a Divine decree.

Every time Arabs fought against Israel they suffered humiliating defeats. In opposing the will of God by making war on Israel, Arabs were in effect making war on God Himself. They ignored the Qur’an, and God punished them. Now, having learned nothing from defeat after defeat, Arabs want to obtain through terror what they were unable to obtain through war: the destruction of the State of Israel. The result is quite predictable: As they have been defeated in the past, the Arabs will be defeated again.

In 1919, Emir Feisal wrote, “We feel that the Arabs and Jews are cousins in race, having suffered similar oppressions at the hands of powers stronger than themselves, and by a happy coincidence have been able to take the first steps towards the attainment of their national ideals together. The Arabs, especially the educated among us, look with the deepest sympathy on the Zionist movement.”

In Feisal’s time, none claimed that accepting the creation of the State of Israel and befriending Zionism was against Islam. Even the Arab leaders who opposed the Feisal-Weizmann Agreement never resorted to an Islamic argument to condemn it. Unfortunately, that Agreement was never implemented, since the British opposed the creation of the Arab Kingdom and chose to give sovereignty over Arabia to Ibn Sa’ud’s marauders, i.e., to the forefathers of the House of Sa’ud.

When the Saudis started ruling an oil-rich kingdom, they also started investing a regular part of their wealth in spreading Wahhabism worldwide. Wahhabism is a totalitarian cult that stands for terror, massacre of civilians, and for permanent war against Jews, Christians, and...
Israel's Messianic Shepherd

In the previous chapter, the Lord is pictured as a shepherd who saves Israel, and Israel becomes “the flock of His people” (9:16). Israel’s redemption will take place when the nation receives the Messiah at His Second Advent.

Chapter 10 continues the theme of Israel’s redemption and restoration. Messiah appears as a compassionate, caring Shepherd who will lead the flock of Israel, vanquish Israel’s enemies, restore and reunite the 12 tribes, and shower the nation with prosperity.

Shepherds of Deception

The temporal blessings promised in Zechariah 9:17 are expounded on in this chapter. These blessings come from God’s hand, not from the idols mentioned in verse 2. Zechariah commanded Israel, “Ask the LORD for rain in the time of the latter rain” (v. 1). The “latter rain” comes in late spring (March–April) and is essential for Israel’s crops.

Those asking for rain are assured that the request will be granted: “The LORD will make flashing clouds [lightning flashes]; He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone” (v. 1). Notice, if the men of Israel will only make their requests known to God, He will grant all who ask for rain the amount necessary for a productive harvest.

In the past, the Israelites were led astray by ungodly leaders who failed to direct them to seek God for His help. Instead, their leaders directed them to idols that had no power. Zechariah rightly said that those who divined with idols were full of deception: “For the idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain” (v. 2).

These idols (Hebrew, teraphim) were household gods used to “predict” the future. People who practiced such divining were deluded and predicted ungodly lies. They were like fortune-tellers who offered false hope. Their predictions were empty promises, providing no comfort to the expectant Israelite. The Lord had warned Israel not to seek guidance through the abomination of divination (Dt. 18:10–12).

The deception of Israel’s diviners carried consequences. First, the people wandered away from the truth: “Therefore the people wend their way like sheep” (v. 2). Sheep without a shepherd wander and get lost, unable to find their way back to the flock.

Second, Israel was wounded: “They are in trouble because there is no shepherd” (v. 2). The Hebrew word for “trouble” connotes being browbeaten or humbled in the journey through life. The imperfect tense indicates that Israel’s trouble still exists today and will continue until the Messiah removes its sin at His coming.

Third, many of Israel’s shepherds were worthless. The word for “shepherd” refers to Israel’s kings, priests, and prophets—the men who led the nation (v. 2). Under Roman occupation, for example, Israel’s political leaders were corrupt. The nation was described as “sheep having no shepherd” (Mt. 9:36)—a condition that will exist until the Messiah comes to shepherd the nation.

Fourth, the Lord’s wrath will burn against those who abuse the flock of Israel: “My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the goatherds” (v. 3). God’s anger burned like a kindling fire against Israel’s apostate leaders. The goatherds are wicked leaders in high places, both Jewish and Gentile, who seek to subjugate and shepherd the flock of Israel for their own profit.

The Shepherd of Perfection

In contrast to Israel’s false shepherds, “the L ORD of hosts will visit His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His royal horse in the battle” (v. 3). In other words, God will take faithful shepherds from His sheepfold in Judah and turn them into His strong army to overthrow the ungodly Gentiles who persecute the Jewish people prior to the Messiah’s return.

Zechariah used four phrases in verse 4, each beginning with the words from him, to describe how Israel’s righteous Messianic Shepherd will help the nation. From him refers to Judah.

(1) From him comes [is] the cornerstone. Cornerstone is a Messianic title. Throughout Scripture the Messiah is identified as a stone: a stone of stumbling (Isa. 8:14; Rom. 9:32–33), a smitten stone (Ex. 17:6;
I Cor. 10:4), a smiting stone at His Second Coming (Dan. 2:34–35), and a rejected stone that became the chief cornerstone (Ps. 118:22–23; Mt. 21:42). A cornerstone was the boulder laid at the corner of a building where two walls met. It was the principal stone of a foundation, giving a structure stability and strength. The apostle Paul identified the “chief cornerstone” as Jesus the Messiah (Eph. 2:20). With the Messiah as the cornerstone, Israel’s leaders should not fear her enemies. The complete fulfillment of this prophecy will be at the Messiah’s Second Coming, when He will endow Israel’s leaders with the needed strength and power to conquer their enemies.

(2) From him [is] the tent peg. A tent peg holds a tent cord taut. In Isaiah 22:15–25, this imagery is used of Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, who replaced Shebna as administrator of David’s house in Jerusalem. Eliakim was like a tent peg because he brought stability to the house of Judah (vv. 22–23). In Zechariah the term refers to the Messiah, whose leadership, like a deeply driven peg, will bring support, stability, and security to the nation of Judah.

(3) From him [is] the battle bow. The battle bow symbolizes strength for military conquest. The Messiah is the great Conqueror and Avenger against His and Israel’s enemies (Ps. 45:5; Rev. 19:11–16). When He returns, He will not only give Israel military strength to vanquish its enemies, but He will also give its new leadership the strength and stability to defend the nation under His rule.

(4) From him [is] every ruler together. The Messiah will empower Judah to drive out every oppressor from Israel. Sensing the Lord’s strength, the people of Judah will be forged into an army of “mighty men,” or strong warriors, who will defeat their enemies and trample them into the “mire of the streets” (v. 5). The cavalry of Gentiles will be overthrown and “put to shame,” or confused and embarrassed by Judah’s victory and subjugation (v. 5). This will take place prior to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom.

The Lord will have mercy on the entire nation of Israel:

I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside (v. 6).

Judas represents the southern kingdom, and Joseph represents the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom that separated from Judah after Solomon’s death (931 B.C.). Israel is again forged into one nation due to the Lord’s mercy—His unbroken, unconditional love for the nation. Israel’s worldwide restoration will be comprehensive and complete, as if its division and exile had never taken place. The Lord will forgive and forget Israel’s sin, and the nation will enjoy a new communication with Him. For as God said, “I am the Lord their God, and I will hear them” (v. 6); that is, He will listen to their requests and answer quickly.

Ephraim, representing the 10 tribes, will be restored and empowered “like a mighty man” (v. 7). The tribes’ reinstatement and renewal will produce great rejoicing: “And their heart shall rejoice as if with wine. Yes, their children shall see it and be glad” (v. 7). In other words, children will rejoice along with their parents.

The Certainty of Redemption

As a shepherd signals his scattered sheep to come using the shrilling sound of a pipe (Jud. 5:16), so the Lord will whistle His scattered sheep back to their land: “I will whistle for them and gather them, for I will redeem them; and they shall increase as they once increased” (v. 8). His call will be to redeem Jewish people from sin and separate them from the nations into which they were scattered. Since Israel’s exile, its population has remained small (Dt. 28:62). But after its return, the Jewish population will increase greatly, as it did during the captivity in Egypt.

Israel’s dispersion was God’s doing: “I will sow [scatter] them among the peoples, and they shall remember Me in far countries; they shall live, together with their children, and they shall return” (v. 9; cf. Lev. 26:40–42; Dt. 28:63–64; 30:1–3). While living in the Diaspora, Jewish people “remember” the Lord, that is, turn to Him in repentance (Zech. 13:1). Then God will regather them, along with their children, and “they shall live,” or experience a life of spiritual and physical blessings in Israel. Although Jewish people are experiencing some blessing there today, the fulfillment of this prophecy will come during the Millennium:

I will also bring them back from the land of Egypt, and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon, until no more room is found for them (v. 10).

God will bring them back from “Egypt” and “Assyria,” lands that represent the major areas of Israel’s captivities (v. 10). Scripture mentions Assyria in the north and Egypt in the south because they were Israel’s most formidable enemies. These nations represent any world power that would hamper the regathering of the Jewish people to their land. Proud Assyria’s prestige will be broken, and Egypt’s scepter (a symbol of the nation’s governmental authority to obstruct and oppress Israel) will be taken away.

The Jewish people shall take up residence in the land of “Gilead [east of the Jordan River] and Lebanon [northwest of present-day Israel].” This land was promised to Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant. (See Genesis 15:18–21.) So numerous will be the returnees to Israel that “no more room is found for them” (v. 10). continued on page 36
God Is Moral (Part 3)

The previous article examined two types of sexual violations and perversions of God’s moral absolutes and His fixed order of moral law. Here we will examine five more such violations.

**Bestiality.** The American College Dictionary defines bestiality as “unnatural sexual relations with an animal; sodomy.”

Through the Mosaic Law that God gave to Israel, He clearly revealed His attitude concerning human beings having sexual relations with animals. That Law stated the following: “Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death” (Ex. 22:19). “Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion” (Lev. 18:23). “If a man mates with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. If a woman approaches any animal and mates with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood is upon them” (Lev. 20:15–16). “Cursed is the one who lies with any kind of animal” (Dt. 27:21).

**Incest.** The American College Dictionary defines incest as “the crime of sexual intercourse between persons related by blood or marriage within the degrees in which marriage is prohibited.”

Before God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel, Jacob’s firstborn son, Reuben, had sexual intercourse with his father’s concubine (Gen. 35:22). Years later, when Jacob was on his deathbed, he did not bless Reuben. Instead, he rebuked him for defiling his father’s bed (Gen. 49:4).

Donald J. Wiseman wrote the following concerning the Hebrew word for “defiling”:

> The original use of the word may have been in reference to sexual relations, since it is used of Reuben’s defilement of his father’s line (Gen. 49:4) or of intercourse within the near kin relations forbidden by law. Such actions were considered fornication and prostitution. The word may therefore be used of any action which controverts God’s planned order.

Through the Mosaic Law, God forbade an Israelite man from marrying his stepmother or daughter-in-law and the marriage of a man to a woman and her mother. The Law called such violations a perversion of what God had ordained and characterized them as “wickedness” (Lev. 20:11–12, 14). The Law forbade an Israelite from marrying his stepmother (Dt. 22:30) and cursed a man who had sexual intercourse with her (27:20).

**Pedophilia.** Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language defines pedophilia as “erotic desire of an adult for a child.” The term clearly includes sexual activity between an adult and child, including all forms of sexual abuse and the production and distribution of child pornography.

Those involved with any form of pedophilia would be wise to heed the following warning given by Jesus Christ:

> Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven (Mt. 18:6–7, 10).

**Rape.** Rape is the act of forcefully violating another person sexually against his or her will.

Before God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel, Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, was raped by a young Hivite prince. Jacob’s sons were so grieved and angry because their sister had been defiled that two of them killed her rapist, his father, and all the men of the Hivite city (Gen. 34).

While the Mosaic Law was in effect with Israel, God required that rape be treated as follows: If a man raped a betrothed woman in a...
rural area where her cry for help could not be heard, he was to be executed (Dt. 22:25–27). If a man raped a young woman who was a virgin and not betrothed, he had to pay her father a betrothal purchase price and take the young woman as his wife for life. He was never permitted to divorce her because he had humbled her through rape (22:28–29).

During the time of the Judges, perverted men of the Benjamite city of Gibeah repeatedly raped the concubine of a Levite. The woman died from their abuse. In response to this lewd, outrageous deed, the other tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, demanding they turn the rapists over to them for execution and thereby remove this evil from Israel. The Benjamites refused. As a result, war broke out between the Benjamites and the other tribes. Many on both sides lost their lives, and Gibeah and other Benjamite cities were destroyed (Jud. 19–20).

David’s firstborn son, Amnon, raped his half sister, Tamar, despite her earnest plea that he not do such a disgraceful thing. As a result, her brother, Absalom, hated Amnon and had him murdered (2 Sam. 13:1–29). When the Babylonians conquered and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C., they raped women in Jerusalem and other cities of Judah (Lam. 5:11).

The Israelites used the following descriptive terms for instances of rape: disgraceful (Gen. 34:7, 2 Sam. 13:12), wicked deed and wickedness (Jud. 20:3, 12), lewdness and outrage (v. 6), vileness (v. 10), and evil (v. 13). In addition, they emphasized that these rapes were committed “in Israel” (vv. 6, 10), declared that “no such thing should be done in Israel” (2 Sam. 13:12), and wanted to “remove the evil from Israel” (Jud. 20:13). All of these expressions indicate their conviction that God regarded rape as immoral and, therefore, contrary to what God had ordained for their nation.

Homosexuality. Historically, homosexuality has been defined in a broad sense as sexual activity or relations between persons of the same sex. In a narrower sense, the term has been used specifically of sexual relations between men. Another term, sodomy, has been used as a synonym for homosexual relations between men. The American College Dictionary defines sodomy as “unnatural sexual intercourse, esp. of one man with another or of a human being with an animal.”

The term sodomy originated as a synonym for homosexual relations between men as a result of what men practiced in the ancient city of Sodom. The Lord told Abraham that the sin for which the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were notorious was “very great” (Gen. 18:20). Because the men of Sodom thought the angels whom the Lord sent to their city were mere men, they demanded them so they could sexually abuse them (19:4–5). Thus they revealed the nature of the very great sin for which Sodom was noted. The angels stated that the Lord had sent them to destroy Sodom (v. 13). The Lord “rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah,” destroying those cities and their inhabitants through the angels (vv. 24–25).

Later, through the Mosaic Law that God gave to Israel, He forbade the men of that nation to “lie with a male as with a woman” and described sexual relations between men as “an abomination” (Lev. 18:22). Again God said, If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them (20:13). Some men from the Israelite city of Gibeah demanded that a Levite man be turned over to them so they could force homosexual relations on him. They are described as “perverted men” (Jud. 19:22). The man responsible for the Levite’s safety said such action would be wicked, an outrage, and vile (vv. 23–24). Through their action, the men of Gibeah, like the men of Sodom, blatantly and unashamedly revealed their perverted passions and lusts.

Years later God described the pernicious actions of Jews who opposed the Lord through their speech and deeds during the time of the prophet Isaiah. He said, “They declare their sin as Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves” (Isa. 3:9).

The apostle Paul addressed the ultimate cause of the breakdown of morality and order in ancient times, saying it was the rebellion of human beings against the sovereign God who created the universe. Such rebels “did not like to retain God in their knowledge” (Rom. 1:28). In other words, they wanted their world-view of ultimate reality to be completely devoid of the existence of God. Their motivation was obvious. Acknowledging God’s existence would mean they were subject and answerable to Him for the conduct of their lives. They did not want those implications.

A modern expression of this rebellion is the following statement of a professor of Early Christianity at Gottingen University in Germany: With the last of my strength I pushed God himself down into the mire and at last became free. . . . So I prefer from now on to develop a purely human view of religion without having to legitimate myself by a higher authority which theologians call God.

In order to delete God from their knowledge, the ancient rebels willfully suppressed the revelation of God’s existence and power that is displayed through the universe He created (vv. 18–20), and they claimed they were wise to do so (v. 22).

The next article will observe how this suppression of divine revelation prompted a moral breakdown that welcomed homosexuality.

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1 American College Dictionary, s.v. “bestiality.”
4 The American College Dictionary, s.v. “sodomy.”

Enoch E. Showers is an author, professor, and international conference speaker for The Friends of Israel.
Israel's Messianic Shepherd
from page 33

The Lord “shall pass through the sea with affliction [sea of trouble], and strike the waves of the sea: All the depths of the River shall dry up. Then the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt shall depart” (v. 11). In other words, the Lord will go before the Jewish people to remove every obstacle and barrier that would hamper their worldwide return. Their deliverance will be similar to when the Lord parted the Red Sea to make a way for Israel to escape the Egyptian army (Ex. 14:21–31). Enemies of the Jewish people, like Egypt and Assyria, are used figuratively to show that Israel’s most formidable oppressors will be removed.

God alone supplies the Jewish people with strength to return: “So I will strengthen them in the LORD, and they shall walk up and down in His name,” says the LORD” (v. 12). At the Messiah’s Second Coming, the redeemed remnant of Jewish people who return to their land will live in obedience to the Lord. Strong and secure in Him, a redeemed Israel will walk throughout the world as priests and ministers of their God, witnessing to the glory of the Lord with power and great zeal (Isa. 61:6).

What a picture of Israel’s redemption and restoration! Israel’s false shepherds will be replaced by the Messiah of Israel, who is its true Shepherd. He will deliver Israel from all its enemies, visible and invisible, and bring to fruition these words: “I will place salvation in Zion, for Israel My glory” (Isa. 46:13).

David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries for The Friends of Israel.

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TORAH

Generally, Torah refers to the Five Books of Moses, also called the Pentateuch: Genesis (Hebrew, Bereshit, meaning, “In the beginning”), Exodus (Shemot, “Names”), Leviticus (Vayikra, “And he called”), Numbers (Bamidbar, “In the wilderness”), and Deuteronomy (Devarim, “Words”). The Hebrew Bible titles these books with the first significant word in the first verse.

However, the term Torah, meaning “teaching” or “instruction,” can also refer to all the laws on a certain subject, the Bible as a whole, the oral and written laws, and, as the Encyclopedia Judaica states, “the whole corpus of Jewish traditional law from the Bible to the latest development.”
The Jewish canon (Tanach) is not arranged in the same order as our Old Testament. Divided into three sections (Law [Torah], Prophets [Neviyim], and Writings [Kituvim]), it begins with Genesis and concludes with 2 Chronicles.

This order explains Jesus’ comment to the sinful religious leaders in Matthew 23:34–35:

Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son [descendant] of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Jesus was saying the righteous have been killed from the first book of Scripture to the last. Abel’s murder was recorded in Genesis 4:8; Zechariah’s, in 2 Chronicles 24:20, where King Joash of Judah showed contempt for the love shown him by the late high priest, Jehoiada, and murdered Jehoiada’s grandson, Zechariah, at the Temple of the Lord.

The Jewish Bible flows as follows:

**Torah.** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

**Neviyim.** Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings. Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve (minor prophets).


by Thomas C. Simcox

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Please Excuse Our Typo

A typographical mistake in the article “The Staggering Cost of Disengagement,” in our November/December 2005 issue, inadvertently changed Israel’s annual budget to $59 million. The correct figure is $59 billion, $2 billion of which will have to pay for disengagement from Gaza. We apologize for the error.
Mary Magdalene: Setting the Record Straight

Seventeenth-century philosopher Joseph Hall once said, “A reputation once broken may possibly be repaired, but the world will always keep their eyes on the spot where the crack was.” How true.

Worse yet, some reputations are destroyed deliberately by people who delight in turning today’s noble prince into tomorrow’s filthy criminal. No one’s good reputation is immune from degradation, and, unfortunately, few people actually worthy of contempt get what they deserve.

How would you feel if you lived an upright, honorable life, only to have people say after your death that you were a no-good, lying philanderer? I imagine you wouldn’t like it. And I suppose if Mary Magdalene knew what was said about her these days, she wouldn’t like it either.

For some reason, Mary has been singled out for especially nefarious treatment. She has been called a prostitute, a “terrible sinner,” and the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (we all know that was said of John because of his intense spirituality, Jn. 21:20–24). Mary also has been accused of being the Lord’s physical love interest, His wife and mother of His children, and the list goes on. Her name has been unjustifiably sullied in the most vicious ways, and now a popular novel has only made things worse.

But there is always a method to Satan’s madness. By destroying Mary Magdalene’s reputation, he believes he can destroy the Lord’s as well. By convincing people that Jesus (1) was a mere mortal and/or (2) that He had a physical relationship with a woman, he can keep unbelievers imprisoned in his kingdom of darkness forever.

So here is one more attempt to set the record straight. Who was Mary Magdalene? Why is she significant? What does Scripture say about her, and what does it not say?

Since Matthew is the first book of the New Testament, Mary first appears there, in 27:56, after Jesus yielded His spirit on the cross:

And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons (vv. 55–56).
The name Magdalene refers to Mary’s hometown, Magdala (from the Hebrew for “tower”) near Tiberias in Galilee, an extremely wealthy but corrupt city noted for its woolen textiles and dyes. The text implies these women had sufficient financial means to provide for Jesus when He ministered in Galilee. So Mary Magdalene probably had money. Scholar Herbert Lockyer referred to her as a “woman of high standing and comfortable circumstances.” Nowhere does the text say she was a prostitute. Wrote Lockyer, “There is not an iota of genuine evidence to suggest such a bad reputation.”

And she traveled in good company. Mary “the mother of James and Joses [Joseph]” was the wife of Clopas, whom the risen Savior met on the road to Emmaus (Jn. 19:25; cf. Lk. 24:13, 18). The “mother of Zebedee’s sons” was Salome, the Virgin Mary’s sister and the apostle John’s mother (Mt. 10:2; Mk. 15:40; Jn. 19:25). Salome’s husband, Zebedee, was a wealthy fisherman. Thus Salome was Jesus’ aunt; the apostle John, His cousin. When Jesus looked down from the cross and told John, “Behold your mother!” He was instructing John to care for His mother—the apostle’s Aunt Mary (Jn. 19:27). Scripture says the apostle John immediately “took her to his own home” (v. 27), which explains why she is listed among the women at the cross in John 19:25 but is absent from the lists in the other Gospels when Jesus actually died.

Clearly, Mary Magdalene was a close friend of the Lord’s mother, her sister Salome, and Clopas’s wife—all older women. Nothing in the text suggests she was younger than they. For all we know, she was the age of Jesus’ mother and had grown children. Scripture does not give her age. It does not comment on her looks. It does not say whether she was married or if she had a family. Nor does it render a single shred of support to the theory that she was a pretty young woman whom the Lord found attractive, much less to the blasphemy that He had a physical relationship with her.

It does say the 12 apostles and certain women traveled with Jesus as He preached the Kingdom of God. These women had been “healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance” (Lk. 8:2–3). Mary obviously had given her life to Christ after she was healed, faithfully followed the Lord, and helped finance His ministry, as did the other women.

But unbelievers forge ahead, determined to destroy her reputation and even imply she had an illicit relationship with Jesus or, as Dan Brown’s novel The Da Vinci Code claims, married Him and bore His children. Some use John 20:1–17 to prop up their arguments. That passage says Mary came to the tomb in the dark, failed to find Jesus, wept, then saw Him standing there. He spoke her name; she recognized Him; and He told her, “Do not cling to Me” (v. 17). These few verses do not a case make, particularly when the Gospel of Matthew says she went with “the other Mary [Clopas’s wife]” (28:1); Mark says she went with Clopas’s wife and Salome (Mk. 16:1–2); and Luke says Joanna, Clopas’s wife, and other women also were there (Lk. 24:10). Bible scholar Alfred Edersheim explained:

Her report to Peter and John [Jn. 20:2]: ‘We know not where they have laid Him,’ implies that she had not gone alone to the Tomb… Whether or not there were two groups of women who started from different places to meet at the Tomb, the most prominent figure among them was Mary Magdalene—as prominent among the pious women as Peter was among the Apostles. She seems to have first reached the Grave.

More important, however, was that Mary of Magdala was the first person to see the risen Savior (Mk. 16:9). And there-in lies the rub. There is little Satan hates more than the truth of the resurrection of the Son of God. It is the resurrection that sealed his doom, stripped him of his power of death, and guaranteed his everlasting torment in the Lake of Fire and Brimstone (Heb. 2:14–15; Rev. 20:10). Hence, he has spent millennia using every trick in his bag to discredit Mary Magdalene. This devout, committed, faithful woman of God has become an object of the evil one’s lies and hate because she received the unparalleled privilege of becoming the first person to testify to the bodily resurrection of Jesus the Messiah and, thus, to Satan’s defeat.

Sadly, many people have swallowed Satan’s lies. And as the world degenerates, their number will increase. But a day will come when Mary’s reputation will be repaired completely, and no one will see the “crack” Satan manufactured. In that day, everyone will be too busy looking, as she first did, at the risen Savior. And every knee will bow and every tongue confess “that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10–11).

ENDNOTES

1 Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, bk. 3, From Jordan to the Mount of Transfiguration (n.p.: Hendrickson, 1993), 393–94.

2 Herbert Lockyer, All the Women of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 100.

3 Ibid.

4 Edersheim, 907–908.

Lorna Simcox is senior editor for The Friends of Israel.
**Arab ‘nerve’ never ends**

*ARUTZ-7*—The Palestinian Authority (PA) wants the United States to pressure Israel into allowing PA polling stations and campaigning in Jerusalem, enabling the Hamas terrorist organization pledged to Israel’s destruction to campaign in Israel’s capital.

In previous municipal elections, Israel unofficially allowed only limited campaigning, but the PA wants all candidates, including terrorists, to electioneer and place posters on Israel’s streets.

When Hind Khoury, PA minister for Jerusalem affairs, was in Washington, D.C., in November 2005, she said, “We hope that the United States will support the right of [Arab] Jerusalemites to practice democracy.”

Meanwhile, the armed wing of Fatah, the ruling party of the PA and its chief, Mahmoud Abbas, has called for wiping the State of Israel off the map.

Fatah’s military wing, the al-Aqsa Brigades, said in a pamphlet distributed in the Gaza district, “Anybody who recognizes Israel will burn in the fire of the Islamic nation’s fury. Any [Islamic leader] who recognizes the Zionist regime means he is acknowledging the surrender and defeat of the Islamic world.”

Under a plan supported by the United States and Israel, hundreds of Brigades terrorists have been recruited into the PA’s “security” forces.

**Feiglin: Iran must be stopped**

*ARUTZ-7—*Moshe Feiglin believes a Muslim country that obtains a nuclear weapon will not hesitate to use it against the Jewish state.

“We are into fences,” Feiglin said on a radio show. “And, just as effectively as the separation fence prevented a bombing in Hadera, the Arrow Missile will be effective against missiles from Iran with nuclear warheads—by taking down two out of three missiles. Yet the Israeli military industry comes up with ideas based on fences and more fences and more fences.”

Feiglin believes there must be a return to the paradigm originally adopted by Menachem Begin. “One of the good things Begin did was the attack on Iraq’s nuclear reactor,” he said. “This showed the entire world the way to deal with countries threatening to develop nuclear weapons.

“We must make them pay a price that will make it not worth it for them to continue with the process. The only way to do this is to make the ruling regime fearful that it will lose power. They won’t care if a million Iranian children die, but they care about staying in power. Any Islamic dictator who destroys Israel will become the king of the Muslim world. He doesn’t care if he loses a few cities. Look what happened on September 11. Bin Laden became the hero of the entire world the way to deal with countries threatening to develop nuclear weapons.

“arutz-7 reported that President Moshe Katzav’s office “categorically denies” any intention of doing so, but “arutz-7 has received a copy of the alleged agreement,” which it published in its e-mail to subscribers. Hillel Fendel reported, “The proposed agreement stipulates that the Holy See will preserve the historic character of the site and keep it open to pilgrims and tourists, and that Israel will provide for the safety of the site.”

The Diaspora Yeshiva is located on Mt. Zion, a few hundred yards from the Temple Mount and adjacent to the Old City walls.

Said Yeshiva Director Rabbi Shabtai Herman, “It is certain one of the holiest spots in the Land of Israel. We’ve already given away the Temple Mount and the Machpelah Cave, except for here and there when we’re allowed in; now they want to give Mt. Zion away as well? For thousands of years, this area was almost always totally closed off to Jews. G-d gave it back to us in 1948, but parts of it were still in range and sight of Jordanian snipers and were not in full use.”

Fendel reported that newspapers in Italy and around the world “are replete with reports that such a deal is in the works. According to the reports, Israel will receive control of an 800-year-old synagogue in Toledo, Spain, known now as Santa Maria, in exchange for David’s Tomb.”

In an open letter to Katzav, Shlomo Alfassa, executive director of the International Society for Sephardic Progress, ridiculed this idea: “When the Jews of Toledo prayed each morning, they faced east towards Jerusalem. It was not Toledo that they desired, but the Land of Israel, which was still unobtainable. Now, we have Jerusalem, we can go to the holy sites and we can live in the land. If those who built that synagogue knew that this abandoned building in Christian Spain was being traded for a piece of real estate in the Land of Israel, they would roll over in their graves.”
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The Palestinians have raised the bar on chutzpah. In an attempt to get its hands on the fortune that its late terrorist chieftain, Yasser Arafat, stole and invested in his personal portfolio, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has asked Israel to help it find the loot!

PA financial official, Salam Fayid, has asked Israeli intelligence to help search for Arafat’s secret investments, estimated at more than $1 billion. The PA wants the money to turn the Jewish lands of Samaria, Judea, plus Gaza, into an anti-Israel Palestinian state.

Arafat, who died in November 2004, had amassed a fortune that ranked him as the sixth richest leader in the world, while his people languished in poverty. Some analysts placed his stash at close to $3 billion.

So where’s the money? That’s what the PA wants to know. And although it usually has no use for Israel, apparently it now thinks the Jewish state may come in handy. Wrote Scott Shiloh, with Arutz-7:

“Most of the efforts to find the money are focusing on locating a web of complex investments spread around the world by Arafat’s financial advisor and personal confidante, Mohammed Rashid. Rashid has so far been unwilling to volunteer detailed information regarding those investments.

“A number of investments were purportedly made in various tourist sites in Africa, with others in communications and other international high-tech companies. Rashid, considered an expert at moving and hiding money, so far has not left any significant leads.

“Arafat’s wife, Suha, who lives in Tunisia, is also apparently a party to the money’s disappearance. Suha’s expense account in Paris has led investigators to open a file into suspicions of her involvement in laundering money in Swiss bank accounts, according to Israeli newspaper Yediot Acharonot.

Five years ago, at the onset of the Oslo War, Suha and her daughter moved to Paris, where she received a stipend from Arafat that ballooned to a quarter-million euros per month. Suha began investing in international companies through the help of financial advisors like Rashid, who made it difficult to follow the money.

Suha did not attend Arafat’s funeral out of fear the PA was after her money. An intelligence source has said that it is possible the location of Arafat’s millions may never be known.
From time to time I go to the Orthodox to bring them the good news of the Lord. With them, you cannot finish a conversation in a few minutes. They are suspicious and ask many questions, trying to show how wise they are. Often I speak to young men who are students.

Recently I was in the Orthodox section of Jerusalem when a number of young men recognized me and approached me. They were full of confidence, feeling like conquerors, because their teachers were with them.

"Tell us," one student asked, "in which god you believe?"

"You tell me," I replied, "why you are asking me such a foolish question." Quickly I read to them Deuteronomy 6:4, which they pray three times each day: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!"

They all were surprised because they are certain that those of us who believe in the Lord Jesus do not believe what is written in the Bible. "You call yourselves religious," I said, "but you do not follow God. I follow God, about whom it is written here, in the Bible."

The teachers disliked what I said. "How can you say this?" one asked. I replied, "Have a good look. Whom do you worship? In all your many synagogues, no one can find a Bible. You have commentaries and books, and you spend many long years studying them and dancing with great joy. Who has made you so blind? Then you come to me and ask me such foolish questions. Who is my God? How many of them do I worship? This is my answer: I worship only one God; and I never bow down before what is not God, as you do."

Many of these people believe that the late Lubavitch rabbi, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, is the messiah. This time one man replied, "But we know that you obey This Man [Jesus]. About Him it is not written in the Bible!"

"I am very thankful we have come so far," I said, "and that you have given me this opportunity to show you where it is written in the Bible about the Lord who came from Bethlehem—not from New York. You believe in Rabbi Schneerson and dance around his picture. We believe in the living God."

"Where is it written about This Man and that He came from Bethlehem?" someone asked.

They made me so happy when they started to ask these questions. I quickly read to them from Micah 5:2. "If this is not enough for you, I will continue to read more." They started to write down the Bible verses I showed them. Then I turned to the teacher. "Please," I said, "read this passage of Isaiah 53."

"No! This I will not read!" he declared. "You will not read it because you are afraid of the truth," I told him. When his pupils asked me if the passage was in the Bible, I replied, "Yes. Isaiah was a major prophet. And if you don't want to read it, I will be happy to."

But before I was able to begin, one of the Hasidic students said, "Give me the Bible, and I will read it."

With great joy, I handed him my Bible, and he read the words slowly and carefully. The others listened intently. When he came to verses
5 and 6, the students began to ask questions.

“What does it mean when it says, ‘and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all? About whom is this written?’” they asked.

Instead of answering, their teacher asked them a question. “Can a virgin give birth to a child?”

“No!” the students replied. “Such a thing cannot be!”

All the teachers were confident they had backed me into a corner. Then one teacher said, “If you are so sure that This Man was born to a virgin, show these students where it is written in the Bible. If you can show that to them, I will eat my shoes.”

I replied, “Start eating.” I opened my Bible to Isaiah 7:14 and gave it to him to read. Isaiah 7:14 says, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

“Read it loudly, so all your pupils can hear,” I said.

But when he began, he stopped quickly. He was afraid to read the passage.

Instead he told the students, “We do not have time to continue. Let us go!”

But I would not let the students leave without hearing the truth. I handed the Bible to one of the young men, and he read the verse aloud. As he read, everyone became still. They were so quiet.

When he finished, I said to the teacher, “Good appetite!”

The things that will destroy America are prosperity at any price, peace at any price, safety first instead of duty first, the love of soft living, and the get-rich-quick theory of life.”—Theodore Roosevelt, 26th president of the United States

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