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Martyrs or Murderers? There Is a Difference
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Religion, religion, religion. We don’t like to speak of it in the West, but it permeates every facet of everyday life for Muslims. And it determines many things, as you’ll see when you read this article.

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Jehoshaphat’s Big Mistake
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Jehoshaphat played the fool by trying to travel two roads at the same time. And the admonishment God gave him back then still applies to us today.

About This Issue
Why do bad things happen to good people?” That question has clouded the minds of the masses in the Christian world for millennia. But an equally relevant query may be, “Why do good people make bad choices?” The most often used explanation these days seems to be, “Well, we all make mistakes.” Indeed we do. However, though that may be the case, we cannot escape the consequences that inevitably follow. In this issue, our authors present clear examples of choices, consequences, and correctives in the lives of some of Israel’s best and brightest kings. Perhaps we can learn from their mistakes and, in the process, avoid making more of our own. On our cover, a woman washes clothes in the Pool of Siloam, a water reservoir constructed in Jerusalem under King Hezekiah (Ted Spiegel/Corbis).

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When Bethel Baptist Church in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, celebrated the modern State of Israel’s 60th anniversary, it went all out! The congregation staged a biblically based, three-act dramatic performance of *The Life of Moses—A Prince of Egypt, A Man of God.*

With a main cast of 26, a supporting cast of 95, and a technical team of 79 (some of whom also served in the cast), the mammoth, two-and-a-half-hour performance traced Moses’ life from his birth and bondage in Egypt to his confrontations with Pharaoh and the drama of the Exodus.

Rounding out the inspirational tribute was a series of scenes depicting the Israelites’ challenges in the wilderness in preparation for their entrance into the Promised Land.

In addition to garnering the participation of Bethel Baptist Church’s members and friends, this monumental production also attracted the involvement of many people within the Jewish community of southern New Jersey. They encouraged the folks at Bethel and provided valuable support, beginning with the initial concepts and continuing through to the details of the actual performances.

In a special news release, Alan Respler, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Southern New Jersey, said, “I warmly recommend this wonderful performance, for all ages, all people.”

According to Barbara Sharp, director of the congregation’s massive effort, “It is an honor to join in celebrating the anniversary of the State of Israel. Moses serves as our gift to the Jewish community in appreciation for the wonderful heritage that the Jewish people have given to us as Christians.”

The enthusiastic and sometimes emotional responses of the Jewish people who attended one of the eight performances over two weekends demonstrated that Barbara Sharp’s mission was definitely achieved.

Following the play, Harriet Kessler, editor of the *Jewish Community Voice* newspaper published by the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey, wrote, “Bethel Baptist Church found a glorious way to celebrate Israel’s 60th anniversary.”

Rev. David Cortner, Bethel’s senior pastor, reflected on the church’s presentation: “It’s not just to share the factual, historical story from the Word of God, but to show that it has practical application to our lives today! Our great Jehovah God who did miraculous things for Moses is the same God who loves and cares for each one of us today.”

The church’s outreach to Cherry Hill’s Jewish community can be traced back to previous years’ performances of *Joseph—God Meant It for Good,* also directed by Barbara Sharp. In joint effort with The Friends of Israel, personal invitations were extended to a number of Jewish leaders, encouraging them to experience firsthand the church’s dramatic production based on the Hebrew Scriptures. These same leaders who attended *Joseph* encouraged the Jewish community to list Bethel Baptist Church’s *Moses* as an officially supported “Israel at 60” event.

This is one of many illustrations of how Christians have been reaching out to their Jewish friends this year in response to the opportunities of “Israel at 60,” something that we at The Friends of Israel have been encouraging throughout this year. Christians have been showing up with posters like those I saw recently at a Jewish community rally for Israel in Margate, New Jersey: “Christians Support Israel at 60.” And congregations have been using their church signs to express their sentiments, as evidenced by the posting “Happy Birthday Israel” along the highway in front of Newtown Community Church in Langhorne, Pennsylvania.

Many Jewish people have noticed and dearly appreciate these efforts, which demonstrate that Bible-believing Christians are rock-solid in their support of Israel as the God-given homeland of the Jewish people. May such efforts be multiplied—over and over.

*From BILLSUTTER’S DESK*

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
British police forensic officers at work after Muslims bombed London’s subway and bus systems in 2005 (Gareth Copley/AP Photo).

Two preachers were handing out tracts in England recently when a police officer threatened to throw them in jail for committing a hate crime. “They were warned that if they came back and were beaten up [by Muslims], it would be their fault, not that of the thugs who beat them,” wrote Michael Reagan.

Reagan, eldest son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is a conservative Christian radio-talk-show host whose June 4 column, “Is This Our Future?” is making its way around the world. And for good reason. The implications of England’s actions are staggering. “Remember,” wrote Reagan on his Web site, Reagan.com, “this was not in the Middle East. It was a neighborhood in Birmingham, England, a nation whose official church is the Church of England, a Christian denomination.”

Although proponents of hate-crime legislation claim the laws are meant to protect minorities from violence, they are primarily being used—even in America—to stop Christians from preaching the gospel and sharing their Christian values.

In Boston in 2005, a large, violent mob tried to silence a Focus on the Family rally at a church. The police did nothing to stop the mayhem that resulted. But in Philadelphia in 2004, 11 Christians were arrested and thrown in jail for singing hymns and holding signs. Apparently, there is “no ‘hate’ when Christians are on the receiving end” of the trouble, wrote Concerned Women for America (CWA).

Ultimately, said CWA, hate-crime laws are designed to punish beliefs and thoughts. “All totalitarian countries employ ‘thought crime’ laws that criminalize the conscience. Now, under ‘hate crime’ laws . . . even Western nations with long traditions of freedom, such as the United States, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Sweden, are experiencing more and more challenges to basic freedoms.”

Michael Reagan said the situation in England is worse than most people realize. Muslims are repeatedly smashing church windows, and the parishioners are too scared to do anything about it: British columnist Melanie Phillips reported an attack on the Rev. Michael Ainsworth by three Muslim youths in his own East London churchyard. She wrote that it was far from the first such attack in the area. Indeed, she wrote, “There appear to have been many attacks on vicars or churches by Muslims who are clearly intent on turning east London into a no-go area for Christians.”

“On one occasion,” wrote Reagan, “youths shouted: ‘This should not be a church, this should be a mosque, you should not be here.’”

England fails to stop Muslim hate crimes that are actually violent, but police threaten two Christian preachers with jail for handing out tracts that teach the love of God.

Unfortunately, what is happening in Europe is coming to America. Reagan sounded the alarm:

The real tragedy lies in the fact that governments all over the western world are not only turning a blind eye to Muslim efforts to establish communities ruled by Sharia—Muslim law—in defiance of established national law, but are enacting laws that would punish those who place their nation’s traditional interests above those of a foreign faith. . . . The more you see the Muslim influence coming into the United States the more you are going to see Muslims demanding and getting laws defining the promotion of Christianity to Islamists as a hate crime that will get you tossed in the slammer. Don’t tell me what happened in London can’t happen here. It can and it will. It’s called Jihad, and it’s world-wide.

by Elwood McQuaid
Positive or Negative?
You Can’t Have One Without the Other

People who make their livings as editorial writers, news analysts, and commentators on contemporary trends and events are on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, society yearns for communicators who, in the words of a ditty from another era, accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. On the other hand, journalists are supposed to tell the truth.

At what point does one stop soft-pedaling the negative aspects of the world we live in? Even some professional agencies that counsel publishers of magazines, newspapers, and other media-related materials are evidencing a penchant for pleasanties rather than cold, hard facts. They consider conservative commentary to be harsh and believe some Christian publications offer excessive doses of theological application that fall outside the politically correct standards of the “me generation.”

All this, of course, is nothing new. Those conversant with the history of the Old Testament prophets can observe the pattern. There were always two groups of advisors in the courts of Israel’s kings. One was the gaggle of insiders who secured their positions with bewitching tales and prognostications of good things to come, regardless of the sullen realities that stared them in the face.

The other was the small band of pestiferous prophets who refused to play the game. They dared tell their kings the truth about the consequences of the monarchy’s actions and the future of the nations. These men were scorned as purveyors of negativism, and they were dealt with accordingly. For their trouble they were castigated, slapped around, and sometimes incarcerated in what passed for the slammer. When in their king’s presence, they were often enjoined to put on a happy face and be positive. Gloom and doom were forbidden.

In reality, the conflict was between truth and wishful thinking. Or worse, between truth and a calculated commitment to spinning the facts to secure the short-term illusion that all was well.

There was, however, a defect in the smiley-face mentality. It is the same defect that exists today: When you ignore the truth and convince the masses that nothing bad can happen, you are blindsided when the inevitable occurs.

What’s troubling about this self-indulgent, delusional, carefree culture is that it dumbs things down at the primary level and then destroys its proponents at the secondary level.

For example, we have been told recently that the problem with the English language is the English language. It’s just too hard to master. So, say the “experts,” some changes need to be made. And what are these prospective changes? Well, for starters, we must allow language proficiency to rise from the lingo of the streets and television cartoons, thus bringing usage into a more accommodating sphere. Otherwise, for heaven’s sake, language would only be valued as a tool with which to articulate thoughts clearly at a level that would generate respectability in any circle in the English-speaking world.

You may have noticed of late how many reporters and television personalities grossly violate the rules of grammar. We must ask ourselves if we finally aspire, as a society, to descend to a system of grunts, pushes, and pointing as our basic means of communication. If so, we are doomed.

The cogent point is that there is a necessity to maintain balance in presenting the facts and to offer a proper perspective of the consequences we will face if we ignore or minimize the threats to life in our time. We cannot immerse ourselves in a cult of positive belief that life is all about feeling good and being satisfied with ourselves, our circumstances, and our financial status. Incidentally, that is the palaver often peddled by some people (religious and otherwise) for their own gratification and profit.

Neither can we become fatalistic pessimists, seeing everything through a prism of catastrophic annihilation. In a world of imperfect human beings, there is good news, and there is bad news. And pleasant or not, we cannot immunize ourselves with ignorance or indifference.

We are God’s appointed stewards of the present and, above all, of the future for those who follow us. That fact translates into the lives of our children, grandchildren, and all the generations to come. If we make a wrong turn now, it will put them in serious jeopardy.

We all know that there seems to be an overload of negative events and influences assailing us. However, the situation cannot be properly addressed by criticizing the messengers. It’s the whole truth that will set us free; and, in biblical terms, we are only witnessing what we were forewarned will happen—both the positive and the negative. You can’t have one without the other!
The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.

Statement of Activities
Year Ended December 31, 2007

Changes in net assets:

Public support and revenue:

Public support:

Contributions:

- General ministry contributions ........................................ $4,373,479
- North American ministry contributions ............................... 1,143,043
- Foreign ministry contributions ............................................ 926,025
- Institute of Jewish Studies .................................................. 11,857
- Gift portion of annuities .................................................... 515,900
- Legacies ........................................................................... 1,281,186
- Gifts-in-kind ....................................................................... 17,071

Total public support ............................................................. 8,268,561

Revenue:

- Ministry publications, audio and video ............................... 1,704,596
- Conferences and special functions ...................................... 98,903
- Interest and dividends ........................................................ 102,500
- Other revenue .................................................................... 60,106

Total revenue ....................................................................... 1,866,105

Total public support and revenue ......................................... 10,234,666

Program services:

- Outreach ministries ........................................................... 4,174,566
- North American ministries ................................................ 1,517,643
- Foreign ministries ............................................................. 1,096,279
- Institute of Jewish Studies .................................................. 67,733
- Conferences and special functions ..................................... 265,569

Total program services ........................................................ 7,122,190

Supporting services:

- Management and general .................................................. 1,270,847
- Stewardship and fund raising ............................................. 365,070

Total supporting services .................................................... 1,635,917

Total program and supporting services ............................... 8,758,107

Change in net assets from operating activities ....................... 1,476,559

Other changes in net assets:

- Realized gain (loss) on investments ...................................... (4,982)
- Change in actuarial value of gift annuities and trusts ............ (21,484)

Changes in net assets ........................................................... 1,449,729

Net assets at beginning of year ............................................... 3,513,988

Net assets at end of year ....................................................... $ 4,963,717

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, 2007, was rendered on April 10, 2008, with an unqualified opinion. The above figures are taken from that report.
When the self-proclaimed mastermind of the September 11, 2001, horror, Kalid Sheik Mohammad, appeared before a military court in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, recently, he said he wanted the death sentence so he could die a martyr. “Yes,” he said, “this is what I wish. I have been looking to be a martyr from long time. I will, God willing, have this, by you. I understand very well.”

One of Mohammad’s fellow conspirators, Ramzi Binalshibh, echoed the desire. “I have been seeking martyrdom for five years. I tried for 9/11 to get a visa, and I could not. If this martyrdom happens today, I welcome it. God is great, God is great, God is great.”

Mr. Mohammad has it wrong, as do all rabid Islamists who aspire to kill themselves and as many innocent victims as they can, thinking they will reap the glories of dying as shahids (martyrs). Actually, Kalid Mohammad and his ilk are not martyrs but murderers. A martyr is a victim; a murderer is a perpetrator. And there can be no uncertainty about Kalid Mohammad’s classification.

Perhaps it would do well for us to refresh our memories concerning that day of infamy seven years ago this month that sent more than 3,000 people—Americans, foreigners, and Muslims—to their deaths. We must never forget those who left their families and headed off to a day’s work, never to return.

Some people, of course, will plead for leniency for the men who conspired to bring down the World Trade Center and Pentagon and strike a major blow against America and the West. And doubtless there will be streets and institutions named for them, ceremonies honoring them, and inscriptions in Arabic textbooks extolling them as heroes in the radical reaches of Islamist circles. And, yes, Kalid Sheik Mohammad and his companions in crime will be dubbed martyrs by their own kind. But in the civilized world, call them what they are: murderers.

Collision of Cultures

It has been well documented that there is an identifiable clash of civilizations between the democracies and militant forces in Islam. The radical Islamist obsession is to create a global caliphate (Islamic empire) that will subjugate the Western democracies while obliterating the Jewish state. Columnist

Martyrs or Murderers? There Is a Difference

Taliban and al-Qaida detainees in orange jumpsuits sit in a holding area under the watchful eyes of military police at Camp X-Ray at Naval Base Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in this 2002 photo (U.S. Navy, Shane T. McCoy/AP Photos).
Charles Krauthammer clarified the issue four years ago:

"Today there is no doubting the intentions of Arab-Islamic radicalism. . . . The intention, endlessly repeated, is the establishment of a primitive, messianic caliphate—redeeming Islam and dominating the world."

Dr. Ariel Cohen, in an article on the Heritage Foundation Web site, described the goals of global jihadists, particularly those of Hizb-ul-Tahrir al-Islami (Islamic Party of Liberation), a secretive, radical organization now in 40 countries:

"Its proclaimed goal is jihad against America and the overthrow of existing political regimes and their replacement with a Caliphate, . . . a theocratic dictatorship based on the Shari’a (religious Islamic law). The model . . . is the “righteous” Caliphate, a militaristic Islamic state that existed in the 7th and 8th centuries under Mohammad and his first four successors, known as “righteous Caliphs.”"

Although the goals of international Islamist imperialism are not difficult to define, the Western media and political establishment, as well as the general population, do not grasp them because they do not appear to present an existential threat to our existence. To many, the clash of civilizations is a benign social phenomenon, more about cultural and religious customs imported by immigrants than anything affecting real-life situations or national security.

However, there is a chillingly disturbing quality about this combative front that we can only ignore or wish away at our own peril. And the declarations of Kalid Sheik Mohammad and other 9/11 terrorists who seek “martyrdom,” especially when cast against the backdrop of the disintegrating plunge of the World Trade Center, make it personal and imperative.

The words of the late humorist and Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Art Buchwald still ring in my ears. The man who found humor in everything found nothing to laugh about on the streets of New York City that September morning, “For the first time in my life,” he remembered, “I realized that these people were out to kill me.” Death at a distance can be impersonal; but in your face, it becomes personal indeed.

**Culture of Death**

Where does one draw the line when it comes to separating Western democracies, constructed on Judeo-Christian concepts, and the world of militant, imperialistic Islam? The basic tenet of life as opposed to a love of death. A striking clarification appeared in an article written by a man named Spengler and titled “Why Israel is the world’s happiest country”:

"Envy surrounds no country on Earth like the state of Israel, and with good reason: by objective measures, Israel is the happiest nation on Earth at the 60th anniversary of its founding. It is one of the wealthiest, freest and best educated. . . . But most remarkable is that Israelis appear to love life and late death more than any other nation."

Spengler further noted that even though Israel is surrounded by Islamic forces willing to instigate suicidal attacks to destroy it, Israelis seem to love life more than any other people. Muslims are the opposite. "As much as you love life, we love death," Muslim clerics teach; the same formula is in a Palestinian textbook for second graders. . . . Arabs did not invent suicide attacks, but they have produced a population pool willing to die in order to inflict damage greater than any in history. One cannot help but conclude that Muslim clerics do not exaggerate when they express contempt for life.

Justus Reid Wiener and Michael Sussman extensively analyzed the problem of inculcated shahid indoctrination of Palestinian children:

"The idea of the shahid (martyr) has become so ingrained in Palestinian culture that it is a major theme in formal education, family values, religious practices, television broadcasting, posters, pre-suicide eulogies, trading cards, family celebrations, movies, music, games, and summer camps."

The culture-of-death syndrome is not simply a matter for intellectual investigation, to be read and shelved as an exercise for academicians; it is a manifested fact of life that can no longer be ignored. The list of examples is virtually endless. From the 1983 Marine barracks bombing in Beirut, Lebanon, to the streets of Israel; Egypt; Afghanistan; Pakistan; India; Spain; Britain; Chechnya; and regions beyond, the obsession with inflicting death at the expense of one’s own life is endemic in radical Islam.

**The Gulf Between Death and Life**

Spengler rightly observed, "It’s easy for the Jews to talk about delighting in life. They are quite sure that they are eternal, while other peoples tremble at the prospect of impending extinction. It is not their individual lives that the Jews find so pleasant, but rather the notion of a covenantal life that proceeds uninterruptedly through the generations."

And even though many Jewish people may not know the intimate details of the biblical mandates regarding their nation’s destiny, they have an inherent sense of continuity as a people. How else can one explain the urge to return to the ancient land of their ancestors against the advice of most international “friends” and all reasonable odds of survival?

The entire idea of divine association, intervention, and guidance has its roots in the Book, its Author, and its information—in other words, in religion. The Bible is a letter of life and expectations.

A few months ago I listened to TV news personalities discuss terrorism and its causes. One statement arrested my attention. The host said, rather emphatically, “Don’t bring religion into this discussion.” However, there can be no viable examination of the Islamist terror crusade against Israel and the West without bringing religion into the discussion.

Muslim clerics consistently extol the rationale for suicide attacks and the glorification of becoming a shahid. They in fact are at the basis of the appeal to kill oneself and the unsuspecting, in the name of religion, to win the spoils of martyrdom in Paradise.

Unlike what we are led to believe, the root causes for jihadist militancy are not fostered by poverty and exasperation with deprivation or by the feeling of being kept down by “occupiers” and “aggressors.” These symptoms could be alleviated by giving leaders an infusion of desire to improve the lot of their people.

The primary aggravating factor is a religious premise that demands conquest and the liquidation or subjugation of all who are regarded as infidels—thus the drive to establish a global Islamic caliphate ruled by a messiah-like potentate.

Unfortunately, most Western politicians and diplomats fail to consider the depth of commitment to radical Islam that drives terrorists to kill
It is the last day of your long-awaited vacation. And you think, I’d just love another day. Or you’re a grandparent hosting the out-of-town grandchildren. And when it’s time for them to leave, you hope for just one more day. Oh, for that extra day!

According to Jewish thinking, that is how Jewish people should feel after the seven joyous days of Sukkot are completed. Judaism actually adds two extra days to the celebration that are not really a part of Sukkot but follow immediately after it. Shemini Atzeret (“the assembly of the eighth day”) is one of those days. Through Moses, God told Israel, “On the eighth day you shall have a sacred assembly. You shall do no customary work” (Num. 29:35). In Temple days, burnt, grain, sin, and drink offerings were brought on Shemini Atzeret. Today people pray for rain, necessary for a good year. Although the day is distinct from Sukkot, many observant Jews still spend an extra day in the sukkah (see page 17).

Simchat Torah (“rejoicing in the Torah”) takes place the day after Shemini Atzeret. This year it falls on October 22. It celebrates the conclusion of the annual cycle of Torah readings that ends with Deuteronomy 34. The new cycle begins again with Genesis 1. Adults and children are honored with aliyot to the bima, meaning they ascend to the synagogue platform to read from the holy Torah. Congregants sing and dance as they carry the Torah scrolls up and down the aisles of the synagogue and people in the pews lean over to touch and kiss the scrolls passing by. It is a joyous procession displaying love and respect for the Word of God. A joyous time, indeed, as celebrants read the following: There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms (Dt. 33:26–27).

On the other hand, those who would destroy both us and our way of life do not think in such terms. They think religion, preach religion, and enforce religion as a consuming fact of their existence. For them, religion is a reason to win at any cost, even if that means deliberately confusing murder with martyrdom.

Consequently, we find ourselves in a struggle not of our own making—but a struggle nonetheless. It is a monumental conflict of cultures: a culture of life and its sanctity versus a culture of death to achieve supremacy. Unfortunately, it is a conflict we cannot talk our way out of.

Murder must be defined as what it is—in whatever guise it presents itself. And the need to understand the ramifications of the struggle between the entrepreneurs of death and the lovers of both life and the God who blessed us with it is profound; and it will determine the future.

E N D N O T E S

1 Josh White, “9/11 Architect Tells Court He Hopes for Martyrdom,” June 6, 2008 <washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/05/AR2008060500305.html>.
4 Spengler, “Why Israel is the world’s happiest country,” The Asian Times, May 13, 2008 <atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/ JE13Ak01>.
5 Ibid.
7 Spengler.

CAN YOU STAY FOR AN EXTRA DAY?

Shopping for the four species of Sukkot in Israel (Raffi Rondel /Israelimages.com).
At least 30 serious instances of persecution of Christian believers have occurred over a one-month period, reports Compass Direct News. Attacks, arrests, incarcerations, rapes, treason charges, destruction of church properties, blasphemy charges, and fines are all part and parcel of the ongoing ill-treatment Christians face in countries across the planet.

- In Algeria a believer was arrested and detained for five days for carrying a Bible and personal study books. He received a one-year suspended prison sentence and was fined $460 dollars. Since January 2008, police and provincial officials have closed up to half of Algeria’s 50 or so Protestant churches. A 2006 law governing worship by non-Muslims restricts most religious meetings to approved places and forbids any attempts to “shake the faith of a Muslim.”

- In Bangladesh a pastor reported that Muslim villagers attempting to force him to leave the area gang-raped his 13-year-old daughter. Then the rapists left the girl unconscious in front of his house. The pastor had been receiving death threats from men in the village who objected to his preaching and pastoral activities. “When nothing stopped me,” he said, “then they wanted to leave me scarred for life, so that I would be upset and not able to show my face to the society for shame, and therefore I would leave the village,” Compass Direct reported.

- In Eritrea unconfirmed reports indicate that the repressive regime in this African country plans to press formal charges of treason against three prominent Protestant pastors who have been jailed for the past four years. Conviction carries a death penalty. Compass Direct said the three “have been missing within the Eritrean prison system since their arrests in May of 2004.”

- In Karnataka, India, police arrested a pastor on charges of luring Hindu villagers to convert to Christianity. The Global Council of Christian Churches said about 15 Hindu extremists stormed the Assembly of God Church; cursed at the Christians; ripped up their hymnals and Bibles; and dragged the pastor to the police station, beating him along the way. At the station, he was falsely accused of forcing Hindus to convert.

- In Nigeria Christian sources reported that a mob of paramilitary Islamists destroyed six churches to protest a police rescue of two teenage Christian girls whom Muslims had kidnapped with the intent of marrying them to Muslim men. Following the rescue, Muslims under the Hisbah Command, a paramilitary arm of Kano State’s Sharia Commission, went on a rampage attacking Christians and setting fire to churches, Compass Direct reported. One pastor reported damage to his church amounting to an estimated $112,000. But even more disturbing was that, following the attack, his congregation of 130 shrank to some 40 people.

- In Turkey most of the Christians in that tiny community of believers were formerly Islamic. Several months ago, three armed men approached a church, threatening to “get rid” of the pastor. It was the seventh such incident reported in Ankara in the four months preceding the encounter. “Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also” (Heb. 13:3).
Today we live in what Jesus referred to as the “times of the Gentiles” (Lk. 21:24). The entire world lies under Gentile domination and has done so since the Babylonians destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem and carried the Israelites into captivity in 586 B.C. But Gentiles will not dominate the world forever. Scripture is clear that God has a future for Israel, and it will be glorious. Three prophecies summarize Israel’s future Kingdom.

**Times of the Gentiles**

1. **Daniel’s Five Kingdoms.** In the book of Daniel God summarized future world history through Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Daniel’s vision. In Daniel 7, four beasts come out of the sea. The first is like a lion; the second, like a bear; the third, like a leopard.

   The fourth, however, is different. It is grotesque, “dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet” (v. 7). Daniel was told that these four destructive beasts represent four major Gentile kingdoms. The prophet’s vision expanded on the dream Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar had in Daniel 2.

   Nebuchadnezzar saw a statue. Its head of gold represented Babylon, corresponding to the lion in Daniel’s vision. Its chest and arms of silver represented Medo-Persia, corresponding to the bear. The statue’s bronze belly and thighs represented Greece, corresponding to the leopard. And the legs of iron and feet of iron and clay represented the Roman Empire, corresponding to the grotesque beast.

   In Daniel 2, a stone “cut out without hands” strikes the statue and destroys it:

   > You [Nebuchadnezzar] watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

   And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever (v. 34–35, 44).

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The stone is the eternal, heavenly Kingdom, presented in Daniel’s vision to the “One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!” (7:13). He receives the Kingdom for the saints of the Highest One:

Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed (v. 14).

So the Gentiles are represented by four kingdoms, followed by the Messiah’s Kingdom that is obviously Jewish. Clearly, Daniel understood that God was prophesying that four major world kingdoms would be followed by a heavenly Kingdom that would destroy all the Gentile kingdoms and encompass the entire earth.

Jesus Confirms Daniel

Today many argue that Daniel’s prophecy was scuttled by Israel’s rejection of its Messiah. But they are wrong. Daniel 9:26 actually includes a reference to the Messiah’s crucifixion: “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.” Furthermore, Jesus actually reaffirmed Daniel’s prophecy. It is no accident that in Matthew 24, at the request of His disciples, Jesus laid out Israel’s future. When they asked Him, “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” He explained what lies ahead (Mt. 24:4–31).

2. Jesus’ Olivet Discourse.

In Matthew 24 Jesus elaborated on Daniel 9:24–27, where the angel Gabriel told Daniel, “Seventy weeks [literally, seventy groups of seven] are determined for your people and for your holy city” (v. 24). Each “week” is composed of seven years. When Jesus spoke on Mount Olivet, He stood between the end of the 69th week and the “cutting off” of the Messiah. It was now merely two or three days before Jesus’ death. He certainly knew that Israel had rejected Him and that He would return to build His church.

In Matthew 23, Jesus had castigated the Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees for their rebellion against Him. Now, addressing His Jewish disciples who asked, “What’s the sign of Your coming?” He elaborated on the remaining week (70th week) of Daniel’s prophecy.

This would have been the time for Him to say, “Men, I want you to understand something. There is no future Kingdom for Israel.” Instead, He explained the future to them. Though He had been preparing them for the mystery form of the Kingdom for a year, He now reverted to Israel’s Kingdom program and what will happen.

The 70th week is divided in half by the breaking of a covenant and the Abomination of Desolation. Jesus said there will be “wars and rumors of wars” (24:8). These will occur during the first half of the 70th week, also called the Tribulation. Then will come “famines, pestilences, and earthquakes” (v. 7). These constitute the beginning of birth pangs. There will be tribulation and persecution. Lawlessness will increase, and the gospel of the Kingdom will be preached (vv. 9–14).

Yet it is not the end. It’s only the beginning of the end. Then, Jesus said, “When you see the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet,” flee to the mountains because things will get a whole lot worse (v. 15). Much greater tribulation, “such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time,” will follow (v. 21). False christs (messiahs) will be everywhere. Then the sun will grow dark and the “sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven” (v. 30).

Perhaps the sign will be akin to the glory of God that appeared to Moses in the burning bush or to Abraham in the Chaldees. All we know is that it will be clear indeed that the Son of Man is coming. Jesus then said that the Son of Man will descend to this earth and establish His Millennial Kingdom. Throughout the remainder of the Discourse, Jesus warned His disciples to watch and be alert.

Thus, mere hours before His death, Jesus clearly reaffirmed Daniel’s prophecy that the Kingdom will come to the nation of Israel.

Paul Confirms Israel’s Future

Twenty-five years after Jesus’ prophecy and well after the establishment of the church, the apostle Paul confirmed the future of Israel’s Kingdom. Though the apostle to the Gentiles did not focus primarily on eschatological issues (as did John in Revelation), he did affirm the centrality of Israel in God’s program and the future of its Kingdom.


In Romans 11 Paul likened Israel to the root of a cultivated olive tree whose branches were broken off due to unbelief. Then branches from a wild olive tree (Gentiles) were grafted in. However, a day is coming, Paul wrote, when the natural branches will be grafted back into its root. “Do not boast against the branches,” he told the Gentile believers in Rome. “Remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you” (v. 18). “Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved” (vv. 25–26).

Paul taught that the Kingdom will come to the nation of Israel. The Jews are still God’s Chosen People. There is still a future for them. Israel is still the “apple of His eye” (Zech. 2:8). We Gentiles have been grafted in through the church. But one day the church program will end, and God will begin to work with the nation of Israel again. And so God’s Chosen People will be restored to their covenants.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God told Israel, “Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs” (61:7).

Meanwhile, we must pray for the peace of Israel. We are outsiders who have been adopted into God’s family. So we must pray for the Jewish people around us.

Second, we must share Jesus’ love with them. And third, we must thank God for all the blessings we enjoy because of what He has done through the nation of Israel. Israel’s Messiah is our Savior; and someday, as His Bride, we will reign with Him in a Jewish Kingdom that will have no end.

by Richard D. Emmons, senior professor of Bible and doctrine at Philadelphia Biblical University and senior pastor of Bible Baptist Church, Hamilton Township, New Jersey.
For better or for worse, one of the best-known accounts in the Old Testament is that of David and Bathsheba. It is the history of the great king of Israel who, at the height of his power and blessing, committed adultery and murder. Ultimately, however, it is the revelation of God’s faithfulness to His promises: how He dealt with David, a man after His own heart, and how He deals with us.

The Deed

The complexity of David’s sin developed from his attempts to cover it up. Bathsheba was married to Uriah, one of King David’s mighty men, when David committed adultery with her and she became pregnant. His calling Uriah home from battle in order to persuade him to stay with Bathsheba only compounded David’s deceitfulness. When Uriah refused to visit his wife even after David got him drunk, the Hittite turned out to be more honorable than the king (2 Sam. 11:13). (Notice the emphasis on the words the Hittite: vv. 3, 6, 17, 21, 24; 12:9–10.)

So David engineered Uriah’s death at the hands of the Ammonites (11:14–17). After David married the widowed Bathsheba and their son was born, it seemed as if the matter were settled.

But though David was the anointed king, God was the true King of Israel, to whom David was accountable under the Law. The question then became, “What will God do with David, an adulterer and murderer, a man worthy of death?”

The Discipline

Nathan the prophet told David a story about a rich man who took a poor man’s lamb, at which David angrily decreed, “The man who has done this shall surely die!” (12:5).

Nathan then declared, “You are the man!” (v. 7). Confronted with his guilt, David realized he should be executed. But Nathan pronounced the Word of the Lord: “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (v. 13).
How could this be? Wasn’t Saul rejected from being king because of disobedience (1 Sam. 15:20–31)? David, however, was neither executed nor rejected. Why? Because of the promise the Lord made to him, recorded in 2 Samuel 7, termed the Davidic Covenant. There God promised David a dynasty forever and vowed not to remove the kingship from him or his descendants if they sinned, as He removed it from Saul.

God promised that His loving-kindness (Hebrew, chesed: “loyal covenant love”) would never depart from David. Rather, He would discipline him as a father would a son:

“My mercy shall not depart ... as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:15–16).

As David recounted in Psalm 51:1, he was forgiven because of God’s mercy, love (chesed), and compassion.

God was faithful to His promise concerning the Davidic dynasty, but the consequences of David’s sin were heartbreaking. First, the son born from his illicit relationship with Bathsheba died.

Second, conflict arose in David’s family. Amnon, David’s firstborn and heir to the throne, raped his half-sister, Tamar. Absalom, her brother, avenged Tamar by murdering Amnon (2 Sam. 3:2; 13:1–39).

Third, Absalom turned the Israelites against David and briefly became king before being killed by the commander of David’s army, against David’s wishes. David’s pain on learning of Absalom’s death is a heart-wrenching portrayal of the horrible consequences of sin: “O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!” (18:33).

But out of this discipline came hope. After David and Bathsheba’s son died, a second was born to them: Solomon. “Now the Lord loved him [Solomon], and He sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord” (12:24–25). Jedidiah means “beloved of the Lord.”

Even as God was disciplining David through his sons, He was also raising up a descendant of David who would be the greatest King of Israel, just as He promised (7:12).

**The Depth of God’s Forgiveness**

God is faithful to His promises. The history of David and the nation of Israel testifies to God’s faithfulness to His people despite their unfaithfulness. As the apostle Paul said after Christ’s
crucifixion, “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Rom. 11:2, 29).

This statement refers not merely to God’s promises to Israel in the Abrahamic Covenant; it also refers to God’s promise to David that his house and “kingdom shall be established forever” and that his “throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16), which will be fulfilled in the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the promise we pray in the Lord’s Prayer when we say, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10).

The account of David and Bathsheba also has great personal application. Believers in Jesus Christ partake in the New Covenant, which means, as Paul wrote, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). Christ has paid the penalty for sin so that those in Christ by faith are righteous in God’s sight, despite their present sinfulness: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (6:23).

But just as the second part of this verse is true concerning eternal life, the first part of this verse is also true: Sin pays out in death. Yet as we saw in David, believers do not receive the punishment they deserve for sin. However, although their sin and guilt are forgiven, the consequences of that sin can be devastating.

Yet after sin, discipline, repentance, and forgiveness, there is restoration. God’s discipline is that of a good Father and is always remedial, not punitive. His grace does not teach that sin is to be taken lightly; rather, it demonstrates the depth of what it means that Christ died for the ungodly—that He died for us.

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“If freedom is right and tyranny is wrong, why should those who believe in freedom treat it as if it were a roll of bologna to be bartered a slice at a time?”

—Jesse Helms, in a 1959 editorial. The conservative, five-term U.S. senator from North Carolina died July 4 at the age of 86.

“I’d rather have the slingshot of God than the sword of Goliath.”

—Adrian Rogers, the late pastor, Bible teacher, and founder of Love Worth Finding Ministries.
Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days to the LORD’” (Lev. 23:33–34).

Sukkot, or Tabernacles, begins this year on October 13 at sundown, five days after Yom Kippur, and commemorates God’s provision and protection of the Jewish people during their 40-year trek through the wilderness. Those years followed their redemption from bondage in Egypt and the receiving of the Law at Sinai.

Tabernacles, along with Unleavened Bread and Pentecost (Feast of Weeks), compose the three pilgrim feasts that require all Jewish males to appear before God with an offering (Dt. 16:16) and to abstain from work. Specific offerings were also required (Lev. 23:36–37).

For Sukkot, Jewish people around the world camp out in temporary booths (sukkahs) for seven days to identify with their forefathers and remember God’s provision (23:42). It is a time to celebrate God’s dwelling (“tabernacling”) with His people.

Tabernacles also celebrates the final harvest of the year, providing an opportunity to thank God for sending the rain that watered the crops. Each person waves a lulav (bundle of palm and other branches) and an etrog (citron, or lemon) before the Lord during synagogue services.

In the days of the Temple, the people would make a procession around the altar once a day for six days and offer a series of prayers, each ending with the Hoshanah (“please save” or “save now”). On the seventh day, they walked around seven times. They were to walk in every direction—north, south, east, and west—to demonstrate that God provided the harvest collected from everywhere.

Since the Feast of Tabernacles is so obviously Jewish, you might wonder what significance it could have for Christians today.

First, we are told in John’s Gospel, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). God’s presence came in the incarnated Messiah who was present with His people. He was Immanuel, Hebrew for “God with us.”

Second, the prayer “please save” or “save now” has already been answered: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). The cry for salvation at Tabernacles is heard and answered through Jesus the Messiah, for He came to “save His people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21).

Third, the prophet Zechariah tells us that in the future Messianic Kingdom, “ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (emphasis added, Zech. 8:23). Christ is coming back to tabernacle with His people. Every eye shall see Him, and we will worship Him together.

When Jewish people celebrate Sukkot this year, let us take the time to thank God for His provision in earthly things, for He is our Provider. And take time to thank Him for His ancient people, for it is through them that our salvation is here.
No man can serve two masters, especially when one of them is supposed to be the Lord.

The First Commandment proclaims, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3). To that end, God’s Word provides instructions to light our paths and help us live. One of those instructions for believers is not to be unequally yoked with those who do not love the Lord.

King Solomon failed to heed this admonition, and it caused him and his descendants no end of problems. His choice affected the Jewish people profoundly and resulted, after his death, in the demise of the Israelites’ united kingdom.

Scripture traces Solomon’s fall from the Lord to his involvement with foreign women:

King Solomon loved many foreign women . . . from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these [wo-men] in love (1 Ki. 11:1–2).

Yet it wasn’t always so. Solomon began well. When the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Ask! What shall I give you?” Solomon responded admirably. He did not request long life, wealth, or the death of his enemies. Instead, he asked, “Give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” (3:5, 9).

Solomon asked for wisdom. His request pleased God, and...
the Lord gave him not only wisdom but also riches and honor, making him unrivaled among the kings of his day (v. 13).

Solomon was wise indeed. But he willfully forsook that wisdom and married heathen women whose pluralistic values overrode his love for God. His house became divided, his loyalties split, and ultimately “his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God. . . . For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord” (11:4–6).

Most of those women were probably given to Solomon through peace treaties with heathen nations. Rather than trusting God to protect Israel, Solomon forged alliances.

Because of Solomon’s disobedience, his throne will never be established, like that of his father, David. There is no direct descent from Solomon to Israel’s Messiah.

The legal messianic line, recorded in Matthew 1, establishes the right to rule through Solomon’s descendant Joseph, Jesus’ stepfather. But the Messiah’s bloodline through His mother, recorded in Luke 3, sidesteps Solomon and goes from King David to David’s son Nathan (1 Chr. 3:5; cf. Lk. 3:31). In the future, when Messiah Jesus rules, He will sit on David’s throne, not on Solomon’s, because of Solomon’s failure to keep his heart loyal to God.

Solomon’s sin also opened the floodgates to a problem that would hound the Israelites for hundreds of years: idolatry. It was Solomon who first introduced false religion into Jerusalem. This besetting sin would eventually shatter the united kingdom and lead the Israelites into captivity.

But perhaps the biggest irony of all is that the man who was blessed with such great wisdom, the man who built the first Temple to the Lord, is the one who also built temples for all his wives to worship their false deities. The Bible states, “No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other” (Lk. 16:13).

Our world today is replete with those who profess faith in Jesus but seek to dilute His Word, His authority, and His authenticity. Believers, however, should not heed their words but remain steadfast and unmovable, serving God alone.

Frances R. Havergal had it right when she wrote “Like a River Glorious” in 1876. Her timeless hymn declares, “Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest/ Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.”
Like most people who grow up in Bible-believing homes, my earliest memories revolve around church. I grew up in a family whose history was distinctly linked with loving the Lord and His Word and attending worship services regularly.

Sometimes I’d have questions about a Sunday school lesson or a message. When that occurred, I knew exactly whom to go to: Nelson Bettinger. He and his wife, Dorothy, had served the Lord for many years as missionaries. Mr. Bettinger taught the men’s Bible class at church, and his wife taught the women. They knew the Word, loved the Lord, and always had time for a young boy and his questions.

As I grew older, the Lord provided other godly influences, like my loving and wise pastor, John Goodhart, and Mr. and Mrs. Earl Emmons. As with the Bettingers, Earl taught the men, and Jean ministered to the women. Both of them loved the Lord and always made time for me.

In these saints, I had a treasure trove of biblical knowledge and wisdom that would have taken many years to acquire on my own. Such mentoring is exactly what the Lord had in mind when the apostle Paul instructed his protégé Titus that “older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience” (Tit. 2:2). Wise, mature believers need to instruct the young and immature. This principle affects all areas of life. Heeding the voice
of wisdom and experience can prevent much heartache.

King Solomon’s son Rehoboam should have known all these things and heeded the advice of the men who had counseled his father. But he chose instead to listen to his peers, and the cost to both him and his kingdom was enormous.

Scripture says, “Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king. And the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy’” (1 Ki. 12:1, 3–4).

Taxes are nothing new. Solomon had taxed his people heavily to build his palace, the Temple, and the many cities he established for Israel’s protection. As his kingdom grew, the monetary burden increased; and the people felt they needed a break.

So they implored their new king, “Now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you” (v. 4). They asked for relief and promised their unflinching loyalty in return.

“Depart for three days, then come back to me,” Rehoboam told them (v. 5). He wanted time to consider the situation. He showed some wisdom here in taking time before answering his subjects. He then “consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, ‘How do you advise me to answer these people?’” (v. 6).

Rehoboam first went to the advisors of the previous administration and requested their input. They advised him, “Be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever” (v. 7).

However, Rehoboam “rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him” (v. 8). In other words, he went to his buddies. He did not really consider the wisdom of his elders.

His young friends told him to increase the tax burden, not lessen it. Rehoboam took this extremely bad advice, which infuriated 10 of the 12 tribes and led to their rebellion against his authority. To make matters worse, he unwisely dispatched Adoram, the revenue man, to collect taxes from the rebelling tribes. The result? They “stoned him [Adoram] with stones, and he died” (v. 18).

And thus ended the united kingdom over which Saul, David, and Solomon had presided. For the next 209 years (931 B.C.-722 B.C.) there would be a northern kingdom called Israel, composed of 10 tribes; and for the next 345 years (931 B.C.-586 B.C.) there would be a southern kingdom called Judah, composed of two tribes. All of Jewish history changed with Rehoboam’s bad decision.

Of course, the Lord foretold the division of the kingdom through the prophet Ahijah (11:29–36). So God tore the kingdom from Solomon’s son because Solomon became an idol worshiper. And God used Rehoboam’s foolishness to get the job done.

Although most bad decisions don’t result in the division of a kingdom, they can still ruin your life. Young people should not only seek but also heed godly wisdom and instruction from their spiritual elders. Even today I think back on the choices I’ve made and realize the great blessing I received by having Pastor John, the Bettingers, and the Emmonses in my life.
History and literature often speak of the “seven deadly sins”: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride. The Bible also lists seven sins and calls them “an abomination” to God: “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, and one who sows discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:16–19). Common to both lists is pride. It can infect believers and unbelievers alike, and it turned good King Uzziah into a leper.

Pride is defined as “having an excessively high opinion of oneself or one’s importance.”¹ The Bible simply states, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (16:18). Pride has shipwrecked many, even some who truly loved the Lord—like Uzziah, a king of Judah.

Uzziah (also called Azariah) was 16 when he became king, and he reigned for 52 years, doing “what was right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Ki. 15:2–3). He “sought God . . . [and] God made him prosperous. So his fame spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong” (2 Chr. 26:5, 15). Then “his heart was lifted up” with pride (v. 16).

Uzziah’s pride led to a transgression so grievous that even the priests became afraid and tried to stop it. For some unstated reason, Uzziah overstepped his authority and entered the Temple of the Most High God to offer incense on the altar. After somehow securing a censer, the king quickly crossed into a priestly area of service that was strictly forbidden him by the Mosaic Law.

So often during times of tremendous blessing, conceit rears its head. It appears Uzziah forgot God’s restrictions and began relying on his own strength. Pride can often make a person careless, egotistical, and bold.

God had set up specific areas of responsibility and service. And it was against His Law for someone to trespass into an area that was not assigned to him. Uzziah’s trespass was particularly bad because he merged two offices that were never to be combined: king and priest.

Ancient Israel had three anointed offices: prophet, priest, and king. The word anoint simply implies being set apart for special service. Each anointed office had specific responsibilities under the Law. Prophets declared God’s Word to the people; they faced the nation and declared, “Thus saith the Lord!”

Priests faced the Lord for the nation. As the people heard a prophet’s message from God, their hearts were to become broken and repentant. Their brokenness and sorrow were communicated to God through the priests. The priests were responsible for the sacrifices, offerings, festivals, and the Temple itself.
The king was God’s ruler. He was to “write for himself” a copy of God’s Law, “that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren,” and was to rule under God’s authority (Dt. 17:18, 20).

These three anointed offices were never to be united in one person. A man could be a priest and prophet, as Samuel was. Or he could be a king and prophet, as David was. But the offices of priest and king were to remain separate.

The king held temporal authority; the priest had spiritual authority. To unite those offices in a sinful human being would have given that individual absolute control over the nation. Only one person will ever unite those two offices; and He actually will unite all three. Jesus, the sinless Messiah of Israel, will be Prophet, Priest, and King.

As soon as Uzziah crossed the line of his God-given authority, “Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the Lord—valiant men. And they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, ‘It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests. . . . Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed!’” (2 Chr. 26:17–18).

The Bible declares, “Then Uzziah became furious. . . . And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead” (v. 19). Right there in the Temple, God judged him.

So they thrust him out of that place [the Temple]. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord (vv. 20–21).

Often people feel led to do something for God. But in our enthusiasm we must still remember that God will never encourage anyone to do anything contrary to His Word. Uzziah may have felt led to offer incense, but it was not the Lord leading him.

Pride can take us down a lonely road. The Bible admonishes us to shun pride and to remember always, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

The Most Sacred Day

The most sacred day in the Jewish High Holy Days observance is Yom Kippur. Held in the fall, it is the sixth of the seven observances recorded in Leviticus 23. The words Yom Kippur mean “day of covering, or atonement.”

Although many customs are associated with Yom Kippur, a 24-hour fast is probably the main feature. The rabbis say fasting makes one like the angels who do not require food so that God can see piety in action. This year Yom Kippur will begin at sunset on October 8.

Some traditional practicing Jewish men wear a kittel (long, white robe). It is meant to symbolize their innocence from sin and represent a burial shroud to remind all to repent before the day of one’s death.

A Yom Kippur ritual that started in the Middle Ages involves waving a chicken (or hen for a female) over the head of the repentant sinner. The chicken is then slain with a prayer that God will accept the blood as atonement for sin. The tradition, called schlug kapporos, is not widely practiced today. But many who live in the Orthodox section of Jerusalem, called Mea Shearim, practice it faithfully.

During the biblical period, Yom Kippur was viewed as an extraordinary occasion. First, it was a day of substitution. Perfect bullocks and goats were selected to die for sin in place of the individual and the nation (Lev. 16:3, 5). This function prefigured what Jesus came to Earth to become: our substitute.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ [Messiah] died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

Second, Yom Kippur was a day of sacrifice. The animals were slain at the great altar, and the high priest sprinkled the blood on the Mercy Seat in the Temple’s Holy of Holies (Lev. 16:6, 15). Jesus was our Sacrifice, “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14).

Finally, Yom Kippur was a day of the scapegoat. A goat was led from the camp to symbolize the carrying away of the people’s sins (Lev. 16:21–22). Like the scapegoat, Jesus, in His death and resurrection, removed the sin of the world: “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”’ (Jn. 1:29).

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? . . . But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins . . . He [God] takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Heb. 10:1–2, 4, 9–10).

Today anyone who comes to Jesus by faith and asks Him to remove their sin with His blood can receive God’s gift of eternal life: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (Jn. 3:16–17).

by Peter Colón, Southeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.
Twenty-three months in jail, millions in lost salary and endorsements, and the possible end of a gifted career for Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick, all because he chose to sponsor dogfighting. Choices. We make them every day. Hundreds of them. Big ones and little ones. What to wear. What to eat. To smile, to frown. To praise, to grumble. To love, to hate. To accept responsibility or make excuses. Life is about choices. Good choices bring joy and blessing. Poor choices bring grief.

The poor choices of Judah’s fifth king epitomize the self-destruction of Israel’s monarchy. Despite great potential and positive legacy, Jehoram’s poor choices and negative influences destined him to obscurity. Though he led his nation for eight years, he died “to no one’s sorrow” and was not even buried in the tombs of the kings (2 Chr. 21:20).

Good Potential

Jehoram had much potential. The eldest of King Jehoshaphat’s seven sons, he had lived through his father’s good reign. King at 32, he was old enough to remember his grandfather, good King Asa. Though not perfect in their devotion, both kings had gained Yahweh’s approval. Jehoshaphat “walked in the way of his father Asa, and did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the LORD” (20:32). Two great examples. What more could a man ask?

The prophets had communicated the success principle clearly:

Azariah: “Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you” (15:2).

Hanani: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him” (16:9).

Jehaziel: “Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and...”
you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: ‘Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God’s’” (20:15).

Their message is still true: Choosing God and His ways enables Him to protect and bless us.

Jehoram had the benefit of prophetic instruction, his father’s and grandfather’s experiences, the priests’ counsel, and his own maturity. He was not a child. The kings’ chronicles and God’s Law were available. He was abundantly blessed and perfectly positioned.

You, too, have all the potential and resources needed for what God intends you to accomplish. Why not make a list of all that God has provided? Are you choosing His way in every choice you make?

**Bad Choices**

Spoiled by his father, Jehoram regarded his God-given position as his own possession. He and his brothers had all received “great gifts of silver and gold and precious things, with fortified cities in Judah” (21:3). There is nothing inherently wrong with expensive gifts (God sent Messiah Jesus to die for us so we could receive the gift of eternal life). But, accustomed to having many expensive things, the sons lived off the perks of their father’s office.

Jehoram saw himself as a king to be served rather than as a servant to lead his people in pursuit of God. He neglected Moses’ instruction:

> Also it shall be, when he [the king] sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand...
or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel (Dt. 17:18–20).

The father’s poor choice to spoil his son infected Jehoram, who missed the opportunity to serve God’s people. Unfortunately, one bad choice often leads to another. Jehoram chose the world’s wisdom rather than trusting God for his throne. Once secure, he killed all six of his brothers and any royal cousins who might have posed a threat to him. Murdering one’s family was certainly not God’s way. Unlike King Solomon’s brother Adonijah (1 Ki. 1—2), Jehoram’s brothers had done nothing to deserve such treatment. The “eyes of the LORD” did not miss his ungodly methods.

Jehoram’s wife was another bad choice. Athaliah was the sister of King Joram of Israel and the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Jehoshaphat had experienced God’s miraculous delivery from Edom, but Jehoram seemed oblivious to what God had done. Edom continued to rebel throughout his reign because he did not return to the Lord.

Libnah also rebelled against Jehoram “because he had forsaken the Lord God of his fathers” (v. 10). This was a personal rebuke. Well-fortified but defeated by Joshua’s forces (Josh. 10:29–30), Libnah had been given to Aaron’s sons as one of their 13 Levitical cities (21:13). Rather than accept this direct reprimand by the priests, Jehoram multiplied his sin: “Moreover he made high places in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers and to their 13 Levitical cities and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit harlotry, and led Judah astray” (2 Chr. 21:11).

Jehoram understood less and less about how a Davidic king should succeed. Nine hundred years later, a Pharisee who came out of the same spiritual darkness into God’s light described it this way: “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:21–22).

Elijah sent a letter rebuking Jehoram for his ungodly decisions. Elijah ministered mostly in the northern kingdom, confronting Ahab and Jezebel. His letter chastised Jehoram for following their ways instead of those of his own fathers. The prophet announced God’s judgment: “Behold, the LORD will strike your people with a serious affliction—your children, your wives, and all your possessions; and you will become very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day” (2 Chr. 21:14–15).

What horrible news! Yet there was no regret or repentance. It is never too late to repent of bad decisions. But Jehoram refused to seek the Lord.

True to His Word, God incited an invasion of Philistines from the west and Arabs from the south. Together they “carried away all the possessions that were found in the king’s house, and also his sons and his wives, so that there was not a son left to him except Jehoahaz [also called Ahaziah], the youngest of his sons” (v. 17).

Stripped of all his possessions, the unrepentant king was then stripped of his dignity. He was inflicted with a bowel disease that grew progressively more painful and disgusting until, two years later, his intestines came out of his body and he died in great pain. “For the wages of sin is death” in more ways than one (Rom. 6:23).

Sadly, Scripture says “his people made no burning for him, like the burning for his fathers” (2 Chr. 21:19). Burning great piles of spices created a sweet aroma in memory of some of the kings; the greater the memory of some of the kings; the greater the fire (Jer. 34:5). There was no fire for Jehoram. Denied a royal funeral, he was buried in an ordinary grave, not in the tombs of the kings.

Six hundred years earlier Moses said, “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them” (Dt. 30:19–20).

Jehoram chose poorly. Not every hardship is God’s chastening; but poor choices bring hard times, which should cause us to reflect on our ways. Rejecting spiritual light exacerbates spiritual density. Poor choices beget poor choices. Avoid that road. Jehoram departed—to no one’s sorrow.
often it seems that the good kings of Judah had bad sons, and the bad kings had good sons. Most noteworthy of this perplexing phenomenon were good King Hezekiah—undeniably one of the most spiritually virile of all the kings who ruled Judah—and his son Manasseh, who ruled longer than any other Judean king and was the most wicked of them all.

Ironically, Manasseh was born after the Lord had extended Hezekiah’s days. When the Lord told Hezekiah it was time for him to die, the king begged for more years (2 Ki. 20:1–11). Ministering to him during his reign was none other than the distinguished prophet Isaiah who told Hezekiah the Lord would add 15 years to his life.

Sometimes our prayers can be wrong, and so it would seem in this case. Wicked Manasseh chose a course diametrically opposed to that of his father. Other strange happenings in his life and reign command our attention and warn us that the inner peril is sometimes more dangerous than the outer foe.

A Stellar Course

Becoming king at age 25, Hezekiah ruled for 29 years; and it was said of him at the outset, “He did what was right in the sight of the LORD” (18:3). He was zealous in challenging the idolatry that enveloped Judah at the time and broke in pieces the brazen serpent Moses had lifted up in the wilderness because people were worshiping it (v. 4). Sixteenth-century theologian John Calvin argued that the human heart is an idol factory that easily seduces people into the worship of even a meaningful artifact from a bygone era.

Truly, Hezekiah “trusted in the LORD God of Israel” to a degree unequaled by any king who preceded or followed him (v. 5). “He held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him” (v. 6). And God’s hand upheld His servant in conflicts with those who sought to harm His people (v. 8).

A Glorious Revival

When Hezekiah mounted the throne, spiritual life was at a low ebb in Judah. The lights were even out in the Temple (2 Chr. 29:7). So he issued a clarion call to his generation to rise up and cleanse the defiled and desolate House of God.

It took days to carry out the accumulated rubbish. Worship was restored, and “the song of the LORD also began” (v. 27). His summons to consecration was heeded because “God had prepared the people, since the events took place so suddenly” (v. 36). Temple personnel could not handle the volume of sacrifices being offered. The revival was a beautiful visit of God to His ancient people. How we need such today!

Hezekiah even invited the northern 10 tribes (now in grave danger of the Assyrian invasion) to come to a special Passover observance (30:5). Such a grand celebration had not been seen since the days of King Solomon (v. 26). It was a time of affluence and abundance. In all of this, Hezekiah did “seek his God . . . with all his heart. So he prospered” (31:21).

An Epochal Divine Deliverance

With the successive Assyrian invasions that led to the downfall of the northern kingdom of Israel, Hezekiah
God’s purposes are not thwarted by our sin. God used Jacob’s stubbornness to raise up the 12 tribes of Israel. He used Israel’s failure under the theocracy in the time of the judges to bring in the monarchy under David. And He even used David’s tragic and ill-fated army census to accomplish His goals.

The circumstances of David’s numbering of his army and God’s resultant punishment are somewhat murky. The fact that there are two accounts of this incident (2 Sam. 24; 1 Chr. 21) actually complicates the matter because of differences in the details. Nevertheless, the account is an important part of the Davidic saga as it relates to God’s faithfulness despite David’s sin, as well as the consequences for Israel.

Though the impetus to number the army is attributed to both God’s anger (2 Sam. 24:1) and Satan (1 Chr. 21:1), the result was that David decided to determine how many people and fighting men he had. The question is, “Why was this a sin?”

Under Moses, an army census had been taken at God’s command, so the sin cannot be the idea of a census itself (Num. 1; 26). The answer is that this census was not the result of God’s command but of David’s pride.

Perhaps David wanted something to boast about. The theology seems to be that, while recognizing God’s goodness is commendable (cf. 2 Sam. 5:12), David’s action here seems to indicate a desire to glory over Israel as though he had been responsible for the nation’s blessings. In any event, after the census, David himself realized he had done wrong: “And David’s heart condemned him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly’” (24:10).

**Famine, Flight, or Sword**

That the Lord answered David’s prayer can only be attributed to His promise in the Davidic Covenant, where He assured David He would never remove His loving-kindness from him (7:15; 1 Chr. 17:13–14).

The Lord then sent the prophet Gad to David with His judgment on the matter. David could choose his punishment: seven years of famine (1 Chronicles 21:12 and the Septuagint say “three years”) or three months of fleeing his enemies or three days of pestilence from the Lord (2 Sam. 24:11–13). David chose option three because he trusted in God’s mercy to him and his people: “And David said to Gad, ‘I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man’” (v. 14). As a result of the plague, 70,000 people died in Israel.

As in the case of David and Bathsheba, one is struck by God’s faithfulness to David despite his sin. Yet God disciplined Israel as a result of it. It is interesting that the judgment here affected the very area of David’s pride: the number of people in the kingdom. But as David intuited, God’s mercy to Israel would be the key.

When the angel of the Lord came to Jerusalem to strike the city, the Lord was moved to be merciful on...
seeing the effect of the calamity; and He commanded the angel to pause. When David saw the angel with his sword over Jerusalem, he repented further and asked God to punish him, rather than the people. In response, the Lord told David through Gad to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah (or Ornan) the Jebusite in Jerusalem. David went to Araunah, bought the site and the oxen, built an altar, and sacrificed the oxen in burnt and peace offerings to the Lord. God accepted his sacrifice, and the plague was halted (vv. 18–24; 1 Chr. 21:18–27).

The story, however, does not end there. When Solomon later prepared to build Israel’s first Temple, the spot he chose was the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite on Mount Moriah, which David had purchased for his altar (2 Chr. 3:1–2). We surmise, then, that the “rock” Araunah used as his threshing floor is the same place where Abraham attempted to sacrifice Isaac (cf. Gen. 22:2, 14; 2 Chr. 3:1); where Solomon built his Temple; and where Zerubbabel built the second Temple, later known as Herod’s Temple. Today the centerpiece of this area, known as the Temple Mount, is the Muslim Dome of the Rock.

Again God used tragedy to further His purposes for Israel, turning sin and death into an opportunity for atonement.

**Victory of Grace**

The apostle Paul wrote that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God (Rom. 8:28). In the preceding verses, Paul recounted our sufferings and weaknesses. He was not saying that God is the author of sin or that sin and its effects are good. But what he did say is that God can take the consequences of sin and death and make something good out of them.

The prime example is the victory of the grace of God in Jesus Christ over the consequences of Adam’s sin and its disastrous effect on the human race (Rom. 5). In David’s case, God was faithful despite David’s foolish decision and the resultant consequences.

We see in these examples the relationship and tension between God’s gracious promises of unconditional love and His high standard that demands His children be holy, just as He is holy (Lev. 19:2; cf. Mt. 5:48).

But we also see that God’s purposes are not thwarted by our sin. God used David’s sin to establish Solomon on the throne, and He used Solomon to build the Temple on the spot where David atoned for numbering the people. Today God is using Israel’s national rejection of its Messiah to reconcile the world—Jewish people and Gentiles—to Himself before He restores Israel as a Kingdom.

This knowledge should encourage us in our relationship with God, as well as give us hope for the future. Despite our weaknesses, if God is for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)? Our hope for the future is not in man but in God, who is always faithful to keep His promises.
Well begun is half done,” says the old adage. But we should be dedicated to finishing strong. The apostle Paul ran the race of life in order to win the prize (1 Cor. 9:24). He did not want to be “disqualified,” or laid aside as useless (v. 27). And indeed he did finish his race (2 Tim. 4:7). In this, our Lord Jesus, as in all else, is our model in that He could say, “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (Jn. 17:4). So Paul aspired to finish his course with joy (Acts 20:24).

Yet how many have faltered down the stretch. Many have been the dropouts along the way. Like the Galatians, they began “in the Spirit” but sought to be “made perfect by the flesh” (Gal. 3:3). Paul analyzed their experience: “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (5:7).

John Bunyan’s timeless allegory, The Pilgrim’s Progress, insightfully depicts one of the most perilous stages in the Christian walk. As Bunyan’s characters Christian and Faithful near the end of their trek, they enter the dangerous Enchanted Ground that coaxes people to sleep. But if you fall asleep, you never awake.

The enemy of our souls would deflect and destroy our effectiveness for God even as we come down the last lap. After all, “There’s no fool like an old fool!” Then there is the age-old tale of the tortoise and the hare. The fast start out of the gate does not guarantee the constancy required for victory.

A Word Fitly Spoken

Our gracious God mercifully sent the Spirit-controlled prophet Ahaziah to warn Asa of his danger: “The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you” (15:2).

Believers need both the encouragement of the Scriptures and its warnings as well. Life contains hazards that can shipwreck a ministry and a testimony: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

Happily, when King Asa heard the warning, he intensified his activities to purify worship in his realm; and he summoned huge convocations in which the Lord’s presence was powerfully manifest (2 Chr. 15:8–9). This was a time of covenant-renewal and great generosity in giving by the people (v. 11). They sought the Lord, and He gave them rest.

Even the secret idolatry of Asa’s own mother was exposed and disciplined. Although not every objective was achieved, the Scripture testifies, “the heart of Asa was loyal all his days” (v. 17). Such a conspicuously high level of spiritual commitment is refreshing to consider. We give praise to God.

A Tragic Tumble

How then shall we understand the ensuing fiasco? In the 36th year of his reign, King Asa lost his spiritual poise. In the face of a threat, he did not depend on the Lord as he had pre-
viously, and he made alliances with the Syrians. The seer Hanani came from the Lord and rebuked him for his folly:

Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand. . . . For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. . . . From now on you shall have wars (16:7, 9).

King Asa refused to hear the message, imprisoned the messenger, and began to oppress the people (v. 10).

Even in the 39th year of his reign, when he was grievously ill, he did not seek the Lord (v. 12). What went wrong? What soured this sweet saint of God?

Scripture here is silent, but we may well surmise that the seeds of spiritual sedition had been sown in Asa’s heart and not dealt with over time. He meant well and preserved appearances; but some hidden erosion, some undetected dryness in his walk with God, ultimately caused him to turn from the Lord in his advanced years, thus leaving us with this doleful, final verdict. He did not end strong.

Samson the judge, King Saul, and King Solomon all began with exceptional promise. Many illustrious servants of the Lord, both lay and clergy in a variety of ministries today, have squandered their spiritual capital. The law of spiritual entropy insists there is a tendency for things to run down, to become random and diffuse. We need to seek spiritual concentration in these days and not allow the springs of devotion and inner renewal to shrivel into spiritual sinkholes.

What speaks to my own heart as I view the landscape of our times is the urgent exhortation of Hebrews 12:1–2:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
American radio talk-show host Don Imus, almost 90 Major League baseball players, and many others have something in common. Can you guess what it is? They believe good people can make bad decisions.

Don Imus believes it because he said it happened to him when he was forced to apologize in 2007 for his racial comments about the Rutgers University women’s basketball team. The baseball players believe it happened to them when the Mitchell Report named 89 of them for illegal use of steroids. In fact, many people caught in a bad spot are quick to say they are good people who merely made poor choices.

Judging by the preponderance of seminars, books, and DVDs available these days, the prevailing belief is that people can avoid bad choices. Employees can be taught to become people of integrity. Singles can be taught how to choose the right mates. There is even help for consumers who want to learn how to choose healthful foods.

The assumption is always that people are good but need help to make good choices. Scripture makes no such assumption. God’s Word is far more objective and a great deal less flattering to mankind. Most people make bad decisions because they reject true wisdom, which comes from God (Ps. 111:10; Eccl. 2:26; Jas. 1:5).

Unfortunately, that problem can plague believers and unbelievers alike, as it plagued Jehoshaphat, one of Judah’s godly kings.

When ancient Israel was divided in two, the northern kingdom (Israel) had bad kings only. The Bible says of each one that he “did evil in the sight of the LORD.” In the southern kingdom (Judah), 12 of its 20 rulers did the same. Yet eight kings “did what was right in the sight of the LORD.” And Jehoshaphat was one of them.

Jehoshaphat ruled for 25 years, from 873 to 848 B.C. Yet, though he loved the Lord, he stands today as an example of someone who failed to lean on godly wisdom and consequently made several dreadful decisions that cost him and his kingdom dearly.
Yet despite this zeal, Jehoshaphat played the fool by trying to travel two roads at the same time. On the one hand, he loved the Lord. But on the other hand, he formed a bond with ungodly Israel by forging a military alliance with Ahab, one of the northern kingdom’s most wicked kings, and letting his son marry Ahab’s daughter.

Jehoshaphat seemed to want an insurance policy in case the Lord failed him. While marriage alliances were a common way to forge peace between countries at odds with each other, this pact was an unholy union. Ahab and Jezebel were evil. They practiced abject paganism, flooded the land with Baal worship, and almost obliterated the worship of Jehovah from Israel.

The late C. I. Scofield astutely noted, “The marriage of Jehoshaphat’s son, Jehoram, to Ahab’s daughter, Athaliah, was a great mistake. The union was supposed to foster peace and cooperation between the two kingdoms, but it only degraded Judah.”

Jehoshaphat should have known better. He made the monumental error of relying on the world’s wisdom instead of God’s. Years later, Athaliah usurped the throne of Judah and murdered all the heirs to the throne but one, almost annihilating the messianic line, before being killed herself.

The Ramoth Gilead Fiasco

In another monumental error, Jehoshaphat agreed to join Ahab in battle against Ramoth Gilead. Jehoshaphat told Ahab, “I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses” (1 Ki. 22:4). When he sought counsel as to how the battle would go, Ahab produced 400 “prophets,” all of whom probably served Baal and all of whom promised victory (v. 6).

Recognizing these men did not serve the living God, Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there not still a prophet of the Lord [YHWH] here, that we may inquire of Him?” (v. 7). Ahab grudgingly mentioned Micaiah, adding, “but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil” (v. 8). Micaiah prophesied that Ahab would be killed.

Yet Jehoshaphat went into battle anyway and barely escaped with his life. Ahab, as Micaiah had prophesied, was killed. (2 Chr. 18:28–34).

Later God sent a prophet to Jehoshaphat to scold him: “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you” (19:2). God generously provides His wisdom when we ask for it (Jas. 1:5). But He does not force us to accept it.

Unfortunately, even after all that happened to him, Jehoshaphat still did not “get it.” He joined with Ahab’s son Ahaziah, king of Israel, to build trade ships to go to Tarshish. Those ships never made it, for we are told, “The Lord has destroyed your works. Then the ships were wrecked” (2 Chr. 20:37).

When unbelievers refuse God’s wisdom, we justify it by saying, “Well, they don’t know the Lord. What do you expect?” But when believers reject God’s wisdom, they needlessly play the fool and often end up mired in terrible circumstances.

Don Imus was fired from his job. The baseball players named in the Mitchell Report were disciplined. And Jehoshaphat’s bad choices brought great trouble to Judah. His son, King Jehoram, was an evil king who ruled like his father-in-law, Ahab, because he had Ahab’s daughter as a wife (21:6).

True wisdom comes only from God. Jehoshaphat’s life is a warning to everyone who loves the Lord. Do what is right with a loyal heart, and always heed His Word “because the foolishness of God is wiser than men” (1 Cor. 1:25). “How much better to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver” (Prov. 16:16).

ENDNOTE

Christ Is Superior to Moses

Moses is a dominant figure in Israel's history. Of all the Old Testament leaders, there is none greater. He is described as “the man of God” and “the servant of the LORD” (Dt. 33:1; 34:5). Moses’ relationship with God was so intimate that “the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex. 33:11). Some Jewish rabbis even believe Moses was greater than angels because of his unusually close relationship with God.

Yet Moses understood the Lord would raise up a prophet from within Israel who would be much greater than he and who would speak God’s Word to Israel (Dt. 18:15–18). This prophet is clearly identified in the New Testament as Jesus the Messiah (Jn. 1:45). In Hebrews 3 the author shows how Christ is superior to Moses.

Afterward, he sternly warns Jewish believers that if they return to the Jewish religion, they will be in danger of forfeiting God’s rest.

Rest here does not mean salvation. No true believer can lose or forfeit his or her salvation. Jesus made it extremely clear that those to whom He gives eternal life will never perish or be snatched from His hand (Jn. 10:28–29). Christ will not lose one soul the Father has given Him (6:37, 39). Scripture teaches that lives of genuine believers are hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). Therefore, by definition, someone who renounces Christ and returns to Judaism (or to any other religion, for that matter) is not a true believer in the Messiah. However, true believers can lose their “rest,” meaning the peace, joy, and assurance that come from a life of faith in Jesus. Num. 12:7). Moses was appointed to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, give them the Law, and lead them to the Promised Land. But Christ was even more faithful because, unlike Moses, He did not falter or waver, even to His death on the cross.

Second, Moses was a human servant (v. 5); but Christ is a divine servant and, as the Son of God, is “worthy of more glory than Moses” (v. 3).

Third, Moses was a “faithful servant” in all His [God’s] house and should be granted all the honor, respect, and reward due him (v. 2; cf. Num. 12:7–8). But Christ built and oversees the house of Israel in which Moses served, making Christ more honorable: “For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house” (v. 3).

Both Jesus and God are called the builder of the house (vv. 3–4). Since all things were created through Jesus Christ (1:2), these verses confirm His deity. If Jewish people returned to Judaism, they would be worshipping the house rather than the Creator or Builder, thus turning from the One who is God, namely, Jesus Christ.

Fourth, “Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward” (v. 5). Moses not only was faithful in his ministry but also faithfully witnessed and wrote about Christ (cf. Dt. 18:15, 18; cf. Jn. 5:46; Heb. 11:24–27).

Under Moses, house referred to the house of Israel. But in this age the reference is to Christ’s position over the church: “Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (v. 6).

Verse 6 expresses three thoughts: (1) Christ is superior to Moses because Moses is merely a servant; but Christ is the Son of God. (2) Within every household a son is always superior to a servant. A servant may have authority to oversee the house, but the son rules over the house and everything in it. (3) The phrase if we hold fast the confidence . . . firm to the end does not refer to how to become a believer or remain a believer. The author simply said that those who possess faith in Christ will remain faithful, thus giving evidence that they are members of Christ’s household. True believers will continue “rejoicing of the hope” in Christ’s redemption to the end of their lives. On the other hand, if
someone professes faith in Christ but returns to Judaism, that person reveals that he or she is not a true believer in the Messiah.

**Example of Failure**

God, through the Holy Spirit, provides a quote from Psalm 95: 7–11 to warn those professing faith in Christ not to repeat the same sin of murmuring and rebelling that their forefathers committed in the wilderness, culminating in their refusal to take the Promised Land (Num. 13—14).

After 400 years in Egyptian captivity, Israel was miraculously delivered. Yet the Israelites continually complained about God and Moses on the way to possess the Promised Land. At one point, the Lord commanded Moses to send two representatives from each of the 12 tribes to search out the land of Canaan.

The spies returned with a mixed report. All agreed Canaan was a good and fruitful land, flowing with milk and honey. Nevertheless, its people were strong and lived in walled cities (Num. 13:27–29). Of the 12 spies, only Joshua and Caleb had faith to believe God would deliver the Canaanites into their hands. Israel’s refusal to take the land constituted rebellion against God, resulting in His displeasure and judgment of that generation of Israelites:

*Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:* “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest!’” (Heb. 3:7–11).

The word *today* in verse 7, quoted from Psalm 95:7, is repeated twice more in this chapter (vv. 13, 15) and sends an urgent message to Jewish believers to heed God’s Word immediately and not make the same mistake as their forefathers.

Their forefathers disobeyed God in six ways. They (1) failed to “hear His [God’s] voice,” (2) hardened their hearts, (3) rebelled, (4) tested and tried Him, (5) always went astray in their hearts, and (6) never really knew Him.

In other words, they neglected to listen to, or chose to forget, what God told them through Moses. Failing to listen produced hard hearts (v. 8).

Hardness of heart resulted in rebellion against God (v. 8). During Israel’s 40 years of wandering, it witnessed many miracles but still “tested” and “tried” God by complaining and rebelling (v. 9). Instead of taking Him at His Word, Israel put Him to the test, making Him prove that He could do or would do all He had promised them.

Such distrust was gross sin and angered God. It also was inexcusable, since the Israelites had witnessed God’s miracles and provisions for 40 years. So God’s evaluation was that they erred habitually: “They always go astray in their heart” (v. 10; cf. Dt. 9:24).

Though the Israelites saw God’s mighty miracles, knew what He expected of them, and had His Law to lead them, God said of them, “They have not known My ways” (v. 10).

Israel’s unbelief and rebellion grieved God, and He became justly “angry with that generation” (v. 10). Consequently, Israel would suffer God’s wrath, or righteous indignation, as He destroyed that generation in the wilderness. Israel’s lack of faith resulted in the nation not entering God’s “rest” (v. 11); that is, that generation would not possess and occupy the Promised Land of Canaan.

**Exhortation to Faithfulness**

In Hebrews, Jewish people are strongly exhorted to avoid the defection of their forefathers who went off into unbelief:

*Be aware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (vv. 12–13).*

This is a command that believers take heed and keep a watchful eye over their lives. Drawing away from commitment to the Lord can result in apostasy.

The remainder of chapter 3 exposes the process of becoming an apostate. A person departs from God due to “an evil heart of unbelief” (v. 12). An evil heart allows the “deceitfulness of sin” to control the believer. Sin is described as being “deceitful,” or tricky, because it subtly seduces those whose spiritual guard is down; and they succumb to Satan’s attack. Sin that is not dealt with will produce an unexpected, gradual hardness of heart, making believers indifferent; cold; callous; and insensitive to God and spiritual things (v. 13).

Christians are to “exhort [encourage] one another daily” and stay focused on Christ because they are “partners [part- ners] of Christ” (vv. 13–14). The real test of these professing believers is to “hold the beginning of [their] confidence [in Christ] steadfast to the end” (v. 14).

Again the author emphasized the word *today,* alerting Jewish believers that they, too, were in danger of developing the same hardness of heart and rebellious attitude toward God as their forefathers “who came out of Egypt” (vv. 15–16).

Though God was angry with those persistent sinners, He patiently showed them mercy for 40 years; but eventually they perished in the wilderness as punishment for their unbelief (v. 17). This was a direct fulfillment of God’s promise to unbelieving Israel. He preserved only Caleb and Joshua because they believed Canaan could be conquered (v. 18; Dt. 1:34–40).

Because of unbelief, these Israelites missed entering the Promised Land and the rest God had prepared for them (v. 19). “Trials, troubles, temptation, testing, travail, turmoil, and tempest was their lot in place of the tranquility they might have enjoyed” had they believed and obeyed God (1).

The illustration, instruction, and invitation given in this chapter were not only for Jewish believers in the early church, but for us today. All who harden their hearts against God will forfeit His rest and suffer His discipline. This example sends a sobering message to all who profess faith in Christ. God will discipline believers who harden their hearts and rebel against Him.

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Two previous articles examined the biblical view concerning eight types of negative speech. We will continue this study and then discuss positive types.

Negative Types of Speech

Reviling Speech. Revilers are people who use abusive, malicious language to disgrace and shame a person or injure his or her reputation. The Bible records several examples of people who were victims of reviling, abusive speech. The prophet Jeremiah was one. His enemies said, “Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah; . . . Come and let us attack him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words” (Jer. 18:18).

After Jesus healed a man who had been born blind, the Pharisees “reviled” the man, saying, “You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from” (Jn. 9:28–29).

Jesus was reviled while on the cross: “You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Mt. 27:39–44).

The Bible has interesting things to say about revilers. It declares, “Whoever spreads slander is a fool” (Prov. 10:18) and says revilers will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9–10).

Paul told believers “not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is . . . a reviler . . . not even to eat with such a person” (5:11).

The Bible gives instruction concerning what the attitude and response of believers should be when they are reviled. Jesus said,

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt. 5:11–12).

The apostle Peter reminded believers, To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”, who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously (1 Pet. 2:21–23).

Again Peter stated that believers should not return “evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For ‘He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit’” (3:9–10).

Empty Speech. Paul wrote, “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them” (Eph. 5:6–7). Empty speech consists of words “without content, without any basis, without truth, without power.” In 1 Timothy 1:6–7, Paul referred to people who “have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.” Whereas the word translated “empty” in the expression “empty words” in Ephesians 5:6 refers to speech that is “worthless, . . . without content,” the word translated “idle talk” in 1 Timothy 1:6 describes speech that is “worthless . . . deceptive or ineffectual.” (Compare with 1 Timothy 6:20 and 2 Timothy 2:16.)

Devouring Speech. Psalm 52:4 refers to “devouring words.” Devouring speech involves the figurative sense of “swallowing” the intended victim through words of “destruction.”

Cutting Speech. The Bible refers to the wicked and workers of iniquity “who sharpen their tongue like a sword” (64:3) and to evil and violent men who “sharpen their tongues like a
serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips” (140:3).

**Shameful Speech.** Paul declared, “It is shameful for believers “even to speak of those things which are done” by the ungodly “in secret” (Eph. 5:12). The word translated “shameful” refers to what is “ugly, shameful, base.” It refers to “that which is disgraceful in the judgment of men . . . especially as expressed in words.”

**Deceiving Speech.** Paul also referred to people who “by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:18). The word translated “smooth” refers to speech that sounds “plausible.” The word translated “flattering” refers to “well chosen (but untrue) words” of “praise” or “flattery.” Both types of speech “are simply a mask for fraudulent purposes.” (Compare with Psalm 12:3; 52:4; 78:36.)

**Arrogant Speech.** Psalm 12:3 states, “May the LORD cut off . . . the tongue that speaks proud things.”

**Perverse Speech.** Proverbs 10:31–32 declares, “The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the wicked what is perverted speech is when kindness controls or governs what the tongue says. The Bible addresses several kinds of speech that should be characteristic of Christians.

**Truthful Speech.** Ephesians 4:25 indicates that, in contrast with lying, each believer should “speak truth with his neighbor.”

**Gracious Speech.** Colossians 4:6 reveals that a Christian’s speech should “always be with grace, seasoned with salt.” The word translated “grace” refers to what is gracious or attractive. Since salt was used for “purifying and seasoning,” gracious speech is purged of everything “contrary to God” and will have “the religious and moral quality which must characterize the speech of the Christian.”

**Sound Speech.** When teaching doctrine, believers should use “sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you” (Ti. 2:7–8). Sound speech is “reasonable and appeals to sound intelligence.” (Compare with 1 Timothy 1:10: 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:13; 2:2.)

**Wise Speech.** Proverbs 10:31 states, “The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom,” and 31:26 claims that the virtuous woman “opens her mouth with wisdom.” The word translated “wisdom” refers to “prudence.” The word prudence refers to “cautious practical wisdom; good judgment; discretion.”

**Kind Speech.** Proverbs 31:26 asserts that on the virtuous woman’s tongue “is the law of kindness.” The function of law is to control or govern. Thus kind speech is when kindness controls or governs what the tongue says.

**Acceptable Speech.** Righteous people know what type of speech is proper or acceptable to God and people (Prov. 10:32).

**Studied Speech.** Proverbs 15:28 states, “The heart of the righteous studi...
Modern Judaism calls the fifth of seven observances recorded in Leviticus 23 Rosh Hashanah. The words mean “head of the year.” And the holiday—which begins at sundown on September 29—is considered a New Year, marking the beginning of the High Holy Days. The Bible calls this observance “a day of blowing the trumpets.”

On this day, according to Jewish tradition, the Devil accuses Israel of its sins. Therefore, a trumpet is blown to confuse Satan. During the Middle Ages, the custom began of casting crumbs into a moving body of water to symbolize a person’s sins being cast into the sea, to be remembered no more (Mic. 7:18–20).

Other Rosh Hashanah customs that started about the same time are reconciling with neighbors, expressing good wishes to one another, and visiting the graves of relatives and friends. Practices include dipping pieces of challah (braided egg-bread) into honey. This signifies hope for a sweet new year.

During Bible times, the Israelites gathered at the Sanctuary (Num. 29:1) and heard Scripture read about judgments that God would send for failing to turn back to Him: “Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger” (Zeph. 2:3).

Then a trumpet was blown. Today a ram’s horn, called a shofar, is used. It signifies a call for repentance: “He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life” (Ezek. 33:5). Scripture speaks of a coming judgment for personal sin (18:4; Jn. 8:24).

The warning continues to sound.

Today only through the death, burial, and resurrection of Messiah Jesus can deliverance be found: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1).

Finally, Rosh Hashanah was viewed as a sabbath, a day of rest (Num. 29:1). Only in the Lord does a person find true peace and rest: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).
and his people faced grave peril. The outward foe was formidable. Taking all prudent steps, the king of Judah encouraged his people to trust in the Lord:

Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles (32:7–8).

In the face of Assyria’s derision and mockery, King Hezekiah and Isaiah prayed to the Lord (v. 20). And God sent a most extraordinary deliverance: “The Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side” (v. 22).

Prosperity came down in cascading abundance. King Hezekiah was virtually suffocated with gifts “so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter” (v. 23). Such good times posed a problem. Of an earlier king it was said, “He was marvelously helped till he became strong” (26:15). Watch out!

Snared

The apostle Paul once counseled Timothy, his son in the faith, not to put a new believer into a position of power in the church, “lest being puffed up with pride he [the novice] fall into the same condemnation as the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6).

How easily we fall into the trap of self-sufficiency and pride. This was the snare that got Lucifer, the enemy of our souls. Our first parents aspired to “be like God” (Gen. 3:5).

Unfortunately, “Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor shown him, for his heart was lifted up” (2 Chr. 32:25). He had bouts of humility, but his substance overflowed. He was highly vulnerable when Babylon, the rising power in the Middle East, sent him flattering letters and presents when he was ill (2 Ki. 20:12).

Then, eager to impress the visiting envoys, he granted their request to see all of his possessions and defenses (v. 13). Babylon’s visit was, in fact, a test from God; and Hezekiah did not pass (2 Chr. 32:31).

We all face the danger of being “exalted above measure” through abundance (2 Cor. 12:7). The apostle Paul warned us all “not to think of [ourselves] more highly than [we] ought to think” (Rom. 12:3). Like Hezekiah, we often are tempted to show off. The inner peril is greater than the outward foe.

A biographer once called the late Oswald Chambers “an unbribed soul.” Judas had a price. Paul’s friend Demas gave in to the blandishments and allurements of the world (2 Tim. 4:10). Are you tempted to cease confessing, “Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory” and to say instead, “Mine is the kingdom and the power and the glory”? If so, then beware. “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jas. 4:6).
Obama recants AIPAC statement

Apparently Harvard graduate Barack Obama has trouble with the English language. Or he says one thing when he speaks to Jewish people and another when he speaks to CNN.

Under questioning from reporters, Obama, the Democratic Party’s contender for U.S. president, retracted his statement to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) convention in June that Jerusalem should remain Israel’s undivided capital.

He blamed “poor phrasing” and careless syntax for leading Jewish people to think he meant all of Jerusalem should remain in Israeli hands. Here is what he told AIPAC: “Now let me be clear: Israel’s security is sacrosanct. It is non-negotiable; the Palestinians need a state—the Palestinians need a state that is contiguous and cohesive and that allows them to prosper, but any agreement with the Palestinian people must preserve Israel’s identity as a Jewish state with secure, recognized, defensible borders. And Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel and it must remain undivided.”

But when questioned by CNN’s Fareed Zakaria, Obama said, “You know, the truth is that this was an example where we had some poor phrasing in the speech. And we immediately tried to correct the interpretation that was given. . . . It is an example of us making sure that we are careful in terms of our syntax.”

Then he threw the onus for making peace back on Israel, adding that Israelis must “recognize that their long-term viability as a Jewish state is going to depend on their ability to create peace with their neighbors.”

Tourism up!

The summer of 2008 has become one of the Holy Land’s best in terms of tourism. As of April, this year was already a record year for tourism in Israel, with a 41 percent increase in tourists over April 2007 and 26 percent more than in April 2006, according to the Ministry of Tourism.

During the first four months of 2008, nearly 1 million tourists arrived in Israel, leading the ministry to predict that it will meet its goal of attracting 2.8 million tourists to Israel this year.

Moreover, the number of Americans visiting Israel is hitting an all-time high, with 85,000 American tourists during January and February, and many more expected during the course of Israel’s 60th anniversary year, which began in early May.

“The majority of tourists to Israel this summer are American, and the [weakened] dollar doesn’t affect them one way or another,” says Mark Feldman, the American-born owner of Zion Tours Travel Agency in Jerusalem.

“Everything in the Israeli tourist industry is based on dollars, from airline tickets and hotels to half the tourist attractions, so Israel becomes a much cheaper alternative because the dollar goes a lot for-
Future Temple Priests Get Fitted for Holy Garments

As the Jewish people continue their national return to their ancestral homeland, tailors at the Temple Institute in Jerusalem’s Old City began taking measurements of Kohanim (the priestly tribe designated to run the Temple services) in early July in anticipation of an even bigger event: the dedication of the Third Temple.

Yehuda Glick, director of the Temple Institute, presided over the first-ever fitting of Kohanim for their priestly garments. “Today, in this room, Kohanim are being measured for the first time in 2,000 years for the type of garments they will be wearing in the rebuilt Temple,” announced Glick to an audience of rabbis, reporters, and cameramen on hand to witness the historic event.

The garments of the Kohanim are described in great detail in the Torah. While scale models of the future Temple can be seen in shop windows and the clothes of the priesthood can be seen hanging on mannequins, the event marked the first time since the destruction of the Second Temple that real-life Kohanim have been measured for the clothing of their holy work in the Temple.

At the beginning of the ceremony, Rabbi Yisrael Ariel delivered a speech describing the importance of the occasion. “Just like the animal sacrifices atone for the nation of Israel, so do the clothes of the Kohanim,” he remarked.

A man named Aviad Jerufi was on hand to model the full uniform of the Kohanim, while each individual garment was described.

Pamphlets were then distributed to each Kohan being measured, containing a Jewish legal description of the clothes they were to receive. Representatives from the Israel Textile Association recorded each Kohan’s head circumference, shoulder width, leg length, and other measurements as they were taken before the audience.

According to Yaacov Gutfreund and Yitzchak Shechter of the Israel Textile Association, the clothes for which the Kohanim were measured during the special fitting, and which they were to receive, are not intended to be worn during actual Temple service. They are rather meant to be identical in fabric and dimension to the clothing they hope and pray to wear when the Holy Temple is rededicated.

The fitting of the high priest, who has a special set of garments, will have to wait until then.

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 life-long 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.
A while ago I had a long conversation with our Arab neighbors here in Jerusalem. They came to me to convince me that they are holy people who are more humane than we. However, they always speak of killing us and driving us into the sea. They strap explosives onto themselves to blow us up, and they even turn their children into suicide bombers to kill us—all because they want to take our land.

As we spoke, I told them, “What you are doing is clearly written about in the Bible. Do you want me to read it, or do you want to read it yourself?” So one read, and his friends listened:

*You shall speak to him, saying,*

“That says the LORD: ‘Have you murdered and also taken possession?’” And you shall speak to him, saying, “Thus says the LORD: ‘In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours’” (1 Ki. 21:19).

God was angry with King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, for killing Naboth and stealing Naboth’s land. “This is what you are doing,” I told them. “You weep about how poor you are. What about those who have paid such a high price and lost children? Do you want to pay that price also?”

I told them, “If you would believe in the Lord, you would have special feelings for one another and be more considerate of one another. But you do not have proper faith. We, however, are ready to release hundreds of Arab prisoners—even those who have killed our women and children—to secure the release of a few kidnapped Israeli soldiers. And you say no! The only way you return our soldiers to us is in a coffin. But you pray every morning. To whom? This is your faith? To kill men, women, and children?

“You bow down before one in whom you believe. Yet in the Bible it is clearly written that we become like the one in whom we put our trust [Ps. 135:18]. We become like what we worship. What does the Lord our God say in His Law? You shall not murder! And what does your law say? That you shall kill, murder, and turn people into suicide bombers so that you can go to heaven. And you want the entire world to agree with you and become like you.”

Then one man declared, “Islam will control the world!”

It is difficult to speak to these people, yet the Lord commands us to bring His salvation to them because they walk in such great darkness. So I continued. “You have tried hard to destroy us, but we are still here. And we will survive against all our enemies who want to swallow us alive because it is so written:

*Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad. Bring back our captivity, O*
LORD, as the streams in the South.
Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.
He who continually goes forth weeping,
bearing seed for sowing,
shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
bringing his sheaves with him (Ps. 126:2–6).

They quickly wanted to know where this was written. So I showed them, and they were extremely surprised to see that my Bible contains the New Testament.

One immediately asked, “How did you come to learn all this? As we can see, you have believed in Jesus Christ. How did you come to faith in Christ? This is what we want to know.”

And I was happy to tell them. “You see,” I said, “I never looked for special books about faith. What I read was the Holy Bible. It alone tells us how to know the Lord. And in this Bible, I found so many places where it is written about the Lord Jesus Christ that I learned about true faith in the living God.”

“We want to know more,” one said. “You must show us where all these things are written in the Bible. We will not leave until you show us where it is written about Jesus.”

So I gave them my Bible and showed them Isaiah 53. And from then on, they asked many, many questions, including, “Why do all Jewish people not believe as you do?”

“Many do!” I replied. “Come to our congregation and have a good look and see how many Jewish people worship with us. Even a rabbi was baptized. And we have Arabs who come to our congregation. We never go to people and say, ‘You must believe in Christ!’ No. Only God can help people believe. So we speak to them as we speak to you: step by step. They must read the Bible and see for themselves where the truth lies. Only in such a way can you come to know the Lord. And I pray that in time, you, too, will come to know and believe in Christ as your own Savior. Then you will have peace and will worship the God who loves you.”

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