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If I Forget You, O Jerusalem
Jewish people the world over cling to the land, the city of Jerusalem, and the Temple—a bond they affirm each year at Tisha B’Av.
Steve Herzig

Ezekiel: The Times, the Man, the Book
This outstanding article takes a three-part look at the Jewish exile in Babylon and the messages God gave His prophet.
Tom Davis

The Divine Distribution
To whom does the land belong? God reveals the borders and beneficiaries of His sovereign allocation of His land.
David M. Levy

The Best Is Yet to Come
Here is a look at God’s promises to Israel in Ezekiel 36—37.
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The Coming Invasion
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Some things seem almost too absurd to be true. But life is filled with absurdities when it comes to Israel. Do you see the ladder in the photo below? It has leaned against the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem for at least 150 years.

Six religious denominations share the church and must stay within their designated areas—or else. “On a stifling summer day in 2002,” reported Slate.com, “a monk moved his chair eight inches to find shade. This was interpreted as a hostile act and violation of boundaries, and 11 were hospitalized after the fight that ensued.” Over eight inches!

 Understandably, no one dares remove the ladder. Some say it’s been there since the 1700s, some say the 1800s. But it cannot be relocated unless all the denominations agree. So there it stands.

Like the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Israel houses several people groups, some of which will go to absurd lengths to stake their claims. When the United States announced plans to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the Arabs promised a fight. Last year the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron to be a Palestinian heritage site, even though everyone buried there is considered Jewish: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas claims the Arabs of Samaria, Judea, and Gaza descended from the Canaanites, even though “it is a historic fact that Arabs actually arrived in Israel in the 7th century C.E. [AD],” writes Israelnationalnews.com.

A volatile situation for sure. So this issue of Israel My Glory explores portions of the book of Ezekiel in which God, the definitive boundary-maker, explains who owns the land and who eventually will live in it in peace. Enjoy!

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
I recently had the privilege of spending several days in Israel with new Jewish arrivals to the land. They varied in age from teens to older adults, but the same theme defined their testimonies. They had an innate desire to return to the land of their ancestors, and I’m convinced it was put there by God.

God told Israel,

*Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east, and gather you from the west; I will say to the north, “Give them up!” and to the south, “Do not keep them back!” Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory* (Isa. 43:5–7).

God says those He brings back will be “called by My name” and were created for “My glory.” When we acknowledge the Jewish return to the land, we give God glory.

The name of this publication, *Israel My Glory*, was chosen by the founders of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry with great care and forethought. It, too, comes from the book of Isaiah. God declares He is the one who “will place salvation in Zion, for Israel My glory” (46:13). The men who chose this title more than 75 years ago did so to remind us that, as believers in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, all our blessings—past, present, and future—come through God’s uniquely Chosen People, Israel.

Many Christians today doubt Israel is the conduit of our future blessing and do not see modern Israel as a partial fulfillment of God’s promises to bring the Jewish people back to their land prior to the coming of the Messiah. Not only do I hear such doubt from people who hold to Replacement Theology—who believe God has replaced Israel with the church in His covenants and plan for the ages—but I also hear it from many who do not.

It seems to me we should exercise great caution before we deny that the Jewish people’s return reveals God at work fulfilling His promises. For if the return is scriptural (and I believe it is), then we fail to give God the glory due to Him when we deny that it is a partial fulfillment of prophecy.

It is a special privilege to witness Jewish people return to their land. One person told me, “As a Jew, I must live in the Jewish land!”

Another said he “dreamed of living in Israel, where it is easy to be Jewish.” Many come from countries where Jewish persecution has increased dramatically.

The Jewish Agency for Israel hosted my visit. It is the sole organization empowered by the Israeli government to handle Jewish immigration, referred to as aliyah in Hebrew, meaning “to go up, to ascend.” Said Yehuda Scharf, the Jewish Agency director of the Aliyah, Absorption and Special Operations Department, “Our dream is simple: to support every Jew to return to Israel.”

It’s a simple dream but a huge undertaking. It involves helping immigrants settle in Israel, learn Hebrew, and find a job and housing. The Jewish Agency hosts approximately 20 percent of the new arrivals in absorption centers. That’s about 7,000 of the 30,000 who come each year. The cost is enormous.

At The Friends of Israel, we collect funds for aliyah to help Jewish people realize their dream to come home. When we give to aliyah, we give glory to God as He draws His Chosen People back to their land—just as He promised.
Josh Blackman, a law professor at South Texas College of Law and frequent guest lecturer on college campuses, found himself the object of protest at City University of New York (CUNY) School of Law earlier this year. Professor Blackman was invited by the Federalist Society, CUNY’s conservative legal group, to discuss the legal and philosophical reasons to promote and protect free speech on campus.

CUNY protesters stonewalled his introduction by shouting over him, “He’s a white supremacist” and screaming “CUNY is not having you. You are not welcome.” The irony of the situation is that Blackman, who is far from being a provocateur, was silenced by law-school students for lecturing on the value of free speech.

The Federalist Society responded by saying students heckled Blackman because the conservative group invited him. Blackman eventually continued his lecture after protesters moved to the dean’s office to complain. CUNY students who attended Blackman’s lecture later admitted to him that conservative voices are often suppressed by students who hold different views.

When the Founding Fathers crafted the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States—providing freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition—they intended it to be a tool to create and sustain a free government. Founder Benjamin Franklin once wrote, “Freedom of speech is a principal pillar of a free government: When this support is taken away, the constitution of a free society is dissolved.” The founders saw the First Amendment as the bedrock of any free society.

But what happens when the First Amendment is no longer seen as a tool for governing the free but as a potential weapon for protecting “hate speech”? Today, 40 percent of people under 35 consider the First Amendment ammunition to hurt someone’s feelings. This is why certain college students feel justified silencing opinions that don’t meet their standards. One fifth of college students argue that, if they disapprove of what you say, they have the right to inflict physical harm on you because your words are harmful to them.

Over the past few years, student protesters have successfully interrupted or silenced speakers because they believed the speakers’ conservative opinions were equal to hate. At Professor Blackman’s lecture, one protester’s sign read, “Conservative hate does not equal intellectual debate.” That’s why speakers like Ben Shapiro and Dennis Prager have been harassed for their views on traditional marriage, abortion, microaggression, and the political left. Ayaan Hirsi Ali was canceled from speaking at Brandeis University for criticizing Islam. Bassem Eid’s lecture on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was shut down at the University of Chicago because he is a Palestinian who supports Israel. Mayor Nir Barkat’s event at San Francisco State University was scrapped because he is the Israeli mayor of Jerusalem. Even Princeton Seminary President M. Craig Barnes was pressured by students to retract the Kuyper Award from conservative pastor Timothy Keller because he opposes women and gays being ordained into the ministry.

“Progressive” students feel the need to silence these speakers, claiming their opinions are hate speech. Universities and colleges pay lip service to promoting free speech on campuses but do little to protect it.

While 73 percent of Americans believe in 18th-century French author Voltaire’s statement “I disapprove of what you say but will defend to the death your right to say it,” a generation is rising in this country that would say, “I disapprove of what you say and will amend the law to prohibit you from saying it.”

That is not freedom. That is the doorway to totalitarianism. Freedom of speech never promised to protect people from getting their feelings hurt. It was designed to challenge the government and promote the exchange of ideas, which has proven to contribute to peaceful political exchange, economic growth, entrepreneurialism, education, and cultural development.

If we aren’t careful to educate our children in basic American civics, the freedoms we enjoy today will disappear in the interest of making sure nobody’s feelings are hurt. On July 4, as we celebrate 242 years of independence, let’s come together as a nation to remember the freedoms we have and to promote them as a tool for the good of all, not for the benefit of the few.

by Chris Katulka
Saudi Arabia recently granted Air India permission to fly over its territory on new routes to and from Israel. The decision to open Saudi airspace to commercial jets bound for the Jewish state ended a 70-year ban on such flights and reflected thawing ties between Israel and the Arab kingdom.

“This is a historic evening,” said Israeli Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz when the jet landed at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. “The Israeli skies are connecting with the Saudi Arabian skies in one direct flight. We are celebrating the strengthening relations with India and the first civilian connection with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.”

A few weeks later, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman publicly recognized Israel’s right to exist. When asked if he believes the Jewish people have a right to a nation-state in their ancestral homeland, the 32-year-old de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia replied, “I believe that each people, anywhere, has a right to live in their peaceful nation. I believe the Palestinians and the Israelis have the right to have their own land.”

The remarks, long taboo in a country that was fiercely opposed to Israel’s creation in 1948 and still does not recognize Israel’s right to exist, underscore the important realignment taking place in the Middle East: Iran’s pursuit of regional hegemony is driving strategic convergence between Israel and Saudi Arabia—both of which view Iran as an existential threat.

Iran is on the ascendency. The destruction of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq in 2003, which removed a Sunni Arab strategic counter-weight to Shia Iran, created a massive power vacuum that Tehran quickly filled. Since then, Iran has greatly expanded its influence in Syria by aligning with Russia to support the government of Bashar al-Assad.

Tehran’s goal in Syria has been to build a land bridge between Iran and Lebanon, home to Hezbollah, the Iranian proxy dedicated to the destruction of Israel. Iran’s geopolitical ambitions have been aided by a nuclear deal that lifted crippling economic sanctions on Tehran and enabled it to fund proxy wars throughout the Middle East, including in Yemen, from where Iranian-backed rebels have fired missiles into Saudi Arabia.

“Unfortunately, the U.S. left a vacuum in the region which was filled by the Russians in Syria and by the Iranians and their proxies in other parts of the Middle East,” according to Kobi Michael, a research fellow at Tel Aviv University. “Israel,” he said, “is perceived as the most reliable potential ally. Therefore, the Saudis understand pretty well that it is a good time to be good friends with Israel.”

Middle East expert Sebastian Sons concurs. “Saudi Arabia doesn’t have a lot of strong allies left who could confront Iran, which is why Israel has become its second-most important military ally, right after the United States.”

Israel’s Chief of Staff, General Gadi Eisenkot, in a recent interview with UK-based Saudi newspaper Elaph, said Israel was ready to exchange intelligence with the Saudis in order to confront Iran. “There are shared interests and as far as the Iranian axis is concerned we are in full accord with the Saudis,” he said.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said stronger strategic alliances with Arab countries were necessary to confront Iranian expansionism. “There is an alignment of Israel and other countries in the Middle East that would have been unimaginable 10 years ago,” he said. “Certainly in my lifetime, [I’ve never seen] anything like it, and I’m at the age of the State of Israel more or less, so it’s an extraordinary thing.”

by Soeren Kern, a senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, a nonpartisan foreign-policy think tank based in New York City.
UGANDA—The Muslim relatives of 27-year-old Gobera Bashir in eastern Uganda recently burned 40 percent of his body with hot cooking oil because he converted to Christianity.

The attack came a week after Bashir accepted Christ at a church service. The pastor gave him a Bible and counseled him, “Be cautious when reading the Bible, since your family is a Muslim family,” Bashir told Morning Star News.

Four days later, his sister found him reading the Bible in his room. “Why are you reading the Bible? You know our family only reads the Koran,” she said, according to Bashir. He told his sister he was just reading the Bible to gain knowledge.

Soon afterward, word spread that he had a Bible, and a group of people showed up at his house. Bashir refused to open the door, but they forced their way in. “As they entered the house, they found me in the sitting room and began tying my arms and legs. . . . ‘Shame! Shame! You are bringing a bad omen to the family with your bad Christian religion. Our family is a Muslim family,’ [they shouted]. There and then one of them poured a hot liquid from a thermos flask on me, and then they dragged me out of the house,” Bashir said.

The assailants’ faces were covered, but Bashir heard one of them call another “Paata,” his uncle’s name. So he knows some of them were relatives.

After burning him, they took him to a nearby swamp. “As they pulled me, I felt a lot of pain and screamed for help as one of the attackers blocked my mouth, and there I lost consciousness,” Bashir said.

Christians from a nearby house found him and took him to Naboa Health Centre, where he received treatment for four days.

After his treatment, a Christian widow and her grown children took him into their home. “Bashir has wounds all over his body, and his clothes have stains from an oily substance, suggesting that what was poured on him is a kind of oil,” the woman told Morning Star News. “He sleeps under very strong pain killers, hence he spends sleepless nights. The burns cover about 40 percent of his body.”

Most of his burns cover his legs, buttocks, and hands, since the assailants forced him to sit on hot cooking oil, she said.

Two days after being discharged from the health center, family members discovered where Bashir had taken refuge, and he was taken to another location. “Please pray for quick recovery for Bashir, as some of the skin burns are rotting with a very bad smell,” a local source said. “He needs urgent attention and specialized treatment, which might be very costly.”

Bashir has not reported the attack to the police, since doing so would expose those hiding him to attacks from his family, sources said.

In January another Christian in eastern Uganda, Munabi Abudallah, lost his wife and seven children after putting his faith in Christ. In December 2017, a widowed mother of five was poisoned on Christmas Day for converting to Christianity.

Although Uganda’s laws provide for religious freedom, including the right to evangelize and convert from one faith to another, Christian persecution occurs in the eastern part of the country, where Muslims constitute about 12 percent of the population.

by Morning Star News

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If I Forget You, O Jerusalem

Jewish people the world over cling to the land, the city, and the Temple—a bond they affirm each year at Tisha B’Av.

by Steve Herzig

Among the many things God cares about, three stand out: Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple.

During my Hebrew-school days, I learned about these things in multiple ways. From the Jewish Scriptures, I learned God set Jerusalem in the midst of the nations (Ezek. 5:5). From the Midrash (rabbinic commentary), I read that this world is like an eyeball: The white of the eye is the world; the iris is Jerusalem; and the pupil is the Holy Temple.

I learned that when Jews pray, we face Jerusalem—unless we are in Jerusalem; then we pray toward the Temple. I learned that we always conclude the Passover seder meal by chanting in unison, “Next year in Jerusalem!”

At the conclusion of a Jewish wedding ceremony, the bridegroom breaks a glass. Some say it is a sign of mourning to commemorate the destruction of the Temple that once stood atop Mount Moriah. Afterward, the bridegroom recites Psalm 137:5-6: “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.”

From the holy writings to the traditions, the Jewish connection to Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple is everywhere, extending back 3,000 years. Such history would seem enough to settle what is today an extremely controversial question: Was there a Jewish presence in Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount before the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque were built there? But apparently, it isn’t.

The United Nations and imam of Jerusalem both claim there was no Jewish presence. In fact, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) denies all Jewish connections to Jerusalem. The grand mufti of Jerusalem, Sheikh Muhammad Ahmad Hussein, who oversees the Temple Mount, claims no Jewish Temple even stood there.

These lies would be laughable if not for the fact that so many countries believe them. In December 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump decided to implement the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995. He recognized Jerusalem as the official capital of the State of Israel, which calls for Jerusalem to remain an undivided city, and ordered the federal government to relocate the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem—a move timed to help celebrate Israel’s 70th birthday.

The UN General Assembly then countered with the “Status of Jerusalem” resolution—which passed 128 to 9, with 35 abstentions—denying the Jewish people’s connection to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Voting against the resolution were Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Togo, and the United States.

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the Lord has inflicted in the day of His fierce anger. For your ruin is spread wide as the sea; who can heal you? (1:12; 2:13).

These Scriptures voice Jeremiah’s anguish at seeing his people’s disobedience and the resulting destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

The Babylonians destroyed Solomon’s Temple in 586 BC, around 1,000 years before Islam was born. A story is told of the 19th-century French leader Napoleon Bonaparte who learned a lesson from Tisha B’Av. When he passed a synagogue in Paris and heard the sounds of mourning and crying, he asked his aide, “What is this all about?”

His aide explained that the Jewish worshipers pray next to the Western Wall on Tisha B’Av.
people were mourning the loss of their Temple. “When did this happen? Surely I would have heard such a thing from my military.”

The aide replied, “Sir, it occurred about 1,700 years ago.”

Napoleon reportedly declared, “Certainly a people which has mourned the loss of their Temple for so long will merit to see it rebuilt.”

Jews have mourned over their Temple since the second one fell at the hands of the Romans in AD 70. Throughout the Diaspora, wherever Jewish people were scattered, they grieved over their beloved city and Temple.

UNDISPUTED TRUTH

Through the years the Byzantines, Arab Muslims, Crusaders, Egyptian Mamluks, Ottoman Turks, and British have occupied Jewish land. At no time did any of them make Jerusalem the capital of any country. When Jordan controlled eastern Jerusalem, which included the Temple Mount, between 1948 and 1967, not once did anyone suggest making Jerusalem the capital instead of Amman.

Even the Muslims knew the truth. “A guide to the Haram al-Sharif, as the Temple Mount is known in Arabic, published by the Muslim Waqf in 1924, mentioned the presence of two Jewish temples atop the Jerusalem compound in antiquity,” reported The Times of Israel. The Jewish identity of Jerusalem was an undisputed, unchallenged truth until Israel united the city in 1967.

But there is yet another proof of the Jewishness of the Holy Land, Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount; and it comes not from Judaism, but from Christianity.

It surfaces regularly whenever Bible believers travel to Israel. I witnessed it anew in February on our Canadian Up to Jerusalem tour. When we left the Galilee and drove south, the sun began to set as we approached Jerusalem. Gazing out the bus windows, our people seemed to catch their breath collectively as they scanned the city’s ancient walls; saw the city’s hills; and smiled at the inhabitants, some of whom were dressed as if it were still the 18th century.

A familiar Christian hymn, written in the late 1800s—“The Holy City”—began to play: “Last night I lay a-sleeping/There came a dream so fair/I stood in old Jerusalem/Beside the temple there.” The refrain declares, “Jerusalem! Jerusalem!/Lift up your gates and sing/Hosanna in the highest!/Hosanna to your King!”

There was not a dry eye among us.

Christians know what many foolish nations refuse to admit: The Temple existed; and it, as well as Israel and Jerusalem, are Jewish. They know because their Savior is Jewish. The God-Man was born in Jewish Bethlehem, raised in Jewish Nazareth, taught in and around the Jewish Temple, died, and was buried and rose again in Jewish Jerusalem.

They know because these facts come from the Bible, a Book written long before Islam and the Qu’ran existed. They also know, as Jeremiah knew, that even though there is mourning, there is hope. (See Lamentations 3:21–34.)

After all, His mercies are new every morning. Great is His faithfulness.
EZEKIEL

ISRAEL MY GLORY

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA COMMONS, PUBLIC DOMAIN PD-US
ILLUSTRATION BY LINDSEY SOBOLEK

12 ISRAEL MY GLORY
THE TIMES
THE MAN
THE BOOK

BY TOM DAVIS
The times

Assyria dominated the early half of the eighth century BC, conquering and deporting the 10 northern tribes of Israel in 721 and almost doing the same to Judah in 701. Then Babylon ascended, tipping the scales in 612 by conquering Assyria’s capital, Nineveh.

Three years later, the Babylonians defeated an Egyptian-Syrian alliance at Harran in 609 and again in 605 BC at Carchemish. They pursued the fleeing Egyptian armies southward into Judah, taking Jerusalem in 605.

To protect his right to the throne, General Nebuchadnezzar immediately withdrew from Jerusalem when he received word his father the king had died in Babylon. But he did not leave empty-handed. He took Daniel and other upper-class Judeans with him.

Eventually, Jerusalem rebelled against the Babylonians and was again defeated in 597 BC. This time the Babylonians dragged Ezekiel into captivity, along with 10,000 other Judeans (2 Ki. 24:14). Ezekiel lived with the common Jewish captives approximately 50 miles south of the capital city of Babylon, ministering to them for 22 years (593–571 BC).

The prophet Daniel lived in the city of Babylon in what today is the city of Hillah in Iraq, approximately 550 miles from Jerusalem, with a ministry to his captors.

Jeremiah, the third influential prophet during this period, stayed in Jerusalem, ministering to the Jewish people left behind.

Adding to the turmoil of the times, the Persian kingdom attacked and vanquished the Babylonian Empire in 539 BC. We don’t know if Jeremiah (considered the oldest of the three prophets) and Ezekiel were still alive. We know Daniel was summoned to King Belshazzar’s feast the night Babylon was conquered (Dan. 5) and that he was involved in the new Persian government (chap. 6).
THE MAN

We know little about Ezekiel prior to the start of his ministry, and he is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. Ezekiel never mentioned Jeremiah, but he referred to Daniel as righteous and wise (Ezk. 14:14, 20; 28:3), though he did not mention his ministry or writings.

Compared to the other prophets, Ezekiel was asked to perform the greatest number of startling, dramatic, symbolic feats to communicate God’s message. For example, God commanded him to lie on his left side for 390 days and on his right side 40 days to “bear the iniquity” of Israel and Judah respectively, “a day for each year” (4:5–6). The Lord restricted what Ezekiel ate and drank during that time as an object lesson to those who would suffer starvation (vv. 9–13). God also told Ezekiel his wife would die the year before the holy city’s destruction but that he should not mourn for her (24:15–18) because God would not mourn the death of His wife, Jerusalem.

Ezekiel descended from the priestly line of the high priest Zadok, whose heirs became the officiating priests from King Solomon’s time onward. He began his ministry at age 30, as did all Levitical priests and Jesus of Nazareth (Ezek. 1:1). His first prophetic act was to remain silent for seven days, which was the time it took to dedicate a Levite into the priesthood (3:15).

Ezekiel began his ministry in 593 BC, and his final message is dated 571 BC (29:17), which means he ministered about two years longer than the standard 20 years for Levitical priestly service.

Ezekiel means “God strengthens,” a rather appropriate name for the ministry God called him to and the situation the people of Judea faced. More than 90 times in the book of Ezekiel, he is called “son of man,” which was the title Jesus preferred when referring to Himself. In both cases, the purpose was to identify with humanity.

Ezekiel rivals Jeremiah for the title “The Weeping Prophet.” Jewish scholars call him the “Father of Judaism.” They call Abraham the “Father of the Hebrew Peoples”; Moses, the “Father of the Jewish Nation”; Elijah, the “Father of the Reforming Prophets”; Daniel, the “Father of Predicting Prophets”; and Ezra, the “Father of the Scribal Office and the Sanhedrin.”

Despite the horror of deportation, once the Jewish people settled in Babylon, they eventually led relatively pleasant lives. They were free to build homes, write back to Judea, establish businesses, and enjoy their Jewish culture. Their comfort is reflected in the fact that only 43,000 of the estimated 2.5 million people in captivity chose to leave when allowed to return to their land in 539 BC. (See Ezra 2:64–65.)

Though comfortable in Babylon, many still longed for their homeland, as illustrated by the mournful words of Psalm 137:1–6:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, and those who plundered us requested mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.
THE BOOK
The theme of Ezekiel is the glory of the Lord. The other three major prophets have similar themes: Isaiah, the salvation of the Lord; Jeremiah, the judgment of the Lord; and Daniel, the sovereignty of the Lord.

Prophecy. Ezekiel is unique among the prophetic books for the number of prophecies (13) introduced by dates. The dates are chronological except for Ezekiel 29:17, which jumps ahead to 571 BC. This anomaly may reflect Nebuchadnezzar’s extended siege of Tyre before finally attacking Egypt in fulfillment of Ezekiel 29.3
The book is organized by topic and time:
- Chapters 1—3: Ezekiel’s call, before 586 BC.
- Chapters 4—24: Ezekiel’s condemnation of Judah, 586 BC.
- Chapters 25—32: Ezekiel’s condemnation of the nations, 586 BC.
- Chapters 33—48: Ezekiel’s country restored, after 586 BC.

A number of famous passages include the following:
- The “wheel within the wheel”—Ezekiel 1 (cf. 3:22; 8:4; 10:1; 43:1)
- The “cedar branch” Messianic passage—Ezekiel 17:22
- The “Shiloh” Messianic passage—Ezekiel 21:27
- “David reigns” Messianic passage—Ezekiel 34:23
- Glorious return through the Eastern Gate—Ezekiel 43:1–4
- The Battle of Gog and Magog—Ezekiel 38—39
- The Millennial Temple—Ezekiel 40—48

Ezekiel was asked to perform the greatest number of startling, dramatic, symbolic feats to communicate God’s message.

EZEKIEL HIGHLIGHTS

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EZEKIEL 1 (CF. 3:22; 8:4; 10:1; 43:1)

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The Battle of Gog and Magog—Ezekiel 38—39
The Millennial Temple—Ezekiel 40—48

Several of Ezekiel’s prophetic concepts reoccur in the book of Revelation: the four cherubim with four faces (Ezek. 1; Rev. 4); the eating of the scroll (Ezek. 3; Rev. 10); coals from the altar used in punishment (Ezek. 10; Rev. 8); four apocalyptic evils that parallel the four horsemen (Ezek. 14:21; Rev. 6); Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38—39; Rev. 20); and a river flowing from Jerusalem (Ezek. 47; Rev. 22).

Theology. The book also addresses several key points of theology. Ezekiel warned the Jewish people Jerusalem could fall because of their sin, contrary to their assumption God
would supernaturally deliver them, as He delivered them from the Assyrians in 701 BC. But despite the Israelites’ defeat, God promised to be with them in captivity, demonstrating that He is not merely a local deity effective only in Judea.

The book also teaches the new birth, the New Covenant, and God’s everlasting covenant with Israel (Ezek. 11:19–21; 16:60; 36:26–27; 37:26). It teaches God is the source of spiritual life and that He will give His people a new heart, just as He breathed into Adam the breath of life (36:26–27). He will resurrect their dead bodies from the Valley of Dry Bones (37:1–14), and He will cause a life-giving river to flow from the Messianic Temple in Millennial Jerusalem (chap. 47).

The book concludes with the glorious statement, “And the name of the city from that day shall be: THE LORD IS THERE” (48:35). This final verse summarizes the greatest story ever told: When all sin is dealt with and only the redeemed are honored on this planet, the city of Jerusalem (The City of Peace) will also be known as Jehovah Shammah, which means “THE LORD IS THERE.”

ENDNOTES

1 Kenneth L. Barker, ed., The NKJV Study Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1335.
2 Ibid., 1336.
4 The phrase scribal office refers to the fact that, particularly under Ezra’s example and leadership, the act of writing copies of Scripture evolved into interpreting and teaching Scripture (Ezra 7:6, 10). The Jewish Sanhedrin evolved from the Great Assembly, which Ezra, by tradition, organized to maintain proper interpretation of Jewish law because the king of Persia commissioned him to enforce the Mosaic code over the province of Judea (vv. 24–26).

New Film Helps People Advocate for an Israeli Jerusalem

Why is it so important for the United States to acknowledge Jerusalem as the capital of Israel? Why does Jerusalem mean so much to the Jewish people and the Jewish state? And why must all of its holy sites remain under Israeli control?

These are questions filmmaker and rabbi Nolan Lebovitz seeks to answer in his new, 26-minute documentary, Roadmap Jerusalem, now available on the website roadmapjerusalem.com, as well as on Amazon.com.

Rabbi Lebovitz said the world’s new and nefarious tactics to delegitimize the Jewish state motivated him to make the film to help people advocate for Jerusalem and articulate both its importance and its Jewish heritage “through history, politics, and the Bible.”

The website, where a two-minute trailer is available for viewing, says the film follows Rabbi Lebovitz “as he travels the streets of Jerusalem, walks the corridors of the Knesset with former Knesset Member Rabbi Dov Lipman, learns about our [the Jewish people’s] archaeological and historical connections at the Temple Mount with Dr. Jon Seligman from the Israel Antiquities Authority, and studies biblical texts with Vered Hollander-Goldfarb at the Conservative Yeshiva. Rabbi Lebovitz captures the spiritual qualities of our ancient holy city to shine a great [light] on its strong ties to our past and its crucial importance for our future. It’s time to advocate for Jerusalem.”

Jim Showers, executive director of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, said the film “makes the case that Jerusalem is important, not only for Jewish people but for the world.”

“While there are many organizations, thank goodness, that advocate for the State of Israel,” Rabbi Lebovitz told Israel My Glory, “I don’t know of any project solely devoted to advocating for Jerusalem as the historical and rightful, spiritual and political capital of the Jewish People. Roadmap Jerusalem makes the case for all peoples of faith to advocate for Israeli control of Jerusalem. The State of Israel insures unfettered access for all to all of our holy sites.”

Lebovitz spent 10 years in the Hollywood film industry before reading the Torah (Five Books of Moses). “I found myself looking for meaning [in life],” he said. “Abraham’s narrative in Genesis resonated with me in a deep and profound way as an adult, husband, and father. That drove me to begin studying the texts of the Jewish tradition, moving my family to Jerusalem for a year so I could study there, and ultimately being ordained as a rabbi.”

His study led to his previous film, Roadmap Genesis. Today he leads Adat Shalom, a synagogue in Los Angeles.

Tom Davis is the academic dean and a professor at Word of Life Bible Institute, Schroon Lake, New York.
When God confirmed a covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1), He issued a divine proclamation: He vowed to give all the land He was promising Abraham to both Abraham and his descendants forever (13:15). God bequeathed the land through an unconditional covenant in perpetuity with an everlasting promise (17:8).

He even set the boundaries (15:18–21). The southern border is the “river of Egypt” (v. 18), which most scholars believe is the Wadi el-Arish, not the Nile. The northern boundary is the Euphrates River, and the western boundary is the Mediterranean Sea. To the east, Israel’s territory includes a portion of the Transjordan (Moab and Edom, v. 18).

Genesis 15:19–21 lists 10 nations Israel dispossessed. That said, many conservative scholars differ regarding Israel’s divinely assigned borders, and today much of the world believes all of Israel’s land rightfully belongs to the Arabs and that Israel has no legitimate claim to any of it.

However, Scripture not only teaches that the land belongs to Israel but that Israel has never even possessed all the territory God has promised to Abraham and his descendants through Jacob. Ezekiel 47–48 sheds tremendous light on the territory Israel will one day possess.

In Ezekiel, the tribe of Joseph receives two portions of land (Ezek. 47:13), just as Joseph’s father, Jacob, had promised (Gen. 48:5–6; 49:22–26). Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, inherited the birthright of a double portion that rightfully belonged to Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn (49:3), because Reuben “defiled his father’s bed” by committing adultery with Bilhah, Jacob’s concubine (1 Chr. 5:1).

Levi receives no land because the tribe is the Lord’s inheritance and will live among the 12 tribes. Originally the land distributions varied in size (cf. Num. 34:1–15; Josh. 13–22), but in
Ezekiel each tribe receives equal allotments (Ezek. 47:14).

**DIMENSIONS OF THE LAND**

Israel's northern boundary will run from the “Great Sea” (Mediterranean Sea) at an unrevealed point to “Mount Hor” (Num. 34:7). The line will run “by the road to Hethlon, as one goes to Zedad” (Ezek. 47:15). We don’t know the location of Hethlon today, but it is thought to be the northern border of Lebanon at the entrance of Hamath (Num. 34:8), which is the northernmost area captured by King Solomon (2 Chr. 8:3). The city of Zedad is thought to be 25 miles north of Damascus and is identified with Sadad.

Some of the cities mentioned in Ezekiel 47:16–17 can be located in a Bible atlas or other such source. The important fact about the northern border is that it begins at the Mediterranean Sea, runs through where these cities stood, and includes Lebanon and sections of Syria to the Euphrates River.

The eastern boundary of the Promised Land runs “between Hauran and Damascus, and between Gilead and the land of Israel, along the Jordan, and along the eastern side of the sea” (v. 18). In other words, it runs from the Euphrates River south, encompassing the Golan Heights and Sea of Galilee, down the Jordan River to the Dead Sea.

The southern boundary “shall be from Tamar to the waters of Meribah by Kadesh, along the brook to the Great Sea [Mediterranean Sea]” (v. 19). Most scholars believe Tamar was a city in southern Judah southwest of the Dead Sea between Elath and Hebron. Meribah is called Kadesh Barnea in Numbers 34:4 and lies nearly 50 miles southwest of Beersheba. Most scholars also believe the “brook” refers not to the Nile River in Egypt but to the Wadi el-Arish, called the “Brook of Egypt” in Numbers 34:5. It runs to the Great Sea that marks the western boundary of the land promised to Israel.

**DISTRIBUTION OF THE LAND**

Ezekiel 48 holds supreme importance for Israel in the future Millennial Kingdom. The chapter reemphasizes the fulfillment of God’s unconditional covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and Israel’s position in the Kingdom Age after Christ establishes His rule on Earth.

It also outlines the distribution of land to seven of the tribes; land allocated for priests, Levites, and the “prince” (vv. 8–22); distribution of land to the remaining five tribes (vv. 23–29); and the gates and name of the city (vv. 30–35).

The land distribution to the seven tribes moves from north to south and stops immediately before the holy district begins. No allotment sizes appear, but we can assume each tribe receives the same-sized portions of land that parallel each other moving from east to west. The seven tribes are Dan (v. 1), Asher (v. 2), Naphtali (v. 3), Manasseh (v. 4), Ephraim (v. 5), Reuben (v. 6), and Judah (v. 7). Keep in mind God does not distribute the land to Israel based on merit but, rather, based on the promise He made to the fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The holy district allocated to the priests, Levites, and prince (vv. 8–22; cf. 45:1–8) lies between the seven tribes
and remaining five tribes and contains six sections: (1) the sanctuary of the Lord (48:10); (2) an area 8.3 miles long by 3.3 miles wide for Zadok’s sons, the priests (vv. 9–12); (3) an area 8.3 miles long by 3.3 miles wide for the Levites (vv. 13–14); (4) the city 1.5 miles on each side (vv. 15–20); (5) open land surrounding the city for 150 yards on each side, as well as land outside the city for farming (vv. 18–19); and (6) a section for the prince (David, v. 21; cf. 34:24). The city is named “THE LORD IS THERE” (48:35).

The remaining five tribes in southern Israel receive equal allotments, as did those in the north: Benjamin (v. 23), Simeon (v. 24), Issachar (v. 25), Zebulun (v. 26), and Gad (v. 27).

**DESCRIPTION OF THE CITY**

Near the end of the seven-year Tribulation, Israel will repent and grieve over its sin (Zech. 12:10). All Israel will be redeemed, and God will take away its sin (Rom. 11:26–27). Then Jesus the Messiah will return to set up His Davidic, Messianic Kingdom; and God will grant to Israel all of the land promised in the Abrahamic Covenant, to be distributed to the 12 tribes as recorded in Ezekiel 47:13—48:35.

The Millennial city is Jerusalem, which lies south of the sacred district. It has four sides, 12 gates, and measures 10 miles square (Ezek. 48:15–19, 30–34). The gates will be named after the tribes of Israel.

Although similarities exist between this city and the New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21, they are entirely different cities with no connection. The Millennial city is prepared only for the Millennium (Christ’s 1,000-year reign), whereas the New Jerusalem is an eternal city prepared for the eternal state in a new heaven and new earth (vv. 1–2).

Though the Millennial city is Jerusalem (cf. Zech. 14:17), its name will be changed to “THE LORD IS THERE” (Hebrew, Jehovah Shammah, Ezek. 48:35). The city also will be called “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer. 33:16).

Thus the city’s complete name will reflect the character of the Millennium. It will be a place where peace reigns, God dwells and rules, and God’s righteousness prevails and flows to all nations. What an exciting and awe-inspiring day to anticipate because, as believers in Christ, we, too, will enjoy these blessings.

**David M. Levy**

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A LOOK AT GOD’S PROMISES TO ISRAEL IN EZEKIEL 36–37

THE BEST IS YET TO COME

BY TOM SIMCOX
LEON URIS’S novel Exodus, about the founding of the State of Israel, captivated the world when it came out in 1958. It became an international sensation, rising quickly to number one on The New York Times best-seller list and staying there for eight months.

Two years later, Otto Preminger directed the film version. The “Theme of Exodus” is beautiful and has been sung by many recording artists over the years. But better still are the lyrics, written by popular singer Pat Boone. The opening lines sum up Ezekiel 36: “This land is mine. God gave this land to me.”

God gave the physical descendants of Jacob the land of Israel, and the land is theirs—despite what most people think today. Others have tried to claim it, including elements within the church, and most of the world accuses Israel of “occupying” Arab territory. However, Ezekiel 36 states plainly the land belongs to God, who gave it to the Jewish people for an “everlasting possession” (Gen. 17:8, 48:4; Lev. 25:23). They forfeited it temporarily due to disobedience; but in the Almighty’s grand plan, they will flourish in it someday and testify to the entire world that Jehovah (YHVH) is God.

A WORD TO ISRAEL’S ENEMIES

Over the centuries, God used many prophets to bring Israel messages of punishment and restoration. One of the clearest messages came through Ezekiel, who ministered to the Israelites as they languished in exile during the Babylonian Captivity in the sixth century BC. Ezekiel’s prophecy transcends the corridors of time and looks to the future, when the Lord will fully restore the land to Israel and punish those who took it for themselves:

“The enemy has said of you [Israel], ‘Aha! The ancient heights have become our possession.’ . . . Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Surely I have spoken in My burning jealousy against the rest of the nations . . . who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country. I have raised My hand in an oath that surely the nations that are around you shall bear their own shame. But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel. . . . I am for you, and I will turn to you. I will multiply upon you man and beast; . . . I will . . . do better for you than at your beginnings. Then you shall know that I am the Lord. Yes, I will cause men to walk on you, My people Israel; they shall take possession of you, and you shall be their inheritance” (Ezek. 36:2, 5, 7–9, 11–12).

God promises the nations humiliation and punishment for their deeds. Yet to Israel He promises blessing. The Jewish nation will no longer “hear the taunts of the nations anymore, nor bear the reproach of the peoples” (v. 15).

Anti-Semitism is mushrooming today around the globe. Sometimes it seems as though the abuse of God’s Chosen People will never end. But God promises that someday it will be but a distant memory, and His people will enjoy a time of unparalleled blessing. This promise, however, contains two conditions, which God also promises to bring about: (1) The Jewish people must be regathered from the nations and (2) be in a close, personal relationship with Him.

PHYSICAL RESTORATION

God vows to plant the Jewish people back in their own land. He uprooted and dispersed them as punishment for their disobedience: “So I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed throughout the countries; I judged them according to their ways and their deeds. . . . They profaned My holy name” (vv. 19–20). Like many of us, they behaved in a manner that dishonored God.

God is holy, which means He is unique, different, and separate from everything else in the universe; and He calls His people to holy living. The Israelites were to be different, separated unto Him, and completely unconnected to the surrounding nations in order to maintain the purity of their relationship with the Lord and the Law He gave them. They were not to intermarry or engage in pagan practices. God even gave them dietary laws to prevent them from bonding over meals with their neighbors.

Apart from adhering to food restrictions, the Lord expects much the same of Christians today. We are to be in the world but not of it: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). We are not to yield to society’s value system or love the things the world treasures: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15).

Unfortunately, the Israelites wandered from God and “profaned” His holy name. The word profane means the opposite of holy. Profane means common, ordinary, and every day. Profanity, for example, takes God’s holy name and uses it in a low, common, or vulgar way. God said Israel “profaned [His]
GOD INTENDED ISRAEL TO BE HIS VEHICLE FOR IMPACTING THE GODLESS GENTILES WITH THE REALITY AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE ONE TRUE GOD.

God intended Israel to be His vehicle for impacting the godless Gentiles with the reality and knowledge of the one true God. Like the church today, Israel was to broadcast the light of almighty God to a lost world. As Christians, we also are called to holy living. We are to be “blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15).

To profane God’s holy name assassinates His character—His very nature. That’s why He says, “But I had concern for My holy name. I will sanctify My great name” (Ezek. 36:21, 23).

The Hebrew word for “sanctify” appears only three times in the Bible and is closely related to the word holy. God was telling Israel that His great name was to be set apart, hallowed, and respected. Ultimately, this feat will be accomplished when the Jewish people are regathered to their land: “For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land” (v. 24).

Israel’s physical restoration will cause the world to understand that “I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it” (v. 36). A partial restoration already has begun. But the Lord’s ultimate plan is for a full restoration and to have the Jewish people dwell in Israel in safety and in a proper relationship with Him because it will glorify Him.

What a question! The bones were immeasurable in number and “very dry,” having no vestiges of life (v. 2). Since when can something dead be reanimated and live?

Ezekiel’s response was simply, “O Lord God, You know” (v. 3). From a human standpoint, it certainly looked impossible that these dead bones could ever live again. But as God told Abraham, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14).

God then told Ezekiel, “Prophesy to . . . [the] bones, and say to them ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!”’ (Ezek. 37:4). To prophesy here does not mean to foretell the future but, rather, to preach God’s Word. As Ezekiel preached, the “bones came together, bone to bone. . . . The sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over” (vv. 7–8). But something still was missing: “There was no breath in them” (v. 8).

They were alive physically but not spiritually. Then God commanded Ezekiel, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live’”’ (v. 9).

To whom do these dead bones belong? “These bones,” God told Ezekiel, “are the whole house of Israel” (v. 11). It was not enough for them to be regenerated physically; they had to be regenerated spiritually. God was telling His prophet this dead nation would someday be resurrected, both physically and spiritually.

Today 6.59 million Jewish people live in Israel, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. The Times of Israel reported in April 2018 that 43 percent of world Jewry now resides back in its homeland. God is making good on His promises. However, spiritual regeneration requires the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which will take place in the future, bringing Israel into a close personal relationship with Him: “I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it” (v. 14).

The truth of Pat Boone’s words will someday become obvious to the entire world: “They shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever” (v. 25).

In that day, Jewish people will be able to declare, “This land is mine. God gave this land to me.” And no one will argue with them.

SPIRITUAL REGENERATION

In Ezekiel 37, the Lord promises to regenerate the Jewish people spiritually, so they may have a close relationship with Him. Through a vision, God transported Ezekiel to a valley filled with sun-bleached, dry, dead bones. Then He asked His prophet, “Son of man, can these bones live?” (37:3).

In Ezekiel 37, the Lord promises to regenerate the Jewish people spiritually, so they may have a close relationship with Him. Through a vision, God transported Ezekiel to a valley filled with sun-bleached, dry, dead bones. Then He asked His prophet, “Son of man, can these bones live?” (37:3).
The land of Israel. The most hotly contested region in the world. The Jewish people say it is theirs, and the Arabs say it is theirs. Yet God tells us clearly to whom it belongs: In the last days, He says, “I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they [the Gentiles] have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land” (Joel 3:2, emphasis added; cf. 2 Chr. 7:20; Isa. 14:25; Jer. 2:7; 16:18; Ezek. 36:5; 38:16; Joel 1:6).

The land belongs to Jehovah, and He says He has given it to the Jewish people as an inheritance forever (Gen. 17:8; 48:4; Ezek. 36:24; 37:14).

Interestingly, this tiny slice of real estate surrounded by enormous Muslim countries has prospered only under the Jewish people. Under the Babylonians, it sat desolate, the dwelling place of jackals and hyenas, while the Israelites lived in captivity for 70 years in the sixth century BC. After the Israelites returned from exile, they rebuilt Jerusalem and its walls, and the situation improved. But in AD 70 the Romans sacked Jerusalem and denuded the land.

Some of the trees were used to construct a framework that was placed around the second Temple and set on fire, causing the Temple to explode into bits. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, a Jerusalemite who was there, described the devastation in his book The Jewish War:

And now the Romans . . . had cut down all the trees that were in the country that adjoined to the city, and that for ninety fur- longs [11 miles] round about, as I have already related. And truly the very view itself of the country was a melancholy thing; for those places which were before adorned with trees and pleasant gardens were now become a desolate country every way, and its trees were all cut down: nor could any foreigner that had formerly seen Judea and the most beautiful suburbs of the city, and now saw it as a desert, but lament and mourn sadly at so great a change.1

The land changed hands many times through the centuries but remained ruined. When the Ottoman Turks captured it in the early 16th century, they stripped what was left, leaving only barrenness and malaria-infested swamps that were good for nothing.

In 1867 American writer Mark Twain described the Holy Land in his book The Innocents Abroad. He called it a “desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds—a silent mournful expanse. . . . There was hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive tree and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country. No landscape exists that is more tiresome to the eye than that which bounds the approaches to Jerusalem.”

This is how God’s land fared when other nations took it for themselves. “Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Surely I have spoken in My burning jealousy against the rest of the nations . . . who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country’” (Ezek. 36:5, emphasis added). He promises them humiliation and punishment.

Today the land of Israel is producing fruit and blossoming because the people to whom God gave it are the ones working it. So He is blessing it.

When the Israelis established farms in Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip, the Arabs there told them they were wasting their time. “This land is cursed,” the Arabs said. But 20 years later, Gush Katif had become the nation’s breadbasket, providing 10 percent of Israel’s agricultural output and 65 percent of its greenhouse vegetables. Yearly exports came to $25 million. Israel evacuated all 21 communities in the Gaza Strip in 2005 in hopes of making peace. Instead, Hamas reduced the farms to rubble and used the area to fire rockets into Israel.

God promises, “The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose” (Isa. 35:1). Today is but a sneak preview of what God will do when the Jewish people are fully reconciled to Him in the future Millennial Kingdom. That will be a time of great revival and renewal, both spiritually and physically: “‘I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it,’ says the Lord” (Ezek. 37:14, emphasis added).

No one will dispute who owns the land, and Israel will glorify God. *

ENDNOTE

1 Josephus The Jewish War 6.1.1.
GOD’S PRONOUNCEMENT AND REVELATION CONCERNING THE KING OF TYRE

THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE

EZEKIEL 28:1-19
FROM THE TIME GOD CREATED THE WORLD, SATAN HAS WANTED TO RULE IT. In ancient days, one of Satan’s strongholds was the Phoenician city-state of Tyre, which dates back to around 2700 BC. Four of God’s prophets condemned Tyre, but the prophet Ezekiel went a step further: He also addressed Satan, the mastermind who controls people and nations that hate God. ➔
Tyre is first mentioned in the Bible as the inheritance of the tribe of Asher (Josh. 19:29), but Israel failed to conquer the area. A highly developed trade center situated on the Mediterranean Sea between Sidon in the north and Acre in the south, Tyre originally was located on Phoenicia’s mainland. But because of foreign invaders, the city was rebuilt on a rock island in the sea, making its destruction extremely difficult. Today the area is in Lebanon. Tyre was so rich in commercial trade, timber, and skilled labor that King David asked the city's King Hiram to provide cedar trees, carpenters, and masons to build him a house. Later, King Solomon did the same when he built the Temple in Jerusalem. Tyre maintained a relationship with Israel even after the northern 10 tribes split from Judah. But Assyrian and Babylonian aggression severed Tyre's ties with Israel, and they became enemies. Many nations invaded the city-state but could not destroy it. The Assyrians invaded Tyre in the 10th century BC and managed to force it to pay tribute until the Babylonians destroyed the Assyrians in 612 BC. Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar then besieged Tyre for 13 years (586–573 BC) but ended up signing a treaty. The Persians attacked, further weakening the city, but by 520 BC they severed relations with it. Finally, in 332 BC, Alexander the Great captured Tyre after besieging it for seven months and building a causeway to the island. The city eventually was destroyed in the 13th century AD when Muslims captured it from the Crusaders.

Four prophets condemned Tyre: Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, and Zechariah. God gave Ezekiel four prophecies against the city, each beginning with “The word of the Lord came to me, saying” (Ezek. 26:1; cf. 27:1; 28:1, 11). The messages detail Tyre's sinful trade practices, idolatry, sexual immorality, and pride. God pronounced judgment on the city and its ruler and called the prophet to lament over the nation’s coming demise.

The Bible clearly teaches that Satan is the mastermind behind the enemies of God.

PRIDE OF THE KING
The chief sin of the “prince [leader, ruler] of Tyre” was pride. He was so proud, in fact, he actually proclaimed himself to be “a god” (28:2).

Using great sarcasm, Ezekiel declared, “You are wiser than Daniel! There is no secret that can be hidden from you!” (v. 3). The prophet Daniel resided in Babylon, where God had highly elevated him and used him to speak divine wisdom to Nebuchadnezzar. However, Daniel never claimed to be wise on his own. He always proclaimed that all the wisdom he uttered came exclusively from the true and living God.

On the other hand, Tyre's ruler thought himself a god because of his skill in accumulating massive wealth (vv. 4–5). God castigated him for his proud, arrogant self-gloration: “Yet you are a man, and not a god, though you set your heart as the heart of a god!” (v. 2).

PROPHECY AGAINST THE KING
The king was in for a rude awakening:

Therefore thus says the Lord God: “Because you have set your heart as the heart of a god, behold, therefore, I will bring strangers against you, the most terrible of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom, and defile your splendor. They shall throw you down into the Pit” (vv. 6–8).

The king's arrogance, pride, and self-exaltation would precipitate the worst, most violent death possible for him and his kingdom. Strangers would obliterate his beauty, splendor, and wealth; and he would “die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of aliens; for I have spoken,' says the Lord God” (v. 10).

The Phoenicians practiced circumcision, as did
the Israelites. To die “the death of the uncircumcised” meant to die in shame, dishonor, and contempt as a barbarian. His corpse would be treated with humiliation and disrespect and left unburied for vultures to devour.

POWER BEHIND THE KING
The Bible clearly teaches that Satan is the mastermind behind the enemies of God. This fact apparently was true of the king of Tyre and the city-state he ruled. God commanded Ezekiel to pronounce a prophetic lamentation against the king (vv. 11–12). Verses 12–13 have generated much debate over the years because the revelation transcends the human ruler:

- “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (v. 12).
- “You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering” (v. 13).
- “The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created” (v. 13).
- “You were the anointed cherub; . . . you were on the holy mountain of God” (v. 14).
- “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created” (v. 15).

Abruptly, a great contrast appears:

- “Till iniquity was found in you” (v. 15).
- “You became filled with violence within” (v. 16).
- “You sinned” (v. 16).
- “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty” (v. 17).
- “You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor” (v. 17).

God also declared, “I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God; and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the fiery stones” (v. 16).

Various interpretations of these verses have surfaced throughout the centuries. Some say they refer to a heathen god that energized the king to proclaim himself a god. Others believe Ezekiel was speaking of Adam (the ideal man) before his sin and expulsion from Eden. Still others believe the verses refer to the entire revelation of paradise in Genesis 3 before God judged Adam, Eve, and the serpent.

Another widely held belief is that Ezekiel used a well-known mythical Phoenician story to explain the king’s power and how he acquired such wealth. Some interpreters believe the chapter teaches the king of Tyre was actually possessed by Satan.

Finally, many view these verses as a dual prophecy, speaking about the king’s pride in comparison to Satan’s. These are only a few of the many interpretations.

People go to great lengths to try to tie this section to the earthly king. But they cannot explain the extraordinary language and details God revealed to Ezekiel. The king of Tyre (thought by many to be Ithobaal II or III) cannot be the one described here. Rather, God is pointing to someone who is the power behind the king and whose attributes transcend anything the king of Tyre ever possessed.

For example, the king was never “perfection” (Ezek. 28:12; cf. v. 15) “in Eden” (v. 13). He was never “the anointed cherub . . . on the holy mountain of God” (v. 14). Nor was he “created” (v. 15). The king was born, not created.

This passage and Isaiah 14:12–15, used in conjunction with the king of Babylon, reveal the origin of Satan’s creation and his original, angelic holy state; his disastrous sin and fall; his power; and his state today. It does not seem reasonable that Ezekiel was describing the characteristics or career of a human ruler, let alone the king of Tyre. Ezekiel closed this section of the chapter by telling of this individual’s pride, rebellion, violence, revolt, expulsion from the mountain of God to the earth, and final destiny (Ezek. 28:16–19).

The evil characters and their corrupt influence constantly shift back and forth from the ruler of Tyre (v. 2) to Satan himself (vv. 12–15), closely linking the two and indicating the king was satanically influenced and motivated.

Ezekiel’s words describe Lucifer’s evil nature and career before his fall—before his name was changed to Satan. This setting becomes the backdrop for the fall of the king of Tyre. Therefore, the power behind Tyre’s throne was none other than Satan himself.

Satan is the mastermind behind evil individuals and nations who hate God. This was true of the king of Tyre and the city-state he ruled. God’s judgment fell on the king as Ezekiel prophesied; and in God’s time, eternal judgment and perdition will fall on the power behind the king of Tyre, who is the Devil himself.

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BY MIKE STALLARD

THE COMING INVASION
Today much of the world despises Israel. All it takes to substantiate this truth is a look at the UN’s overwhelming number of anti-Israel resolutions, the countries that have waged war against Israel in hopes of annihilating it, and the news media’s endless caricature of Israel as an aggressor—despite this tiny nation’s constant battle merely to survive. But more hostility is coming.

The Bible says that in the end-times, nations will fight against Israel at the Battle of Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38—39). Prior to that time, the Jewish people will be regathered in their land in unbelief (20:33–38; 22:17–22). The Battle of Gog and Magog will culminate with the Messiah’s return to defend Israel and set up His Messianic Kingdom (chaps. 40—48).


da conflicts, unlike any other. It’s the battle of Gog and Magog.

WHICH NATIONS WILL ATTACK ISRAEL?

Scholars debate much about the identity of the nations involved in the future Battle of Gog and Magog. The prophet Ezekiel wrote, “Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal” (38:1–2).

The word Rosh can mean “chief” or “head.” Consequently, some theologians believe Gog is the chief prince of two places—Meshech and Tubal—rather than the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. But the text most likely means Gog is the prince of the three territories.¹

Magog, Meshech, and Tubal were sons of Noah’s son Japheth (Gen. 10:1–2). Their descendants populated Asia Minor (Turkey) and the regions farther north. Rosh likely was close by. Ancient historian Josephus identified Magog with the Scythians who eventually inhabited the areas around the Black and Caspian Seas.² Gog, the leader of this faction of opponents, will come “out of the far north” (Ezek. 38:15).

Ezekiel also prophesied that Persia (Iran), Ethiopia (Sudan), Libya, Gomer, and Togarmah will join Gog’s forces against Israel (vv. 5–6). Gomer, like Magog, was Japheth’s son; and Togarmah was Gomer’s son (Gen. 10:2–3). Some scholars place the descendants of Gomer and Togarmah in central Europe, but it’s more likely they lived in southern Russia and later moved to Asia Minor.³

Ezekiel 38:13 also mentions Sheba, Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish. But it is not clear if they join the attack on Israel. Sheba and Dedan were probably in southern or central Arabia, and the merchants of Tarshish were traders in the Mediterranean world.

Therefore, the Battle of Gog and Magog will be a northern confederacy led by Gog in the areas associated with southern Russia and Asia Minor and will also involve nations from northern Africa and the Middle East. Though some interpreters spiritualize the places as symbols of a general plot against God, it is best to take the text at face value and interpret the names as real nations that attack Israel.
WHAT WILL PROVOKE THE ATTACK?
The news media today constantly accuse Israel of provoking Arab hostility. But it is impossible to read the Bible’s account of the future Battle of Gog and Magog and see Israel as the instigator. Israel’s future attackers—much like its enemies today—will use evil thoughts to produce evil plans (v. 10). They will take advantage of Israel’s disposition toward peace and safety and invade the Jewish nation to seek plunder and spoil (vv. 11–13).

Interestingly, the passage says God will lead the aggressors (v. 4). In fact, God asserts, “I will bring you against My land” (v. 16). How should we understand this passage?

It is best to see God as the one putting structure to the thoughts and plans of evil men. In other words, God lets some evil take place but turns it in a direction to advance His ultimate purpose in the world, “that the nations may know Me” (v. 16).

WHEN WILL THE ATTACK OCCUR?
Bible scholars differ concerning when this battle will occur. The venerable theologian Harry A. Ironside, citing Zechariah 14:1–4, taught it will take place near the end of the seven-year Tribulation. To be sure, Ezekiel 39:17–20 depicts a call for birds to eat the flesh of the defeated hordes after the Battle of Gog and Magog in the same way they are called to do so after Christ returns to destroy His enemies at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 19:17–18).

Yet some incongruities exist in this view, such as how Israel’s burning of war instruments could last seven years after the battle if the Millennium (Christ’s 1,000-year reign on Earth) is about to begin (Ezek. 39:9).

Others equate the Battle of Gog and Magog with the Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:8, which describes Satan’s future, last-gasp attack on Jerusalem to dethrone God and Christ at the end of the Millennium. But there are too many differences between the two accounts to make a definite correlation.

Others believe the battle will occur early in the Millennium or before the Rapture or between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. But all of these views lack precision and raise questions.

The best view is that the Battle of Gog and Magog will occur early in the first half of the Tribulation. The peace treaty between the Antichrist and Israel at the beginning of Daniel’s 70th week (Dan. 9:27) will make Israel feel safe and secure, as implied in Ezekiel 38:11. Based on history, the current Arab-Israeli conflict, and future prophecy, Israel’s window of time for feeling safe and secure appears quite small. Thus the battle most likely will take place during the first three and a half years of the Tribulation, when the Jewish people will feel protected.

HOW WILL GOD JUDGE GOG AND MAGOG?
Most of Ezekiel 38—39 describes God’s judgment of the confederacy that will come against Israel. But God will not fight Israel’s enemies by assisting the nation in direct military combat. Instead, He supernaturally will cause a tremendous earthquake in Israel and confuse the minds of the attacking armies so they fight one another:

Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. . . . Every man’s sword will be against his brother. And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone (38:19, 21–22).

The dead attackers will become food for
animals and birds and will be buried in Israel over a period of seven months (39:4, 11–13, 17–20). God’s judgment will be just, true, and complete.

A GLORIOUS ENDING

The Battle of Gog and Magog will result in God’s glorification and Israel’s ultimate restoration. God will be magnified and known among all nations, including Israel (38:23; 39:7, 13, 21–22, 28). His intervention on Israel’s behalf will help the Jewish people know the Lord their God.

In addition, God’s victory will assure Israel of His ultimate plan for the Jewish nation’s restoration in the Messianic Kingdom: “And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel” (39:29). That is why the Ezekiel 38—39 account of the Battle of Gog and Magog precedes the Ezekiel 40—48 teaching of the coming Kingdom and the glorious future for Israel and the Jewish people.

ENDNOTES

1. The NASB and NKJV translate Rosh as a place name, whereas the KJV and NIV do not. Either way, the issue does not affect the passage’s overall interpretation.


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THE BEREAN BOX

Who are the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:2?

“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose” (vv. 1–2).

Surprisingly, the phrase sons of God appears solely in reference to angels. Many people reject this interpretation because it would mean angels had sexual relations with humans—something abnormal and grotesque; and the offspring would be part angel, part human.

Others say the phrase refers to the godly line of Seth marrying the godless line of Cain (4:16—5:32). Still others believe the phrase refers to men (not angels) who were giants, mighty men, and men of renown (6:4). Thus they believe humans, not angels, married these women (v. 2).

However, there are good reasons to accept the view that the sons of God were fallen angels (demons) who “did not keep their proper domain”; left their habitation in heaven; followed Satan; against their nature, interbred with women; and are now chained “under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6).

1. The union produced a breed of humans whose offspring were “giants” (nephilim, Hebrew for “fallen ones,” not “giants”); “mighty men” (warriors of superior intellectual and physical ability); and men of “renown” (fame, prestige, distinction, and notability; Gen. 6:4).

2. The term sons of God in Jewish Scripture (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) always refers to angels.

3. The context of Genesis 6:1–4 seems to be the major reason God destroyed all of humanity with a universal flood, except for the people inside Noah’s ark.

4. When Jesus referred to angels in Matthew 22:30, He was speaking of those in heaven, not of angels in general.

5. The angels who appeared to Abraham had physical, male bodies. They ate, touched things, washed their feet and hands, and were identified as men by the men in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18—19).

6. Literature and Jewish scholars and historians (Josephus and others) all maintained that Genesis 6 refers to fallen angels having relations with human women.

7. Early church leaders, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and others also held this position.

So it seems the sons of God were fallen angels who cohabited with human women and produced offspring with intellectual and physical abilities that gained fame in the antediluvian age.

BY DAVID M. LEVY
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When I was a student at the Hebrew University, Professor Avraham Malamat told our class no camel bones had ever been found from the time of the Patriarchs. The problem, as the professor saw it, was that the Bible incorrectly placed Abraham and his kin in the second millennium BC even though camels were not domesticated until the first millennium BC.

Scripture teaches that Abraham owned camels and that Rebekah and Rachel rode camels (Gen. 12:16; 24:10; 31:34). The majority of critical scholars contend there is no support for the domestication of the camel before 1200 BC, well after the Patriarchs; and they consider these scriptural accounts anachronisms, meaning they belong to a period other than the one in which they appear. In this case, they say, they belong to a later period, when camels were domesticated.1

This issue may seem trivial, but at stake is the Patriarchs’ historicity. A much later writer could not have reported earlier events accurately, making the entire account suspect as invented history.

However, archaeology has demonstrated that the domestication of the camel, at least on a limited scale, took place much earlier than previously supposed. The problem is not the lack of domestication but, rather, which type of camel is in view. Two species of camels were associated with the Ancient Near East: the dromedary (long-legged with a single hump) and the Bactrian (stocky with two humps). Archaeological sites like the Umm an-Nar island, Tell Abraq, and Al Sufouh have produced examples of dromedary camel bones dating to the third and second millennium BC. But the strongest support for early domestication is for the Bactrian camel.2

Although this wild camel stayed outside urban areas, droughts forced them to migrate into more populated areas (cf. Gen 24:64; 37:25).3 Recognizing how well-suited they were to the harsh desert environment, people employed them. Michael Ripinsky argued for domestication in the fourth millennium BC,4 and R. W. Bulliet traced a first stage of domestication to southeastern Arabia in the fourth or third millennium BC.5 Early Bronze Age discoveries of model camels attached to miniature clay carts in Southern Turkmenistan also show the Bactrian camel was in use by the early third millennium BC.6 In addition, third millennium BC gold and silver vessels depict Bactrian camels,7 as does a cylinder seal from Syria in the 18th century BC with two figures riding astride. Also, a Sumerian love song from the Old Babylonian period (third–second millennium BC) mentions the camel being milked, which also implies domestication.8

There is no reason why the species of camel used by the Patriarchs could not have been the Bactrian, which is precisely what the archaeological record shows is most probable. Archaeology again has demonstrated that we have every reason to trust the text of Scripture, first because it is Scripture and second, because God has left us evidence to confirm its historicity and, therefore, its truth.

ENDNOTES

3 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 344.
8 Ibid., 356. The primary source can be found in The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago I/J, 2 (lines 18–27).

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THE CHRISTIAN’S LIFE

1 Thessalonians 5:4–11

“At the Rapture,” wrote Bible scholar John F. Walvoord, “Christians will see their loved ones who died and preceded them to heaven. It will also end their earthly problems, and they will be forever with the Lord.”¹ For these reasons, the Rapture has been a blessed hope of the church for millennia. But those left behind will face a world of depraved humanity enveloped by misery and spiritual darkness—a time the apostle Paul called the Day of the Lord.

Paul told the Thessalonian church the Day of the Lord will strike unbelievers “as a thief in the night” (1 Th. 5:2). But he assured Christians they will not experience God’s wrath, which He has appointed for the God-rejecting world. First Thessalonians 5:4–11 instructs us to remember our deliverance, duty, and destiny as we await the Rapture, when God will carry His church to heaven.

REMEMBER YOUR DELIVERANCE

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness” (vv. 4–5).

The phrase but you, brethren establishes a contrast between believers and unbelievers. Christians are “not in darkness” (v. 4). The word darkness is a metaphor for sin and a depraved world that is morally and spiritually blind to righteousness and redemption. People without Christ live within this world’s demonic system, unaware of their needy spiritual condition and the divine judgment that awaits them unless they obtain forgiveness through Christ.

Paul told the Thessalonian believers they did not live in darkness; the Day of the Lord would not “overtake [them] as a thief.” All Christians will already have been raptured off the earth before the Great Tribulation begins (4:13–18). Jesus substantiated this fact by His promise to the Philadelphia church: “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth” (Rev. 3:10).

The language clearly reveals the church will not go into the Tribulation. The preposition from (literally, “out of”) carries the meaning of keeping the church out of the Tribulation. It will not go through any portion of it.

Paul also said the Thessalonian believers were “all sons of light” (1 Th. 5:5). The word all means no exceptions. All born-again believers possess life and light that will never be taken away. The phrase sons of the day simply means those who are redeemed live and function in the light of God’s provision.

Paul ended verse 5 with a strong affirmation of the Christian’s position: “We are not of the night nor of darkness.” Notice, he included himself. In other words, Paul and the missionary team had nothing to do with this world’s dark system or unrepentant sinners who were alienated from God.

REMEMBER YOUR DUTY

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that as sons of light, they were obligated to live in a way that pleased God: “Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (v. 6).

The word therefore introduces a strong, emphatic, well-thought-out, and essential conclusion to verses 4–5: “Let us not sleep.” The word sleep is used metaphorically to denote indifference, insensitivity to spiritual things, or inertia in serving the Lord. The phrase as others do contrasts believers with unbelievers: “But let us watch and be sober” (v. 6). Alertness is the opposite of sleeping and should distinguish our character and attitude as we interact with society.

The word sober (literally, “self-controlled”) broadens the meaning of watch. Self-control refers to our desires and emotions and the part they play in guiding our behavior. Without self-control we will succumb to the world’s sinful lifestyles like a drunk who is out of control. Paul provided a simple illustration to make his point: “For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night” (v. 7).

It is a fact that people instinctively sleep at night. So unsaved people are characterized as unconcerned about and uninterested in knowing God because they are asleep, living in a darkened spiritual state (cf. Jn 3:19–20).

Likewise, the unsaved “get drunk.” The word drunk appears twice in 1 Thessalonians 5:7 and simply refers to the process of drinking until one becomes drunk and remains that way. This is another illustration to drive home the sinfulness of...
people who do not care about God. They will be asleep in their
darkened spiritual state when the Day of the Lord seizes them
as a thief in the night.

Paul continued to emphasize that believers belong to the
day and unbelievers belong to the night. He exhorted us to
properly equip ourselves to live a life that glorifies God: “But
let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate
of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.” (v. 8).

1. “Be sober.” We are to maintain a habitual lifestyle of being
calm and collected in our spirits, attitudes, and temperaments.
We are always to be on guard while living in a world filled with
turmoil, disorder, anarchy, lawlessness, and upheaval; and
we do so by drawing on the inexhaustible riches of Christ’s
strength, wisdom, and grace.

2. Put on the “breastplate of faith and love.” The idea of
“putting on” reflects being clothed with faith and love. Not only
are we watchmen but also warriors. We are to be equipped
to stand against the wiles of the Devil and a hostile world
ready to destroy us. We are to be “good soldier[s] of Jesus
Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3–4).

Putting on the “breastplate” (armor, 1 Th. 5:8) is to be a
once-and-for-all action. The armor must never be removed.
This is something we do for ourselves. A breastplate covers
one’s vital organs from neck to waist.

Faith refers to our commitment to God that protects our inner
life, while love refers to our outward relationship with others.

3. The “helmet” refers to the “hope of salvation.” A helmet
protects a soldier’s head. A damaged helmet can disable a
soldier or even result in his death. In this context, the word
helmet does not refer to salvation because the addressees are
all believers in Christ. The “hope” here is a settled expectation
of Christ’s imminent return to rapture the church. Then every
believer will receive a glorified body, bringing salvation to its
culmination.

REMEMBER YOUR DESTINY
Paul described the salvation Christ provides for every believer:
“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation
through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether
we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him” (vv. 9–10).

God Himself, according to His own will, has decreed that
we will not experience His wrath during the Great Tribulation
(Rev. 6:15–17; 14:10; 19:15). Why? Because He will rapture the
church before the Tribulation (1 Th. 1:10).

The word but (5:9) provides a strong contrast to wrath. By
His own action, God in time past had appointed all believers
“to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This divine
calling requires individual responses to Christ in order to be
effective (2 Pet. 1:10). That is, each person God calls must per-
sonally receive Christ in order to possess salvation. Salvation
is acquired through Christ alone.

It was necessary for Christ to die voluntarily in order for
you and me to obtain salvation. Notice, it was “for us” He died
(1 Th. 5:10). Christ’s vicarious, substitutionary death was on
behalf of mankind, and it is the sole reason believers in Him
are delivered from God’s wrath.

The purpose of our salvation is to “live together with Him
[Christ]” (v. 10). The phrase whether we wake or sleep refers to
whether we are alive or dead. Regardless, we will be raptured
when Christ returns for His church (4:16–17). Whether Christ
is in heaven or on His throne in the Millennium or Eternal
State, all believers will be living with Him. “Therefore,” wrote
Paul, “comfort each other and edify one another, just as you
also are doing” (5:11).

We are to “comfort” and encourage one another
in our walks with the Lord, especially in times
of discouragement or trial. We are to “edify” one
another, building one another up in the faith.
The word edify means to build or erect, as when
putting up a house or building. Edification is to
be a conscious, ongoing process until the Lord
returns for His church.

Paul closed with an assuring word to the Thes-
salonians that he knew they were doing what
was commanded. Are you a comforting fellow
Christian, building others up in Christ during these difficult
days? If not, why not start now?

ENDNOTE

1 John F. Walvoord, “When Christ Comes for the Church,” Bible.org, January 1, 2008 <goo.gl/
TH0dot>.

by David M. Levy,
director of Education and Ministry Relations
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Gospel Ministry
I recently read about a man who was flying an airliner over Tennessee. He told his copilot, “You see that lake down there? When I was a boy, I used to sit in a rowboat on that lake and watch the airplanes soar across the sky and wish I were up there. Now I’m a pilot, and I look down at the lake from up here and wish I were in that rowboat fishing.”

Sometimes we’re simply not content with where we are in life. In the United States, we probably have more material benefits than any culture before us. Yet our contentment is overshadowed by our society’s high level of consumer debt, divorce, and other negative factors. Many Americans spend more than they make, and contentment eludes them.

Statistics reveal the average American household that carries a credit card balance owes more than $16,000 on those cards. Although some valid reasons exist for using credit cards, most people use them because they live beyond their means. They want things they can’t afford but buy them anyway. Our country’s high divorce rate reveals people are discontent with their spouses—the ones to whom they have committed themselves in marriage.

Yet for Christians, contentment should be a hallmark of a godly life. The apostle Paul wrote, “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:10–13).

What is contentment?

Contentment is an inner sense of rest and peace that comes from trusting God’s wise and gracious provision for us. It is the opposite ofcovetousness, desiring what belongs to someone else.

If I were to ask, “Do you think God possesses all wisdom and that His grace is sufficient?” most of us would say yes. But we tend to lose that perspective when troubles come. We let circumstances, difficult job situations, insufficient wages, or material or health needs impede us from trusting the Lord.

Paul wrote, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Phil. 4:11). Contentment is learned. We cannot acquire it in a prayer meeting by saying, “Lord, give me contentment.” We can ask the Lord to help us be content, but contentment is something we learn.

The word translated “learned” in Philippians 4:11 is the Greek word manthanō, which means “to be instructed.” From it we get the Greek word mathētēs, or “disciple.” Jesus used manthanō in the Gospel of Matthew when He told the religious Paul wrote this letter around AD 61 while under house arrest in Rome. He had survived the ordeal of a shipwreck (Acts 27:27–44) and was now confined because of false charges and corrupt government officials who wanted bribes. Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, left Paul incarcerated, hoping Paul and his friends would bribe him to let Paul go (24:26). When
leaders, “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’” (Mt. 9:13). Contentment must be learned.

**HOW DO WE LEARN CONTENTMENT?**

We learn contentment by studying, memorizing, and meditating on God’s promises in Scripture. A favorite passage of many is Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” That is a promise God made to us.

Does that promise relate to your job situation? Does it relate to being passed over for a position you thought you deserved? Does it relate to your marital status? God works all things together for good.

Jesus promised, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt. 6:33). He did not say, “I’ll add a few things to you.” He said, “All these things shall be added to you.”

The phrase all these things pertains to food, clothing, and shelter—the basic necessities of life. God promises to take care of all our needs.

He also promises not to allow us to be tempted beyond what we can handle:

> No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1 Cor. 10:13).

God will never let us be subjected to trials beyond what we’re capable of enduring. Yet we say, “Oh, Lord, I can’t handle this.” “I can’t handle my situation.” “I can’t handle my boss.” We need to trust His promises.

He also will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5). If we are God’s children, we can never be separated from Jesus, who has redeemed us. Never. It doesn’t matter where we are or what we’re going through. God’s promise is sure.

In Isaiah 54:17, God told His people, “No weapon formed against you shall prosper.” No one who wants to hurt us will flourish. From God’s perspective, He is using hurtful situations, including persecution, for our good (Rom. 8:28). God knows what we need. We are certain to face difficulties in life, but they are designed to teach us contentment and reliance on Him.

A writer said, “The secret of contentment and inner peace is found in letting go of the need to be in control and resting in the confidence that God is in control.” We need to rest in the knowledge that God is in control of our lives. He is in control of our circumstances. In fact, He is in control of everything; and trusting in Him produces the contentment of which Paul spoke.

Grace Fox, a woman who ministers to women around the world, once described the contentment she witnessed among Nepalese believers after a devastating earthquake hit in 2015:

> On my recent trip to Nepal, I met a group of church leaders who live in a region where the earthquake’s epicenter happened 17 months ago. These folks had precious little to begin with, and they lost it all when the earthquake struck. And yet they danced for joy when we worshiped God together with music. I watched them celebrate Jesus, and I knew immediately that they had much to teach me. One of the lessons is contentment. Warren Wiersbe, a famous Christian writer, says, “Real contentment must come from within. You and I cannot change or control the world around us, but we can change and control the world within us.” My Nepalese friends model Wiersbe’s words despite their world literally falling out from beneath them. They’ve chosen to control the world within them. They’ve chosen to give thanks and praise God in the midst of the circumstances that North Americans seriously cannot fathom, and the result is contentment.¹

Learning to be content takes place on the inside—in our hearts. The Nepalese Christians had learned contentment by deciding to trust God through their circumstances.

Many of us quote Psalm 23:1: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” That is a statement of purpose. It is a declaration. We need to decide to trust that God is in control and will take care of us. He leads us beside the quiet waters (v. 2). He provides for us, so we will not want. He leads us in the paths of righteousness (v. 3). He directs our lives.

Let us purpose in our hearts to study and meditate on God’s promises, so we might learn contentment as we follow our Shepherd.

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**ENDNOTE**


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**by Richard D. Emmons,**

professor emeritus in the School of Divinity at Cairn University in Langhorne, Pennsylvania, and senior pastor of GraceWay Bible Church in Hamilton Township, New Jersey
EUROPE: ACTS OF TERROR AGAINST JEWISH PEOPLE INCREASING

The brutal murder of 85-year-old Holocaust survivor Mireille Knoll marks the 11th time in 12 years someone has been viciously killed in France specifically for being Jewish and attests to the alarming rise of anti-Semitism across Europe.

Knoll, who had survived the roundup of more than 13,000 French Jews sent to Nazi death camps in 1942, was found dead in her apartment in March after it was set on fire. An autopsy revealed 11 stab wounds, JNS.org reported.

Knoll's granddaughter Noa Goldfarb, who lives in Herzliya, Israel, wrote on Facebook, "Twenty years ago, I left Paris knowing that neither my future nor that of the Jewish People is to be found there. . . . Grandmother was stabbed to death 11 times by a Muslim neighbor she knew well, who made sure to set fire to her home and left us not even one object, a letter, a photograph, to remember her by."

Knoll’s horrific murder resembles that of Sarah Halimi, a 65-year-old Orthodox Jewish woman and physician who was killed in the same Paris district last year. Halimi’s Muslim neighbor broke into her apartment, beat her to death, then hurled her body off the balcony while yelling "Allahu Akbar" (Arabic, "Allah is Great").

Other anti-Semitic attacks in France include the 2015 murder of four Jewish men at a kosher market in Paris, the 2012 shooting of four people at a Jewish school in Toulouse, and the 2006 barbaric torture and murder of 23-year-old Jewish man Ilan Halimi.

Such vicious anti-Semitism has become rampant across Europe. "Examples are legion," wrote Michel Friedman for the German news site DW.com. “[They include] Britain, where the Labour Party is rocked by anti-Semitic scandals and the leader does nothing about it; Hungary, where Prime Minister Viktor Orban rants about a supposed conspiracy by the Jew George Soros; Poland, which is desperately trying to define itself as the innocent party with regard to its anti-Semitism before, during, and after the Holocaust, right up to the present day; Austria, where right-wing extremists skulking in government are lent respectability. . . . And yes, it is happening in Germany, too. Jewish schools, kindergartens and community centers have needed protection against original and neo-Nazis for decades.”

From news reports

ANOTHER LIFE-SAVING TECHNOLOGY IN ISRAEL

Magen David Adom (MDA) has introduced its newest life-saving technology: an innovative car system that immediately alerts emergency medical technicians if a car is in an accident and provides the driver’s location, even when the driver is unconscious.

Magen David Adom, Israel’s national emergency medical service, began rolling out the new system, eCall, in April. eCall uses high-technology sensors and geolocation capabilities to sense a crash and report it, along with the vehicle’s location, to an MDA dispatcher. The dispatcher then uses the system’s cellular connection to talk to the driver and send an ambulance if the driver is unresponsive or reports an injury.

eCall adds to the growing list of MDA’s emergency-response technologies. In 2016, MDA introduced its My MDA smartphone application, an innovation allowing users to call for emergency assistance, send their geolocation and preuploaded medical history to emergency personnel, and live stream photos and videos from the scene to the dispatcher.

My MDA’s video feed and command-and-control system allow dispatchers to make life or death decisions within seconds: Dispatchers immediately see the nature and scope of an incident, a patient’s vital medical information and location, and current traffic conditions for routing an ambulance.

From news reports

For news about Israel updated daily, log on to foi.org/news.
NETANYAHU: ‘IRAN LIED BIG TIME’

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu revealed Israel has obtained some 55,000 pages of documents and 55,000 files on 183 CDs proving Iran has a nuclear weapons program and lied about it. He also said the evidence has been shared with the United States.

“This is Israeli intelligence at its most extraordinary. . . . I expect this trove of documents will lead to a fundamental change in dealings with Iran’s nuclear buildup,” Daniel Pipes, president of the Middle East Forum, told JNS.

JNS.org

SAUDI PRINCE TO PA: PUT UP OR SHUT UP!

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said recently the Palestinian Authority (PA) should accept peace plans proposed by the United States or stop complaining. “In the last several decades, the Palestinian leadership has missed one opportunity after the other and rejected all peace proposals. It is about time the Palestinians take the proposals and agree to come to the negotiations table or shut up and stop complaining,” Salman told Jewish leaders in a closed-door meeting in New York, WorldIsraelNews.com reported.

Salman also recently stated that Israels and Palestinians have a right to their own land, distinguishing himself from most of the Arab world that denies Israel’s right to exist.

From news reports

NEW PAMPHLET DOCUMENTS NEO-NAZIS ON U.S. CAMPUSES

The David Horowitz Freedom Center recently published its newest pamphlet, SJF: Neo-Nazis on Campus, detailing the vehement anti-Semitism of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), a campus organization founded by the Muslim Brotherhood and funded by Hamas. SJP spreads lies about Israel on 200 college campuses across the United States.

“Members of SJP have been caught praising Hitler, calling for a second Holocaust, and wishing death upon Jews—all while spreading the propaganda of the terrorist group Hamas, whose stated mission is to exterminate the world Jewish population,” the Freedom Center reported.

The pamphlet includes the 2013 posts by former SJP activist Nancy Salem, who tweeted, “@DictatorHitler: How many Jews died in the Holocaust? Not enough,” and “Have a safe trip Lulu. . . . Kiss the Palestine ground for me and kill some jews!”

From news reports

UNHRC PASSES MORE ANTI-ISRAEL RESOLUTIONS

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) passed five more anti-Israel resolutions at its March meeting in Geneva. The resolutions call on member states not to sell military armaments to Israel; condemn Israel for committing what it considers human-rights abuses against Palestinians; and demand Israel give the Golan Heights to war-torn Syria, withdraw to the 1948 armistice lines, and cease building homes in Judea and Samaria.

U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley expressed America’s outrage at the UNHRC’s treatment of Israel and warned the United States would reconsider its membership in the body. “When the Human Rights Council treats Israel worse than North Korea, Iran, and Syria, it is the Council itself that is foolish and unworthy of its name,” said Haley.

From news reports

PA DEFIES UNITED STATES, REWARDS TERRORISTS

One week after the United States passed the Taylor Force Act, which discontinues financial aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) if it continues to pay terrorists, the PA openly defied the United States and released its 2018 budget, allotting $355 million to convicted terrorists and their families.

The budget’s release marks the first time since 2014 the PA admitted to rewarding terrorists, Palestinian Media Watch reported. The figure makes up 44 percent of the PA’s anticipated foreign aid funding for this year.

JNS.org

PA TV AIRS PHONY PHOTO

The Palestinian Authority’s television network, PA TV, recently aired an altered Holocaust photo that claimed the emaciated, dead bodies of Jews killed by the Nazis were Arabs killed by Jews in 1948.

The PA removed the striped concentration camp uniforms and American soldiers from the photo and claimed Jewish people put Arab women and children in ovens, UnitedWithIsrael.org reported. “PA TV altered the photo showing hundreds of dead bodies at the Nazi concentration camp at Nordhausen, originally a subcamp of Buchenwald, presenting the victims as ‘Arabs killed by Jews’ on April 9, 1948, in the Arab village of Deir Yassin,” UnitedWithIsrael.org reported.

PA TV also aired an interview the day before Israel’s Holocaust Memorial Day of Palestinian political analyst Hani Abu Zeid denying the Holocaust, JNS.org reported. “They [the Jews] used to cry about the false Holocaust in the days of Hitler, the scope of which was not that large” Zeid said. The PA TV host agreed, adding, “a lie they spread worldwide.”

From news reports

ARCHAEOLOGISTS DISCOVER ANCIENT ISAIAH SEAL

Israeli archaeologists have discovered an eighth-century BC clay seal with the words Belonging to Isaiah near Jerusalem’s Temple Mount. The seal also contains a partial word containing letters of the word prophet.

“We appear to have discovered a seal impression, which may have belonged to the prophet Isaiah, in a scientific, archaeological excavation,” said Hebrew University archaeologist Eilat Mazar. A grazing doe also appears on the seal, which is “a motif of blessing and protection found in Judah, particularly in Jerusalem,” according to Biblical Archaeology Review.

JNS.org
After two weeks in Canada, I am now home in Jerusalem. My flight back was fruitful, as I had a good conversation on the airplane with a friendly group of young Orthodox students who were flying to Israel for the first time. They were so happy and excited.

As it is written in Isaiah 49:6, "You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth." So I was determined to share with them about the Lord's salvation.

The group had many young people and a few older rabbis. As we started talking to one another, we formed a nice friendship. When they became more interested in learning about me, I began to talk about how I came to believe in the truth of God's Word.

I told them that when I started to read the Bible, I began to find the Lord our Savior, Yeshua Hamashiach, throughout the Scriptures. They were extremely surprised. "How can this be, that a Jew believes in Jesus?" one asked.

"You see," I said, "I do not read other books. I just read the Bible, where it is clearly written about the Lord." Then they asked me where the Bible mentions Him. I had been waiting for that question.

The rabbis, however, were not happy. "Enough for today!" one said, no longer so friendly.

"No way!" the young students responded. "This conversation is interesting. It is not every day we hear about such things," one said.

Then a student asked me, "If you say Jesus is written about in the Bible, why is He not written about in the Talmud?"

I answered him with another question: "Which book is more important? The Bible, which was written by the Holy Spirit of God, or commentaries like the Talmud, which were written by people?"

When the rabbis heard me mention the Holy Spirit, they became angry. One of them yelled to the group, "Do
not listen to him! He speaks about the Holy Spirit like those Christians!

“What do you have to say about that accusation?” one of the young boys asked me.

I opened my Bible to the Psalms and asked, “Does this book belong to us or to another faith?” They all replied Psalms is an important book in the Jewish Bible. “If so,” I said, “then read Psalm 51, and you will find that it speaks about the Holy Spirit, whom your rabbis are against.”

Then one of them read Psalm 51:11 aloud: “Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.”

“It is clearly written about the Holy Spirit,” I said. “Who was King David? Did he not belong to our nation, Israel? You sing many times ‘Messiah, Messiah ben David,’ and your rabbis so quickly forget all that is written in the Holy Bible. But they remember well all that is written in those many fictitious storybooks. You must remember that you belong to the nation of Israel, whom the Lord has chosen.”

I explained to them the Lord has instructed us as His Chosen People to bring His salvation to the Gentiles (cf. Isa. 49:3–6). “How shall we bring His salvation to them? With a big stack of commentaries or with the Holy Bible, written by the Holy Spirit of God?” They agreed we should use the Bible.

The rabbis were extremely unhappy, but they could not force me out since we were all in the air on an airplane. Then the students began to question the rabbis. One asked, “Why do you hide the full truth from us? Should we not go to people with the Bible, rather than with a big stack of books filled with stories? This man—who is not a rabbi—has believed according to the Bible.”

The rabbis were silent. Finally, one of them said, “As it is written in Deuteronomy, ‘Follow justice and justice alone’” (Dt. 16:20, NIV).

“Amen,” I responded.

Soon our flight came to an end. The young students told me it was the best flight they ever had, and they thanked me for helping them understand to whom they belong. The rabbis said nothing.

The Friends of Israel Archives,
November 2005
Jesus’ disciples were as anxious as we are today to know the timing of His return as King. “Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’”

In Matthew 24—25, Jesus delivered the well-known, but often misunderstood, Olivet Discourse to help ease the fear that this world will never know peace. Join us as we open the Scriptures and examine what Christ told His disciples regarding the future and the direction in which the world is moving.