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ABOUT THE COVER

The biblical standard for the treatment of children was established millennia ago. They are to be cherished, nurtured, and treated as gifts from the Lord. But pagan and cultic societies often practice the degradation of children. Tragically, child sacrifice did not die with the passing of ancient heathen worship. As our cover graphically depicts, it has returned. The children in military uniform are names after terrorists. They are marching in a Hezbollah rally.

(Sharif Karim/Reuters/Corbis; digital composition, Thomas E. Williams).

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The release of The Passion of the Christ earlier this year evoked much discussion and controversy within both Christian and Jewish communities. For the most part, Christians responded to the representation of Christ's suffering and crucifixion with a deep, personal gratitude to the true Christ for all that He endured for them.

However, many Jewish people have viewed the Mel Gibson film with apprehension and even fear.

For centuries, passion performances in Europe have provided an excuse for anti-Semites to instigate hatred and violence toward Jewish communities. “Christ Killers” was an epithet frequently hurled at Jewish people to intimidate them and encourage violence against them.

With the record-breaking box-office success of The Passion of the Christ, it is hardly surprising that Jewish people are afraid of the possible repercussions. In recent years anti-Semitism has been surging worldwide, especially in Europe; and it is even overtaking college and university campuses in the United States. Jewish agencies are now documenting the fact that it is dangerous to be openly Jewish in many areas of the world, including in some democratic countries.

In conversations and interviews with Jewish leaders, audiences, and media, we have tried to give assurances that Christians of biblical faith will be found standing with their Jewish friends if people attempt to use this film or any other issue as an excuse to fan the flames of anti-Semitism and direct hatred against them and their communities.

Jesus endured tremendous physical suffering. His humiliation was beyond our limits of comprehension. The brutalities He experienced at the hands of the Roman soldiers prior to and during His crucifixion represented a worst-case scenario of man’s barbarism. As the Sinless One, Jesus Christ’s violent physical death was infinitely more unjust than the death of an ordinary man. The Bible teaches that all men are sinners and therefore deserve death (Eccl. 7:20; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23). But the Messiah was God Himself—perfect and undeserving of death.

Submerged in the discussions of the physical cruelties Jesus suffered, however, is the fact that something even more agonizing happened: He “who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21) suffered God’s wrath for our sin. As the Father turned from Him, the Savior endured the full penalty that we deserve ( Isa. 53). He was forsaken of God. Thus He tasted spiritual as well as physical death to guarantee that all who come to Him in faith would never have to suffer separation from God. Abandoned by the Father, Jesus, quoting Psalm 22:1, cried out:

Eli, Eli, la’ma sabach’ thani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Mt. 27:46).

God forsook His only Son so that He would not have to forsake us. Jesus endured the punishment of separation from God that should have been ours. He felt the full burden and shame of our sin as if it were His own. He who dearly loved His Father was rejected by Him. He suffered spiritual darkness so that we would have spiritual life. This was God’s plan from the beginning, and Jesus was totally obedient to it.

Can there be a greater love than His? Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (Jn. 15:13).

He was made sin for us. And on Him alone fell the sin of the entire world: For he hath made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

God, in His righteousness, turned away from His sinless Son, who was covered with the sins of the world. The spotless Lamb paid the ultimate price for my sin and yours: Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13).

The implications of Jesus’ spiritual death for us are profound. We can expect to die physically unless our death is preceeded by the Rapture of the church. But as believers in Him and in His death on our behalf, we will never experience what He suffered—spiritual death—separation from God. This is the answer to Jesus’ famous agonizing cry to His Father (Mt. 27:46).

By utterly forsaking His Son, our righteous God extracted from Jesus the full price of our redemption.

May we respond in heartfelt gratitude and life-changing dedication to our wonderful Savior who accomplished so much on our behalf!

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
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Israel’s Significance Is Insignificant

The headline of this editorial is the considered opinion of two men who are deemed “very influential and major [religious] voices throughout America.”

Their identities are not particularly relevant. Their statements concerning Israel are being espoused by a host of pop-culture theologians currently afflicted by the pernicious Replacement Theology ideology of the day. The issue is the right of contemporary Israel to a homeland in the Middle East sanctioned by God and whether today’s Israel is in any way related to the prophetic promises of the Word. Their message is that Israel’s presence in the Middle East is not currently relevant for reasons they feel constrained to explain. Following are sermon excerpts from these men:

Geo-political Israel today is not to be understood as God’s promise to Abraham and Joshua. IT IS NOT! . . . It is fair to say, the world owes them a homeland. But, and this is important, there is no biblical right that geo-political Israel has today to that particular piece of geography in the Middle East. For Israel is not a nation state any more; Israel is the church. Israel is people of God, Jew and Gentile from every nation and every tribe. Ancient Israel is a preview of what God intends for the new Israel.

Therefore [because Israel broke her covenant by rejecting the Messiah], the secular state of Israel today may not claim a present divine right to the Land, but they and we should seek a peaceful settlement not based on present divine rights.

By faith in Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, Gentiles become heirs of the promise of Abraham, including the promise of the Land. But I think we will make better progress if we do not yield to the claim of either side to be ethnically or nationally sanctioned by God in their present conflict.

Such Replacement Theology is actually ideology in the guise of theology. And it plays to the cultural interests of self-absorbed Christians in the West.

God’s program for Israel and the Jewish people has not run off the tracks. The inviolable bedrock of prophetic truth did not somehow draw its last breath when the corrupt Temple hierarchy incited a crowd to reject the Christ in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. While acknowledging the historical veracity of all prophecies related to the Messiah’s First Coming, our friends tend to forget that you cannot accept these promises as literal and then leap into the murky realm of allegory, spiritualizing the text to prop up culturally preferential theory. One reference will suffice:

Hath God cast away his people? God forbid (Rom. 11:1).

Despite whatever manipulative gyrations one employs, Romans 11 clearly enunciates the future promise of Israel’s national reconciliation to the Messiah in anticipation of the King’s reign in fulfillment of Scripture:

And so all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Rom. 11:26).

This does not refer to the proclamation of the gospel to Jewish people and Gentiles during the Church Age. It can only be ascribed to Israel and the future fulfillment of God’s plan.

However, there are more pressing and potentially devastating issues to confront here; namely, the incredible naiveté of promoting the fantasy that Israel is the cause of Muslim and Arab belligerence and worldwide terrorism. Said one of the preachers,

The existence of Israel in the Middle East and the extent of her borders and her sovereignty are perhaps the most explosive factors in world terrorism and the most volatile factors in Arab-Western relations.

This statement is not only wildly exaggerated but potentially deadly. To indulge the fantasy that the issue can be addressed from a purely human-rights perspective is beyond the pale. Such thinking exposes the underlying militancy of Replacement Theology, which seems to relish making Israel the heinous perpetrator, and Arabs and Palestinians the helpless victims.

The Muslim world’s greatest problem is not with Israel; it is with us! Democracy, freedom, and our insistence on life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are the real adversaries. Israel is but the token of that light in the dark sea of Islamic hatred.

To take potshots at prophetic bibli-cists and the Chosen People and their inherent, God-given right to a safe haven in the land of their fathers may be the popular sport of contemporary skeptics; but in the end, it may cost us all dearly.
Tape of the Month Ad
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Children in the Fire

To the west and south of the Old City of Jerusalem is a deep gash in the landscape. It is identified as the Hinnom Valley. Today it is a lush area lending itself to picnics, outdoor concerts, and public events. However, to ancients, it was known as the valley of the sons of Hinnom and later the Valley of Tophet. In the seventh century B.C. it became Gehenna, a designation synonymous with hell, the place of burning.

Most notorious in the history of Hinnom is the practice of child sacrifice—placing infants and children in the fire to appease the ancient pagan god Molech. Talmudic tradition asserts that the image of Molech bore a brass calf’s head adorned with a royal crown. He was represented as sitting on a brazen throne, arms extended to receive his youthful victims.

When, in the reign of King Josiah, the book of the Law was rediscovered in the Temple in Jerusalem, the young king initiated a program to purge the land from idolatrous worship. Among his sweeping reforms was the defiling of “Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech” (2 Ki. 23:10). The power of God’s Word in His covenant with the Jewish people was revolutionary:

And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant (2 Ki. 23:3).

King Josiah’s commitment to reject pagan practices revived a divine standard reflective not only of Judaism but also of Christianity, which came later, and all civilized societies on the face of the earth. The willful sacrifice of innocent children in the name of pagan gods remains a vile abomination that goes against everything true religion holds sacred.

In March a terrified 14-year-old Palestinian boy, Hasam Abdu, stood with his hands up at the Hawara checkpoint near Nablus. Quick-thinking Israeli paratroopers at the checkpoint discovered the lethal device strapped to his body. The child’s mission was to get as close as he could to Israeli soldiers and detonate his bomb. His reward: a hundred Israeli shekels—about twenty dollars—and seventy-two virgin brides when he arrived in Paradise to celebrate his martyrdom in the presence of Allah.

A few days earlier, another boy, only eleven years of age, was asked to carry a bag through the checkpoint and deliver it to a woman waiting on the other side. He was given no explanation about the bag’s contents. He, too, was discovered; and while the people who dispatched him frantically tried to detonate the device, Israeli sappers were able to defuse it and save the boy’s life. Abdullah Quran was promised five shekels (approximately one dollar).

These episodes are not random acts of spontaneous terror. They are part of a calculated, cold-blooded plan by ruthless Palestinian leaders who, to get what they want, are quite willing to send their children into the fires—all in the name of their god.
In a speech to the UN General Assembly in December 1988, Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Yasser Arafat brought greetings “from the children of the stones who are challenging occupation forces armed with warplanes, tanks and weapons—an unarmed Palestinian David facing a heavily armed Israeli Goliath.”

In a January 2002 interview on PA TV, Arafat was asked what message he would like to send to the Palestinian children. His reply was reported by the Palestinian Media Watch: “The child who is grasping the stone, facing the tank; is this not the greatest message to the world when that hero becomes a Shahid [dies for Allah]? We are proud of them.”

This is what the “children of the stones” is all about.Youngsters are being fed into the fires for consumption by the world media and a susceptible international community.

These acts are not laudable expressions of pent-up anger and frustration. They are an intolerable, figurative return to Hinnom and the furnace of Molech. Children sacrificed in the name of their god.

And who should be speaking out? If “moderate” Islam is more than merely a wish of the West, where are the voices of the majority of moderate Muslim clerics who claim love, peace, and compassion as hallmarks of their faith? Their compassion evidently does not extend to the world of the brainwashed children of the suicide belts and sack bombs.

God’s Word and the Sanctity of Children

A comparison of the Islamic extremist attitude with what the Bible says about God’s love for children and His mandate regarding how we must nurture them constitutes a litmus test of whether Judaism, Christianity, and Islam serve the same God. Clearly, they do not.

Lo, children are an heritage [gift] from the LORD; and the fruit of the womb is his reward (Ps. 127:3).

A gift from the Most High can never be accepted lightly. Nor can it be regarded as something to be used, abused, or cast aside based on individual whims or self-indulgent preferences.

Consider this statement in relation to the gift of salvation:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God—Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8–9).

The God-given gift referred to in Ephesians is no less than the creation of new life—spiritual life. Such life revolutionizes an individual and raises one to an entirely new lifestyle. We recognize it as the “new birth.” Each new birth is a spectacular creation effected by God through faith in Jesus Christ: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

This new creation is cherished and nurtured until it matures into a radiant manifestation of God’s singular ability to create. The same is true of children, “an heritage [gift] from the LORD.”

We should not be surprised, therefore, to hear Jesus say,

Permit the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them (Mk. 10:14, 16).

And again,

Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall...
not enter into the kingdom of heaven. And whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whosoever shall offend one of these little ones who believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Mt. 18:2–3, 5–6).

And in a mysteriously compelling statement, Jesus declared,

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father, who is in heaven (Mt. 18:10).

These passages emphasize the intimacy of God’s relationship with His crowning creation. From the instant of conception, a child is, in the eyes of the Lord, a treasure attended by angels, loved by the Savior, and committed to us through an unbreakable trust.

The Old Testament and Godly Instruction

The same pristinely lofty standard is conveyed in biblical Judaism. In a portion familiar to many of us, the Hebrew Scriptures give specific instructions on how to teach children biblical and spiritual truths.

In the immediate context of God’s instruction to love Him with the whole heart, soul, and might, we find these words:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up (Dt. 6:6–7).

In addition to teaching the actual biblical text, the Israelites could clearly infer from Scripture that they were to communicate through the example of their lives.

The apostle Paul said as much in his appraisal of young Timothy:

I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day. When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother, Lois, and thy mother, Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also (2 Tim. 1:3, 5).

We do well to remember that the faith of Timothy’s mother and grandmother was unwavering belief in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was a pre- New Testament faith. Equally important is the fact that the apostle brought to this family the fulfillment of what had been promised and anticipated through the millennia—that is, faith in the Messiah, who finished the work.

Lois and Eunice had the same relationship with Jehovah as the “heroes” of the faith, mentioned in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. That faith never varied in its quality. What differed was how the individuals manifested the reality of such a faith. Yet, in whatever fleshly form that faith resided, it showed. Consequently, believers, regardless of station in life, gender, age, or color, embodied the faith articulated in the precepts of Scripture.

Ephesians 2:10 says it well: For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Lois and Eunice lived their testimonies before young Timothy, not because they were trying to make a favorable impression, but because they were being who they were. Simply put, they did what they did because they were who they were—women of faith.

The Irrevocable Standard

If we understand what Scripture faithfully communicates to us, we can never, for any reason, sanction violating God’s trust regarding the responsibility He has given us for children. That any group, individual, or religion would justify using children as sacrificial pawns for its self-instituted brand of political hell is an unspeakable outrage. Yes, hell—the “New Gehenna” of pros- trate, pagan infidels chanting to drown the screams of innocent children being consumed in the fiery hands of their Molech delusion.

Justification of, or indifference to, this monstrous atrocity is evidence of the biblical illiteracy strangling even our Western societies. And marching in lockstep with this terrible malignancy is the affliction of compassionless lives devoid of faith and lacking the capacity to care about the devastating consequences of turning their backs upon God, His Word, and His children.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of a coming day when

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them (Isa. 11:6).

A child shall lead them, indeed. But to green pastures, not into the New Gehenna.

Elwood McQuaid is editor-in-chief
for The Friends of Israel.
The word covenant is one of the most significant terms in Scripture. Used more than 300 times, it means simply an agreement between two parties, be they individuals or groups or nations.

There are many modern equivalents of a covenant. For example, a house purchase may involve a mortgage, which is a “covenant.” The buyer and lender enter into a contract that binds them to certain obligations.

Some covenants in the ancient Near East, such as treaties between a king and his subjects, were bilateral agreements, like mortgages. Others were one-sided or unilateral, such as land grants from a king to his subjects. A last will and testament is a modern example of a one-sided covenant, expressing only the wishes of the deceased.

It is this type of unilateral covenant that began God’s plan to bless the world. It is called the Abrahamic Covenant.

Its Promises

In Genesis 12:1–3 the Lord made promises to Abram that involved three concepts: land, descendants, and blessing. First, God commanded Abram to leave his homeland of Ur (modern-day Iraq) for the land God would show him. This promised land is described later in Genesis.

Second, God promised Abram that he would become a great person and great nation. Though childless, Abram was promised a progeny.

Third, God promised that Abram would receive His blessing as well as mediate it to all the families of the earth. The focus on Abram is so central that God said, “I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee” (Gen. 12:3). This man became the unique channel of reciprocity from God. Cursing would come to those who treated Abram and his descendants with contempt;
blessing would flow to those who treated them with favor.

Its Establishment

In Genesis 15:1–6 God repeated His promise that Abram would have descendants by comparing them to the uncountable stars. Abram expressed faith in God’s Word, which caused God to credit Abram’s faith as righteousness. (The apostle Paul quoted this passage in teaching the timeless truth of justification by faith [Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6]).

God then repeated His vow to give Abram the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:7–21), as promised earlier (12:7; 13:14–17), and here cited its natural borders: the river of Egypt (the Wadi el-Arish in the southeast) and the Euphrates River (in the northeast).

Abram then asked God to confirm this promise. So God told Abram to cut three animals in half (15:9–10). This custom enacted a solemn promise when those involved walked between the pieces of the animals. It pictured a self-curse: If the parties did not obey the covenant’s terms, their fate was to become like that of the slain animals.

In this covenant, however, Abraham did not walk between the pieces. God alone appeared as “a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces” (v. 17). These two symbols, like the cloud by day and fire by night in the wilderness, represent God Himself. He, and He alone, walked between the divided animals. God took upon Himself all the obligations of the covenant; and if they were not kept, the unthinkable would happen—God would die. But God cannot die. Therefore, He must keep His unconditional promises to Abram.

God reaffirmed His covenant with Abraham on three other occasions (Gen. 17:1–8, 21; 18:18–19; 22:15–18). God then passed it on perpetually to Abraham’s descendants, as confirmed to Isaac (Gen. 26:3–5, 24) and Jacob (Gen. 28:13–15; 35:9–12; 46:1–4).

As He told Abraham, “I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen. 17:7).

Its Fulfillment

In the Nation of Israel

The three components of the covenant can be traced through the Scriptures.

Land. The land promised to Abraham formed the basis for the Exodus from Egypt: “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Ex. 2:24). Moses led Abraham’s descendants out of Egypt; and Joshua led them into the Promised Land: “And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers, and they possessed it, and dwelt in it” (Josh. 21:43).

Under the reign of Solomon, the land was extended to the largest area possessed in ancient times (1 Ki. 4:21–24). Even though the Babylonian exile forced the Israelites from their land, they returned because of God’s promise to Abraham (Neh. 9:8). And though they were exiled again by Rome, the nation of Israel was reborn in 1948 and now inhabits part of its ancient homeland.

A brighter day is coming for that land of turmoil. The prophets foretold that Israel will be restored like the Garden of Eden (Ezek. 36:35) with fertility and peace (Amos 9:13–15).

Descendants. God’s promise of descendants from Abraham was realized in the Israelites who came out of Egypt (Ex. 32:13). The next generation entered the land; became a nation; and, by Solomon’s time, were “as the sand which is by the sea in multitude” (1 Ki. 4:20), a clear reference to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 22:17).

In or out of the Promised Land, Jewish people are always considered the children of Abraham: “Ye are the sons . . . of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (Acts 3:25).

Every Jewish person is living proof that God still keeps His promise to Abraham. Every attempt to persecute or eliminate the chosen line of Abraham is an attack against God and His eternal covenant. Despite Satan’s attempts to destroy the Jewish people, God will preserve them. A peaceful day is coming for this people, for their prophets envisioned a future gathering to the land of Israel when they will seek God and live in safety (Zech. 10:8–12).

Blessing. The promised blessing to and through Abraham is illustrated in the account of Abimelech, king of Gerar (Gen. 20). While Abraham journeyed in Gerar, he feared that Abimelech would kill him in order to take his wife, Sarah. As a defense, he lied and said Sarah was his sister.

Although Abimelech did not knowingly steal another man’s wife, God implicated him, disciplined him, and threatened him with death if he did not return Sarah. In the end, Abraham took back his wife, prayed for Abimelech, and received payment from him. Abraham told the lie, but God protected him by the covenant. Abimelech “cursed” Abraham and was cursed; he then blessed Abraham and was blessed.

Throughout history God has desired to bless His Chosen People Israel and, through them, all the world. However, God’s desire did not come to pass because Israel failed to obey Him and instead experienced His judgment.

But God, in His faithfulness to the covenant, has not rejected Israel. One day the nation will be restored to Him through the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34) when Messiah Jesus returns (Rom. 11:25–27). Then Israel will enjoy God’s blessing and will lead all nations in worshiping the true God (Isa. 2:2–3). Israel’s future kingdom will last a thousand years (the Millennium) and then usher in the New Heavens and New Earth.

In the Church

Jesus, the Seed of Abraham. God’s promises in the Abrahamic Covenant find fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. Until His coming, the promises could never find fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. Until His coming, the promises could never find fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. Until His coming, the promises could never find fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel. Until His coming, the promises could never find fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel.
help to “his servant, Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever” (Lk. 1:54–55).

Zacharias the priest, father of John the Baptist, likewise tied Jesus’ birth to the Abrahamic promises providing “the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he swore to our father, Abraham” (Lk. 1:72–73).

The apostle Paul confirmed that Jesus came to fulfill the Abrahamic promises, not only for the Jews but also for Gentiles:

Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers [Abraham]. And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy (Rom. 15:8–9).

The New Testament thus expands the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant to include both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul stated that the seed of Abraham consists of all believers: “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29; cf. Rom. 4:11–12, 16).

The blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant are available in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ:

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed (Gal. 3:8).

The Abrahamic Covenant is actually the gospel in advance! The good news, or gospel, consists of God providing the blessing of justification to Gentiles who believe in Jesus, who is the seed of Abraham, “the son of Abraham” (Mt. 1:1; Gal. 3:16).

The Holy Spirit. Another blessing Christians receive is the Holy Spirit: Christ hath redeemed us . . . That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:13–14).

This down payment of the Spirit will find full expression in God’s future Kingdom when we will possess new bodies and be free of sin forever, serving our Savior and Lord.

But Not the Land. There is no fulfillment of the land promise in the church. The church is never given a land; the land is promised to Israel alone.

Christians have always been a remnant within every nation, from Roman times until today. Believers exist in every land as witnesses to the spiritual blessings that flow to Gentiles from God’s covenant with Abraham. Before Jesus, Gentiles were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12).

But Christians are no longer strangers to the covenants. They are grafted in through faith in the Jewish Messiah. Thus Paul urged Roman Christians to contribute to needy Jewish believers in gratitude for the blessings of salvation that came to them via Jesus: “For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things [Abrahamic Covenant blessings], their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal [material] things” (Rom. 15:27).

This present, spiritual fulfillment of Abrahamic promises to all Christians in no way negates God’s promises to the nation of Israel. When Jesus returns to earth, the Jewish people will continue as a people; they will obtain the land of Israel; and they will both receive and channel God’s blessing to the nations.

Listen to the encouraging words of the prophet Isaiah:

Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah, who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the LORD shall comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD (51:2–3).

ENDNOTE

1 In Gen. 15:18 the Hebrew for “made a covenant” is “cut a covenant,” a reference to the act of cutting the animals. The only other reference to it is Jeremiah 34:18–20.

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DEFINING DIFFERENCES

The word millennium combines two Latin words: mille (one thousand) and annum (year).

Premillennialism: The prefix pre means “before.” Premillennialism is the view that Christ will return to earth before the Millennium or Kingdom of God. He will establish a literal, political Kingdom of God on earth, and He will rule worldwide as King together with the saints of God for one thousand years (Rev. 20:1–7). During this time Israel will be exalted above the nations and will receive all the promised blessings that have not yet been fulfilled. Premillennialism interprets Scripture using the plain, normal, literal, historical, and grammatical method.

Amillennialism: The prefix a means “no.” Amillennialism contends there will be no literal, political Kingdom of God on this earth. The future Kingdom of God foretold in such passages as Daniel 2 and 7 is totally spiritual in nature and consists either of the church or Christ’s present rule from heaven over the hearts of believers or the future eternal state. The amillennial view sees no future for Israel and believes the church has replaced Israel and is the recipient of all God’s promises of blessing to Israel. Amillennialism interprets Scripture by spiritualizing the promises made to Israel as a nation and says they are fulfilled in the church.

Postmillennialism: The prefix post means “after.” This view states that the last thousand years of the Church Age is the Millennium, after which Christ will return. Postmillennialism spiritualizes the prophetic portions of God’s Word but believes Revelation 20 will be fulfilled in an earthy kingdom of peace and abundance, brought in through the church’s efforts.

Replacement Theology: Any view that replaces Israel with the church. Replacement Theology strips Israel of its future in God’s plan, spiritualizes the promises given to Israel, and makes the church the recipient of all the blessings God has promised to Israel.

1 Ronald E. Showers, There Really Is a Difference (Bellemar, Nj, The Friends of Israel, 1990), 113.
3 Showers, 114.
4 Ryrie, 2075.
5 Ibid.
Ishmael was the son of Abraham and Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian maid servant. His name, which in Hebrew means “God heard,” memorializes the Almighty’s concern for Sarah’s harsh treatment of Hagar (Gen. 16:6, 11).

God predicted that Ishmael’s character would be like a “wild man” whose “hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him” (Gen. 16:12).

When Ishmael was thirteen, God reaffirmed His covenant with Abraham and bypassed Ishmael in favor of Sarah’s yet unborn son. Ishmael now stands outside the Abrahamic Covenant, not part of the chosen lineage. Yet God promised Ishmael fruitfulness as the father of twelve princes and a great nation (Gen. 17:18–21).

During a feast held because of young Isaac, Ishmael publicly mocked his younger brother. This action led Sarah to demand that Abraham send both Hagar and her son away to the southern desert regions. Later Ishmael married an Egyptian; returned to join Isaac to bury their father, Abraham; and died at age 137 (Gen. 21:8–21; 25:9, 17).

God’s promise to him was fulfilled when Ishmael produced the “twelve princes” listed in Genesis 25:12–16. Just as Abraham’s grandson Jacob would produce twelve tribes, this son of Abraham also produced twelve tribes. But God’s promise of the land of Canaan went to Isaac’s heirs, not to Ishmael’s (Gen. 26:3–4).

The Ishmaelites lived like Bedouins in the region of the Arabian Desert south and east of the land of Canaan (Gen. 25:18), corresponding to the modern areas of Sinai, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and western Iraq. Eight of the twelve names appear in later Scriptures, and six are found on ancient inscriptions from the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. As is often the case in the ancient world, the proper names of the sons were applied to the geographical territories they occupied.

God’s words were also fulfilled in the Ishmaelites’ troublesome relationships. The phrase that describes Ishmael’s living “in the presence of all his brethren”
should be translated “in defiance to all his brothers” (Gen. 16:12; 25:18). The following examples reveal such hostility.

Ishmaelites purchased Joseph from his brothers and took him to Egypt where they sold him into slavery (Gen. 37:25–36; 39:1). Ishmaelites were associated with the Midianites in attacking the children of Israel during the time of Gideon (Jud. 8:24). The psalmist lamented the conspiracies the Ishmaelites raised against Israel (Ps. 83:2–8). Finally, the eastern tribes of Israel waged war against the Ishmaelites, who in turn suffered defeat (1 Chr. 5:19–22).

Because the Ishmaelites presented a continual threat to Israel, God threatened to judge them for their sinful ways. Both Isaiah (21:11–17) and Jeremiah (49:28–33) predicted God’s judgment on certain Ishmaelite tribes—Tema, Dumah, and Kedar. The Assyrians and Babylonians carried out God’s sentence. Other tribes of Ishmaelites continued to live throughout vast Arabia.

The Arabs have looked to Ishmael as one of their ancestors. The Qur’an even substitutes Ishmael for Isaac as God’s chosen son (Surah 19:54). In Muslim tradition, the prophet Muhammad, the founder of Islam, claimed direct descent from Ishmael. Hostility continues today as Arabs resist the presence of Jewish people in the Middle East and around the world.

The prophets wrote the final chapter about the Ishmaelites as they looked ahead to the coming of God’s Messiah and His Kingdom on Earth. Messiah will rule the world from Jerusalem and the restored Jewish kingdom. Then Israel, along with all nations, including the descendants of Ishmael, will worship God at His Temple in Jerusalem:

Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, . . . the villages that Kedar doth inhabit . . . Let them give glory unto the LORD. The forces of the nations shall come unto thee. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together unto thee, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister unto thee; they shall come up with acceptance on mine altar, and I will glorify the house of my glory (Isa. 42:10–12; 60:5, 7).

by William L. Krewson
A round two o’clock in the morning the climb had begun. According to the guide, the traditional Mount Sinai hike would be a 7,497-foot ascent. The plan was to reach the summit in time to see a breathtaking view of the sun rising over the mountains. Many believe this is the place where Moses received the Law from God.

The entire Sinai ridge is hard granite. The mountain’s physical features serve as a graphic illustration of the Mosaic Law. According to the apostle Paul, a former Pharisee, the Law was not designed to provide personal salvation. Rather, one of its purposes was to show people their need for salvation (Rom. 3:20). Depending on a person’s attitude, the Law can fall on one hard, like a stone that crushes. It falls hard on the braggart, on the brazen, and on the bold.

When the people of Israel assembled at Mount Sinai, an epic moment was about to occur. God was to make a special covenant with His people, which would serve as their guiding light. It would involve a series of laws. The Jewish people know them as Torah. Commonly, Torah refers to the first five books of the Old Testament. However, Torah also refers specifically to the commands or instructions recorded in Exodus and Leviticus. In Scripture the commands are the revelation of God to Moses, who wrote the words and gave them to Israel at Sinai (Ex. 34:27). It was incumbent on Israel to obey and follow the laws without fail. Only then would the blessings associated with the covenant be realized (Ex. 19:5).

The Torah, or Mosaic Law, was a conditional covenant between God and the nation of Israel. This meant that the contract made at Mount Sinai was based on the faithfulness of God and Israel. Some claim the Mosaic Law was actually formed from other ancient laws of the time. The classic example is the Code of Hammurabi (1728–1686 B.C.). Though there are some close parallels, there is also a significant difference. According to Professor R. K. Harrison, “The Code of Hammurabi is clearly deficient in spiritual thought, and in general it placed a lesser value upon human life than did the Mosaic legislation.”

Basically, the Mosaic Law consists of three categories: moral, civil, and ceremonial. The moral laws pertain to an inward, heartfelt observance for holy living. These include the Ten Commandments, sometimes viewed as God’s “Ten Words” (Ex. 20:1–17). The civil laws govern Israel’s social life (Ex. 21:1–23:33). The ceremonial laws relate to Israel’s worship. These would include the Tabernacle, priesthood, and festivals, with all their colorful pageantry (Ex. 25:1–31:18).

God gave the Law to separate Israel from other nations. It was God who created these people as a distinct nation (Isa. 43:15) and called them to be His witnesses (Isa. 43:10). Israel was to be His distinct, holy nation, a kingdom of priests separated unto Him (Ex. 19:6; Dt. 7:6).

The word holy is associated with the concept of sanctification. Therefore, by observing the Law, Israel was to reflect the holiness of its God (Lev. 11:44–45).

The Law also was designed to reveal God’s character to all of mankind. Besides being holy, God is just in all areas, including those involving capital offenses, personal property, and social responsibility. Though the Law was good and perfect...
(Ps. 19:7), it was a covenant of works. Violations could be atoned for through the sacrificial system outlined in Leviticus 1—7. Still, this feature was only a temporal arrangement, making the Mosaic Law a hard road to follow consistently.

Yet failure to obey the Law resulted in God’s curse (Dt. 27:26).

**Hard for the Braggart**

A story is told about a rabbi who lived long ago. Just before his death he extended both arms with fingers spread open toward heaven. “Not one have I broken,” he said. His assessment, however, must have differed from God’s.

The Law was given to shut the mouths of all who think they can keep the whole law:

> Now we know that whatever things the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God (Rom. 3:19).

The world contains many religions and philosophies. They all present some standard for righteousness and salvation. The result is that people can boast within their religiosity, as though telling God to be impressed with their accomplishments and righteous attainment.

However, the Mosaic Law was given to close up, or block up, all this pretentious, pious talk. The whole world is to stand speechless in guilt when confronted with God’s holy and unattainable standard. It is the nature of God’s Law to arouse a feeling of personal guilt. The Law stabs the guilty conscious with an uncanny expectation of impending judgment. The cry from human lips should be for mercy, not self-praise. The Torah’s purpose was to muzzle all haughty talk. The world stands condemned. The Law is a hard road for the braggart (Rom. 3:23).

**Hard for the Brazen**

> Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).

Volumes of personal, subjective speculation abound as to what constitutes sin. Some theological groups view sin as a mere human weakness—a “frailty” easily fixed with time, money, or human exertion.

The purpose of the Law was to quash all such futile, mental absurdity. With the revelation of the Law, the world received clear and exact knowledge of sin. Even the apostle Paul came to know this fact experientially: “I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet” (Rom. 7:7).

A true mirror is designed to reveal a true image. The mirror does not lie. Yet, though it may state a cruel truth, it has no power to change the image it reflects; it only tells it like it is.

So, too, is the Law. It provides the knowledge of the horrid sinfulness of sin. It reveals mankind’s transgressions. But it does not correct or give life to a dead spirit. For that, something other than the “mirror” is required.

Jesus Christ is that “something.” Jesus alone can give life. He alone kept
the just, harsh demands of the Law (Jn. 8:46). He then imputes its benefits to whoever believes on Him (Phil. 3:9). The fact is, the Law reveals sin; but Jesus saves us from sin.

Sin is a treacherous adversary. Many people justify their behavior and deceive themselves into thinking God doesn’t care what they do. But God does care; and He says, “Take heed, . . . lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:12–13). The Law is a hard road for the brazen who are deceived about their sin.

**Hard for the Bold**

A familiar sales adage says, “The customer is always right.” When a certain store clerk became a police officer, he was asked what he liked about his new vocation. He said the hours and pay were good, but what he really liked best was that the customer was always wrong!2

God’s creation is never right before Him. The tendency is to go astray ( Isa. 53:6). “Wherefore, the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24).

A schoolmaster, according to the ancient concept, was a slave entrusted with the moral supervision of a child. Another picture of a schoolmaster was that of a jailer of sorts, who kept the child morally under lock and key. The Law was to function as a guardian over the wayward spiritual inclinations of Israel and mankind. The inclination of the human soul is to challenge the Law. The schoolmaster’s job is to keep everyone in check.

Like a fierce jailer who never sleeps, the Law holds the world in custody so that no one should escape condemnation. The Law, like a good schoolmaster, was to guide the world to the Lord for salvation (cf. Rom. 10:4): “The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Gal. 3:22).

The Mosaic Law is a hard road for the bold, who think they can flout it.

During the Civil War, the Federal generals and politicians were overly optimistic about taking the Confederate capital at Richmond, Virginia. They nonsensically underestimataed the tenacity of their opponents to defend their capital. Each assault on Richmond was thwarted.

The cost to Union soldiers was appalling. Thereafter, whenever a new general took command and proposed another “onto Richmond campaign,” the soldiers lamented with a song. It was a popular tune reflecting past failed attempts, titled “Richmond Is a Hard Road to Travel.”

Likewise, the Mosaic Law is a hard road to travel for salvation. It can only result in personal failure. One may brag of great spiritual achievements; but when measured against God’s revelation from Mount Sinai, those achievements crumble into speechless guilt.

Self-confidence and self-esteem may be commendable, but they are condemnable compared to the perfect Law of God. Like the granite ridge of traditional Mount Sinai or like Richmond during the Civil War, the Mosaic Law is a hard road to travel—for all of mankind.

The Mosaic Law was given at a particular time and for a particular purpose. It has served its objective flawlessly. However, according to Scripture, a New Covenant made by God with Israel (Jer. 31:31–34) supersedes the Old Covenant. The good news is that Jesus established that New Covenant on the cross (Heb. 8:6). The Torah could never give eternal life; but faith in Jesus Christ, who kept the Law, can now give life eternal freely to whosoever will (Rom. 6:23).

ENDNOTES


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Peter Colón is the Southeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.
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Upon capturing Jerusalem from the Jebusites, King David immediately made it the capital of his empire. Soon afterward, David brought the ark to Jerusalem and erected it in a simple tent within sight of his own cedar palace.

The contrast between the Lord’s humble tent and David’s beautiful cedar house brought conviction on the king. It seemed incongruous that the God whom David served should dwell in a tent, while he resided in a cedar house. Consequently, the king dreamed of constructing a beautiful temple to house the ark of God. But instead, God promised to build a house for David. This promise is contained in what is known as the Davidic Covenant.

**Its Circumstance**

David wisely confided in Nathan the prophet, “I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains” (2 Sam. 7:2). Nathan instructed David, “Do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee” (v. 3).

However, the Lord intervened and instructed Nathan to tell David He had never asked anyone to build Him a house, let alone David (vv. 4–7). Nathan was to rehearse David’s life before him, reminding him that God had elevated him from shepherd to king, given him victory over his enemies, and made his name great among the nations (vv. 8–9). Nathan told David that God would provide a permanent home for Israel and give the people rest from all their enemies (vv. 10–11).

Lastly, he conveyed God’s promise to make a house for David (v. 11). Because he shed blood as a man of war, David would not be allowed to build God a house (1 Chr. 28:3).

**Its Content**

Nathan went on to reveal the major provisions of the Davidic Covenant. They expand and develop the “seed” promise found in the Abrahamic Covenant.

God informed Abraham that Sarah would give birth to a son: “I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her” (Gen. 17:16). Then He said, “Thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (v. 19).

Thus the promise would go through Isaac to Isaac’s son Jacob (Gen. 28:13–15), then be narrowed to the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and finally narrowed further to the house of David (2 Sam. 7:12).

Within the Davidic Covenant are four major promises. They deal with a house, temple, throne, and kingdom.

**House.** The first promise deals with David’s house (physical descendants). David’s own son would sit on his throne as king of Israel after his death: And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thine own body (2 Sam. 7:12).

David’s son Solomon was God’s choice to succeed David as king (1 Ki. 1:30).

**Temple.** The second promise deals with the temple David wanted to build for God. David would not be allowed to build it; but his son Solomon would: “He shall build an house for my name” (2 Sam. 7:13).

**Throne.** The third promise deals with the throne (royal authority) of David and Solomon. God said, “I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:13, cf. v. 16). The promise is that Solomon’s throne, not his seed, would be established forever. Christ did not come through Solomon’s line, which was cut off at Coniah (Jeconiah). God said of Coniah, “No man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah” (Jer. 22:30).

Christ was born of Mary, a direct descendant of David’s son Nathan (cf. Lk. 3:23–31). Joseph, Jesus’ legal...
father, was a direct descendant of Solomon, through whom the throne legally passed to Christ (cf. Mt. 1:6, 16).

During his lifetime, Solomon fell into sin and was severely punished for his transgression. But the Lord did not dethrone Solomon or take the kingdom from him (1 Ki. 11:1–11), for the sake of his father, David. Neither would God remove His mercy (lovingkindness) from Solomon as He did from Saul.

Kingdom. The fourth promise deals with David’s kingdom: “And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16). This pledge did not guarantee that the rule of the Davidic family would be uninterrupted. Although David’s kingdom has been inoperative for centuries, this promise, nevertheless, guarantees its existence forever.

David’s kingdom will be reestablished at a time of God’s choosing (Acts 1:6–7). This promise also guarantees that no other family will ever displace David’s line as the royal family of Israel.

Its Confirmation

Although the phrase Davidic Covenant is not mentioned in 2 Samuel 7, it is evident from other passages in the Bible that God made a covenant with David. This fact is clearly confirmed by the psalmist who wrote,

My covenant will I not break, nor will I alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven (Ps. 89:34–37).


The New Testament confirms the Davidic Covenant. The angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary,

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father, David (cf. Acts 2:30). And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end (Lk. 1:31–33).

Notice, Jesus has the right to David’s house, throne, kingdom, and the house of Jacob. The kingdom promise of the Davidic Covenant was acknowledged by the mother of Zebedee’s sons (Mt. 20:21); confirmed to Christ’s disciples (Lk. 22:29–30; Acts 1:6–7); and reconfirmed at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:13–18).

Its Character

Literal. The Davidic Covenant is to be interpreted literally. First, God would make “a great name” for David (2 Sam. 7:9) and give him rest from all his enemies (v. 11); both promises were literally fulfilled in his lifetime. Second, God solemnly confirmed this covenant with an oath to David (Ps. 89:3–4, 33; 132:11), guaranteeing that every aspect of it would be fulfilled literally.

Third, David believed the covenant God made with him would be fulfilled literally (2 Sam. 23:5). His son Solomon believed the promises were literal, especially in relationship to a throne and kingdom (2 Chr. 6:14–16). And the angel Gabriel confirmed an earthly, literal fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant at the announcement of Jesus’ birth to Mary (Lk. 1:31–33).

Unconditional. God clearly says that fulfillment of the promises made in the Davidic Covenant do not depend on David, but on Him. The covenant, therefore, is unconditional.

Throughout Psalm 89, God uses the personal pronoun I to confirm that He and He alone will bring to fruition the covenant promises (Ps. 89:1–4, 20–37). The only reservation in this covenant centers on the chastisement of David’s sons who would succeed him, but the covenant itself would never be abrogated.

Though chastisement disrupted David’s kingly line from the Babylonian Captivity until the birth of David’s Greater Son, Jesus Christ, all the promises made in the covenant have been reaffirmed and will be reestablished at Christ’s Second Coming when He sets up His earthly Kingdom.

Eternal. Scripture calls this covenant an eternal covenant: “And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee; thy throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16; cf. 2 Sam. 23:5; Isa. 55:3; Ezek. 37:25).

Immutable. The Davidic Covenant is also unchangeable. It is based on the nature and character of God, who is immutable, meaning there is no variability or change with Him. Thus the promises in the Davidic Covenant are immutable, since they were decreed by God. And they will come to fruition in the way and time that the Lord has predicted in Scripture.

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A millennialists interpret the Davidic Covenant differently than do premillennialists. Amillennialists believe the promises God made to David in the Davidic Covenant should not be taken literally, but spiritually.

They believe that Christ is now fulfilling the Davidic Covenant in heaven and contend that He is seated on David's throne at the Father’s right hand, reigning over a spiritual Kingdom called the church.

Scripture does not support this amillennial teaching. First, Jesus is not sitting on the throne of David in heaven but is at God’s right hand (Heb. 10:12). The only throne mentioned in heaven is not David’s or Jesus’, but God’s (Acts 7:55-56; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:13; 8:1; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22).

Today Jesus is at the Father’s right hand as the Christian’s High Priest, functioning in the role of Mediator and Intercessor (Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5), which has no relation to the Davidic Covenant.

Second, there is no indication in the Bible that the throne of God the Father is identified with the Davidic throne: God’s throne was established in eternity past (Ps. 93:2; Lam. 5:19), but David’s was not.

Third, Revelation 3:21 distinguishes between the Father's throne in heaven and Christ’s throne on Earth. Christ is heir to the Davidic throne of His father David, which He will occupy at His Second Coming (Lk. 1:32).

Fourth, if Christ were now seated on David’s throne in heaven, ruling over the house of Judah on Earth, a change would have been necessary in the promises made in the Davidic Covenant. But nowhere in the Bible is the Davidic Covenant modified to allow David’s throne to be anywhere other than on physical Earth. Scripture makes it clear that David’s throne was always a physical throne set up on physical Earth in the city of Jerusalem. Christ (David’s Son) is to rule over the house of Judah from David’s throne (Lk. 1:32-33) in Jerusalem and, thus, during the Millennial Kingdom, after His return to Earth.

Fifth, the time of the Messiah’s (Christ’s) rule is stipulated in Daniel 2 and 7. The Gentile nations mentioned in the Daniel passages must run their course before Christ returns to Earth and takes possession of David’s throne.

Sixth, although Jesus is David’s Greater Son and is to sit on David’s throne in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, He cannot do so until His Second Coming. The New Testament never connects David’s throne with Jesus’ present ministry in heaven.

Thus Scripture confirms that God will preserve the nation of Israel forever so that He can fulfill the promises of the Davidic Covenant literally (Jer. 4:27; 5:10; 18; 30:11; 46:28). These promises will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ when He physically returns to Earth, assumes His rightful seat on King David’s throne, and rules over the house of Jacob forever. Of His kingdom there shall be no end. Praise God for His wonderful plan!

by David M. Levy
God pronounced severe judgment on the people of Judah and Jerusalem because they worshiped “the queen of heaven” (Jer. 7:17–20; 44:15–19). Who or what was the queen of heaven, and how did the people of Israel get involved in worship of her?

As early as the twenty-fifth century B.C., people of Ur of the Chaldees in Sumeria worshiped a mother-goddess named Ishtar.1 Around the same time the Minoans of Crete had a mother-goddess portrayed with “her divine child Velchanos” in her arms.2 Later, the people of Cyprus revered a goddess who appears to have been patterned after the Sumerian Ishtar and later adopted by the Greeks as Aphrodite,3 or Astarte.4

The Babylonians, who conquered Sumeria around the twenty-second century B.C.,5 related their religious beliefs to the heavenly bodies. They regarded the planets as gods and goddesses and equated the planet Venus with the Sumerian mother-goddess Ishtar.6

The Babylonians worshiped Ishtar as “The Virgin,” “The Holy Virgin,” “The Virgin Mother,” “Goddess of Goddesses,”7 and “Queen of Heaven and Earth.”8 They exclaimed, “Ishtar is great! Ishtar is Queen! My Lady is exalted, my Lady is Queen... There is none like unto her.”9

They called her “Shining light of heaven, light of the world, enlightener of all the places where men dwell, who gatherest together the hosts of the nations”; and they claimed, “Where thou glancest, the dead come to life, and the sick rise and walk; the mind of the diseased is healed when it looks upon thy face.”10

In Babylonian mythology Ishtar wore a crown and was related to Tammuz, who sometimes was portrayed as her son and other times as her lover.11

It appears that the Sumerian-Babylonian Ishtar was the counterpart of the Egyptian Isis and the model for the Grecian Aphrodite, Roman Venus, Assyrian Nina, Phrygian and Roman Cybele, Phoenician Astarte,12 and Astarte of Syria.13 In essence they were the same mother-goddess.14

The Egyptians called Isis “the Great Mother” and “the Mother of God.”15 Isis worship spread to Italy by the second century and then throughout the entire Roman Empire. There the goddess was portrayed with her “divine child Horus” in her arms and widely acclaimed as “Queen of Heaven” and “Mother of God.”16

The people of Phoenicia worshiped Baal. Baalism included the worship of Molech with fiery sacrifices of children and the worship of Astarte, the Phoenician Ishtar Queen of Heaven.17

When the Phoenician princess Jezebel became the wife of King Ahab of the northern Kingdom of Israel, she influenced him to fully establish Baal worship in his realm (1 Ki. 16:29–33; 21:25–26). This move entangled the people of Israel in Queen-of-Heaven worship. As a result, God judged them with the Assyrian Captivity (2 Ki. 17:5–7, 16–18).

Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, became the wife of King Jehoram of the Kingdom of Judah. She influenced him to do what her father had done—fully establish Baal worship in his kingdom (2 Ki. 8:16–18). Her son, Ahabiah, the next king of Judah, did the same (2 Ki. 8:25–27), as did King Manasseh (2 Ki. 21:1–6). These actions would have entangled the people of Judah in Queen-of-Heaven worship. Thus God judged them with the Babylonian Captivity (2 Ki. 21:12–14).

by Renald E. Showers

ENDNOTES

3 Ibid., 33–34.
4 Durant, Our Oriental Heritage, 235.
5 Ibid., 219.
6 Ibid., 256.
7 Ibid., 235.
8 Ibid., 236.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 238–39.
12 Ibid., 235, 266, 288, 294–95.
13 Durant, The Life of Greece, 178.
14 Ibid.
15 Durant, Our Oriental Heritage, 200.
16 Will Durant, Caesar and Christ (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1944), 523.
17 Durant, Our Oriental Heritage, 294–95, and Caesar and Christ, 41.
The New Covenant and its application is one of the more controversial issues among dispensational interpreters. Some contend that traditional Dispensationalism is dying, if not dead—a premature obituary, as we soon shall see.

Dispensationalism is a system of interpreting the Scriptures based on certain major foundational pillars. Like other systems, it allows for a wide variety of opinions on ancillary issues. Like Martin Luther, John Nelson Darby, its founder, was not a systematic thinker and did indulge some curious inconsistencies.

Although he clearly taught that the church of Jesus Christ enjoyed “the blessings of it [the New Covenant] spiritually,” he was anxious to avoid what the New Testament itself assiduously avoids, namely, any equation of geopolitical and ethnic Israel with “the church, Which is his body” (Eph. 1:22–23). Still, his language veered toward understanding the New Covenant as “made with Israel and no one else.”

A recent critic of dispensational interpretation advances this issue as the critical “test case” for Dispensationalism’s approach to biblical prophecy."
does not use these terms. Still, such efforts to periodize biblical and redemptive history have been common. (Note Augustine’s seven periods of time or the divisions of Joachim of Fiore or Isaac Watts or John Nelson Darby and company.)

The Hebrew Scriptures speak of a number of covenants that pertain to Israel to which Gentiles have been “strangers,” since we are “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” (Eph. 2:12). Yet all these covenants have interest and relevance.

Broad and inclusive covenants, sometimes called promissory covenants, are unilateral and without conditions (Gen. 12:1–3). The Abrahamic Covenant or promise involves the blessing, the seed, and the land; and the promise of the land has never been abrogated. Similarly, the Davidic Covenant of promise (2 Sam. 7) restates the earlier covenant and projects the reign of the Messianic King in an eternal, earthly kingdom (cf. Lk. 1:31–33).

No aspect of later restatement nullifies anything that was promised, but doubtless aspects of scope and offspring far exceed anything that Abraham earlier imagined. Expanded but never denied.

Further defining and delineating the overarching promissory covenants are what have been called administrative covenants, such as the covenant of circumcision (Gen. 17; Acts 7:8) or the Deuteronomic Covenant, which is built on the basis of Israel’s eternal title to the land but stipulates that her actual possession of it and her prosperity in it are contingent on her obedience to God (Dt. 28—30).

Another key covenant like this one is the Mosaic Covenant, with which the dispensation of law commences (Ex. 19:5 ff.). In no sense does this covenant annul the promises made to Abraham (Gal. 3:17). The Law was “added because of transgressions” (Gal. 3:19) in order to “shut [us] up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed” (v. 23).

The Law then was given to be “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (v. 24). “But after faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (v. 25).

The marvelous law of God, which is “holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12) and is that disclosure of the mind of God in which we delight, had as its main function to show us our sin like a mirror.

The Israelites’ response to the Law was sincere but naïve: “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). They, like we, needed a little law under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit before they could appreciate grace.

P. T. Forsyth put it well: “We’ve got to hear the bad news before we are ready to hear the good news.” So “the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17). The discontinuity could scarcely be clearer.

Deep Consternation Under the Old Covenant

The ministry of this Old Covenant was, according to the apostle Paul, a ministry “of death” and “of condemnation” (2 Cor. 3:7, 9). The fault was not in the Old Covenant itself since it had never been intended to be the means of salvation. The problem in this “law of sin and death” was in “what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). Its faultiness lies with us (Heb. 8:7–8) because we have a debilitating sin nature through the fall. The outcome can only be failure and frustration, for “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20).

Even today some Christians seek completeness “by the works of the law” (Gal. 3:2–3). This endeavor was futile in Paul’s time, and it still is.

Of course, people were saved under the Law as they looked forward to the coming of the long-promised Messiah and the fulfillment of that to which Old Testament sacrifice pointed. Abraham “rejoiced to see my day,” our Lord Jesus said (Jn. 8:56). He “believed in the LORD; and he [God] counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6).

The coming of the Savior and completion of His atoning work would “declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom. 3:25). But these Old Covenant believers languished.

Intimations were forthcoming that, in pursuit of the “sure mercies of David,” there was to come “an everlasting covenant” (Isa. 55:3; 61:8). And thus, in a context dealing with Israel’s glorious future, God made an unequivocal promise of a New Covenant:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house
of Judah, Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which, my covenant, they broke (Jer. 31:31–32).

Incalculable Largess of the New Covenant

The characteristics of the New Covenant as promised are essentially four. The New Covenant is:

- Internal, not external: written on minds and hearts (31:33).
- Intimate, not distant: “I . . . will be their God, and they shall be my people” (31:33; cf. Ex. 19:12).
- Direct, not mediated: no more Levitical priesthood (31:34).
- Cleansing, not covering: sins are blotted out and forgotten, not merely covered up (31:34).

The New Covenant was instituted in the upper room with the Lord’s Supper when Jesus said, “This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:28). This New Covenant was put in force with Jesus’ death for our sins on the cross.

The Epistle to the Hebrews declares Christ “the mediator of a better covenant” (8:6) and our great High Priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (5:10). Since the Law “made nothing perfect” (7:19), our Lord is not a Priest “after the law of a carnal commandment but after the power of an endless life” (7:16). There has been a most significant change, indeed, “an annulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness of it” (7:18).

From Hebrews it seems clear that this New Covenant is now in force and is the covenant under which believers in Christ today are beneficiaries (cf. Heb. 10:16–17). Paul spoke of Christians as “able ministers of the new testament” (2 Cor. 3:6). This point is important because dispensationalists have always urgently maintained that we are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:14).3 We do well to emphasize, as did Paul, a sharp discontinuity here. Christ is the goal and the completion of the Law (Rom. 10:4).4

Of course, there are continuities between Israel and the church, but the two entities are also distinctive and different. Both the Old and New Testaments see true believers as being the children of Abraham, saved in one way only—by grace through the perfect, atoning sacrifice of the Messiah of God.

In the Church Age there is “no difference” between Jewish and Gentile believers since we are all baptized into Christ’s body where all such ethnic differences do not exist (1 Cor. 12:13). Gentile believers have been grafted in to partake of “the root and fatness of the olive tree” (Rom. 11:17). But those natural branches are to be grafted in again “into their own olive tree” (v. 24); “so all Israel shall be saved” (v. 26).

Notice the fulfillment of the New Covenant promise when Jacob turns from ungodliness: “For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (v. 27). This is a clear reference to what will happen to geopolitical Israel after “the fullness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom. 11:25; cf. Zech. 12:10; 13:1). Israel’s distinctive future is certain, even amid multiple fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

The great promises of Messiah were given to Israel (Rom. 9:4), and Christ came through Israel; but Gentile believers have become the joyful beneficiaries of these promises without any loss whatever of the ultimate and final fulfillment of the kingdom promises to Israel during a literal, thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth.

Israel’s failure under the Old Covenant is like our own, and the Lord promises a New Covenant (Ezek. 36:26ff.). The “oldness of the letter” has not served us well (Rom. 7:6). Indeed, “the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life” (2 Cor. 3:6). With the internalization of the Law and the energizing of “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:2), we can know the empowerment and enablement to do His will, made possible “through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20). All praise be to God.

ENDNOTES


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Despite her injuries, the 14-year-old managed to drag herself and her younger sister to safety. The terrorist’s encounter with Yaakov alarmed neighbors who, with Israel Defense Forces security people, shot the man as he ran up the street spraying bullets in every direction. The Hamas terrorist organization quickly claimed responsibility for the attack and extolled the terrorist as a martyr.

While terrorists expressed elation, the seven remaining members of the family of Yaakov Zagha were left without a husband and father. And the legacy of that awful night will be with them for the remainder of their lives.

Hani recalls the tragedy:

We understood immediately that it was a terrorist and I screamed to my father. I tried to continue running for the shelter room, but I couldn’t walk anymore because I was injured, so I fell down and crawled to the shelter, with my little sister Tehiya in my arms. If my father hadn’t gone outside, maybe none of us would be alive. People tell me that I saved my little sister, but my father was a hero and saved the whole family.

Esther, Hani, and the children stayed in the shelter for twenty minutes waiting for him to return and tell them it was safe to come out. At the time they had no idea what had happened to him.

“He didn’t return the whole time we were waiting,” said Hani. “Slowly I realized . . . ” Her voice trailed off.

Through this atrocity in April in the Israeli community of Avnei Hefetz in northern Samaria, Yaakov Zagha, 40, an immigrant from Argentina, joined the host of nearly one thousand innocent civilians killed since Yasser Arafat and his terrorist colleagues declared war on Israel more than three years ago.

Such terrorism is not a cottage industry confined to Israel, the Middle East, or Africa. It has become a global business with tentacles spreading all over the world. And while those of us in the West may derive some degree of comfort because the phenomenon appears relegated to half a world away, there is actually no place of refuge. No safe rooms, if you will.

Upon taking office as head of the Hamas, the late Abdel Aziz Rantisi joined Osama bin Laden and other terror kingpins in declaring war on the United States and its citizens. Judging by what happened to the Zagha family, the kind of war Hamas wants to wage is in the living rooms of Americans and our western allies.

The Zagha family in northern Samaria, Israel, is six thousand miles from America. But as things stand in the world today, the Zaghas are practically the people next door. On September 11, 2001, our neighbors died in the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, on the fields of Pennsylvania, and in the halls of the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

The War on Terror is a real war—relentless, deadly, and personal. And the next time the enemy strikes, it may not be at a neighbor six thousand miles away. It may be in your front yard or mine.
Jerusalem’s Future Glory

No other city is more treasured by the Lord than Jerusalem. The prophet Ezekiel said that Jerusalem is set in the middle of the nations (Ezek. 5:5); and the prophet Ahijah called Jerusalem the city where the Lord has chosen to put His name (1 Ki. 11:36).

Likewise, there is no place on earth that fills the Jewish heart with love and loyalty like the city of Jerusalem. Jewish exiles have prayed for centuries, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy” (Ps. 137:5–6).

In chapter two, Zechariah recorded another vision he received from the Lord concerning the city of Jerusalem. This vision not only described Jerusalem’s reconstruction after the Babylonian Captivity, but also foreshadows Jerusalem’s reconstruction in the Millennial Kingdom.

The Surveyor

Zechariah said, “I lifted up mine eyes again, and looked, and beheld a man with a measuring line in his hand” (2:1). The phrase I lifted up mine eyes indicates that the prophet was experiencing a new vision, the third of eight received in one night. The measuring line is not just any line. The Hebrew indicates it was a surveyor’s line.

Zechariah inquired concerning the vision, “Where goest thou?” (v. 2). The man replied, “To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth of it, and what is its length” (v. 2). Jerusalem is being surveyed in order to plan its restoration.

Who is the man? He cannot be the angel who spoke with the prophet in verse 3 or the “young man” in verse 4. Some commentators identify him simply as an Israelite with the occupation of a surveyor; but we know he is more than a mere man. Others see him as an angel charged with measuring Jerusalem.

Still others believe he is the Angel of the Lord, Israel’s Messiah. For in the second vision the man (1:8, 10) who appears to Zechariah is divine and identified as “the angel of the LORD” (vv. 11–12). The same can be said of the man called “The Branch” in the eighth vision (6:12-13). Furthermore, Ezekiel prophesied of a man with a similar mission (Ezek. 40:3) who also is divine (Ezek. 43:6-7).

Although Scripture does not identify the surveyor, other passages would lead one to believe that He is the divine Messiah of Israel.

The Promises

While Zechariah was receiving the surveyor’s answer, the interpreting angel, who talked with the prophet, left to meet another angel who had a revelation from God. Zechariah reported what happened: And, behold, the angel who talked with me went forth, and another

angel went out to meet him, And said unto him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem shall be inhabited like towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle in it; For I, saith the LORD, will be unto it a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of it (vv. 3–5).

The interpreting angel tells the latter angel to give God’s revelation to the “young man” (Zechariah). He is to run, or make haste, because of its urgency and thrilling news of Jerusalem’s reconstruction. This news would fill both Zechariah and the residences of Jerusalem with great joy, for it was coming when the Israelites were struggling to rebuild their city and Temple.

God gave Zechariah four promises in the third vision.

(1) Prosperity. First, Jerusalem will experience prosperity: “Jerusalem shall be inhabited like towns without walls for the multitude of men and cattle in it” (v. 4). The Hebrew word for “inhabited” means to expand or overflow the bounds of the city or village in contrast to a walled city.

Thus Jerusalem would be much larger when rebuilt because of increased population, reconstruction, and material wealth. The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy will take place in the Millennial Kingdom when Jerusalem becomes the capital of the world.

(2) Protection. Second, Jerusalem will experience divine protection: “For I, saith the LORD, will be unto it a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of it” (v. 5).

This is a personal word from the Lord that He and He alone will be the city’s divine Protector. The Lord will be a “wall” (i.e., ring of fire) around His people, protecting them from men or wild animals that try to hurt them. This is the greatest assurance and defense any people could be given.

Moreover, the Lord declared that He would be “the glory” in the midst of Jerusalem. This is none other than a promise of God’s Shekinah (personal) glory that once filled the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and the Temple. The
glory that had departed (Ezek. 11:22–23) will again return to Jerusalem.

Ezekiel prophesied that the Shekinah will dwell in the future Millennial Temple (Ezek. 43:1–5). Zechariah’s prophecy more fully reveals the function of God’s glory. In Temple days, only the high priest was able to get a glimpse of the Shekinah glory; but during the Millennium, the Lord will unveil His glory continually to all those dwelling in Jerusalem. The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy will be seen in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:23).

(3) Population. Jerusalem’s population will be greatly multiplied. The Lord called His people home:

Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD; for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, saith the LORD. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon (vv. 6–7).

The majority of Jewish people had chosen to remain in Babylon when the Lord made a way for them to be repatriated to Jerusalem; now they are encouraged to return to Jerusalem. The prophecy also looks forward to a day when God will call Israel back to its land after the Messiah’s Second Coming.

(4) Punishment. The nations who plundered and destroyed Israel will be punished:

For thus saith the LORD of hosts: After the glory hath he sent me [literally, He (God the Father) sent Me (the Servant God's Presence]. The Savior will dwell in Jerusalem: “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD” (v. 10).

The word dwell is the root word for Shekinah, indicating the Lord’s presence. Messiah will fulfill this prophecy when He takes up residence in Jerusalem and reigns from the throne of David.

The Praises

The inhabitants of Jerusalem are told to praise God and rejoice over their future for three reasons.

God’s Presence. The Savior will dwell in Jerusalem: “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD” (v. 10).

The word dwell is the root word for Shekinah, indicating the Lord’s presence. Messiah will fulfill this prophecy when He takes up residence in Jerusalem and reigns from the throne of David.

Gentiles’ Position. People from every nation will come to know the Lord and be joined to Him:

And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee (v. 11).

Gentiles who trust in the Lord will come from every nation to worship the Messiah when He rules and reigns in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2–3; Mic. 4:1).

Judah’s Privilege. Judah will be uniquely privileged: “And the LORD shall inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and shall choose Jerusalem again” (v. 12). The massive conversion of Gentiles might lead one to believe that God’s promises to Israel have been annulled or abrogated. But nothing can be further from the truth.

Israel’s election is unconditional and irrevocable. Here God reaffirms His covenant commitment and again declares Israel and Jerusalem as His portion and inheritance (cf. Dt. 4:20; 9:26; 32:9; Isa. 19:25). The phrase shall choose Jerusalem again does not mean the Lord has elected Israel a second time but only that He reaffirmed His original choice.

Verse 12 is the only place where the phrase holy land appears in the Bible. It is wrong to designate the land as holy today. The land will not be holy until Israel’s sin is removed at the Messiah’s Second Coming (Zech. 3:9; 13:1). Then Israel will be called “The holy people” (Isa. 62:12) and made His priests and ministers (Isa. 61:6). These prophecies will be fulfilled in the Millennium (Zech. 14:20–21).

The Silence

Zechariah called on all men to pause and contemplate in silent awe the glorious revelation that was given: “Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD; for he is raised up [awakened or aroused] out of his holy habitation [dwelling]” (v. 13).

This verse does not mean the Lord is asleep, but that He is incited to act in bringing God’s program to fruition. So awesome is Messiah’s coming judgment on the wickedness of Gentile nations, and His future blessing to Israel in a reconstructed Jerusalem, that the whole earth is admonished to be hushed at this prospect.

ENDNOTE


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This is perhaps an unfortunate fact of life, and I know there are many among us who don’t like to be reminded of it, but that doesn’t alter the situation. This is how the world of men has been constituted since time immemorial, or at least since the creation of nations.

I’d like to quote now a passage from one of Yoni’s letters. He wrote it to our parents when he was studying at the Hebrew University, debating with himself whether to leave school and return to the army:

“We must, we are obliged, to cling to our country with our fingernails, with our bodies and with all our strength. Only if we do that, if we give all we have for the well-being of the country, will Israel remain the state of the Jews. Only then will they not write in the history books that once indeed the Jews roused themselves to action and held on to their land for two decades, but then were overwhelmed and became once more homeless wanderers. (July 22, 1968)

Shortly after he wrote these things, he returned to the army, to serve as an officer in Israel’s elite commando unit.

What could be more just than the struggle for the survival of a people? Yes, we are all aware of the attacks against Israel from all parts of the globe, every single day of the year, year after year, saying how wrong we are, trying to erode our sense of right and undermine our belief in our cause, and attempting moreover to convince us that we are an all-powerful country, fighting a weak and homeless people, rather than presenting the situation as it really is—that we are five million Jews surrounded by...
We are being defamed and vilified, while contrarily, those who seek our destruction are being lionized. Cruel murderers, men who judge justice by the amount of power one has and whose sense of right and wrong is intertwined with the amount of blood they can spill, are labeled freedom fighting “guerillas.” And men whose national heroes and official martyrs are the suicide-bombers who try to ensure that as many innocent victims as possible die with them—such people are to be considered legitimate, and even desirable, partners for “peace,” and are often looked upon not as what they are—killers of innocent men, women and children, that is, terrorists of the worst ilk—but as champions of human rights and freedom. At the same time, young Israeli soldiers, forced to fight such a brutal enemy, have been castigated as Nazis.

What hasn’t been said about us by our detractors? Almost everything imaginable. We have even been accused of attempting to poison the Palestinian population—not by defiling their wells, as we were accused of in the Middle Ages, but by literally poisoning the air they breathe and the food they eat.

Many of you might remember the accusations hurled against us by the Palestinians twenty years ago, and the big to-do about it in the world media at the time. The media, mind you, did not turn against those who instigated this horrendous lie, but against us. And it doesn’t matter that it’s our enemies who have been using poison gas on others. All this doesn’t matter: for it is the Israelis (so they say) who are the poisoners.

And when Israel’s enemies admit to their heinous crimes of suicide bombings and political assassinations—for which they gloat (when not speaking to the Western media, of course), for in their eyes these are highly admirable acts—even then it is not they who are to blame for them. No, even on those occasions, it is Israel that is at fault, for it is our supposed “oppression” that has supposedly caused these acts to be committed!

Thus, no matter what, we are the guilty party. A very neat arrangement indeed.

But in truth, Zionism is as just a national movement as ever there was one. It is a movement that sought to ensure a permanent refuge for a homeless and persecuted people; and it did so not by taking anyone’s country, as did most other peoples, but rather by having us return to our ancient and beloved homeland, which was a virtual wasteland when we first resettled it, sparsely populated, consisting for the most part of swamps, sand, and rocks, and belonging to no existing nation and to no known people.

Indeed, during the years my mother grew up as a child in the land of Israel, it was she and her friends who were called Palestinians (just as my uncles and their Jewish friends, from Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, when they served in World War II in the British army, were called by the British), for the Arab inhabitants of the land did not call themselves that and certainly did not regard themselves in any such way. If they had a national affinity whatsoever, it was to the larger Arab world.

The Arabs can say what they will until doomsday, but nothing will alter the fact that it is they, not us, who possess a huge land-mass, larger than the continental U.S., populated by hundreds of millions of people, and divided into twenty-two (!) states, each of which considers itself part of the greater Arab nation. All have a similar, if not identical culture, possessing the same religion, and speaking the same language.

Compare this with what we have—one of the smallest and most densely populated countries on earth. Yet despite that, it is we who are castigated as being “expansionist,” as being land-grabbers at other people’s expense, and it is we whose country the world wants to shrink further, so that it may possess a waist comparable to the breadth of an ordinary American city.

The Arabs know full well why they want Israel to have such a narrow waist. It is for the very same reason that they also continually insist on the “right of return,” whereby Israel would be flooded with a hostile population. They know that a nation with...
The previous article examined two ways in which God has manifested His glory during history: (1) through His created universe and (2) through unique, historic events. This article will examine two more ways.

**Nation of Israel**

God also manifests His glory through the nation of Israel. God assigned the title “Israel, my glory” to that nation (Isa. 46:13) and said of Israel, “I have created him for my glory” (Isa. 43:7) and “the Lord hath . . . glorified himself in Israel” (Isa. 44:23).

God’s means of glorifying Himself through Israel is His historic dealings with that nation. Early in Israel’s history, Moses promised the Israelites that if they would heed and obey God’s Word, God would do the following for them:

*The Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth; . . . The Lord shall cause thine enemies who rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face; . . . And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath* (Dt. 28:1, 7, 13).

Moses also promised that if the Israelites rejected and disobeyed God’s Word (Dt. 28:15), then the following would happen to them:

*The Lord shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand to do. . . . Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies whom the Lord shall send against thee. . . . And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other. . . . And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest; but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind. And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have no assurance of thy life* (Dt. 28:20, 48, 64–66).

These statements indicate that God intends to manifest His glory through Israel by making that nation an object lesson to the rest of the world. His historic dealings with Israel are designed to impress the people of the world with two great truths concerning Himself. First, He is the kind of God who will bless those who will heed and obey His Word. Second, He also is the kind of God who will curse, vex, and rebuke those who will not.

It is no mistake that in ancient times, God placed Israel in the most strategic geographical location on the face of the earth. The land of Israel was the crossroads of three great continents: Africa, Asia, and Europe. And it is no mistake that in modern times, God has placed a nation-state of Israel back in that same strategic geographical location. Notice how frequently the world’s attention is drawn to that nation despite its small size.

**Future Manifestations.** At least two incredible manifestations of God’s glory through Israel are yet to come in conjunction with the future seven-year period of tribulation.

First, God revealed that in the latter times, when Israel will be restored to its homeland and dwell safely there, it will be invaded by a large, combined military force from six nations (the names, as they were known in Ezekiel’s time, are in Ezekiel 38:1–16).

God will react with supernatural fury and wrath to destroy these invaders in the mountains of Israel (Ezek. 38:18–22). He thereby will impressively magnify and sanctify Himself “in the eyes of many nations” (Ezek. 38:23).

Second, near the end of the Tribulation, all the Gentile nations will send their political leaders and armed forces against Israel in the Middle East (Joel 3:9–12; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 12:2–3; 14:2; Rev. 16:12–16; 19:19).

Two-thirds of the Jewish people in the land will perish (Zech. 13:8). The one-third remnant will be surrounded in Jerusalem (Zech. 13:9; 14:2). In desperation it will cry out to God for deliverance (Zech. 13:9). God will respond by sending Jesus Christ from heaven (Zech. 12:10).
The remnant will, in faith, embrace the Messiah (Zech. 12:10–14). God will cleanse them of their sin (Zech. 13:1). Then Christ will destroy the political leaders and armed forces of all the nations that have come against Israel (Joel 3:12–17; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 12:3–4, 8–9; 14:3, 12–15; Rev. 19:11, 20–21).

Glory-Fire of God

God also has manifested His glory through fire.

This glory-fire appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2–3). It appeared as a pillar of fire enshrouded in a cloud during Israel’s Exodus journey from Egypt (Ex. 13:21–22; 14:24) and wilderness wandering (Ex. 16:10; Neh. 9:19).

It came to the top of Mount Sinai when God met with Moses to give the Law to Israel (Ex. 19:9, 16–18; 24:12, 15–18). It came to the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:34–38) and Israel’s first Temple (2 Chr. 7:1–3) when they were dedicated as God’s worship structures. God’s glory-fire remained continuously with the nation of Israel for several centuries.

Its Significance. Every time the glory-fire appeared, it signified that God was present in a unique sense. At the burning bush it signified that God was present to appoint Moses as His deliverer of Israel from its slavery in Egypt. During Israel’s Exodus from Egypt and wilderness journey, it signified that God was with the nation to guide, protect, and provide for it.

When the glory fire descended to Mount Sinai, it indicated that God had come there to enter into covenant relationship with Israel. Its coming to the Tabernacle and Temple revealed that God was coming to dwell in a unique sense in those structures.

Because the glory-fire remained with Israel for several centuries and signified God’s unique presence, through time it became known as the Shekinah Glory of God. The term Shekinah is derived from a word that means “to dwell.”

Sometimes the glory-fire signified that God was present to judge. For example, God’s glory-fire appeared when He judged Israel for lack of faith at Kadesh-barnea (Num. 14:10, 20–23, 28–37). On other occasions it signified that God was present to administer grace. One instance was the appearance of God’s glory-fire when He commissioned Moses to lead Israel out of slavery (Ex. 3:2–10).

Its Effects. The glory-fire of God had significant effects on people and things. At the burning bush it made the surrounding land holy and caused Moses to hide his face in fear (Ex. 3:2–6).

It protected the Israelites and discomfited the Egyptian chariot force at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:19–25). It caused Mount Sinai to quake, burn, and become engulfed by flashes of lightning, loud claps of thunder, smoke, and a thick cloud (Ex. 19:16–18; Dt. 5:23; 9:15).

It caused the Israelites to withdraw out of fear of being consumed (Ex. 20:18–21; Dt. 5:5, 23–26; 18:16). It made Moses’ face glow with a brilliant radiance that necessitated a veil on his face because of the Israelites’ fear (Ex. 34:29–35).

It sanctified the Tabernacle (Ex. 29:43) and made it impossible even for Moses to enter that structure for a while (Ex. 40:33–35). Its presence on the mercy seat in the most holy place of the Tabernacle necessitated a veil between the most holy and holy places lest people be stricken dead (Ex. 26:33–34; Lev. 16:2). When it consumed sacrifices, the Israelites shouted and fell on their faces in fear (Lev. 9:23–24).

While the glory-fire remained in Israel’s first Temple in Jerusalem, that structure and city were protected from destruction. Once it departed because Israel rejected God (Ezek. 8—11), the Temple and Jerusalem were vulnerable to total destruction by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. (Jer. 52:12–14). The departure of the glory-fire signified the withdrawal of God’s protective presence (Jer. 52:3).

These effects reveal that God designed the glory-fire to impress mankind with two aspects of His nature: His “unapproachable holiness and terrifying power.”

Its Special Manifestation. Nowhere in the Old Testament did the glory-fire of God inhabit human flesh. That changed with Jesus of Nazareth. The apostle John wrote of Him, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt [literally, tabernacled] among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father)” (Jn. 1:14).

John saw the glory-fire of God in Jesus’ flesh when Jesus was transfigured before him, Peter, and James (Mt. 17:1–6). Jesus’ flesh radiated a brilliant light (Mt. 17:2). A bright cloud appeared overhead, and God spoke from that cloud (Mt. 17:5; 2 Pet. 1:16–18). John, Peter, and James knew from their nation’s history that the light in the cloud was the glory-fire of God enshrouded in a cloud, the same manifestation of God that appeared to Israel in Old Testament times.

As they compared the light in the cloud with the light in Jesus’ flesh, they recognized that they were the same. Thus the light in Jesus’ flesh was the Shekinah glory of God. As a result, they fell on their faces and were “very much
From The Name by Franklin Graham (Thomas Nelson Publishers):

“The god of Islam is not the God of Christianity. The doctrines of Scripture are not the doctrines of the Koran. Heaven for Christians is not the same place as the paradise sought by Muslims. For anyone to say that the two faiths worship the same God is incredibly uninformed. As someone so eloquently has said, The god of Islam requires you to give your son to die for him. The God of the Bible gave His Son to die for you.”

Deane J. Woods, founder and president of Adelaide College of Ministries in Adelaide, Australia, has joined The Friends of Israel as a full-time ministry representative to help expand FOI’s outreach to Southeast Asia and New Zealand.

Dr. Woods and his wife, Margaret, will work with FOI’s Australian Director Graeme Harrison to impact the region bounded by the 3,000-mile radius of Singapore, home to one-third of the world’s population.

Deane, who holds a doctorate from Dallas Theological Seminary as well as a graduate degree from the University of London, left the presidency of Adelaide after twenty years there to join FOI. He and Margaret, a triple certificated nurse, have served the Lord full-time for more than forty-five years in cities with populations of a million or more.

They have served in the Australian cities of Adelaide (population 1 million), Melbourne (population 3 million), Brisbane (population 1.6 million), and Sydney (population 4 million).

Deane has taught college and seminary and has pastored two large Baptist churches, one in Brisbane and one in Sydney. He has ministered as a speaker in twenty-five countries, including Israel and the Middle East, and for five years was the “Australian Voice of Missions” on an international Bible-teaching radio program that aired in Ecuador, Australia, the Southwest Pacific, and Southeast Asia.

Together with Graeme Harrison, Deane and Margaret will seek every opportunity to make Christ known, teaching the life-changing message, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord” (Rom. 6:23).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Covenant</th>
<th>Book(s)</th>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adamic</strong></td>
<td>Genesis 3:14-19</td>
<td>None Given</td>
<td>God promises a Redeemer and (1) curses the serpent; (2) puts women under male domination and links motherhood to sorrow and pain; (3) curses the earth; (4) imposes burdensome labor, sorrow of life, and physical death. This is a universal covenant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noahic</strong></td>
<td>Genesis 8:21 9:17, 24-27</td>
<td>Rainbow</td>
<td>God institutes human government and promises (1) to continue the natural order (springtime, harvest, night, day, etc.), (2) never again to destroy all flesh by flood, (3) Canaan’s descendants will serve their brother, (4) Shem will have a special relationship with Jehovah, and (5) the predominant Gentile nations will come from Japheth. This is a universal covenant, made with all mankind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abrahamic</strong></td>
<td>Genesis 12:1-3</td>
<td>Circumcision</td>
<td>God promises to (1) create a great nation through Abraham, (2) bless Abraham, (3) make Abraham’s name great, (4) bless those who bless Abraham, (5) curse those who curse Abraham, (6) bless all nations through Abraham, and (7) give Abraham all the land of Canaan. God later confirms this covenant with Isaac, Jacob, and all of Israel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mosaic</strong></td>
<td>Exodus 19:5-8</td>
<td>Sabbath</td>
<td>God gives the Israelites the civil, ceremonial, and moral law and promises that, if they obey it, He will make them (1) a peculiar treasure, (2) a kingdom of priests, and (3) a holy nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deuteronomist</strong></td>
<td>Deuteronomy 28:63-68; 30:1-9</td>
<td>None Given</td>
<td>This covenant pertains only to the promise of the land. God promises (1) dispersion for disobedience, (2) to bring the Jewish people to repentance while in dispersion, (3) the return of the Lord, (4) to restore the Jewish people to the land, (5) national conversion, (6) to judge Israel’s oppressors, and (7) to bestow on Israel national prosperity. This covenant is confirmed in Ezekiel 16:60-62.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Davidic</strong></td>
<td>2 Samuel 7:12-16</td>
<td>None Given</td>
<td>God promises (1) David’s son will succeed him and establish his kingdom; (2) David’s son will build the Temple; (3) David’s throne (right to rule) will be established forever, never to be removed even if his son’s sins justify it. This covenant is confirmed in Psalm 89:3-4, 28-37.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New</strong></td>
<td>Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-13</td>
<td>Communion</td>
<td>God promises (1) regeneration, to put His law in hearts; (2) to restore Israel to favor and blessing; (3) the gift of the Holy Spirit; (4) justification; (5) everlasting blessings; and (6) to exalt Israel as the head of all the nations. The blood of Christ is the foundation of all the covenant blessings (Zech. 9:11; Mt. 26:28; I Cor. 11:25; Heb. 13:20). Israel’s restoration to the land is linked with this covenant (Jer. 31:38-40).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Donna and I do not necessarily know the road ahead, but we take comfort in knowing the One who made and is in control of that road.

—Missionary Warren Pett

Warren and his wife, Donna, were missionaries with the Africa Inland Mission (AIM). They were on loan from AIM to Here Is Life, a Ugandan Christian ministry that runs the Esther Evangelical School of Technology in Uganda, Africa. The school trains students in carpentry, mechanics, leadership, Bible, evangelism, and other practical skills. Warren, 49, taught agriculture and Bible courses, while Donna, 48, taught cooking and tailoring.

On March 18, before leaving for the day, teachers, students, and staff met for devotions led by Warren. Around 9 P.M. the Petts left the school to walk home. Soon after, several gunmen wearing military uniforms appeared, demanding the school payroll be handed over to them. Finding they could not enter the school’s secure room where the payroll was kept, the men rampaged through the property, setting a vehicle on fire and torching the houses of staff members. Denied the money, the attackers started for the Petts’ residence.

A courageous student, Isaac Juruga, realized where they were going and attempted to intervene by trying to get to the Petts’ home to warn them about the impending danger. He was shot and killed.

When the men arrived at the Petts’ home, they called the couple out of the house. As Warren and Donna appeared on the porch, they were shot to death.

Their funeral services were conducted at the Elmbrook Church in Brookfield, Wisconsin, where they were members. They had operated a dairy farm in Wisconsin for twenty-two years before going to Africa in 1997. Scott Arbeiter, Elmbrook senior associate pastor, called them “salt of the earth people. Very authentic. They were vital and lived out what they believed. The news of their lives being taken has sent a shock wave through our church. We are a church in mourning.”

Oli Jacobsen, chairman of New Tribes Mission, stated poignantly,

“Times like this are a brutally painful reminder that we were not created for sorrow and suffering and separation and death, and that we live in a cruel, fallen world. That stark reality makes the truth of what Christ has done for us all the more precious. It is a great comfort to know that Warren and Donna are standing victorious in the Lord’s presence today, rejoicing, and without a moment’s regret.”

Not long ago, the murder of American missionaries serving the Lord in foreign countries sent shock waves through the entire evangelical Christian community. That is no longer true. Foreign workers give up their lives at an alarming, escalating rate. Sadly, it is almost eerily common to learn of yet another atrocity committed to sacrificially dedicated “salt of the earth” servants of Christ.

But this is certain: Tyrants and the grave know no victory here. Heaven gathers God’s fallen children home; the Spirit sustains those forced to stay behind; and the work goes on.
MYTH: Israel has no right to be in the West Bank. Israeli settlements are illegal and an obstacle to peace.

FACT: Jews have lived in Judea and Samaria—the West Bank—since ancient times. The only time Jews have been prohibited from living in the territories in recent decades was during Jordan’s rule from 1948 to 1967. This prohibition was contrary to the Mandate for Palestine adopted by the League of Nations, which provided for the establishment of a Jewish state, and specifically encouraged “close settlement by Jews on the land.”

Numerous legal authorities dispute the charge that settlements are “illegal.” International law scholar Stephen Schwebel notes that a country acting in self-defense may seize and occupy territory when necessary to protect itself. Schwebel also observes that a state may require, as a condition for its withdrawal, security measures designed to ensure its citizens are not menaced again from that territory.1

According to Eugene Rostow, a former U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs in the Lyndon Johnson administration, Resolution 242 gives Israel a legal right to be in the West Bank. The resolution, Rostow noted, “allows Israel to administer the territories” it won in 1967 “until a just and lasting peace in the Middle East is achieved.”2

Nor have the settlements ever been an obstacle to peace.

From 1949 to 1967, when Jews were forbidden to live on the West Bank, the Arabs refused to make peace with Israel.

From 1967 to 1977, the Labor Party established only a few strategic settlements in the territories, yet the Arabs were unwilling to negotiate peace with Israel.

In 1977, months after a Likud government committed to greater settlement activity took power, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat went to Jerusalem and later signed a peace treaty with Israel. Incidentally, Israeli settlements existed in the Sinai, and those were removed as part of the agreement with Egypt.

One year later, Israel froze settlement building for three months, hoping the gesture would entice other Arabs to join the Camp David peace process. But none would.

In 1994, Jordan signed a peace agreement with Israel, and settlements were not an issue. If anything, the number of Jews living in the territories was growing.

Between June 1992 and June 1996, under Labor-led governments, the Jewish population in the territories grew by approximately 50 percent. This rapid growth did not prevent the Palestinians from signing the Oslo Accords in September 1993 or the Oslo 2 agreement in September 1995.

In 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered to dismantle dozens of settlements, but the Palestinians still would not agree to end the conflict. Settlement activity may be a stimulus to peace because it forced the Palestinians and other Arabs to reconsider the view that time is on their side. References are frequently made in Arabic writings to how long it took to expel the Crusaders and how it might take a similar length of time to do the same to the Zionists.

The growth in the Jewish population in the territories forced the Arabs to question this tenet. “The Palestinians now realize,” said Bethlehem Mayor Elias Freij, “that time is now on the side of Israel, which can build settlements and create facts, and that the only way out of this dilemma is face-to-face negotiations.”3

Many Israelis nevertheless have concerns about the expansion of settlements. Some consider them provocative, others worry that the settlers are particularly vulnerable and have been targets of repeated Palestinian terrorist attacks. To defend them, large numbers of soldiers are deployed who otherwise be training and preparing for a possible future conflict with an Arab army.

Some Israelis also object to the amount of money that goes to communities beyond the Green Line and special subsidies that have been provided to make housing there more affordable. Still others feel the settlers are providing a first line of defense and developing land that rightfully belongs to Israel.

The disposition of settlements is a matter for the final status negotiations. The question of where the final border will be between Israel and a Palestinian entity will likely be influenced by the distribution of these Jewish towns. Israel wants to incorporate as many settlers as possible within its borders while the Palestinians want to expel all Jews from the territory they control.

If Israel withdraws toward the 1967 border unilaterally or as part of a political settlement, many settlers will face one or more options: remain in the territories, be expelled from their homes, or voluntarily resettle in Israel.

The impediment to peace is not the existence of those settlements; it is the Palestinians’ unwillingness to accept a state next to Israel instead of one replacing Israel.

ENDNOTES
3 The Washington Post (November 1, 1994).

A pastor in the Midwest tells about his early years trying to shepherd a church that his entire family attended—sisters, brothers, and father.

Apparently it wasn’t easy. During a business meeting when he was trying desperately to make a point, his sister jumped up to remind him, in front of everyone, “I changed your diapers.” Not helpful, to say the least.

Finally, either at that meeting or another, the pastor’s father and patriarch of the family had had it. Rising slowly from the foot of the table, he looked at his daughter and declared, “This is not your brother. This is your pastor.”

It is almost an art to know one’s place. Rabbi Noah Weinberg, dean and founder of the worldwide Jewish teaching organization Aish HaTorah (“the fire of Torah”), says that knowing where you stand in relation to others (Hebrew, hamakir et mikomo) is essential for successful living.

“Before you begin talking,” he says, “stop to think: Is this a time to step forward, or a time to step back?”

That is good advice. And it is even better advice for people who tend to lose sight of where they fit in relation to others and forget to give respect where respect is due.

Miriam is probably one of the most prominent women in the Hebrew Scriptures. She was Moses’ older sister, a prophetess in her own right (Ex. 15:20), and a leader of the multitude of Jewish women whom her brothers had led out of slavery in Egypt.

In Micah 6:4 the Lord included her among the leadership when he said, “For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.”

But somehow Miriam forgot her place. She began to think more highly of herself than she should have and stepped forward when she should have stepped back.

Because of a petty family squabble, Miriam and Aaron challenged Moses’ authority. The result was a rebuke so humbling and severe that it remains to this day one of the best-known facts about Miriam.

Miriam was well up in years when chastened, the matriarch of what could easily be called the First Family of Israel. At eighty, her youngest brother, Moses, was handpicked by Almighty God to deliver the Israelites from bondage, give them the Law on Mt. Sinai, govern them, and form them into a nation in covenant relationship with Him. Her other younger brother, Aaron, at eighty-three, was second in command to Moses and God’s choice for high priest—the highest spiritual position under the Mosaic Law.

Scripture does not say whether Miriam ever married. She is never referred to as anyone’s wife or mother. Aaron, however, married prominently. His wife, Elisheba, was the sister of Nahshon, “prince” of the tribe of Judah (Ex. 6:23; 1 Chr. 2:10) by divine appointment. When the Lord told Moses and Aaron how to encamp the tribes around the
Tabernacle, He named Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, “captain of the children of Judah” and its 74,600 fighting men (Num 2:3–4).

From Miriam’s perspective, Aaron had married well. However, her brother Moses, whose “diapers” she no doubt had changed, was another story. Moses had married a Cushite woman (12:1). Scholars disagree over whether this woman was Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian, or someone Moses married after Zipporah died. Either way, Miriam did not like her:

And she spake, Miriam and Aaron, spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married. . . . And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us? (Num 12:1–2).

Apparently, Scripture names Miriam first because she was the chief offender. The Hebrew word for “spoke” is feminine and reads in the original text, “And she spake, Miriam and Aaron, against Moses.”

Perhaps she was jealous and felt Moses’ wife threatened her position. Perhaps she was prejudiced and considered her sister-in-law inferior and unsuitable for such a prominent family. Whatever the reason, Miriam crossed a doubt had changed, was another story. Moses had married a Cushite woman (12:1). Scholars disagree over whether this woman was Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian, or someone Moses married after Zipporah died. Either way, Miriam did not like her:

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So the Lord descended in a pillar of cloud and challenged them:

My servant, Moses, . . . is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even plainly, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold. Wherefore, then, were ye not afraid to speak against my servant, Moses? And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them (12:7–9).

When the Lord departed, Aaron looked at Miriam, “and, behold, she was leprous” (v. 10).

God had reminded Miriam who Moses was. He was not merely her brother. He was God’s chosen servant. And her closeness to him gave her no right to denigrate him.

So the Lord vindicated and exalted Moses, whom He called “very meek, above all the men who were upon the face of the earth” (v. 3). And Miriam, who had succumbed to pride, He slapped back in place. Aaron then begged Moses to forgive them, and Moses “cried unto the LORD” to heal her (v. 13).

The Lord did so, but said, “If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again” (v. 14).

So Miriam endured public disgrace because she had allowed a family squabble to stoke her pride and provoke her into undermining the authority of God’s servant.

The apostle Paul wrote, “Render, therefore, to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor” (Rom. 13:7).

When you know someone well, it is particularly easy to forget your place in relation to others and step forward when you should step back. As this world deteriorates, pride and arrogance run amok. But the Bible teaches the opposite. It teaches humility, honor, and respect, no matter how close the relationship.

Children are to respect their parents; employees, their employers; wives, their husbands; a congregation, the shepherd of the flock, etc. That is God’s way: “forbearing one another in love” (Eph. 4:2); esteeming others better than ourselves; and doing everything without complaint (Phil. 2:3, 14), “that ye may be blameless and harmless, children of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

REFERENCES


Lorna Simcox is senior editor for The Friends of Israel.

CONCLUSION

Because God is the “God of glory” (Acts 7:2) and the “King of glory” (Ps. 24:7–10), mankind is to ascribe glory to Him (Ps. 96:7–8) by declaring what is impressive concerning God.

ENDNOTES


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

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH FROM PAGE 33

afraid” (Mt. 17:6), reacting the same as the Israelites when they saw the glory-fire of God in Old Testament times.

This embodiment of the Shekinah glory in Jesus’ body signified that He was God in human flesh. Just as the appearance of the glory-fire of God in the Tabernacle and Temple signified that God was present in a unique sense to dwell, or tabernacle, in the midst of the people of Israel, so the appearance of God’s glory-fire in Jesus’ flesh signified that, once again, deity was present in a unique sense to dwell in the midst of His people Israel.

Because of the glory-fire of God in Jesus’ flesh, several statements concerning Him were extremely appropriate. Matthew stated that, in fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14, Jesus would be called Immanuel, which means “God with us” (Mt. 1:23). Simeon, a devout Jew, said Jesus was “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people, Israel” (Lk. 2:32).

Referring to Jesus, John said, “the Word was God” (Jn. 1:1). Jesus called Himself “the light of the world” (Jn. 8:12) and His body a temple (Jn. 2:19, 21).

Paul designated Him “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8) and said that He is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) and “in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). The writer of Hebrews declared that Jesus is “the brightness of his [God’s] glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3).

ENDNOTES

Arafat ok’d attack on U.S.

Arutz-7—The United States has determined that Yasser Arafat approved the terrorist attack on a U.S. embassy convoy in which three Americans were killed in October 2003. Middle East Newsline reported in the name of U.S. diplomatic sources that an American investigation into the Gaza bombing last October indicated Arafat’s clear role.

The sources said that Arafat agreed to a proposal for the Palestinians to “send a message” to the United States.

Israel’s typical ‘catch’ of the day

Not a day goes by that Israel does not catch infiltrators, terrorists, smugglers, or someone out to destroy the nation. Arutz-7 recently filed this report, which covered one day of activities:

“A female Palestinian terrorist, the mother of six children, was apprehended in Ariel yesterday, just before the 20-kilogram explosive pack she was carrying could explode. Several army units in the Shomron had been placed on notice that an attack was suspected, and in fact several alert reserves soldiers near the city of Ariel noticed a woman carrying a large pack.

“When they approached her, she threw the bag aside, thus saving several Jews from death, but ensuring her own quick arrest. IDF [Israel Defense Forces] sappers safely blew up the bomb. Shabak (GSS) investigators are looking into whether the woman was planning to blow herself up with the bomb, or to pass it onto someone else.

“IDF forces uncovered yet another Egypt-Gaza arms-smuggling tunnel—one whose northern (Gaza-side) exit opened into an abandoned cowshed. The tunnel, before IDF sappers destroyed it, was 6 to 8 meters [19.5 to 26 feet] deep and 300 meters [984 feet] long. The discovery was accompanied by a battle with terrorists, some 10 of whom were reported to be wounded.

“Other incidents since last night included a mortar shell that hit a factory in Kfar Darom, a Kassam rocket fired towards Kissufim, a firebomb lobbed at Israeli vehicles near Beit Rimon, and gunfire at IDF outposts in Hevron and Rafiach Yam. IDF soldiers shot and hit an armed terrorist near the southern Gush Katif community of Morag. No Israelis were hurt in these incidents.”

Israel, Jordan plan desert research campus

The International Jerusalem Post—Israel and Jordan laid the cornerstone for a joint research center straddling the border between the two countries in the desert.

Organizers said the 150-acre campus near Moshav Ein Yahav is a way of building peace from the ground up. The project has the backing of Israeli, Jordanian, and American businesspeople, as well as Cornell and Stanford Universities in the United States.

The Bridging the Rift Center, which takes its name from the Jordan Rift Valley, is to be open to students from both countries within five years. Israel and Jordan have torn down a stretch of the border fence between the Red and Dead Seas for the campus, which is to be paid for by private donors.

Although the two countries signed a peace treaty in 1994, cultural and economic relations are limited. More than three years of Palestinian-Israeli violence has also strained diplomatic ties. About half of Jordan’s population is Palestinian.

Students are to move from one country to the other without visas or passports, using a magnetic student card instead, to enable free access to professors and research facilities.

Oops, there goes another . . .

The area around the Dead Sea—the lowest point on earth—is becoming a little lower these days as gigantic craters spontaneously open, swallowing animals, people, and even roads.

The sinkholes can open directly under a person walking along admiring the scenery, “which is more or less what happened to Eli Raz of Kibbutz Ein Gedi,” according to a report by Mark Schulman in The International Jerusalem Post.

Raz, a geologist, fell into a sinkhole and was stuck there for almost 14 hours “with a cell phone, but no reception, until a rescue team from Ein Gedi found his jeep nearby and pulled him out,” Schulman wrote.

“This was the third time someone had fallen into one of these holes, some of which measure as large as 15 meters [49 feet] in depth and 25 meters [82 feet] in diameter. Two ibexes have also fallen into the holes in the past several years and died,” Schulman reported.

Although sinkholes occur elsewhere in the world, particularly Florida, he said the Dead Sea situation is unique. Raz told the Post, “Here, the reason is due to the rapid fall of the level of the Dead Sea and the existence of a thick layer of salt underground.”

In January 2001, a road collapsed into a sinkhole “only seconds after a bus full of tourists drove by.” Wrote Schulman, “The sinkhole phenomenon will no doubt continue unabated unless steps are taken to control the receding water level of the Dead Sea.” There are about 2,000 sinkholes on the western side of the Dead Sea, “with several hundred around the Ein Gedi area alone,” Raz told the Post.
**Is Hamas’s next target the U.S.?**

Before Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi was assassinated, he urged Iraqis to “strike and burn” American and coalition forces and “teach them the lessons of suicide actions.”

Erick Stakelbeck reported in *The Jerusalem Post* that Rantisi’s “last public appearances came on Easter weekend, as thousands of Palestinians took part in rallies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” burning American flags and chanting “death to Americans.”

He said Rantisi wrote an article published on a Hamas Web site arguing that attacking the United States was not only “a moral and national duty—but, above all, a religious one.”

In another article, Rantisi called for “terror against the United States.” He also said the United States had “declared war against God,” and that it would be defeated “by the hand of Hamas.”

Stakelbeck reported that Muqtada al-Sadr, “the extremist cleric behind the ongoing Shi’ite uprisings in Iraq, vowed to serve as the ‘striking arm’ in that region for Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah,” obviously striking at Americans, since Israelis are not involved in Iraq.

Shortly before former Hamas leader Ahmed Yassin was assassinated, he ordered “all Muslims to kill Americans wherever they were found if U.S. troops dared set foot on Iraqi soil,” Stakelbeck said.

Stakelbeck reported, “High-ranking Hamas officials have already managed to infiltrate the U.S., the most notorious example being Musa Abu Marzuk, a senior Hamas leader now based in Syria. Marzuk, who had been living in northern Virginia, was detained by U.S. authorities for 22 months and deported to Jordan in 1997.”

**Swiss ambassador boycotts event on Holocaust Day**

As it does each year, everything in Israel ground to a halt on Holocaust Day for two minutes of absolute silence to pay tribute to those who perished in one of the darkest periods in Jewish history. At 10 a.m. even traffic stopped and people stood in the streets and at their desks for two minutes of silence.

But as the tide of anti-Semitism rises again, the Swiss ambassador to Israel refused to attend a ceremony honoring one of his countrymen who rescued Jewish lives during World War II.

Arutz-7 reported that Ernst Iten “refused to attend a street-naming ceremony in honor of a Swiss Righteous Gentile—because of anti-Israel political considerations.

“The street, located in the northern neighborhood of Pisgat Ze’ev in an area liberated in the Six-Day War, was named in memory of Paul Grueninger. A Swiss police commander, he saved more than 3,600 Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis by providing them with false papers enabling them to enter neutral Switzerland. Grueninger took these actions at great personal cost at a time when his country generally closed its doors to Jews.”

The ambassador wrote to Jerusalem’s mayor saying, “Unfortunately, the embassy cannot attend a ceremony [for] a street that is not located within the internationally recognized territory of Israel.”

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, speaking at the official Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem, which saw 14,000 visitors in that 24-hour period, said, “Our face is turned toward peace, but the defending sword will not be

**Daniel Pipes Exposes ISLAMIC ‘Whited Sepulchers’**

It comes as no surprise to Christians that “whited sepulchers” appear beautiful outside, though they are full of nothing but “dead men’s bones.” But apparently the U.S. government could learn a thing or two from Matthew 23:27.

Journalist Daniel Pipes recently blew the whistle on a benignly named Washington-based organization that was invited to cohost an event with the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). It turns out the pleasant-sounding Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID) is filled with Muslim radicals. Pipes particularly objected to Kamran Bokhari, a man he said the United States has legitimized with power and prestige.

In an article titled “The U.S. Institute of Peace Stumbles,” Pipes wrote, “Mr. Bokhari also happens to have served for years as the North American spokesman for Al-Muhajiroun, perhaps the most extreme Islamist group operating in the West. For example, it celebrated the first anniversary of 9/11 with a conference titled, ‘Towering Day in History.’ It celebrated the second anniversary by hailing ‘The Magnificent 19.’ Its Web site currently features a picture of the U.S. Capitol building exploding.”

Over and over again, wrote Pipes, the government has failed to see past the surface to the true identities of its enemies:

“Ask the presidential candidate who had himself photographed smiling side-by-side with an Islamist who soon after was imprisoned for terrorist activities.

“Ask the U.S. military, which has arrested or convicted at least seven Islamists for criminal activity connected to jihad.

“Ask the mayor of Boston who had city land sold to the Islamic Society of Boston for less than 10 percent of market value, only to learn later that the organization is closely associated with one jihadi extremist banned from entering America, another sitting in federal prison, and a third who welcomes suicide bombings against Israelis as ‘glad tidings.’”

“In all these cases,” said Pipes, “no one was minding the store. The American government needs to wake up to those elements in its midst whose allegiance in the war on terror is on the other side.”
Everyone talks about the “road map” to peace. They say, “Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14). And there will be no peace until the Prince of Peace comes.

And who is always the guilty one because there is no peace? It is never our enemies, who try every day to kill us and take our land. No, it is always Israel.

For many years I have lived in the same neighborhood with many Arabs. We were friends. But now they are afraid to speak with me because the other Arabs will shun them and put them on a list to be killed.

Fanatic Muslims have done much damage here. They preach hatred and try to convince people to become suicide-bombers, sending them to die. They do not know the ways of God or the love of Christ, so they follow evil leaders and preach hatred.

For many years now I have talked with these Arabs and told them that God gave this land to the Jewish people. I have shown them what is written in the Bible and prayed for them.

Not long ago I had a big surprise on a bus. I was on the way to Jerusalem when an Arab man approached me. He was among those who always argued zealously against me.

Many times we spoke, and I would tell him the Bible teaches us to love our enemies. He would become angry and ask, “How can this be when you are fighting against us?”

So I told him, “If you will not come against us with this great hate and kill little children and mothers, of course we can be good friends. But the trouble is that you put your trust in evil leaders who send you out to commit suicide.

“Your leaders promise that you will go to heaven, become shahid (holy), and receive in Paradise seventy-two young girls. Think about this. Ask these great sheiks, who call themselves so faithful, if even one of them has sent his own son. They are telling you nothing but lies. Their promises will never be fulfilled.

“Because you are far away from the love of the Lord, you are going like poor sheep to be killed; and you also are killing little children. Why is all this happening? Because you follow wicked men, not Almighty God, the God of love.

“Not everything can be done by the sword.” I showed him proof of this fact. In 1948 we were only half a million Jews with few weapons. Five Arab
nations came against us to destroy us. But did they win? No, because the Lord fought for us; and the victory was His. As it is written, “If thou shalt say in thine heart, These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them? Thou shalt not be afraid of them, but shalt well remember what the Lord thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt” (Dt. 7:17–18).

Because I speak Arabic and have lived here so long, I often meet Arabs at the bus stop. And I have great opportunities to present the gospel of Christ and teach of God’s love.

When I saw this Arab man approach me on the bus, I wondered, What can this mean? Why is he coming near me? Does he want to fight?

But to my great surprise, he was extremely friendly.

“You know the Bible that you gave me to read? I have been reading it and have been receiving many things from it,” he said. “It is not like the Qur’an. It does not teach people to hate those who are not with you. I read here in this book, ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you’ [Mt. 5:44]. Can this be?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said. “It can be when you believe in Christ. He is the One who is our great example.” I read for him John 3:16 and Isaiah 53. I also read Galatians 5:13–14, where it is written, “By love serve one another. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

“We can do this,” I said, “because of His love for us. And in Him is everlasting love. As it is written, ‘I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore, with loving-kindness have I drawn thee’ [Jer. 31:3].”

Just a few days earlier this man was fiercely against me. But now he is my friend. God and His Word have changed him. Truly, it is amazing what this great love of Christ can do!