EXCLUSIVE:
Randall Price explains why the Olivet Discourse speaks of future events— Page 11

Renald Showers outlines the Tribulation— Page 14

Plus:
Russia’s resurgence —Page 8
Craig Parshall on “Finding Eden”—Page 24
The lowdown on false teachers—Page 31
This Page
Is Intentionally
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Emerging Shadows of the Hammer and Sickle
by Elwood McQuaid .......................................8
When the Soviet Union collapsed, America breathed easier. “Russia is vanquished,” we said. Well, folks, it’s time to reevaluate our thinking.

The Time of Jacob’s Trouble
by Renald E. Showers .....................................14
There’s no mystery about what the future holds. The Old and New Testaments fit together like a hand in a glove to reveal what is to come.

Perusing the Future
by Randall Price .............................................11
Some people believe the Olivet Discourse has already been fulfilled. This excellent article explains why they are wrong.

Illustrations From the King
by Deane Woods .............................................20
Learn what Jesus meant when He answered the question, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

The Judgment and Return
by David L. Larsen .............................................22
What will happen when Christ returns to Earth? A lot. And not everything will make everyone happy.

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Delivery Acquisition Device, you are using the world’s fastest package-tracking system, made by Motorola in Israel. And it is the Israeli company Given Imaging Ltd., that is a leader in medical technology with its recent development of the PillCam™ Capsule Endoscopy. Patients swallow a pill containing a tiny camera that produces images of the entire digestive track, a welcome alternative to more invasive procedures.

This degree of leadership from a country raised to life from the devastation of the Holocaust a mere 57 years ago lacks adequate explanation apart from the blessings of God.

Now ranked third in patent production globally, Israel is developing technologies and products at an astounding rate. Many consider Ituran, a new high-tech tracking system manufactured by an Israeli company of the same name, to be more reliable than the Global Positioning System (GPS). More companies from Israel are traded on Wall Street than any other country except the United States and Canada. These include Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd., distinguished as one of the world’s largest manufacturers of generic drugs.

Agriculture is another dynamic and highly developed segment of Israel’s economy. The Israeli farmers’ achievements in rolling back the desert are recognized throughout the world. Using state-of-the-art irrigation systems and the latest in agricultural mechanization, Israel is reaping bountiful harvests and exporting them to many countries while maintaining agricultural independence.

The wide variety of crops grown throughout the year includes citrus fruits, vegetables, potatoes, melons, field crops like cotton and wheat, and a host of flowers and ornamental plants. Israel’s Ministry of Agriculture reports that the most widely grown flower in Israel, both for domestic use and export, is the rose—the same flower the prophet Isaiah referred to as evidence of God’s blessing on the Jewish people.

Despite formidable obstacles, including war and terrorism, the Israelis have transformed vast areas of barren landscape into productive farmlands, forests, and viable communities.

Unfortunately, Israel’s enemies around the world are increasing their efforts to weaken her economy. They organize boycotts of Israeli products and pressure firms to stop doing business with the Jewish state. Christian supporters of Israel can help counter these destructive actions by telling stores they want to buy products from Israel. Israeli consumer goods are also available online at such sites as www.israelexport.org and www.shopisrael.com.

For businesspeople, opportunities abound for dealing with Israeli companies. According to Debbie Buchwald, AICC executive director, “The chamber exists to foster business contacts, trade, and investment with Israel.”

To explore such opportunities, contact the AICC at 200 South Broad Street, Suite 700, Philadelphia, PA 19102. AICC’s telephone number and e-mail address are 215-790-3722, aicc@gpcc.com. Or visit its Web site, www.americaisraelchamber.com. Be sure to explain that you are a Christian supporter of Israel. And also mention The Friends of Israel!

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
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I have a friend who spent his military career in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) as a sapper—a military demolitions specialist. His job was to defuse land mines and other lethal explosives. Upon being inducted into that hazardous branch of service, he was told, “In this job you have to be perfect every time, because you only get one mistake.”

That bit of advice seems applicable in the current rush toward a “two-state solution” to peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The warning, frankly, has little if any application for the Palestinians. It is the Israelis who are in the minefield. And virtually every decision they make has potentially lethal consequences.

At the core of the issue rests another assumption: that the Palestinians will install a freely elected, democratic government. So far, that prospect seems extremely tenuous. The two heavyweights in the ring are Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and the Hamas terrorist organization. Also in Hamas’s corner are Islamic Jihad, al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, and an assortment of thugs bent on destroying Israel.

Although Abu Mazen holds the top spot, enjoying the near adulation of Western leaders, Hamas has the practical advantage. Hamas has been astute enough to do for people on the street what the late, money-grubbing Yasser Arafat and his cast of Palestinian Authority (PA) cronies refused to do, that is, provide decent social services and practical assistance to the rank and file—a fact that may not be lost on Palestinian voters when they elect legislators this summer.

During the run up to coming elections, the wheeling and dealing for accommodation between the factions have many Israelis and a few politicians in the West furrowing their brows, and with good reason. A few examples:

• No attempt has been made to disarm terrorists operating against Israel within Palestinian jurisdiction.
• Hamas has promised no more than a wafer-thin agreement to a temporary hudna (tactical cease-fire) before cranking up its killing machine if its demands are not met in full.
• In the March meeting in Cairo, Egypt, between Abbas and terrorist leaders, Abbas reportedly declared that upon receiving security control over Jericho, he would release all Palestinian terrorists held there since May 2002, including the murderers of Israeli Minister of Tourism Rehavam Ze’evi who was shot in the face at point-blank range in his hotel in Jerusalem in 2001.
• Abbas also told terrorist leaders now headquartered in Damascus, Syria, that when the IDF leaves the Gaza Strip, they would be invited to move their offices there.
• Abbas ordered the execution of 15 Palestinians accused of collaboration with Israel, while he harbored fugitive terrorists in Ramallah.

Add these factors to Abbas’s irrevocable demands that Israel deliver a basketful of already well-known concessions and one arrives at the conclusion that all may not be as predictable as we might be led to believe.

As if the thought of hostile forces joining hands in a push toward independence were not enough, the promise of a Palestinian state enforcing Judenrein (“free of Jews”) is intolerable. And when Palestinians clamor, as they do, to dictate where and what Israelis are allowed to build, Western negotiators should not be echoing and certifying their demands.

Based on the evidence currently at hand, many people have an overwhelming and legitimate fear that a new state of Palestine will harbor and export terrorism—a chilling consideration.

An Israeli journalist, who had the question put to him about where Abu Mazen landed on the peace-prospect chart, offered three possibilities. Abu Mazen could be in (1) the rejectionist camp, openly and totally committed to the annihilation of Israel and relentlessly in pursuit of that goal; (2) the peace camp of Palestinians who yearn for a real peace and coexistence with their Israeli neighbors; or (3) the phased annihilation camp: take what you can get at every juncture until the final phase is accomplished—no more Israel.

So far it looks like Mr. Abbas has pitched his tent in camp number three.

We applaud the fact that the Middle East is taking halting steps toward democracy. And we commend the Bush administration for leading the way toward that liberating goal. At the same time, we are cognizant that millions of militant Muslims and Arabs in the region have an intrinsic hatred of Israel and despise her very existence. It is legitimate to ask, “Could these two states live side by side in peace, or would the attempt merely be a noble experiment doomed to fail in the end?”

For both the State of Israel and those Palestinians longing for peace, we hold a tenuous hope that a two-state plan could work. We are, however, in a minefield; and any wrong step could be that one mistake too many.
Can Abbas Deliver?

Mahmoud Abbas (Jerry Lampen/Reuters/Corbis).

No one should have any illusions about newly elected Palestinian Authority (PA) president, Mahmoud Abbas. He was the number two person in the Palestine Liberation Organization and a founder of the Fatah terrorist organization. His uncompromising position on the “right of return” of Palestinian refugees, for example, bodes ill for negotiations. On the other hand, he was one of the Palestinian architects of the Oslo accords. He also demonstrated courage by criticizing the intifada, saying that violence has not helped the Palestinian cause, and declaring a readiness to make peace with Israel.

The first days of his regime were not encouraging, as mortars continued to be fired into Israel and two terrorist attacks were perpetrated (one of which killed six Israeli civilians, two of whom were Arabs). These acts either were direct challenges to his leadership or an indication that Abbas has not abandoned Yasser Arafat’s two-track policy, namely, to talk about peace with the Western media while orchestrating a terror campaign against Israel.

Coexistence is impossible unless Palestinian violence stops. There can be no attacks on Jews anywhere, no mortars fired into Israel, and no incitement to violence. This is not a case of giving extremists a veto over negotiations; Israel has not said that Abbas must stop 100 percent of the incidents before it will talk, but Israel does insist that he demonstrate a 100 percent effort to stop them.

The media has created the false perception that the “militants” cannot be stopped because of their numbers. While it is true that the Islamic terrorist groups enjoy broad popular support, mainly in the Gaza Strip, the actual number of forces under arms is estimated to be no more than 1,500. Moreover, the terrorists’ identities and locations are known. The PA has an estimated 40,000 policemen and multiple security services. If Abbas is serious about establishing control of the PA, for the sake of his own authority and legitimacy, as well as to fulfill the road map commitments, he must use the resources at his command to disarm and arrest anyone who illegally possesses weapons and threatens or engages in violence.

Israel is being asked to make gestures to help Abbas; however, Israel owes him nothing. It is Abbas who must show that he has both the will and ability to reform the PA, to dismantle the terrorist networks, and to end the violence. Words are insufficient; he must take action. The agreements signed by the Palestinians are unequivocal about what is required of them; they cannot evade their responsibilities with conciliatory statements to the press in English or cease-fires with groups such as Hamas that remain committed to Israel’s destruction.

Though it has no obligation to do so, Israel has taken steps to show its goodwill, including facilitating the Palestinian elections (which international observers reported were unfettered by Israel), releasing prisoners, and withdrawing troops from parts of the territories. Israel has also said it is prepared to negotiate the disengagement rather than act unilaterally. A unity government was formed in January 2005 that now includes the Labor Party, which increases the flexibility Prime Minister Ariel Sharon will have to negotiate in the future.

Abbas has made a number of positive statements about ending violence and confiscating illegal weapons. We will know very quickly if he is serious. If violence is significantly reduced, it will indeed be possible to advance the peace process. If, however, he once again lacks either the will or the capability to control the PA, Israel will have to proceed with its disengagement and hope that another Palestinian leader emerges in the future with the courage and vision to make peace.

What do you fellows intend to preach about Ezekiel 38, since Communism is dead and the Soviet Union is no longer a threat to anyone? It doesn’t even exist. You’ve got a lot of explaining to do.

The question was put to me after I had finished bringing a prophetic message at a conference in the spring of 1992. The Soviet Union had disintegrated in December 1991 and was supposedly on the road to freedom and democracy. The new Russia, we were told, would be more an ally than an enemy.

My answer to my inquisitor was, “It isn’t over yet.”

I confess that I answered with confidence. First, a last-days attack on Israel from “out of the far north” (Ezek. 38:15), a region clearly associated with Russia, is an integral part of the last-days
scenario portrayed in God’s Word. Articulating that fact as biblical, prophetic revelation was neither sermonizing from the newspaper nor building eschatology from a current-events manual.

Yet there was also another, quite compelling reason for my confidence: Russia is essentially imperialistic. Imperialism is the driving force behind Russia’s political, social, and religious regional and global considerations. And though this hunger for power may lie dormant from time to time, it will inevitably come to the fore.

It was folly to believe that, although bankrupt and dispirited after the Soviet breakup, Russia would be content to ride in the backseat of the global political limousine and exist on the largesse of the Western nations. What is currently taking place is bearing this fact out.

Heady Days and Hopeful Hearts

On June 8, 1982, President Ronald Reagan delivered his famous “evil empire” speech before the British House of Commons. He said in part, If history teaches anything, it teaches self-delusion in the face of unpleasant facts is folly. We see around us today the marks of our terrible dilemma—predictions of doomsday, antinuclear demonstrations, an arms race in which the West must, for its own protection, be an unwilling participant. At the same time we see totalitarian forces in the world who seek subversion and conflict around the globe to further their barbarous assault on the human spirit. What, then, is our course? Must civilization perish in a hail of fiery atoms? Must freedom wither in a quiet, deadening accommodation with totalitarian evil?

The president understood much better than most the issues and potentially painful alternatives we must employ in the interests of international stability or, for that matter, survival.

Five years later, on June 12, 1987, Mr. Reagan stood before the Brandenburg Gate in what was then West Berlin and issued a challenge bordering on an ultimatum to then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev:

*General Secretary Gorbachev: if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization: Come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!*

On June 13, 1990, hammers began to pound away at the infamous Berlin Wall that had held East Germans captive since its construction in 1961. Opening the gates and destroying the wall, a symbol of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West, caused optimism to soar. And as families embraced and the barrier collapsed, optimism seemed well justified. Two words characterize the benefits of the breakup of the Communist Soviet empire: egress and access.

For millions of Jewish people long oppressed behind what Winston Churchill dubbed the “Iron Curtain,” the dissolution of the Soviet Union brought a golden opportunity to leave it. Thus in the 1990s, a mass exodus got under way and saw hundreds of thousands of Jewish people immigrate to Israel and other Western nations. The Jewish people’s massive exit brought ancient images to mind of Israelites fleeing from Egypt under Moses. This modern exodus, however, was led by men like Siberian gulag survivor and Soviet dissident Natan Sharansky.

For Westerners, the Soviet collapse provided access to a people no longer under the cloak of secrecy woven by Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and facilitated by Joseph Stalin and his despotic successors. The new Russia was destitute, bankrupted by 70 years of corrupt Communist, socialist delusion. Consequently, no options existed for those picking up the pieces other than to put their hands out to the democracies in order to fend off anarchy and chaos.

Perhaps the greatest of all doors that swung open during this time was for Christians, particularly evangelicals. Finally they were free to enter the region and minister to a spiritually starving population. For decades the Soviets deliberately excluded God as they passionately pursued their socialist, secular excursion into an atheistic nirvana, a state *Webster’s Dictionary* rightly defines as “a goal hoped for but apparently unattainable.”

What the Communist commissars failed to account for was the human heart’s inherent instinct to worship, to experience some link to the eternal. Predictably, when the opportunity to hear divine truth became available, floodgates of desire opened; and opportunities abounded. The fields were ripe, and the harvest was abundant.

Shadows of the Past

But in all of this, there remained an unsettling political, social, and religious reality that would eventually have to be reckoned with. To remain a client state for the long haul was never something Russia saw as a viable option. After all, the Soviet empire had been a major player on the world stage. Power, prestige, massive territories, and fearsome military power caused continual international apprehension, as nations tried to ascertain what the Russian “bear” would do next.

The Soviets hated everything democracy stood for. They despised evangelical Christianity. They had evicted the God of the Judeo-Christian world. And anti-Israel/anti-Semitic militancy ranked high on their list of preferred national pastimes.

At one critical juncture in the Soviet-Israel standoff, Moshe Dayan, the famous Israeli general and political leader, was quoted as saying, “The key to war in the Middle East is in the hands of the Soviets, while the key to peace is held by the United States.”

Those words succinctly articulated the essence of the major issues during the not so Cold War.

A few facts about arms agreements with Israel’s archenemies exhibit Arab
and Soviet intentions in the Middle East extremely well.

Soviet Arms Agreements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement Year</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Extent of Soviet Aid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Main Supplier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Main Supplier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>Main Supplier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Main Supplier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Main Supplier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>Partial Supplier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Partial Supplier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adapted from Russia Imperial Power in the Middle East published by Carta Press in Jerusalem, 1971, page 28.*

The ‘Bear’ Begins to Stir

Early this year, Russia began a serious Middle East venture designed to reassert its influence. In a deal with the besieged outlaw Syrian government, the Russians cancelled most of Syria’s $10 billion debt and, in a formal declaration, jumpstarted their once intimate relationship. That cozy alliance began in the Cold War days of the mid-1950s and came to a halt only with the collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago.

For their part, it is a big win for Bashar Assad and Syria. Assad regains an ally that will presumably protect it in the international arena. That cozy alliance began in the Cold War days of the mid-1950s and came to a halt only with the collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago.

For their part, it is a big win for Bashar Assad and Syria. Assad regains an ally that will presumably protect it from the United States and patronize it in the international arena.

What’s in it for Russia? Orly Halpern of The Jerusalem Post tells us:

Russia’s ambitions are growing to Soviet-era size. It wants to be involved in the international games that are now the recreation of the European Union and the United States. But the US is not letting it get involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and it has little to say in the Iraq issue because it refused to make war on a country that owed it so much money.

By renewing political and military relations with countries the US has blackballed, the downsized former superpower aims to bring back the glory of its Soviet-era days when it played countries like chess pieces.¹

To add to Israel’s and the United States’s reasons for concern, the Russians have reportedly agreed to sell advanced missiles to Syria. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon protested to Moscow that such missiles could fall into the hands of terrorists and gravely endanger Israel. Given Syria’s track record, one can virtually be assured this will be the case.

Another cause for consternation is the agreements Russia has made with the Iranians to assist them in further developing their nuclear program. Although the Russians claim they will only help Iran achieve the ability to produce nuclear generating power, the West worries that this totalitarian successor to the ambitions of deposed Iraqi despot Saddam Hussein has other plans in mind.

Furthermore, the new Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas [Abu Mazen] made every effort to make sure his first trip abroad was to Moscow. He did so, he said, to demonstrate the respect the Palestinian people feel toward the Russians and their role as major players on the world scene, particularly in the Middle East.

On January 13, 20 members of Russia’s Duma (lower house of parliament) sent a letter to the prosecutor general asking him to investigate their allegations and, if confirmed, to initiate proceedings prohibiting all religious and ethnic Jewish organizations in Russia, branding them as “extremist.”

They argued that the Jewish people are the cause of the anti-Semitism that has reemerged in the country in recent years. The charge is hauntingly reminiscent of the threadbare, but too often effective, lies that instigated the vicious “blood libels” and Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion, which have served Russian anti-Semites so well in the past.

Evangelical Christians in Russia and some of the commonwealth states are also feeling the heat. It is no secret that the Russian Orthodox hierarchy is in a huff over the giant inroads Bible-believing Christians are making among a spiritually emaciated people long stifled by the sterile formalism of the Orthodox system. Consequently, the Russian Orthodox have forged alliances with some of Russia’s most radical political groups, branding evangelicals as cultists who prey on unsuspecting citizens. Of most concern is that evangelical churches, once unregistered and “underground” during Communism, are now in the open and are exposed targets for the anti-Christian establishment, should the hammer of hate fall once again.

Perilous Times, Desperate Measures

We have long been warned that in the last days perilous times would come upon the face of the planet. For all but those who persist in maintaining a debilitating state of spiritual hibernation in order to avoid the facts, that time is upon us. The great powers are moving inexorably toward the final convulsions prewritten in the Scriptures. What we have described as developing in the North in the prophetic scenario is merely one piece of the puzzle.

And though some may argue that the words desperate measures should not be used to describe what Jesus’ followers must take in response to the crisis, no one can argue the legitimacy of the desperate need to buy up the time and make a difference; time is most assuredly of the essence.

Someone once said, “The only juncture where time and eternity meet is at this moment.”

Think about it. If that is true, it makes what we do for the cause of Christ at this moment the great imperative of our lives. Face it. Our moments to touch eternity are running out.


Elwood McQuaid is editor-in-chief for The Friends of Israel.
Futurists have been divided over whether or not the Olivet Discourse has already been partially fulfilled. The argument hinges on whether Matthew 24:4–14 describes general characteristics of the Church Age\(^1\) or only the future, seven-year Tribulation.

These verses speak of “wars and rumors of wars” (v. 6); “famines, pestilences, and earthquakes” (v. 7); tribulation, martyrdom, betrayal, hatred, false prophets, and lawlessness (vv. 9–12).

Despite what some people teach today, verses 4–14 must be eschatological and refer to the events of the first half of the Tribulation for several reasons.

### The Conditions

The conditions described must be considered divine judgments rather than “natural” disasters, in keeping with the pattern of Old Testament revelation. Jesus said, “All these are the beginning of sorrows [literally, “birth pains”]” (v. 8). In the Old Testament the prophets used a Hebrew word for “birth pains” to symbolize the terrible calamities that accompany the Day of the Lord (Isa. 21:3; 26:17–18; 66:7; Jer. 4:31; Mic. 4:10), particularly “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:6–7) alluded to in the description of the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24:21.\(^2\)

Many Jewish people during the second Temple period believed a time of suffering would immediately precede the end. (See 4 Ezra 9:3; 13:31–32; 2 Baruch 27:7; 70:3; Sibylline Oracles 2:22–24; 3:660–61.) The Jewish
sect at Qumran referred to these troubles as “birth pangs.” (See Qumran Hymns.)

Rabbinic Judaism likewise spoke of the “birth pangs [Hebrew, chavelim] of the Messiah” as a series of worldwide convulsions that would precede the Messianic Age. The Talmud’s list of these disastrous spiritual, moral, political, social, and environmental conditions that will characterize “the generation when the Son of David is to come” (Sanhedrin 97a) closely parallels the list in Matthew 24:4–14.3

Since the New Testament indicates the church will not experience the judgments of God that have been appointed for the Day of the Lord (1 Th. 5:9; Rev. 3:10), these verses cannot describe events within the Church Age.

**The Sequence**

Second, Jesus stated that these judgments are not “the end” of the judgments but merely the “beginning” (v. 8). After beginning birth pains the more intense birth pains come that climax the birth process. Since the Tribulation does not immediately begin after the Rapture of the church, but begins with the commencement of Daniel’s 70th week (Dan. 9:27), these verses cannot describe events within the Church Age.

The most compelling argument for a Tribulation context for these verses comes from a comparison of verses 4–14 with the first five seal judgments in Revelation 6. (See Correlation Chart 1.)

These parallel conditions demonstrate that, just as the seal judgments of Revelation 6 lead to the more intense trumpet and bowl judgments of the Great Tribulation, so, too, the “beginning” birth-pain conditions described in Matthew 24:4–14 lead to the more intense, final “birth pains” described in Matthew 24:15–26, which result in the climactic advent of the Messiah (vv. 27–31).

Furthermore, Jesus himself referred to Daniel’s prophecy of the 70th week: “Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken

of by Daniel the prophet [Dan. 9:27], standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains” (24:15–16).

Both Matthew and Mark (Mk. 13:14) tell the reader to consider this text as a means to understanding the prophecy of the Olivet Discourse. In other words, Jesus used the 70th-week prophecy as the template for the chronological events He unfolded in His response to the disciples’ questions. This also applies to the judgment section of Revelation (chapters 4—19) where Jesus, the one who gave the Revelation vision to the apostle John (Rev. 1:1), modeled the vision on the structural divisions of Daniel’s 70th week.

Viewing these texts together (see Correlation Chart 2, page 30), we find that the “beginning” birth pains of Matthew 24:4–14 correlate with the seal judgments of Revelation 4—6, which (1) have a terrestrial focus; (2) fit within the first half of Daniel’s 70th week (Dan. 9:27a); and (3) climax with the pivotal event of the Temple’s desecration (abomination of desolation) in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14, the midpoint of Daniel’s 70th week (Dan. 9:27b).

Events then intensify to concluding birth pains in Matthew 24:16–26, which (1) correlate with Revelation 7—19, (2) have a celestial focus, and (3) climax with the heavenly appearing of “the sign” of Messiah’s advent to Earth in judgment (Mt. 24:27–31; Rev. 19). These events fit within the last half of Daniel’s 70th week (Dan. 9:27b), which concludes with the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Gospels</th>
<th>Revelation 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>False Messiahs/Prophets</td>
<td>Mt. 24:5, 11</td>
<td>v. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wars</td>
<td>Mt. 24:6–7</td>
<td>vv. 2–4</td>
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<td>International Discord</td>
<td>Mt. 24:7</td>
<td>vv. 3–4</td>
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<td>Famines</td>
<td>Mt. 24:7</td>
<td>vv. 5–8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pestilence</td>
<td>Lk. 21:11</td>
<td>v. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persecution/Martyrdom</td>
<td>Mt. 24:9</td>
<td>vv. 9–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earthquakes</td>
<td>Mt. 24:7</td>
<td>v. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmic Phenomena</td>
<td>Lk. 21:11</td>
<td>vv. 12–14</td>
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Adapted from John McLean’s “Chronology and Sequential Structure of John’s Revelation” in Thomas Ice and Timothy J. Denny’s book, When the Trumpet Sounds.
Understanding the Olivet Discourse

Jesus’ instruction to His disciples from the Mount of Olives (Mount Olivet, giving it the name the Olivet Discourse) appears in Matthew 24—25, Mark 13; and Luke 17:20–37. It is one of the Bible’s most important texts because it not only provides the Lord’s final discourse but also His most extensive prophetic teaching.

It reveals His interpretation of crucial Old Testament prophetic passages concerning Israel and the nations and serves as an inspired master outline of end-times events. Furthermore, it explains God’s judgment on Israel, especially His promised restoration of it at the advent of King Messiah and the establishment of His Messianic rule.

If properly interpreted, the Olivet Discourse enables the church in this age to distinguish itself from national Israel in the Tribulation—the future “time of Jacob’s trouble”—and from the events that will characterize that time immediately preceding Christ’s return to Earth.

Much prophetic confusion has resulted from a failure to understand that the Olivet Discourse involves Israel, not the church, and refers to a future (eschatological) age, not the past or present one.

Matthew 24:1–14 explains the historical setting (vv. 1–5) that precipitated the prophetic discourse and describes the signs, or “birth pains” (divine judgments of the first half of the Tribulation, vv. 4–13), and the global evangelization that will be accomplished by the midpoint of this period (v. 14).

The setting was the latest occasion of Jesus and His disciples to journey to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple. Aware of Jesus’ pronouncement against the nation and particularly the Temple establishment (He had just said, “See! Your house [Temple] is left to you desolate,” Mt. 23:37–38), the disciples perhaps thought a reminder of the national unity symbolized by the Temple might temper Jesus’ disposition toward national judgment. Indeed, some Jewish sects, such as that at Qumran, expected the Temple to be destroyed because it had an illegitimate priesthood and had been ritually defiled; but the disciples knew Jesus continued to reverence the Temple as His “Father’s house” (Jn. 2:16).1

Too, the disciples were impressed, as were most in that day, with the Temple’s unrivaled magnificence, which had become a source of national pride: “Some spoke of the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and donations” (Lk. 21:5–6). The disciples made their national statement to Jesus as He left the Temple precincts. There, waiting for Him, they began pointing out the latest structural additions to the compound, which, according to John 2:20, had been in process for 46 years: “Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!” (Mk. 13:1).

Perhaps the disciples also thought, as did Aristeas in his letter to Philocrates (Letter of Aristeas, 100–101 B.C.), that the Temple was inviolable and invincible. Consequently, they were trying to comprehend Jesus’ judicial remarks. In any case, Jesus addressed both of these ideas in His unexpected reply that all of the stones they had shown Him would be violently torn down at the time of judgment.

No doubt, as the disciples thought on these words, they concluded that Jesus meant the final attack on Jerusalem that Zechariah predicted will come at the end of the age when the Lord will destroy the Gentile nations and establish Messianic rule (Zech. 14:3–9). The disciples believed these events were already in motion and would soon climax with Jesus’ public revelation and reign as Messiah.

However, as they walked with Him up the Mount of Olives, the inner circle of disciples determined they needed clarification, especially concerning the issue of the Temple’s destruction and Jesus’ timetable for these events. Therefore, in verse 3, these disciples privately posed two questions: “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”

The first question concerned the specific time of the Temple’s destruction; the second (composed of two related parts) concerned “the sign” that would mark Jesus’ advent to Israel (Greek, paraousía, “bodily presence”) as Messiah at the end of the age.2 Jesus’ response to these questions form the prophetic teaching of the Olivet Discourse. The first question is addressed in Luke 21:10–24 and the second, in Matthew 24:4–31 and Mark 13:1–27.

There has been considerable discussion as to whether the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled in the past or is yet to be fulfilled, as futurists believe. Historists have held that most of the events described (except Christ’s advent) have been fulfilled. Preterists contend all events (including the advent) were specifically fulfilled in A.D. 70. The disciples had also presumed a connection between the Temple’s destruction and the Messianic advent. Jesus gave the Olivet Discourse to correct this misunderstanding and protect the disciples from becoming deceived as a result of the events that would take place in their generation, since Jesus would not bodily return to restore Israel and establish the Messianic Kingdom after Rome razed the Temple.3

Therefore, Jesus began His discourse with a warning: “Take heed that no one deceives you” (v. 4). Failing to understand this warning, preterists have been led astray in their interpretation, being forced to spiritualize prophecy in an attempt to force a first-century fulfillment. However, what the disciples saw as connected events, Jesus explained were chronological and sequential but would not all occur within the same time frame.

Despite the terrible conditions of the Tribulation, one of the greatest evangelistic outreaches in history is predicted: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Mt. 24:14).

This global message, while having the same elements as the gospel of grace, that is, faith in Jesus as Savior, focuses on repentance concerning Messiah’s coming to overthrow the nations and establish the Messianic Kingdom for Israel. It is this repentance that will reverse the condition of Israel’s house being left desolate (Mt. 25:38–39; cf. Acts 3:19–21).

This was the same message initially preached by John the baptizer and by Jesus during His earthly ministry. However, “the gospel of the kingdom” cannot again be proclaimed until the nation has moved into the chronological confines of Daniel’s 70th week. The Greek term for “world” in verse 14, while meaning “the inhabited earth,” cannot be limited to a particular region but must include the entire world of Gentile occupation.

It is this “world” that Christ is coming to judge (Acts 17:31), which is implied by the phrase “then the end will come.” For this reason this global evangel cannot be limited to the first-century Roman Empire. Nor could it have been accomplished within 25 to 30 years of Christ’s ascension. Nor did it fulfill the Great Commission by a.d. 70, as preterists contend.

The good news that the Lord Jesus has left for believers in this future time of Jacob’s trouble is that “birth pangs” will not hinder the gospel of the Kingdom. Instead, the judgments will magnify its message, enforce its urgency, and fulfill the promise of Jeremiah’s prophecy that Israel “shall be saved out of it” (Jer. 30:7).

by Randall Price

1 For further discussion see Randall Price, The Coming Last Days Temple (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999).
2 Gerald B. Stanton, Keep the Door (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 21.
The Time of Jacob's Trouble
(Matthew 24:15–31)

In the Old Testament God foretold an unparalleled time of trouble, characterized by birth pangs but followed by the return of scattered Jews to their homeland to serve the Lord and live in peace under a Davidic king (Jer. 30:4–10). God called this period “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (v. 7).

Centuries later Jesus described that identical time, also called the Great Tribulation, and told how it will begin and what will follow (Mt. 24:15–31).

Its Beginning
(Mt. 24:15)

After Jesus described the Great Tribulation (the second half of a seven-year period called the Tribulation, vv. 9–14), He began the next sentence (v. 15) with “therefore.” Thus He indicated that the next section of His discourse was an inference drawn from the characteristics of that future period.

Speaking in advance to Jewish people who will live in Judea then, Jesus told them that, in light of the traumatic nature of the second half of the Tribulation, they should be alert to the event that will begin that second half: the setting up of the abomination in the holy place as foretold through Daniel the prophet (Dan. 9:27).

The word translated “abomination” means “detestable thing.” It refers to “anything that must not be brought before God because it arouses his wrath” and is used in the Bible “of everything connected with idolatry.”

The expression “the holy place” refers to the Temple. God commanded Israel to destroy all the idolatrous Canaanite worship places and to worship Him exclusively at “the place” where He would put His name and dwell (Dt. 12:1–6, 11). The Temple Solomon built in Jerusalem was that place (1 Ki. 8:28–30). First-century Jews called the Temple “this holy place” (Acts 6:13; 21:28), indicating it was “reserved for God and his service.”

The noun translated “abomination” is neuter, and the verb translated “standing” is perfect tense. Therefore, the “detestable thing” will be an idolatrous image set up to stand permanently in the Temple. Since the Antichrist will oppose and exalt himself “above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Th. 2:4), and since an image of the Antichrist will be made for people to worship (Rev. 13:12–15), it appears the detestable thing set up to stand permanently in the Temple will be an image of the Antichrist.
The worship of this Satan-possessed man as God in the Temple will be more detestable to God than the Babylonian destruction of Israel’s first Temple (586 B.C.), the defilement of the Second Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes (171–165 B.C.), and the destruction of the second Temple by the Romans (A.D. 70). Daniel 9:27 reveals why Jews of that future time should be alert to the setting up of this detestable thing in the Temple:

Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week [seven years]. But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate.

The Hebrew text indicates that a person perpetrating desolation will be associated with setting up this abomination. Daniel 9:27 is part of the 70-weeks prophecy that begins in verse 24. That verse signifies that every part of this prophecy is related to Israel and Jerusalem; they will be the primary targets of the person perpetrating desolation. Since the subject of verse 27 is the activities of the Antichrist, it is apparent that he is the person perpetrating the desolation.

The apostle John received revelation relating to the Daniel 9:27 prophecy: Satan and his demonic angels will be cast down from their heavenly realm to the earth in the middle of the seven-year Tribulation (Rev. 12:7–9). This action will infuriate Satan. Knowing his time is growing short, he will begin wrathful desolation (Rev. 12:12). Then he apparently will take possession of Antichrist and prompt him to stop Israel’s reinstated Old Testament worship. He will seize the Temple, set himself up as God in that place, and demand to be worshiped as God. Because Satan desires to be worshiped as God ( Isa. 14:12–14), he will receive that worship by proxy through his Antichrist (see Rev. 13:4). Once this blasphemous worship begins, Antichrist will be empowered to continue for 42 months (Rev. 13:5; cf. Dan. 7:25).

In addition, Satan will begin to desolate Israel through his Antichrist. In Revelation 12:13 and 15, God revealed that Satan will persecute and try to destroy Israel (represented as a woman, Rev. 12:1–2, 5; cf. Gen. 37:9). The Jewish people in Israel will flee to the wilderness for 1,260 days, or three and one-half years (Rev. 12:6, 14), indicating that Israel will experience unparalleled desolation throughout the entire second half of the seven-year Tribulation period as Satan tries to annihilate it through Antichrist and his forces. For that reason God called that future time “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:4–7).

God will not crush Satan and establish His Millennial Kingdom on Earth until Israel repents and experiences a
national reconciliation with God (Zech. 12—14; Acts 3:12–21). Thus Satan attempts to destroy Israel beforehand so that God will not crush him.

The Commands
(Mt. 24:16–20)

In light of the ominous desolation associated with the setting up of the detestable thing in the Temple in the middle of the seven-year Tribulation, Jesus issued several urgent commandments to the Jewish people who will live in Judea at that time.

First, flee for refuge to the mountain wilderness as soon as you see the detestable thing set up in the Temple (v. 16). Second, don’t even take time to obtain provisions from your homes (vv. 17–18). Third, pray that your flight will not be during the bad weather of winter or on the Sabbath (v. 20). He also indicated that flight will be extremely difficult for pregnant and nursing women (v. 19). The urgency of His speech implied that Israel’s desolation will begin as soon as the detestable thing appears in the Temple.

The Description
(Mt. 24:21–28)

Jesus gave the reason for His urgent commands: The unparalleled time of trouble in all of history will begin at the moment the detestable thing is set up in the Temple in the middle of the Tribulation. That time will be characterized by “great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (v. 21).

The word translated “tribulation” refers to “distress” and was used to describe birth pangs. The word translated “great” emphasizes the “intensity” of the distress. Earlier in His discourse (vv. 4–8), Jesus indicated the first half of the Tribulation will be characterized by “the beginning of sorrows” (literally, “birth pangs”). The concept of “great” distress in verse 21 means the second half will be characterized by the intense, hard-labor birth pangs. The Greek text reveals that Jesus used a double negative to emphasize the impossibility of any other time equaling the intense distress of that time.

To emphasize this aspect even more, in verse 22 Jesus indicated that, if God in eternity past had not determined to cut off the second half of the Tribulation at the end of three and one-half years, all flesh would perish. For mankind to survive, God determined to prevent the time of “great tribulation” from running indefinitely beyond the time limit He had set.

Jesus’ statement implied that period will be the unparalleled time of trouble for all flesh (Jewish and Gentile) on Earth. For several reasons, this fact prevents the “great tribulation” from referring to the Roman Empire’s destruction of Jerusalem, the second Temple, or Israel as a nation-state in A.D. 70:

(1) Only Jewish flesh was threatened in A.D. 70. (2) The A.D. 70 destruction was not worse than that of Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel as a nation-state in 722 B.C. or the destruction of Jerusalem, the first Temple, and the kingdom of Judah as a nation-state in 586 B.C. (3) The destruction of A.D. 70 was not worse than the Holocaust of World War II. Four times as many Jewish people were killed in the Holocaust than in the war that ended in A.D. 70.

Jesus warned that the unparalleled time of trouble will also be characterized by false christs (messiahs) and prophets making deceptive claims (vv. 23–28).

The Aftermath
(Mt. 24:29–31)

Jesus indicated that immediately after the time of “great tribulation,” cosmic disturbances will take place (v. 29). Then His sign will appear in heaven (perhaps a display of His brilliant Shekinah glory against the backdrop of the darkened heavens). Then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will
see Him coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (v. 30; cf. Rev. 1:7).

It is important to note that every part of Jesus’ statement in verse 31 comes from Old Testament statements that relate exclusively to Israel, not the church. Jesus indicated that at His Second Coming, He will send His angels to gather His elect. God called Israel His “elect” (Isa. 45:4; cf. Dt. 7:6).

Jesus said that His angels will gather His elect “from the four winds.” God warned Israel that, because of its rebellion, He would scatter them into “all the winds” (Ezek. 5:10). Later He declared that He did scatter them abroad “like the four winds of heaven” (Zech. 2:6). God also promised that in the future, He will gather them together “from the four corners of the earth” (Isa. 11:12)—from the east, west, north, and south (Isa. 43:5–6).

Jesus declared that His angels will gather His elect “from one end of heaven to the other” (v. 31). God asserted that, in the future, if any of the people of Israel be scattered to the farthest parts under heaven, even from there He will gather them (Dt. 30:4).

Jesus signified that His angels will gather His elect “with a great sound of a trumpet” (v. 31). God promised that, in the future, the people of Israel will be gathered when “the great trumpet will be blown” (Isa. 27:12–13).

ENDNOTES

5 Ibid., “megale,” 498.
6 For an in-depth study of this statement, see Renald E. Showers, MARANATHA, Our Lord, Come! (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel, 1995), 50–54.

Renald E. Showers is an author, professor, and international conference speaker for The Friends of Israel.

Our beloved brother and faithful servant of the Lord, Julio Espinoza, entered God’s presence on January 30, 2005, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Julio was born in Chile, South America, and received his early education there. He later completed studies at the Baptist Bible School in Bolivia, South America; the University of Michigan; Argentina-Israeli Institute; and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A brilliant scholar, he spoke seven languages and often served as a translator.

Before joining The Friends of Israel in 1970, Julio was a pastor and open-air preacher and ministered for 14 years in towns and villages under the auspices of the Hebrew Evangelization Society in Buenos Aires. He was tireless in teaching, preaching, counseling, visitation, literature distribution, and campus ministry.

Humble and unassuming, Julio scorned personal recognition and invested his life in others, as evidenced by the ministries of his three children. Juan Carlos is a dental assistant in Argentina. Alfredo is a physician who, with his wife, Asunta, heads the thriving Friends of Israel Medical Clinic in Buenos Aires. Daughter Ruth is a successful certified public accountant married to a physician.

Following the homegoing of Maria, his wife of over 50 years, Julio wed Betty in 1988. She was at his side when he entered glory.

Julio Espinoza will be fondly remembered by his colleagues, and all whose lives he touched, as a man wholly given to his Lord and the work the Savior called him to. And, in the end, that’s the highest achievement any of us can aspire to.
In a strikingly significant way, this verse expresses what Indonesian Christians practiced in the aftermath of the catastrophic tsunami that struck along the Bamboo Rim in December. Stories of suffering, death, and privation flooded the news media for months. As never before in recent memory, the Western world reached out to aid survivors and their families.

Not widely reported was the heroism of Christian believers who live in the hardest hit areas, particularly in the Aceh region of the island of Sumatra, Indonesia.

The province of Aceh is nearly 100 percent Muslim. Missionaries in Indonesia say that Muslims have used Aceh as a terrorist training ground for years. Whatever Christians were there suffered intense persecution, particularly after Muslim sharia law was introduced in January 2002.

As in so many other places where believers are severely persecuted, the world looked the other way; and the cries for help went unanswered. But in Aceh, amid the death and devastation, a miracle of grace took place that stunned and confused many a Muslim tormentor. The principle stated by the apostle Paul went...
to work: Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure.

The tsunami had struck a bewildering blow to the faith of Muhammad’s followers who so strictly adhere to the laws of Islam. They began to ask why Aceh, the most devoted of all Islamic areas in Indonesia, would become the center of the catastrophe. Was Allah angry? What had they done? To say the least, the tsunami shook Muslim theology as violently as it did the island’s landscape.

One victim reportedly lamented, “I don’t know if this is a punishment or a warning, and I don’t know if God loves us or despises us. . . . No one knows what God is up to. . . . This disaster has left us with nothing.”

But while the devout were wondering, they began witnessing what they never expected. The Christians whom they despised and persecuted were extending hands of help to them. The persecuted had suddenly become those who blessed their enemies. Equally stunning was the influx of Christians from Western countries; they came asking no more than to help these people recover.

When one radical Muslim group came to warn tsunami victims not to accept aid from the “infidel” Christians, a number of local Muslim leaders had an answer for them: “You come carrying your flag, but they [Christians] have come carrying rice, medicine, and tents, and we have been greatly helped.”

The Baptist Press reported that Kompas, Indonesia’s leading newspaper, quoted a State Islamic University instructor who expressed a similar feeling:

A number of community groups in Australia, Canada, America and other western nations are unceasingly raising funds for the tsunami victims on their own initiative. While many western nations are pouring forth dollars, sending soldiers, heavy machinery and military, we hear little about such action from rich Muslim nations.

When we find ourselves at a loss to understand or explain why believers are persecuted, these wonderful glimmers of light break out. To which we say, “And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure.”

Amen!
Illustrations From the King
(Matthew 24:32–51)

by DEANE WOODS

That summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away (Mt. 24:32–35).

The whole point of the Lord’s horticultural exposé about the fig tree and its sprouting leaves was to teach one central, axiomatic truth: A fig tree is a harbinger of summer. In like manner, the signs of Matthew 24:4–28 are a harbinger of His coming, which will occur shortly thereafter. Jesus emphasized the fact that all these precursors would be necessary. All these seemingly disparate phenomena will form a totally integrated whole. Israel must get the big picture and “be ready.”

The Days of Noah

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (Mt. 24:36–39).

Jesus went on to say that in those last days, wickedness will abound as it did in the days of Noah. Even so, He said no one would be able to calculate the precise moment of the King’s return because, at that point, only the Father knew when it would be (v. 36).

Given that Christ stressed that the Jewish people must “be ready,” the Noah illustration is striking. All the people in Noah’s day are said to be going about their normal, daily routines. Preoccupied with temporal issues, they ignored the eternal and lived as if there were no tomorrow. But the moment came without warning. Light was suddenly turned off forever.

Thus, the warning to the Gentile world is clear: “Be ready.” Like the Jews of Noah’s day, we must not be caught unawares. We are to be “watchers” and “standers,” expectant of the One who will return.

The Parable of the Fig Tree

Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away (Mt. 24:32–35).

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were no future judgment.

That is the significance of Jesus’ reference to the two men in the field (v. 40) and the two women grinding at the mill (v. 41). Analogous to Noah’s day, the individuals who will be taken are the wicked, whom the King will take away to judgment (cf. Lk. 17:37). Those left will be believers, who will receive God’s grace and mercy. They will populate Messiah’s Kingdom in physical bodies and become the King’s loyal subjects.

The Faithful Servant

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, “My master is delaying his coming,” and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 24:45–51).

Jesus began this illustration with the repeated theme, “watch therefore.” His point here is vigilance. The Lord is coming, and His coming will test His servants. The illustration is simple, yet sublime. Just as the master in Jesus’ story entrusted all his possessions to his servant, so the God of Israel has entrusted all things in the earth to His servants. A servant’s response to his Lord reveals the true condition of the servant’s heart (Mt. 24:46, 48–49). The Lord wants to find His servants faithfully doing His will (vv. 45–46). And when the Lord returns, He will reward faithfulness (v. 47).

Failure to do the Lord’s bidding is faithless stewardship. This action brings the Lord’s just punishment because, in the parable, when such a servant noted his master’s delay, he abused his own servants. Yet the master returned to the house unexpectedly, and judgment came (vv. 50–51).

In the Lord’s eyes, that servant was a hypocrite. Thus he was separated from the others and consigned to eternal judgment, where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (cf. Mt. 13:42). Likewise, at the Messiah’s Second Advent, the wicked will be judged and separated eternally from God.

These parables of the faithful and evil servants and the talents given them by the master speak of the privileges God has given to His covenant people and the consequences of willful and prolonged disobedience.

So What?

What observations may be taken from Matthew 24:32–51?

Regarding Israel. Matthew’s presentation of Yeshua is consistent, justified, and true. He is Israel’s true King, the “Son of David,” the Messiah of His covenant people. His prophetic predictions in the Olivet Discourse enhance the validity of His Messianic claims and fulfill the promises in the Jewish Scriptures. Furthermore, His Messianic credentials assert His worthiness. Therefore, let all Israel receive Him individually and as a nation.

Regarding the Church. Only in a secondary way can the passage be applied to the church, that is, Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua. That said, the church may extrapolate spiritual principles from the passage and appropriate the truth so that believers may be faithful in hearing, believing, and obeying God’s Word.

Specifically, believers should:

1. Make every effort to present the Messiah to Jewish and Gentile people in a contextually sensitive, Spirit-endued way. This should involve vigilance in making Him known by life and lip.

2. Acknowledge that, whereas Matthew’s Gospel opens with the worship of the newborn King, it was the Gentile magi who came and knelt before Him (Mt. 2:1–12). Matthew closed his account with Yeshua’s poignant command to His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (28:19–20).

God’s interests are global—but they start with Israel. Therefore, “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Ps. 122:6) and lovingly reach out to His people and to others around the world.

Your life must illustrate the truth. True light illumines the soul.

Deane Woods is a representative with The Friends of Israel in Australia, Southeast Asia, and New Zealand.
As the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west (Mt. 24:27), the Lord Jesus will return to Earth “on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (v. 30). What will happen to the living nations when Christ returns to Earth to have victory at Armageddon and set up His Kingdom? This is the issue our Lord addresses in the last section of the Olivet Discourse as He puts the last piece of the end-times mosaic into place.

**Some Wrong Turns**

Even a casual reading of Matthew 25:31–46 makes it clear that the judgment of the living nations is not the same as the believers’ appearance at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) or the Great White Throne Judgment of the unbelieving dead (Rev. 20:11–15). The idea of a general judgment for all has been widespread in the history of biblical interpretation. To do justice to the complexity of the data, dispensationalists have posited five separate judgments. The Scripture does speak of “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5), but this refers to the epoch of judgment and is not a day of 24 hours anymore than is “the day of the Lord” as described in both the Old and New Testaments.

The liberal establishment has used Matthew 25:31–46 as the basis for asserting that social good deeds will make us acceptable to God and ensure felicity in the life to come:

> Then the King will say to those on His right hand, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me” (vv. 34–36).

Obviously, some are adjudged saved at this judgment of the living nations, and some are adjudged lost. Because we hold to the noncontradictory nature of Holy Scripture, we must reject any interpretation that is inconsistent with what the Bible teaches about salvation being by grace alone (Eph. 2:8–9). Further, identifying all people in material need as the brothers of Jesus is more out of Count Leo Tolstoy than the Bible.

Holding to a general day of final judgment, as many evangelicals do, only blurs and confuses what our Lord taught about “the end [consummation] of the age” (Mt. 28:18–20). How can believers, who “shall not come into judgment” (Jn. 5:24), and the living nations and unrighteous dead all be accommodated in one conflated judicial event? Believers will never be examined in an adjudicatory way as to whether or not they are saved. The final verdict has already been pronounced: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). The event before us is far more constricted than a general judgment allows.

**An Awesome Tribunal**

The returned and reigning Son of Man will take His place on the “throne of His glory” (Mt. 25:31) and
summon the living nations to come before Him. The Great Commission is directed to “all the nations” (28:19), so accountability involves all living persons.

There are two categories, and only two: (1) those who respond positively to the Lord and (2) those who reject Him. The former are called “sheep” and are invited to enter the millennial Kingdom, the long-promised, long-awaited theocratic Kingdom that our Savior will rule and administer with justice for a thousand years. These persons are labeled “righteous,” which means they have been saved from the penalty of sin and clothed in Christ’s righteousness, as are the saved in any age. They responded to a witness during the Tribulation.

God always has His witnesses who proclaim the truth about Him. In the first half of the seven-year Tribulation, God empowers two witnesses (Rev. 11:1–13) who faithfully bear testimony. Then, at the midpoint of the seven years, I believe, 144,000 Jewish men will come to faith. They will be the vanguard of the Jewish people who will come to Messiah in the last half of the Tribulation and be His evangelists throughout the world.

Indeed, “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Mt. 24:14). The gospel will go forth in the face of great difficulty and duress, and the witnesses will be exposed to physical privation and great persecution. Yet they will be joined by Gentiles who will become converted through the witnesses’ testimony, as depicted in the Left Behind books by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Christ’s brethren (His “family,” Mk. 3:31–35) will be severely persecuted. These are primarily Jews but will include saved Gentiles also.

Despite this intense oppression, some people will extend sympathy, kindness, and love to the saints. Who will those be who will so minister to the Lord Jesus by supporting His despised messengers? The people who believe the message and express their faith by their deeds (Jas. 2:14–26). Although clothing the needy, for example, cannot earn one salvation, it will demonstrate genuine faith in the face of the Antichrist’s fierce hatred of the Jewish remnant and those who receive its witness. Indeed, the “righteous [will go] into eternal life” (Mt. 25:46).

Two Contrasting Destinies

Individuals who go along with the Beast (Antichrist) and receive his mark, opposing the faithful remnant and its witness to Jesus and salvation, are labeled “goats.” They will go into “everlasting punishment [fire]” (v. 46). No notion here of the annihilation of the wicked dead; their agony is coextensive with the believers’ eternal life (Mt. 25:46).

Thus will the Savior’s prediction be fulfilled that, at the end of the age, “the angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire” (13:49–50). The criterion for salvation is always response to the gracious message of salvation, which results in a changed life.

Three days after the Olivet Discourse, our blessed Lord laid down His life for us sinners. But He did not die before putting the last piece of the mosaic in place. Not only in our age is the door of salvation open, but even in the most convulsive epoch of human history, the Tribulation, there will be the opportunity for sinners to be saved.

“Sheep” from among the nations will join Christ’s brethren and enter the enjoyments and employments of the messianic Kingdom on Earth. These people will populate the millennium as mortals and will procreate. Some of their children will embrace Christ, and others will not. At the end of the 1000-year reign, the unsaved will rebel against the Lord and His anointed (Rev. 20:3, 7–10).

Only the dispensational system of theology provides any explanation for the origin of the final revolt against the Lord at the end of Christ’s Millennial reign. How, in terms of one universal judgment, is there any solution to this burning question? Again, the drama of the two eternal destinies is underscored; and the perfection of the divine mosaic of end-times events is reinforced with compelling clarity.

All praise and glory be to our gracious and merciful God.

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A Creation of Paradise

The Genesis account makes it clear that the Garden of Eden was both physically beautiful and environmentally perfect. It is also plain that the Bible speaks of it as an actual, existing site, though it gives only enticing hints as to its exact location.

Merrill Unger’s Commentary on the Old Testament offers the traditional view that the Sumerian roots of the word Eden indicate the Garden stood somewhere in the oldest cultural strata of Mesopotamia, possibly at the head of the Persian Gulf. Archaeologist Juris Zarins shared this view in an interview with Smithsonian Magazine.

There is some geographical support for this view. The headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers are described as flowing out of Eden (Gen. 2:10–14). These two rivers, together with the “Pishon” and “Gihon” rivers, all found a common source in Eden (vv. 11, 13). The Tigris and Euphrates both exist today and flow into the Persian Gulf, supporting this traditional theory. The problem is that neither the Pishon nor the Gihon are current geographical entities. Juris Zarins speculates that, based on satellite photos, the Pishon could be Wadi Batin, a fossilized riverbed running through Saudi Arabia; and the Gihon might be the Karun River, which rises in Iran and flows toward the Gulf.

On the other hand, there is intriguing evidence of an Eden-Jerusalem connection. To conclude that the Garden of Eden may have been located in the current site of Jerusalem, however, we first must explain away the four-rivers issue, as neither the Tigris nor the Euphrates currently run into Israel. One theory is that the catastrophic Noahic flood obliterated or, in some cases, reoriented river paths and geological features. As we see the devastating result of one tsunami that hit recently on a single day in the Indian Ocean, we can imagine the force of a global flood lasting 40 days.

There are biblical and linguistic clues that link Jerusalem with the Garden of Eden. Harvard Archaeologist Lawrence E. Stager notes that, during the united monarchy in Israel, there were strong suggestions of such a link. In an article in Biblical Archaeology Review (BAR), he points out that, during the building of Solomon’s Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the iconography and architectural details harken back to several features of the first paradise.
After the Fall of Man, God posted angelic cherubim to guard the Garden’s eastern entrance, to block access to the “tree of life” (Gen. 3:24). Compare this with Solomon’s Temple, where elaborate images of cherubim filled the inner sanctuary (1 Ki. 6:23–28). There are strong suggestions that, like the Garden of Eden, the Temple (the House of God) flourished with trees and greenery (Ps. 52:8; 92:12–14).

Ezekiel 31:8–9 speaks of the trees in “the garden of God,” and then links that in verse 16 with “the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon.”

Clearly, the reference is not to an “Eden” that was in Saudi Arabia or the Persian Gulf.

In his article in the November/December 2004 issue of Israel My Glory, Jimmy DeYoung cited the fact that in Ezekiel 28:14, 16, the phrase mountain of God, referring to the Temple Mount, is equated with the Garden of Eden. Ezekiel 28:13 describes the same place as being “in Eden, the garden of God.”

Finally, in a recent letter to the editors of BAR, Rabbi Bernard Bloom said the mysterious Gihon River of Genesis may not be missing after all; in fact, it is linked with Jerusalem. Gihon was the name of the main spring and water source for David’s Jerusalem. Furthermore, King David ordered his servants to take his son Solomon down to the Gihon stream to anoint him as king (1 Ki. 1:32–40).

A Courtroom of Judgment

However, to quote the English poet John Milton, the perfection of Eden eventually became “paradise lost.” Adam’s utter failure of moral leadership and his embarrassing attempt to shift the blame (Gen. 3:12), plus Eve’s willingness to be deceived and the couple’s direct disobedience to God’s eternal command in deference to temporal enticement (Gen. 3:2–13), are shockingly reminiscent of all our universal struggles with sin, as we fight against “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 Jn. 2:16).

What had been an ideal relationship of communion between God and man, woman, and nature was now smashed and disfigured. Though He is Creator, Nurturer, and divine Father, God is also a holy and righteous Judge. His clear, perfect moral law would have been empty and meaningless had it not been inexorably connected to consequences—and punishment. Because of sin, God converted the lush paradise of peace and tranquility into a courtroom for the execution of judgment.
For the 30 years I have been trying cases in court, I can recall one common sensation in every case. In those final minutes before the judge gavels the case back into session to announce a decision, or in that instant before the jury foreman passes the verdict to the court to read it aloud, there is one final, trembling, fearful moment. It is the recognition that justice—albeit a frail, imperfect, and abundantly human type—is about to be administered.

Now think about divine justice meted out by the High King of the universe. If the prophets and righteous men of old fell on their faces at the appearance of angels who had come from the mere presence of God, what must it be like to fall into the hands of that righteous God himself who must execute judgment?

Here, also, is a clear connection to Jerusalem. In Eden, God passed judgment on the “first Adam” because of sin. Later, at the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, God exercised judgment in Jerusalem by permitting His own Son, the “second Adam,” to be wrongly arrested, charged, and convicted because of the sin of us all (1 Cor. 15:22, 45).

A Consolation of Grace

Happily for us, the story doesn’t end with condemnation and punishment. God graciously covered the couple’s shame with animal skins (Gen. 3:21), prefiguring the necessity of blood sacrifice for the covering of sin.

The Lord also promised victory over the power of Satan—the demonic, beguiling serpent. To the serpent, God said, “He [the Redeemer] shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” (3:15), clearly referring to Jesus, the promised Messiah and perfect Lamb of sacrifice. And though Adam and Eve were evicted from Eden and the entrance barred, we know that the great Hero of this story will yet appear. The first appearance of the King of kings was to fulfill Genesis 3:15—to overcome the power of Satan, the sting of death, and the seeming invincibility of sin.

And as our Savior hung in indescribable physical and spiritual agony on the cross, He took the time to look with kindness on the believing thief next to Him. Jesus told him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:43).

In the Greek, the word paradise can also be rendered “garden” or “park.”1 How incredible that our Lord used a phrase reminiscent of the Garden of Eden before the fall in His promise to the dying, repentant criminal who was suffering on the cross next to Him.

But that is not the end of the story of Eden. There is a second appearing of the Messiah and a future role for the Garden of God.

Back to the Future

The Bible is clear: There will be a future end of days and an eternal Kingdom where God will reign, His Son will be glorified, and where we who have believed on the name and in Jesus’ blood sacrifice will abide.

God will create a heavenly Jerusalem.

Some of its features will be powerfully familiar: a great river that flows from the throne of God, much like the first Eden. It will water a special tree, the Garden of Eden’s “tree of life,” which now reappears and will yield its fruit and heal the nations with its leaves (Rev. 22:1–2). Permanent peace in Jerusalem, which will have evaded us all throughout all of the millennia, shall finally be achieved.

And when we are there, basking in the glory and love of Him who wowed us to salvation and walking the paths of His future garden city, I can just imagine looking past the smiling faces of the millions of His children and seeing the faces of one man and one woman who are standing quietly off to the side, by that great tree. And in their visage I vaguely recognize the features of everyone I have ever known. And the man and woman are smiling as if to say, “So you see, the Lord has brought us, all of His children, all the way back home to be with Him in His wonderful Garden after all, hasn’t He? Just like He said He would.”

Students of Scripture have long observed that the central message of God’s Word is reflected in the motif of the Lamb, who is Jesus.

The Lamb in the Old Testament is seen on the altar. In the Gospels, He is on the cross. And in the Apocalypse, He is on the throne.

The apostle John referred to the Lamb 28 times. But more significant is his use of a particular Greek term to achieve his purpose. In Revelation he used to ἀρμίον to denote a horned, Ruler Lamb. In John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32; and 1 Peter 1:19 the regular term, ἀμνός, is used, which carries the idea of Redeemer Lamb.

The only other times ἀρμίον appears in the New Testament is in Luke 10:3 and John 21:15. This last reference is revealing. The resurrected Christ told Peter, “Feed My lambs.” Thus, by virtue of being united with their Redeemer Lamb, believers would share the triumphant reign of their all-conquering Ruler Lamb.

continued on page 37

The Lamb in the Apocalypse

arna

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ever assume anything.” This well-known adage works particularly well when applied to the science of biblical interpretation. Assuming too much about a scriptural text can lead to inaccurate conclusions that miss the meaning the Lord intended.

A good example of this situation comes from Matthew 24:34 where Jesus, speaking of a future time of terrible trouble, followed by His return, stated, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.”

Through the years, teachers and preachers have made such inaccurate assumptions about this text that they have created confusion and frustration. Some have even gone so far as to date Jesus’ return to Earth. These improper assumptions concern three areas: (1) the word generation, (2) the phrase all these things, and (3) the identity of the fig tree in verse 32.

Generation. Not long ago people assumed the word generation indicated a fixed period of time, specifically, 40 years. Actually, a generation is not limited to 40 years. Only once (Gen. 15:16) does the Bible even use the word to denote a specific amount of time, in this case, 100 years. The word can be used to denote generations of 20, 40, or more years.

Further, generation is not limited to the element of time. It could, in some instances, be used to categorize people of similar age, occupation, or social status. Consequently, some scholars now conclude that, in this passage, generation refers to the nation of Israel, meaning that Jesus guaranteed the continued survival of the Jewish people.

All These Things. Although it may seem natural to believe Jesus spoke about the disciples and their contemporaries, certain elements of the Lord’s prophecy do not fit this interpretation. The disciples no doubt later witnessed the horrors involving the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in A.D. 70. But they did not witness the rest of the events that Jesus described as all these things. Never have the events of verse 29 occurred: “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” Thus, either Jesus made an inaccurate prediction (we know this to be impossible) or the disciples were not the “generation” to whom He referred.

The Fig Tree. Through the years many well-meaning folks assumed the blossoming fig tree in verse 32 symbolizes Israel. When Israel became a state in 1948, these people believed they would be the ones to witness Christ’s return. In other words, they viewed Israel’s rebirth as a prophetic time clock, ticking down until judgment came. They assumed a 40-year generation that will see all the events—all these things—Jesus described. Jeremiah 30 referred to them as the “time of Jacob’s trouble.” Daniel described them as the 70th week (Dan. 9:24). We refer to them today as the seven-year Tribulation.

In addition, in the parallel account of Matthew 24, Luke quoted Jesus as saying, “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees” (emphasis added, 21:29). Jesus used the parable of the fig tree to convey a simple truth. The fig tree is nothing more than a fig tree; and when it puts forth leaves, summer is coming. Thus Jesus told the disciples that the generation to witness all the literal events of Matthew 24:4–31 will be the generation to witness His return.

His return is yet future. After the Rapture of the church, there will be a generation of people who will live through the Tribulation and the Antichrist’s reign. When He returns, these people will receive their reward. Therefore, the time we are living through will be significant, but it is not the final days.

by Steve Herzig,
North American States director for The Friends of Israel.
In answering their questions regarding future events, Jesus gave His disciples a ray of hope: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Mt. 24:13). What did He mean?

The key is the phrase to the end. The word end marks time in Matthew 24:6, 13–14 but is nonspecific. Other verses speak of “the end of the age” (13:39–40, 49; 24:3; 28:20).

The Jewish people perceived two ages: one preceding the coming of the Messiah and one following.¹ Matthew 24:3 concerns the former. In context, “the end” in Matthew 24:13 does not, as some have claimed, refer to the end of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, particularly since Jesus did not return then and establish a literal, tangible Kingdom. Nor does it refer to the end of personal trials and persecution or the end of one’s life. Rather, the end refers to the end of the age preceding Messiah’s coming.

Jesus also explained in Matthew 24 who will have to endure those final seven years prior to His coming. Throughout the Olivet Discourse, Jesus addressed the disciples as “you” (plural). But this word goes beyond them to Jewish believers in the distant future. Although it is true that Gentile believers alive then may also “endure,” the passage’s context, along with its parallels in Matthew 10:22 and Mark 13:13, as well as the entire Gospel of Matthew, focuses on Jewish people. Thus Matthew 24:13 was not written for believers of all eras, as some have proposed, but for those Jewish believers who will live in the tumultuous days immediately preceding the arrival of Messiah Jesus.

What exactly will they have to endure? Like a woman in childbirth (Mt. 24:8), those days will be filled with pain and anguish. Those days are also known as Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), “a time of trouble” (Dan. 12:1), and “great tribulation” (Mt. 24:21). Israel will undergo severe persecution (Zech. 13:8; Rev. 12:13). Even Jewish believers in Jesus will suffer, being in the crosshairs of the Antichrist (Dan. 7:21; Mt. 24:9-12; Rev. 12:17; 13:7). Some will even die.

Those believers, however, are contrasted with others in Matthew 24:13 who endure. Although the word endure has a range of meaning, it is best understood here as “staying alive.”² Notice that the verses following are life-saving instructions from Jesus himself.

Matthew 24:13 is not a command, nor is it a conditional clause. It is merely a matter-of-fact statement that the survivor of those days will have the sure hope of salvation. The salvation promised here cannot be spiritual because spiritual salvation is based on faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8–9), not on physical survival.

Also, in context, Jesus said, “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved” (physically delivered or rescued, Mt. 24:22). Since the word save can refer to either spiritual or physical salvation, and since the Bible clearly promises that God will rescue His people Israel from physical destruction at the end of the Tribulation (Isa. 4:2–3; Jer. 30:7; Dan. 12:1; Zech. 12:7–9; 14:3), the salvation presented in Matthew 24:13 signifies a physical deliverance, or rescue. Thus Jewish believers who manage to survive until the end of the Tribulation will be physically rescued by Jesus Christ at His Second Coming.

¹ Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Hebrews 6:5. Also, Mishnah, Aboth 5.19.
² When writing from prison to the Philippians, the apostle Paul believed he would not die but “remain in the flesh” and “remain and continue” (Phil. 1:24–25). Both words for “remain” are related to “endure” in Matthew 24:13.

ENDNOTES

1 Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Hebrews 6:5. Also, Mishnah, Aboth 5.19.
² When writing from prison to the Philippians, the apostle Paul believed he would not die but “remain in the flesh” and “remain and continue” (Phil. 1:24–25). Both words for “remain” are related to “endure” in Matthew 24:13.

by Bruce Scott

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destruction of the Temple’s desolator (“the prince who is to come,” the Antichrist, Dan. 9:26).

If verses 4–14 predict signs that are for the future Tribulation and relate primarily to the Jewish people of that day, they cannot have had a past fulfillment, especially not with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Comparing the events in these verses reveals that they cannot be identified with first-century historical events.

The passage describes wars between many different nations and kingdoms, not between a single nation (Rome) and Israel, as occurred in the Jewish people’s First Revolt against Rome (A.D. 66–74).

Likewise, Scripture says there will arise many claiming to be Christ (Messiah). But no historical evidence exists of anyone claiming to be a messiah in the first century until Simon Bar-Kokhba (A.D. 135), and then it was only a single individual making this claim.4

Neither can the signs be used by the church as “signs of the times” to indicate the nearness of the Lord’s coming. Many Christians have used the apparent increasing frequency of earthquakes, apostasy in the church, and moral decline in society in general as indicators that we are fast approaching the Rapture and the end-times. However, the Rapture is a signless event; and since these birth pains do not begin until Israel enters “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (and we do not know how long this will be after the Rapture), we must exercise caution in trying to predict the nearness of end-times events based on the presence of these conditions in the present age.

During the Church Age these general conditions (given in 1 Tim. 4:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:1–9; 1 Jn. 2:18; 4:1–3) remind us we are in the “last days.” But during the Tribulation, the conditions of verses 4–14 become specific signs of the end-times, whereby “you” (in context, this word means the disciples’ people, or Jewish believers) will be able to discern where they are in the 70th week and endure to the end of the Tribulation: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved,” meaning physically delivered at the messiah’s advent (v. 13).

These signs—and especially the signal event of verse 15, the abomination of desolation—will enable Tribulation saints to persevere physically and spiritually as they await their promised rescue at the end of Daniel’s 70th week.
False teachers can pose a health hazard. Perhaps you remember some from our own time.


On April 19, 1993, 74 members of an armed, religious group called the Branch Davidians, plus their leader David Koresh, died in Texas after a 51-day standoff with the FBI. Sect members believed Koresh was God incarnate.

In late March 1997, Marshall Applewhite’s 39 followers, called Heaven’s Gate, committed suicide in California by drinking Phenobarbital and vodka. They believed that, after they died, a spacecraft would whisk them away to a “higher plane.” Applewhite was a homosexual who introduced himself as “Jesus, Son of God.”

Today hundreds of young Muslims become human bombs, murdering themselves as well as thousands of innocent people. They believe doing so is the surest way to heaven.

Just as false shepherds lead sheep to the slaughter, false teachers lead their followers to destruction.

False teachers posed a great problem in Old Testament times. Deuteronomy 13:1–5 records the warning God gave the Israelites concerning false prophets:

*If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, . . . you shall not listen to the words of that prophet . . . because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God.*

The Old Testament describes false teachers in more than one way. In 1 Kings 22:21–23, they are Ahab’s lying prophets. Ezekiel 13:3 describes them as those “who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing [no vision].” They are “shepherds who destroy and scatter” God’s sheep (Jer. 23:1). Thus the Old Testament pictures them as people who lie, are self-centered, look out for themselves alone, and cause the flock to scatter.

The New Testament provides much the same description of a false prophet, his destructive message, and his denial of biblical truth.

According to Matthew 7:15, false teachers are crafty, like wolves in sheep’s clothing (yes, that’s where the saying originated), sneaking in unnoticed. Initially they just try to blend in. Over time, however, they reveal their ungodliness (Jude 4) by going after the flock (Acts 20:29). Matthew 7:20 says, “Therefore

continued on page 37
A delegation from Bethel arrived in Jerusalem seeking counsel from priests and prophets concerning fasting. They asked whether the annual fast commemorating the destruction of Solomon's Temple should be continued since a rebuilt Temple was well on its way toward completion. Apparently people were growing weary of keeping this fast, along with others they had instituted while exiled in Babylon. These fasts had become burdensome rituals devoid of spiritual significance.

In chapters 7 and 8, God addressed the delegation’s question on fasting. Zechariah presented His answer in four messages that told the Bethel delegation what it needed to hear, not what it expected to hear. Each message was introduced with a form of the phrase the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying (7:4, 8:1, 18).

The People’s Question

Zechariah began by providing the date when he received the four messages from God: “Now in the fourth year of King Darius it came to pass that the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, on the fourth day of the ninth month, Chislev” (v. 1). The prophet received this revelation on December 7, 518 b.c., 22 months after receiving the eight night visions (1:7).

Zechariah further stated, “when the people sent Sherezer, with Regem-Melech and their men, to the house of God, to pray before the LORD” (v. 2). A better translation of the Hebrew is, “Now the town of Bethel had sent Sherezer and Regem-Melech and their men to seek the favor of the LORD.” Instead of taking the Hebrew word Bethel to mean the town by that name, both the King James and New King James versions recorded its literal meaning (“house of God”). However, the phrase house of God does not refer to the Temple under construction at the time of Zechariah’s prophecy. The proper translation is “Bethel,” referring to the city 12 miles north of Jerusalem, an ancient capital of the northern kingdom and the seat of idolatrous worship before it fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

Sherezer and Regem-Melech are Babylonian names, indicating these two men were born during Judah’s exile in Babylon. Many Jewish people, including the prophet Daniel, received Babylonian names while in exile. These men probably joined the returnees from Babylon to rebuild the city of Bethel (Ezra 2:28).

The delegation came to inquire of the priest and prophets: “Should I weep in the fifth month and fast as I have done for so many years?” (v. 3), referring to weeping over the destruction of Solomon’s Temple after the Babylonians destroyed it on the ninth of Av (August 9) in 586 B.C. (2 Ki. 25:8). This was a self-imposed fast, not ordained by God. The Jewish people developed it during their captivity in Babylon to remember the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple.

Over time, they developed mourning practices for the ninth of Av (Tisha B’Av) to deny themselves comfort and pleasure by refraining from using perfume and cosmetics, wearing leather shoes, bathing, shaving, and cutting hair. And they sit on low stools as a sign of mourning. It is customary to read Lamentations, Jeremiah, and parts of the Talmud that refer to the Temple’s destruction and the laws of mourning.

The Israelites also established other fasts in relation to the Babylonian invasion. (See 8:19.) The fourth-month fast was in memory of the city’s walls being destroyed (Jer. 39:2), the seventh-month fast memorialized Gedaliah’s assassination (2 Ki. 25:22–26), and the 10th-month fast was in memory of the Babylonian invasion (2 Ki. 25:1–2).

The phrase as I have done for so many years (v. 3) seems to reveal that the delegation’s true desire was to discontinue the self-imposed ceremony of fasting and mourning over the destruction of the Temple. Since the Temple was being rebuilt, these men probably felt it unnecessary to continue the previous practice. Zechariah did not answer their question until he gave his fourth message (8:18–19).

The Prophet’s Rebuke

In his first message, Zechariah launched into the motive of fasting with the words Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying (v. 4). The Lord’s message through Zechariah was addressed to “all the people . . . and to the priests” (v. 5).

God asked the people two rhetorical questions about fasting. The first was, “When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months during those seventy years, did you really fast for Me—for Me?” (v. 5).

Thus Zechariah asked the people whether they fasted out of a dead, formal ritualism or from a heartfelt commitment. The question implies that their fasting was selfish and not God-honoring. If such fasting does not honor God, it is mere external formalism and a total waste of time and effort.

The second rhetorical question brings out the true motive of their fasting:
“When you eat and when you drink, do you not eat and drink for yourselves?” (v. 6). In other words, they fasted and feasted for a feeling of self-satisfaction. It was outward, ritualistic show, empty of spiritual reality; God had no part in it.

Zechariah continued by asking his own question: “Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?…” (v. 7). The Israelites had received numerous warnings to obey God’s Word from their hearts during times of prosperity while living in the land. All their religious observances, such as fasting, were of no value, no matter how well executed, if not done from the heart in obedience to God’s Word.

Warning from the earlier prophets went unheeded during Israel’s time of peace and prosperity. Judah did not listen then, but ought not she to listen now to God’s warning? If these returning exiles ignored God’s Word from Zechariah, they would be in great danger of provoking God’s warning. They fasted and then, but ought not she to listen now to his message, they resisted his warning and held it in contempt. They refused to hear the Israelites’ crying prayer for help. They refused to hear the prophet’s message, so He acted in kind by turning a deaf ear to the Israelites’ warning, so the nation would not repeat the error of its forefathers.

Zechariah listed the ways their forefathers had responded to the messages of the preexilic prophets:

- But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts (vv. 11–12).

Zechariah said their forefathers resisted and pulled away their shoulders (a sign of rejection) from submitting to God’s ways as an ox turns its neck away from being yoked. They also plugged their ears to God’s prophet. Refusing to listen to his message, they resisted his warning and held it in contempt. They made their hearts like “adamant stone,” meaning their hearts were impervious to God’s Word (Ezek. 3:7–9). This attitude caused God to pour His wrath out on Judah and yoke the survivors to the cruel nation of Babylon for 70 years of slavery.

**The Lord’s Retribution**

Zechariah addressed his second message to the Bethel delegation, recounting what the Lord did to his preexilic forefathers:

“Therefore it happened, that just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen,” says the LORD of hosts. “But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; for they made the pleasant land desolate” (vv. 13–14).

Israel’s disobedience to God brought His retribution on Israel. First, God turned a deaf ear to the Israelites’ crying prayer for help. They refused to hear the prophet’s message, so He acted in kind by choosing not to hear them.

Second, God dispersed their forefathers among the nations. The Lord scattered them like a tornado or hurricane swiftly removes everything its whirlwind touches (Lev. 26:14–43; Dt. 28:15–68). Israel was to be scattered “among all the nations which they had not known” (v. 14): Assyria (722 B.C.), Babylon (586 B.C.), Rome (A.D. 70), and then the world.

Third, the land of Israel was made desolate. Once called the “pleasant land” (literally, “land of desire, delight,” v. 14) and “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 38), it now lay in ruins.

Whenever the Jewish people were dispossessed from their land, it became desolate and undeveloped. The only time the land blooms is when the Jewish people are in it. The past 1,900 years have shown this to be the case. With the return of the Jewish people in the 20th century, Israel has come alive and continues to be a modern, thriving country.

The Bethel delegation, along with all of Israel, was called on to heed Zechariah’s warning, so the nation would not repeat the error of its forefathers.

On the final page of the Old Testament (2 Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew canon), we read, “But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy” (2 Chr. 36:16).

Is there not a message for our generation in these words? We, too, must listen to God’s Word; or the same judgment will befal us.

David M. Levy is the director of International Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
God’s Revelation Is Wisdom

The Scriptures indicate that the revelation God has given to mankind is wisdom.

**God’s revelation of wisdom through oral speech and written Scripture.** The statutes and judgments that God gave to Israel were to be that nation’s wisdom and understanding. As the Israelites would conform their lives to them before the nations, those nations would say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (Dt. 4:6).

David asserted that the Scriptures God revealed made simple people wise (Ps. 19:7). The psalmist declared that people who obey God’s commandments have good understanding (Ps. 111:10).

Proverbs 2:6 signifies that God gave wisdom through the knowledge and understanding that He communicated orally from His mouth.

Jeremiah indicated that men who rejected the word God gave to Israel lacked wisdom (Jer. 8:9).

Paul claimed that the apostles and New Testament prophets communicated the wisdom of God that God had revealed to them by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:7, 10). He also stated that God’s Scriptures are able to make a person wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).

James referred to the wisdom that God gave to mankind from heaven (Jas. 3:17).

Peter asserted that Paul recorded in his epistles the wisdom that God revealed to him (2 Pet. 3:15).

**God’s revelation of wisdom through the incarnated Jesus Christ.** The Scriptures indicate that the incarnated Jesus Christ was an incredible revelation of God and His wisdom to human beings during the years Jesus lived among them on Earth. John signified this fact through his designation of Jesus as “the Word” (Jn. 1:1, 14). Just as words are the outward revelation of invisible human thoughts to other human beings, so the incarnated Jesus Christ was the outward revelation of the invisible God and His wisdom to human beings (Jn. 1:18).

Jesus claimed to be God the Father’s revelation to people who saw Him (Jn. 14:9). People who heard His teaching and observed His miracles were so astonished that they asked the nature and source of His unique wisdom (Mt. 13:54; Mk. 6:2). Even when He was 12 years old, people who heard Him marveled at His understanding and answers to questions (Lk. 2:42, 47). Jesus promised to give His disciples irrefutable, irresistible wisdom to speak when confronted by enemies (Lk. 21:15).

Paul called Christ “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24) and stated that Christ Jesus became “wisdom from God” to believers (1 Cor. 1:30). He declared that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge reside in Christ (Col. 2:3). Through these statements Paul indicated that the incarnated Jesus Christ embodied the wisdom of God. Because Christ embodied the treasures of God’s wisdom, Paul exhorted believers to appropriate those riches by letting Christ’s teaching take up permanent residence inside them (Col. 3:16).

God’s creatures in heaven asserted that Christ, the Lamb who was slain, is worthy to receive wisdom (Rev. 5:12). They did not indicate that Christ lacked God’s wisdom before He was slain for the sins of the world. Instead, they asserted that He is worthy to receive acclamation of the fact that He has always fully possessed and embodied God’s wisdom.1

**God’s revelation of wisdom through the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit played a significant role in revealing God’s wisdom to human beings.

Isaiah 11:2 says, “the Spirit of the LORD is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding.”

Pharaoh of Egypt signified that the Spirit of God in Joseph revealed knowledge to him and made him exceedingly wise (Gen. 41:38–39).

God filled Israel’s craftsmen with “the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” to enable them to make the Tabernacle and everything related to its fixtures and worship service the way God wanted (Ex. 31:1–11; 35:30–36:1).

Isaiah foretold, “the Spirit of the LORD . . . the Spirit of wisdom” would rest on the Messiah (Isa. 11:2).

Christ’s apostles instructed the early church to appoint leaders who were “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3).

Opponents were unable to deal effectively with “the wisdom and the Spirit” by which Stephen, a man “full of . . . the Holy Spirit,” spoke (Acts 6:5, 10).
Paul indicated that God revealed His hidden wisdom to the apostles and New Testament prophets “through His Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:7, 10). Paul and the other apostles and prophets presented the content of God’s revealed wisdom, not in words that man’s wisdom taught, but in words taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:13). Paul signified that God gave believers “the word of wisdom” and “the word of knowledge” as spiritual gifts through the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:8).

The Importance of Wisdom

Proverbs emphasizes that wisdom is “the principal thing” that a person should obtain (4:7; cf. v. 5). Obtaining wisdom is of primary importance because of what it can do for a person. For example, it can provide long life, riches, honor, peace, happiness (3:16–18), safety, freedom from fear, calm sleep (3:23–24), preservation from harm, promotion, glory (4:6, 8–9), deliverance from sexual immorality (7:4–5), God’s favor (8:35), commendation (12:8), a built house (24:3), strength (24:5), sweetness of soul (24:13–14), profit, defense (Ecc. 7:11–12), a beaming face (Ecc. 8:1), success (Ecc. 10:10), and stability ( Isa. 33:6).

Consequently, it is far better to get wisdom than precious jewels, silver, gold, or other items that people desire (Prov. 3:13–15). Wisdom is better than strength and weapons of war (Ecc. 9:16, 18). Therefore, Proverbs exhorts mankind to get and keep wisdom and truth, especially the true wisdom that begins with knowledge of God and a right attitude toward Him (4:7; 9:10; 15:33; 23:23).

Two Contrasting Wisdoms

Two contrasting wisdoms or world-life views are available to mankind. In many points they are antagonistic toward each other and conflict concerning issues in modern-day society.

One wisdom, or world-life view, has as its foundation and starting point both the revealed knowledge of the existence, thoughts, and ways of the personal, sovereign God who created the universe and a reverential trust in Him and His thoughts and ways. The Bible indicates that this is the true wisdom that is rightly related to ultimate reality.

According to this wisdom, truth is an essential aspect of God’s nature. He is the fountainhead or ultimate source of truth, and He has given mankind revelation of truth. Thus there are such things as absolute truth, moral absolutes, and an objective standard of right and wrong to which the Creator holds all human beings accountable and by which systems of thought, movements, values, beliefs, motives, actions, and lifestyles can be evaluated.

According to this wisdom, each human being exists to glorify God and serve Him and other human beings. The source of this wisdom is God in heaven (Jas. 3:17).

This wisdom is characterized by meekness (“the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of ones [sic] self-importance”), purity (not tainted by selfishness), peace (harmonious relationships with others), gentleness (doesn’t insist on personal rights), lack of unreasonable demands, fullness of mercy (“kindness or concern expressed for someone in need”), good deeds for others, no favoritism toward certain persons, and no hypocrisy (doesn’t falsely pretend to act with pure motives) (Jas. 3:17).

This wisdom produces a righteous life that is the result of pursuing and attaining peace (the right kind of harmonious relationships) with others (Jas. 3:18).

The other wisdom or world-life view has as its foundation and starting point both a (1) willful rejection of the revealed knowledge of the existence, thoughts, and ways of the personal, sovereign God who created the universe and (2) a reverential trust in false religion, including the religions of naturalism and secular humanism (Rom. 1:18–23, 25). It denies the existence of the God of the Bible or claims that, if God exists, He is irrelevant to today’s world.

This wisdom claims there is no divine source or revelation of ultimate truth. Thus it denies the existence of absolute truth; moral absolutes; and an objective standard of right and wrong to which the Creator holds all human beings accountable and by which systems of thought, movements, values, beliefs, motives, actions, and lifestyles can be evaluated.

This denial prompts the following conclusions: (1) Truth is relative and subjective. Each individual determines what is truth for himself or herself, so no truth is the same for all persons. (2) The idea of only one true religion is wrong. Since there is no divine revelation of truth to mankind, all religions are human in origin. Thus all religions must be regarded as equal, and attempts to convert a person from one religion to another should be forbidden. Any person who believes or states that a belief, action, or lifestyle of another person or group is wrong is an intolerant bigot who is guilty of a hate crime.

Those who adopt this wisdom claim they are wise to do so, but the Bible indicates they are fools because they have adopted a false wisdom divorced from ultimate reality (Prov. 3:5–7; Rom. 1:22).

According to this wisdom, each human being exists to glorify and serve mankind or one’s self, not God (Rom. 1:21). James 3:15 indicates the source of this wisdom is threefold; (1) the world system that is in rebellion against God; (2) the natural, unsaved man, who is unrelated to God and therefore claims that the highest good is the development of mankind or his own self, not God and His
The Palestinian leadership has proven its ability to keep the situation under control. It has also proven its ability to coordinate the activities of all Palestinian organizations, including those who hold tough positions toward the Israelis.

The author of those words is Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who declared his country's commitment to consider the possibility of selling Russian military equipment to the Palestinian Authority.

Russian President Vladimir Putin offered aid to the new Palestinian regime. The deadly incident brings to the surface once again a consideration few have mentioned since the euphoria of the road-map-to-peace era began a few years ago. Those who argued against the viability of a totally autonomous, sovereign Palestinian state and predicted its danger to Israel spoke with foresight we can ill afford to ignore.

If such a state, now all but assured, comes into existence based on Palestinian promises and the West's eagerness to make it work and then get out, we may have a prescription for tragedy.

The hard fact is that despite all assurances, there is a strong possibility, even probability, that a Palestinian state will be hostile to its Israeli neighbor.

What was not in the equation was that Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) has done little to prevent the militant factions under his authority from planning or carrying out attacks on innocent Israelis. This unfortunate reality came to light February 25 when a suicide bomber slipped into Tel Aviv and detonated an explosive device that killed five people and injured nearly 100 a few days after operated under Yasser Arafat have not been dismantled, disarmed, or dissuaded from their determination to fight to destroy Israel, should everything not fall their way through negotiations.

Writing off such incidents as the suicide bombing in Tel Aviv and the rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip as mutant, temporary manifestations can be a devastating mistake. And doing so verifies the gut feelings of many radical Palestinians that whatever promise of hudna (cease-fire) they make is only temporary. In their minds, the issue has not been settled. And whatever concessions the Israelis, starved for peace, are willing to offer, it will never be enough. There is not enough land that Israel can give away in any land-for-peace scheme that will both allow the Jewish nation to survive and the Islamists and Palestinians to declare victory.

Take a long look at Iraq, Syria, Iran, and remnants of Saddam Hussein’s decimated Iraqi regime carry on the fight against freedom and democracy for the battered Iraqi people. Unfortunately, many people have dignified these bands of murderers and thugs by calling them insurgents. They are not insurgents; they are terrorists.

By the same token, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Hezbollah, and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and their bedfellows are not freedom fighters in quest of a noble cause. They are cold-blooded, ruthless killers of innocent men, women, and children.

The problem with these elements is that they will not disappear when the issues are settled in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Israel. An insatiable passion to destroy or drive out the “infidel” consumes them. And they will surely continue their crusade to destabilize democracies and find rogue states from which to operate.

For this reason, a sovereign Palestinian state cannot, under any circumstances, be allowed to fall prey to these forces of evil. Russia offering military materiel to the Palestinian Authority may seem of little consequence today. But it should be a wake up call for us all.
**The Lamb in the Apocalypse**
from page 27

John’s portrait of Christ as the Ruler Lamb is inherent in the visions of Him in the Apocalypse. John introduced the whole of his revelation of Christ in chapter 1. As sovereign King-Priest and Prophet (Rev. 1:13–18), Christ’s authority is unrivalled; His character, sinless; and His Person, peerless.

In Revelation 2—3 He is the one who holds the “seven stars” (churches) in His hand—the Ruler Lamb in the midst of the golden lampstand, with the sovereign right to inspect the churches thoroughly. Significantly, He “walks” through the seven representative churches, and the Holy Spirit “talks” to them. The Head of the church must always be in the midst of His church. He cares for His own (Rev. 3:20; cf. 1 Pet. 5:7), and His abiding presence and power are sufficient—even unto death (Rev. 2:10).

In Revelation 4—5, John saw the Ruler Lamb on the throne in the celestial courtroom of heaven. The Lamb is to be praised because of who He is and what He has done. He is the Creator Lamb (4:9–11) and Redeemer Lamb (5:12–14). His credentials are impeccable and qualify Him to effect the forthcoming judgments on the universe.

As the one “worthy” to open the seals (Rev. 5—6; 8:1) the Ruler Lamb begins judging an unrepentant, godless world. After the seal judgments come the trumpet (Rev. 8:2—11:19) and bowl judgments (Rev. 15:1–8; 16:1–21). Each successive judgment becomes more intense, culminating in the fulfillment of God’s purpose in Revelation 16:17. (There is no mention of the church in chapters 6 through 18, as Church Age saints will be in heaven following the Rapture (1 Th. 4:17).

John’s vision reveals that, at the end of this “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), the Ruler Lamb, presented as the “The Word of God” (Rev. 19:13), returns to Earth with His saints as the invincible conqueror of all anti-God forces (cf. Rev. 19:11–16).

Then the Ruler Lamb will establish His Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20; cf. Isa. 2:2–4; 11:1–16), effecting eternal judgment on all unbelievers, including the Devil and the fallen angels, at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11–15).

Next follows the glorious appearing of the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven (Rev. 21:1–27), and the emergence of the eternal state. Believers will share the blessedness of the Ruler Lamb’s presence and the bliss of heaven itself, of which He is the central object of worship (Rev. 21—22).

The epilogue of these verses involves an appeal by the Ruler Lamb himself. Three times he says, “Behold, I am coming quickly” (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20). Each appeal is addressed to a different group: first, to the church universal (v. 7); second, to humanity at large concerning His coming personal judgment (v. 12); and finally, to believers who respond to the promise of the Lord’s return—“Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (v. 20). The book therefore ends with longing and expectation for those who await His appearing.

by Deane Woods

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**False Teachers from page 31**

by their fruits you will know them.” In other words, pay attention to the results of their teaching.

Second Peter 2:1 explains that false teachers bring in “destructive heresies,” and they do it secretly. Their messages bring divisiveness and destruction. They do not unite believers but divide them. These people use “deceptive” (meaning, “plastic”) words (v. 3). They tailor the structure of their messages to the people they address. As plastic can be molded to change, so their messages change. Truth is not the goal; self-gain is.

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

They don’t live godly lives; rather, they live outside the authority of God. They “walk according to the flesh,” “despise authority,” and mock celestial beings (2 Pet. 2:10–11). False teachers regard themselves as superior to those who follow them and even to the authority of the Bible itself.

Unfortunately, false teaching is not relegated to unbelievers. It can infiltrate the church through well-meaning believers and do great damage to the body of Christ.

Several years ago a radio preacher who truly loves the Lord tried to prepare the church for Christ’s return, which he said would come September 6, 1994. He was sure Jesus would come then and continually proclaimed it on his program. Obviously, he was wrong. Today he tells his listeners to flee their local churches. He claims all churches are apostate and admonishes his audience to neither support nor attend them. As a result, his followers are leaving their churches.

Christians must be careful not to become followers of other men but to heed Scripture and be ever vigilant to identify false teachers and protect the flock from them.

by Steve Herzig
Our greatest tragedies in life sometimes produce our greatest triumphs. And when our circumstances bring us so low that we cry out to God in anguish, He seems to take me long to sink into a depression I thought I would never pull out of. Only my closest friends knew what I was going through; and though they reached out to me daily, the only one who could truly help me was God.

One day, as I sat in bed crying, feeling miserable and alone, I called out to Him in desperation and pain. And something wonderful happened. He lifted me from my pit and set my feet on a rock. He showed me, through His Word, that He heard all my prayers, saw all my tears, understood what I was going through, and loved me.

That was 22 years ago. And though I had given my life to Christ several years earlier, my encounter with Him that day, during my deepest despair, changed me and remains one of my sweetest memories in my walk with Him.

More than 3,000 years ago Hannah had an encounter with God. And through her pain and sorrow, He not only changed her but altered the entire course of Jewish history as well.

Hannah lived during the time of the judges, when the nation of Israel had no king and wallowed shamefully in sin, self-indulgence, and corruption. However, no matter how degenerate society becomes, God always has His faithful remnant. In those days, the remnant included Hannah.

She was a pious, godly Jewish woman who was in the unenviable position of having to share her husband with another wife. Most commentators believe Hannah was Elkanah’s first wife, but because she was barren he married another so he could have children. Wrote Alfred Edersheim, “The Mosaic Law tolerated and regulated [polygamy], but nowhere approved it, and in practice polygamy was chiefly confined to the wealthy.”

Elkanah, in fact, probably was well off. When he made the 15-mile trip from his home in Ramathaim-zophim (usually called Ramah, 1 Sam. 1:19) to the Tabernacle in Shiloh, he was able to offer a bull—an expensive sacrifice (1 Sam. 1:25). According to Bible scholars C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, the town even derived the latter portion of its name from Elkanah’s ancestor Zuph (1 Chr. 6:26, 35). His family apparently was prominent and had lived in Ramah for generations.

Elkanah was a Levite, a descendant of Levi’s son Kohath through Kohath’s son Izhar (1 Chr. 6:33–38). These Levites were not priests because they were not descendants of Aaron, also a Kohathite through Kohath’s son Amram (vv. 1–3). When the Israelites
wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, the Kohathites carried the Tabernacle’s sacred furnishings (Num. 4:14–15). Later, under King David, some ministered in music (1 Chr. 6:32).

The Mosaic Law required all Jewish men to appear before the Lord three times each year with their sacrifices. It was on these trips to Shiloh that Hannah’s wretchedness became most acute. Even Elkanah’s ardent love for her could not console her:

*And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the Lord had closed her womb* (1 Sam. 1:4–5).

Her misery was twofold: She was childless in a culture that venerated childbearing and considered barrenness a curse; and “her rival [Peninnah] also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the Lord had closed her womb” (v. 6).

By the time Hannah came to Shiloh in the account in First Samuel 1, she was so depressed no one could help her. She cried constantly, could not eat, and could not respond to her husband’s tender, sincere consolation: “Elkanah her husband said to her, ‘Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?’” (v. 8). To prove his love, he even gave her a double portion of the sacrifice, enough for two people, “as if to indicate that he loved her just as if she had borne him a son.”

But nothing helped. So Hannah went to the only one who could truly meet her need: the Lord. And in bitterness of soul, she poured her heart out to Him at the Tabernacle and promised that if He gave her a son, she would “give him to the Tabernacle and promised that if He gave his petition which you have asked of Him” (v. 17). Scripture says she went her way, “and her face was no longer sad” (v. 18).

God had spoken to Hannah through Eli. When she had reached her lowest point and needed Him desperately, He answered her. Hannah, whose name means “favor” or “grace,” found favor with God and bore a son whom she named Samuel, formed from two Hebrew words meaning “heard of God.”

The Bible does not say how many years Hannah suffered before God finally answered. But during those years, He no doubt was molding Hannah into the person He wanted her to be.

God never wastes anything that He allows into our lives, particularly our suffering. He uses everything for our good and His glory to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28–29).

Hannah’s prayer also answered mine. The same God who answered my prayer is the same God who answered Hannah’s prayer and mine.

The apostle Paul called this wisdom or world-life view “the wisdom of this world” (1 Cor. 1:20; 3:19).

God never wastes anything that He allows into our lives, particularly our suffering. He uses everything for our good and His glory to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28–29). The same God who answered Hannah’s prayer also answered mine. He still answers today, inviting us, “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer. 33:3).

But Hannah’s story does not end here.

### END NOTES


3. Edersheim, 410.


Lorna Simcox is senior editor for The Friends of Israel.
Reunited at last

The International Jerusalem Post—

Two sisters who had not seen each other since the start of World War II have been reunited through the Yad Vashem database.

Hannah Katz, 78, and Klara Blire, 81, were separated in 1939 when the Germans invaded their native Czechoslovakia. Their father sent them to take shelter with separate uncles in Hungary. The sisters lost touch with each other, and each was certain the other had perished.

On February 3, Katz’s granddaughter, Merav Zamir, was searching the Yad Vashem database for a page of testimony concerning Katz’s mother, Shendl Weiss. She found two pages: one that Katz had submitted and another by Blire. All the details coincided, but Zamir was not aware her grandmother had any siblings.

Zamir immediately asked Yad Vashem to track Blire down; and on the same night, the sisters and other family members got together. Both had survived camps and death marches, had moved to Israel in 1948, and had raised families only 45 miles apart.

Sharon wrong

Arutz-7—Proponents of Ariel Sharon’s disengagement plan argue that withdrawal from southern Lebanon proves missile attacks will cease after Israel withdraws from Gaza. But Israel Defense Forces (IDF) reports show otherwise.

Investigative journalist David Bedein has published a declassified IDF situation report issued on June 8, 2004, and it tells a different story. The document reads, in part, “In the four years since the IDF unilaterally redeployed its troops from Lebanon, the following attacks on Israel took place from Lebanon: 34 attacks with mortar shells and anti-tank missiles into northern Israel, 7 shooting attacks with light arms fire, 8 roadside bombs planted, 127 [incidents of] antiaircraft missiles, 5 Katyusha rocket attacks, 10 infiltrations into northern Israel, 11 soldiers killed in northern Israel, 3 IDF troops kidnapped and murdered, 50 soldiers wounded, and 14 civilians killed.”

Disengagement fiasco continues

Only 10,000 people showed up for a recent Israeli rally to support the plan to expel the Jewish people from Judea, Samaria, and Gaza this summer. Arutz-7 reported that these numbers paled compared to the 100,000–200,000 people who have rallied against the government’s disengagement policy.

The planned demolition of 25 communities and expulsion of 8,500 Jewish people has so sharply divided Israel that it threatens to create civil war.

Threats and obscenities dominated the left-wing rally, and Peace Now leader Yair Oppenheimer told the crowd, “Those who invite a civil war should know that we’re ready for battle,” Arutz-7 said.

Arutz-7 said the army does not realize the extent of the crisis. It reported that a high-ranking army general said, “Hundreds of soldiers will tell their officers that they simply cannot carry out the expulsion orders—if not at the first community, than at the second.” At least 10,000 soldiers have signed petitions saying they will refuse such orders.

Arutz-7 also reported the government plans to limit media coverage. Radio, television, and newspaper reporters will not be allowed to move from one community to another without permission and military escort. The only journalists who will be allowed to enter the communities will be “embedded” with military personnel, who will restrict photographers.

The IDF plans to fight the expected onslaught of disengagement opponents by closing checkpoints soon at many intersections in the northern Negev. “Don’t bother planning any weddings for the summer,” a senior IDF officer said, because it’s not certain that your guests will be able to attend.”

Police expect to use some 50 to 60 German-bred horses to repress resistance. Each horse is reportedly equal to 100 policemen.

Have we truly learned nothing?

Arutz-7—“What’s the purpose of memorial stones and speeches, if Europe does not find the will and the courage to defeat anti-Semitism?”

So asked Minister Natan Sharansky at Yad Vashem, speaking at the opening of the new Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial museum in Jerusalem. Sharansky opened his speech by quoting from the newest edition of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a recent best seller in Syria. He quoted passages accusing Jews of killing Gentiles, kneading their blood into matzahs, and using them in religious rites.

“Before the Germans agreed to slaughter millions of defenseless Jewish men, women and children,” Sharansky said, “they were taught that the Jews are subhumans who defile and poison the German race. We should have learned from this of the great destructive potential of incitement, which prepares the ground for boundless violence.”

Sharansky warned that the recent edition of Protocols is now found in bookstores in Paris, London, and Amsterdam. “This is the tip of the iceberg of the industry of anti-Semitism that is returning to Europe from the Middle East,” the former Soviet refusenik said. “It includes books, movies, cable television programs and internet sites. The bottom line of this propaganda is: The world would be a better place without Jews. The effects of this incitement can be seen on the streets of Europe.”

“I ask myself,” Sharansky said, “what is the purpose of all the memorial sites and speeches, if the Europe of today, on the ground of which the Holocaust occurred, is not able to enlist the necessary will and courage to defeat anti-Semitism? Have we truly not learned a thing?”
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 TRUSTED 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 BENEFITTED ARE 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.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SIMPLY CHECK THE APPROPRIATE BOX ON THE ENVELOPE IN THIS MAGAZINE; OR WRITE TO TOM GEOGHAN.
Not long ago I got together with some of the men I served with in the army. We first met 56 years ago when we were young. And we served together in all of Israel’s wars. Some, like me, survived the Holocaust. But truly, time waits for no man. We are much older now, and many in our group have died. But some of us are still here, and we enjoy getting together to share our memories of the old days and renew our friendships.

Several of these men are now Orthodox. We were having a friendly discussion when one of them said, “I have seen some Jewish people who believe in Jesus. And I can say that they are, in my eyes, traitors to their faith.”

I was listening quietly when one turned to me and asked, “Zvi, what do you say to this?”

“The traitors,” I said, “are those who do not worship God according to the Bible but worship according to the many rabbinical traditions. It is clearly written in Leviticus 26:3–4, ‘If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season.’ We must obey what is written in God’s Word, not the rabbinical traditions.

“Let me ask you something. Do you think that those who do not believe in all the rabbinical traditions are traitors? I do not believe in them. But I believe in the Lord according to what is written in the Bible. So in your eyes, I am a traitor?”

Then one of them replied, “As a Jew, you must follow the traditions of our great rabbis.”

Now the discussion, which had been so friendly earlier, suddenly became like a volcano about to erupt.

“Are you a Jew?” someone asked angrily.

“I believe in the one mighty God,” I replied. “As it is written, ‘the LORD is one!’ [Dt. 6:4]. He is the one on whom is laid the iniquity of us all [Isa. 53:6]. It is not written, ‘the iniquity of the Jews’ or ‘the iniquity of the Gentiles,’ but ‘the iniquity of us all.’

Now they looked at me with suspicion. “Tell us in whom you have believed,” one demanded.

So I asked them, “How many Gods do we have? Every morning you pray this most important prayer from Deuteronomy 6: ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!’ [v. 4]. We are commanded to fear the Lord and serve Him only: ‘You shall not go after other gods’” (v. 14).

“No one speaks to us as you do,” one man said. “We are not like the ultra-Orthodox, but we believe in God.”
"You believe in something God does not like," I said. "You give false testimony. Do you believe in the Ten Commandments?"

They all said they did. "But you disobey them," I said, "because you put your trust in what is not God. You put your trust in men, in these rabbis who persuade you to follow them instead of the Bible. You have lost the right direction; and now you are at a crossroads, waiting for someone to come and lead you onto the right path. Here I am!"

This time someone asked me, "Who are you that you will tell us how to worship God?"

As we were discussing these matters, others began to gather around and listen. So I said, "I do not know these other people. But I want to ask them a question. What is the best way to worship God? According to the Bible or according to a big stack of commentaries?"

The people all answered, "According to the Bible, of course."

Again I asked the crowd, "How do you feel about all the commentaries?"

Someone replied, "They are idolatry (in Hebrew, Avodah Zarah; this is the name of the Talmudic tractate)."

The others who listened to our conversation also began to ask questions. They even asked questions my friends did not have the courage to ask. When we finally got up to leave, the others said they would like to speak with me again. And they wrote down the Bible passages I told them about: Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 53; Micah 5:2; and so forth.

Slowly, slowly, step-by-step, my friends and I came around to a discussion that showed them that Jesus is truly the Lord. Earlier they did not want to hear about Him. But when more people came and began to agree with me, then everything became kosher, as we say in Israel. It took a long time to bring them this truth. But those who were once so blind have seen the Light, who is the Lord.