EXCLUSIVE:
Elwood McQuaid asks, “What kind of America do you want?” — Page 8

Israeli photographer Hanan Isachar takes you inside Gush Katif — Page 28

Plus:
Craig L. Parshall checks the ‘weather’ at the Temple Mount — Page 11
Conquering spiritual paralysis — Page 17
The ‘Samson Syndrome’ — Page 25
What Kind of America Do You Want?
by Elwood McQuaid .................................8
An important issue went before the Supreme Court recently. America is heading where it’s never been before. And you may be the decisive factor.

Red Skies Over the Temple Mount
by Craig Parshall .................................11
The most hotly contested piece of real estate in the world is the Temple Mount. Today three ominous trends threaten the area.

Outrage at Gibeah
by Peter Colón .................................14
The story of the Levite and his concubine is one of the grimmest in all of Scripture. And its relevance for today may surprise you.

Conquering Spiritual Paralysis
by Thomas C. Simcox .................................17
Have you ever thought God let you down? Perhaps you’re simply looking at things the wrong way, as Gideon did before he fought the Midianites.

Jepthah: Faithful but Flawed
by Marshall Wicks .................................20
Jepthah was the man of the hour to deliver Israel, going from outcast to tribal chief. But when he was on top, a grave error cost him dearly.

TIME TO RENEW?
Check the mailing label on the back cover of this magazine. The date in the upper right corner of the label indicates the end of your current subscription.
Use the enclosed envelope to renew.

Subscription Rates:
USA: $16.95 for 1 year, $25.95 for 2 years
Overseas: $19.95 for 1 year, $31.95 for 2 years
(U.S. dollars only) Single copies $4 each
Canada: $21.95 CAD for 1 year, $31.95 CAD for 2 years
Israel My Glory is also available in Spanish.
Call during business hours 8 A.M. to 9 P.M.
(Eastern time) 800-345-8461

ABOUT THE COVER
For Israelis who lived in the Gush Katif communities in Gaza for decades, the issue is more one of personal trauma than political debate. It is there they have raised families and invested their lives in building homes, developing businesses, and perfecting agricultural enterprises. Our cover montage projects images of the heartrending situation imposed on these families by disengagement, which forces them to leave everything behind.

ALSO FEATURED
From Bill Satter’s Desk .................................4
Myths/Facts .........................................5
Editorial ..............................................6
Beware of Today’s ‘Canaanites’ ....................15
Outline of the Book of Judges ...................22
Jepthah’s Vow: Did He or Didn’t He? ...........24
The ‘Samson Syndrome’ .........................25
Slated for Destruction .............................28
They Cry in Silence .................................30
The Book of Zechariah .............................32
The Foundations of Faith .........................34
Eye on the Middle East .............................36
Women of the Bible .................................38
Israel in the News ..................................40
The Case of Ma’aleh Adumim ....................41
Zvi .........................................................42

TO CONTACT US
Call during business hours 8 A.M. to 9 P.M.
(Eastern time) 800-345-8461
Subscription Rates:
USA: $16.95 for 1 year, $25.95 for 2 years
Overseas: $19.95 for 1 year, $31.95 for 2 years
(U.S. dollars only) Single copies $4 each
Canada: $21.95 CAD for 1 year, $31.95 CAD for 2 years
Israel My Glory is also available in Spanish.

© Copyright 2005 The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA by Waveline Direct.
Four years ago this month we experienced the horror of an evil hijacking. And as the memory of 9/11 slowly begins to dim, another may be under way.

On September 11, 2001, Muslim terrorists hijacked airliners and used them to destroy the massive twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and severely damage the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. It was a defining day in American history, when our national will was tested to the utmost.

These unprecedented acts of war committed on U.S. soil claimed the lives of almost 3,000 innocent civilians; and the loss of life, property, and jobs affected millions of us both directly and indirectly.

As Christians, we knew these deeds, terrible though they were, did not take our Lord by surprise. We were as confident then as we are today that He was in control and that His purposes will ultimately be served. As people looked for answers, we at The Friends of Israel had wonderful opportunities to point them to God’s Word and the hope that is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. While terrorists sought to bring America to its knees, in the days following the tragedy, many people did bend their knees... in prayer.

In the aftermath of 9/11 a determined President George W. Bush demonstrated strong resolve to defeat the terrorists. And with God’s blessing, our economy has bounced back.

Now another sinister plot appears to be hatching. This one has as its objective the hijacking of the World Trade Center Memorial at the Ground Zero site in New York City. We would expect our national memorial to focus primarily on the events of 9/11, to remember the victims, and honor the many heroes who emerged from that tragedy. We would want the memorial to reenact the outpouring of patriotism—the sea of flags and handmade posters—symbols of our national pride. This memorial should relive the scope of the terrorist devastation, the human suffering the terrorists caused, and the accounts of bravery embedded in the American will. It should carry forward important lessons about the terrorists’ deceptions and their designs to subjugate the freedoms and values we cherish as Americans.

Not So for This Memorial!

It is beyond disturbing to learn that the planning process for the future of Ground Zero has been captured by a collection of activists, globalists, human rights advocates, and radical educators. If their designs prevail, our hopes for a truly meaningful 9/11 memorial will be destroyed. According to the World Trade Center Memorial Foundation’s plans for Ground Zero, the actual Memorial Center with 9/11 artifacts will be relegated to 50,000 square feet—underground yet! The real expansive “showcase” at Ground Zero will be above ground and known as the International Freedom Center. Here six times the space—300,000 square feet—will be devoted to a technology-driven educational center designed to be a “magnet” for the world’s “great leaders, thinkers, and activists.” People like activist lawyer Tom Bernstein; leftist billionaire George Soros; radical Columbia University history professor, Eric Foner; and Human Rights First’s executive director, Michael Posner, are among the project’s leaders.

This spells trouble for patriotic Americans. We can expect that instead of looking like the victims of 9/11, Americans will be made the villains. We can anticipate that this “memorial” will bombard visitors with lessons in “tolerance.” And we can predict that the meaning of freedom will be artfully crafted to support the globalist agendas of blame-America activists.

Another hijacking is under way, but this one is not using airplanes. Instead, powerful forces are attempting to seize our 9/11 memorial and use it to undermine our national values. The implications for our country and its future are profoundly important.

Americans must not stand by while a radical minority captures our Ground Zero memorial and uses it to attack our national will. To have your say, contact your congressional representatives plus New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg (City Hall, New York, NY 10007, dial 311 [or 212-639-9675 outside NYC], fax: 212-788-2460) and New York Gov. George Pataki (State Capitol, Albany, NY 12224). Also log on to www.takebackthememorial.org for further information. We must demonstrate the patriotism and determination, under God, that helped bring America back from the rubble and ashes of 9/11.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
drive away. Ma’aleh Adumim is not linked to Jerusalem, the city would be an island. We hear a lot about Palestinian concerns about the contiguity of a future Palestinian state, but the same principal applies to the future boundaries of Israel.

Why should it be a problem for Israel to fill in the empty gap between the city and this bedroom community? The corridor is approximately 3,250 acres and does not have any inhabitants, so no Palestinians will be displaced. And why shouldn’t Israel be able to build in and around the city that the U.S. Congress said “should be recognized as the capital of the State of Israel” and “should remain an undivided city”?

In his April 14, 2004, letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, President Bush acknowledged that Israel would incorporate some settlements inside its borders.

In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion.

Given that Ma’aleh Adumim is the largest of these population centers, the decision to develop around the town seems consistent with the policy expressed in Bush’s letter. It is also consistent, incidentally, with the Clinton plan.

Would the completion of the building project known as E-1 prevent the creation of a contiguous Palestinian state? Again, a look at a map shows that it would not. The security fence is being built roughly along the Green Line and around the major settlement blocs, such as Ma’aleh Adumim, which are expected to be within the final negotiated borders of the state. The area of the West Bank beyond the fence is contiguous.

A Grave for Israel?

The wild-dove hath her nest—The fox his cave—
Mankind their country—Israel but the grave.

—Lord Byron from “Oh! Weep for Those” in Hebrew Melodies

In light of the situation in the Middle East, the poet’s words are hauntingly prophetic. Not only do they carry refrains from Israel’s ancient prophets, but they echo the Holocaust, pogroms, and the perpetual anti-Semitism that drives demented legions to seek the annihilation of Israel and the Jewish people.

Politicians may thrust and parry over the future size, shape, and disposition of the State of Israel, but few realize the magnitude of the compromises they are willing to make for what they conceive to be peace. In reality, Israel has only two viable considerations: survival, through sufficient determination and muscle to ward off the attacks that are certain to come, or surrender, to again wander as dispossessed and dispersed people in an increasingly hostile international environment.

If this analysis sounds overly dramatic and pessimistic, consider what Israel’s enemies say. In a sermon delivered in May and broadcast on national Palestinian television, imam Ibrahim Mudayris said Jewish people are so evil they cannot be subjugated like Christians. So they must be killed:

Israel is a cancer that spread in the body of the Islamic nation; because the Jews are a virus similar to AIDS, from which the entire world is suffering. . . . The day will come and we shall rule America, Britain, we shall rule the entire world, except the Jews. . . . The stones and trees will want Muslims to finish off every Jew.

Mudayris’s venom is typical of Israel’s Palestinian “peace partners.” It is incomprehensible that there are Western leaders who think they can transform terrorists still bent on destroying Israel into respectable, nonviolent political activists. It’s as though the rap sheets of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade count for nothing.

Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas has labored long to get these terrorists to say the right things. No matter that they refuse to lay down their arms or relinquish their promises to blow up the peace process the moment they become dissatisfied with the raft of concessions granted them. No matter that they continue to stockpile weapons, keep the rockets flying, and attempt suicide missions. In a global environment that is long on rhetoric, short on memory, and negligent in weighing consequences, making promises you never intend to keep seems a priority.

Every negotiator should ponder what would happen if the eventual were sacrificed for the immediate. Should unwise, quick-fix concessions fail and serve to encourage Israel’s enemies to continue their attacks, frustrated international politicians can walk away from the consequences. Israelis, however, must live with them.

Israel can’t count on outsiders to impose lasting, effective solutions to its problems. But it can count on the continuing animus of its enemies, their religious-political fanaticism, and their obsessive conviction that to annihilate the Jewish people and their state is the supreme act of devotion to Allah.

You might ask why decision-makers in the world of secular politics don’t seem to get it, or why they simply wish to ignore religion as a fundamental issue in the conflict. Perhaps it is because faith plays no dominant role in their own thinking, at least on international issues. Secularization has so thoroughly remolded the public sector that ignoring the obvious is the natural, politically correct thing to do.

For this reason, those who have a more dimensional view of global realities are indispensable to the peace process. When it comes to Israel and Islam, no group outside the Israeli and conservative Jewish communities has a better grasp of reality than do Zionist, evangelical Christians. However, liberal secularists make every attempt to eliminate evangelical perspectives and ridicule the very idea of evangelical participation in the peace process.

Involved evangelicals understand what is at stake and the underlying reasons why compromise in essential matters, such as defensible borders, is unacceptable. Israel’s survival is not optional. It is not, nor will it be, for “Israel but the grave.” Philosopher Eric Hoffer’s words, spoken in 1968, still ring true:

I have a premonition that will not leave me; as it goes with Israel so will it go with all of us. Should Israel perish the holocaust will be upon us.

Biblically and historically literate evangelicals know Hoffer was right.

ENDNOTE

1 “Oprah’s Mag Misses the Mark” <www.honestreporting.com/articles/45884734/critiques/Oprahs_Mag_Misses_the_Mark.asp>.

†
The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.

Statement of Activities
Year Ended December 31, 2004

Changes in unrestricted net assets:
Public support and revenue:
  Contributions:
    General ministry contributions .............................................. $3,789,605
    North American ministry contributions ................................ 1,118,105
    Foreign ministry contributions ..............................................  743,044
    Institute of Jewish Studies ....................................................  36,751
    Legacies, gift annuities and other .......................................  894,088
    Total public support ........................................................ 6,581,593

  Revenue:
    Ministry publications, audio and video ................................. 1,486,300
    Conference and special functions ........................................  70,432
    Investment income ..................................................................  17,011
    Change in value of annuities and trusts .................................. (131,394)
    Other revenue .......................................................................  74,276
    Total revenue .................................................................... 1,516,625
    Total public support and revenue .................................... 8,098,218

Net assets released from restrictions:
  Satisfaction of program restrictions ...........................................  66,579

Expenses:
Program services:
  Outreach ministries ................................................................. 3,938,837
  North American ministries ...................................................... 1,522,065
  Foreign ministries .................................................................... 1,019,198
  Institute of Jewish Studies .....................................................  109,968
  Conferences and special functions .......................................  248,330
    Total program services .................................................... 6,838,398

Supporting services:
  Management and general ......................................................... 1,457,104
  Stewardship and fund-raising .................................................  375,167
    Total supporting services ................................................... 1,832,271
    Total program and supporting services ................................. 8,670,669

Decrease in unrestricted net assets ............................................. (505,872)

Changes in temporarily restricted net assets:
Contributions ............................................................................. 133,700
Legacies and bequests ................................................................. 244,675
Actuarial adjustment on annuity obligations ..............................  95,284
Net assets released from restrictions .......................................... (66,579)

Increase in temporarily restricted net assets .............................  407,080
Increase (decrease) in net assets ................................................. (98,792)
Net assets at beginning of year .................................................. 3,782,774
Net assets at end of year ........................................................... $ 3,683,982

Our financial statements are audited by the accounting firm of Lambrides, Lamos & Moulthrop Co., Certified Public Accountants. Their report on the audit for the year ended December 31, 2004, was rendered on April 1, 2005, with an unqualified opinion. The above figures are taken from that report.
Little is being said among rank and file evangelicals about a recent decision handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court. To sidetrack the issue by saying evangelicals should not become involved in political church-state controversies is, frankly, inexcusable because the future of this nation and much of the world hinges on the outcome of the battle for America’s soul.

The question litigated was this: Should the Ten Commandments be displayed on government property? So far, banning crèches in town squares; Christmas carols in public schools; the mention of God’s name, particularly Jesus Christ, in valedictory addresses and commencement prayers; plus a myriad of other complaints have been but the warm-up to the big push to expel God permanently from the public arena. The Court handed down a decision that satisfied few and confused many. Sharply divided 5-4, it ruled to allow the Ten Commandments display in Texas. In a Kentucky case, however, the Ten Commandments displayed on the walls of two county courthouses were declared unconstitutional. The issue turned on whether the displays were acceptably secular or reverberated with spiritual significance tantamount to advancing religion, thus violating the separation of church and state. What should concern us is why the conflict even exists and how it affects the life and culture of our society. In the end, does it matter which way things go?

Freedom-From-God Alliance

The proponents of showing the Lord the door, along with all laws and injunctions ascribed to Him, constitute a familiar lineup of ultra-secularists. Wrote Julia Duin in The Washington Times:

They’re part of a network of organizations that shares logistics, troops, board members and funding sources and includes radical feminists, humanists, atheists, and liberal Jewish and Christian groups. Four organizations furnish most of the leadership.

The oldest and best-known is the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), whose Kentucky chapter is the plaintiff in one of the two cases before the Supreme Court. The others are Americans United for Separation of Church and State, People for the American Way (PFAW) and the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF).1

Duin also reported that Duke University Law School Professor Erwin Chemerinsky argued that the presence of the engraved Commandments outside the Texas Capitol in Austin is excessive:

It’s the most powerful and profound religious message that this court has ever considered on government property. Here you have a monument that proclaims not only there is a God, but God has dictated rules of behavior for those who follow him or her.2

Chemerinsky did further judicial hand-wringing:

Imagine the Muslim or the Buddhist who walks into the [Texas] Supreme Court to have his or her case heard. That person will see this...
Bearing the Brunt of the Attack

We must remember that the primary target of liberal/secularist search-and-destroy missions is the backs of Bible-believing, evangelical Christians and their organizations and institutions.

For one thing, liberals have unbridled animosity toward evangelical involvement in politics. To their way of thinking, Christians speaking out on moral and social issues is verboten, and faith-based commitment on moral, spiritual, and social issues is unpalatable and, furthermore, un-American. Among the most withering attacks leveled against the current administration is that it contains too many people of faith.

This is patently partisan nonsense. All secularists and liberals carry their aggression against the religious traditions of this country into every venue of their lives, including the voting booths and public offices where they function as advocates for a radical alternative to what we have known for more than two centuries. Their goals are clear: oppress conservative “obstructionists”; eliminate Christian participation; refashion the culture; and let the good times roll—that is, their vision of the good times. And the rest of us—the majority—are supposed to swallow it.

Exactly what do these merchants of change for change’s sake plan to instate once they have shoveled away the Judeo-Christian foundation that has undergirded the nation since its inception? In my opinion, their intent was bluntly articulated by the “God is dead” movement.

In October 1965, Time magazine ran a piece in its religious section about young theologians at Emory University, a Methodist institution, who referred to themselves as “Christian atheists.” The leader of the pack was Dr. Thomas J. J. Altizer, a 38-year-old associate professor of Bible and religion at Emory, who believed, as one biographer wrote, “the task of theology must abandon the theology created by Christendom and embrace the dawn of radical theology that proclaims the good news of the ‘death of God.’”

The resulting furor left a bad taste in the mouths of most Americans. The upshot, however, was that these young anti-God “theologians” admitted what they were: atheists.

In 1966 an Anglican theologian, Joseph Fletcher, came up with “situation ethics.” Fletcher rejected what he referred to as legalism: the theory that there are fixed laws we must obey at all times. His view offered a guide to moral decision-making: reject rules and act instead in the most loving way you decide is right for you.

With God declared dead and His Word pronounced irrelevant, our culture spiraled into a clash with divine injunctions—rules, if you will. These new movements harmonized with the 1960s militant subculture that made it fashionable to rebel against order, godliness, and organized society. In many respects this subculture was the fuse for the cultural revolution of today.

However, these radicals have no discernable program to replace what they are Spoiling to bring down. A system based on no moral moorings, no individual evaluations of right and wrong, and no absolutes to govern and guide is no system at all. Instead, it is a prescription for chaos.

More Than a Civil Debate

These new hedonists are not amicable people calmly debating the future of our culture and government. They have an ax to grind, which they’re happy to let fall squarely on the necks of those with a different opinion from theirs, namely, Bible-believing Christians. These superheated, secular “evangelists” are waging a war they intend to win. And they know it, even if the fact has not yet dawned on many of us.

Consider what U.S. Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., said recently. He told a radio audience that Dr. James Dobson and Focus on the Family “are the Antichrist of the world.” What was Dobson’s offense? Urging citizens to demand their senators vote to end the filibuster of President George W. Bush’s judicial nominees. Salazar further opined, “What has happened here is there has been a hijacking of the U.S. Senate by what I call the religious right-wing of the country.”

In May Harper’s Magazine professed to expose “The Christian Right’s War on
America.” The New York Times alleged that House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Tex., threatened “the judiciary for not following the regressive social agenda he shares with the far-right fundamentalists controlling his party.”

A conference in New York City cosponsored in part by the City University of New York Graduate Center and People for the American Way was titled “Examining the Real Agenda of the Religious Far Right.” Topics included “Fundamentalism: The Fear and the Rage”; “Is an Unholy American Theocracy Here?”; “Learning About the Christian Right, and What in the World to Do”; and “On the Psychology and Theocracy of George W. Bush: Reflections in a Culture of Fear.”

Need I say more?

A Country Without a God?

In 1863 Edward Everett Hale wrote a fictional story about a man named Philip Nolan, a lieutenant in the United States Army who, while being court-martialed for involvement in the Aaron Burr affair, cursed America and said, “I wish I may never hear of the United States again.” The judge at his trial accommodated him. For the next 55 years until his death, Nolan lived aboard naval vessels and was never allowed to hear the words United States of America. He became “the man without a country.” He died in his cabin, which he had turned into a shrine to the land he had so tragically and irreversibly spurned.

Think of this story when you consider what is truly at stake in this culture clash. There are people declaring they never want to hear God’s name or see any evidence of Him in an American institution again. Should they prevail, America will become a nation without an identity, no longer to be known, even superficially, as Christian, but as a country without a God. Paul warned us, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come” (2 Tim. 3:1).

Romans 1 details the malignant spiritual and moral disintegration that occurs when people reject God in favor of paganism. Little wonder that in such “perilous times,” the thought of acknowledging God is becoming an unthinkable transgression.

We are speeding toward a place we have never been before. Where shall we end up? You must decide.

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid.
5 Ibid.

Elwood McQuaid is editor-in-chief for The Friends of Israel.
When I typed the final chapter of my most recent novel, *The Last Judgment,* I had no pretensions of prophecy (I still don’t). I wanted to tell a good story in the format of another “legal thriller.” But, as with my other books, both fiction and nonfiction, I also felt pressed to follow Jesus’ admonition in Matthew 16:2–3.

There, when confronted with demands for a “sign,” Jesus pointed out that His listeners followed the age-old
adage about the weather, the one that would later translate to the familiar “red sky at morning, sailors take warning; red sky at night, sailor’s delight.”

“You know how to discern the face of the sky,” Jesus said, “but you cannot discern the signs of the times” (v. 3). He made a similar statement that is recorded in Luke 12:54–56.

As I analyzed it, I thought, What better barometer for the spiritual climate of our present age than the status of the Temple Mount? I postulated a religiously motivated attack on the Temple Mount, resulting in a legal and geopolitical confrontation between Israel, Christianity, and Islam.

You can imagine my shock when, just weeks following the release of The Last Judgment, news came from Jerusalem of an alleged plot to take over the Temple Mount. On March 17 Agence France Presse (AFP), an international news agency, noted that on the previous day, Israel’s Channel 2 television aired a video supposedly showing Jewish plotters, including rabbis and, in the AFP’s words, “far-right extremists,” secretly meeting in the Old City to plan a Temple Mount takeover.

Police reinforcements were deployed to the area of the Temple Mount plateau. Immediately Sheik Ibrahim Mudeiris, addressing Muslims at a Gaza mosque, announced that “millions” of Muslims would defend the al-Aqsa Mosque, which is situated on the Mount. Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister Ahmed Qorei joined the chorus, warning that the region would “explode” if Jewish people took any action against the Muslim-controlled site.

The controversy also coincided with efforts by a grassroots Jewish organization to bring some 10,000 Jews to the Temple Mount on the eve of the Hebrew month of Nissan. The group wanted to focus attention on the need for Israeli control of the top of the Mount.

As this cauldron threatened to boil over, an underlying fact grew clearer still: For thousands of years the Temple Mount in Jerusalem has been the most hotly contested piece of ground on Earth. And what happens there reveals much about “the times” in which we live.

According to news reports, the purported takeover was in protest of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s disengagement plan and the unilateral Israeli pullout of Gaza. Whatever the reason, the situation verifies that the final, and most difficult, issue in any peace negotiations will be the Temple Mount. Casting a long view into the future, we can see three ominous and significant trends. Each threatens Israel’s rightful claim to the Mount; but collectively, they also point to future events that ought to leave Bible-believing Christians breathless.

Abdicating History

Any approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that obscures Israel’s lawful claim to the Temple Mount is based on a flat-out lie. The Mount was the site of the Jewish Temple of Solomon; the rebuilt Temple as described in Ezra; and finally, the Temple built under Herod. Of course, some leading Muslim clerics try to contest these historical facts. See, for instance, Jimmy DeYoung’s article “God’s Holy Mountain,” in the November/December 2004 issue of Israel My Glory, recounting a leading mufti’s astounding claim that no historical evidence exists of a Jewish presence on the Mount.

Volumes of historical and archaeological data could be marshaled to demolish that myth. But the best argument is the concession made by the Muslim Council that controlled the Mount. The Temple Institute and The Jerusalem Post point to a 1930 Muslim-authored tourist booklet about the site entitled A Brief Guide to al-Haram al Sharif, which describes the Temple Mount by saying that its “identity with the site of Solomon’s Temple is beyond dispute.” Any discussion of the Temple Mount that sweeps away Israel’s claims to it suffers from gross historical amnesia.

Secularizing Israel

Bernard Avishai, a public policy professor at Duke University, typifies the voices now calling for a complete secularization of Israel. In his article in the January 2005 issue of Harper’s Magazine, he even goes so far as to suggest that the Law of Return, which grants automatic Israeli citizenship to Jewish people, must be replaced. In his view, only a secular “democracy” will save Israel and provide a functional future.

But this stance ignores Israel’s 1992 Basic Law and its Declaration of Independence, which provide that the values underlining Israeli laws be both “Jewish and democratic.” Avishai and others apparently want to camouflage or radically redefine that first component. In an interview with Legal Affairs magazine, Aharon Barak, president (chief justice) of Israel’s Supreme Court, has opined that the use of the word and in the phrase Jewish and democratic means that legal rules should be made compatible with Judaism if feasible, but should not be dominated by it.

That kind of conciliatory approach could bode ill for any superior claim of Israel to the Temple Mount in the future.

Internationalizing the Conflict

Professor Avishai is also typical of many liberals in another respect. In his article he said he wants the international community to govern the “holy sites” in Jerusalem. “Holy sites” meaning “Temple Mount.” Historically, the Palestinians and Arab Muslims have consistently played that tune. In April 2004, when Israeli police clashed with Palestinians at the Temple Mount’s al-Aqsa Mosque, the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) called for
the European Union (EU) and UN to exercise “international protection” of the Mount.

But now Israeli leaders are joining the band. In a March 22, 2005, op-ed piece in The Wall Street Journal Online, Shimon Peres, Israel’s vice prime minister, suggested that Israel, together with a future Palestinian state and Jordan, be given membership in the EU. Peres noted that “greatness lies” not in a “geographically bound place,” but in “the borderless realm of ideas”; and he pointed to the EU as an example of such a “vision” for the future of Israel.

To some, however, that “vision” might seem more like a nightmare. Imagine the prospect of Israel trying to gain full recognition from, say, France or Germany or the EU hopeful, Turkey. Further, what’s wrong with borders? God is geographically specific in talking about borders when it comes to Israel. (See Deuteronomy 34:1–4; Joshua 1:3–4.)

Nor would the United Nations, the other international member of the Middle East negotiating “quartet” (the quartet is the U.S., EU, UN, and Russia), be any better at accommodating Israel’s Old Testament connection to the Temple Mount. The UN’s hostility toward Israel is legendary. A simple review of all of the viperous UN resolutions against Israel proves that point.

Checking the Weather

There are endless scenarios for the Temple Mount. One of them could look like this: The trend toward secularization reinforces an increasing abdication of Israel’s biblical and historical claim to the Mount. Consequently, the chances of Israel successfully promoting an official policy of controlling the top of the Mount become wafer-slim at best. This scenario is consistent with a March 2005 report from Israel National News, which notes that a Dahaf Institute survey shows only 51 percent of Israeli Jews favor sole Israeli control of the Temple Mount.

The logical next step would be international control of the site. However, under the 1954 Hague Convention administered by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), archaeological digging in “occupied” territories is forbidden. The UN and EU undoubtedly consider all of Israel’s 1967 war acquisitions (including the Old City and Temple Mount) “occupied.” Thus Israel would be banned from any definitive digs that could resolve the intriguing question of where, on the Mount’s plateau, Herod’s Temple actually stood.

Although archaeologists have debated this question for years, it looks like Leen Ritmeyer’s estimate may be closest to the scientific consensus. Ritmeyer, a Temple Mount specialist, postulates that the Temple lies under the Muslim Dome of the Rock and Altar of Sacrifice underneath the present-day Dome of the Chain.

Will there be a future Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount? Many Orthodox Jews pray for it, wait on it, and plan for it. Bible-believing Christians, such as myself, who read 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4 literally, say yes. There we are told that the “man of sin,” the “son of perdition,” will sit “as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (emphasis added). This act will mark the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

The linguistic use of the word for “temple” in verse 4 corresponds to the same Old Testament term that denoted the physical Jerusalem Temple.1 Different words could have been used to connote a more symbolic sense, but they were not.

After Jesus walked out of Herod’s Temple and predicted its destruction (Mt. 24:1–2), He sat on the Mount of Olives and elaborated on the end of days. He told His disciples that an “abomination of desolation” would precede the Great Tribulation, which must occur before His glorious appearing (vv. 15, 21). Admittedly, there have been prototypes for this “abomination.” The best-known was Antiochus Epiphanes who, in 167 B.C., plundered the treasury, defiled the Temple, and dedicated it to Zeus. However, Jesus clearly was speaking of an event further in the future, which involved a future Temple and would immediately precede the Great Tribulation and His imminent return.

Where would such a Temple be constructed? Interestingly, there seems to be sufficient room on the 1-million-square-foot plateau itself to house a Temple without disturbing the mosques or the Dome of the Rock. And that would be consistent with the internationalists’ “common ground” approach. On the other hand, surprising events may unfold that give Israel the power to control that site itself and thereafter construct a Temple.

Regardless, we must interpret these “signs of the times” by keeping three things in mind: (1) God and His Word are sure, certain, and infallible; (2) His will is supreme; and (3) we have a role to play in this great drama. A prophecy teacher once told me that, although we cannot predict the exact time on God’s great clock, we can surely tell which way the pendulum is swinging. And in so doing, we are to be energetic and committed to the task before us.

Like Paul, we must pray that “God would open to us a door for the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ” and enable us to “walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time” (Col. 4:3, 5).

Now is not a time to be fainthearted or dismayed but to be full of thanksgiving. After all, it’s impossible to watch the skies without looking up.

ENDNOTE


Craig L. Parshall is a highly successful trial attorney in the Washington, D.C., area. His latest novel, The Last Judgment, is available in bookstores.
Outrage at Gibeah: A Spiritual and Societal Breakdown

Once there was a man who lived on top of a very high mountain.

Because of an old war injury, he needed to hire someone to take his little daughter up and down the mountain each day for school. Quite a few people applied for the position. He asked each only one question: “How close can you come to the edge of the mountain without going over?”

One brash fellow said, “I can come within 12 inches.”

“That’s nothing,” said another. “I can come within six inches.”

Still another boasted, “I can come within an inch.”

Standing quietly alone was a simple man. When his turn came, he replied, “There is no way I am going near the edge. I am staying on the clear path for dear life.” He got the job.

Many people think they can live on the edge of spiritual and cultural debauchery. But it’s a dangerous, slippery slope that leads to apathy, sin, and assimilation for the followers of the Christ. The shocking story of the Levite and his concubine (Jud. 19—21) warns God’s people of such a threat. The admonishment is to obey God’s Word and stick to His path.
Panorama of Trouble

But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day (Jud. 1:21).

A Levite from Ephraim had a concubine from Bethlehem. Concubines were secondary wives, usually ranking low in marital status. The ancient custom eventually degenerated, though laws were made to restrain and regulate it (Ex. 21:7–11; Lev. 19:20–22; Dt. 21:10–14). Jesus restored the original design for marriage (Mt. 19:4–9). Concupiscence, polygamy, and having a mistress on the side are all sin (1 Cor. 7:2).

Apparently, the Levite’s concubine returned to her father’s home in Bethlehem. Four months later the Levite decided to bring her back. Entertained in typical Near Eastern custom by his father-in-law, the Levite stayed for five days. On the afternoon of the fifth day, he and his concubine left for his home, heading toward Jebus (pre-Israelite Jerusalem). It was late, and his servant suggested they stay overnight in the Jebusite city. The Levite didn’t think it was safe to stay where there were no Israelites. So they pushed on another five miles to the Benjamite city of Gibeah. At Gibeah no one took them in for the night. This was a bad reflection on Gibeah, because God commanded hospitality.

Beware of Today’s ‘Canaanites’

In 1929 a fantastic archaeological discovery was made in the ancient port town of Ugarit on the Syrian coast. Hundreds of ancient tablets were found, providing a wealth of information about Canaanite culture. They revealed that the Canaanite religion emphasized war, religious prostitution, and cultic personal sensuality. As a religion of convenience, no central sanctuary was needed. Viliness could be practiced anywhere.

Canaanite Baal worship appealed to the Israelites because it wasn’t morally demanding. There were no Ten Commandments in the Canaanite culture. It was easy for Israel to intertwine cultic sex with Scripture and consider it a normal religious expression. Depravity evolves when God’s people allow evil influences to abide with them.

There are “Canaanized” people, including believers, even today. And a Canaanite attitude is seen in society’s casual acceptance of open promiscuity. Like some in ancient Israel, many people, including Christians, have not separated themselves from the evil influences of the world. God commands us, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17).

Bible scholar C. I. Scofield wrote, “Separation in Scripture is twofold: (a) from whatever is contrary to the mind of God; and (b) unto God Himself. The underlying principle is that in a moral universe it is impossible for God fully to bless and use His children who are in compromise or complicity with evil.”

Biblical Christianity condemns all sexual impurity; “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Th. 4:3). “But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints” (Eph. 5:3). The book of Judges shows that the generation after Joshua did not know the Lord. Therefore sin reigned. This is still the sad global situation today.

The generation after Joshua did not appreciate the works of their Lord. It chose to do evil and rejected the call to be holy. “And you shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine” (Lev. 20:26). Believers are to abstain from all appearance of evil (1 Th. 5:22). Only by the sure knowledge of God’s Word can we discern truth from error (2 Tim 2:15).

The duty of each individual is to remember God and give Him glory and worship. Then we will find strength to face the temptations of life. The great English Bible scholar F. E. March once said, “When we face difficulties, we sometimes forget God’s past faithfulness. We see only the detours and the dangerous path. But look back and you will also see the joy of victory, the challenge of the climb, and the presence of your traveling Companion, who has promised never to leave you nor forsake you.”

by Peter Colón

among His people (Lev. 19:33–34; 25:35; Mt. 25:35; Heb. 13:2).

An old man saw the travelers resting in the town square and invited them home for a meal and lodging. That evening some wicked men of the town surrounded the house. They began to bang on the door, shouting, “Bring out the man who came to your house, that we may know him carnally!” (Jud. 19:22).

The old man stepped outside. “No, my brethren! I beg you, do not act so wickedly! Seeing this man has come into my house, do not commit this outrage” (v. 23). He even offered his virgin daughter and the concubine for their gratification. But it wasn’t women they wanted. To protect himself, the Levite pushed his concubine out the door.

She was brutally abused all night. Released by daybreak, she collapsed at the doorway of the house. Her husband opened the door to leave and found her lying face down, with her hands on the threshold. Unsympathetic, he said to her, “Get up and let us be going.” There was no answer. She was dead (v. 28).

The Levite’s heartlessness toward his concubine unfortunately illustrates aspects of today’s society. Scripture states that in the last days there will be a lack of natural affection (2 Tim. 3:1–5). Sadly, such is the case in many marriages. Even the household of faith is not immune.

So the Levite strapped the woman’s lifeless body to his donkey and resumed his travel. When he arrived home he cut her body into 12 pieces and sent one to each tribe of Israel. Revolted by the sight, Israel demanded justice for Gibeah’s crime (v. 30).

An assembly was called at Mizpah in Benjamin territory. Here the Levite told his experience to the leaders, spinning the story to his own advantage. What he said was true, but he failed to mention the heartless way he discarded his concubine to the gang. The elders demanded the Benjamites hand over the vile men of Gibeah for punishment. However, the children of Benjamin refused. Their tolerance for debauchery had evolved into an attitude of self-defense stoked by pride, which became their downfall. “By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-Advised is wisdom” (Prov. 13:10).

With blind passion and unbending stubbornness the tribe mobilized at Gibeah against their brethren. Sixty-five thousand men, including 25,000 Benjamites, died in three great battles that almost annihilated the tribe of Benjamin. Only 600 survived, hiding four months in the wilderness.

Now there was a new problem. Israel’s other tribes had vowed at Mizpah never to let their daughters marry a Benjamite. But they became alarmed over the possible obliteration of an entire Israelite tribe. The Israelites wept bitterly to the Lord (Jud. 21:2, 6). Then they contrived a plan. They found a town, Jabesh Gilead, that had not participated in the war and punished it by killing all its men and women except for its 400 young virgins, which they captured and gave as wives to the men of Benjamin.

But 200 more virgins were needed. Conniving, the elders of Israel told the remaining men of Benjamin to hide in the vineyards at Shiloh. When the daughters of Shiloh came out to dance at the festival, every man was to rush out and snatch a wife for himself. The elders promised to pacify the girls’ irate fathers and family.

Scripture ends the entire sad episode with these pathetic words: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (v. 25).

The Only Solution

Before he died Joshua had warned the Israelites to obey the Lord. He reminded them of the Lord’s victories over their enemies (Josh. 23), reviewed God’s faithfulness and goodness (Josh. 24), and admonished them to heed the Lord, always be faithful to Jehovah, and not associate with pagans.

However, “When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel.

Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the Lord to anger” (Jud. 2:10–12).

The Levite didn’t think it a good idea to stay in Jebus. Why? The city was Canaanite. He felt it would be better for them in Gibeah. What he didn’t know was that Gibeah had become Canaanized.

The appalling narrative of the Levite and his concubine serves as a picture of disintegration. Israel declined spiritually by mingling the idolatrous rites of Canaanite worship with the service of the Lord. It declined nationally by neglecting the continuous war against the Canaanites. The Jebusite city should have been conquered. Its existence allowed the insidious Canaanite culture to spread. Furthermore, as captives of their culture, Gibeah and the Benjamites lost sight of God.

The death of Joshua and the leaders of that day created a void in godly leadership. It’s apparent that the absence of godly leaders will bring out the worst in society. King David declared, “Help, Lord, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men” (Ps. 12:1). Believers, by their separation and godly lifestyle, should influence society. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Ti. 2:11–12).

The slippery path towards apathy, sin, and assimilation is real. The level to which people become captive to worldly culture may vary, but the relentless battle between the gospel and culture is universal. “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:14).

Peter Colón is the Southeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.
Everyone struggles with something. Even when we try to follow the Lord, we find that problems; heartaches; and vast, deep valleys of sorrow and pain bring discouragement and fear. We pray and seek the Lord’s direction and help, never realizing that, more often than not, we do not see the entire picture. We see life from a human, finite, and therefore distorted perspective, while the Lord sees things from an entirely different vantage point. Consequently, our vision is skewed. This situation can often lead to a kind of spiritual malaise—a spiritual paralysis—that can prevent us from effectively serving our God.

Look Beyond Your Circumstances

In Judges 6:11 Gideon, the man God chose to deliver Israel from its troubles, “threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites.” Israel was under oppression once again, this time from the land of Midian, located east of the Sinai Peninsula.

The Midianites sprung from Midian, Abraham’s fourth son. His mother was Keturah (Gen. 25:1–5). According to Dr. Henry M. Morris, “Of Keturah’s six sons (all probably born early in Abraham’s thirty-five-year period with her), Midian is the only one whose descendants, the Midianites, are adequately identified. The others probably mixed with the various descendants of Ishmael, Lot and Esau to become the modern Arabic peoples. Abraham sent them ‘eastward’ (Gen. 25:6) with adequate gifts to begin their own tribes, and this would correspond to Arabia.”

Midian is also the geographic region where Moses dwelt when he fled Egypt in Exodus 2:15–22. It was there he married Zipporah and tended the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro.

The Israelites encountered the Midianites during their wilderness wanderings. They fought each other, and Israel almost completely destroyed them (Num. 31:1–20). Enmity existed between these nations. And now the tide had turned, and Israel was under Midian oppression.

Now the Angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth tree . . . and said to him [Gideon], “The Lord is with you, you mighty man of valor” (Jud. 6:11–12).
Gideon’s response was quick and pointed: “O my lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about . . . ? But now the Lord has forsaken us” (v. 13).

From Gideon’s perspective the Lord had somehow failed His people. Why else would they be under Midian oppression? Why else would He have to thresh in such a pathetic location and hide the grain from His oppressors? Obviously, he thought, the Lord has forsaken us. Gideon felt the Lord was at fault. In this respect, he was much like us. So many times, when we face deep waters and dire situations, we blame God, believing He has somehow let us down or forsaken His promise never to leave us. It’s amazing how quickly our thinking would change if we could see our situations from God’s perspective.

Earlier in Judges 6, the Lord revealed why Israel suffered so much and why the Midianites raided her crops: “The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years” (v. 1). God had not failed His people; they had sinned and fallen away from Him and were reaping the consequences. Gideon had misinterpreted his situation. Although it may appear the Lord has forsaken us, the reality is quite different. Sometimes we suffer because of sin. Other times God uses circumstances to protect us or give us a testimony to glorify Him. No matter what the circumstance, we must look beyond it and remember that God never forsakes those who are His; and He is never unjust.

**Reassess Your Resources**

The Angel of the Lord, who is a preincarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus, identified Gideon as a “mighty man of valor” (v. 12). Would a man of courage and fearlessness thresh his harvest in a valley instead of on a mountaintop, as was traditionally done? Threshing, or winnowing, separates the grain from the chaff; the useless husks that grow around the kernels. On a mountaintop, the wind blows the chaff away, while the kernels fall to the ground. The high plateau of the Temple Mount, for example, was originally the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite (1 Chr. 21:18).

Gideon, this “mighty man of valor,” was hiding because he didn’t yet realize to whom he was speaking. “Then the Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?’” (Jud. 6:14).

The Lord told His chosen vessel to go and lead Israel against its enemy. He also gave him a key to this instruction: “Have I not sent you?” The Lord himself had commissioned Gideon. If we are His children by faith, He also has commissioned and commanded us to do certain things. So many times the Lord chooses a reluctant servant like Gideon. Like Moses before him, Gideon attempted to reject the Lord’s direction for his life.

How often do we today find ourselves following a similar pattern? For example, we know there are needs within our local fellowships, but we feel inadequate to the task. We must reassess our resources and remember that God has given us spiritual gifts for the purpose of serving Him.

Gideon’s response was clear: “O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (v. 15). He was saying, “I am not worthy of the task; I am not well-known enough and am too insignificant to do what you ask.” Interestingly, Gideon used the Hebrew word Adonai as he spoke with the Angel of the Lord. Adonai is one of the names of God found in the Hebrew Scriptures. It can be translated “master.” If the Lord is our Master, then He has the right to expect absolute obedience to His every command. And His servants can expect Him to provide all the assistance necessary to complete the assigned task.

The apostle Paul understood this concept, as the Holy Spirit inspired him to pen one of the most powerful verses in the New Testament: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). God’s work is done through God’s power. We do not count on our resources; we count on His. That power was available to Gideon. The angelic visitor assured him, “Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites” (v. 16).

**Trust God**

Despite these assurances, Gideon was still uncertain. It appears he doubted the one who stood before him and did not entirely trust Him. Perhaps he did not yet realize that it was the God of heaven and earth commissioning him and promising victory.

So Gideon asked the Angel of the Lord for a sign: “Show me a sign that it is You who talk with me” (v. 17). He then suggested his visitor wait while he prepared a sacrifice and set it before Him (v. 18). This must have taken time, since he had to kill and skin a goat, cook it, and bake unleavened bread. When his offerings were ready, “he brought them out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented them” (v. 19).

*Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Lord departed out of his sight* (v. 21).

It was then Gideon finally realized he had been in the Lord’s holy presence: “‘Alas, O Lord God! For I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face’” (v. 22). He must have expected to die because the Lord assured him, “Peace be with you; do not fear, you shall not die” (v. 23). The servant responded to his Master by building an altar, which he called “The-Lord-Is-Peace [Jehovah Shalom]” (v. 24).

Like Gideon, we often mistrust the Lord’s call on our lives. Yet Proverbs instructs us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (3:5–6). The New Testament also
admonishes us to trust the Lord when He calls us to serve: “He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (1 Th. 5:24). If the Lord has a mission for you, you can trust Him to give you all that is necessary for you to comply with His instructions.

The Lord was faithful to Gideon, who again questioned His Master by asking for yet another sign, this time utilizing fleeces. Gideon laid a fleece on the threshing floor and “said to God, ‘If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said,’” then let the fleece be wet and the floor dry. In the morning, “it was so” (vv. 36–38).

Then he requested the reverse: wet ground and a dry fleece. “And God did so that night” (v. 40). Gideon was finally ready to attack the Midianites.

However, the Lord wanted it clear that the victory belonged to Him alone, and He whittled down the size of Israel’s army from 32,000 to 300 men. First He sent home those who were afraid (7:3); then He released men based on how they drank water from the water’s edge.

So Gideon and his unlikely band of 300 routed men who were “as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the seashore in multitude” (v. 12). And Gideon delivered Israel, just as God had promised.

The same Lord who assisted Gideon and his men more than 3,000 years ago is the same Lord who supports, protects, defends, and empowers His servants today. He has not changed, nor will He ever; “For I am the LORD, I do not change” (Mal. 3:6). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

We must remember that God’s perspective is the right perspective. And the best way to conquer spiritual paralysis is to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Him and run the race that is set before us, “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2).

ENDNOTE


Thomas C. Simcox is the Northeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.
Believers never completely escape the influence of the times in which they live. That is not meant as an excuse but as a context in which to evaluate a great man of faith who was humbled by a flaw and is often remembered for that flaw alone.

Jephthah’s story does not begin with him but with Joshua. The book of Judges rehearses Israel’s history from Joshua to Samuel, who likely wrote the book. It ostensibly is designed to demonstrate the need for central leadership, i.e., a king. We sometimes mistakenly assume these books are primarily historical. However, though historical, they are primarily theological. They use selected historical materials to advance a theological agenda. The book of Joshua ended on a high note but shows that the seeds of destruction were already planted. In Judges the tribes of Israel are encouraged to return to those glory days by again accepting centralized leadership. This agenda clearly appears in the recurring phrase *In those days there was no king in Israel,* implying, “Aren’t you glad we have a king today!”

The structure of Judges is designed to impress the reader with the fact that, throughout the whole period (about 400 years), things just went from bad to worse. Little attempt is made to emphasize the positive qualities of the latter three judges—Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. Each is more flawed than his predecessor.

Gideon puts out a fleece; Jephthah makes a rash vow; and Samson trusts...
in his Nazirite vow. Gideon was a weak man who tested God; Jephthah was a strong man who asked God to test him; and Samson was a deluded man who valued the test above the God who gave it.

Yet these men were heroes of the faith. (See Hebrews 11:32–34.) We must always keep in mind that the author of Judges chose his material to emphasize the importance of a king. His readers would have known this fact. Hebrews, on the other hand, gives a more balanced or generic overview.

**Jephthah’s Transformation**

God consistently chooses the least likely candidate to fulfill His missions. This truth is established in Genesis and continues throughout the entire Bible. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty (1 Cor. 1:26–27).

This pattern keeps the glory where it belongs: with God. And Jephthah fits this model perfectly (Jud. 11:1–3). The illegitimate child of Gilead and a prostitute, Jephthah was disowned and driven out by Gilead’s legitimate children.

But later, in Joseph-like irony, the very individuals who had driven him out were forced to go to him begging for his help (vv. 4–11). God truly has a sense of humor. The rejected half-brother is transformed into savior of the family. A much more important rejected half-brother will appear later in history, and his name will be Jesus. But that is another story.

So the man of the hour was Jephthah. He was as innocent as a dove and as wise as a serpent, negotiating with his conveniently admiring family. Suddenly he went from despised duckling to revered chief (v. 10).

The narrative then recounts Jephthah’s dealings with the nation of Ammon (vv. 12–40). Here he displayed the same negotiating skills that he demonstrated with his family. But more important, he displayed a clear understanding of God’s Word (particularly Deuteronomy) and the history of Israel.

Ammon had accused the Israelites of confiscating land from both Ammon and Moab. This claim probably was Ammon’s pretext for war. Jephthah did not bother to refute the charge and made it clear that the land his people possessed was given to them by God. His entire speech reflected a man of faith who was willing to stand firmly on the promises of God.

**His Big Mistake**

Jephthah’s flaw emerged, however, when he began to negotiate with God. In an attempt to make the promise more sure, Jephthah vowed a sacrifice to God: “If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering” (vv. 30–31).

Many modern Christian and Jewish exegetes have argued that Jephthah did not actually sacrifice his daughter, but rather dedicated her to a life in God’s service as a perpetual virgin.2 However, this opinion seems forced with respect to the language, culture, and purpose of the book. The word used for “burnt offering” means “that which goes up.” This is perhaps related to the concept of smoke going up as an animal is burned or to the fact that it goes up to God. The word is consistently used in the Old Testament to refer to ceremonial sacrifices, not to walking somewhere, such as to a mountain.

Furthermore, the idea of perpetual virginity is not an ancient Near Eastern tradition. It originated in the ascetic period of the early church. Interestingly, this interpretation seems to have migrated from the church to the synagogue during the Middle Ages. Marc Saperstein, a professor of Jewish history, wrote,

> Now clearly the Christians did not learn about cloisters from this ambiguous passage. Rather, Jewish intellectuals derived their interpretation from the Christian practice of nuns in cloisters. What is striking is that the Biblical phrase in the vow, “devoted to God,” is interpreted to be fulfilled through a life of seclusion and virginity. It is impossible to derive this from an internal Jewish tradition of celibate eremiticism [seclusion]. What it shows is that this aspect of Christian spirituality, far removed as it was from most Jewish sources and actual behavior, apparently had some impact.3

Jephthah’s flaw was not that he made a foolish vow, but that he vowed at all. The greatest enemy of faith is often a person’s own strength and self-righteousness. What was the purpose of this vow? Was it an act of worship, or was it an attempt to secure insurance? Jephthah was not trying to thank God for His incredible promises; he was trying to guarantee them.

God instituted sacrifices and vows as an appropriate means for people to thank Him for what faith has wrought. They were not designed to replace, augment, or even enhance that faith.

The final element to this story hinges on the purpose of the book. Samuel wrote Judges to highlight the worsening social and political climate that existed in Israel from the time of Joshua until the nation accepted a king. Diminishing the repulsion of Jephthah’s act seems incompatible with that theme. Godly men are certainly capable of committing the worst of sins.

A modern parallel might be the lack of concern we sometimes show about abortion. Often these little ones are sacrificed for mere convenience. The biblical text never implies that God

---

*continued on page 24*
The Fudge Factor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle of partial disobedience</th>
<th>Othniel and Ehud</th>
<th>Deborah and Barak</th>
<th>Gideon</th>
<th>Jephthah</th>
<th>Samson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Chaps. 1:1—3:6 Chap. 3 Chaps. 4—5 Chaps. 6—9 Chaps. 10—12 Chaps. 13—16

Author: Unknown—perhaps Samuel
Date: circa 1020 B.C.
Years covered: About 400
(Joshua’s death to Samuel’s birth)
Thesis: Incomplete obedience produces spiritual degeneration.
Synopsis: Judges describes the Israelites’ failure to live under Yahweh’s rule as their king. Their incomplete obedience (the “fudge factor”) ruined their attempts to possess the land God had given them through Joshua, and it subjugated them to neighboring nations as part of God’s chastening. When Israel repented, God provided a judge (military figure) to deliver her from her oppressors. But each such cycle moved Israel to a lower level of spiritual experience, which is reflected in the lives of the judges as well. The degenerating cycles spiral downward from the high point of Israel’s conquest under Joshua to the depravity of Eli and his sons in 1 Samuel. By recording selective stories from Israel’s history at that time, Judges warns about the consequences of disobedience.
Application: Sin always carries consequences. Even though God forgives us when we repent, sin’s consequences reduce our spiritual accomplishments and experiences below what they would have been had the sin not occurred. Forgive ness is wonderful; obedience is better!
Every man does what is right in his own eyes

Micah’s idolatry; hires a personal Levite.

Danites fail to possess land; search for new territory.

Danites seize Micah’s idol and priest; settle in unprotected area.

A Levite’s concubine guilty of harlotry; returned to him; abused and killed in Gibeah.

Civil war in Gibeah: 40,000 Israelites die; Benjamin loses all but 600 men.

Israelites regret cutting off Benjamites; find wives for them.

Chaps. 17—21
approved of Jephthah’s vow, but neither did He stop him from fulfilling it. God is not obligated to bail out His saints, even a choice servant like Jephthah. Note Ecclesiastes 5:4–6:

When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed—Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?

The final phase of the Jephthah narrative concerns the treatment of the Ephraimites (12:1–7). Ephraim was a tribe of Israel whose men were slow to answer the distress call that Jephthah had sent out. They showed up after the battle was won, and rather than help Jephthah, they fought against him. So Jephthah tenaciously pursued the Ephraimites and set up checkpoints at all the river crossings. Because the Ephraimites had trouble pronouncing the “sh” sound, Jephthah’s men easily identified them by asking them to pronounce the word shibboleth. Whoever could not pronounce it was killed. This tactic again shows Jephthah’s skill as both a warrior and politician.

The story of Jephthah underscores the fact that Romans 12:1–2 asks us as believers to offer ourselves in response to the mercies of God, not in order to obtain them. Jephthah must have considered his offer of inestimable value to God, when in reality it was but the overstepping of a proud and rash man. And he paid dearly for it. He should have known that it was not his political and military skill that allowed God to use him; it was his faith.

The gospel has always been most attractive to and most effective for the “poor in spirit.” The unconditional promises of God cannot be earned; they can only be freely received. The conditional promises of God, such as the Mosaic Law, are particularly useful for showing men and women that they need a different way of salvation. But that is another story.

\[\text{END NOTES}\]

2 Gleason L. Archer, Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 164.

Marshall Wicks is a professor of Bible at the Word of Life Bible Institute in Schroon Lake, New York.
Millions of Americans are experiencing the “Samson Syndrome.” Nearly 20 million have purchased Rick Warren’s book *The Purpose-Driven Life*, attesting to the fact that this generation desperately seeks purpose and meaning. People sense their potential but lack the perception and discipline to achieve it. The strongest man in the world was just such a man, and his failure was recorded that we might learn from his mistakes.

The book of Judges records the work of people whom God raised up to deliver Israel from divine chastening. They usually were ordinary individuals who defeated Israel’s oppressors after the nation repented of sin and called on the Lord. Samson alone was designated a judge before his conception.

Israel’s cycle of rebellion, repression, repentance, and restoration (through a
judge) repeats throughout the book. God was always faithful to restore Israel, but each cycle produced an overall degeneration in Israel’s spiritual condition (2:19). Each judge became less of a spiritual leader, and Samson was the last in line.

The Announcement

The prophecy of Samson’s birth was filled with promise. Childless long enough to be considered barren, his mother was visited by the Angel of Yahweh with the wonderful news that she would bear a son. She was told to abstain from wine, strong drink, and unclean food because her son was to be a lifelong Nazirite; even his prenatal existence was important to Yahweh.

The woman related the epiphany to her husband, Manoah, restating the Nazirite lifestyle expected of their promised son. Dedicated to God from conception, he would “begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines” (13:5) after 40 years of oppression.

Imagine Manoah’s shock. He begged God to resend the messenger and provide more information. So the Angel of Yahweh visited the woman again. When she fetched her husband, Manoah asked, “What will be the boy’s rule of life, and his work?” (v. 12). But Manoah was instructed to listen to everything already told his wife, especially concerning her diet. God’s Word states explicitly that this child was to be a Nazirite from womb to tomb. The Nazirite lifestyle expected of his ministry as rather ineffective. The account is a disappointing mixture of God’s supernatural enablement (strength) and Samson’s neglect of his calling.

Why did Samson disregard everything prophesied before his birth? Why did he live to satisfy himself rather than God, evidencing no sense of his destiny? Why did he manifest no apparent sense of God’s purpose in his life? The Bible mentions no unusual acts of patriotic service or interest in delivering his people. Clearly, “the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him” three times (14:6, 19; 15:14), revealing that supernatural strength and ability were available. But he did not use this divine enablement effectively, except for his own self-preservation or gratification.

Samson focused on satisfying his desires. Living in Danite territory, he spent his leisure and sought his pleasure in the Philistine kingdom next door. He insisted on marrying a Timnite woman, rather than an Israelite as God had directed, saying, “for she pleases me well” (14:3). Incredible as it seems, this insistence was “of the Lord—that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines” (14:4). God used Samson’s consorting with the Philistines as a means to implement the whole purpose of the man’s existence—to break the Philistine yoke—though Samson and his parents seemed oblivious to the fact.

At his wedding feast Samson engaged his 30 companions (secured by his in-laws) with a riddle and a wager of new clothing for each. The atmosphere changed when, unable to unravel his riddle, they angrily threatened his new bride and her family. Desperate, his wife wept and begged him for the answer. Imagine the betrayal Samson must have felt when his new wife told the answer to his new “friends.” Angrily he stormed off to kill 30 Philistines to fulfill his bargain and, more likely, to assuage his grief. He then returned to his parents’ home, rather than to his new wife.

When he eventually returned to his wife’s father’s home, he was denied entry because she had been given to his “friend.” Heartbroken and angry, Samson expended what must have been an enormous amount of time and energy to catch 300 foxes, tie them in pairs by their tails, and release each pair with a burning torch into the Philistine grain fields. When the Philistines retaliated by burning his former wife and her father, Samson ruthlessly attacked them “with a great slaughter,” saying, “Since you would do a thing like this, I will surely take revenge on you, and after that I will cease” (15:7-8).

The angry Philistines mobilized against Judah and demanded Samson. Frustrated, afraid, and seeing him as a royal pain rather than a theocratic leader, 3,000 Judean men sought to bind and deliver him to the Philistines, which he allowed. After the exchange, Samson, empowered by God’s Spirit, destroyed 1,000 Philistines with a donkey’s jawbone. He bragged about his conquest and called on God because he was thirsty. Amazingly, God blessed him with a spring of water from a rock. He accomplished
God’s will only in the exercise of his own selfish motives.

As a corollary to satisfying his sensual desires, Samson disdained his divinely imposed Nazirite lifestyle. Nazirites were prohibited from consuming products of the grapevine, cutting their hair, and touching anything dead (Num. 6:1–8). Nazirite, from the Hebrew verb nazir, means to “separate or consecrate,” indicating one’s total separation unto God for the duration of the vow. Samson practiced some physical aspects of his vow (he never cut his hair) but ignored the spiritual: consecration to Yahweh. His contact with the dead (lion, carcass, dead men’s clothing, jawbone, etc.) seems quite casual, and his riddle manifested his lighthearted attitude toward his separation, as did playing with the ritually unclean foxes.

Though not explicitly condemned by the law of the Nazirite, Samson’s Philistine marriage and his other relationships with women certainly belied his separation unto God. Samson consorted with the Philistine community rather than fighting against it and acted mostly on the impulses of his own selfish desires. This man was no Joshua, Samuel, Gideon, or even Jephthah. Like a mirage, Samson’s spiritual ministry dissipates under scrutiny.

The Downfall

Defeat and death occur because Samson continued to consort with those he was born to defeat. As he prostituted (literally) his separation unto the God who created him, so he prostituted the design and destiny of his life. Like a Greek tragedy, this life, so full of promise and potential, ground grimly to a sad end.

Trapped in an evening tryst in Gaza with a Philistine prostitute, Samson used his God-given strength to save himself. Rising at midnight, he uprooted the city gates, bars, and posts and carried them up the mountain. Again he walked away unscathed from open disobedience to God’s law. But no one trifles with God indefinitely.

Enter Delilah. In this longer relationship, Samson’s spiritual and relational density manifested his delusion that he could live on the edge forever. Delilah, a Philistine, tried to coax him into revealing the source of his strength so that the Philistines could enslave him. Scripture says, “she pestered him daily . . . so that his soul was vexed to death” (16:16). Ignoring the obvious warning signs, he finally told her the truth. Delilah lulled him to sleep, shaved his head, and handed him over (vv. 19–20). Despising his separation for the last time, Samson’s world came crashing down. The Lord “departed from him,” and he lost all his strength (v. 20). Clearly, he never saw this coming.

His Philistine masters were as merciless as sin. They gouged out his eyes, the gate of his sensual path. They took him to Gaza and bound him with bronze chains to the prison’s grinding wheel. This time there was no escape. Probably replacing an ox, he served, most menially, the people he had been born to destroy.

Yet even to those who trifle with His calling, God is often merciful. Soon the Philistines assembled to worship their god for supposedly delivering Samson to them. Exuberant in celebration and ignorant of his growing hair, they summoned Samson to their temple for amusement. Begging God for one last enablement, Samson dislodged the center support pillars and collapsed the roof, killing everyone and destroying more Philistines at his death than during his entire life.

What a testimony to ineffective living. The man whom God had gifted to remove oppression accomplished more at his death than during his 20-year judgeship. Will it be said of us that more Kingdom work was accomplished at our funerals than during our lifetimes?

The Samson Syndrome can be deadly. It is to ignore your heavenly calling by living for your sensual appetites, to despise the holiness God requires while satisfying your earthly desires, and to marginalize your Kingdom effectiveness by seeking pleasure in another kingdom.

How can you avoid the Samson Syndrome? The same way Samson could have. The key to success had been recorded for him by Moses (Dt. 30:15–20) and Joshua (1:8): Love the Lord, meditate on His Word, obey Him, and serve Him. Paul said it well to the Romans (12:1–2; 13:13–14). Dabbling in the world brings devastation.

On his first visit to Britain, D. L. Moody heard the words of evangelist Henry Varley: “The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in and by the man who is fully consecrated to Him.” Moody responded, “I will try my utmost to be that man.” What about you?

Richard D. Emmons is senior professor of Bible and doctrine at Philadelphia Biblical University and is senior pastor of Bible Baptist Church, Hamilton, New Jersey.

Quoteworthy

Israeli author Victor Mordecai, speaking on American radio regarding the pressure being put on Israel in every venue:

“You guys [evangelical Christians] are not our [Israel’s] best friends; you are our only friends.”

Victor Mordecai is the pen name of a Jewish American who immigrated to Israel in 1968. His book Christian Revival for Israel’s Survival voices his belief that only a Christian revival and Judeo-Christian alliance will save Israel from extinction.
Slated for Destruction: Life in Gush Katif

Clockwise from bottom left: A Yeshiva student at the Hesher Yeshiva in Neveh Dekalim; schoolchildren at the bus station in Neveh Dekalim; Children in Morag displaying their anti-evacuation shirts; the regional elementary school in Neveh Dekalim; resident and greenhouses in Gadid, a Moshav (agricultural cooperative) founded in 1982; mother and child at a playground in Bnei atzmon; inside the Gadid agricultural cooperative greenhouses; nursery for house plants in Bnei atzmon. Background: Morag, the southernmost settlement, founded in 1982. The sign in Hebrew says, "Morag. This is my home." The government plans to bulldoze the towns (Hanan Isachar/www.israelimages.com).
When Israel abandons Gush Katif in the Gaza Strip, it will walk away from 21 communities that house schools, businesses, farms, and 900 acres of high-tech hothouses that yield nearly 70 percent of all Israel’s organic fruits and vegetables and 90 percent of its cherry tomato exports.

In the 20 or so years they have been there, Israelis have turned this

*continued on page 31*
It is hard for those of us in freedom-loving countries to imagine being thrown in jail for teaching children the things of God and the love of Jesus. But this is precisely what is taking place in Indonesia and other parts of the world. The Voice of the Martyrs Canada (VOMC) reports that three Indonesian Christian women face possible five-year prison terms for “attempting to convert Muslim children.”

The women are incarcerated in a small cell at a police station in West Java. They held a picnic at a theme park and were joined by some Muslim children. The 12-year-old daughter of a prostitute was given a Bible and T-shirt at the child’s request.

VOMC said the picnic was part of a church-operated children’s program. The children were having a great time until a few parents began to complain. Consequently, the three women were arrested and charged with seeking to Christianize Muslim children.

Believers are asked to pray for these women and for others who suffer severe discrimination in Indonesia. Pray also that the children’s ministry will not be abandoned because of this incident. Ironically, many Christian organizations in the island country hoped to receive some appreciation from Muslims because of their unstinting work in joining humanitarian efforts to help tsunami victims following that terrible disaster in the region. Many Christians have given of themselves, often hazarding their own lives, to rescue and aid suffering Muslims.

Yet the persecution of true believers, who instinctively share the love and compassion of Christ, continues. Christians received neither appreciation nor understanding for the sacrifices they made.

Such reactions are difficult to understand unless you know the teachings of extreme Islamists. They see Christians as irredeemable unbelievers, second only to Israel as infidels, and fit only for consignment to jihad or second-class status.

The violence has become so problematic that both Christian and Muslim leaders are seeking to end it, particularly after recent bombings and attacks against Christians. Some Muslim leaders want to implement nationwide Muslim law (sharia), claiming it will stem the violence now rampant in the country. However, sharia law will be a nightmare for Christians and will assuredly lead to the restriction of freedom to worship in Indonesia.

Do you ever get the feeling that things are getting worse where you live? Well, to some extent, that may be true. But consider the lot of our brothers and sisters in Christ in such countries as Indonesia. Would you ever, in your wildest dreams, believe that sharing your faith with young people in a Sunday school class, Bible club, or vacation Bible school could land you in jail for five years? In America, a country of freedom, such a thought never enters our minds.

But every day it is on the minds of fellow believers in other lands. Do you care enough to pray?

ENDNOTE

rugged land, considered cursed by the Arabs, into a region of luscious produce, brilliant flowers, and aromatic spices. Gush Katif’s famous bug-free vegetables are shipped around the world, generating annual export revenues of $60 million. So far the Palestinians have rebuffed Israel’s efforts to help them take over these assets.
The Grecian Conqueror

The six remaining chapters of Zechariah’s prophecy consist of events pertaining to God’s eschatological program for Israel. They cover a vast period that extends from the Grecian era under Alexander the Great to the yet future return of Israel’s Messiah. Some of the clearest, most abundant Messianic prophecies on the Lord’s First and Second Advents are revealed in Zechariah 9—14.

These six chapters separate into two divisions with the phrase the burden of the word of the Lord (9:1; 12:1). The first burden (oracle) reiterates Alexander’s historical conquest of the East and the appearing of Israel’s Messianic Shepherd (9:1—11:17). The second burden describes events surrounding Messiah’s Second Coming and His Kingdom rule as they relate to Israel’s restoration and redemption (12:1—14:21).

Theologians disagree on when Zechariah 9:1—8 was fulfilled. We will not compare views here. Most conservative scholars teach that the Grecian Empire, like a winged leopard (Dan. 7:6) and strong he-goat (Dan. 8:5—7), would swiftly conquer Asia. With his army of 40,000, Alexander rapidly defeated the Persians at the Battle of Issus in 333 B.C. King Darius escaped. But rather than pursue him, Alexander focused on attacking Phoenicia and Egypt.

Zechariah mentioned cities that Alexander conquered on his way to Egypt. Hadrach (v. 1) appears only here in Scripture. Scholars have interpreted the word in various ways: (1) symbolically and mystically; (2) as the name of an Assyrian king or fire-god; (3) as the name of a deity in Eastern Aramea; and (4) as a scribal error for Hauran, a district south of Damascus connected with Hamath. We may safely identify Hadrach with Hatarikka, a city north of Hamath, a district south of Damascus connected with Hamath. We may safely identify Hadrach with Hatarikka, a city north of Hamath, mentioned in an Assyrian inscription as the opponent of Tiglath-pileser III who conquered it in 738 B.C.

Damascus (v. 1) was the capital of Aram (Syria), a strong enemy of Israel for many centuries. God’s wrath will “rest,” or settle, on Damascus first.

Hamath (v. 2) was an Aramean (Syrian) city north of Damascus on the Orontes River. Tyre and Sidon (v. 2) were ancient Phoenician cities on the coastal plain, with the mountains of Lebanon on the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the west. All of these nations, including Israel, had their “eyes . . . on the Lord” (v. 1), or stood in awe at God’s judgment through Alexander the Great.

Verses 3 and 4 describe Tyre’s destruction. Tyre was an impregnable fortress that had grown rich through commerce. Silver there was as common as dust; and gold, as common as dirt—making the city self-sufficient (cf. Ezek. 28:4—5). Nevertheless, Tyre would not survive: “The Lord will cast her out; He will destroy her power in the sea” (v. 4).

Nebuchadnezzar besieged Tyre from 586–573 B.C. and eventually destroyed it. But many of the inhabitants escaped to a fortified island. Alexander scraped up the ruins of old Tyre and dumped the debris into the sea, enabling him to build a half-mile causeway so his army could attack the island. In 332 B.C. Alexander conquered the island city and burned it to the ground. The prophecies of Tyre’s destruction were fulfilled in every detail as Alexander annihilated this “power,” its riches, fleet of ships, commerce, and fortifications (cf. Ezek. 26—28).

Alexander the Great then traveled south to battle Egypt. As he advanced, he destroyed four of the five cities of Philistia: Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod (vv. 5—6). Gath was omitted from the list, since Judah had already destroyed it (2 Chr. 26:6).

Ashkelon feared attack, and rightly so, for Alexander annihilated the city’s population (v. 5). Gaza anguished over the loss of its king, especially when Alexander replaced him with a Grecian governor (v. 5). Ekron had expected Tyre to come to its aid, but this was impossible since Alexander had already destroyed it. Ashdod would become a city of mixed nationalities after its destruction (v. 6).

With their demise, God eradicated the national pride and arrogance of these four Philistine cities and their
idolatrous practices. God would “take away the blood from his mouth, and the abominations from between his teeth. But he who remains, even he shall be for our God, and shall be like a leader in Judah, and Ekron like a Jebusite” (v. 7). In other words, God would stop the practice of eating unclean animals (along with their blood) that had been sacrificed to idols. The people who survived ceased their idolatry and were absorbed into Israel. A similar absorption took place among the Jebusites after David defeated them and captured Zion.

Jerusalem Delivered

In contrast to these nations, Jerusalem would be spared. Humanly speaking, there is no good reason why Alexander should have spared Jerusalem. In fact, he was on his way to conquer the city. He had sent a messenger to Jerusalem requiring the tribute it paid to Persia be transferred to him, but the high priest refused to comply, not wanting to break his oath to Persia.

Jerusalem survived because God promised to protect the city from Alexander. Prophe sing directly through Zechariah, the Lord said, “I will camp around My house because of [against or from] the army, because of [against] him who passes by and him who returns. No more shall an oppressor pass through them, for now I have seen with My eyes” (v. 8).

Josephus’ account is fact and how much of the Middle East, but how much of Jerusalem during his conquest of the Middle East, Alexander’s marauding forces passed Jerusalem on the way to Egypt and returned via the same route without ever invading the city. Jerusalem’s deliverance can be attributed directly to God’s divine protection. The Lord promised to encamp around the city, and He did (2:5).

Ancient historian Flavius Josephus, in his Antiquities of the Jews (11.8.5–6), recorded how Jerusalem, humanly speaking, survived. As the story goes, Jaddua the high priest heard that Alexander was on his way. Overwhelmed with fear, Jaddua ordered the city to sacrifice and pray to God. That night Jaddua had a dream, which he believed was from the Lord. He dreamed that God instructed him to be courageous, decorate Jerusalem with wreaths, remove his priestly garments, and have the people dress in white. Then they were to march out of Jerusalem and welcome Alexander with open arms.

So Jaddua did just that. Josephus wrote that when Alexander saw the procession, he prostrated himself before the high priest. Alexander’s officers questioned whether he had gone insane. Alexander replied that he had seen this person in a dream, dressed as he was now, before beginning his conquest of Asia. In the dream, Alexander was told to conquer with confidence and take dominion of Persia. Alexander was escorted to Jerusalem by Jaddua. There he went to the Temple, offered sacrifices, and was shown from the book of Daniel that a Greek would swiftly destroy the Persian Empire. Alexander offered Jaddua whatever he desired. The high priest asked that Jerusalem be left to live in peace, abide by its own laws, and be exempt from paying tribute. Alexander granted the request.

Alexander the Great visited Jerusalem during his conquest of the Middle East, but how much of Josephus’ account is fact and how much is legend is uncertain. What is certain is that God kept His promise to give Jerusalem divine protection, resulting in its survival against Alexander the Great.

Jerusalem’s Destiny

Verse 8 ends with this marvelous word from the Lord: “No more shall an oppressor [taskmaster or slave driver] pass through them, for now I have seen with My eyes.” In other words, God promises to watch over the Jewish people. His “eye” has seen Jerusalem’s distress and destruction throughout the centuries, and there will come a day when He will allow it no more. Unfortunately, that day has not yet arrived.

After Alexander’s death, Jerusalem suffered at the hands of many tyrants, especially the infamous Antiochus Epiphanes (Dan. 11:21–35). Antiochus was a Syrian king who desecrated the Temple by offering a pig on the altar (168 B.C.). Then he subjugated the people ruthlessly. Titus, a Roman general, destroyed both Jerusalem and Herod’s Temple in A.D. 70.

Jesus prophesied, “Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Lk. 21:24). The “times of the Gentiles” began with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and will end at the Second Coming of the Messiah when He reclaims the earth. Then Jerusalem’s oppression by the nations of the world will be terminated. This prophecy will ultimately come to fruition when the Messiah himself protects Israel in the Millennial Kingdom.

You might ask, “Why spend so much time on the conquest of Alexander the Great?” It is important to see how Alexander’s victory prepared the Near East for the Messiah’s First Coming. Alexander encouraged his soldiers to marry women in the areas he conquered and educated them in Greek law, language, and culture. Greek became the lingua franca of the Middle East. Romans spoke Greek as a second language. Eleven of the Lord’s disciples spent much of their lives near the Sea of Galilee, around which bordered the Greek cities of the Decapolis. With Greek manuscripts in hand, the apostles spread the gospel of the Messiah to the farthest parts of a Greek-speaking world.

Thus we see another illustration of God’s sovereign hand organizing, orchestrating, and overruling in the course of history to prepare for the advent of the Messiah.

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

(Part 1)

The fact that God created the universe with this fixed order of moral law indicates that God is moral. Other factors signify that truth as well. For example, Scripture states six times that God created mankind in His own image, or likeness (Gen. 1:26–27; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas. 3:9). The fact that four of these six statements are in the first book of the Bible may indicate God’s desire to emphasize this truth at the very beginning to impress readers with the fact that mankind’s creation in the image, or likeness, of God has considerable significance.

Mankind’s creation in the image of God means He made humans to be personal and moral beings. The beings (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who constitute the Godhead are persons, possessing intellect, emotions, and will. He also created them as moral beings, responsible to Him for their conduct. Thus it is in the personal and moral senses that human beings exist in God’s image.

God’s creation of mankind in His own image is extremely significant for several reasons.

1. It indicates that people are the highest form of God’s earthly creation. Nowhere does the Bible declare that God created animals or plants in His image. It reserves that statement exclusively for humans (Gen. 1:26–27). The fact that mankind was created in God’s image, but animals and plants were not, signifies that people, by nature, are distinct from all other earthly forms of life. Humans are personal, moral beings; animals and plants are not. Thus it is mankind’s creation in the image of God that gives human beings genuine dignity and worth.

As personal, moral beings, mankind is superior to all other forms of life in God’s earthly creation. In the personal realm, mankind’s intellect is different from and superior to that of all animal and plant life. Only people can use mathematics; compose music; paint pictures; write books; discover and develop medical cures for diseases; design and build such things as airplanes, computers, telephones, space satellites, and televisions; and communicate concepts by arranging words in logical order in sentences and paragraphs.

Humanity’s uniqueness in the moral realm is seen in the fact that human beings are the only earthly creatures to whom God has revealed moral absolutes and forbidden them to violate those absolutes. The fact that God has revealed moral absolutes to humans and forbids them to violate these absolutes is another indication that God is moral.

2. Mankind’s creation in the image of God also provides the...
basis for humanity’s dominion over the earth. Genesis 1:26–27 reveals that it was in the context of God’s decision to create mankind in His own image that He determined to give humans ruling authority over all other earthly, living beings and the earth itself.

God created the entire universe, including the earth and all its forms of life, to be a universal Kingdom over which He would rule as the ultimate Sovereign or King. God created mankind to be His representative, with the responsibility to administer His rule on His behalf over the earthly province of His universal Kingdom. In order for mankind to know how God wanted that rule to be administered, humans had to be personal beings with whom God could communicate intelligently. In order for mankind to administer God’s rule in accord with His moral nature and the fixed order of moral law that He established in the universe, humans had to be morally responsible. The fact that God gave humanity dominion over all other earthly, living things on the basis of mankind being made in God’s image indicates again that God regarded mankind as distinct from and superior to all other earthly forms of life.

God brought mankind into existence by creating the first two humans and giving them sexuality: one male (Adam) and one female (Eve) (Gen. 1:26–27; 2:7, 18, 20–23). Based on their sexuality, God instituted marriage between male and female (Gen. 2:24). Many centuries later Jesus responded to a question about marriage by answering,

“Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mt. 19:4–6).

Jesus thereby asserted that the Genesis account revealed that God instituted marriage because He created human beings as male and female.

The fact that God ordained marriage because He created male and female people prompts several conclusions.

1. God—not mankind, human government, or society—is the one who created human sexuality and instituted marriage. Therefore, He alone has the authority to determine what constitutes marriage and the proper use of sexuality.

2. God intends all human sexual relationships to be male-female.

3. God intends human male-female sexual relationships to take place totally within the bonds of marriage.

4. God instituted marriage exclusively for human, male-female sexual union. He did not institute marriage for anything else.

5. Jesus’ assertion indicates that God intends marriage to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman.

When God created human beings as male and female and instituted marriage as a result, He commanded them to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:27–28). He thereby indicated that He intends (1) for the male-female sexual union within the bonds of marriage to be His means of propagating mankind throughout history and (2) that stable, male-female marriage be the foundation of society and the nurturing haven for each new generation of people.

Because God created humans in His own image as personal and moral beings, children of each generation need that stable, nurturing haven with a male father and female mother for proper intellectual, emotional, volitional, and moral development.

Genesis records the fact that, when God created mankind as male and female, He revealed the fixed, unchanging, inflexible moral order that He, the sovereign King of the universe, determined and established for human sexuality. Any deviation from that order would be a violation and perversion of what God intended and would have dire consequences for mankind.

Genesis 1:31 indicates that, after God completed the creation of His universal Kingdom, including the earth and all its plant and animal life-forms and mankind, He “saw everything that He had made”; and His evaluation was that “it was very good.” In other words, no part of God’s Kingdom had turned against Him yet. However, it did not remain that way for long.

The Tragic Change

Not long after God created them, the original man and woman made a fateful decision that would have long-range, tragic consequences for them, all of mankind, and their earthly realm. Before that decision they were favorably disposed toward God. They enjoyed fellowship with Him, voluntarily submitted to His sovereign rule as their King, and lived together as husband and wife in marriage, as God intended. As God’s earthly representative, Adam administered God’s rule over the earth in accord with God’s instructions.

But Satan introduced the idea that, if they would rebel against God’s rule, they would “be like God” (Gen. 3:5). This lie prompted the first man and woman to reject God’s rule over them and assert their own self-rule. In other words, mankind decided to exercise dominion over the earth and itself the way it would choose, not the way God intended.

That fateful decision triggered several tragic consequences, including the following: First, the first man and woman experienced a radical spiritual change internally. They lost their favorable disposition toward God and replaced it with a confirmed disposition of enmity against God and His rule. The apostle Paul described that disposition as follows:

continued on page 39
In the quest for peace and survival in the Middle East, a little history and a few questions may be to our benefit. Following Britain’s defeat of the Muslim Ottoman Turks in 1917, the Mandatory powers created by the League of Nations rested with two countries: Britain and France.

Lebanon and Syria fell to the French. Britain received a huge region that included Palestine and Mesopotamia (Iraq). Palestine, designated initially as a Jewish state-to-be, was mutilated when three-quarters of it was lopped off to create Transjordan (currently Jordan). So the Arabs received three-fourths of British Mandate Palestine. These vast territories of Iraq, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon all were given to the Arabs and are Arab states today.

Wrote historian Shmuel Katz, “Thus the great Arab nation came into sovereign possession of the whole of the huge territory between the Persian Gulf and Mediterranean, except for the sliver of land that remained for the Jewish State of Israel.”

But were the Arabs satisfied when even more territory was ceded to them in the UN plan of 1947? No. They rejected the UN partition and seized the opportunity to attack the Jewish Palestinians in the land and the emaciated and exhausted Jewish Holocaust survivors who had arrived, with the exuberant hope of wiping them out.

In a recent Jerusalem Post article, Katz, cofounder of the Herut political party with the late Menachem Begin, asked a question international leaders should be mulling over:

Why? Why? What quarrel with Israel did Egypt have, or Iraq, or Syria, or Saudi Arabia, or indeed Transjordan itself? They had no quarrel with Israel—except its very existence. Whence comes the Arabs’ unchanging, inflexible attitude to the Jewish people?3

Answer: All of the territory between the Persian Gulf and Mediterranean is, they claim, Arab property.3

Katz stated that, after the humiliating Arab defeat of 1967, the Arabs changed their strategy. They recalled the advice of the Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba who warned them in the 1950s that they would never destroy Israel in one blow and must aim at accomplishing it in phases. Thus Arab diplomacy switched from dissolution of the Jewish state to the creation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank, but with Jerusalem as its capital.4

It is patently clear that since the Arabs began following Habib Bourguiba’s slice-at-a-time counsel, their strategy has not changed. Therefore, are Israelis and their Western advisors making a huge mistake in granting unilateral concessions?

A look at the truncated 1922 version of the British Mandate shows the entire area west of the Jordan as the Jewish homeland, plus Gaza and Judea/Samaria (the West Bank). And if one contends that the 1947 repartition negates the 1922 version, one must also remember that the Arabs universally rejected the 1947 version and that their position is virtually unchanged today. Furthermore, the West Bank, which the Palestinians now claim rightfully belongs to them, was seized militarily by the Jordanians in 1948 and held until 1967 without regard for international rights.

That’s all history. Now for some questions:

1. Are Israel and its Western allies contributing to the phased Arab program to eliminate Israel?
2. Will Arab leaders view disengagement as a further triumph in their plans to have it all?
3. Will forcing Jewish people off lands they have every right to live on cool tensions?
4. Will the Arab and Muslim worlds be satisfied?
5. Will a state with a “No Jews Allowed” policy based on hatred and discrimination settle for less than everything?

You do the math. It isn’t tough.

ENDNOTES

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
This September marks the fourth anniversary of that awful day when radical Islam officially declared war on the United States by commandeering four commercial airliners and slamming three of them into prominent American buildings, killing more than 3,000 people. The fourth plane was derailed from its mission by several brave, patriotic men who went to their deaths by crashing it in a field in Pennsylvania.

Yet these Muslims, shaking their heads up and down as though they were more certain of their facts than the names of their own mothers, insisted to Mike Wallace that the individuals responsible for 9/11 were Jewish.

How do people become so abysmally deceived? How can they see irrefutable facts that point incontrovertibly in a single direction and then, contrary to all logic, turn in the opposite direction to deliberately believe a lie? Yet people do so every day, just as they have for centuries.

Jezebel is a classic example. She was a Phoenician (Sidonian) princess who witnessed obvious truth, yet blatantly rejected it because she preferred a lie. All the qualities God despises she personified: “A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies” (Prov. 6:17–19). She was so heartless and cruel that her very name has become synonymous with evil.

Jezebel gained power in Israel through her marriage to Ahab, who reigned over the northern tribes of the divided kingdom from 874 to 853 B.C. Although an able warrior, Ahab was a weak-minded, petulant, deceitful idol worshiper who ensconced the vile Canaanite deity Baal in a lavish temple he built for him in the capital city of Samaria. He saturated the land with idolatry and allowed his domineering wife to slay the prophets of Jehovah and nearly exterminate worship of the true and living God.

Scripture first mentions Jezebel in 1 Kings 16:31:

And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him [Ahab]
“The carnal mind is enmity against God,” and he indicated that it does not submit to God’s rule and is incapable of doing so (Rom. 8:7). This radical, internal, spiritual change in Adam and Eve was demonstrated by their reaction to God when He came to talk with them after their decision. For the first time since their creation, they ran and hid. They wanted nothing to do with God.

Since it was the first man and woman who experienced this spiritual change, and since humanity reproduces after its kind, each child procreated through the union of a man and a woman is conceived and born with the disposition of enmity against God and His rule. Thus David wrote, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5; cf. Ps. 58:3; Prov. 22:15; Isa. 48:8). Since this disposition of enmity against God and His rule is sin, it often is called the “sin nature.” The Bible sometimes refers to it with the noun sin (Jer. 17:1; Rom. 6:1—8:4).

Second, mankind became subject to disease, deformity, and physical death (Gen. 5; Rom. 5:12; 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:21).

Third, the woman became subject to greatly multiplied sorrow and conception, plus pain in childbirth (Gen. 3:17—19).

Fourth, the ground was cursed and began to produce thorns and thistles, making the man’s work of growing food more difficult (Gen. 3:17—19).

Fifth, all creation was subjected to vanity (Rom. 8:18—23).

Sixth, as a result of rejecting God’s intended way for dominion to be exercised over the earth, mankind began to abuse the earth’s environment.

Seventh, influenced by their disposition of enmity against God and His rule, people began to violate and pervert His fixed order of moral law.

Part 2 will examine examples of that violation and perversion.

Lorna Simcox is senior editor for The Friends of Israel.

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

ENDNOTES


3 Ibid.
Settlers’ things to be left behind

An outstanding issue in the ever-so-complicated disengagement/expulsion is what to do with the residents’ property. “Whatever we can fit into two large containers, we will take,” army Brig.-Gen. Guy Tzur told the people of Gush Katif, “and the rest we will simply leave behind.”

“Whoever stays after the date set by the government, August 15, will have some of their property packed by the army, and the rest of it will remain,” the officer said. “After the residents are taken out, whatever is on the floor [chairs, tables, etc.] we will take, and whatever is not, such as pictures on the wall and air conditioners, we will leave behind.”

Benny Yefet, whose son Itamar was murdered by Palestinian terrorists in Gush Katif almost five years ago, called out, “Sure, it would truly be a good idea to leave behind the picture of my son for his murderers who will receive my house.”

Another woman called out, “Who’s talking about air conditioners? We’re talking about something very different; we’re talking about the values that you taught our sons in the army officers’ courses, about the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.”

Anita Tucker of Netzer Hazani said they had learned there are no housing solutions for them for a month. At that, Gen. Tzur pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and began to read, “I met with Bassi, and he told me that there are solutions for everyone. There are 300 caravilot [new mobile homes of 60 and 90 square meters (72 and 107 square yards)] in Nitzanim, for instance.” He also said apartments are available.

Tucker told Arutz-7, “We told him that there are 420 people already signed up for those 300 caravilot. We told him that there was going to be a lottery for the caravilot, which means that some of those who think they have a solution, really do not! And certainly Netzer Hazani would not be able to go as one bloc, which all the experts said all along is critically important. He said that it was our fault for not meeting earlier, etc., and we told him that we had met with lots of people, and that the idea of Nitzanim had come from our representatives in the first place!”

“Gen. Tzur said that the expectation is that only 20 percent of the population will actually remain in Gush Katif by August 15, such that the problem would not be as critical as we were describing,” Tucker recounted. “We told him, ‘Wake up! Do you know how many people are here already?’”

The official population of Gush Katif is approximately 8,000, but some estimates are that close to 11,000 people, including entire high school and yeshiva classes from around the country, live there.

IDF to blow up Katif synagogues

How do you dismantle entire communities? The Defense Ministry acknowledges that one of the possibilities for the synagogues and yeshivot in Gush Katif is to blow them up.

The decision to destroy all the houses scheduled to be evacuated in Gush Katif and northern Shomron appears final. When U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Israel recently, she reached an “agreement in principle” that the Israelis would destroy the houses and then pay the Palestinian Authority (PA) to deal with the rubble. The PA, however, has apparently reneged on the deal, and Israel is negotiating with Egypt over a plan to bury the rubble—an estimated 60,000 truck-loads’ worth—in the Sinai Desert.

The army plans to bulldoze the buildings, as it did in Yamit in 1982. Bulldozing the large buildings, such as synagogues, might take too long, however, and the army is therefore likely to blow them up. Close to 30 synagogues and religious schools are at stake.

Army rabbinate officials will first catalog and remove all items from the synagogues, including holy books and possibly furniture.

Plans are also being made regarding the 48 graves in Gush Katif. Relatives of the deceased have refused to allow the exhumation of the bodies, but there is no chance the bodies will be left behind if the expulsion becomes fact.

Left-wing writer moves right

A veteran left-wing columnist wrote that he now realizes disengagement is a mistake because it will reward terrorism.

“Events from recent days raise fears that a unilateral withdrawal from Gaza is causing serious security damage to Israel,” Danny Rubenstein wrote. He added that Arabs see the planned withdrawal of the army from Gaza as proof that “Israel only understands the language of terror attacks and violence.”

Rubenstein’s comments come after weeks of warnings from several senior Israeli Defense Forces officers that Arab terror will escalate after the Jewish residents abandon their homes and turn over more than 25 Jewish communities to the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Rubenstein wrote, “There does not seem to be a solution for this at the present, and the conclusion is that embittered and angry Hamas members in Gaza will continue and even intensify terror attacks and firing at Israeli targets. Hamas doesn’t mind making the Israeli withdrawal difficult or even torpedoing it.”

Danny Rubenstein has been writing on the Israel-Arab conflict for 30 years.

Mortars still fly

Nothing Israel does keeps the Palestinians from shelling Jewish homes in and around Gush Katif.

By mid-July the total number of mortar shells fired reached 5,865, with five more people wounded, two seriously.

The Jewish town of Netiv Ha’asara, within Israel’s pre-1967 border, was one of the targets.
The Case of Ma’aleh Adumim

Did you know it’s possible to give a one-time gift to The Friends of Israel—a gift annuity—that will reap spiritual fruit among God’s Chosen People?

In addition, that same gift can increase your personal income and reduce your future tax payments.

If your heart’s desire is to invest in the Lord’s work, yet at the same time you need to make the most of your current financial resources, then you may want to consider purchasing a gift annuity from The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.

If you decide to give appreciated property, such as stock or real estate, rather than sending a check, you will pay capital gains tax on only part of the appreciation. In addition, the capital gains tax will be spread over many years, rather than all be due in the year of your gift.

Indeed, a gift annuity is a gift with benefits both lifelong and eternal, allowing you to maximize the impact of your financial stewardship. For specific details about how a gift annuity can work for you, complete the form and mail it in the return envelope in this magazine. There is absolutely no obligation on your part.

Name _____________________________________________
Address ___________________________________________
City/State/Zip______________________________________
Date of Birth (month/day/year) _______________________________ (Suggested minimum age of 60)
Name of Joint Annuitant ____________________________
Date of Birth (month/day/year) _________________________ (Suggested minimum age of 60)
Relationship to First Annuitant ______________________
Phone ( ) ______________________________________
Possible Amount of Annuity $_______________________ (Minimum annuity amount is $5,000)
Income to be paid:
☐ Quarterly  ☐ Semiannually
☐ Annually
☐ I would like a Friends of Israel representative to contact me.

Want to order pizza? Need to go to an Ace Hardware store? Or maybe you just need to withdraw money from an ATM machine before a trip to the library or mall. You can do all these things, just as you can in any thriving city, in Ma’aleh Adumim, ironically dubbed a “settlement” by the secular news media.

In April the Israeli government announced plans to build 3,500 more homes in the corridor between Jerusalem and Ma’aleh Adumim to link this bustling suburb of 32,000 residents directly to the capital city. And, of course, it is being told that doing so will impede the peace process.

Ma’aleh is located 4.5 miles east of Jerusalem in Judea (West Bank), the fruit of 23 pioneering families who moved to the dry, lifeless area inhabited by no one in 1975. By 1999 Ma’aleh Adumim, filled with stores, schools, factories, and more, opened a mall to accommodate its 25,000 residents.

Today it is a beautiful city with playgrounds, outdoor sculptures, 275 acres of green space, and magnificent views of Mount Scopus and the Mount of Olives.

Despite the world’s attempts to strip Israel of its land, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon vowed before he left for talks at the White House in April, “Ma’aleh Adumim will remain part of the state of Israel forever and ever.”
In Deuteronomy 31 it is written, “Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you” (v. 6).

Recently I was walking along the street in Jerusalem when an ultra-Orthodox man stopped me and said, "If I am not mistaken, you have been to our synagogue; and we had a long discussion at that time on a subject all of us are much against.”

So I asked him, “Who are you against?”

“You spoke about This Man, Jesus Christ,” he replied. “We had a long discussion, but we did not come to a conclusion. So, what do you think? Do you think that one day you can return to our synagogue so we can continue to speak on this matter? Because it was a very interesting conversation.”

I replied, “do you really want me to come to your synagogue and continue the discussion?”

“Yes,” he said. “We will have an open conversation, and we will see where the truth lies.”

As we spoke, two of his friends arrived. They recognized me also. “So,” asked one, “what are you up to these days?”

“I do as I always do,” I told them. “I read the Bible and try the best I can to teach others, so they will know what the Lord expects from them.”

“Can you tell us what He expects from us?” one asked.

Of course, I was happy to oblige. “He has chosen us to be His servants and to bring His salvation to the ends of the earth. Look around you. What are you doing?”

They showed me the big books they were carrying, all containing rabbinical stories that they call the Word of the Lord. By this time more people had gathered around to listen. Then still more came until the street became crowded.

“Tell me,” I asked, “what is more important for the people of Israel? To worship God according to those many rabbinical traditions or according to this Book, the Holy Bible, written according to the Holy Spirit of God?”

Everyone on the street began to reply, “According to the Holy Bible, of course!”

Most of them were far from religious, and the ultra-Orthodox realized they had little power with which to confront me because the crowd was not on their side. So one said, “We have no time to talk here. We must go to the Yeshiva to study Talmud. But we would be happy if you would come with us.”

“I am ready now!” I told them. And I went to the Yeshiva (seminary) with them. When we arrived, other ultra-Orthodox men came up to us. Now I was alone, and they were many. But I
did not fear them because I put my trust in the Lord, knowing that the Holy Spirit tells us what to say at the appropriate time.

“Now what do you have to say?” one asked, thinking I would be afraid.

So I began. “I am the same here as I was on the street,” I said. “I try to worship the Lord according to what is written in the Bible, not according to your many superstitions.”

The men were listening, and then their rabbi arrived. When he saw me, he began shouting at his pupils, “How can you listen to such a one! Let me speak to him!” Addressing me, he asked, “Do you believe in God?”

“Of course I believe in God, but according to what is written in the Bible. Not as you do. You should be a good example. But instead you teach these students falsehoods and lead them down a wrong path.” Then I read to them, from Deuteronomy 6, what is perhaps the most important passage to them in the Bible: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (vv. 4–5). The students were so happy when I read this. They knew what I told them was right and that their rabbi had lost his argument.

They realized that I do not teach the traditions of men, as he does. I teach from the Word of God. So I continued reading to them from Isaiah chapters 25, 35, and 53. Even though their rabbi was unhappy, the students listened. And when I was finished, they said, “We want you to come again.”

I pray that someday they all will come to know personally the One about whom it is written, “Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isa. 25:9).

---

**Disengagement**

Featuring articles by:
- Jimmy DeYoung
- David Dolan
- Elliot Jager
- Craig Parshall

Plus . . .
- Women of the Bible
- Christian Persecution
- David M. Levy’s Series on the Book of Zechariah
- Renald E. Showers’ Series on Doctrine (Theology Proper)
- Eye on the Middle East
- Israel in the News
- Zvi