EXCLUSIVE:
Ahmadinejad wants more than Israel. What he wants is you—Page 10

David M. Levy unveils God's glorious grace—Page 14

Salvation: So near and yet so far—Page 18

Plus:
The story of John Newton—Page 24
How to become righteous—Page 28
Three men who survived torture for Christ—Page 31
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Is Intentionally
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In This Issue

‘People Just Want Nice.’ Oh, Really?
by Elwood McQuaid .................................10
When will we learn that some people don’t care about “nice” and that annihilating Israel is merely the warm-up to something far more nefarious?

God’s Glorious Grace
by David M. Levy .................................14
God’s grace comes to us in many forms. Each has a special purpose, and each provides a particular blessing.

So Near and Yet So Far
by Marshall Wicks .................................18
Can a person grow up in a Christian home, hear the gospel every week, and still not be a Christian? Absolutely, as Marshall’s fascinating story will reveal.

Saved by Amazing Grace: The Story of John Newton
by Bruce Scott .................................24
Most people know him as the godly writer of “Amazing Grace.” But Newton’s life was far from godly before the Lord saved him and changed him forever.

Road to Righteousness
by Richard D. Emmons .................................28
Why can’t good deeds and the Law get you to heaven? If you think you don’t need Jesus, this article is especially for you.

About the Issue

The cover of this issue, created by Art Director Tom Williams, tells the whole story of the content you are about to enjoy—and that we hope you’ll share with others. Our authors will escort you through the essentials of the Christian faith: sin, the holiness of God, salvation, and the unfathomable depths of His loving grace. You’ll learn why being a church-going Gentile does not a Christian make. Steve Herzig explains why the Jewish concept of atonement has changed. And Elwood McQuaid’s ever-insightful analysis of the world scene reveals why political niceties don’t cut it when you’re dealing with Islam. Finally, to encourage your heart, we give you the inspiring story of Sir John Newton, whose hymn “Amazing Grace” has blessed millions. Enjoy! (Digital composition, Thomas E. Williams)

Also Featuring

From Bill Sutter’s Desk .................................4
Eye on the Middle East .................................5
Editorial .................................6
Getting Down to Business .................................8
They Cry in Silence .................................9
Solving the Sin Problem .................................13
Stories Behind Great Hymns .................................21, 30
Gospel Message Chart .................................22
Pulled Into Heaven .................................27
The Price of Faith .................................31
A Better Sacrifice .................................32
Promoted to Glory .................................33
The Book of Jonah .................................34
The Foundations of Faith .................................36
One God, Three Entities .................................38
Israel in the News .................................40
Netanyahu Gives U.S. Five Years at Most .................................41
Zvi .................................42

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We have experienced a little taste of heaven on earth." This comment, shared toward the end of our recent Christian/Jewish journey to Israel, struck a responsive cord in all our hearts as we prepared to return home. The congeniality within the group went far beyond anything anyone had ever experienced.

We visited numerous biblical sites and sailed on the Sea of Galilee where we recounted many of Jesus’ miracles and God’s promises to the Jewish people, through whom He has blessed the entire world in fulfillment of key texts in Genesis 12, 15, and 17. And we saw how His promises will never be voided but are everlasting, according to Psalm 105:10–12.

As Christians, we also expressed our personal appreciation to our Jewish friends for all God has given to us through them, particularly the Bible as God’s Word and Jesus as our Savior.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, our cohost, Alan Respler, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Southern New Jersey, declared: “No one can come to Jerusalem without being transformed!” Then he quoted Psalm 122:8–9: “For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, ‘Peace be within you.’ Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good.” We were experiencing firsthand the city so close to the Lord’s heart, the incomparable Jerusalem.

Overlooking the Valley of Jezreel, site of the future Battle of Armageddon, we read from Revelation, Joel, and Zechariah, observing how Armageddon and related biblical end-times campaigns are, in part, the Lord’s judgment on the godless Gentile nations for the horrific way they have treated His ancient people. The “big story,” yet future, is that Messiah will rescue the Jewish people; and they will lead the world in worshiping the Lord from Jerusalem.

We also visited Lior and Ita Applebaum in their home near Haifa. Lior and Ita are former emissaries from Israel to the South Jersey Jewish community. During Israel’s war with Hezbollah last summer, Lior led a military unit into southern Lebanon. He told us that when the Israeli soldiers there found their supply lines cut and their rations depleted, they received permission from the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to enter Lebanese homes from which residents had fled. They took only what was needed and slept only on the floors, not in the beds. Before leaving, they cleaned up after themselves and left messages for the homeowners, explaining how to file a claim for reimbursement from the IDF.

Later on the tour we gathered in a peaceful alcove at the Garden Tomb. First we focused on the significance of the date, November 9, the 68th anniversary of Kristallnacht, the “Night of Broken Glass.” A Jewish day-school teacher described the horrors of that night in 1938 when the Germans destroyed more than 1,600 synagogues throughout the country and smashed and ransacked Jewish stores and homes. Jews were beaten to death in the streets, and 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up by the government and shipped to concentration camps.

Then our evangelical contingent observed communion, explaining why, as Bible-believing Christians, we could never blame the Jewish people for Christ’s death. We read from John 10 how Jesus went to the
her toward the circle of condemned women. The scene was enough to tear the heart out of anyone compelled to witness the atrocity. But there it was, for all to see—a fulfillment of the prime minister’s words. Doomed are they who entertain a false illusion of peace and mercy at the hands of their enemies. The fact is, peace and mercy never arrive. And concessions to tyrants are never a way to obtain them. Strangely, however, it is the consistent illusion of the West that concessions, accompanied by expressions of benevolence and goodwill, ultimately will initiate a new sense of civility from propagators of violence, mayhem, and malevolence. It doesn’t work that way—not in the real world.

Fortunately, there are those who, like the prophets of old, tell us the truth. When someone threatens to kill you, believe it. I learned this reality in the early days of my ministry as a pastor. When someone says he is going to commit suicide or some other act of violence, believe him. This is especially true in the environment of the Middle East. Hamas members say they exist to annihilate Israel. Believe them. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad says he intends to incinerate Israel and its Jews. Believe him.

The great failure of Western politicians prior to World War II was their refusal to face the facts, hiding instead beneath a “peace in our time” illusion. We can no longer indulge such fiction. To be tired is understandable. We are all tired of war, conflict, and sacrifice—no more so than is Israel. But to give cause to our enemies to view our condition as a terminal weakness is not only surrender; it is treason. Furthermore, it violates every sacrifice made by every patriot—American, Israeli, and others—who gave their last measure for freedom.

This is a battle we must not lose. Or else, as the prime minister said, we are doomed.

**Endnotes**

1 “Address by PM at the Memorial Ceremony at Grunewald Train Station in Berlin,” Prime Minister’s Office <pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Communication/PMSpeaks/speechgru121206.htm>.

2 “JCPA Middle East Briefing: Remarks by Israel’s Vice Prime Minister Ehud Olmert,” United Jewish Communities, June 22, 2005 <ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=155321>.

by Elwood McQuaid
So Much for the Divine Spark

That was then and this is now.

Most of us have had such sentiments thrown at us when we’ve lamented the current state of affairs and extolled the virtues of the “good old days.” Well, since the genocidal Saddam Hussein was snatched from among us at the end of a rope, I’ve been giving the viewpoint some thought. Is society ascending or descending? Are we moving forward or backward?

Several decades ago two ideas surfaced that have become staples of what some have coined the post-Christian era. The first notion wafted to us from the minds of liberal theologians who, finding sin and depravity decidedly discomfiting, concluded that within every man and woman there resides a divine spark that renders all people essentially “good at heart.” All that is needed to fan the spark into a flame of virtue and magnanimity is encouragement. And voilà! Natural goodness bursts to the surface.

Darwinian evolutionists promoted the second notion: that through a process of natural selection, everything evolves upward toward an eventual state of functional perfection. All of this occurs outside the stultifying strictures of biblical restraints and moral refinements.

So within the halls of liberal seminaries, and then passed along to pew sitters, was the prevailing conviction that “every day, in every way, I’m getting better and better.” Such chest-thumping appraisals of the human condition eventually morphed into the popular mantra, “I’m okay, you’re okay.” Evolutionists kept pace by inventing formulas derived from the tadpole-to-frog phenomenon and applying them to old bones to “prove” the existence of an ever-evolving natural and social environment.

Yet the pestiferous question arises: Were the “good old days” better or worse than today? According to liberal theologians and atheistic evolutionists, the answer must be that the “better” is now and the best is on the way.

Since Jewish people recently celebrated the Feast of Esther (Purim), it may contribute clarity to the Bible, history, and the evening news to read the book of Esther and give some thought to the sentiment that “that was then and this is now.”

The events recorded in Esther transpired in the fifth century B.C. in Persia, modern-day Iran. During the reign of Persian King Ahasuerus, an aide to the king—Haman—hatched a plot to exterminate the Jewish people in all of the 127 provinces of an empire that spanned from India to ancient Ethiopia.

Haman’s wrath against the Jews was precipitated by Mordecai, a Jewish man who refused to bow before the egocentric, megalomanic politician. So Haman wrangled a decree from the king, condemning to death “all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day” (Est. 3:13). His feigned justification for committing this colossal atrocity was that Mordecai’s people were different from all the others; they did not keep the king’s laws and, therefore, were desirably expendable.

But God had providentially placed a Jewess, Esther, in the palace. Through her, the plot was uncovered. Wicked Haman was hung on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, and the Jewish people were given a holiday.

What is striking about the story is that virtually every aspect of it is currently taking place in the very land where the drama of Esther occurred more than two millennia ago.

Because he hates Israel and its Jewish people, the 21st-century Haman, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, almost daily vows to destroy the Jewish nation—every man, woman, and child—in a single day and with the most devastating device available: a nuclear weapon. Although penetrating the mind of a madman is an insuperable challenge, we can deduce at least one of his motives: Israel and its 6 million Jews stand between Ahmadinejad and the throne of a global caliphate that he envisions for himself. Like Mordecai of old, Israel will not bow before the Persian despot or surrender and accept servile dhimmi status under Islam.

There are two things we must remember: (1) Despite what liberal pseudotheologians and their evolutionist sidekicks claim, God is on His throne, and His infallible Word is still relevant. (2) As with Saddam Hussein, Haman had a noose awaiting him. What form Ahmadinejad’s noose will take is as yet unknown. But of this we can be sure: Israel will not perish at his hand in a day. Israel has a future; her oppressors do not.

Haman was then. Ahmadinejad is now. And there is little difference between the two.

Progressive, evolutionary, ever-upward theory turned into a secularist religion is humbug. History is not on an interminable upward curve. Pure evil is ever afoot on this planet. And rather than being good at heart, “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21).

So much for the divine spark.
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Once, when walking down a certain street in Chicago, evangelist D. L. Moody stepped up to a man, a perfect stranger to him, and said, “Sir, are you a Christian?”

“You mind your own business,” was the reply.

Mr. Moody replied, “This is my business.”

The man said, “Well, then, you must be Moody.”

One time Moody was going to Milwaukee, and in the seat that he had chosen sat a traveling man. Mr. Moody sat down beside him and immediately began to talk with him. “Where are you going?” Mr. Moody asked. When told the name of the town, he said, “We will soon be there; we’ll have to get down to business at once. Are you saved?”

The man said that he was not, and Mr. Moody took out his Bible and there on the train showed him the way of salvation. Then he said, “Now, you must take Christ.” The man did; he was converted right there on the train.

—R. A. Torrey, Why God Used D. L. Moody
A 24-year-old man known only as Hasanuddin has admitted planning the savage, October 2005 beheadings of three Christian girls in Poso, Indonesia, as a “gift” to Muslims in celebration of Idul Fitri, the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

The girls were ambushed as they walked to school. Their severed heads were wrapped in black plastic bags, one of which was deposited on the steps of a church. The two other heads were left near a police station. Another girl was seriously injured but survived.

According to a report from Compass Direct News, Hasanuddin, one of three Muslim extremists on trial for the murders, was charged under the antiterrorism law. If convicted, he could face the death penalty. He told prosecutors the attacks were revenge “to seek justice for our brothers and sisters who have been sadistically and inhumanly slaughtered.” The defendants claim they were avenging Muslims who died during the interfaith clashes in the eastern province of Central Sulawesi between 1998 and 2001, reported Compass Direct.

Hasanuddin expressed his sorrow at murdering the girls, according to a newspaper article: “With honesty and sincerity coming from my heart, I ask for forgiveness from the families of the victims. I promise to never repeat it again.”

If saying “I promise to never repeat it again” seems to be too little too late, the response of some of the parents of the victims was timely and a surprise to many onlookers. In the Muslim world, such an atrocity demands revenge. What is not expected is forgiveness, which is exactly what was extended to the killers.

Compass Direct said Asia News has reported that the parents of the three girls met with Hasanuddin and his accomplices in November 2006 and that all three said they had repented and were sorry.

“The mother of one of the girls in return said that she was ready to pardon them. The families embraced the terrorists and shook hands as a sign of peace,” Compass Direct reported.

The act of forgiveness, unknown in so many countries when violent crimes are committed, is one thing that separates true Christianity from other religions. And it is one reason why the testimony of persecuted Christians so often makes a powerful impact on the persecutors.

Muslim converts to Christianity tell how they were taught from childhood to hate Jewish people, Christians, and especially Israel. This unfortunate truth has been borne out by young Arabs, indoctrinated in the ways of jihad, who commit suicide bombings inside Israel. It mystifies them when they discover that their sworn enemies operate entirely differently, and that they do so because of the love and forgiveness they have found in Christ. It was Jesus who taught His disciples in this way:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who spitefully use you and persecute you (Mt. 5:43-44).

So when the mother of a teenage daughter embraces and forgives the man who mutilated her child, she is manifesting the teachings of Jesus. And in a most wonderful way, she is expressing what the Holy Spirit has placed in her heart.
The issue on the table during a discussion by prominent talk show hosts was the situation in the Middle East and how to solve the problems there that seem to go on forever. With a sigh of resignation, one of the talking heads said he is convinced, “People just want nice.”

That may seem like a great idea to those who are weary of war, but unless the guys on the other side of the guns, bombs, and nuclear warheads “just want nice,” too, it is a philosophy without foundation. As a
Sounds a Lot Like Hitler

Comparing Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Adolf Hitler is not a right-wing, knee-jerk leap into hysteria. For starters, Ahmadinejad denies the historicity of the Holocaust that sent 6 million Jewish victims to the gas chambers in Europe, yet he salivates over his dream of creating a holocaust of his own. Ironically, 6 million Jews now live in Israel.

Furthermore, Islam strikingly embraces the idea of continuity. More than 60 years ago, Hitler began his rampage of death in Europe, and Jews were the cause célèbre for his extermination plan. Today we are witnessing, not the beginning of a new thing, but another chapter in the continuing saga of the Holocaust epic. What the Nazis began, the Iranians aspire to consummate.

But annihilating the Jewish state is merely a warm-up. Although the lynchpin of Ahmadinejad’s crusade is a first-strike success against his near neighbor Israel, the next move is westward to Europe and then on to finish off the hated United States.

To accomplish his objectives, Ahmadinejad plans to establish an Islamic caliphate across the Fertile Crescent in the Middle East. And contrary to what many would have us believe, he is well on his way toward accomplishing that objective.

Casting the Net

Recently a famous evangelical pastor went to Syria for a sit-down with President (dictator) Bashar Assad and his henchmen in Damascus. Four erroneous conclusions were widely reported following the meetings:

(1) There is no persecution of Christians in Syria. Christians compose about 10 percent of Syria’s population of 17.1 million, the rest of which is Muslim. Although Christians enjoy a modicum of freedom, Muslims who convert to Christianity are persecuted. Furthermore, Christian Solidarity International reported, “The historical process of Islamization has transformed Syria’s once thriving Christian majority into a small frightened community. . . . Sunday sermons in churches are routinely monitored by the secret police. Violence against Christians often goes unpunished.”

Amir Taheri, writing in The Jerusalem Post, cautioned that trouble may lie ahead for all Syrians:

Today, [Syrians] may well have much to worry about. For there are signs that the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to export its ideology to Syria. Teheran believes that only an Islamicized Syria would be a dependable ally in driving the U.S. out of the Middle East, wiping Israel off the map, and creating a new Islamic “superpower” with Iran as its “core component.”

The influx of Iranian ideology, mosques, and imams who preach their hatred of all things not radically Islamist could be lethal for Syria’s Christians.

(2) There is no persecution of Jews in Syria. Fewer than 100 Jewish people remain in Syria. Many who survived the severe persecution of earlier times have fled. Members of this sliver-like remnant of what was once a thriving population are not allowed to hold public office. Only two synagogues remain in Damascus. It is also worth noting that today some 40,000 Syrian Jews make their homes in Brooklyn, New York.

(3) There is no evidence of extremism. The fact is that the U.S. State Department certifies Syria as actively supporting terrorism and political extremism. According to Israel Defense Forces military sources, weapons are being smuggled daily to Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon through Syria; and all fingers point to the Syrians in the deaths of two prominent Christian/anti-Syrian/anti-Hezbollah Lebanese leaders, Pierre Gemayel and Rafik Hariri.

The infiltration of Iranian religious, military, economic, and political influence confirms the State Department’s appraisal. For example, Bashar Assad has granted 41 Iran-based charities permission to operate in Syria. These use the models of Hezbollah and Hamas by providing services that induce the public to see Iranians as benefactors.

matter of fact, the attitude might foreshadow the mood that will mark the last-days decline of Western civilization as we have known it.

Let’s face it: If an advocate of the just-want-nice consortium walked down one of America’s mean, big-city, thugs-infested streets at 2 A.M. flashing a wallet full of money, we know what the outcome would be. The power of positive thinking simply wouldn’t cut it. A couple of cops would work much better.

Regrettably, we now live in a global, bad neighborhood. Israelis have lived there for nearly 60 years and have watched the deterioration spread to the suburbs, as witnessed by 9/11 and the bombings in the subways of London and the streets of Madrid.

Look at Iran. When have you heard a leader in the international fraternity repeatedly declare his intention to execute genocide on an entire nation—that nation, of course, being Israel? The only thing preventing him is that, so far, he lacks the means. But it is a grave error to write off his bellicosity as mere claptrap spewed by a little man shooting off his mouth. Nor is it wise to indulge the fantasy of the just-want-nicers, who naïvely believe that reasonable discourse and Western incentives will change his heart and win the day.
Matthew A. Levitt, senior fellow and director of Terrorism Studies at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, thoroughly documented that “Hezbollah uses charities and front organizations to conceal its fundraising activities, although it is less reliant on charities than groups like Hamas due to its annual subsidies from Iran and significant involvement in criminal enterprises.”

(4) There is no sponsorship of terrorism. The Syrian government provides material and political support to both Hezbollah and Hamas. During the recent war with Israel, Syria permitted Iran to use Damascus as a transshipment point to resupply Hezbollah terrorist forces operating in Lebanon.

It is well known that the external leadership of major terrorist organizations is headquartered in Damascus. A prime example is Hamas, whose power-wielding leaders issue orders from Damascus. Hamas leaders in Gaza operate under direct orders from their bosses in Damascus.

Syria is rapidly becoming an instrument in the Iranian plan to impose hegemony over the entire Middle East land arch known as the Fertile Crescent. It seeks to establish an Islamic regime that will immediately include Iran, Syria, and Lebanon and that eventually will engulf the entire region.

Of primary concern is the obsession to eliminate the State of Israel and then subjugate Europe, as well as the United States. In the Gaza Strip and areas of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), Iran and its allies already have foot soldiers in the ranks of Hamas and other terrorist groups, which are preparing for a new war with Israel. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is casting a net. Syria and major sectors in Lebanon are already ensnared. And in the minds of the Islamists in Lebanon, the global caliphate that U.S. President George W. Bush warned us about is just over the horizon.

Understanding these countries’ declared intentions is essential in dealing with the world situation. Syria is a notable example.

The Big Question

A question frequently asked by Christians, who see things deteriorating at an accelerated pace, is “Where are we with respect to the last days and the intervention of God by the coming of the Messiah—first in the Rapture and then in the Second Advent?”

Of course, no one knows the precise answer to that question. Every prognosticator for the past 2,000 years has been embarrassingly wrong. God has chosen not to reveal the date, only to tell us to be mindful of His coming, discerning about the “times and seasons,” and busy about the Lord’s business while we have the opportunity. We can, however, make some general and legitimate observations in view of what He has told us in the prophetic Word and what we see on the stage of human events.

First, there is the West’s unwillingness to confront enemies that are determined to destroy us. Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu raised a warning flag about the situation in Israel, which seems applicable to the climate that is becoming all too prevalent in nations under attack. Speaking of Hamas’s current preparations for war against Israel, he stated:

“The time has come for us to draw conclusions. We can’t close our eyes and say, “I’m showing restraint, everything’s okay.” Everything is not okay. . . . Our policy has stopped [its aggressive approach] toward Hamas and those who announce that they will destroy [us], and continue to arm themselves. . . . If you think that the correct policy is to sit and shake their hands, I think otherwise. For the sake of security, we have to act. . . . A policy of restraint is a bad thing, and it is necessary to act against bad things while they are still small, not once they’ve gotten bigger.4

Diplomats today appear to be rushing to sit down and shake hands with terrorists, to “talk” with them, and concede to their demands.

After all, “people just want nice,” right? Unfortunately, nice means “surrender.” Surrender is exactly what we’re talking about. The true test of the times is not whether we are capable of dealing with our enemies; it is whether we have the will—the right stuff—to do what must be done. If the will of the West becomes a will-o’-the-wisp fantasy, it will invite defeat and open the door to the Antichrist.

Furthermore, events in the Middle East are beginning to shape the picture. To deny Ahmadinejad’s attempt to stitch together an Iran-Syria-Lebanon-Hamas axis of evil against Israel, America, and Europe is to labor at missing the point. Islamists feel they are on a roll, and they are not going to disappear with the signing of a few paper promises.

And then there is Russia. Russia is a major supplier of the technology to create nuclear capability in Iran. Russia can also be credited with consistently blocking efforts to impose UN sanctions on the Ahmadinejad cartel.

Before the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, a close associate of then Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin was asked whether Begin believed Ezekiel 38—39 regarding an end-times invasion of Israel led from the far north and supported by Muslim nations that included Persia (Iran). The answer was that he did indeed. In fact, it was Mr. Begin’s belief, said his aide, that the invaders would be led by Russia.

In a nutshell, when you combine the apparent decline of the Western world’s will with the rise of belligerents in the neighborhood and beyond, you arrive at one conclusion: The Lord is coming, and the sooner the better.

ENDNOTES


Elwood McQuaid is executive editor for The Friends of Israel.
Solving the Sin Problem

by Steve Herzig

We believe that sin is anything that does not conform to the character and nature of God. We believe that all mankind sinned in Adam, the head of the human race, and that each human being has a sin nature and also has committed personal sin.

So reads The Friends of Israel’s doctrinal statement. Although sin entered the world through Adam and Eve, the knowledge of sin came through the Mosaic Law given to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. With the Law came the Tabernacle and later the Temple, where people could bring sacrifices to deal with their sin. But neither of those is around today. Consequently, the Jewish concept of sin has changed dramatically.

The biblical words translated “sin” are chet in Hebrew and hamartia in Greek. Both communicate the idea of missing the bull’s-eye of a target. In theology, the target is the righteousness of God. If you are not as good as God, you are a sinner. The Bible also describes behavior that “misses the mark” as transgression, rebellion, error, wickedness, ungodliness, and lawlessness.

Most Jewish people today do not view sin with such precision. While many Orthodox Jews see sin as simply choosing to break God’s law, more “modern” Jewish thinkers would say it is the breaking of civil laws. Yet many readily accept sin’s reality and the need to help people deal with it. Wrote Rabbi Morris Kertzer, “A postscript to every Jew’s life, uttered at his gravesite, are the words: ‘For there liveth no man on earth who is so righteous that he sinneth not.’”

The Concept of Kedushah

The Torah (Five Books of Moses) makes it clear that God chose the Jewish people as His own. With such privilege also came great responsibility. Unlike Adam, who was given one command, the Jewish people were given 613. The first 365 are negative (“you shall not”), while the second 248 are positive (“you shall”).

The commands cover laws regarding man’s relationship with God and man’s relationship with man. Breaking or disobeying any one of them constitutes missing the mark of a holy God.

Adam and Eve’s disobedience resulted in their separation from God’s presence in the Garden of Eden and their ultimate death. Orthodox Judaism possesses a strong conviction about separation. The Hebrew word kadosh is often translated as “holy.” That is why observant Jewish people (by far the minority today) emphasize living holy, or separate, lives. God’s holiness is emphasized; it cannot commune with sin. The clean and unclean cannot exist together. God told the Jewish people, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2).

When Moses stood before the burning bush, God told him to remove his sandals because he was standing on holy ground (Ex. 3:5). Moses’ disobedience of striking the rock rather than speaking to it to receive water in the wilderness separated him from the promise of entering the land he was leading the Israelites to possess (Num. 20:12).

This reminder of separation is incorporated into the Kedushah (sanctification) prayer: “I will be hallowed [treated as holy] among the children of Israel” (Lev. 22:32).

Many items in the Bible are called “holy” or “sanctified,” including the Ark of the Covenant, the priests’ garments, the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and Temple, the Sabbath, and the “holy convocations” (feasts). These were all set apart for God’s purpose and were, therefore, to be separate, pure, clean, and without spot. Any defilement rendered them unacceptable to God.

The widest of all separations came when Adam and Eve’s sin cost them their intimate fellowship with God and eternal life on Earth. They were consigned to go from dust to dust—to return to the ground from which they were taken (Gen. 3:19). Or, as the prophet Ezekiel wrote, “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4).

From Temple to Al Chet

From the giving of the Law until A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed the second Temple in Jerusalem, the redress for sin was through a substitutionary blood sacrifice, as specified in the Torah. Today, during Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), many Jewish people spend all day praying, fasting (on Yom Kippur), and begging God to forgive their sins.

Reciting a prayer called Al Chet (“For the sins which I have sinned”), the congregation cries out in unison to God for forgiveness. The liturgy lists such sins as lying, cheating, bribery, covetousness, and pride.

This change from Temple sacrifice to prayers of repentance is summed up in the Talmud in Midrash Avot D’Rabbi Nathan 4:5:

Once, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai was walking with his disciple, Rabbi Y’hoshea, near Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple. Rabbi Y’hoshea looked at the Temple ruins and said “Alas for us!! The place that atoned for the sins of the people Israel lies in ruins!”

Then Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai spoke to him these words of comfort: ‘Be not grieved, my son. There is another equally meritorious way of gaining ritual atonement, even though the Temple is

continued on page 26
Almost 100 years ago, Julia H. Johnson penned the words to a hymn titled “Grace Greater Than Our Sin.” Her fourth stanza aptly sums up God’s grace:

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, 
freely bestowed on all who believe; 
You that are longing to see His face, 
will you this moment His grace receive?

We who receive God’s grace through Jesus Christ realize it truly is marvelous and matchless. But what is meant by the term God’s grace?

**God’s Grace Defined**

The dictionary defines grace as “the unmerited favor of God toward man.” Although the definition is true, it is incomplete. Grace is an attribute of God, a part of His character, which He expresses through His goodness to undeserving, sinful humanity.

A holy God is under no obligation to bestow grace on sinners, but He does so as He chooses. He demonstrates His grace by extending His favor, mercy, and love to meet man’s need. Since God’s character is one of grace, He is kindly disposed to bestow His grace spontaneously on sinful humanity in our time of suffering. God’s grace can be defined as “that intrinsic quality of God’s being or essence by which He is spontaneously favorable in His disposition and actions” to bestow unmerited favor, love, and mercy on whom He chooses among undeserving humanity.1

**God’s Grace Declared**

God’s grace is revealed throughout the Bible in three stages. First, God exhibited His goodness and grace by showing mercy, favor, and love to all men in general but to Israel in particular. Second, God expressed, or exhibited, His grace more clearly through Jesus Christ, who came to earth to pay for man’s sin through His sacrificial death on the cross. Third, God’s grace
provides salvation and sanctification for all who put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

In the Septuagint, an ancient translation of the Old Testament into Greek, the term for “grace” is charis, meaning “grace or unmerited favor.” The Jewish Scriptures have no Hebrew equivalent. The Hebrew words for charis are chanan or chen, translated as “grace,” “favor,” or “mercy.”

These two Hebrew words are used in the Old Testament to depict the same meaning as charis: (1) showing mercy to the poor (Prov. 14:31); (2) providing mercy to those who call on God in time of trouble (Ps. 41:6; 62:31); (3) extending favor to Israel in Egypt (Ex 3:21; 11:3; 12:36); and (4) bestowing His grace on individuals, such as Noah (Gen. 6:8), Joseph (39:21), Moses (Ex. 33:12, 17), and Gideon (Jud. 6:17). In addition, God’s grace will be poured out on Israel at the time of its salvation (Zech. 12:10).

Other Hebrew words, such as racham or rachamim (“mercy”) and chesed (“loving-kindness”), are also used—often together—to express God’s grace (Ex. 34:6; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2). Grace, love, and mercy are expressed in God’s covenant with King David, which was extended to his son Solomon even after Solomon sinned later in life (2 Sam. 7:1–17).

God did not bestow His love and mercy on Israel because of any merit within the nation. God chose Israel as His treasured possession through a pure act of grace (Dt. 7:6–9).

Grace and mercy are also manifested to entire nations. The Lord graciously delivered Israel from Egypt, provided for the nation during its wilderness wanderings, and gave it the land of Canaan. The prophet Hosea’s love for his wife, Gomer, who was a prostitute, illustrated God’s grace and mercy for Israel. Although Gomer was an unfaithful wife, Hosea showed her grace, mercy, and love when he bought her back from the slave market. She was a type of Israel being redeemed from sin.

By God’s grace, Nineveh was spared from destruction when this ungodly city repented of its sin at the preaching of Jonah.

The New Testament concept of grace finds a sharper, richer, and fuller expression in the Greek word charis, which occurs at least 170 times. God’s grace takes on a whole new personal dimension and visible demonstration in the redemptive words and works of Jesus Christ’s ministry to mankind. What better evidence of God’s grace can be shown than in that of salvation?

It is God who, in His goodness and grace, took the initiative to bring salvation to man after Adam’s fall. His grace is manifested to mankind in two primary ways.

(1) Common Grace. Common grace speaks of God’s unmerited favor, love, and providential care extended to all of depraved humanity, whereby He showers general blessings on saved and unsaved alike (Ps. 145:8–9). God restrains His wrath against sinful humanity, giving a nation or individual time to repent—which is an extension of the Lord’s common grace.

Common grace is also seen in the work of the Holy Spirit, who exercises sway over the heart of a person, convicting and convincing that individual of his or her need for salvation through Jesus Christ (Jn. 16:8–11).

(2) Special Grace. The second way God manifests His favor is through special grace, commonly referred to as efficacious, effectual, or saving grace. God’s grace is efficacious in that it produces salvation in the life of the elected individual who puts faith in the death of Christ on the cross and in His shed blood for the remission of his sins. Efficacious grace is experienced when God, through the Holy Spirit, irresistibly works in the mind and heart of a person so that the individual freely chooses to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior.
Believers are called, not according to their own works, but according to God’s purpose and grace (2 Tim. 1:9). Paul is a classic illustration of God’s efficacious call. He was called, not according to his own will, but according to God’s will (1 Cor. 1:1). In fact, he was trying to destroy the church until the moment of his conversion, which came through God’s grace (Acts 9).

God’s Grace Demonstrated

God’s grace is manifested in a number of ways in the life of a believer.

**Saving Grace.** The word salvation is an all-encompassing term. It refers to God’s redemptive act, whereby He redeems the individual presently from the penalty and power of sin and will deliver the believer from the presence of sin at his glorification. Salvation is a free gift from God, bestowed on an individual by grace through faith, apart from any work or merit on the part of the person receiving it. At the time of salvation, unmerited grace and the believer’s faith are gifts that come directly from the Lord to those who put faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8–9).

Salvation grace, offered in this dispensation, encompasses every aspect of God’s redemptive work for the believer and includes redemption, propitiation, justification, forgiveness, sanctification, reconciliation, and glorification for the one who puts faith in Christ.

**Sanctifying Grace.** The moment a person receives Christ, he or she is sanctified by God’s grace. The word sanctification means, “to make holy” or “set apart unto God” for a sacred purpose or use. The Bible speaks of people, places, days, and inanimate objects being set apart unto God. With respect to an individual, sanctification may be defined as the work of God’s free grace through the Holy Spirit, whereby He sets the believer apart to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Scripture mentions three stages of sanctification by God’s grace. First is positional sanctification, referring to a believer’s holy standing before God on the basis of his redemption through Christ.

Second is progressive sanctification, whereby the believer is in the process of being sanctified through God’s Word (Jn. 17:17). Believers are commanded to “grow in grace” (2 Pet. 3:18) and, in so doing, are recipients of the Lord’s unmerited favor. Growth in grace is not acquired naturally but takes place through the study of God’s Word (2 Pet. 1:2–3, 5–6, 8). As a believer grows in grace, the fruit of the Spirit is manifested through his or her life (Gal. 5:22–23), bringing the person in conformity to the likeness of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

Third is perfected sanctification, which believers will experience when they receive their glorified bodies, completing their redemption (Rom. 8:30; Eph. 5:27). This event will take place at the Rapture of the church (1 Cor. 15:51–52; 1 Th. 4:16–17).

**Serving Grace.** The word gift (Greek, charis; “gift of grace”) refers to a favor one receives freely, without meriting it. God, through the Holy Spirit, has provided supernatural spiritual gifts to equip and enable each believer for ministry within the local church. There is not merely one gift but diversities of spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to believers (Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–11; Eph. 4:7, 11–12; 1 Pet. 4:11).

Believers have “gifts differing according to the grace that is given” by God (Rom. 12:6). Some believers have a multitude of gifts; others, only one or two. These gifts, or graces, are not natural gifts, talents, or abilities, but divinely provided gifts operating through the believer for edifying the body of Christ, thus bringing glory to God.

A believer is to communicate to others with grace in the use of his gift. Paul said, “Let your speech always be with grace” (Col. 4:6). When it came to Paul’s service for the Lord, he was equipped, not by his own power, but by the grace of God bestowed upon him. Paul said, “I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

**Suffering Grace.** Suffering is part of the human condition because of sin, aging of the body, disobedience to the Lord, or God’s chastening. Paul had a “thorn in the flesh” (physical ailment) that he appealed to God three times to remove. With each request, the same answer was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). In other words, God’s grace was sufficient to strengthen Paul in his physical need, so he could bear it. The same is true for believers today. God provides sufficient grace to strengthen us through any trial, temptation, or time of suffering.

Paul summed it up well when he wrote, “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). That says it all. With the hymn writer we sing, “Marvelous, infinite, and matchless” is God’s amazing grace.

ENDNOTE


David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
cross of His own accord. His death as the final atonement for me, my family, friends, neighbors, and everyone in the entire world was God’s plan. Our service emphasized our deep appreciation and thankfulness for Christ’s provision of our personal salvation. Closing with Alfred Ackley’s hymn “He Lives,” our voices rang out into the oncoming dusk of late afternoon in Jerusalem:

I serve a risen Savior, He’s in the world today; I know that He is living, whatever men may say; I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer, And just the time I need Him He’s always near.

This unique trip intertwined our lives and bestowed on us all the blessings of enduring friendship. We believe the Lord was pleased with our journey and with the relationships that continue.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.


“Salvation is not a reward for the righteous; it’s a gift for the guilty.”

—Adrian Rogers, late pastor of the 29,000-member Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. Dr. Rogers led the conservative resurgence within the Southern Baptist Convention when he was first elected president in 1979.
As a professor of Bible and theology for an evangelistic organization, I’ve had opportunities to hear many personal testimonies. Over the 26 years I have worked for Word of Life Bible Institute, I have been impressed by how many of our students were born into Christian families but did not become Christians themselves until later in life. That theme resonates with me because it was my story, too. I was born into a devoutly Christian home in Halifax, Nova Scotia. But like the ancient Israelites, I suffered from unbelief.

I cannot remember a time that my four brothers and my sister and I were not getting dressed, having our hair slicked down, and being marched off to one church service or another. And go to church we did. Dad was not content with attending all the services at our church; whenever there were special services at another church, we were there as well.

For many years we didn’t own a car, and I was mortified to be seen in my Sunday best, marching 20 or 30 minutes to church. However, my glee at getting a car was short-lived. Dad started a “bus” ministry before such a thing was even popular. We picked people up on the way, and then Dad made a couple of additional runs to pick up more families for the service. We had to leave home even earlier than when we walked.

It would be great if I could explain away my rejection of the gospel by claiming that it was not preached, but that wasn’t the case. Service after service I heard the simple plan of salvation: that I was a sinner and that Jesus was God who came to Earth to bear my sin, take my punishment, and set me free.

At first I went forward at least once a month to accept Jesus as my Savior. But it never seemed to take. I was such a rascal that I knew I was in big trouble with God. But I never seemed to get converted; I never really became a Christian.

Like so many whose testimonies I have heard, I merely grew colder and colder to the Lord. I grew to hate Christianity and all it stood for. The more I tried to be good and please God, the more I failed. The task seemed overwhelming; and the benefits seemed minimal, if not nonexistent.

In my teen years, my life spiraled out of control. I left home; got involved with the drug culture; and was soon jobless, homeless, and living on the streets of Toronto.

A Near-Fatal Choice

It still amazes me that a person can grow up with all the opportunities I had and yet reject the gospel. How did I not get it? I saw what alcohol did to other families. I saw broken homes and shattered lives. I saw how Christ had made a difference in our home; but, mysteriously, nothing registered.
The apostle Paul marveled in the same way at Israel:

For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ [Messiah] came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen (Rom. 9:3–5).

The Faith Factor

Salvation in the New Testament is based on the same factor as salvation in the Old Testament: faith. Writing in the New Testament, the apostle Paul indicated that he viewed the Pentateuch’s broader message as designed to distinguish between a man-centered salvation and a God-centered salvation.

Jerusalem is built on a dual-peaked mountain. One peak is Zion; the other, Moriah. We are told in 2 Chronicles 3:1, “Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah.” That is the peak where it is said of Abraham that he finally understood, and he feared God:

And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad [Isaac], or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me” (Gen. 22:12).

Moriah was the place of Abraham’s greatest test and his greatest victory by faith. By being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, he laid the promise of Israel on the altar. Thus Moriah symbolizes faith and became the natural place to put the Temple, the spiritual focal point of all Israel and the site where Israel would worship its God.

But it is to Deuteronomy that Paul turned to make his most definitive statements about the faith character of salvation. In Romans 10:6–8 he quoted from Deuteronomy 30:

But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach).

Deuteronomy 30 was written to contrast with chapter 29, which opens with an ominous statement to unbelieving Israel:

Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see
much in chapter 29. This is the commandment to believe, the commandment epitomized by Abraham on Mount Moriah.

Unbelief is a cruel master. It promises nothing and delivers less. It requires payment for everything but never delivers what is bought.

But there is a better way; a way that is as close as the heart and lips and that requires no human payment whatsoever; a way that Abraham walked, Moses commanded, and Paul preached: the obedience of faith.

The Day It ‘Took’

I am not sure what was different on that rainy, cold day in November 1969. I was still doing drugs. I was as rebellious and resentful as ever. My dad had come from Halifax to look for me, and we were parked on a quiet street. Outwardly, nothing was different.

But on that day, my heart was different. When my dad asked me if I wanted to receive Christ, my heart and lips said, “Yes.” I didn’t even question the decision. It seemed obvious. That was the day I became a Christian.

I guess I always knew the gospel and probably always accepted it in an intellectual way. But like the children of Israel who ate God’s manna and walked in God-enhanced shoes, it never made a difference in my life.

That day with my dad, I was willing to agree with God about my condition and His provision for me. This is the childlike faith Christ spoke of when He said, “Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 18:3).

Salvation is free to us, but it was of infinite cost to the Messiah. Furthermore, it is never far off. It is available to everyone willing to believe right now. Nothing stands between any one of us and eternal salvation except an unbelieving heart.

Are You Amillennial, Premillennial, or Confused?

Then it’s time to clear things up. Dr. Charles L. Feinberg, one of the 20th century’s leading Hebrew-Christian scholars, does just that in his outstanding work, Millennialism: The Two Major Views.

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Marshall Wicks is a resident professor of Bible survey and systematic theology at the Word of Life Bible Institute in Schroon Lake, New York.
William Cowper (pronounced Cooper, 1731–1800) was one of those enigmas of life where creative talent is torturously combined with introspection and melancholy. Cowper was the fourth of seven children born to an English minister. He had a tender disposition, but the deaths of numerous loved ones over the years—including that of his beloved mother when Cowper was only six—coupled with being bullied by an older student at school and being denied marriage to the love of his life, left Cowper emotionally despondent and fragile.

Trained as an attorney, Cowper was offered a post as a clerk to the House of Lords in 1763. But while anticipating the formal review, the pressure became too much. He attempted suicide and had a nervous breakdown. Cowper was sent to an asylum for recovery. The director and attending physician there was an evangelical Christian named Nathaniel Cotton. Dr. Cotton nursed Cowper back to health. But the greatest balm for Cowper’s ills was what he found one day while strolling the grounds.

Someone had left an open Bible on a chair. Cowper read the passage from John 11 that spoke of Christ’s sorrow at Lazarus’s tomb. He was impressed with Jesus’ compassion. Later, in his own Bible, he discovered Romans 3:25. Referring to Jesus, it says, “whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.”

It was then, in 1764, that Cowper believed the gospel and became a Christian. Over the ensuing years, Cowper continued to struggle with fits of depression. But God provided comfort through His Word, as well as through the many Christian friends who saw him through his dark days.

A gifted poet, Cowper eventually became a poet laureate. But he also used his talents for the Lord, writing many hymns, including “God Moves in a Mysterious Way,” with its famous last line, “God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.” Cowper also collaborated with his close friend, John Newton, to write and publish a collection of hymns known as Olney Hymns.

Based on Zechariah 13:1 and dated around 1771, the hymn “There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood” expresses Cowper’s love and gratitude for the Savior’s cleansing blood and power to save—a truth Cowper knew personally.

by Bruce Scott
### The Bad News: Our Helpless Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We Are All Sinners</th>
<th>Good Deeds Cannot Remove Sin</th>
<th>Sin Separates Us From God</th>
<th>Sin Brings Death</th>
<th>Atonement Requires Blood Sacrifice and Repentance</th>
<th>God Loves You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Old Testament</strong></td>
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<td>“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9).</td>
<td>“But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away” (Isa. 64:6).</td>
<td>“Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:2).</td>
<td>“The soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:20).</td>
<td>“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement [covering] for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11).</td>
<td>“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you” (Jer. 31:3).</td>
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<td>“There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin” (Eccl. 7:20).</td>
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<td>“Therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken” (Gen. 3:23).</td>
<td>“Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” (Isa. 33:14).</td>
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<td><strong>New Testament</strong></td>
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<td>“As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’” (Rom. 3:10, 23).</td>
<td>“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9).</td>
<td>“And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15).</td>
<td>“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).</td>
<td>“Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Lk. 13:3).</td>
<td>“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16).</td>
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<td>“The Lord knows how . . . to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Pet. 2:9).</td>
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<td>“The Lord knows how . . . to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Pet. 2:9).</td>
<td>“Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).</td>
<td>“You were not redeemed with corruptible things . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18–19).</td>
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**Explanation:** People are not basically good; we are sinners whose hearts are utterly contrary to God. Nothing in either Testament teaches that good deeds remove sin. By death, God means eternal separation from Him forever in a place of torment. God showed Israel the necessity for blood sacrifice. But animal sacrifices were merely temporary until the time was right for the once-for-all, perfect sacrifice that could eradicate our sin forever (Heb. 10:10). Out of His great love for us, God came to Earth in the person of Jesus. He kept the Law perfectly because He was the sinless Son of God. His death was the final sacrifice God required. As was
**THE GOOD NEWS: GOD’S MATCHLESS PROVISION**

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<td><strong>Jesus the Messiah</strong></td>
<td><strong>Was Punished for Your Sin</strong></td>
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**Old Testament**

| “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” (Isa. 53:5–6, 12). | “And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come [Rome] shall destroy the city [Jerusalem] and the sanctuary” (Dan. 9:26). | “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD, ‘though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.’ I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake” (Isa. 1:18; 43:25). | “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand” (Isa. 53:10). | “Kiss the Son, . . . Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him” (Ps. 2:12). | “And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He [the Lord] accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). |

**New Testament**

| “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). | “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). | “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7). | “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9–10). | “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:9–10). |

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People are not basically good; we are sinners whose hearts are utterly contrary to God. Nothing in either Testament teaches that good deeds remove sin. By death, God means eternal separation from Him forever in a place of torment. God showed Israel the necessity for blood sacrifice. But animal sacrifices were merely temporary until the time was right for the once-for-all, perfect sacrifice that could eradicate our sin forever (Heb. 10:10). Out of His great love for us, God came to Earth in the person of Jesus. He kept the Law perfectly because He was the sinless Son of God. His death was the final sacrifice God required. As was preordained, Jesus died and arose again because He is God. Your faith must not be in what you do yourself, but in what Jesus did for you. God declared Abraham righteous solely because of his faith. And God will declare you righteous today if you place your faith in Jesus. Salvation is His free gift to you if you ask for it.

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*Thomas C. Simcox is the Northeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.*
When John Newton composed the words to what has perhaps become the most widely recognized hymn of our day—"Amazing Grace"—he was the pastor of a growing congregation in Olney, England. Newton loved the country setting. He had a loving wife, a thriving ministry, and pleasant surroundings. Life was good. But 25 years earlier, John Newton’s life had been a wreck.

Newton was born in London on July 24, 1725. His father, a merchant-ship captain, loved John but was stern and aloof. John’s mother, on the other hand, was attentive and nurturing. She taught him Scripture—entire chapters
at a time—along with hymns and poems. Unfortunately, John’s mother died two weeks before his seventh birthday, and his father remarried shortly afterward.

When the new couple had a son of their own, they centered their affections more on him than on John, and John drifted into the company of noxious boys and learned their nasty ways. At age 11, he took the first of five sea voyages with his father, learning quickly to swear and curse with the best of sailors.

Over the next five years, however, John occasionally was forced to reflect seriously on the condition of his soul. Once he barely missed boarding a warship carrying a friend, only to learn later that the ship had overturned and his friend and several others had drowned.

About this time, Newton also had a disturbing dream in which he threw away a ring representing all of the mercy God had in store for him. These experiences greatly convicted Newton’s conscience, prompting him temporarily to take spiritual matters more seriously. But after a few days, he quickly forgot what had caused his sobriety, and he continued his downward spiral into wickedness. Newton said, “I often saw the necessity of religion, as a means of escaping hell; but I loved sin, and was unwilling to forsake it.”

At 19 Newton was forced to enlist as a midshipman on the HMS Harwich. He later deserted and was caught, placed in irons, publicly striped on board the ship, whipped with a cat-o’-nine-tails, and demoted. Newton then fell into dark depression and despair, wanting at times to throw himself overboard and scheming of ways to murder the captain who had humiliated him. His situation soon changed, however, when his captain swapped him for sailors from a ship bound for West Africa to procure slaves.

**Slave-Trading Days**

The slave trade was a lucrative business in the mid-1700s. More than 100,000 slaves came to the New World on English ships. Wrote William E. Phipps: “The average death rate of slaves on the middle passage [from Africa to port of sale in the Caribbean or North America] in English ships in the eighteenth century was about fifteen percent.” Approximately 15,000 Africans died at sea as slaves on English ships during this time.

In his new environment, Newton did nothing to endear himself to the ship’s officers. He concocted a little ditty ridiculing the captain and taught it to the entire crew. After six months of snatching a profitable stock of slaves, Newton gained permission to stay in Africa along the Guinea coast, where he worked for an English slave trader who kept an African mistress. This mistress disliked Newton. So when Newton contracted malaria, she treated him pitilessly, insulting him and half-starving him.

Later Newton was unjustly accused of stealing from the Englishman. He was put in chains on the deck of the Englishman’s boat with very little food, water, or clothing. In effect, he became the man’s slave, ironically being treated in the same manner as the people he had been helping to acquire.

For a year this torment continued until Newton convinced his master to transfer him to another slave trader. The new master treated Newton kindly and placed him over the “factories” (holding pens for slaves).

Despite the watchful eye of his previous slave-trader master, Newton had been able to send off a few letters to his father, pleading for rescue. One day a merchant ship named the Greyhound appeared. It had been sent at the behest of John’s father. At first, Newton hesitated to leave his now profitable business, but he finally agreed to return to England. All told, Newton had been held captive in Africa 15 months.

On his return voyage on the Greyhound, Newton proved to be the most profane, debauched man on the ship. One night Newton got so drunk that when his hat blew overboard, he would have dived in after it had not another sailor grabbed hold of his clothing.

Later on the voyage, Newton leafed through one of the few books on board—Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis. Newton read it as pure fancy but then began to question what would happen to him if it were true. It scared him, and he closed the book.

**Caught in the Storm**

That night, on March 21, 1748, a fierce storm overtook the ship, almost sweeping it. Men, animals, and provisions were swept overboard. Newton prayed for the first time in years. He feared he was going to die, and if the Christian faith were true, he surely would not be forgiven. He reflected on all he had done over the past few years, including mocking the historical facts of the gospel; and it disturbed him.

After four days the storm abated. In God’s providence, the beeswax in the ship’s hold helped to keep the boat afloat. Newton attributed the deliverance to God. He began to read the New Testament with more interest. When he came to Luke 15, he observed remarkable parallels between his life and that of the prodigal son.

The ship drifted for a month. Provisions were running out. The captain blamed Newton’s blasphemy for the problems and considered throwing Newton overboard, like Jonah. The crippled ship finally made its way to Northern Ireland just in time before another great wind began to blow. Newton acknowledged that God had answered his prayer.

Upon reaching shore, Newton resolved to swear no more. He even went back to church. However, he was not yet a Christian. He said later, “I consider this as the beginning of my return to God, or rather of his return to me; but I cannot consider myself to have been a believer (in the full sense of the word) till a considerable time afterwards.”

**Converted Through Faith**

In 1749 Newton sailed as first mate on another slave-trade ship. By this time, Newton had forgotten his vows and slipped back into his old, sinful ways. While collecting slaves along the west coast of Africa, Newton came down
with malaria again, which caused him to reflect once more on his life. In light of the mercies God had shown him, he felt great conviction over his recent failures. Half delirious, Newton dragged himself off his bed and trudged his way to a remote part of the island. There, realizing the futility of making more self-reliant resolutions, “he cast himself upon the Lord,” wrote Richard Cecil, “to do with him as he should please. It does not appear that any thing new was presented to his mind, but that, in general, he was enabled to hope and believe in a Crucified Saviour.” God’s amazing grace precisely appeared the hour John Newton first believed. From that point on, Newton’s life gradually changed. As with most believers, Newton did not see at the outset all of the areas of his life God’s grace needed to transform. For example, he struggled for five years to have assurance of his salvation. But through the encouragement of another Christian ship captain, Newton said, “I began to understand . . . and to expect to be preserved, not by my own power and holiness, but by the mighty power and promise of God, through faith in an unchangeable Saviour.”

The most glaring change in Newton’s life was in the area of the slave trade. A year after trusting Christ, Newton became captain of a slave ship. Within the next four years, Newton made three voyages to obtain slaves in Africa and take them to the Caribbean for sale. During those trips, Newton led his crew in prayer and worship. Yet he also forcefully put down slave insurrections, even using thumbscrews on occasion to obtain confessions. Later in life, Newton viewed the slave trade and his participation in it with disgust and moral outrage. “Custom, example, and [commercial] interest had blinded my eyes,” he said.7

Once the Holy Spirit convinced Newton of the evils of the slave trade, he worked tirelessly for decades to ban it. He mentored a younger Christian named William Wilberforce who served in the British Parliament. Wilberforce became the most noteworthy and effective abolitionist in British history. A few months before Newton’s death on December 21, 1807, the British Parliament passed the Act for Abolition of the Slave Trade, much to Newton’s satisfaction.

The Sweetness of Grace

Before experiencing God’s saving grace, John Newton had no qualms about swearing up a blue streak, blasphemying the God of heaven, jeering the Bible, scoffing at piety, engaging in vile practices, and buying and selling human beings like chattel. Yet after his conversion, John Newton changed completely. He later pastored for 23 years, constantly punctuating his sermons with the theme of God’s grace. He wrote and published hundreds of hymns, including “How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds” (a marked contrast from his earlier blasphemous days) and displayed unending hospitality in his home.

He fellowshipped with such revival notables as George Whitefield and John Wesley; taught and strengthened such influential people as the great missionary William Carey, the poet William Cowper, and the abolitionist William Wilberforce; and became one of Britain’s great anti-slavery advocates. How do we explain such a difference in one man’s life? Old and frail, Newton explained it this way weeks before he died: “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.”

END NOTES


3. Ibid., 60.


5. Ibid., 37.

6. Phipps, 66.


8. Ibid., 238.

Bruce Scott is the staffing coordinator for The Friends of Israel.

Solving the Sin Problem, from page 13

destroyed. We can still gain ritual atonement through deeds of loving-kindness. For it is written “Loving-kindness I desire, not sacrifice.” (Hosea 6:6)

That story, though not known by most Jewish people, is the template that encourages two major erroneous beliefs about sin: (1) that sin is a choice, not a nature, and (2) that we can get right with God through our own efforts.

The latter promotes the false teaching that one can do enough mitzvot, or good deeds, to overcome the bad. However laudable it is to spend time in confessed prayer and to fast and give of one’s time and money, none of these removes sin. The Hebrew Scriptures declare plainly, “All our righteousnesses [good deeds] are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

How does a Holy God forgive sinners? The answer is in Leviticus 17:11: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”

On Passover in Egypt, God used the blood of the lamb to stay judgment from the firstborn. On Yom Kippur in the days of the Temple, the priests sacrificed goats and used the blood to atone for the sins of the high priest and the nation. And when the time was right, Jesus the Messiah solved the sin problem forever by becoming the final sacrifice—the substitutionary atonement—for our sin.

No one can keep 613 commandments perfectly except God Himself. That is why God came to Earth in the person of Jesus. Jesus never missed the bull’s-eye; He kept the commandments for all of us and then took the punishment we deserve for breaking them. He arose from the grave because He is God, and He can set us free: “For Christ [Messiah] is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4).

END NOTE


Steve Herzig is the director of North American Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
Christians are not born; they are born again. No one is a Christian because of lineage, heritage, or parentage. Individuals become Christians when they realize they are sinners with no way of removing their sins, they believe that Jesus willingly accepted the punishment they deserve, and they commit their lives into His loving care.

But to know about Jesus—who He is, what He did, and how He conquered sin and death—often requires an evangelist, someone who proclaims that gospel message loud and clear, up hill and down dale, to anyone who is willing (and sometimes unwilling) to listen.

Dwight Lyman Moody was such a man. Some consider him the greatest evangelist who ever lived, preaching before enormous crowds and seeing God convert thousands to Christ. Before his death at age 62 in 1899, he had, among other things, founded Moody Church and what is today Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois.

His closest friend, evangelist R. A. (Reuben Archer) Torrey (1856–1928), whom Moody called to head the Bible institute, was asked in 1923 to preach at a memorial service titled “Why God Used D. L. Moody.” Torrey offered many insights, including the fact that Moody had a “consum­ning passion” to see people saved:

“On one occasion in Chicago Mr. Moody saw a little girl standing on the street with a pail in her hand. He went up to her and invited her to his Sunday school, telling her what a pleasant place it was. She promised to go the following Sunday, but she did not do so. Mr. Moody watched for her for weeks, and then one day he saw her on the street again, at some distance from him. He started toward her, but she saw him too and started to run away. Mr. Moody followed her.”

Eventually Mr. Moody found her and led her to Christ. “He found that her mother was a widow who had once seen better circumstances but had gone down, until now she was living over this saloon,” Torrey said. “She had several children. Mr. Moody led the mother and all the family to Christ. Several of the children were prominent members of the Moody Church until they moved away, and afterwards became prominent in churches elsewhere.”

Torrey said that, when he was the pastor of the Moody Church, the little girl with the pail was, by then, the wife of one of the most prominent officers in the church.

“Oh only two or three years ago, as I came out of a ticket office in Memphis, Tennessee, a fine-looking young man followed me. He said, ‘Are you not Dr. Torrey?’”

“I said, ‘Yes.’

“He said, ‘I am so and so.’

He was then a traveling man and an officer in the church where he lived.”

When Mr. Moody led that little child to Christ, he pulled an entire family into the Kingdom of God. And, said Dr. Torrey, eternity alone will reveal how many succeeding generations were pulled out of darkness and into the Kingdom of His glorious Son.
On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses of the Christian faith to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. In so doing, he started something that radically affected all of Europe, initiating the Protestant Reformation that broke away from the Roman Catholic Church’s domination of northern Europe.

In his personal struggle to find forgiveness and relief from the guilt of sin, Luther came to the understanding of justification by faith.
Human Righteousness Rejected

In Romans 3 the apostle Paul highlighted this major doctrine of biblical Christianity when he explained that the Law condemns every human being, both Jewish and Gentile:

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God (v. 19).

Every man is a sinner as a result of God’s law. For example, the Mosaic Law commands, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3). Yet most of us have many things that take precedence over our relationships with God. So we’re condemned.

The second law says, “You shall not make for yourself a carved [graven] image” (v. 4). Yet we create all types of items that we idolize above God.

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain” (v. 7). “Honor your father and your mother” (v. 12). God prohibits stealing, lying, and coveting (vv. 15–17). These laws continuously point out our sinfulness. The law does not make us sinners; it reveals that we are sinners and that we are condemned and accountable before God.

Romans 3:20 says the law brings the knowledge of sin because “by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified [declared righteous] in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Paul said, “I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet’” (7:7).

Many of us have read the Bible and suddenly said to ourselves, I didn’t realize what God thought about that. The Bible gives us knowledge of sin and an awareness of how sinful we truly are.

As King David said, the problem is that we are born in sin (Ps. 51:5). We are born with a sin nature; we never have to learn how to sin. We are born with a sin nature; we never have to learn how to sin. We are born with a sin nature; we never have to learn how to sin. We are born with a sin nature; we never have to learn how to sin.

are condemned from the beginning. I was reared on a farm. And before I ever got out of the farmhouse, I started to disobey my parents.

Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The standard is not 80 percent or 90 percent; the standard is the 100 percent holiness of God. The law points out that we fall short. We may not be the worst sinners ever, but we are as bad off as the worst because we are sinful human beings. And no human being will be made righteous by the law.

For example, suppose I committed a murder and then felt terrible about it and decided to do as many good things as possible for the rest of my life. How many good deeds would it take to undo my murder? Nothing could undo it; I would merely become a “good” murderer—not good at murdering, but a murderer who is good. By the same token, the best we can be is “good” sinners. We are sinners by nature and sinners by deed. And as a result, a holy God must reject us.

Our good deeds cannot remove our sin and make us righteous; furthermore, without His forgiveness, we have no release from guilt. Many people today are overwhelmed by guilt that they may partake of the righteousness that we could never manufacture on our own through the Law.

God’s Righteousness Demonstrated

But there is good news. God demonstrated His righteousness apart from the Law. The Law separated people from God, constantly pointing out their sin by manifesting His holiness. Yet it did not help anyone relate to God.

Humanity needed another display of God’s righteousness apart from the Law. That righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ:

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe (Rom. 3:21–22).

It was necessary for God to demonstrate His righteousness publicly in the person of Jesus so that we would have help and not solely condemnation; so that we would be enabled and not disabled. Jesus, God the Son, took on human flesh so that He could die in our place. That was a demonstration of God’s righteousness, one that helps us rather than simply condemning us. Through it, we may partake of the righteousness that we could never manufacture on our own through the Law.

Jesus manifests God’s righteousness, which is available as a gift of His grace. He wants to give it to us. We can’t earn it; we can’t buy it; we can’t do enough good things to receive it.

Paul said, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9). God’s righteousness comes to you as a free gift through faith in Jesus.

God intended for Jesus the Messiah to die (Isa. 53:5–6). It was His plan that the shedding of Jesus’ blood would publicly demonstrate that the demands of a holy God were satisfied. The Bible has always taught that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23; cf. Ezek. 18:20). Jesus had no sin; yet He died as a criminal, for you and me. The One who was not a sinner died for sinners, and His blood was poured out for us.

That act also demonstrated God’s righteousness in that God passed over the sins of preceding generations. In the Old Testament, the Jewish people lived under the Law, which was a terrible slave master. No one could keep all of the Law; so God incorporated sacrifices that the Israelites would offer, knowing the blood of bulls and goats could not remove their sin. However, they also knew that God promised to accept the righteous and faithful manifestation of their sacrifices and to cover their sins from year to year.
So every year, on Yom Kippur, the high priest would offer animal blood as a sacrifice on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies; and God would accept that sacrifice for another year. Thus God passed over the sins previously committed. Those sins were never forgiven; they were covered until Jesus the Messiah arrived to become the perfect and final sacrifice. That is why the book of Hebrews teaches that Jesus is a better sacrifice, offering better blood in a better Temple—the actual Temple in heaven.

His sacrifice removes sin and makes available the gift of eternal life. Thus Paul said in Romans 3:26 that God would be “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

God’s Righteousness Applied

The good news is that God’s righteousness is applied as a gift of God’s grace: “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith” (v. 27).

Those who have received Jesus as their personal Savior have been born again into God’s family and have no right to boast. They did not earn what they received; they received it as a gift from God.

Although I was privileged to have been reared in a Christian home, I was a sinner who was as lost as anyone else. And it was God’s grace that saved me. Perhaps you come from a home where there is no interest in spiritual things. That fact makes you no worse off than I was. The Bible says we are all born in the same condition: spiritually dead.

Apart from the gift of God’s grace, we have no hope. We could only become good sinners. But the gift of God’s righteousness is applied by grace. That means you cannot earn it. You cannot buy it. You cannot do enough good deeds to merit it. God’s grace is available to anyone who will enter into a relationship called faith with Jesus.

If you’re willing to express your faith in what Jesus did 2,000 years ago on the cross, God wants to give you the gift of eternal life. That’s a wonderful solution to an otherwise unsolvable problem. The Law simply condemns. But God’s righteousness is available to you as a gift through faith in Jesus. And it makes sense that, since God sent His Son, His Son would now be the only way this righteousness is accessible. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6).

Lawfully condemned men consigned to hell can appropriate God’s justification by grace through faith. God would have been just if He had let us alone. But He is not merely righteous; He is also loving. And He wants us to spend eternity with Him. So He provided for His righteousness to be manifested through Jesus, not merely through the Law. The Law was good, but it could not make us righteous.

Everyone must be saved. If the Law condemns everyone, then everyone needs to be born again. It doesn’t matter whether we are Protestants or Jews or Catholics or whatever. We must all be born again, or we will die in our sins.

As believers, we have a mandate to take this message to the world. Thousands of people are under the same misconception Martin Luther was once under, and they need to hear the truth. Anyone can be saved. It doesn’t matter who you are or what you’ve done. The gift of righteousness is available, if you will take it.

If you have never received Jesus as your Savior, you must, my friend. You must. You may provide excuses and resistance. But in the final analysis, faith in Jesus is the only way to enter into the presence of God.

Richard D. Emmons is senior professor of Bible and doctrine at Philadelphia Biblical University and senior pastor of Bible Baptist Church in Hamilton, New Jersey.
In Pakistan, death awaits everyone who opposes Islam. Mujahid el Masih knows. In 1997 thousands of Muslims attacked his Christian village, setting fire to 1,500 homes, plus cars and medical clinics—even burning livestock alive.

Anything with the name Christian attached to it was destroyed, he said. Pakistan has no freedom of speech and no freedom of religion. All schoolchildren study Islam, and there are no alternatives.

“Christians are very poor,” he said. “Once your home is burned, it’s gone.” But three days after the devastating attack, 20,000 people showed up for church. Despite the persecution and destruction, they still followed the Lord.

“Jesus is not in the killing business,” said Masih. “It is only Allah’s teaching that kills people.”

Masih, a Muslim who later received Jesus as his Savior, gave his testimony in New Jersey recently at a conference organized by the Voice of the Martyrs (VOM), a nonprofit, international Christian organization headquartered in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, that ministers to persecuted Christians around the world. With him were Getaneh M. Getaneh from Ethiopia and Kamil Solomon, who grew up in Egypt. All shared how the Lord upheld them through torture, persecution, and imprisonment—an everyday way of life for those who follow Christ in many parts of the world.

Masih grew up studying the Qur’an. He was taught to hate Israel, Christians, and all non-Muslims; and he was passionate about becoming a martyr for Islam. But at 25, he gave his life to Christ and began to preach the gospel. He even went to Bible college.

While preaching in South Africa by invitation, he showed videotapes of how the Muslims had destroyed the Christian villages in Pakistan. The Pakistani government banished him, and Muslims in South Africa tried to kill him. Eventually he made it to the United States, where he teaches Americans the truth about Islam.

Christians, he said, must tell their persecutors that Christ loves them. “It is not with your own power or strength, but with the strength of Jesus Christ that you can do this. It is our job to pray for the Muslims.”

Getaneh’s Ordeal

Getaneh M. Getaneh is Ethiopian. He grew up Jewish and came to Christ as a child. Later his parents also came to faith.

Getaneh and his family began preaching on the streets and baptizing people secretly in the rivers at 2 A.M. Then someone brought the police to the riverside during a baptism, and the newly baptized Christians were killed where they stood, proclaiming Jesus as Lord.

“Communism took our freedom in one night,” he said. “My dad got killed in prison.” While being beaten, he prayed, “May the Lord have His way; may His will be done.”

The Communists also arrested Getaneh. He was repeatedly denied food, water, and sleep for days. Then they hung him upside down, poured boiling oil on the soles of his feet, and beat him with a metal cable. His prayer, he said, became, “Oh Lord, take me home.”

Terrified and in pain, he was afraid to tell his persecutors about Jesus’ love. They knew no mercy. They had burned his Bible and killed his church members. So he prayed for God’s help.

“Suddenly, with joy, I began to tell them how God so loved the world,” said Getaneh. “They thought I was crazy and put [lowered] me down.” He eventually escaped from prison and fled to neighboring Djibouti. When the Communist government fell in 1994, he returned to Ethiopia but was arrested at the airport because an autonomous Islamic court had charged him with converting Muslims to Christianity. He escaped again, this time to America.

At times his voice trembled and tears ran down his face as he addressed the group at the conference. But his passion and love for Jesus only shone through him more strongly.

“We don’t want the persecution to stop,” Getaneh said. “Let it go. That is the Word of God. Everywhere, persecution is there.” But he asked Christians to pray that the persecuted church would remain faithful to Jesus and not deny Him under torture.

‘Threat’ to Islam

Kamil Solomon holds a Master of Divinity degree from the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt. Between 1990 and 1993 he was a full-time evangelist, apologist, and counselor until his arrest by the Egyptian secret police in 1993 on charges of being a threat to Islam.

Although the charges were dropped and the high court ordered him released, the secret police held him for two weeks, tortured him mercilessly, and transferred him to a prison in southern Cairo for life, where he was severely tortured.

It was the Lord’s intervention through Christian organizations and radio programs in America that secured his release in 1994. Even so, he was placed under house arrest for two years, then exiled from Egypt. Now in the United States, he teaches the truth about Islam around the country.

David Brackemeyer, VOM ministries director, impressed on the audience the pervasiveness of Christian persecution. In America, persecution is virtually nonexistent. But in the rest of the world, Christians face torture and imprisonment every day. Prayer is the most powerful way to support the persecuted church, because it is through the strength of Jesus Christ that the church will grow, he said.

“Though we can never contact our brothers and sisters because it would put them in danger,” said Brackemeyer, “we can pray. They truly are our brothers and sisters in Christ, just as much as our husbands and wives and children.”

Persecution is not about extremism. It is not about putting yourself in harm’s way to show the world that you can take whatever it can give. It is about being obedient to the will of God and knowing that He will be faithful, no matter what happens in life. This is the message these men conveyed. And they shared their horrific experiences so that the world may know that the Lord is good.
When I was a boy, my grandmother would take me downtown to a butcher who sold live chickens. This was an important trip for her. She took great pains to choose the right bird, even poking her fingers into the cages, because she had a special purpose for this chicken. It would be killed (sacrificed) in a ritual she believed would remove her sins. As do many observant Jews, my grandmother believed the chicken was her *kapparot* (atonement).

The time of year—fall—was also significant. We always bought the chicken between Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), during the Ten Days of Awe. Repentance and forgiveness of sin are extremely important to Jewish people during this time, as the chicken ceremony reveals.

While reciting from the Psalms (107:10, 14, 17–21) and Job (33:23–24), an extremely observant individual swings a chicken three times above his or her head. After the Scripture is read, the person says, “This fowl shall be in my stead, shall be my atonement; it shall go to death so that I can attain a good life and peace.”

The Bible verses used speak of God’s deliverance from the darkness of death. The *kapparot* ceremony is still observed in Israel, as well as in every city in the world that has a significant Jewish population.

Like my grandmother, Jewish people who observe such traditions believe that nothing but blood can atone for their sin. In fact, it says in the Torah, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11).

The book of Leviticus is the Older Testament’s worship manual. The words *holy, sacrifice, offering, and blood* appear often. Specific instructions are given for Rosh Hashanah and Yom
Kippur, the high holy days that are considered the most important dates on the Jewish calendar (Lev. 16, 23).

Although most “modern” Jewish people probably shudder at the idea of blood sacrifice, observant Jews still believe the ritual of kapparot makes forgiveness possible. In fact, God’s only method of dealing with sin involves blood. Good deeds do not remove sin today, nor did they do so under Moses.

When Jesus lived on Earth, the Temple still stood in Jerusalem; and Jewish people, in accordance with the Law, brought their sacrifices there. Yet Jewish men like the apostle John, a cousin of Jesus, recognized Jesus as the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29).

The apostles Peter and Paul, also Jewish, knew that the animals sacrificed had to be spotless and perfect and that Jesus was the final sacrifice, which satisfied God:

You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18–19).

It was Jesus, wrote Paul, “whom God set forth as a propitiation [satisfaction] by his blood” (Rom. 3:25). “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7).

For Jewish people in that day to come to grips with the change from an imperfect, yearly sacrifice to a perfect, one-time sacrifice took time. The writer of Hebrews put it this way: “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:4, 14).

Jesus’ blood was not magical; its physical composition was not unusual. But there was something unusual, unique, and holy about the person of Jesus. He was the God-man, born without sin, who lived a pure, sinless, and spotless life. For that reason, His shed blood satisfied forever a holy and righteous God. His shed blood was a once-and-for-all offering for your sin and mine.

Those of us who have accepted this spiritual truth by faith can gratefully and joyfully sing of His sacrifice with these wonderful words of hymn writer William Cowper:

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

Another wonderful hymn goes like this:
“What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

Some people today shy away from preaching and teaching about the blood. But were it not for the blood of the Lamb, we might all be swinging chickens over our heads in vain. Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

ENDNOTE


by Steve Herzig
The book of Jonah is probably the best known of all the Minor Prophets. What child has not heard the story of Jonah who was swallowed by a huge fish? The prophet’s story covers only four chapters (48 verses) and is fascinating to tell, but it is ironic and pathetic at the same time.

Throughout the centuries, critics have viciously ridiculed Jonah’s authenticity, considering the book to be mere myth, legend, or—at best—an allegory without any historical reliability. Their positions cannot be validated for a number of reasons. First, ancient Judaism accepted Jonah as truth and included it as one of the canonical books within the Jewish Scriptures. Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, also accepted the book as part of the Scriptures.

Second, Jonah contains no historical inaccuracies. Third, Jesus the Messiah accepted the historicity of Jonah’s prophecy as a divine revelation from God (Mt. 12:39–41).

Jonah differs from other prophetic books in that it does not predict future events but provides an autobiographical narrative of the prophet’s commission to take God’s message to Nineveh. Keep in mind that a prophet spoke for God by bringing a message God wanted people to hear, and not the author. However, other prophets, such as Moses, Isaiah, and Daniel, often mentioned themselves in the third person. No internal or external evidence would lead readers to believe that Jonah did not pen this prophecy.

Jonah’s temperament was more hawkish than dovish. He is called the “son of Amittai,” whose name means “truth.” Jonah is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 as a prophet from Gath Hepher, a city of Zebulun approximately 12 miles west of the Sea of Galilee and three miles northeast of Nazareth (Josh. 19:13). The prophet can be described as a narrow-minded, fiercely zealous patriot who jealously defended the name of his God and had no pity on Israel’s enemies, especially the Assyrians because of their indescribable cruelty to the nations they conquered. In fact, Jonah wanted to see them destroyed.

Jonah ministered during the reign of Jeroboam II (793–753 B.C.), king of the northern kingdom of Israel; and it was during this 40-year period that he wrote his prophecy.

Prior to Jeroboam, Assyria had become the supreme power in the Near East, extracting tribute from King Jehu of Israel (841–814 B.C.). But soon after, the powerful city-state faced internal problems and started to decline, giving Jeroboam an opportunity to expand and secure Israel’s northern border, thus ending years of conflict with Syria (2 Ki. 14:24–25). This gave Israel control of the trade routes, bringing great wealth to the land. But with thriving commerce came an indulgent lifestyle, exploitation of the poor, low moral standards, and the revival of idolatry that would soon bring about God’s wrath and destruction on the northern kingdom. It was in this context that God called Jonah to be a prophet to Nineveh.

After the days of Jonah, Assyria would revive from its temporary decline; and God would use the nation to destroy Israel in 722 B.C.
Jonah's Commission

Described

God said to Jonah, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me” (v. 2). When Nineveh was at the height of wickedness, God commanded Jonah to go there and proclaim His message.

Built by Nimrod, Nineveh lay on the east bank of the Tigris River, about 250 miles north of Babylon where the Tigris meets the Khor River, opposite the site of present-day Mosul, Iraq (Gen. 10:8–11). Archaeologists believe it was originally built between 5000–4000 B.C.

A large city of nearly 600,000 people, Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, stretching 2.5 miles along the Tigris River and eight miles in circumference. The city had 15 gates. Its walls were 50 feet high and were thick enough to accommodate three chariots side by side. Greater Nineveh consisted of many cities in the shape of a parallelogram that covered an area 60 miles in circumference. Its influence in trade, culture, and politics extended from Egypt to the Persian Gulf.

Nineveh's king, Ashurbanipal, boast-ed of his violence and shameful atrocities, which included tearing off the limbs of his victims, putting out their eyes, impaling them on poles, driving stakes through their chests and leaving them to die, boiling them in tar, ripping out their tongues, slitting open pregnant women, savagely raping women, and skinning people alive. Assyrians decapitated their enemies and piled the heads in pyramids as a monument to their victory. A conquered city was sacked and the survivors deported to Assyria as slaves.

Nineveh was notorious for its idolatry and immorality (Nah. 3:1, 19). Its temples were dedicated to the gods Nabu, Asshur, and Adad. The Ninevites also worshiped Ishtar, a goddess of love and war. Religious prostitution was a part of Assyrian worship fertility rites. Even the king of Assyria recognized they were a wicked people (Jon. 3:8).

God commanded Jonah, “Go to Nineveh, . . . cry out against it” (1:2). He was told to preach, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (3:4). Jonah was to speak against Nineveh’s sin with hope that the nation would turn to God. Its refusal to do so would seal its demise.

Jonah’s trip to Nineveh meant traveling 500 miles or so over rugged, desert terrain to preach to a people the prophet hated and wanted to see destroyed. Nineveh’s survival depended on Jonah’s faithfulness to God’s command and commission.

Jonah’s Commission

Disobeyed

God had chosen and commissioned Jonah to carry a divine message to Nineveh. Jonah knew exactly what he was called to do. Either he could be obedient and go to Nineveh, or he could be disobedient and ignore God’s commission. Jonah chose the latter; he ran away from his divine call. Scripture says,

Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD (v. 3).

Giving little thought to God’s commission, Jonah arose and fled to Tarshish, which was in the opposite direction of Nineveh. In order to find a ship bound for Tarshish, he had to travel about 60 miles, from Gath Hepher to Joppa. Tarshish was located 2,000 miles from Joppa in what is now southwestern Spain. In Jonah’s day, Tarshish was a Phoenician outpost, situated at the end of Western civilization. He paid the fare, boarded what was probably a large Phoenician vessel at Joppa (present-day Jaffa, not far from Tel Aviv), and headed away. He ran as far as he could go from the divine commission that the Lord had given him.

Scripture twice mentions that Jonah tried to do the impossible: flee “from the presence of the LORD” (v. 3). Jonah would have known David’s psalm and the revelation to Jeremiah that stated how impossible it is to flee from an omnipresent God (Ps. 139:7–12; Jer 23:24). Knowing this truth, why would he run?

Jonah fled out of a deep hatred for the ungodly Assyrians. Later in the book, Jonah explained: “I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, One who relents from doing harm” (4:2). Jonah knew that if God sent him to preach judgment on Nineveh, the Assyrians might repent. Then the Lord would have compassion on these wicked people and spare the city from destruction. Although not stated, Jonah might have reasoned that if he ran away, God would choose another prophet to preach to Nineveh.

Jonah’s reaction to God’s call is both remarkable and repugnant. Scripture records no true prophet who resigned from his position or ran from his divine call and commission as did Jonah. Jonah dropped out of fellowship with God.

There are lessons for us here. God did not intervene to prevent Jonah from paying the fare, boarding the vessel, and heading for Tarshish; He allowed the prophet to act on his decision.

God is no respecter of persons and extends salvation to all men, Jews and Gentiles alike. Furthermore, God is gracious and patient with even the most ungodly people in the world, providing them with opportunities to be saved before judgment falls.

God is also gracious and patient to His disobedient servants and will let them make decisions that go against His will. In addition, God uses the promise of judgment to bring people to repentance, and He is always ready to deliver the ungodly from judgment and use them to bring Himself glory and honor.

The fields of service that appear the most unpromising are sometimes the most fruitful. God’s servants must never harbor racial or cultural prejudice if they are to proclaim the message of salvation to the lost.

ENDNOTE

1 Homer Hailey, A Commentary on the Minor Prophets (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 62.

David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
The Traducian Theory. The word traducian is derived from the Latin verb traduco, which means, "bring across, lead over, transport across; transfer." Thus the traducian theory asserts that each human soul is brought across, transported across, or transferred to offspring by parents through procreation. The individual soul is brought into existence at the time of conception through the union of the male sperm with the female egg. Consequently, parents propagate entire persons, not merely bodies. Many fine Christians advocate this theory.

Significant biblical evidence exists for the traducian theory. For example, Genesis 46:26 states, “All the persons who went with Jacob to Egypt, who came from his body, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives, were sixty-six persons in all.” The Hebrew word translated “body” refers to Jacob’s “loins, as seat of procreative power.”

The word translated “persons” is the same word Genesis 35:18 and 1 Kings 17:21–22 use for the human soul—the immaterial aspect of a human being, which departs from the physical body at death. Genesis 35:18 states that Rachel’s “soul was departing (for she died).” 1 Kings 17:21–22 records the following incident: Elijah “cried out to the LORD and said, ‘O LORD my God, I pray, let this child’s soul come back to him.’” Then the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived.”

Thus the statement in Genesis 46:26 that 66 people came from Jacob indicates that more than mere physical entities came from his body. It implies that Jacob played a significant role in procreating total human beings—souls and bodies, not bodies only. Therefore, souls are procreated by parents.

Hebrews 7:9–10 is another passage that implies this same concept. Verse 9 states, “Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak.” There was a sense in which Levi, Abraham’s great-grandson, paid tithes to Melchizedek “through” his great-grandfather when Abraham paid those tithes years before Levi was conceived.

How could Levi, prior to his conception, have participated in this action of his ancestor? Verse 10 provides the answer: “for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him” (Jewish people used the term father for any male ancestor). The Greek word translated “loins” refers to “the place of the reproductive organs.” The language of Hebrews 7 insinuates that Levi was present in seminal form in his ancestor Abraham’s loins when Abraham paid the tithes to Melchizedek. Therefore, there was a seminal participation by Levi in Abraham’s act of paying the tithes.

The text implies that more than an impersonal body was present in seminal form in Abraham’s loins. First, how could an impersonal body perform the act of paying tithes? Second, the passage indicates that it was Levi, a person, not just Levi’s body, who was present in seminal form in his ancestor’s loins. Thus Hebrews 7:10 implies that souls, as well as bodies, are passed on in seminal form from generation to generation through ancestral lines until procreated by parents at the moment of conception.

A second line of biblical support for the traducian theory is the fact that it is the only theory that comfortably fits the biblical teaching that all human beings sinned in Adam and die as a result. Romans 5:12–19 contains the following statements: Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread...
to all men, because all sinned. By the one man’s offense many died. The judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, . . . by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, . . . through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, . . . by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners (vv. 12, 15–19).

And 1 Corinthians 15:22 declares, “in Adam all die.”

These statements indicate that, in some sense, all human beings procreated through normal means sinned the original sin when the first man, Adam, committed that sin. The active voice of the verb translated “all sinned” (Rom. 5:12) indicates participation in that sin. And the fact that all people are subject to physical death as a result of that original sin implies that all share the guilt of that sin.

Since sin is related primarily to the realm of the soul, the only way that all humans could have sinned in Adam when he committed the original sin is if their souls are related to or derived from him. According to the traducian theory, each soul is related to Adam in the same way that Levi’s soul was related to Abraham. Just as Levi’s soul was present in seminal form in Abraham’s loins when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, so every human soul was present in seminal form in Adam’s loins when he sinned the original sin.

Thus, just as there was a seminal participation by Levi in Abraham’s act of paying tithes, so there was a seminal participation in Adam’s original sin by all people procreated by normal means. In this way, all human souls are related to or derived from Adam.

A third line of support for the traducian theory is that the theory most comfortably fits the biblical teaching that all human beings procreated by normal means are in a state of sin, having a sin nature from the moment of conception. In Psalm 51:5 David declared, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity.” The word translated “brought forth” means “to be born,”4 and the word translated “iniquity” involves the concepts of “guilt” and “punishment.”5 Thus David indicated that at the time of his birth, he was already bearing the guilt of iniquity and deserved divine punishment.

David further stated, “And in sin my mother conceived me.” He thereby signified that his relationship with sin began before his birth. The word translated “sin” means “to miss a mark or a way.”6 Thus David declared that he was conceived in a state of sin, with a sin nature that missed the mark of the absolute righteousness God requires for acceptance with Him.

According to Franz Delitzsch, an outstanding Old Testament scholar, David’s statements mean the following:

1. that his parents were sinful human beings, and that this sinful state (habitus) has operated upon his birth and even his conception, and from this point has passed over to him. . . . He is sinful, an unclean one springing from an unclean, flesh born of flesh. That man from his first beginning onwards, and that this beginning itself, is tainted with sin; that the proneness to sin with its guilt and its corruption is propagated from parents to their children.

In other words, human beings inherit the sinful state, with a sin nature, from parents through procreation at conception. Consequently, people do not become sinners as a result of sins committed after birth. Instead, people commit sins as a result of already being sinners with sin natures from the moment they are conceived. (See Psalm 58:3; Isaiah 48:8.)

Since sin is related primarily to the realm of the soul, and since human beings inherit the sinful state and sin nature from parents through procreation at conception, it can be concluded that each human soul is derived from parents through procreation at the moment of conception. This conclusion agrees with the traducian theory concerning the source or origin of each human soul.

A fourth line of evidence for the traducian theory is the biblical use of the personal pronouns me, them, and he, and other words—a male child, children, son, and daughter—in conjunction with conception. David said, “My mother conceived me.” The Shulamite spoke of her mother as “her who conceived me” (Song 3:4). Hosea 2:4–5 refers to a mother of children “who conceived them.” Luke 2:21, with reference to Jesus, states, “He was conceived in the womb.”

Job 3:3 refers to the conception of “a male child.” An angel announced that Elizabeth had “conceived a son” (Lk. 1:36). Numerous Scriptures refer to men begetting children, sons, and daughters. (A few are Genesis 5:3–4; Ecclesiastes 5:14; 6:3; Jeremiah 16:3.)

Begetting takes place when the male sperm fertilizes the female egg at conception. The use of these personal pronouns and other words in conjunction with conception indicates that a total person—including a soul, not merely an impersonal body—comes into existence at the moment of conception.

The next article will explore other concepts related to the issue of abortion.

ENDNOTES


Renald E. Shoovers is an author, professor, and international conference speaker for The Friends of Israel.
In his 13 basic principles, renowned Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon (1135–1205), also known as Maimonides and the great Rambam, replaced the Hebrew word *ehad* (“one”) with *yahid* (“only one”) to describe God’s nature. *Ehad* often denotes a compound unity, whereas *yahid* does not.

Although the idea of *yahid* stands in contrast to the Old Testament, rabbinical Judaism embraced it and argues that God is an undivided wholeness. However, the Bible provides many examples that clearly testify to a plurality in the one God. God is one, but not one entity. There is a single Godhead, one God to whom there is no equal; but that one God exists in a plurality of entities.

The Hebrew Scriptures contain verses that refer to each of the entities in the Godhead and clearly indicate their number.

**The Spirit of God**

*And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters* (Gen. 1:2).

The Spirit of God existed from the beginning. He took part in the creation. But the Spirit was never created; therefore He is equal to God. The Spirit of God is an independent, vibrant entity, not merely a trait or dormant, senseless power. The Spirit of God can be grieved; therefore He is a person in Himself.

There are further examples of the Spirit’s existence as an individual entity:

*The Spirit of God has made me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him? (Job 33:4; Ps. 51:11; 139:7; Isa. 11:2; 40:13).

But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit. . . “Where is He who put His Holy Spirit within them . . . ?” As a beast goes down into the valley, and the Spirit of the LORD causes him to rest, so You lead Your people, to make Yourself a glorious name (63:10–11, 14).

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn (Zech. 12:10).

**Seen and Unseen**

Clearly, at least two entities compose the Godhead.

1. **An entity no one can see face to face and live:** “But He said, ‘You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live’” (Ex. 33:20).

2. **An entity man could see face to face:** “So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face” (Ex. 33:11).

God was speaking to Moses and promised to bless and accompany him throughout the Israelites’ journey in the desert. Moses wanted to see the face of the Lord who was speaking to him, but was refused. Finally Moses was allowed to see the back of the One with whom he spoke; but he was not allowed to see His face.

If he had seen the entity’s face, he would have died instantly. Therefore, Moses clearly spoke with a God entity whose face he was forbidden to see.

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The same chapter describes a special encounter between God and Moses. To emphasize the physical closeness
between them, the verse says the encounter took place “face to face,” as a man speaks to a friend. This meeting was not a vision, dream, or voice heard from heaven, but a face-to-face dialogue.

According to Jewish rabbinical opinion, the Lord spoke to Moses through a reflected image. However, this view is inconsistent with God’s Word. If the Lord had spoken to Moses through a reflection, the verse would have said so instead of saying “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”

Using a literal, grammatical interpretation of the text, it becomes evident that verses 11 and 20 speak of two separate entities, both of which are referred to as “LORD.”

Another example of a visible entity within the Godhead is found in Exodus 24:9–11. Moses, Aaron, Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu, and 70 elders of Israel ascended Mount Sinai and “saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone. . . . But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank” (vv. 10-11).

Isaiah’s Revelation

How many entities make up the Godhead? Isaiah the prophet solved the mystery and cast a light on the relationship between the persons who compose the living God.

In Isaiah 44:6, God says, “I am the First, and I am the Last.” In Isaiah 48, the Lord describes Himself as the One who founded the earth and made the heavens; and He declares that all are ready to do His will.

The Lord continues to speak and says that the kingdoms of those days acted under His sovereignty. Then He says the following: “Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD [Adonai YHv H] and His Spirit have sent me (v. 16).

The Hebrew text says, “has sent me.” The verse combines the names Adonai Yehovah [YHVH] into one entity, using the singular verb form “has sent” rather than “have sent.” Thus the speaker is God (entity one). And He was sent by the Lord GOD (entity two) and His Spirit (entity three). Isaiah teaches that the oneness of the Godhead is comprised of three entities: The Spirit of God and two others who are called “Lord.”

Therefore, the meaning of the Lord’s words in the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4 becomes obvious: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” The names of the Lord appear three times in this verse, which ends with the word ehad—“one”—to teach us that one Godhead is composed of three entities.

Meno Kalisher is the senior pastor of the Jerusalem Assembly House of Redemption in Jerusalem, Israel.

Oh, men and women, if you wish to get an audience and wish to do that audience some good after you get them, study, study, study the one Book, and preach, preach, preach the one Book, and teach, teach, teach the one Book, the Bible, the only Book that is God’s Word, and the only Book that has power to gather and hold and bless the crowds for any great length of time.”

—R. A. Torrey (1856–1928)
Abbas: Use rifles against Israel

American rifles supplied to the Palestinian Authority (PA) may be used against Israel if PA President Mahmoud Abbas has his way.

WorldNetDaily’s Aaron Klein reported that Abbas has called on Arab factions to stop their infighting and fight Israel, which he said is “corrupting humanity on earth.”

“Shooting at your brother is forbidden. . . . We should put our internal fighting aside and raise our rifles only against the Israeli occupation,” Abbas declared.

News services like the Associated Press apparently sanitized the speech by omitting the call to fight Israel. Ironically, the rifles Abbas spoke of probably came from the United States, which shipped more than 1 million rounds of ammunition and 7,000 assault rifles to Fatah, an organization birthed by the late terrorist Yasser Arafat. Hoping to deter Hamas, the United States has agreed to provide $86.4 million in aid to strengthen Fatah, which is loyal to Abbas.

A Fatah terrorist told WorldNetDaily the bulk of the American arms will be used to “hit the Zionists. . . . It’s unnatural to think these American weapons won’t be used against the Israelis,” he said.

Arabs steal Israeli cattle

Arutz-7—The Israeli Cattle Breeders Association (ICBA) says that cattle theft in southern Israel is up 236 percent compared to last year. The stolen cattle are taken to Palestinian Authority areas, the Breeders Association reports, where competing milk and meat markets are being developed at the expense of the knowledge, experience, and investments of the Israeli breeders.

More than 1,030 head of cattle were reported stolen from southern farms last year, and another 350 are suspected to have been stolen but were not reported. The nonreporting breeders apparently feel that police will continue to be powerless to help them.

Cattle breeders in the north also suffer. Damages are estimated at 30 million shekels a year, including the loss of some 20 million liters of milk.

ICBA official Chaim Dayan said, “The cattle owners are forced to pay from their own pockets for protection devices, such as closed-circuit cameras, watchdogs, and alarm systems. But the thieves are getting better and more clever, and they are able to get in to the farms and steal cattle despite the means that have been implemented. . . . The thefts have become a national plague of shocking proportions,” Dayan said.

Arab joins Israeli Cabinet

In a country that former U.S. President Jimmy Carter called “apartheid,” Arab Raleb Majadele has taken a Cabinet post.

Israel installed its first Arab Cabinet member, replacing Ophir Pines who resigned last fall because he didn’t want to sit in the same government as Avigdor Lieberman, whom, ironically, he felt was too anti-Arab. Labor’s Majadele replaces Pines as minister of science.

Wrote Arutz-7’s Hillel Fendel: “The decision to appoint an Arab to the Cabinet was received cynically within the political establishment.” Pines declared, “This is . . . a new record in cynicism and insult to the voters’ intelligence.”

“The Arab parties were not impressed either,” reported Fendel, who quoted Arab MK Muhammad Barakeh as saying, “The whole purpose is merely to increase [Defense Minister Amir] Peretz’s diminishing chances in the upcoming primaries.”

Pipeline to unite Red, Black Seas

Arutz-7—Turkey and Israel have agreed in principle to build a water and gas pipeline system connecting the Black Sea to the port of Eilat on the Red Sea. It might even carry water to help back up the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee).

The ambitious project involves building oil, gas, and water pipelines, as well as electricity and fiber optic cables, as part of a seabed pipeline system in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Passing through Turkey and bypassing Syria and Lebanon—countries hostile to Israel—the pipeline will reach the Israeli port of Ashdod, from where an existing pipeline reaches the port of Eilat in the Red Sea.

The system could be used to bring Turkish water to parched Israel. Recent rains have raised the Kinneret, Israel’s largest reservoir, 9.5 centimeters. The lake now stands at just over 212.1 meters below sea level—2.3 meters (7.5 feet)—below the optimal level.

Iran’s Jews won’t budge

Arutz-7—Iran’s 15,000 Jews are ignoring urgent warnings by American Jewish community leaders and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) to flee for their lives.

According to statistics compiled by HIAS, only 152 Jews left the Islamic Republic between October 2005 and September 2006, down 40 percent from the same period in 2004–5. Earlier, only 183 Jews left. Sources said those who left cited economic and family concerns as their primary reasons for leaving, not political considerations.

Other minority groups in Iran are not wasting time, however. HIAS workers in Vienna have noted a substantial increase in the number of Iranian refugees of other faiths, including the Baha’i.
Unless the United States stops Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, America has only two to five years left, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said recently.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad leads an extremist core of Islam whose primary goal is to take down the United States, not Israel. “We’re just the first way station en route to you,” Netanyahu told CNN’s Glenn Beck during an hour-long interview program before Christmas.

“They’re out to get you; they’re not out to get us. We’re simply standing in their way. They’re not interested in Israel, per se. They’re interested in bringing down Western civilization, led by the United States. That’s why you’re the ‘great Satan’ and we’re just the ‘little Satan.’”

Unless he is stopped, Ahmadinejad will have nuclear capability within two to five years at most, Netanyahu said, and America will find itself embroiled in a nuclear holocaust. With nuclear weapons, Iran will be able to hit large American cities.

He said the world must strike now before it is too late. You can deter them, he said, by creating despair. When Muslims achieve victory, they believe Allah is with them, which spurs them on to further extremism. “You want to create despair that nothing will succeed, you will never defeat the West.” The West must thwart the threat in a way that will make Muslims believe they will never win because the West is stronger than they think.

Netanyahu has preached this message for years, and his predictions have been accurate. In a July 10, 2005, article in The Sunday (London) Times, one month after Ahmadinejad rose to power, he warned the world to rein in Iran and stop the shipment of Russian nuclear equipment to a plant under construction at Bushehr. “I think the regime will go as fast as it can to develop nuclear weapons,” he said then.

Ahmadinejad believes he was put on Earth to usher in the Mahdi, a Muslim messiah, by creating a great, apocalyptic religious war that will subdue non-Muslims in an enormous, worldwide conflict in which millions will die but Muslims will go to heaven. Their suicidal fanaticism makes Muslims more dangerous than Nazis or Communists, Netanyahu said.

If millions have to die “in order for their particular Islamic messiah to come, millions have to die; and the sooner the better, in their view,” he said.

Each day, we as Christians are given the opportunity to glorify God. Using our time well, exercising the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, and making wise use of the finances God has entrusted to us are just a few of the many ways in which we can honor Him.

One way we can glorify God beyond our time here on Earth is through a will. A will allows us to make sure that what the Lord has entrusted to us remains His when we no longer need it.

Sadly, it is reported that more than 50 percent of Americans (Christians included) have no legal will in force. This requires the laws of your state to intercede and make a will for you. Does your state know how you want your estate handled? Distributions are often made in ways that may be contrary to your wishes. In addition, your desire to see the Lord’s work benefited is likely to go unfulfilled.

If you would like to have a will written but don’t know where to start, let us help. We would like to send you our informative brochure Making a Will That Works at no cost and without obligation. It is our way of helping you become a wise steward over all the Lord has entrusted to you.

To receive Making a Will That Works, simply check the appropriate box on the envelope in this magazine; or write to Tom Geoghan at The Friends of Israel, P.O. Box 908, Bellmawr, NJ 08099.
by ZVI IN ISRAEL

Many people are preparing for the coming days of Passover, April 2 through 10. For them it is most important to cleanse their homes of leaven and bring home much special matzoh to take the place of bread made with yeast.

My neighborhood has many religious people who believe they must go from house to house, teaching others how to prepare properly to celebrate this great feast. They came to our home, too.

When I opened the door to greet them, one of the ultra-Orthodox men standing there asked, “Do you know about these great days of Passover and why we celebrate?”

I looked at him and replied, “I do not worship as you do, following many commentaries. I worship according to the Bible. This is my way, and so must it be done.”

They should not have been surprised, because we had had a long discussion about faith in Christ several months earlier. Now they came to my home again, this time bringing brochures from their hakhamim, their “wise ones,” the rabbis who write new laws telling people how they must worship during the feasts.

“How blind you are,” I said. “God told our people the right way to worship Him centuries ago. Yet you come with all these fictional stories and try to turn people’s heads to worship according to what your high scholars say instead of what our God says.”

“Read,” one told me, “and you will know how to worship God.”

“I do not need all your instructions. I know how to worship our Savior,” I replied.

“How do you know what to do without asking our great rabbis? You do not even know the books of the great commentaries,” he said.

So I told him what I thought about his books. Now they became angry and started to shout at me. I asked, “What is more important? It is to follow what is written in the Bible. I have believed what is written in the Bible and understand its meaning. I know by whom we have forgiveness of sins. But you are in deep darkness and do not follow what is right.”

“You follow This Man, Jesus!” they declared.

“You can say what you want,” I replied, “but I do not believe in commentaries, as you do. I believe only what is written in the Bible.”

This time they asked, “All that you say, where is that written in the Bible? Have you even read the Bible in your life?”

So I showed them my Bible. They took it, turning it around and around to examine it, and noticing that it also contained the New Testament.

“Okay,” one said. “Show us even one small verse that is written in the Bible about This Man.”

Thank you, Lord, I thought. And I opened my Bible to Isaiah 53 and told them, “Read! Then give me your opinion.” When they came to verses 5-6, they looked at me and said with surprise, “We have never read this chapter before.” There it is written,
But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

“Tell me,” I asked, “who was this one who was wounded for our transgressions? And who ‘laid on Him the iniquity of us all’?” I could see now that they had lost their way. They were confused. They knew the chapter was clearly in the Bible, but none of their rabbis had read it to them.

Then I said, “You know, of course, about Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson who died in the 1990s in New York City. Your rabbis have declared in the newspapers that he is the one on whom has been laid the iniquity of us all.”

“No!” they protested. “This is impossible! We do not believe what you say! We have never even read this chapter of Isaiah. Never would we do such a thing.

How dare you cast against us such a dirty lie! Where did you receive such evil information about our rabbis?”

So I pulled out the newspaper clipping. On it was the photograph of the late Rabbi Schneerson with the words from the prophet Isaiah written underneath. It had been submitted to the newspaper by the ultra-Orthodox rabbis whom these men followed.

One of the men said slowly, “You know, I do not feel well. I must go home now.”

“You are afraid of the truth,” I said sadly. “And now you know why your great rabbis are afraid to read this chapter. Because they know within themselves who is the one on whom our iniquities were laid and through whom we receive forgiveness of sin.”

Please pray that the Lord will show these men the truth so that they can worship Him in spirit and in truth, not only during these great days of Passover, but every day of the year.

Because we believe it is imperative to interpret the Scriptures correctly and that Replacement Theology does not do so, we are devoting an entire issue to Dispensationalism and the literal-historical approach to God’s Word. Articles will include:

- A Look at the Big Picture
- The Essentials of Dispensationalism
- A Literal Hermeneutic
- Why Study Biblical Prophecy?
- How Anti-Semitism Corrupted Church Doctrine
- For the Glory of God

Plus . . .

- Zvi