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What hath the Church of England wrought now? Nothing good for Israel. — Page 10

David Dolan takes you on a special tour of the breathtaking Galilee. — Page 22

Plus:
The newest ploy to entrap Israeli soldiers. — Page 5
Palestinian Christians caught in a waiting game. — Page 9
The Shephelah, where the sun stood still. — Page 18
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There’s never been a better time to visit www.foi.org.
Tears welled up in our eyes as Holocaust survivor Gerda Klein described the devastation of her “tsunami.” In a subdued voice, she recounted, “Ours was a wave of hatred that swept away the lives of my family.”

The occasion of her presentation was the first International Holocaust Remembrance Day held recently in a crowded UN General Assembly Hall exactly 61 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, one of Adolf Hitler’s most infamous extermination camps. The event was a long overdue acknowledgment by the United Nations, itself founded in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Following six horrific years in Nazi captivity, Gerda, weighing a skeletal 68 pounds, was liberated by American forces the day before her 21st birthday. In a weakened voice, she told her attending American soldier, “I am Jewish, you know.” After a pause he replied, “So am I.” As we sat motionless, Mrs. Klein continued: “This beloved, young, handsome officer became my husband.”

The weeks leading up to the UN event saw Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad call for Israel’s destruction and Hamas terrorists win the Palestinian legislative elections. Hamas is committed to replacing Israel with an Islamic, Palestinian state.

In this context, a delegation from The Friends of Israel journeyed to New York City, along with friends from our South Jersey Jewish community, to remember the victims of the Holocaust and its survivors.

Wrote Chanan Tigay, reporting for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency:

“For us survivors, this commemoration under U.N. auspices is a muted triumph,” said Roman Kent, chairman of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. “It is imperfect justice, for it took 60 years for the crimes committed during the Holocaust to be properly acknowledged by the United Nations.”

A rousing presentation by Israel’s ambassador to the UN, Dan Gillerman, challenged everyone to remember the sacrifice of the victims and honor the lives of the survivors. In tones of grief, he urged, “Just imagine the shattering of skulls, the burning of flesh, and the cries of children.”

With obvious reference to Iran, Gillerman regretted the reality of a world in which a UN member would claim the Holocaust did not happen and would call for Israel’s destruction and prepare for the next Holocaust. He brought the crowd to its feet by noting Israel’s vital role in responding to the bigots of the world and by declaring, “There forever will be an Israel!”

The moderator, UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Shashi Tharoor, commented on the day’s theme, “Remembrance and Beyond.” “To remember is not enough,” he said. “You must foster respect toward all human beings.” Secretary-General Kofi Annan appeared via a video message: “Remembering is a necessity to those bigots who deny or underestimate the Holocaust. It falls to us to carry the torch of remembrance.”

Representing the General Assembly, Ambassador Ronaldo Mota Sardenberg, acting president of the 16th session, called on the world to honor Holocaust survivors, adding, “It’s a tragedy that the international community hasn’t been able to stop causes of the Holocaust.”

Providing additional impact to the two-hour ceremony were visual images showing Holocaust victims of all ages, accompanied by summary descriptions of their lives. We also heard a stirring performance by the Zamir Chorale of Boston, featuring music of victims of the Holocaust—songs they actually sang among themselves in the camps.

Another highlight of the gathering was a presentation by Professor Yehuda Bauer, academic advisor to Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. He argued that Nazism was perpetrated by secularized, radicalized intellectuals who were not only anti-Semitic but also anti-Christian, because Christianity’s roots are in Judaism. He explained that the Holocaust represented the depths of human depravity, with Auschwitz the ultimate symbol of evil. The world, he said, still has not learned the lessons of anti-Semitism because the same dangerous elements are rising again in radical Islam.

We at The Friends of Israel are not naive when it comes to understanding the UN’s fundamental character. Its godlessness and accompanying anti-Semitic infrastructure are grossly offensive to the Lord. As Bible-believing Christians, we are reminded of the truth of Isaiah 40:17: “All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.”

For timely information on the UN’s anti-Semitic bent and its anti-Israel machinery, I refer you to an excellent Web site, www.eyeontheun.org.

Strikingly absent from the daylong event that drew 2,000 people was any significant representation from the UN’s 191 member states. Consequently, it became even more important for us as Christians to share the occasion with our Jewish friends.

I encourage you also, as a Christian friend of the Jewish people and supporter of Israel, to take advantage of similar opportunities in your community. You will be warmly welcomed!

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
elections imposes the threat of the establishment of an Islamic ministate openly dedicated to committing genocide against its Israeli neighbors. With no visible, decisive counteraction by the international community, these murderers will probably remain in power for years, mentored by Iranian fanatics who make no bones about their determination to achieve nuclear status, rule the region, and ultimately overtake all free nations.

2. The riots reverberating throughout Europe and many other spots ostensibly erupted because of Muslim distress over a few cartoons caricaturing Muhammad. It took several months before radical Islamists with a mission in mind saw the cartoons as an opportunity to advance their cause by fomenting major disruptions in Western countries. But rather than uniting and treating the perpetrators to what they deserved, many politicians began apologizing, siding with the fanatics, and promising to see to it nothing of the sort ever happened again. Cartoonists were put on notice that, even though they had freedom of the press and open season on personalities throughout the democracies, Islamic themes were off limits—or else.

3. Then there are the war–criminal accusation addicts who, at a whim, can apparently bring charges against whomever they decide to declare a war criminal. This is not the equivalent of making a citizen’s arrest after witnessing someone running a traffic light. If this practice gains traction, it will sow the seeds of chaos in the courts.

Folding these elements into the general scenario of today’s precarious drift into cultural, social, and military decline drives one to consider seriously the words of Scripture concerning the last days. Advocates of a better, brighter, “global village” have little to point to as proof of their thesis. The Scriptures, on the other hand, broad brush reality and tell us clearly where the answer lies, while giving us the assurance that there is hope!
Sixty Years From Now

While rummaging through some photos recently, I ran across a picture of the Corrie ten Boom tree of honor at the upper end of the Street of Righteous Gentiles at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. On May 8, 1945, we celebrated Victory in Europe. Today, 61 years later, thousands of visitors look for the small tree and plaque dedicated to the heroism and courage of Corrie ten Boom. I suppose the majority of visitors are elderly and have vivid memories of the World War II years or know her story through her book The Hiding Place or the motion picture by the same name.

Corrie was a Dutch Christian who, along with her family, risked everything to rescue Jewish people and others who were being hunted down and murdered by the Nazis. It was, she said, their way as a family to live out their Christian faith. When her father, Casper, was asked by a friend if he knew he could be killed for helping Jews, he answered, “It would be an honor to give my life for God’s ancient people.” He died 10 days after being imprisoned by the Nazis.

When the ten Booms were betrayed to the Gestapo in February 1944, they were shipped off to various concentration camps where all except Corrie died or, as in the case of a nephew, disappeared. The nephew was incarcerated at the notorious Bergen Belsen death camp.

The ten Boom story is one to remember, and we do. Here were people willing to suffer and die because it was the Christian thing to do. And for their commitment, they paid the ultimate price.

Mementos of the family’s activities and the “hiding place room” can be seen today at the ten Boom house-museum in Haarlem, Holland. And we also have the tree, standing amid hundreds of memorial carob trees, along the Street of Righteous Gentiles at Yad Vashem, dedicated to the memory of people all over Europe who willingly risked their lives to shelter a suffering people.

Nina Katz is a Holocaust survivor who spent her teen years in forced-labor, Nazi work camps. After the war she came to America, where she twice served as president of Hadassah and was among the prominent speakers at functions memorializing the Holocaust. A few years ago Nina shared her thoughts with me about Corrie ten Boom.

“We were like soul sisters,” she said. “She was like a modern-day prophet. Corrie was deeply spiritual. We talked and talked, and, yes, we wept when we remembered those dark days. . . . One day I said to Corrie, ‘We Jews, because of who we were, had no choice. You and your family did. You knew that if you were caught hiding Jews, it would cost you your life. Still you did it. Why?’ I will never forget the way she looked at me.”

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

“The ten Booms were good Christians,” Nina remembered. “I think often about them and how, while the world stood silent as 6 million perished, a simple watchmaker could feel so deeply.”

As I read other accounts and talk to people who survived Hitler’s horror, I wonder—I really do.

Looking at Europe today, we are witnessing an ominous rise in anti-Israel/anti-Jewish sentiment. Much of it parallels the pre-World War II radicalism that paved the way for Hitler and his henchmen. Neo-Nazism, coupled with anti-Semitic, Islamic militancy, is again goose-stepping its way into the subculture.

Meanwhile, the major Protestant denominations that nurtured the spirit of the ten Booms and multiple thousands of others to love and aid Jewish people have turned in another direction. Having rejected biblical orthodoxy in favor of neoagnosticism, functional atheism, and leftist politics, they have nothing in common with Christians who understand and cherish a commitment to the Jewish people and Israel.

Which brings me to my wondering. Sixty-one years after the Holocaust and victory in Europe, we can walk the Street of Righteous Gentiles in Jerusalem and spend days pausing before the carob trees, reading the plaques memorializing the Gentiles who cared enough. But, I wonder, if trends continue to worsen, as they seem to be, and we were to return 60 years from now, how many carob trees and memorial plaques would there be honoring the sacrifices of this generation?

I think the answer would tell us what kind of stuff we were made of and whether the “Christian thing to do” in our lifetimes amounted to more than blowing words into the wind.

[End of Editorial]
The accusation is often leveled that The Friends of Israel is anti-Palestinian and, therefore, without sympathy for Palestinian Christians. This is in no sense the case. These accusations usually come from individuals and organizations that are anti-Israel and, at the same time, anti-Semitic.

We are a Christian organization, and we support the rights of the Jewish people to a legitimate homeland in the Middle East. We deplore the injustices that have befallen the Palestinians; and we blame the corrupt, brutal Palestinian leadership for them because it has exploited and deprived its own people; taught them to hate, and instilled within them a perverse desire to become homicidal perpetrators of the death and mutilation of thousands of innocent people.

One of our greatest concerns now is for the future of the Palestinians in general and Palestinian Christians in particular. The Palestinian Christians are at greatest risk behind the curtain of a militant, Islamist regime led by the Hamas terrorist organization.

They are, in fact, more in jeopardy than are Israelis. Israel is a democracy, with all the necessary means to protect the state and its people. This is not the situation Palestinians find themselves in today. Nor is their plight apt to improve. The truth is, many Palestinian Christians are very much afraid of what the future holds. Laura Feldinger, writing in The Jerusalem Post, said, “If Hamas installs strict Islamic religious rule, Palestinian Christians stand to become a legally subjugated minority inside Palestinian society.”

Already wary, they anxiously wait to see how the Hamas-led government will proceed. At least one Christian woman is not taking any chances. “Since Hamas took over,” she said, “I don’t feel comfortable, so I cover my head. Years ago, I even used to go with short sleeves. You’d have to put a gun to my head to get me to wear short sleeves now.” And she is not alone. A Christian clergyman commented that recently he had seen an increasing number of women doing the same thing.

Some believe, for the short term at least, Hamas will not impose Muslim Sharia law on its citizens. This will probably be the case. At the moment, Hamas is looking for international legitimacy, support, and an accommodation with much of the West—some of which seems eager to comply. But if one stops to consider (1) Hamas’s announced, ongoing dedication to the destruction of Israel; (2) its unremitting demand that all so-called Muslim refugees be allowed to return to Israel proper; and (3) its commitment to strict, religiously oriented Islamic ways, the future looks anything but bright.

A stonemason from Bethlehem probably spoke for most Palestinian Christians when he told Agence France-Press, “Sure, now Hamas says nice things, but five years from now, I don’t know. A lot of Bethlehem Christians are leaving and going abroad. . . . I would go in a minute if I could. We’re like in a cage here. We hate our life, even if we love our country.”

When Jewish people were trapped behind the Iron Curtain in the former Soviet Union, Christians around the world prayed, contributed, and helped to get them out. Are we coming to the same state of affairs in the coming Palestinian state? What we can do now is pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for safety and security for our Palestinian brethren.
By now it's an old story, but a destructive one nevertheless. On February 6, the Church of England’s highest decision-making body, the General Synod, heeded “the call from our sister church, the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, for morally responsible investment in the Palestinian occupied territories and, in particular, to disinvest from companies profiting from the illegal occupation, such as Caterpillar Inc., until they change their policies.”

To smooth the waters and decipher the gobbledygook of the decision, the archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, who supported the motion, wrote to British Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks to express “deep regret” that “distress has been caused, especially to our Jewish friends. . . . The synod has not, by its action, resolved to disinvest,” but rather, he wrote, “to register our concern.”

The day after the synod vote, former archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, told The Jerusalem Post he was “ashamed to be an Anglican” and that the decision was “a most regrettable and one-sided statement” that “ignores the trauma of ordinary Jewish people” in Israel who endure terrorist attacks.

The rap on Caterpillar, a responsible and legitimate heavy-equipment manufacturer, is that their bulldozers have been used to level the homes of some Palestinians. Never mind that this same machinery was also used by Israelis to knock down Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip, northern Samaria, and Amona on the West Bank. What is at issue here has little to do with moral justice; but it has much to do with radical, liberal, leftist obsession.

Not in the Picture

For leftist zealots of instability and chaos, the matter is not based on the facts of the case, but rather on a predisposition to denigrate the State of Israel.
The sovereign state is nothing more than a diversionary attempt to mask a true agenda and violently held prejudices.

It’s a Matter of Theological Bias

Let it be understood that the entire left wing of the Protestant mainline establishment is hostile to the very idea of a literal fulfillment of the biblical promises to Israel. It contests Israel’s future restoration, as well as the promises of the Millennial Kingdom and a reigning Messiah over a reconciled Israel and subdued Gentile world system. In fact, a literal, resurrected Jewish Kingdom is wholly beyond mainline Protestantism’s concept of what new world theology is all about. It considers the Scriptures antiquated, unacceptable, and passé and contends that those who believe and accept the Scriptures as written are ignorant, uninformed, and far removed from contemporary realities.

For such Protestants, the biblical promises, themes, pronouncements, and mandates are old and irrelevant. Biblical revelation for them is an aberration—particularly when it touches Israel and the Promised Land.

Why Israel Is an Offense

Logically speaking, it doesn’t make sense for objectively sane people to portray little Israel as a militant, apartheid state panting to commit genocide against innocent Palestinians. Consequently, the bottom line must be something else. In my opinion, it is what I term theological anti-Semitism. Israel’s very existence is an intolerable offense to people who allegorize and spiritualize God’s Word and attempt to impose on it the theology that the church has replaced Israel as the true heir of Abraham.

This school of thought has drawn an increasing number of gullible, uninformed people to its side. It has abandoned the literal, historical, grammatical interpretation of Scripture and forsaken Scripture’s clear dictates regarding end-times events and the glorious, future reconciliation of the Jewish people and nation of Israel to the Messiah.

To say it plainly, we Gentiles are not the be-all and end-all in the plan of God. And to infer as much is to assume a degree of self-induced arrogance and self-esteem wholly inconsistent with anything the Bible has ever taught.

Israel’s very existence is a glaring contradiction to everything left-wing, theological pretenders believe and endorse. In fact, I believe the entire liberal school of rejectionist thinkers would suffer no angst or disappointment if the State of Israel passed off the scene.

and its people for their simple desire to stay alive.

The reason Israel demolished the homes of suicidal Islamist radicals is well documented. In the Gaza Strip, Israel destroyed homes having tunnels that were used as conduits for weapons. Elsewhere, the homes of Palestinian suicide bombers responsible for slaughtering innumerable civilians—Israeli, Muslim, and others—fell to the blades of the dozers. The question is, “What civilized country under attack would not have done the same?” The answer is obvious.

Attacking Caterpillar and others doing legitimate business with a sovereign state is nothing more than a diversionary attempt to mask a true agenda and violently held prejudices.

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Aid and Comfort

What is perhaps most distressing in the entire episode of bashing Caterpillar, the United States, and, in the process, evangelicals is the aid and comfort passed along to the enemies of, in essence, you and me.

Here we are in a time of war. And whether you believe it or not, it is a very real and protracted conflict. Muslims affirm continually that they are waging an all-out jihadist war that will end in triumph over the democracies of the West and in the establishment of an Islamist, global caliphate.

The first step in realizing their dream is Israel’s destruction. Why? Because Israel represents the only true, viable democracy in the Middle East. It is a democracy imbued with all of the attributes of a functionally free state. To Arab demagogues, its existence is an insufferable anomaly—one they cannot tolerate. Thus we witness the invasion of Islamist fanatics from other Muslim countries to wage war against the forces of freedom and democracy in Iraq. From their point of view, freedom for their people is simply insupportable.

All of which raises a serious question. Why would Americans side with an avowed enemy that is determined to subjugate and destroy everything we hold dear as a free people? It is indeed strange that those campaigning to destroy Israel, a democracy attempting to survive in a hostile area, would themselves be the first on the chopping block of those whose cause they champion. No, it doesn’t make sense. Sanity and legitimacy belong to those who stand with Israel and the establishment of democracy, freedom of religion, and the rights and privileges of the individual everywhere in the world.

Positive in the history of Judaism and biblical Christianity? But it is, after all, merely the evidence of the chaotic, confused state of the world we live in.

What does it mean to be a Christian Zionist? Simply this: It means to believe the Jewish people have an inherent, God-given right to possess a homeland sanctioned under international law in the land divinely given in perpetuity to the Jewish descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Such a belief is not radical or subversive; it simply accepts what the Scriptures have declared about the rights and legitimate possessions of the Jewish people. It’s as simple as that. In so saying, we do not diminish any of the rights or privileges of believing Gentiles during this interim Age of Grace in which the gospel is extended to all people everywhere—Jewish and Gentile.

Having said that, we have nothing to apologize for in declaring ourselves, based on biblical dictates, to be Christian Zionists.

Yes, I am aware that the Presbyterian (PCUSA) hierarchy, in its infamous decision to disinvest from companies operating for profit in Israel, took a swipe at those “ill-informed” evangelicals who identify themselves as Christian Zionists and are so woefully out of step with reality. However, we ill-informed Christian Zionists have the light of biblical revelation and historical reality on our side. It is, rather, the deserters from biblical truth who should declare what they really are and retreat from the field.

Leaving Your Friends Behind

When former Archbishop Carey told The Jerusalem Post that the General Synod’s decision made him “ashamed to be an Anglican,” he spoke for many thousands of Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Disciples of Christ, and others who felt utterly betrayed by leadership that does not in any sense share their sentiments on the issue.

The beneficial aspect of the synod’s vote was that, for the first time, it definitively unveiled to the people in the pews the anti-Semitic proclivities of its corrupted leaders.

Their agenda is radical and political. If you doubt this fact, study the decisions they have made over the last few decades. They have made themselves clear. Now they have officially gone on record, and members can see the true commitment of their leaders and those who control the expenditures of the believing laity.

For thousands of people, there is an awakening to the realities of what is taking place. Israel is a tiny entity in a sea of militant nations devoted to its destruction. American and coalition forces are fighting and dying to create conditions conducive to the spread of freedom and democracy in the Middle East.

The forces that defame the efforts and sacrifices of people who are paying the ultimate price for our survival and freedom are not the friends of liberty. In fact, they are quite the opposite. They are giving aid and comfort to enemies who are out to destroy not only tiny Israel but all free people in the Western world.

I cannot forget the poignant words of humorist Art Buchwald who commented on the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. Although he had served on the European front in World War II, Mr. Buchwald said that, on that morning, for the first time in his life, he realized there were people out there who wanted, above all else, to kill him.

That’s the fact of life in our times, friend. There are people out there who are enemies of everything we represent, and they want to see us dead. We must not give them any encouragement to accomplish their objective.
These Are the Facts

Israel became a nation around 1450 B.C., some 2,000 years before the rise of Islam.

Jewish people have lived in the land continuously since the days of Joshua—some 3,000 years.

The Jewish people were the main population in the land from 1000 B.C. to A.D. 637—a period of 1,637 years.

Even if the Arabs had become the main population in the land from 637 to the present—which they did not—they would have to remain the main population for 268 more years merely to equal the time the Jewish people were the main population prior to A.D. 637. They would have to live there even longer to account for the years of Jewish residency after 637.

The Muslims controlled the land from 637 to 1099—462 years. Jewish people still lived there.

The Crusaders took the land from 1099 to 1291. Jewish people there joined the Muslims against the Crusaders, who tortured and killed Jews in their quest for ascendancy.

The Muslims retook the land from 1291 to 1917—a total of 626 years. However, by 1880 the Jews again were the main population in Jerusalem, as they had been in Safed and Tiberias.

The British captured the Holy Land from the Muslim Ottoman Turks in 1917.

In truth, “Arab” terrorism in the Holy Land originated centuries before the recent “tool” of the “Palestinian” cause was invented. In towns where Jews lived for hundreds of years, those Jews were periodically robbed, raped, and, in some places massacred, and, in many instances, the survivors were obliged to abandon their possessions and run. At the beginning of this century [20th] Jews were recorded in nearly every town that is today considered to have been “purely Arab.”

—Joan Peters,
From Time Immemorial
The Holy Land is, in reality, God's land. He Himself is the Creator and Owner of every land on Earth, but He specifically identifies Israel as “My land” (2 Chr. 7:20; Jer. 2:7; Joel 3:2). God allowed the Canaanites to occupy that land after the flood of Noah's day. In due course, He punished them by transferring ownership of His land to His own chosen nation, the people of Israel. The Lord told them, “I delivered you out of the hand of . . . all who oppressed you, and drove them out before you and gave you their land” (Jud. 6:9).

After Joshua led the tribes of Israel to fight for the land, as God had instructed, the Israelites received title to it. God transferred possession to the tribes, as recorded in Joshua 13—21, which lists the cities and lands allotted to each tribe and gives detailed descriptions of individual cities. Joshua 15 describes the territory assigned to Judah, with its key cities located between the Mediterranean and Dead Seas. Hebron, an important Jewish city, is in Palestinian hands today. But the Dead Sea, En Gedi, and Qumran belong to Israel.

Top: Ibex at En Gedi. Bottom: Prayer at the Machpelah Tomb of the Patriarchs (Karen Benzian/israelimages.com).
Within the fault line that extends 4,000 miles from Turkey to Africa lies the world’s most unusual body of water. The Bible calls it the Salt Sea, the Sea of the Arabah, and the Eastern Sea. It is popularly known as the Dead Sea because it is 30 percent minerals. Compared with most oceans, which have a mineral concentration of only 3 percent, it is little wonder that nothing lives in its waters. The cause of such dense salinity is simple: there is no outlet at the sea’s south end. Evaporation removes the water but leaves the minerals. Tourists from around the world flock to hotels nestled around the healing waters. Anyone can float without fear, since it is impossible to sink!

The Dead Sea, forming a border between Israel and Jordan, measures about 50 miles long and 10 miles wide. Its precise size is difficult to determine, since it is slowly decreasing. Both Israel and Jordan tap the Jordan River for irrigation, leaving little water to drain south into the sea. Tourists can drive past a mark British geologists made in 1917 noting the height of the Dead Sea on the rock face—50 feet above the current roadway! Proposals to infuse water into the sea have included constructing a canal from the Mediterranean Sea or Red Sea.¹

A small peninsula called the Lisan (“tongue”) divides the northern two-thirds of the Dead Sea from the southern one-third. The sea’s surface is the lowest level on Earth—1,300 feet below sea level. Its bottom lies another 1,300 feet lower, and the bedrock underneath the sedimentary deposits lies about 24,000 feet below sea level.² In comparison, Death Valley in California, the lowest point in the United States, is only 282 feet below sea level.

The ancient world valued the Dead Sea’s salt and the hardened petroleum called bitumen used by the Egyptians for embalming. Josephus and other ancient writers referred to it as the Lake of Asphalt. Today both Israel and Jordan extract minerals from the water and produce cosmetics ranging from hand cream to healing mud.

The Salt Sea is mentioned only in passing in the account of Abram’s battle with foreign kings and in descriptions of geographical borders (Gen. 14:3; Num. 34:3; Josh. 12:3). However, the prophet Ezekiel gave a unique prophecy about the sea:

There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many (Ezek. 47:9–10).

In the Millennial Kingdom, God will cause a freshwater river to flow down from Jerusalem, turning the Dead Sea into a “living sea.”

En Gedi

Nested alongside the western shore of the Dead Sea at the base of 2,000-foot cliffs lies the “Spring of the Wild Goats,” which in Hebrew is En Gedi. These wild goats, known as ibex, still grace the steep cliffs in the En Gedi Nature Reserve. The spring feeds a waterfall that splashes to a pool 600 feet below.

Earliest history finds Canaanites living at this strategic location alongside the Dead Sea and worshiping at a temple on a nearby mountain. After the conquest of the land, Israelites settled here, but not in great numbers. Perhaps this is why David chose to hide here from Saul (1 Sam. 24). Such a remote area would be a natural hiding place, desolate yet full of natural caves and close to the spring water. Some of David’s psalms feature images from the area around En Gedi. David wrote Psalm 57 “when he fled from Saul into the cave.” (See also Psalm 142.) After fleeing from Saul, David penned words inspired by the animals that surrounded him at En Gedi: “He makes my feet like the feet of deer [hinds’ feet], and sets me on my high places” (Ps. 18:33).

The postexilic community of En Gedi grew and served as an administrative center during the Hasmonian dynasty (100 B.C.). Sadly, during the First Jewish Revolt (A.D. 66–70), Jewish Zealots defending nearby Masada wiped out the entire population of 700 men, women, and children.³ Settlement continued in the next centuries, with a prosperous Jewish community rebuilding an older synagogue with unique mosaic floors that can be seen today. Its importance ended during the early Muslim period, and 1,300 years later it was incorporated into the new State of Israel in 1948.

Today En Gedi is an Israeli nature reserve and hosts visitors from around the world. The hike to the refreshing falls always thrills those who brave the climb. Standing in stark contrast to the desert heat that surrounds it, the spring continually pours out water that enriches the tired traveler and turns the bare surroundings lush green. All of God’s people can echo David’s experience of God’s protection in one of En Gedi’s caves: “I cried out to You, O LORD: I said, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living’” (Ps. 142:5).
The importance of Qumran surfaced in 1947. A Bedouin shepherd tossed a stone inside a cave on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, hoping to locate his wandering goat. Instead of hitting the animal, his rock smashed a clay jar that contained leather scrolls. Soon an antiquities dealer in Bethlehem acquired the scrolls, which eventually were purchased by the State of Israel. Since then, hundreds of caves in the area have been explored, and some have yielded manuscripts now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Shrine of the Book, located at the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem, displays many finds from Qumran.

The Dead Sea Scrolls (they contain about 200 copies of the Jewish Scriptures, as well as other writings) were copied between 250 B.C. and A.D. 68, when they were hidden from the invading Roman army that destroyed the community. Although scholars disagree about many details, they affirm that people known as the Essenes placed the scrolls in the caves. These strict Jews abhorred the unholy priesthood in Jerusalem and lived separately, in their own community. Their writings reveal that they anticipated the end of the world, culminating in a battle between the sons of light and the sons of darkness.

Visitors to Qumran can enjoy a multimedia presentation and follow a trail through the foundations of the community’s buildings. Hikers can still follow the path of the Essenes to a few caves—but no scrolls remain. It may be more than a coincidence that the scrolls of ancient Israel were discovered in the very year that modern Israel was founded.

A about 20 miles south of Jerusalem lies Hebron, the world’s oldest Jewish community. Arabs call it El Khali, meaning “The Friend,” which recalls God’s affection for “Abraham My friend” (Isa. 41:8). After his separation from Lot, the patriarch made Hebron his home (Gen. 13:18). It was here that Abraham laid claim to the Promised Land that God had solemnly sworn to give him.

After negotiations with a Canaanite, Abraham agreed to buy the field and cave of Machpelah, which then “were deeded to Abraham as a possession” (23:17–18). He buried his wife, Sarah, in the cave, which later became his own tomb as well as that of Isaac; Rebekah, his wife; Jacob; and Leah, Jacob’s wife (49:29–33).

After the Exodus from Egypt, 12 Israelite spies visited Hebron and brought back a great cluster of grapes (Num. 13:22–23). After Israel conquered the land, the fields and villages of Hebron were granted to one of those spies, Caleb, a great man of faith (Josh. 14:10–15). Hebron itself was given to “the children of Aaron the priest” and was one of six cities of refuge (21:13). Eventually it served as a capital city, for here David was first crowned king of Judah and, seven years later, king of both Israel and Judah (2 Sam. 2:1–4; 5:1–5). Later David moved his capital to Jerusalem.

During the first century, Herod the Great constructed a large complex above the Cave of Machpelah to honor those buried beneath. This Tomb of the Patriarchs features large hewn stones similar to those used when Herod enlarged the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. During the Byzantine Empire the tomb included a church that was converted into a mosque by the invading Muslims in the seventh century. Inside the structure, six monuments have stood for a thousand years—memorials for the three patriarchs and their wives. Jews share the complex with Muslims, with both groups expressing devotion to common ancestors.

From 638 to 1880 Hebron was one of “the four ‘Holy Cities’ of Judaism, in which there was continuous Jewish settlement from biblical times,” wrote historian Martin Gilbert. The others were Safed and Tiberias, in the Galilee, and Jerusalem.

Hebron’s Jewish population continued until the tragic Arab Revolt of 1929, when more than 1,000 Arabs went on the rampage and killed every Jew they could get their hands on. Those they could not kill they tortured and maimed. In Hebron they murdered 23 in one house alone. Only after the Six-Day War (1967) did Jewish people return to Hebron. They now live in two small communities: the Old City, with about 500 Jews; and a settlement of about 6,000 that takes the Canaanite name, Kiryat Arba (Josh. 14:15).

Under Oslo II in 1995, Hebron was transferred to the Palestinian Authority.

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More than 6 million Israelis live on 8,000 acres less than Nebraska plants in wheat alone.

With Israel’s population now at 6.6 million, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) is looking toward the Negev for Israel’s future.

JNF President Ronald S. Lauder outlined a plan to turn the Negev into a lush, friendly, profitable community filled with houses, jobs, and educational opportunities. The Negev “would become home to an additional 250,000 people,” Lauder said in an ad that ran in a February issue of The International Jerusalem Post.

So far the arid, inhospitable desert is the only area the Palestinians aren’t clamoring for. The Negev’s 5,292 square miles receive an average rainfall of only four inches a year. Consequently, only 8 percent of Israel’s population lives there, while 92 percent lives on the remaining 34 percent of the land. The result is a population density ratio in Israel proper of around 2,226 people per square mile on non-Negev land, compared with 80 people per square mile in the United States, for example. (These figures exclude Judea, Samaria, and the Golan and the population there.) Thus single-family houses are extremely rare, and all housing is expensive.

With Jewish Gaza gone and the world pressing Israel to relinquish the land it captured in the 1967 Six-Day War, the tiny country has nowhere to go but the Negev.

JNF’s project, called Blueprint Negev, “is essential to Israel’s future,” Lauder said, hoping to inspire the Jewish people “to be 21st century pioneers and to once again be part of a nation under creation.”

On the drawing board are:

- $300 million in projects to transform Beersheva, the “capital” of the Negev, into a “bustling metropolis.”
- 25 new communities, of which seven are already established.
- A $10 million central park, with a 3,000-seat amphitheater and recycled water reservoirs.
- A 25-acre world-class, residential, rehabilitative village to provide paramedical, therapeutic, and special education services to more than 200 residential adults with disabilities and 12,000 disabled children and young adults as outpatients.

Lauder said Blueprint Negev would also help the estimated 170,000 desert-dwelling Bedouin, who suffer 90 percent unemployment and have extremely low medical and educational standards. “Opening up the Negev economically will positively impact their future as well. This is a vision for all of Israel,” he said.
Three strategic geological formations protect the “heart” of the land of Israel. Whoever controls these formations controls the Jewish nation’s vital interior. These formations consist of the Shephelah, the Jezreel Valley, and the Jordan Valley.

Clockwise from top: The Guvrin Valley from the east; grapevines below Lachish; remains of the Bet Guvrin amphitheater (Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com).
The Shephelah

The Shephelah (Hebrew for “lowlands” and pronounced she-FA-la) designates an undulating cluster of grassy, limestone foothills located between Israel’s coastal plain and the Judean hill country. The Shephelah is roughly 10 miles wide and 27 miles long, ranging in height from 500 to 1,500 feet.

In biblical days, it was known for its olive and sycamore trees (1 Ki. 10:27; 1 Chr. 27:28). Its valleys were also used for growing wheat (1 Sam. 6:13).

Five east-west valleys intersect the Shephelah: the Aijalon, Sorek, Elah, Guvrin, and Lachish.

The Aijalon Valley provides access to the area north of Jerusalem. Significant biblical cities of the Aijalon Valley were Aijalon itself, situated in the eastern part of the valley, and Gezer, guarding the valley’s western entrance. Because of the thoroughfare from the port city of Joppa up to Jerusalem, Gezer became the most strategic city in the Shephelah.

The Sorek Valley also provides direct access to Jerusalem, but in biblical days it was much more difficult to travel. Its important cities included Beth Shemesh towards the center and the twin cities of Zorah and Eshtaol, at the valley’s north-east corner.

The Elah Valley provides access to the area near Bethlehem. Significant cities here were Gath at the western entrance; Azekah, towards the center; and Adullam, in the east.

The Guvrin, or Zephathah, Valley does not provide access to the hill country.

The Lachish Valley provides access to Hebron. Its only important biblical city was Lachish itself, located in the center of the valley and functioning as a southern sentinel between Judah and Egypt.

Joshua allotted the northern section of the Shephelah to the tribe of Dan (Josh. 19:40–46). The rest belonged to the tribe of Judah (15:20, 33).

In the Shephelah, Joshua prayed for the sun and moon to stop in their courses (Josh. 10:12–13, 40). Samson loved a woman named Delilah in the Valley of Sorek (Jud. 16:4). David slew Goliath in the Valley of Elah (1 Sam. 17). Of the 15 fortified cities King Solomon’s son Rehoboam built for defending Jerusalem, eight were in the Shephelah (2 Chr. 11:5–10).

Good King Asa defeated a million-man army in the Zephathah Valley (2 Chr. 14:10). In the days of wicked King Ahaz, the Philistines captured certain cities of the Shephelah (2 Chr. 28:18). And the cities of Lachish and Azekah, along with Jerusalem, were the last holdouts against the Babylonians (Jer. 34:7).

In recent times, the main road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was built to wind its way through the entrance of the Aijalon Valley, then on to follow the foothills just north of Eshtaol. During Israel’s War of Independence in 1948, this road was constantly under Arab attack. One of Israel’s bloodiest defeats took place at Latrun, which was a police station south of the biblical city of Aijalon.

Today the Shephelah is under full Israeli sovereignty and is mostly farmland. Located there is the modern city of Beit Shemesh, situated near the Old Testament Beth Shemesh, where the Ark of the Covenant returned on a cart from Philistine territory, drawn by two cows (1 Sam. 6:13).

In the future Millennial Kingdom, men will buy land in the Shephelah, shepherds will count their flocks there, and the Shephelah’s inhabitants will possess the coastal plain of the Philistines (Jer. 32:44; 33:13; Obad. 19).
The Jezreel Valley is actually a collective term for the Valley of Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley. Together, they form a triangle of more than 141 square miles in northern Israel in the Galilee.

The Valley of Megiddo (2 Chr. 35:22) lies between the Mount Carmel ridge on the south and the Nazareth ridge on the north. The Valley of Megiddo is named after the ancient city of Megiddo, a strategically vital place in the middle of the Carmel ridge, protecting the entrance to the most traveled pass in the region.

Going southeast, the Valley of Megiddo merges into the Jezreel Valley (Josh. 17:16), named after the city of Jezreel. Site of one of Ahab’s palaces (1 Ki. 21:1), the city of Jezreel lay strategically in the center of the valley, 200 feet above the plain, on the lower northwestern edge of the Mount Gilboa ridge.

Across the valley to the north is the Hill of Moreh, on which such well-known biblical towns as Endor on the northeast, Shunem on the south, and Nain on the north were located (Josh. 17:11; 19:18; Lk. 7:11). Slightly to the north of Moreh is Mount Tabor (elevation 1,900 feet), an almost perfectly round geological formation. To the west of Mount Tabor on the Nazareth ridge is the city of Nazareth, Jesus’ boyhood hometown. Standing on the ridge near Nazareth, perhaps the precipice from which the residents of Nazareth tried to throw Jesus, one can almost view the entire valley (Lk. 4:28–30). At the extreme southeastern end of the Jezreel Valley, at an important crossroad, lay the city of Beth-Shean, guardian to the valley’s eastern portal (Jud. 1:27). The Romans developed Beth-Shean extensively and called it Scythopolis.

The Israelite tribes of Manasseh, Zebulun, and Issachar shared the allotment of the Jezreel Valley. But the Canaanites here were difficult to conquer. They had iron chariots, a distinct advantage in such wide-open plains (Josh. 17:16).

The Jezreel Valley has been the location of numerous military conflicts throughout history due to its ideal battlefield contours. Deborah and Barak swept down from Mount Tabor and trounced Sisera near Megiddo (Jud. 4:1–23; 5:19, 21). Gideon defeated the Midianites just south of the Hill of Moreh (Jud. 6—7). The Philistines defeated King Saul near Mount Gilboa (1 Sam. 29:1; 31:1–13). They fastened Saul’s body to the city wall of Beth-Shean (v. 10). Archers from Necho, king of Egypt, shot King Josiah of Judah on the plain of Megiddo (2 Chr. 35:20–24). The Maccabees, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, and Napoleon all fought in the Jezreel Valley. During Israel’s War of Independence, the Jordanians and Iraqis pushed into the Jezreel Valley from the east. Israel, however, succeeded in retaining most of the area.

Today the Jezreel Valley is under complete Israeli sovereignty. Before 1920 it was barren, swampy, and malaria-infested. Between 1920 and 1925, the Jewish people purchased much of the land at exorbitant prices, then drained and reforested it. Currently it is one of the most fertile areas in Israel, receiving a comparatively high level of annual rainfall, along with natural irrigation from the Kishon and Harod Rivers. The result is an agricultural cornucopia of fruit trees and wheat fields. The fields serve as Israel’s major granary.

In the future, the Jezreel Valley will be the northern staging ground for the military campaign known as Armageddon (Hebrew for “hill [or mount] of Megiddo”), when the kings of the whole world will assemble for battle (Rev. 16:14, 16).
The Jordan Valley

The Jordan Valley is named after the Jordan River that flows through it. The Jordan River is Israel's largest river and is a main source of water. Its banks have always had an abundance of foliage (40 varieties today) and animals, even lions in biblical days (Jer. 50:44).

Beginning at the foot of Mount Hermon, the Upper Jordan Valley adjoins the Jordan River north of the Sea of Galilee. The Upper Jordan Valley is about 14 miles long and between four to six miles wide. In Jesus' day it contained a small lake called Semechonitus. Even up to the late 19th century, this lake was home to a variety of wildlife and 10-foot-high reeds.

The Lower Jordan Valley adjoins the Jordan River between the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee and the northern tip of the Dead Sea. From sea to sea, the distance is only 65 miles. But because the Jordan River meanders, its waters actually cover 200 miles, dropping some 600 feet in elevation before emptying into the Dead Sea.

Joshua allotted the west side of the Lower Jordan Valley to the tribes of Issachar, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin. The tribe of Gad received most of the east side.

In biblical days, Succoth, a town east of the Jordan River, became the place where Jacob built himself a house (Gen. 33:17). Near there, in the Jordan plain, Solomon cast the copper for the Temple utensils (1 Ki. 7:46). Under Joshua, the waters of the Jordan River "stood still, and rose in a heap" some 20 miles away at the village of Adam to allow the children of Israel to cross (Josh. 3:16).

Israel had camped on the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho, at the widest spot (14 miles across) of the Jordan Valley (Num. 22:1). Jericho itself, located on the west side of the Jordan Valley, is well known for being conquered by Joshua and as the place where Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus (Josh. 6:2; Mk. 10:46). To get to Jericho, Jesus likely trod the well-beaten road that led down the eastern side of the Lower Jordan Valley. It was easier to travel this road than to traverse the Judean mountains. It is also likely Joseph and Mary took this same road on their way to Bethlehem when Mary was pregnant with Jesus. The Lower Jordan Valley was also where John the Baptist baptized hundreds, including Jesus Himself (Mt. 3:5–6, 13).

Israel drained Lake Semechonitus (also called Lake Hula) in the 1950s. Today the Hula Basin is one of the most fertile farmlands in all of Israel, producing cotton, fruit, and a variety of vegetables. Numerous fish hatcheries are there as well.

Much of the Lower Jordan Valley serves as Israel's eastern border. The northern section of the Lower Jordan Valley abounds with fruit and vegetables.

Interestingly, the Jordan Valley lies on a major geological rift known as the Syrian-African fault. Earthquakes are common. An earthquake from this rift, measuring 5.0 on the Richter scale, struck Israel in February 2004. Israel's Dr. Amos Salamon, research geologist at the Geological Survey of Israel, predicted at that time "with 90 percent confidence, that the next major quake will happen within 50 years." In the future Tribulation, a great earthquake will kill 7,000 people in the city of Jerusalem (Rev. 11:13). It is possible that the shifting of the Jordan Rift will cause that earthquake as well.

For many centuries, the undisputed spiritual and governmental center of the Promised Land has been Jerusalem, the unique city I am privileged to reside in. But before I moved to the Israeli capital in April 1984, I lived for more than three years in the most beautiful portion of the land, Israel’s northern Galilee.

With the exception of the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Six-Day War, most of the Upper and Lower Galilee regions lie inside the area given to the Jewish people by the United Nations in 1947.

However, the Galilee was first given to them by God and allotted to the tribes of Asher, Dan, and Naphtali; the Golan plateau, known as Bashan, became the inheritance of the half tribe of Manasseh. Later the kingdoms of David and Solomon completely engulfed the Galilee, the Golan Heights, and beyond.

The greenest part of Israel by far, the Galilee derives its name from the historic fact that it was a crossroads of ancient travel and commerce. The renowned Via Maris trade route ran through the middle of the area, connecting Egypt and North Africa with flourishing empires like Assyria and Persia to the north and east. Known in Hebrew as Ha Galil, meaning “the circuit,” the word Galilee is also related to the word gal, meaning “wave.” That is an apt description of Israel’s Galilee region—full of tree-lined, rolling hills that gently rise and fall between fertile, farmed valleys.

This verdant area contains the country’s only natural freshwater lake, the picturesque and often tempestuous Sea of Galilee. Called Kinneret by modern Israelis, and measuring 13 miles in length and an average of eight miles in width, the lake’s surface waters actually lie more than 700 feet below sea level, making it the lowest lake on Earth.

The pristine headwaters of the renowned Jordan River flow south from Lebanon into the fish-filled lake, supplemented by many underground springs and streams that emerge from the base of majestic Mount Hermon and from the scenic Golan Heights above the Kinneret’s eastern shore. Israeli government leaders inaugurated the National Water Carrier from the Sea of Galilee in 1964, piping thousands of gallons of potable water to more southerly portions of the semi-arid country every day.

Mount Hermon, the highest mountain peak in Israel, rises like a monarch from the northern reaches of the Galilee region and the Golan Heights. At 9,230 feet above sea level, the towering mountain actually contains three distinct peaks. One of them is within the borders of neighboring Syria; another, in Lebanon. The tallest summit, captured by Israeli forces from Syria during fierce fighting in 1967, is located just inside of Israel’s post-Six-Day War boundaries. With government assistance, local Jewish entrepreneurs began to develop Mount Hermon’s seasonally icy slopes into the country’s only winter ski resort in the 1970s.
Despite possessing the Middle East’s highest mountain peaks, along with the lowest freshwater lake found anywhere on Earth, the Galilee’s overall dimensions are relatively small. The southern section, known as Lower Galilee, begins in the Mount Carmel mountain range southeast of the bustling Mediterranean port city of Haifa. It stretches east across the lush Jezreel Valley, with the Gilboa Mountains, where King Saul was slain, acting as a natural southern border. Mount Tabor, the traditional site where Jesus was transfigured many centuries ago, ascends like a diamond jewel from the northern hills that line the valley.

In the middle of the intensely cultivated valley lies the expanding Israeli town of Afula, a contemporary crossroads for many domestic Israeli travelers and for roadway commerce. The Lower Galilee ends a mere 30 miles east of Haifa at the banks of the southern portion of the Jordan River, which flows out of the southern end of the Sea of Galilee. The slow moving river cuts its swath through the center of the deepest portion of the Great Rift, a massive geological fault that separates the African and Arabian plates, running all the way from Turkey in southwest Asia to central Africa.

Nazareth, Sepphoris, Beth-Shean, and Megiddo were the most prominent ancient towns situated in Lower Galilee. Of the four, only Beth-Shean and Nazareth exist today. Beth-Shean is a prospering Israeli community located on the northern reaches of the Jordan Valley. In the years since I moved to Israel 25 years ago, shovel-wielding archaeologists have uncovered one of the best preserved, Roman-era stone amphitheaters found anywhere on Earth, tucked just inside modern Beth-Shean’s city limits.

Nazareth is a constantly growing city of some 60,000 residents, a majority of them Arabs. Its most prominent landmark is the Roman Catholic Annunciation Church that commemorates the angel Gabriel’s appearance to Mary in the town where Jesus was later raised to manhood. By the time Jesus took His first footsteps in the town of Nazareth, the entire Galilee region was completely under Roman sway.

Although He fulfilled various Bible prophecies by being born in humble circumstances in Bethlehem and dying as a sacrificial lamb in nearby Jerusalem, Jesus spent most of His life in the beautiful Galilee region. Many of His most venerated words and actions were centered there, especially near the Sea of Galilee.

Until recent years, Arab Christians outnumbered Muslims in the Jewish Messiah’s hometown. But that is sadly no longer the case due to significant Christian emigration to other countries and to a much higher Muslim birthrate. Still, Nazareth rivals Jerusalem as having the largest concentration of contemporary Arab Christians found anywhere in the Holy Land, most of them members of the dominant Greek Orthodox Church.
Upper Galilee

Upper Galilee extends from the Beit Hakerem Valley north of Nazareth to Israel's hilly international border with Lebanon. The country's second highest peak, Mount Merom, rises along the area's northern rugged limits. Tiberias, the region's largest urban center and most popular tourist stopover, is located on the western slopes of the Sea of Galilee, about 14 miles northeast of Nazareth. It was named after the Roman emperor who initiated the ancient building of the lakefront community. Today the streets of Tiberias are frequently filled with Christian pilgrims who bask in bright noontime sun or enjoy the warm evening lake breezes while savoring the local delicacy of Saint Peter's fish. After being brought ashore by the many small fishing vessels that ply the lake, Saint Peter's fish can be ordered in one of the open-air restaurants that line the lakefront stone promenade.

The oldest Jewish kibbutz, or collective farming settlement, is located just north of Tiberias. Called Kibbutz Kinneret, it was established by Zionist pioneers in 1909. Around half of Israel's current 260 kibbutz communities are located in the Galilee region, mainly due to the rich soil and ample rainfall found there.

Among the oldest, continuous Jewish religious centers in the Holy Land is the town of Safed, built on pine-tree-lined hills northwest of the Sea of Galilee. It is widely known as one of Israel's most exotic, modern tourist attractions, populated with many adherents of the Jewish mystical Kabbalah movement. They traverse the narrow streets, past shops featuring the works of modern Israeli painters and sculptors, many of whom also reside in the hilltop town. It has been a Kabbalah center since the 16th century.

The book of Judges records that the prophetess Deborah, assisted by Barak, led the armies of Israel in battle against Canaanite King Jabin, who ruled the region from his Upper Galilee stronghold of Hazor, north of Nazareth.

Known in Hebrew as Etzba Hagalil, or the “finger of Galilee,” the Galilee Panhandle stretches north from the Kinneret to the foothills of Mount Hermon. The well-watered Hula Valley, which sits like a bowl in the center of the panhandle, is known for its productive cotton fields and fragrant citrus orchards. The towns of Metulla and Kiryat Shmona are located near the area’s upper reaches. I visited Kiryat Shmona frequently while living on a northern panhandle kibbutz in the early 1980s, despite the fact that it was frequently under siege from Palestine Liberation Organization forces that fired rockets at the half deserted community from nearby southern Lebanon.

The Golan Heights

This militarily strategic area had been part of the original British Mandate over Palestine, but it was ceded to French control soon after World War I and therefore became part of modern Syria. Outnumbered Israeli forces captured the volcanic plateau from Soviet-backed Syrian soldiers in June 1967, ending nearly two decades of Syrian shelling of the Hula Valley below, which left more than 140 Israelis dead and thousands more wounded.

Despite the fact that officials in Damascus began to demand the return of the heights virtually the moment that guns fell silent at the end of the Six-Day War, the tiny Golan region has remained relatively peaceful ever since—especially after Israel rebuffed Syria’s surprise attempt to recapture it during the Yom Kippur War of October 1973.

Israeli leaders have said they will never return the vital watershed area to hostile Syrian control. The first Israeli Golan Heights settlement, Kibbutz Merom, went up in July 1967. Three years later, a dozen Jewish communities dotted the plateau. By 2005, more than 18,000 Israelis were living in 34 Israeli kibbutzim and in towns throughout the Golan Heights, despite continuing Syrian threats to retake the area in a new Middle East war.

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Greetings and Shalom, Shalom. The purpose of this journey to Jerusalem was abundantly realized. My primary assignment was to cover a specific prayer shift at the Western Wall. The rotating schedule included a four-hour morning watch, four-hour afternoon watch, then a free day. Including the walking time to and from the Wall, it was a six-hour day.

Time at the Wall is not always easy. In fact, I would have to describe it as oppressive. An exception was the numerous bar mitzvahs being celebrated. The soul-wrenching singing, chanting, dancing, and playing of instruments of these most musical of peoples caused me to think that I had stumbled onto the set of Fiddler on the Roof.

But the Wall is also known as “wailing,” and for good reason. On the women’s side there is much weeping. Of the three causes of grief, the most common is personal. Some are caught in terrible marriage situations; others are plagued by constant poverty or are suffering the loss of loved ones to illness or terrorism. Others mourn the destruction of the Temple almost 2,000 years ago and the departure of the Presence of Yahveh (יהוה). Finally, there are the genuine Annas and Simeons, described in Luke’s Gospel as “just [righteous] and devout,” serving God “with fastings and prayers night and day” (2:25, 37). These are they who are “waiting for the Consolation of Israel” and looking for “redemption in Jerusalem,” laboring for the Coming of their Messiah, Ha Tikvah (“the Hope”) of Israel and all the world (vv. 25, 38).

On three mornings I was able to walk down through the Windmill Park to a 24/7 prayer and praise center. Its arched windows overlook the deep, rugged gorge of the Kidron Valley to picturesque Mount Zion. This is a liberated time of worship in stark contrast to the myriad restrictions at the Wall. It also has heat and a roof. Thanks be to God!

Particularly on free days, a dear sister or brother in Yeshua would invite me to a meal. Sometimes these brethren were British; other times they were Brazilian, Israeli, or American. Jerusalem is jam-packed with fascinating and intimate restaurants, cafes, gardens, parks, museums, and heritage centers. Many of them are hidden behind ancient stone walls or tucked away in corners of courtyards. It is a vertical city, perched on a half-dozen mountaintops of the Judean Range. “Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together,” we read in Psalm 122:3.

The final Sunday was exceptional. As I had the afternoon shift, I was able to attend church in the morning. This service normally concludes around noon, but as the pastor was announcing lunch across the courtyard, another spontaneous time of worship broke out, with sustained singing, praying, and expounding from the Word. This was a time of refreshment from heaven. No one wanted to leave. Not even for lunch. Is this perhaps a harbinger of revival for the body of Yeshua in the land?

It was raining at the Wall, so I made my way up and into the tiny room in the right corner. Sitting next to a young woman who sobbed deeply and continuously for two hours, we both shared my roll of toilet paper as I identified with her grief, whatever the cause.

At 5 P.M. the Wall warrior team and Brenda Giles, director of Hugs for Israel—an evangelical Christian organization that helps Israeli children maimed in terrorist attacks—met at the Jerusalem Gold Hotel to take a bus to Hadassah Hospital to pray for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. The praying team was the only exception to the multitudinous media encamped at the entrance of this world-renowned medical center. Photographers snapped away as we interceded. Our team leaders were interviewed under huge umbrellas to stave off the driving wind and rain. A few of us were actually able to make it through all the security to pray outside his room.

On the Monday before leaving, I met with someone who graciously took me on a prayer walk through an intense neighborhood in Jerusalem. A petite, resident “guardian angel,” she saw me off on the airport shuttle to Ben Gurion Airport after midnight for a 6 A.M. flight through Munich to Philadelphia. God’s providential hand was evident at every turn in this concert of prayer for the nation and people of Israel.

A bar mitzvah boy carrying a Torah at the Western Wall (Yasha Mazur/israelimages.com).
The Jewish people are in the Promised Land today as a result of divine decree and much blood, sweat, and tears. Despite today’s Arab propaganda that they “stole” the land from the Palestinians, the truth is that the Jews not only did not steal the land, but they legally purchased much of it from Muslim landlords who neither wanted or valued it. The Ottoman Turks raped and pillaged it, but Jewish pioneers brought it back to life. History shows the land only blooms when God’s people possess it.

The Ottoman Empire came into existence in the 13th century, and its influence fell on the Holy Land in 1516 when the Turkish Empire under Sultan Salim al-Yavuz routed the Mamluks, who had held dominion over it and Egypt since 1270.1 The Ottomans, who were Islamic but not Arab, divided the newest addition to their empire into four sanjaks (Turkish for “banners”).2 These were Jerusalem, Gaza, Nablus, and Safed. Each was an organizational, military, economic, and judicial entity.3 However, the land fared poorly under Ottoman rule:

The first three centuries of Ottoman rule isolated Palestine from outside influence. . . . The Ottoman tax system was ruinous and did much to keep the land underdeveloped and the population small. When [historian] Alexander W. Kinglake crossed the Jordan in 1834-35, he used the Jordan’s only bridge, a survival from Roman antiquity.4 Yet, despite all types of hardship, a remnant of Jewish people always remained in the land.

Even after the Jewish state was ended by the Romans, Jewish communities continued to exist. All of the successor governments tried to eliminate the Jews at one time or another, but none succeeded as numerous accounts testify over the centuries. When the Zionists started the modern “return” to Eretz Yisrael in the 19th Century, they were joining Jews who never left.5

The Jews were persecuted mercilessly by the Turks and taxed at a rate equivalent to extortion. Joan Peters, in her outstanding book From Time Immemorial, quoted Christians who visited the important Jewish city of Safed in the 17th century. The Jews, they said, “pay for the very air they breathe.”6 Yet, wrote Ms. Peters, “at the turn of the century, the Jewish population had grown from 8,000–10,000 (in 1555) to between 20,000 and 30,000 souls.”7 But their plight was tragic due to the fact that all non-Muslims were officially tolerated (a second-class status called dhimmi) but were not considered equals. Therefore, the Jewish people had no rights or protection under Islamic law. Yet they could be taxed, humiliated, and even killed—as the majority of them were—by the cruel Muslims.

For example, in 1660 the Jews in Safed were massacred and the town destroyed, despite the staggering taxes the Jewish people were paying. In 1674, wrote Ms. Peters, “Jerusalem’s Jews were similarly impoverished by
The love of the Jews for the Holy Land . . . is unbelievable.”8

A Jewish visitor in 1847 wrote: They [the Jewish people] do not have any protection and are at the mercy of policemen and the pashas who treat them as they wish . . . their property is not at their disposal and they dare not complain about an injury for fear of the Arabs’ revenge. Their lives are precarious and subject to daily danger of death.9

A ‘Mournful Expanse’

When the famous American author and humorist Mark Twain visited in 1869, his description of the land under the Muslim Ottoman Turks was a far cry from a “land flowing with milk and honey”:

We traversed some miles of desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds—a silent, mournful expanse . . . Gray lizards, those heirs of ruin, of sepulchres and desolation, glided in and out among the rocks or lay still and sunned themselves. Where prosperity has reigned, and fallen; where glory has flamed, and gone out; where beauty has dwelt, and passed away; where gladness was, and sorrow is; where the pomp of life has been, and silence and death brood in its high places, there this reptile makes his home, and mocks at human vanity.10

In another chapter, Twain wrote:

There is not a solitary village throughout its whole extent—not for thirty miles in either direction. There are two or three small clusters of Bedouin tents, but not a single permanent habitation. One may ride ten miles, hereabouts, and not see ten human beings.

To this region one of the prophecies is applied: “I will bring the land into desolation; and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and I will draw out a sword after you; and your land shall be desolate and your cities waste” [Lev. 26:32–33].

No man can stand here by deserted Ain Mellalah and say the prophecy has not been fulfilled.31

Indeed, ancient Israel’s disobedience brought desolation. But the land was not always so. The Bible describes the land given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as “a good land and large land . . . a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8). God promised His people that, as long as they “obey the voice of the LORD [their] God, to observe carefully all His commandments,” they would be blessed (Dt. 28:1). He also warned that disobedience would lead to separation from the Promised Land and that the land itself would become desolate.

But God also promised restoration: “Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isa. 27:6). God’s Word is explicit: The land of Israel will generate its bounty only when the people who have biblical title and ownership are in control. Otherwise, it will lie fallow, empty, and desolate.

In fact, the Jewish people have within them a natural and intense desire for the land of Israel and their beloved city, Jerusalem. The psalmist understood this unique, almost inexplicable, longing in the Jewish soul when he wrote, “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill” (Ps. 137:5).

The Muslim conquerors, on the other hand, had neither interest in nor love for the land they dominated. Despite Islamic ownership, the Arabs who lived there, wrote Peters, “had neither the desire nor experience for agricultural toil; they ‘heartily despised’ both the toil and ‘the tiller.’”12

Hal Lindsey, in his book The Everlasting Hatred, described the Promised Land under the Ottoman Turks:

The Holy Land under the Ottoman Turks suffered more devastation in four hundred years than the previous fifteen hundred. By the nineteenth century, the ancient canal and irrigation systems were destroyed. The land was barren and filled with malaria-ridden swamps. The hills
were denuded of trees and brush so all of the terraces and topsoil had eroded away, leaving only rocks.\(^\text{13}\)

Things were so bad that most Muslims were happy to sell their land to anyone who could afford the massive taxes. In 1901 the Jewish National Fund was established. It began collecting money from around the world, purchasing land from Muslims who wanted to make Palestine— their ancient Promised Land— their home again.

Golda Meir, who arrived as a pioneer with her husband in 1921 and eventually became prime minister of Israel, wrote:

> The only people who could possibly undertake the job of draining the Emek [Jezreel Valley] swamps were the highly motivated pioneers of the Labour-Zionist movement, who were prepared to reclaim the land, however difficult the circumstances and regardless of the human cost. What’s more, they were prepared to do it themselves, rather than have the work done by hired Arab labourers under the supervision of Jewish farm managers.\(^\text{14}\)

As Jewish people continued to make aliyah (Hebrew for “going up”) to Israel, their love of the land was evident. They took barren, desolate areas and installed irrigation systems. They cleared rocks and planted fields. They drained low, marshy, mosquito-infested swamps and turned them into fertile farmlands.

When, 40 years ago, the Israelis began moving into the barren Gush Katif area in the Gaza Strip, they were told by the Arabs that the land was cursed and nothing could be grown there. But by the time the Israelis were forced to leave last summer under the government’s disengagement policy, they had turned Gush Katif into the breadbasket of the land of Israel. They did what they had always done: They made the desert bloom.

The Muslim Ottoman Turks left a legacy of desolation. But God had promised that the land would be desolate until His people—the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob— returned to it:

> Thus says the Lord God: “Because they made you desolate and swallowed you up on every side, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, . . . who gave My land to themselves as a possession, with wholehearted joy and spiteful minds, in order to plunder its open country . . . prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say . . . ‘I have raised My hand in an oath that surely the nations that are around you shall bear their own shame. But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel!’” (Ezek. 36:3, 5–8).

Despite the prevailing, anti-Semitic worldview regarding Israel, Scripture is clear: The Sovereign God of the universe created the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). He also created the Jewish people, a nation that had never before existed. And He promised them a piece of real estate located literally in the center of the world. Israel is a Promised Land for a Chosen People; the relationship is symbiotic. They exist as separate entities, but only together are they able to realize fully all the Lord God has promised.

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**Endnotes**


5 Ibid.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 178–179.

9 Ibid., 190–191.

10 Mark Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, chap. 47 <etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccow-v2id=Twalmono.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=47&division=div1>, 489.

11 Twain, chap. 46 <etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccow-v2id=Twalmono.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=46&division=div1>, 485.

12 Ibid., 151.

13 Lindsey, 167.


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Without question, Rabbi Israel Ben Eliezer (also known as the Besht and the Ba’al Shem Tov) left a permanent mark on Judaism. The Hasidic (ultra-Orthodox) movement flourished under his care. But all Hasidic teaching is not alike. And not all Jewish people agree with Hasidism. Although Hasidism possesses many local leaders, each sect has one major leader who is revered, almost worshiped, by his followers. He is the head of his dynasty, and his scepter usually falls to his heir or someone in his family.

The Besht created the climate for this situation with his doctrine on the position of the tsaddik ("righteous one"). Tsaddiks are individuals believed to possess superior spiritual qualities. Unlike the biblical person of the Messiah, a tsaddik is not regarded as one who will bring world peace. Rather, he is a spiritual facilitator to help people function joyously in their world.

Besides tsaddik, a Hasidic leader may be called reb (a Yiddish term of respect), rebe, or rav. Hasidim regard the rebe above all other positions. He is analogous to a Hindu guru because he guides his followers in all aspects of life. He leads his people to do devekut, adherence to God. The tsaddik, or rebe, is responsible to lead his followers to salvation of their souls through communion with God.

The Ba’al Shem Tov left no written form of his teaching, but his followers wrote many stories about him; and when he died in 1770, the popular leader become legendary. His ideas spread to hundreds of communities throughout Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Rebbes arose in dozens of Eastern European towns; and many Jewish people followed them, believing they possessed the knowledge of the way to God. Towns with names like Satmar, Belz, Kotzk, and Lubavitch produced the individual sects of Hasidism we see today.

Wrote expert Chaim Shneider:

"Slowly but steadily, Hasidism came to be accepted as a legitimate way of observing Judaism. Hasidim were known for their devout practices, such as frequenting the Mikva [ritual bath]. They sometimes didn’t follow Halacha [established Jewish law], such as Davening (praying) late in the day. Hasidism branched out into literally hundreds of Rabinic dynasties."

Before World War II, Poland had 3.5 million Jews. And the “vast majority” of them, wrote Shneider, were Hasidic.2

**Satmar.** The most traditional type of Hasidism, Satmar originated from a remote Hungarian town in Transylvania. Satmars hold the distinction of being one of the few Jewish groups that do not support the current establishment of the State of Israel, believing it should not exist until the Messiah Himself establishes it. They contend that Zionism and the creation of the Jewish state brought the Holocaust as judgment to the Jewish people. Thus, wrote Shneider, in 1948 the Satmar leader “would sob tremendously . . . about the harm that the Jewish state causes and about how sinful it is for Jews to establish their own power prior to..."
the arrival of ‘Mashiach’ to redeem them.” He also lamented the Israeli victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, and “at one point he ordered that no one who believes in the Zionist cause should ever step through the Shul’s [synagogue’s] door again.” Satmars do not recruit members from the unobservant Jewish community.

Lubavitch. One of the most visible Hasidic movements is the Lubavitcher, also called Chabad, an acronym for “Hokhmah, Binah, Da’at”—wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.” The Lubavitch desire nonpracticing Jews to return to the fold of observant Jewry. They drive “mitzvah [good-deed] mobiles,” which are milk truck-sized vehicles converted into worship areas, into Jewish communities to look for hatless, Jewish men and invite them to don phylacteries and pray. Their last rebbe was the well-known Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Brooklyn, New York. Many of his followers believe he is the messiah, even though he died in 1994.

Hasidism’s Detractors

Along with his large following, the Ba’al Shem Tov also attracted a number of critics. They considered placing joy and contentment ahead of Torah study to be a dangerous sign of Judaism’s fall. Yet the shocking truth was that, once the Besht died, his teachings spread even faster than when he was alive. The critics felt the movement needed to be stopped. Twelve years after his death, a group arose called the Mitnagdim, which means “opponents.”

The opposition movement actually began with the emergence of a rabbi named Elijah Solomon Zalman (1720–1797). He lived in Vilna, a city called “Jerusalem of Lithuania,” which was filled with synagogues and academies and was located north of the area of Poland where Hasidism was the most prominent. Though brilliant (Solomon delivered a complicated talmudic discourse at age seven), he refused any title or public position. Unlike the Besht, he studied the Talmud 18 hours a day. He also studied secular subjects, such as geometry, astronomy, and medicine. “It may be said of him that no Jewish or general topic which had a bearing on Judaism was alien to him.”

He studied all the time. He slept only two hours a day, never more than half an hour at a time. He eliminated distractions by closing the shutters even in daytime and studied by candlelight. Eventually he arose to become the greatest spiritual and intellectual leader of Jewry in modern times. The Vilna Gaon, as he came to be known, was concerned that Hasidism would spread to such an extent that the Torah and Talmud would be replaced entirely with emotional prayer, experience, and Kabbalah. (See “The Vilna Gaon: A Mystical Genius” in the January/February issue of Israel My Glory.)

Viewing the position of tsaddik as idolatry, he believed it promoted the worship of human beings. In 1772, just two years after the Besht’s death, the Gaon decreed that Hasidim should be excommunicated. He went so far as to state, “I will continue to stand on guard, and it is the duty of every believing Jew to repudiate and pursue them [the Hasidim] with all manner of afflictions and subdue them, because they have sin in their hearts and are like a sore on the body of Israel.”

Over the years the Mitnagdim became less antagonistic toward Hasidism because a more bitter opponent arose, one that threatened both groups. The enemy was a group of men who wanted all people, especially the Jews of Poland and Russia, to embrace the culture of Europe. This movement was called Haskalah, or enlightenment. The demands of Haskalah meant assimilation—an end unacceptable to any observant Jew. Alexander II, czar of Russia, ruled with an “iron fist within the velvet glove.” He tried to open large cities to wealthy Jews, wanting them to invest their skill and money to increase trade. But the majority of Jews would not have benefited from these decrees and were wary of his “kindness.” As a result of their distrust, seen as unwillingness to cooperate, pogroms began just six weeks after Alexander III came to the throne.

It was these pogroms—government-sanctioned massacres of Jewish people—that led to mass immigration to America and the survival of the Hasidic movement.

While there are many differences within the Hasidic movement regarding such things as leadership, Israel, and the identity of the Messiah, there is major agreement that, for Jews, worldliness and assimilation in a Gentile world are dangerous. The current trend of Hollywood elites to blend yoga and New Age “karma” with a study of Kabbalah illustrates their concern.

Hasidic Jews are not interested in the latest fad; they want to preserve their distinctiveness with a desire to please God. It should encourage believers that there are people, especially Jewish people, who have this desire. Yet it is heart-breaking to realize that they misdirect their efforts. Living a life for God does not have to involve special leaders, clothing, dress, or food. A truly pious (hasidic) life is possible only when the heart has been “koshered” (made suitable) by faith in the biblical, true, and living Messiah.

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 3:147.

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Here at the Tel Dan National Park in the Upper Galilee, visitors can see where the Israelites made shrines on the high places and violated God’s order not to worship anywhere but at the Temple in Jerusalem. On the right is the platform where the shrine once stood. In the center is where the altar stood, on which burnt offerings were made. The foundation and stones date back to antiquity, but the upper structure is modern. First Kings 12:25–33 describes the two locations of false worship: Bethel and Dan. See also 2 Kings 10:29 (Dan Pearson/FOI).

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Israel’s Salvation

Will Israel survive the hatred and unceasing persecution that has plagued it for centuries? Although it faces a cauldron of unrelenting conflict, Israel will survive the world’s attempts to annihilate it.

The last three chapters of Zechariah form a single prophecy that reveals the struggle Israel will face to stay alive. This prophecy describes a series of events that will culminate with the Messiah’s return, Israel’s salvation, and the establishment of His Kingdom on Earth.

The prophet’s message is described as the “burden [oracle] of the word of the Lord against Israel” (12:1). The word burden refers to something heavy, a load to be lifted. In context, the “burden” is a weighty message from the Lord concerning (1) a yet future siege against Jerusalem and (2) the eventual salvation of Israel.

Before unveiling the prophecy in chapter 12, Zechariah reminds us that no force in the universe can deter or divert God’s plan and purpose for Israel. This assurance comes from “the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, and forms the spirit of man and establishes it in his place; who makes the bearers of decisions run on their own; who says of Jerusalem, ‘I will save my people Jerusalem’; who makes the war cry in the city, and the battle cry in the land, and the battle cry is against the Chaldeans” (12:1-6).

The Last Three Chapters of Zechariah

Zechariah used two similes in describing the strength given to the Jewish people. They will be “like a fiery torch in the woodpile, and like a fiery torch in the sheaves; they will be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it” (Zech. 12:2-3). God is saying that the nations that attack Jerusalem will drink the full cup of His wrath. Every invading army will become disoriented, like an intoxicated person who reels. In their stupefied conditions, the armies will stumble, fall, and become immobilized in battle.

Likewise, Jerusalem is compared to “a very heavy [burdensome] stone” that weighs too much to “heave . . . away.” And it will “cut in pieces [lacerate]” anyone who tries (v. 3). In other words, those who attack Jerusalem will rupture, injure, and lacerate themselves. In spite of this awesome, detailed warning, “all nations of the earth” will come against Jerusalem in the Day of the Lord (v. 3).

As the battle progresses, said the Lord, “I will strike every horse with confusion, and its rider with madness; I will open My eyes on the house of Judah, and will strike every horse of the peoples with blindness” (v. 4). Thus God will strike the horses with “confusion” (panic) and “blindness” and the riders with “madness” (consternation). Because of its sin, God brought madness, blindness, and confusion of heart on Israel (Dt. 28:28; cf. 1-68). In like manner, God will use the same type of confusion to destroy Israel’s enemies. While the armies are being destroyed, the Lord’s “eyes” will be on the house of Judah, providing divine protection for the nation. (See Zechariah 3:9; 4:10; 9:8.)

The Siege of Jerusalem

Any nation that invades Jerusalem during the Day of the Lord will suffer severe judgment:

Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it (Zech. 12:2-3).

The Strength of Judah

At the appointed time, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah will turn to the Lord for strength: “And the governors [leaders] of Judah shall say in their heart, ‘The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in the LORD of hosts, their God’” (v. 5). That is, the inhabitants of Jerusalem will recognize “the LORD of hosts” as their strength to sustain them in the conflict. In the process, leaders and citizens alike will be empowered and fortified to resist and conquer their foes. Judah will realize that God alone secured its victory.

Zechariah used two similes in describing the strength given to the Jewish people. They will be “like a fiery pot [firepot] in the woodpile, and like a fiery torch in the sheaves; they shall devour all the surrounding peoples on the right hand and on the left” (v. 6). Jerusalem’s attackers will be swiftly consumed, like kindling wood ignited by a firepot full of hot coals or a pile of bound sheaves that is quickly incinerated by a fiery torch. In the midst of the battle, Jerusalem’s inhabitants will not flee but will remain in their “own place—Jerusalem” (v. 6).

All Judah will survive the battle: “The LORD will save the tents of Judah first, so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not become greater
that of Judah” (v. 7). Those living in the rural areas of Jerusalem are delivered first because of their vulnerability, but all in Judah shall share equally in the glorious victory.

Jewish people will be given divine power that will shield and strengthen them during the conflict. The “feeble among them . . . shall be like David.” David was Israel’s great warrior-king. He was unbeatable in battle. Furthermore, “The house of David shall be like God, like the Angel of the Lord before them” (v. 8). Israel will be endowed with great power, “like the Angel of the Lord” (the preincarnate Christ), who is the invincible Commander of the Lord’s army. It was He who strengthened Israel to be victorious over its enemies (cf. Ex. 23:20; 32:34; 33:2; Josh. 5:13–15).

In that day, the Lord will “seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem” (v. 9). The word seek does not cast doubt on God’s ability to destroy Jerusalem’s enemies, nor does it question the success of His mission. To the contrary, seek means the Lord will give His undivided attention to seeking out and destroying any nation that will come against Jerusalem.

**The Salvation of Jerusalem**

At the Messiah’s Second Advent, God will bring salvation to a remnant in Jerusalem:

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

The word I refers to the Lord who is doing the speaking. He is the Creator of the universe, who pours out the “Spirit of grace” on Jerusalem by means of the Holy Spirit. Grace and supplication sum up the ministry of the Holy Spirit as He brings salvation to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. Ezek. 37:14; 39:29; Joel 2:28–29). It is the Holy Spirit who bestows God’s grace on a person or a nation.

In that day (the end-times climax of the seven-year Tribulation), the veil that has for centuries covered the eyes of Jewish people, with the exception of the believing remnant, will be lifted. Then, said the Lord, “They will look on Me whom they pierced” (v. 10). The word they refers to Jewish people upon whom the “Spirit of grace and supplication” is poured. The word Me refers to God, the One who is speaking. In context, this speaker is the divine Messiah.

For several reasons, Jewish scholars have been perplexed over this verse. First, the text says, “They will look upon Me whom they pierced.” The word pierced (Hebrew, dagar) means to be “thrust through,” normally by a sword or spear, usually resulting in a disgraceful and violent death. Since God is speaking, how could God be pierced, resulting in His death? Second, if God is pierced, how could Jewish people look to a dead God for salvation? The answer is found in Jesus the Messiah. He is not only divine but took on flesh and became a man. As a man, Jesus willingly tasted death by crucifixion to redeem sinful humanity; but three days later, He was resurrected.

Partial fulfillment of this text took place at Jesus’ crucifixion. Roman soldiers hammered nails through His hands and feet and thrust a spear into His side. The historical event was clearly recorded in all four New Testament Gospels. The apostle John saw Jesus’ crucifixion as a fulfillment of this text (Jn. 19:37). Although a Jewish mob called for Jesus to be crucified, Roman soldiers actually did the deed. Scripture clearly reveals that all humanity is responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion (Acts 4:27–28).

When the Holy Spirit is poured out on Jerusalem, Jewish people will “look on” (look unto) their Messiah with trust and hope for salvation. This will result in individuals greatly mourning over their sin. Each will recognize that the “Me” in verse 10 refers to his or her Savior and Lord, Jesus the promised Messiah, who was rejected and pierced at His First Advent.

Every stratum of Israel’s society will publicly and privately mourn over its sin. Zechariah illustrates the mourning in three ways. First, people “will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn” (v. 10). The death of an only or firstborn son produces profound grief and elicits one of the deepest types of mourning in a Jewish family. Such mourning became a proverb for the intensity of Israel’s grief during times of severe tragedy. (See Jeremiah 6:26 and Amos 8:10.)

Second, Zechariah compared this time of mourning to that “at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo” (v. 11). Although Hadad Rimmon’s location is not identified in Scripture, most commentators consider it modern Runmaneh, a village near the ancient city of Megiddo. It was at Hadad Rimmon that righteous King Josiah was mortally wounded, whereupon Judah greatly mourned his death (2 Chr. 35:23–25). Zechariah compared Judah’s mourning for Josiah with the intense mourning the nation will experience when it sees its rejected and pierced Messiah at His Second Coming.

Third, the remaining verses in this chapter express how extensive and exclusive the Jewish repentance will be when, without exception, “every [Jewish] family” will mourn over its sin (v. 12). Four men are mentioned as representing various groups of mourners: David, Nathan, Levi, and Shimei (vv. 12–13). David represents the royal family; Nathan represents either the royal family or the prophetic line; and Levi and Shimei represent the priestly family. In that day, all individuals of “all the families that remain”—that survive the Great Tribulation—will mourn privately over their sin.

Whether Jewish or Gentile, one need not wait to repent over sin. Redemption and reconciliation are possible this very moment. And the one who makes this commitment will find peace and purpose and will experience eternal life to come.

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God Is Moral
(Part 5)

A n earlier part of our study indicated that, when God created mankind as male and female, He revealed the fixed, inflexible, moral order that He established for human sexuality. That order is as follows: All human sexual relationships are to take place exclusively within the bonds of male-female marriage, and marriage is to be a lifelong union of a man and a woman. Any deviation from that order violates and perverts what God intended and has tragic consequences for mankind. This article will examine some of those tragic consequences.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

The spread of sexually transmitted diseases (referred to as STDs) is a major, tragic consequence of mankind’s failure to follow God’s order for human sexuality. STDs are “infections that can be spread by having sex with another person who is infected.” Some have plagued mankind for much of human history. But today there are more than 30 new STDs, and 30 percent of them have no cure. STDs are spreading at alarming rates. For example, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 19 million STD infections occur annually in the United States. To grasp the gravity of the situation, it would be helpful to observe the more prominent STDs and their consequences.

Trichomoniasis. This extremely common STD is caused by a parasite and can produce vaginitis. It can be transmitted between persons through sexual relationships. Since the parasite can survive for several hours on damp towels, washcloths, and swimsuits, this STD can be transmitted via these items.

Chlamydia. This STD is a bacterial infection. If neglected, it can cause pelvic inflammatory disease, ectopic pregnancy, and infertility. In addition, it can make the transmission of HIV easier. Chlamydia can be passed to a baby from the mother during delivery and cause pneumonia and conjunctivitis in the child. It is estimated that 2.8 million new cases of Chlamydia occur each year in the United States.

Gonorrhea. Gonorrhea is a bacterial infection. If left untreated, serious consequences can result. For men, it can cause epididymitis (genital swelling and pain) and infertility. For women, it can infect the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries; cause pelvic inflammatory disease, ectopic pregnancy, and infertility; and increase vulnerability to HIV transmission. The Nemours Foundation, one of America’s largest children’s health systems and the operator of the Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Delaware, reported gonorrhea during pregnancy can infect the newborn baby with “meningitis (inflammation of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord) and an eye infection that can result in blindness” if left untreated. For both men and women, gonorrhea can also “affect other organs and parts of the body including the throat, eyes, heart, brain, skin, and joints.” It is estimated that 718,000 new gonorrhea infections occur each year in the United States. Increasing bacterial resistance to the treatment of gonorrhea is causing concern.

Syphilis. Syphilis is a bacterial infection. If left untreated, it can spread throughout the entire body and infect the brain, heart, spinal cord, and bones. It also causes walking problems, numbness, blindness, and death. It can be passed from a mother to her baby during pregnancy and “cause stillbirth, death soon after birth, and neurological problems in children who survive.” Syphilis also makes a person more susceptible to HIV.

Hepatitis B. Hepatitis B is a disease of the liver that can be transmitted through sexual relations or unsterilized needles that have been used by an infected person. Nemours said it leads to “liver damage and an increased risk of liver cancer. Ninety percent of babies born to women who have the hepatitis B virus will have the virus unless they receive special immune injections and the first dose of vaccine at birth.”

Genital Herpes. This STD is a viral infection. It can be transmitted by any kind of sexual relationship with a person who has a herpes simplex virus (HSV). Most persons who have this virus have few or no indicators of it. Normal indicators are blisters that break to form a sore. The HSV virus can be transmitted from a person who has no sores and is unaware that he or she is infected. Because this disease is caused by a virus, there is no cure for it. Thus, once herpes infects a person, it can remain in the body permanently and reactivate blisters periodically. In the United States “at least 45 million people ages 12 and older, or one out of five adolescents and adults, have had genital HSV infection.” An actively infected pregnant woman can transmit that infection to her baby with possible results of meningitis, seizures, and brain damage. Herpes also makes a person more susceptible to HIV.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV). This STD is a viral infection. Thirty of the more than 100 types of HPV viruses are transmitted through skin-to-skin contact in all kinds of sexual relationships. HPV is one of the most widespread causes of sexually transmitted disease in the world. In the United States, genital HPV is more prevalent than any other STD. Approximately 5.5 million new cases are reported each year, and at least 20 million Americans have it. Some types of HPV cause genital warts as an indicator of the infection, but many victims receive no indications.
result, those people can unknowingly spread the virus to other sexual partners and are unaware they could develop more problems. There is no cure for human papillomavirus. Some types of HPV can cause cervical, anal, and other types of cancer. Women who have genital warts bear children who develop throat warts that block their breathing passages.19

HIV/AIDS. HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus, attacks the body’s immune system, rendering it incapable of protecting the body from infectious diseases. Once a person’s body becomes immune deficient, that person contracts AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), the disease that renders a person defenseless against all infections.20

HIV/AIDS has spread rapidly since the first AIDS case was diagnosed in 1980. More than 27 million people have died of AIDS since then. At the end of 2003 approximately 37.8 million people worldwide had HIV/AIDS. Of that, 35.7 million were adults; 2.1 million were under 15. By the end of 2004, 4.9 million new infections occurred.21 It is estimated that an additional 70 million people will die from AIDS by 2025.

The most prevalent means of contracting the HIV virus is direct contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected partner in sexual relations. Less prevalent means include use of unsterilized needles (previously used by an infected person for injecting drugs or medicine, tattooing, or ear piercing), being born to an infected mother (HIV can be passed to the developing child through the umbilical cord and contact with the mother’s blood and body fluid during birth passage from the mother), and drinking an infected mother’s milk.22

In the United States the total estimated diagnosed cases of AIDS through 2003 was 929,985. Of that total an estimated 440,887 men contracted AIDS through male-to-male sexual relations, and an additional 62,418 from a combination of male-to-male sexual relations and injection drug use. Through heterosexual relations with infected partners, 56,403 men and 93,586 women got AIDS. 175,988 men and 70,558 women acquired it through injection drug use. And 14,191 males and 6,535 females contracted it through other means, including blood transfusions.23 In light of this latter means, a man who has had even a single homosexual relation since 1977 is forbidden by the Red Cross to be a blood donor.24

There is no cure for AIDS.25 Modern drugs have slowed the time it takes the HIV virus to progress to AIDS. A person may now have 10 years before HIV turns into AIDS. But early in 2005 a new strain of HIV was detected. It is highly resistant to these drugs and seems to progress to AIDS in several months. This has caused great concern.26

Anal Cancer. Cases of anal cancer have increased in recent decades.27 Studies have demonstrated “significant associations between measures of sexual promiscuity and the risk of anal cancer in both men and women.”28 There is “strong evidence that a sexually transmitted infection causes anal cancer.”29

### Economic Consequences

The spread of sexually transmitted diseases has economic consequences as well. This is especially true of the HIV/AIDS crisis. One consequence is the cost of treatment. The average wholesale cost of medication is about $14,000 per year for an HIV patient and approximately $34,000 per year for a person with AIDS.20 Such costs are bound to affect health insurance premiums significantly.

In addition, the deaths of so many working-age persons from HIV/AIDS can have serious, long-range consequences for economies. Markus Haacker, the primary author of a report issued in 2004, stated, “The economic and social consequences of the increased mortality and morbidity associated with HIV/AIDS are serious and diverse.”31 The report warned that HIV/AIDS deaths could cause an economy to shrink “to about one-third its size in three generations.”32 The children of young adults who die from HIV/AIDS will “be less able to attend school” and won’t learn “the life-skills that parents teach their children.”33 As a result, they will be “less able to provide for their children’s education, and so on.”34

### STD Prevention

The only sure way to escape receiving an STD is as follows: total abstinence from sexual relations before marriage, marriage with a person of the opposite sex who is free of STDs, and complete faithfulness in the marriage. In other words, follow God’s moral order for sexuality.

There are groups that resist teaching this sure way and insist that it actually hinders the battle against HIV/AIDS. They claim the effective way to combat the disease is through the distribution and use of condoms.35 But this approach has two problems. First, even when used correctly, condoms have a “13 percent failure rate against HIV,” a “50 percent failure rate against gonorrhea, syphilis, and chlamydeous,” and a “100 percent failure rate against genital herpes and human papillomavirus.”36 Second, in a little over 10 years, HIV/AIDS infection rates dropped from 21 to 6 percent in Uganda as a result that nation emphasizing abstinence before marriage, faithfulness in marriage or a monogamous relationship, and the use of condoms. By contrast nations with the greatest use of condoms have greater infection rates.37

### A Serious Inconsistency

Government agencies, businesses, the media, and schools try to persuade people to avoid smoking, a known cause of serious illness and premature death. Why, then, do they support and promote acceptance of the gay lifestyle, a known cause of serious illness and premature death to so many? Opponents of that lifestyle are accused of being hateful and unloving. But in reality, it is hateful and unloving to support and promote acceptance of something that can have serious consequences for a fellow human being. As God said,

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death (Prov. 14:27).

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**ENDNOTES**

2 Andree Sea, "In the Know," World Magazine 19, no. 23 (2004), 71.

continued on page 39
For years, The Friends of Israel has planted trees in Israel through the Jewish National Fund, or Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael (JNF/KKL). With each tree purchase comes a certificate that lists the activities of the JNF. These include:

- Afforesting barren land (it has planted more than 230 million trees).
- Preparing land for agriculture.
- Developing new water sources (it has built 170 reservoirs).
- Rehabilitating polluted rivers.
- Building bypass roads.
- Providing a wide range of educational activities in Israel and abroad.

How did such an organization come about, and how did it raise the capital for such an ambitious agenda?
In 1901, the Jewish National Fund had already been formed by the Zionist movement for the exclusive purpose of buying and developing land in Palestine in the name of the entire Jewish people. And a great deal of the Jewish-owned land in Palestine was bought by “the people”—the bakers, tailors and carpenters of Pinsk, Berlin and Milwaukee. As a matter of fact, ever since I was a little girl I can remember the small blue tin collection box that stood next to the Sabbath candles in our living room and into which not only we, but our guests, dropped coins every week—and this “blue box” was likewise a feature in every Jewish home we visited. The truth is, from 1904 on it was with these coins that the Jewish people began to buy extensive tracts of land in Palestine.

—Golda Meir, My Life

Because of that crucial speech, Keren Kayemeth L’Israel was born. The Hebrew name comes from a talmudic dictum about good deeds, “the fruits of which a man enjoys in this world, while the capital abides (ha-keren kayyemet) for him in the world to come.”

In its resolution, the Congress stated, “The JNF shall be the eternal possession of the Jewish people. Its funds shall not be used except for the purchase of lands in Palestine and Syria.” All that land, at the time, was ruled by the Ottoman Turks.

Influenced by Leviticus 25, the founders based KKL on two principles: (1) The land it purchased must be publicly owned because verse 23 states, “The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine”; thus KKL leases its land. (2) The duration of a lease shall be 49 years because verse 10 teaches that, in the Jubilee (50th) year, the land reverts back to its original owner.

The congress immediately set a goal of raising 200,000 British pounds, an impressive sum for that day. “One of the delegates immediately pledged 10 pounds. . . . Herzl made the second donation and his aide, the third. And with this, the dream of a national fund—and a Jewish homeland—became a reality.”

The immediate concern was how to raise capital. Three methods were established:

**Little Blue Boxes.** Wherever a Jewish home, synagogue, Hebrew School, or Sunday school exists, these little pushkhi boxes (little banks) can still be found. By placing their loose change in these boxes, Jewish people have raised millions of dollars and have become personally connected to the Promised Land for more than a hundred years.

**Golden Book.** A large donation made to honor a person or event is recorded in a book located at KKL headquarters in Jerusalem. Theodor Herzl was the first to make such a donation, and his name is on display there today.

**Stamps.** The early Zionists purchased these special stamps and placed them on all their letters. Some people bought them as collectors’ items.

Every year more land was purchased. In 1921, JNF/KKL held 25,000 acres. By the time of national independence in 1948, the Jewish population of 650,000 lived in 305 towns, 233 of which were owned by JNF/KKL.

In 1960 the Knesset (parliament) passed an extremely important law that enabled JNF/KKL to work with the government by forming a council to develop the land and plant trees.

After statehood, more emphasis was placed on land improvement than acquisition. Land reclamation, always a part of JNF/KKL, became its mainstay. Mosquito-infested swamps were drained. Thousands of miles of roads were improved and new ones built. Storage dams and reservoirs were constructed to conserve precious water.

Of all JNF/KKL does, it is best known for planting trees. Since much of the land lay desolate through the years before resettlement, the planting of trees was vital. Trees prevent soil erosion, create oxygen for the atmosphere, provide shade and vegetation, and beautify otherwise barren landscapes.

Israelis who remember the land 60 years ago are proud of the way their country looks today. Indeed, through the legal purchase of land and the hard work of the Jewish people, the desert has indeed blossomed like the rose (Isa. 35:1).

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1 Jewish National Fund <www.jnf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=history>
3 Ibid.
4 Jewish National Fund.

By Steve Herzig
The Two-for-One Deliverance (Part 2)

While I was taking a boat tour of a recreational lake in Western New York years ago, my guide pointed to a magnificent home gracing the water's shores. It dwarfed the smaller, more modest homes that had been there for years. But people lived in the smaller homes. No one lived in the big one.

“That home cost a fortune,” my guide said. “But no one can live in it. The owners can't get a certificate of occupancy because the foundation is bad, and the house isn’t safe.” So there it stood, a silent but eloquent testimony to the biblical principle that you must build on a solid foundation if you want a dependable structure.

A fool denies God and builds his house on the sand; a wise person serves God and thus builds on the rock (Mt. 7:24–27). Abigail was no fool. She built on the rock; and her wisdom not only delivered her household, but it delivered the future king of Israel as well.

David was in dire straits, living in caves and trying to stay away from King Saul, who sought his life because he was jealous of David and feared him.

When David sent his men to Abigail’s husband, Nabal, he humbly requested, “Please give whatever comes to your hand to your servants and to your son David,” expecting Nabal would gratefully supply provisions because David and his men had protected Nabal’s shepherds and flocks (1 Sam. 25:8). But Nabal, whose name means “fool,” refused: “Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shepherds and give it to men when I do not know where they are from? (vv. 10–11).

Four times Nabal used the word my. In his greed, he rejected Moses’ warning not to say in your heart, “My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.” Moses had admonished the Israelites, “Remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth” (Dt. 8:17–18). Everything Nabal had came from God. But fools often bite the hands that feed them because they disdain God, from whom come wisdom and knowledge—two indispensable commodities in this life (2 Chr. 1:12; Ps. 51.6; Jas. 1:5). The Bible teaches, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov. 9:10). Nabal the fool disdained the God of Israel and spurned David, His anointed king.

Abigail, on the other hand, was wise and understanding. As David prepared to avenge himself, one of Nabal’s servants went to Abigail. “Now therefore,” he told her, “know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master...
and against all his household. For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him” (v. 17). Indeed, fools “hate knowledge” (Prov. 1:22), spurn counsel (vv. 25, 30), despise instruction (15:5), and think they’re always right (12:15; 14:16). Talking sense to them is an utter waste of time (23:9).

So Abigail moved quickly without consulting Nabal, who by now was feasting and becoming drunk. She loaded hundreds of supplies onto donkeys and set out to meet David.

When she saw him, she “dismounted quickly from the donkey, fell on her face before David, and bowed down to the ground,” falling “at his feet” (1 Sam. 25:23–24). And in a speech filled with wisdom, humility, and godliness—and one that revealed she knew exactly who David was and that the kingdom of Israel would someday be his—Abigail invoked Jehovah’s name seven times and begged David not to become guilty of shedding innocent blood:

And it shall come to pass, when the Lord has done for my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you ruler over Israel, that this will be no grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself. But when the Lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your maidservant (vv. 30–31).

David, also no fool, immediately recognized that God had sent Abigail to protect him:

Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand (vv. 32–33).

So David took the provisions and left. Ten days later the Lord struck Nabal, and he died (v. 38). David then married Abigail; and she bore his son Daniel, also called Chileb (2 Sam. 3:3; 1 Chr. 3:1).

Through Abigail’s wisdom, God provided a two-for-one deliverance: He saved Nabal’s household from death at David’s hands, and He rescued David from shedding innocent blood. Furthermore, he delivered Abigail from her marriage to a fool.

The world today is filled with Nabsals. They spurn God, ridicule faith in His anointed, walk in pride, boast of their accomplishments, and despise wisdom and instruction. Scripture says, “The Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright” (Prov. 2:6–7). It also says, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1). Since so many people today arrogantly reject the God of the Bible, we now have a world filled with fools.

What we desperately need are more Abigails. She exemplified Proverbs 24:3: “Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established.” She was humble, generous, godly, wise, and understanding because of faith in God. Scripture says, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Abigail built her house on a solid foundation, and the Lord rewarded her by making her the wife of the future king.

About 300 years later, Isaiah prophesied, “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation’” (Isa. 28:16). Seven hundred years after that, the apostle Paul, a Jewish scholar, revealed what that foundation stone is: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ [Messiah]” (1 Cor. 3:11).

The Nabals of this world foolishly build their lives on all types of temporal supports: wealth, prestige, position. But in the end, their structures, like the beautiful house at the lake, never merit certificates of occupancy. They are unsound and will be washed away. It is far better to be wise like Abigail and build on the solid Rock, for then you will have a structure that will last forever.

Lorna Simcox is senior editor for The Friends of Israel.

The Foundations of Faith from page 35

1 “Trends,” 1.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
17 “HIV and AIDS.”
19 “Sexually Transmitted Infection as a Cause of Anal Cancer,” The New England Journal of Medicine, November 6, 1997 <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/short/337/19/1350>
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Renald E. Showers is an author, professor, and international conference speaker for The Friends of Israel.
Hamas launches child terror site

ARUTZ-7—The Palestinian Authority’s ruling Hamas terror group has launched a Web site for children, using cartoons and children’s stories to preach the moral desirability of being a suicide terrorist.

The Hamas-run Al-Fateh.net glorifies shahada, martyrdom, and presents the deaths of terrorists attacking Israelis as a time of celebration, according to a report by the Palestinian Media Watch.

One of the stories quotes a mother saying that, when she heard her son had become a shahid (martyr), she bought dates, candies, and coffee to give out. An entire section of the site is called “Stories of the Shahids,” and a recently posted story honors a Hamas suicide terrorist who murdered 16 people when he blew himself up on a bus in Beersheva on August 31, 2004.

PA creates Gaza food crisis

ARUTZ-7—Only one crossing remained open this spring between Israel and Gaza, yet the Palestinian Authority (PA) refused to accept goods transferred through it and complained that Israel was causing its people to starve.

Because of terrorism warnings, Israel closed the Karni Crossing into Gaza. As a replacement, and to enable basic foodstuffs to enter Gaza, Israel opened the Kerem Shalom crossing in southern Gaza, but the PA refused to cooperate.

“It is inconceivable that the PA would prefer to allow its people to suffer instead of taking up Israel’s offer to use alternative crossings into Gaza until the terror threats are lifted,” a security source was quoted as telling The Jerusalem Post. “This is clearly a political decision on their part.” Furthermore, the PA receives 50 percent of the fees charged for each truck entering Gaza through Karni, but not at other crossings.

Israel said that goods, such as flour and milk products, will be transferred directly to Egypt. If the PA leaders decide not to accept the goods, Israeli sources say, “That’s their problem.”

Netanyahu says, ‘Stop Hamas’

ARUTZ-7—Benjamin Netanyahu told the recent Jerusalem Conference that Hamas’ takeover of the Palestinian Authority is part of Islam’s attempts to conquer the world.

Netanyahu said that Islam tried, upon its founding, to conquer Christian Europe, but failed and was pushed back to Northern Africa. Another attempt hundreds of years later was similarly repelled. “For the last few centuries,” Netanyahu continued, “we thought that religious wars were over; but suddenly, now, we see a third attempt by Islam. In 1979, two seminal events occurred, both of which continue to have a strong effect even now. One is the victory by Islamic mujahedin in Afghanistan over Soviet forces, leading to the formation of al-Qaida, and then, shortly afterwards, the formation of the terrorist Islamic Republic of Iran.

“Since then, more recently, two more important events have happened. One is the formation of another fundamentalist Islamic republic, in Afghanistan, with the Taliban, leading to 9/11. If they had had nuclear weapons, New York and Washington would not be around anymore—and another event that occurred with Israel’s help: the formation of a Hamas regime in the Palestinian Authority.

“The Hamas entity is a daughter state of Iran, with the same policies, and talks openly of its goal of destroying Israel, using its code words of ‘Right of Return’ and ‘continued resistance’—namely, terrorism. Israel is their first stop on the road to world conquest.”

EU aids PA

ARUTZ-7—The European Union (EU) has given another $78 million in aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA), funneling it through the United Nations, which will pass it on to pay the salaries of PA employees, many of whom are terrorists.

The latest EU donation was accompanied by a warning that continued funding would depend on the terror group’s decision to reconsider its stated aim of destroying the Jewish state. Meanwhile, British Foreign Minister Jack Straw said that the Palestinian people should not be punished for the way they chose to vote. And French President Jacques Chirac has urged the international community to continue funding the Hamas-led PA no matter what.

Ancient Jewish town unearthed

ARUTZ-7—An ancient Jewish town from the time of King Solomon has been uncovered beneath the Arab village of Kaf Kana, north of Nazareth, in the Galilee. The discovery, unearthed by Israel’s Antiquities Authority, also includes remnants of Jewish settlement during the Roman period.

Among the findings are underground tunnels excavated by Jews who defended the city against Roman legions during the Great Revolt of the year [A.D.] 66 C.E. During the excavations, a section of the city wall and remains of buildings were exposed. Archaeologists date the remains to the period of the United Kingdom of King Solomon and the Kingdom of Israel (following the split between Israel and Judah, from the 10th through 9th centuries B.C.E. [B.C.]).

Following the town’s destruction, the area was abandoned until its ruins were reoccupied by Jewish settlers during the early Roman period (1st century C.E.). The identity of these residents as Galilean Jews is already known from previous excavations that were carried out at the site and from historic information that identifies the settlement as “Kana of the Galilee,” referred to in the New Testament.
Each day, we as Christians are given the opportunity to glorify God. Using our time well, exercising the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us, and making wise use of the finances God has entrusted to us are just a few of the many ways in which we can honor Him.

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

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

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

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

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A NEW ERA IN ISRAELI POLITICS

When Israelis went to the polls in March, they turned over a new leaf in the history of the country. Old alliances were discarded, and the face of the political landscape acquired a new look. A Kadima-led coalition best described as center-left took control of the state.

In view of the Iranians’ growing belligerence and the threat from the Hamas terrorist-controlled Palestinian Authority, many people wondered why Israelis would opt for leadership that is ready to cede more territory. In the words of Kadima winner, Ehud Olmert, Israelis should be ready to make more “painful concessions” in the quest for peace.

Some analysts believe Israelis voted as they did because of a sense of confidence that security could be maintained in spite of the opposition. Others are not so sure. Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum, wrote that in a state of war, there is no substitute for victory. Compromise and concessions, he wrote, lead only to exacerbating the struggle and encouraging the enemy that it can triumph in the end.

It is no secret that Israelis are sick and tired of war and bloodshed. The problem is that the opposition is not. Israel’s enemies dream of a radical, global, Islamist empire, with Israel the first casualty on the way to its creation.

If Israelis are, in fact, buoyed by confidence, let’s pray that their confidence is not misplaced.
Many years ago new immigrants moved into our neighborhood in Jerusalem. One family in particular became special to us because they spoke about the faith. Yet they did not like people who believed in Christ, even though they were not religious themselves. Several years ago they moved away, and we never heard from them again.

Not long ago my wife and I were waiting for a bus, and whom should we see but our former neighbors. As we boarded together, we began to inquire about each other's families. In a loud voice, our friend said, "You know, we are very happy to tell you that our son repented!"

I was certain they meant their son had come to know the Lord and was baptized. But when they showed us his picture, there he was, wearing a long beard and the black clothing of the ultra-Orthodox!

"What do you say about this?" the mother asked me.

"I say this is nice clothing for the Purim carnival." Now the mother was no longer happy.

"Why do you say such a thing? He is now very religious," the father said. So I explained that to repent means to come before the Lord with a broken heart and to turn from the evil way to the path of righteousness. Repentance does not involve changing one's clothing but, rather, changing one's heart.

"He is not serving the Lord according to the Bible," I told them. "He is serving men. He does what the rabbis tell him, not what the Bible tells him."

"Why do you say such a thing?" the mother asked.

So I asked them, "What is more important? To worship God according to the Bible or according to the fictitious stories contained in rabbinical commentaries?"

"The Bible, of course," they both replied.

So I quickly opened my Bible to Jeremiah 17:7–8, where it is written, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is in the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters."

As I spoke, others on the bus began listening to our lengthy conversation and asked me to read the passage aloud. Then I gave my Bible to others on the bus and asked them to read verses 5–6, which say, "Thus says the LORD: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert.'"

"So," I asked, "in whom shall we trust? In those who disguise themselves so that they will appear holy or in God, who is holy?" Suddenly the atmosphere in the bus became
very tense. More and more people joined the conversation.

“How can you come here and start to speak about faith?” someone asked. “You do not even cover your head!”

I replied, “When Moses went up to Mount Sinai and God gave him the Torah—the most holy commandments—and Moses stood before God Himself, did God ask him, ‘Why did you come up here without your head covered?’ Moses came to God with his heart. And this is the most important thing to the Lord. Everything else I call diversionary tactics. Clothing, beards, head coverings. These are like camouflage to make you believe that someone is holy when his heart is still far from God.

“I come to you plainly. I do not have a long beard or try to persuade you that I am holy by wearing special clothes. Nor do I bring a stack of fictitious stories. I come to you with one small book: the Word of God. In here it is written how we should worship the Lord. So take a good look and see what it says.”

I began to read to them from Deuteronomy, where it is written, “You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him. . . . You shall not go after other gods,” (6:13–14). Everyone on the bus grew quiet.

“Yes, you are to repent,” I told them. “But you are to repent before the Lord and follow Him alone. Only through Him can we be forgiven of all that we have done.”

When the bus finally came to the station, everyone began to say, “What a pity. We would have listened much longer, but now we must go.” I told them to study God’s Word so they can go to Him by faith. “He is waiting for you,” I said.