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ABOUT THE COVER 
Travelers to the Middle East can visit many spectacular ruins of great, ancient cities. But Jerusalem abides as the city that will not die. Even though it has been destroyed at least five times, it has always risen again. God said there is a place, a city, and a mountain that He has chosen as His own: Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount. Our cover reminds us that Jerusalem is, indeed, the eternal city.

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Recently The Friends of Israel joined the Jewish community in a solidarity rally for Israel in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. By our presence we sought to demonstrate that, as Bible-believing Christians, we are loyal friends of Israel and the Jewish people when many other voices are either silent or hostile. And we will continue to join with Israel for many reasons.

Israel is a mere sliver of land in the midst of twenty-two Arab countries. It is sandwiched between Arab populations fifty times greater than that of the Jewish state, and it is surrounded by Arab territories eight hundred times the size of its land.

Does anyone care? Does anyone care that Israel is fighting for its very survival? Does anyone care that the world stands ready to carve up this tiny country yet again and give it away to Israel’s enemies, one piece at a time?

Yes, we care. And God cares. According to Genesis 15:18, “The LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land [Israel].” And seed is defined as coming through Isaac:

And God said, Sarah, thy wife, shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him (Gen. 17:19).

Then, in Psalm 105, the Lord further describes the seed of promise: “O ye seed of Abraham, his servant, ye children of Jacob, his chosen . . . Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance” (vv. 6, 11).

Could anything be any clearer? Undoubtedly, Israel is the land of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and, also undoubtedly, He has chosen to give that land to His people Israel.

We care about Israel because God cares, because God has said the Jewish people are the “apple of his eye” (Zech. 2:8) and that He loves them with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). He has made irrevocable promises to His ancient people and will keep each and every one of them.

In addition to being motivated by vital biblical considerations, we also see much to commend Israel for on an everyday level. Israel’s unshakeable commitment to democracy is well known. She promotes a society of fairness and equity with participation and inclusion. Even Israel’s Arabs vote in Israel’s free elections and are represented in the Israeli Knesset.

Israel has worked tirelessly to integrate Jewish refugees, providing all kinds of help and financial support, a response so lacking in the Arab countries of the Middle East.

And here in America, our hearts were filled with gratitude for Israel’s reaction following the shocking events of September 11. Israelis grieved with us by hoisting American flags and lowering their own nation’s flags in mourning. Streets in Israel received new names, such as Pentagon Road and New York Street.

Israel stood with us. And we stand with Israel.

Ironically, and against all logic, the Jewish state probably has more enemies than any other nation in the world. Every day Palestinians labor to fill their children with a consuming hatred for the Jewish people. Palestinian television and textbooks overflow with chilling images that viciously slander the Jewish people. Radical sermons from mosques around the world denounce the people of God. And news commentators shamelessly draw a moral equivalence between suicide bombers who target Israeli civilians and Israel’s attempts to protect itself.

We live in a degenerate world, where God is scorned and evil exalted. As Isaiah said, “Woe unto them who call evil, good, and good, evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (5:20).

The beast of anti-Semitism is rising again. Organizations, including the United Nations, that should be protecting good and restraining evil are, in fact, doing the opposite.
Calendars Ad
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The struggle over suppressing discrimination in Western societies is an ongoing problem that will grow with the ever-increasing influx of third-world minorities into more affluent nations. Additionally, judicial decisions that grant sweeping concessions to radical subculture elements demanding unequal rights to express and impose their often-perverted lifestyles on the “silent majority” are fragmenting many communities.

However, two minorities open to unrelenting ridicule without redress are evangelical Christians and Jews. For example, any politician running for office or any prospective judicial appointee who openly declares a commitment to protect the lives of the unborn is almost certain to be immediately shouted out of the process. The suspicion that one’s sympathies lean toward evangelical, biblical values ensures pariah status in the intolerant world of the political, social, and religious liberal left.

Individuals who bridle over any suggestion that Jewish people are victims of a rash of anti-Semitic outbursts in the United States and other Western countries are simply not in touch with the facts. Attacks against Jewish students, which occur with increasing viciousness and regularity on many college campuses, should be cause for alarm. In most cases, however, they are simply brushed off by college administrators as the “right of free speech” for militants.

To people with their heads in the sand, these trends are merely the inevitable evolution of enlightened, contemporary culture. In truth, however, they are dangerous throwbacks to eras of oppression that singled out the “undesirable” as scapegoats and placed entire societies in jeopardy.

That he and many other British academics were not prepared to take on Israelis because of the “gross human rights abuses” they “inflict” on the Palestinians.

But at this stage, should we be alarmed? We had better be.

In June an Oxford University professor in England rejected an application from a Jewish Israeli Ph.D. student purely on the grounds of his nationality. Professor Andrew Wilkie told Amit Duvshani, a student from Tel Aviv University,

On June 23 Professor Wilkie wrote, “Thank you for contacting me, but I don’t think this would work. I have a huge problem with the way that the Israelis take the moral high ground from the appalling treatment in the Holocaust, and then inflict gross human rights abuses on the Palestinians because
they (the Palestinians) wish to live in their own country. . . . [I in] no way would take on somebody who had served in the Israeli Army. As you may be aware, I am not the only UK scientist with these views."

Indeed, Professor Wilkie is not alone in his distaste for Israelis. A series of attempts have been made to isolate Israeli scholars in protest of their country’s operations in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip. Last year Mona Baker, a professor at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology in England, fired two Israeli academics from the editorial boards of two journals she owns because of their nationalities.

Wilkie, under pressure, apologized, and Oxford repudiated him for his remarks. Nevertheless, the fact remains that he acted on what he believes and spoke for many others he knows feel the same way.

Reading this extremely disturbing story and considering its origins is not only deeply distressing, it is hauntingly familiar. When we hear of the vicious anti-Semitism rampant in Arab countries and the Muslim world, we are not surprised. This hatred of “infidel” Jewish people and the State of Israel is a staple of the Muslim religion and academic brainwashing systematically afflicting successive generations of Muslim offspring. But we are not speaking about the world of Islam. These exercises in vilification are occurring in England, France, Germany, America, and Scandinavia—countries supposedly “Christian” by tradition.

But need we be reminded that Germany, which became Hitler’s killing field, and Europe, which became his slaughterhouse, were also regarded as Christian? And those who made concessions to the maniac they thought could bring about “peace in our time” also came from ostensibly “Christian” nations.

We must decide whether or not we will stand by silently and let these small but never trivial atrocities continue to gain momentum. Will we allow the shadows of the ’30s to fall upon us once again? In the ’30s the anti-Semitic instruments of annihilation were aimed at Europe’s Jews. Now the same “weapons of mass destruction” are pointing at Israel and its Jewish citizens. Only the location has changed. The desire to destroy remains the same. The clouds are on the horizon. What will you do?

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During a recent radio interview I was asked about the importance of Israel’s decision to allow Christians and Jews to have access once again to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The issue was whether the Temple Mount holds any significance for Jews and Christians in this dispensation. My answer was an emphatic yes for many important reasons.

Islam Denies a Jewish Presence on Moriah

Palestinians and many of their fellow Muslims claim there has never been a Jewish Temple or presence on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Jewish people and evangelical Christians know this astonishing perversion of history is patently ridiculous. Nevertheless, it is gaining credence both in the Muslim world and with people who are biblically and historically illiterate.

These are the same elements that have signed on to the notion that the Holocaust was fabricated and never actually took place, even though the Third Reich meticulously and thoroughly recorded the details of its own atrocities during Hitler’s infamous bloodbath of sixty years ago.

To certify their claims, Muslim authorities involved with excavations at the Mount have deliberately destroyed archaeological artifacts from the first and second Temple periods that would contradict their revisionist propaganda. To the world at large, their assertions and counter assertions are of little consequence. But for Jewry, Christianity, and the world of Islam, they are extremely significant.

Old Testament biblical records, written more than two thousand years before Islam’s Qur’an, verify that the site of the great Temples of Israel was where the Muslim Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosques now stand:

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose: in the feast of unleavened bread, and the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee (Dt. 16:16–17).

And where was that place “which he shall choose?” It was in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where Abraham had brought Isaac in Genesis 22—the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, which David purchased:

And the king [David] said unto Araunah, Nay, but I will surely buy it of thee at a price; neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver (2 Sam. 24:24).

It was at this very place, Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, where Solomon, son of David, was instructed to build Israel’s first great Temple:

Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where the LORD appeared unto David, his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing floor of Ornan
[Araunah], the Jebusite. And he began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign (2 Chr. 3:1–2).

At that sacred place, the great, festive occasions would be lived out in the national life of the Jewish people. Later the eyewitness accounts of historians would testify to the presence of the Jewish Temple and the glory of it. Flavius Josephus, in his book *Wars of the Jews*, left this description of the second Temple prior to its destruction by the Romans in A.D. 70:

> It was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendour, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun’s own rays. But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow; for, as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceedingly white.¹

The white stones Josephus spoke of can be seen today. Some of them lie in a jumble, exactly where they fell during the Roman destruction two thousand years ago, on the excavated Roman street that ran along the base of the Temple platform’s wall.

The evidence is conclusive. The Bible confirms it; eyewitnesses wrote about it; and irrefutable physical evidence exists that anyone who visits Jerusalem can see. Nevertheless, Muslims continue to declare that the Jewish people and their Temples have no prior claim to the Temple Mount. In fact, according to Islamists, they have no claim at all.

**Why Muslims Deny Jewish Rights to Mount Moriah**

The Islamic worldview is absolutist. Every shrine and piece of land that Muhammad’s followers laid claim to is to be controlled exclusively by Muslims. Sharing property rights or acknowledging another faith’s legitimate interests in sacred places is out of the question. Non-Muslims may be allowed to visit as spectators—for a fee, of course. But Islam believes it holds the rights and title deed to all such land, along with the ability to dictate who will enter and when.

Secular apologists will brush off resistance to the new Muslim order on the Temple Mount as not worthy of serious consideration. What’s to argue over? After all, it’s just about old stones beneath the present reality of the very visible, golden Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque. Why offend the Muslim world by supporting Jewish rights on the site?

Truth is that secularists have no interest in any of the spiritual matters at issue and have zero tolerance for anyone who does. So one cannot expect much assistance from governments or politicians, who primarily look after the economic interests of their countries.

But for Christians, Jews, and Muslims, rewriting the history of the sacred mountain has overwhelming spiritual implications. Islamic militants want to turn fact into myth for reasons that go far beyond ownership of a thirty-three-acre platform on a small mountain in Jerusalem. Their obsessive motivation is to establish
Islam as the only credible religion in the world and make the third-string Muslim holy place in Jerusalem a purged shrine, forging a trinity of purified sites for Muslim pilgrims: Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem.

Implications for Christianity and Judaism are also significant. If the Muslims succeed, both the Old and New Testaments will be perceived as flagrant falsehoods because much of the material in both Testaments is set in and around occasions related to the Jewish Temple on the Mount.

Beyond the arguments about rights to the Temple Mount lurks a more ominous, and actually more important, theme: Satan’s plan to ultimately claim the Jerusalem Temple as his possession alone. Such contemporary events as the rush for international Gentile intervention to control Jerusalem, denial of Jewish rights on Moriah, the desire of Orthodox Jews to rebuild their Temple, the growing anti-Israel/anti-Semitic global outbursts, and the search for a world leader who can bring peace all converge to form a backdrop for climactic events that will come to the stage in the last days.

The Center of the Action

Although the contest over the Temple Mount has important ramifications, the future now coming into focus tells the rest of the story. Evangelical Christians who are tuning away from the study of Bible prophecy are unable to discern why our relationship to the State of Israel, the Jewish people, and the land of Israel is of any importance.

Replacement theologians have pressed the debilitating fiction that we Christians are, after all, the true “Israel of God” to the point that many are convinced that prophecy is merely the stuff of allegory or ancient fulfillment, without practical meaning for us. This position, unfortunately, flies in the face of clear biblical revelation, historical reality, and world conditions that are spiraling out of control.

The Scriptures teach that a literal Temple will stand on Moriah during the Tribulation. Second Thessalonians 2:4 describes the “man of sin” (Antichrist):

Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped, so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

The apostle Paul undoubtedly spoke of a future event, a specific place, and a personality not yet revealed to the world. History obviously is moving toward cataclysmic events. Many question how and when the Dome of the Rock will be removed to make way for the Tribulation Temple. There are various theories on the subject. But one thing is sure: When the time comes for the Temple to be rebuilt, the mosque will have been taken out of the way.

But the Tribulation Temple is not the last chapter in God’s plan for the threshing floor King David purchased from Araunah the Jebusite. Scripture contains a lavishly detailed account of a future Millennial Temple that will grace the Temple Mount when Messiah reigns on Earth. Ezekiel 40—44 lays down the dimensions and details of a structure never before seen on this planet. Into this house, prepared for the King of kings, will enter the glory of the Lord, which left Solomon’s Temple and never dwelled in the second Temple:

And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east. So the Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court, and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house (43:4–5).

As Scripture indicates, future history focuses on the land He has chosen (Israel); the city where He has placed His name (Jerusalem); and the Temple Mount, the site of His House. No conflict over those issues is inconsequential. And those who take it on themselves to drive the Jewish people from their holy place, efface Jehovah’s name from the landscape, or impose their will to dictate who will have dominion there will suffer grave consequences.

Up to Jerusalem

At this time of year Israelis and Jewish people worldwide commemorate their high holy days. Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), and Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) form a twenty-two-day span in the Jewish month of Tishri. It is not coincidental that these commemorations have endured from antiquity until today. Nor is it without significance that during these solemn and festive days, thousands of pilgrims will go to Jerusalem from many places in the world to keep the fast and celebrate the feasts.

No, it is not accidental. It is prophetic—God’s reminder of the day when the Messiah will return, ascend His throne, and welcome the masses of mankind that will come up to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Tabernacles:

And it shall come to pass that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles (Zech. 14:16).
The Maccabean Revolt in the second century B.C. is a complicated period to understand. Yet the conflict illustrates important life lessons, such as faithfulness to God, perseverance in spiritual warfare, and the blessing of rededication to the Lord.

DEIFICATION of a Madman

After Alexander the Great died in 323 B.C., his empire was broken up among his four generals. Of those, two dominant powers soon emerged: the Ptolemies in the South, who ruled in Egypt; and the Seleucids in the North, who ruled from Syria and Persia.

Naturally, Israel could not escape becoming embroiled in their power struggle as both fought for control of the Jewish nation. At first Israel was ruled by the southern empire. During this period King Philadelphus of Egypt (285–246 B.C.) ordered that the first five books of the Old Testament be translated from Hebrew into Greek. Later the rest of the Scriptures were translated to produce the Bible version known as the Septuagint, meaning “seventy” in Latin. An outstanding result of this translation was that it introduced Greeks in the South to the true God and His Word. Consequently, many actually embraced the Hebrew faith.

You are stealing bones!” shouted the black-clad, ultra-Orthodox demonstrators. Police guards were quickly posted by the tomb caves in Israel. Many stood around and wondered, Could these bones really be the remains of the Maccabees?
The northern kingdom was different. It chose to practice and push a philosophy started by Alexander the Great called Hellenism. Hellenism was a conformity or devotion to the culture, religion, and language of ancient Greece. In 198 B.C., the district of Judea, referred to then as the “nation of the Jews,” was unfortunately taken over by the Seleucids of the North. And thirty years later, a madman came on the scene.

Antiochus the IV snatched the northern throne in 175 B.C. He was twisted and bizarre. According to the Greek historian Polybius, one of Antiochus’s morbid enjoyments was to pour myrrh over the floor of the public bathhouses, hide, and watch people fall. The pleasure was all the more enjoyable if the injuries were severe.

His grandiose ambition was to conquer Egypt and enlarge his empire. Since the province of Judea bordered Egypt, it was essential for Antiochus to have a loyal, Hellenized population as a buffer zone. So his first order of business was to subdue the region militarily and demand that all his subjects conform to Hellenistic ideals. He crushed all resistance.

Not surprisingly, he viewed himself as the true depicter and principal proselytizer of the Greek culture. To intensify his “modest disposition,” he gave himself the surname Epiphanes, which meant “the visible god.” Thus he became Antiochus Epiphanes, his version of the embodiment of the chief Greek god, Zeus.

The notion of a mortal declaring himself god offended some in Israel. The Hebrew Scriptures teach that God created man from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7). Though created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27), man can never be God. One sure disqualifier is the inherit sin nature that permeates every human being (Gen. 3:1–6; Rom. 5:12–14).

However, in the Hellenistic culture, such a misguided presumption was a natural conclusion. Perfection could be achieved by human effort. The emphasis was on the external, not the inner, man. Whereas the Bible stresses “the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 29:2), the Greeks stressed the holiness of beauty. With help from Greek art, literature, and mythology, it eventually became easy for mortals with this religious belief to think of themselves in terms of deity.

The king’s nickname Epiphanes spelled trouble for Judea. The Jewish people, having a more realistic assessment of Antiochus’s character, made a pun on the word, calling him Epimanes, meaning “Madman!”

DEDICATION of the Temple

Things were bad in Jerusalem. All the decrees issued in 169 B.C. went into effect by 167 B.C. Antiochus sent an emissary there with a huge army. It plundered the city and took women and children captive. Most of the sacred scrolls were torn and burned. Death came to all who kept the Sabbath and feast days. An idol of Zeus was placed over the Great Altar in the Temple. If that weren’t enough, the priests were ordered to sacrifice pigs on the altar. This particular desecration occurred on the twenty-fifth of the Hebrew month Kislev (November/December).

Enough was enough. A full-scale rebellion soon took place. The showdown occurred on a hill along the road from Jerusalem to Jaffa in a village called Modiin. A detachment of soldiers arrived to compel residents to sacrifice a pig to the pagan gods. In the crowd was an elderly priest named Mattathias, along with his sons. According to the apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees, considered a good historical, although extrabiblical, source, the officer
came up to Mattathias and said,
Thou art a ruler, and an honourable
and great man in this city, and
strengthened with sons and
brethren: Now therefore come thou
first, and fulfil the king's command-
ment, like as all the heathen have
done, yea, and the men of Juda also,
and such as remain at Jerusalem: so
shall thou and thy house be in the
number of the king's friends, and
thou and thy children shall be hon-
oured with silver and gold, and
many rewards (2:17–18).
Mattathias, offended by this
wicked intrusion, responded,
Though all the nations that are
under the king's dominion obey
him, and fall away every one from
the religion of their fathers, and
give consent to his command-
ments: Yet will I and my sons and
my brethren walk in the covenant
of our fathers. God forbid that we
should forsake the law and the
ordinances. We will not hearken
to the king's words, to go from our
religion, either on the right hand,
or the left (2:19–22).
Bold words! Mattathias expressed
what many faithful to God felt.
Nevertheless, a frightened Jew-
ish man stepped out of the crowd
and went up to the altar to sacrifice
the pig:
When Mattathias saw, he was
inflamed with zeal, and his reins
trembled, neither could he forbear
to show his anger according to
judgment: wherefore he ran, and
slew him [the man] upon the altar.
Also the king's commissioner, who
compelled men to sacrifice, he killed
at that time, and the altar he pulled
down. Thus dealt he zealously for
the law of God, like as Phinees
[Phinehas, Num. 25:7–14] did
unto Zambri [Zimri] the son of
Salom [Salu]. And Mattathias
cried throughout the city with a
loud voice, saying, Whosoever is
zealous of the law, and maintaineth
the covenant, let him follow me. So
he and his sons fled into the moun-
tains, and left all that ever they had
in the city (2:24–28).
A powerful, guerrilla-warfare
army, which included the Hasidim,
was organized. When Mattathias
died, his son Judah took over.
Under his leadership the revolt
expanded from seeking religious
freedom to a fight for full political
independence. Judah soon acquired
the surname Maccabee, which some
say meant “hammer.” It reflected
his tactics of quick, hammer-like
attacks on his enemies.
Finally Jerusalem and the Temple
were liberated. The city was a terrible
sight. The gates were burned, the
sanctuary desolated, and the Temple
altar polluted. Falling on the ground
and casting ashes on their heads, the
victors wailed. Faithful priests were
chosen to cleanse the Temple. They
removed the defiled altar stones and
built a new altar (4:36–43).
The new altar was dedicated on
the same month and day it had
been desecrated, the twenty-fifth of
Kislev. The celebration lasted eight
days. All the people worshiped and
praised God, sang songs, and
rejoiced with harps and cymbals.
The Jewish holiday Hanukkah, which
means “dedication,” still
commemorates the victory today.
War continued until it was
won. But what was gained was
soon lost. A new world power
arrived to replace the Greeks:
Rome. Yet for a brief moment in
their bitter history, the Jewish peo-
ple again experienced freedom. It
has been said that the Maccabean
Period was the last era of Jewish
independence in the land of Israel
until the modern State of Israel
was born in 1948.
Several practical life lessons can
be learned from this ancient conflict.
First, just as Mattathias and his
sons showed courage before
Antiochus despite the king’s evil
ways, so faithfulness to God brings
fearlessness in the face of cruel
men (cf. Prov. 21:30–31). The world
will always contain men who chal-
lenge His ways. But the Bible
admonishes believers to stand firm
and honor God; and He will bring
the victory.
Second, through Antiochus,
Satan sought to destroy the Jewish
people and undermine God’s pro-
gram for the ages, namely, the
coming of Jesus the Savior. Satan
continues to seek ways to subvert
God’s purposes by instigating
hatred for Israel and all who love
Christ. But our spiritual warfare is
waged “not by might, nor by
power, but by my Spirit, saith the
LORD of Hosts” (Zech. 4:6).
Just as the small band of Maccab-
ees came against the great
Seleucid army, spiritual conflict is
sometimes a fight between unequal
forces. Unless we trust Jesus, the
“author and finisher of our faith”
(Heb.12:2), we cannot stand
against the opposition, whether
great or small.
Finally, the Temple was defiled;
but it was again cleansed. So, too,
the temple of our bodies can be
defiled. But by confession (1 Jn.
1:9) and renewal (Rom. 12:1–2; 1
Cor. 6:19–20) we can rededicate
ourselves to God and His service.
The commotion raised by the
religious demonstrators at the dig
site did not last long. No Maccabean
bones were stolen, or found, for
that matter. The hoopla was a publicity
hoax. However, the valiant Maccab-
ean Revolt happened indeed; and
it still provides inspiration for
faithfulness and trust in God.

Peter Colón is the Southeastern States
director for The Friends of Israel.
For more than a century the Jewish people had suffered the humiliation of subjugation to Rome. Entering Jerusalem in 63 B.C., the triumphant Roman general, Pompey, had even dared to enter the holy Temple, initiating a period of Temple defilement that intensified the Jewish nation’s loss of independence. Nevertheless, as long as the Temple stood and a Jewish king (Agrippa) ruled, future independence remained a hope.

Therefore, as the century drew to a close, rising Messianic expectation combined with Jewish nationalistic aspiration and conflicting political ambition. From Rome’s perspective, Judaism was an insufferable autonomy, tolerated only to keep Jewish nationalism in check. However, once religious ideals ignited such nationalism, Rome was sure to intervene.

In A.D. 44, King Agrippa’s death placed the whole country under direct Roman rule, removing the illusion of Jewish independence. Mounting Roman oppression, the siding of Roman authorities with the non-Jews in the land, and repeated violations of the Temple’s sanctity created an atmosphere for revolt. In April of A.D. 66, when the Roman governor confiscated seventeen talents from the Temple treasury, Jewish nationalists rebelled. They seized the Temple, stopped the daily sacrifices in tribute to the Roman emperor, and captured the stronghold of Masada.

The Revolt

The Great War, or First Jewish Revolt, was unique in the region’s history because the Jews were the only people in the ancient Near East to launch such a large-scale revolution against the Roman Empire. Unique also is the fact that no other ancient conflict has been preserved in such complete detail by an eyewitness. This historian and eyewitness was the first-century Jewish man Yosef ben Mattityahu, better known as Flavius Josephus. Josephus was a former Pharisee and commander of Jewish nationalist forces in the Galilee. Roman historian Dio Cassius provided another important account. His was based on official military records.

In response to the Jewish insurrection, staged primarily in Jerusalem,
Rome’s leading commander, Vespasian, was dispatched to quell the uprising with about fifty thousand soldiers. Vespasian’s attack began in northern Israel, which, unlike Jerusalem, offered little resistance. For example, the Jewish families at the Galilean fortress of Jotapata, defended by Josephus’s forces, committed suicide rather than surrender; and Josephus turned to the Roman side.

An exception was the city of Gamla in the Golan Heights, which attempted to prevent the Roman advance toward Jerusalem in the fall of A.D. 67. However, the Romans decimated the city, slaughtering four thousand Jews. Rather than allow their families to fall to Roman savagery, about five thousand Jewish people took their own lives, plunging off nearby cliffs to their deaths. This heroic stand later earned the site the title “The Masada of the North.”

By the summer of A.D. 70, Vespasian’s Tenth Legion had made its way to Jerusalem and placed the city under siege. Because of the influx of refugees from other Jewish cities destroyed by the Romans, in addition to Judeans fleeing the legions, the city’s population had at least tripled. Jerusalem’s reputation as both impregnable and large (it was one of the largest cities of the ancient world) made it a significant challenge to the already weary Roman soldiers. However, because it was the center of political and spiritual authority and the center of the Jewish revolt, Jerusalem also was destined to become the foremost example of Roman punishment.

At the time of the Roman siege, two of the most militant Jewish nationalist factions, the Zealots and the Sicarii, had gained control of the Temple Mount with the aid of Idumean mercenaries (descendants of the Edomites). The Idumeans had ruthlessly killed the more moderate Sadducaic and Pharisaic elements in charge. The militants’ aim from the beginning was to crush the Roman occupation of Israel and drive the Romans from the land. Now that the war had come to the holy city, they were determined to prevail or perish.

To assure that the city’s Jewish population would not flee but fight to the death, the Zealots destroyed the food storehouses while proclaiming the divine inviolability of Jerusalem. Since the only way out of the city was in a coffin, a leader of the Pharisaic sect, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, escaped by hiding in one and surrendering to Vespasian.

Upon being delivered to the general, he addressed him as emperor and said God would allow only a great ruler to capture His city. According to tradition, a messenger from Rome arrived at that moment, telling Vespasian the emperor had died and that Vespasian had been crowned his successor.

Impressed by the rabbi’s prophecy, the new emperor permitted the rabbi to safeguard the Torah scroll and its sages in the city of Yavneh. Thus, although the Temple was destroyed, the Torah was not; and though Jerusalem was spoiled, Judaism was spared.

It came days later with a catapult barrage that continued for two months until the Romans finally breached the walls. Proceeding house by house, the Romans set fire to the city, slaughtering every Jew in their wake. One archaeological testimony to the fierceness of the fighting is the “Burnt House” within the present Jewish Quarter. Here you can see the debris of one of the houses destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, with the remains of a woman holding a spear, lying on the doorstep where she was killed.

Though weakened by hunger, the Jewish defenders repelled the Roman assault from the Temple Mount for three weeks. Then, on the ninth of the Jewish month of Av (August), the Romans reached the second-Temple compound. This was, providentially, the same day the first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians 656 years earlier.

Dio Cassius described the final opposition of the Jewish people nestled around the sacred precinct: 

The populace was stationed below in the court and the elders on the steps and the priests in the Sanctuary itself. And though they were but a handful fighting against a far superior force, they were not conquered until part of the Temple was set on fire. Then they met their death willingly, some throwing themselves on the swords of the Romans, some slaying one
Randall Price, president of World of the Bible Ministries, Inc., is an archaeologist and author of numerous books on Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple.
In the first century, the Jewish nation rejected One named Jesus as Messiah. However, few people realize that in the second century, it accepted one named Simon.

In the hundred years between the two events, the Jewish nation’s anger against its Roman masters exploded repeatedly. From A.D. 66 to 73 Rome crushed the rebellious nation and stamped out Jewish insurgency in what is called the First Revolt simply because more revolts followed.

However, the Jewish people who lived outside the land of Israel also began to rise up against the empire. Revolts then erupted from A.D. 115 to 117 in Cyrenaica (Libya), Cyprus, and Egypt, costing many lives and causing much destruction. Again Rome again suppressed them. It might seem that after these two devastating conflicts, the Jewish people would finally submit to their Gentile overlords. But such was not the case. A conflict even more terrible was about to begin.

The Provocation

The First Revolt led to the destruction of the second Temple in A.D. 70. The Jewish people who survived Rome’s onslaught wondered if the Temple would be rebuilt after seventy years, as the first Temple had been after its destruction by the Babylonians (586–516 B.C.). As the years passed and the seventieth year approached (A.D. 140), Jewish hopes began to rise.

However, they soon began to fade. Initially the Jewish people had welcomed Hadrian as emperor after he succeeded the vicious Trajan, who had inflicted much destruction on them during his reign (A.D. 98–117). Hadrian had even offered to rebuild the Jewish Temple. But the Samaritans persuaded him to change his mind. Fading hope then turned to fury.
when Hadrian began to reconstruct Jerusalem into a pagan city. He renamed it Aelia Capitolina, after his family name (Aelia) and the sacred hill of the pagan gods in Rome (Jupiter Capitolinus).

Essential to this new Roman city would be a pagan temple on the same spot where the Jewish Temple had stood. Construction of the city began in A.D. 130. Then Jewish fury turned to rage when Hadrian prohibited circumcision. These massive affronts to Judaism fanned the embers of hatred. Preparation for war against Rome had begun. All that was needed was a spark to ignite the fire.

**THE REBELLION**

The Jewish people in Judea patiently prepared for battle by constructing underground tunnels and collecting weapons. Hadrian witnessed the beginning of his building project in Jerusalem and then continued traveling to neighboring countries while the Jews waited for the right time to begin their war of liberation. When Hadrian returned to Rome, the pent-up anger against him burst. In A.D. 132, Jewish forces unleashed their fury against the Roman Tenth Legion, forcing it from Jerusalem. The holy city passed into Jewish hands, and the Second Jewish Revolt was under way. This victory rallied the people, propelling forces to capture Roman positions in southern Judea and eastward toward the Mediterranean Sea.

Sadly, detailed descriptions of this war are not available because no historian wrote from the inside, as did Josephus concerning the First Revolt of A.D. 70. However, the Jewish nation considered itself reborn. Jewish forces quickly defeated local Roman troops. Dates recorded on texts from the Judean desert begin with the “first year” and continue to the “fourth year” of this new Israeli kingdom. This Jewish government created new divisions of the land with local leaders and required taxes. Discipline was strict, and violation of loyalty severely punished. This united front against Rome initially proved successful. How did such national renewal transpire so suddenly and successfully? In a word, leadership.

**THE LEADER**

Twentieth-century Israeli archaeologist Yigael Yadin discovered and translated many of the documents from the Dead Sea area written during the Second Jewish Revolt. In 1960 he announced to the president of Israel, “Your Excellency, I am honoured to be able to tell you that we have discovered fifteen dispatches written or dictated by the last President of ancient Israel 1800 years ago.”

The scrolls echoed the actual name of the Jewish prince who led the revolt—Simon ben Koseva. In addition to these ancient texts, archaeologists have also discovered coins that were minted during this period. On one side is the name Shimeon ha-Nassi (“Simon, the prince”) and on the other side, the words *The First Year of the Redemption of Israel.* A few coins contain the image of a star over a temple. Just who was this leader who had the power to rally the Jewish people and overthrow the Romans?

Few details are known about his background, but we do know that his name was changed from Simon Bar Koseva to Simon Bar Kokhba. Numbers 24:17 prophesies, “There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.” The Hebrew word for “star” is kōkha. Rabbi Akiba, a most highly esteemed rabbi of that generation, proclaimed of Simon Bar Koseva, “This is the King Messiah.” In a play on words, Rabbi Akiba changed *Koseva* to *Kokhba,* thus calling Simon the Messianic “Star” of the famous prophecy—Simon Bar Kokhba. (*Bar* is Aramaic for “son” and *ben,* Hebrew for “son.”)

However, not everyone agreed with Rabbi Akiba. Rabbi Yohanan is said to have told him, “Akiba, grass will grow out of your cheekbones and the Son of David will still not have come.”

A significant group also did not submit to Simon’s rule: the Jewish believers in Jesus. Church fathers Justin and Eusebius recorded that Simon persecuted Christians in Judea for their disloyalty. “It was only Christians whom Bar Chocheba, the leader of the Jewish rebellion of the Jews, commanded to be punished severely, if they did not deny Jesus as the Messiah and blaspheme Him.”

Most Jewish people, however, resolutely followed their new warrior-king, Bar Kokhba inspired his followers by setting an example of both military and religious zeal. Ancient texts from the Dead Sea area reveal his zealous desire to keep the Sabbath and strictly observe Jewish holidays. They also indicate his stern leadership style. For example, he assumed ownership of Roman lands and leased them to fellow Jews to farm. He replaced the Roman
emperor’s authority with his own absolute authority. He chose leaders who could uproot cedar trees or endure having a finger chopped off. Though little else is known of him, one thing is certain: Under Bar Kokhba’s leadership the new kingdom of Israel successfully withstood the Roman Empire for three years.

**THE DISAPPOINTMENT**

After losing to Bar Kokhba and his troops for three years, the local Roman garrisons grew frustrated. They could not win against the fierce Jewish fighters who hid in caves and avoided open warfare. So Hadrian summoned from Britain one of his finest generals, Julius Severus, to lead the war.

Under Severus, Rome’s tactics changed from traditional combat to slow, pinpointed destruction of the Jewish people. This was no small contest. Legions arrived from Egypt, Syria, and Britain to bolster the Romans in Judea. The reinforced troops recaptured Jerusalem. Bar Kokhba’s forces had valiantly held their holy city for three years, as the Dead Sea texts indicate with the date, “the third year of the freedom of Jerusalem.” Jewish rebels withdrew to small towns throughout Judea.

As the Roman armies continued to flush them out of caves and starve them out of their enclaves, Bar Kokhba and his beleaguered forces gathered in the town of Bethar, about six miles southwest of Jerusalem. However, the Romans encircled the city and starved them. Final defeat came in a battle on the ninth day of the month of Av (in Hebrew, Tisha b’Av). According to rabbinic tradition, the first and second Temples were also destroyed on the same date.

And so, after three and a half years, the short-lived Jewish state came to an end in A.D. 135.

Simon Bar Kokhba died in that final battle. He was given another name in Jewish texts: Simon Bar Koziba. Although it may sound similar to his actual name, Bar Koseva, Bar Koziba is a Hebrew pun meaning “son of the lie.” Whether it was invented during his lifetime by his opponents or showed up after the war, the message is clear: Simon was not the Messiah but rather an imposter. And Jewish tradition ascribes the defeat to his sinful pride.

Roman historian Dio Cassius summarized the results:

*Fifty of their [the Jewish people’s] most important outposts and nine hundred and eighty-five of their most famous villages were razed to the ground. Five hundred and eighty thousand men were slain in the various raids and battles, and the number of those that perished by famine, disease and fire was past finding out. Thus nearly the whole of Judaea was made desolate.*

The Jews who survived were sold as slaves. Their selling price equaled that of a horse.

Hadrian won, and his general received appropriate honors. But the cost to the Roman Empire was high. When the emperor wrote to the Senate describing his victory, he omitted the usual greeting, “I and my troops are well.” Jerusalem now became what Hadrian had planned earlier—a pagan city. To insult the Jewish people, the Romans constructed a temple to Jupiter (Zeus) on the site of the Jewish Temple and carved a pig’s image into one of the city gates. And to insult the Christians, Hadrian erected a shrine to Aphrodite (Astarte) where Jesus had been buried.

**THE RESULTS**

The war devastated the Jewish people. They were forbidden access to Jerusalem under pain of death. The Roman province of Judea was renamed Palestine, after the Philistine enemies of the Israelites. The center of Jewish spiritual life remained in the land but moved north to Galilee. With the Temple and the sacrificial system gone, the rabbis began to focus on the study of Torah. Consequently, Judaism evolved into a religion dependent on good works, rather than on blood sacrifice as prescribed in the Hebrew Scriptures. All nationalistic aspirations became but distant hopes until the 1800s. Messianic speculations dimmed and would not reappear until another imposter, Shabbetai Zvi, appeared in the 1600s. Jewish-Christian relations suffered after the Second Revolt. Jewish believers in Jesus would not follow Simon Bar Kokhba. The war accelerated the parting of the ways by revealing the true loyalty of Jewish believers in Jesus, the true Messiah and real Bar Kokhba—“the bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16).

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2 Palestinian Talmud, Taanit 84, 68d.

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In the waning months of A.D. 72, a Jewish lookout spied an approaching dust cloud from the top of his mountain outpost. He knew it meant only one thing—the Romans were coming. The alarm was sounded. The final fortress of Jewish resistance sprang to life. The war had come to Masada.

The Stronghold

Masada, possibly meaning “stronghold” or “fortress,” is an imposing mesa located on the southwest shores of the Dead Sea. It is a natural fortification, with sheer cliffs and rugged terrain. On the east, the rock face towers thirteen hundred feet above the surrounding plain. Access is difficult and made possible only through a meandering snake path.

Flavius Josephus, the famous first-century Jewish historian, is the primary source of information regarding Masada’s history. Even though some of his accounts and figures are often questioned, much of what he wrote has been borne out by archaeology.

Masada first became a Jewish fortress under the Hasmoneans (circa 150–76 B.C.). Later King Herod upgraded Masada’s defenses (37–31 B.C.). True to form, Herod’s renovations were impressive. A 4,500-foot-long, double stone wall close to twenty feet high in some places outlined the summit’s perimeter. The 13-foot-wide space between the two walls was separated into numerous rooms used for weapons and living quarters. More than thirty towers ran along the wall, which had four gates.

Herod also built two palaces with lavish amenities, including mosaic floors, frescoes, colonnades, and a swimming pool. Wanting his desert hideout to be self-sufficient, Herod grew his own crops on the mount and collected rain into massive, hewn cisterns capable of holding 1.4 million cubit feet (11.2 million gallons) of water. Storerooms preserved jars of oil, wine, flour, and fruits. Herod also stockpiled enough weapons to outfit ten thousand men.

Following Herod’s death, the Romans stationed a garrison atop Masada, where it remained for almost a hundred years.

The Sicarii

During the census of Quirinius (A.D. 6, cf. Lk. 2:2) a fourth philosophy or sect (others were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes) arose among the Jews in the land. Josephus blamed this philosophy for the eventual demise of the Jewish Temple in A.D. 70. This sect promulgated rebellion against Rome and allegiance to God alone. Adherents were known as Sicarii, from the Latin *sica*, meaning “curved dagger.”
Some also identify the Sicarii with the Zealots.

Josephus had little good to say about the Sicarii. He called them bandits who not only assassinated Romans but stole from and murdered their own countrymen, committing barbarous acts and fomenting revolt under the ruse of patriotism and freedom.

In A.D. 66 a group of rebels stealthily overran Masada and wiped out the Roman contingent stationed there. Soon after, the Sicarii leader, Menahem, arrived at Masada with his men, raided the armory, and proceeded to Jerusalem as self-appointed leader of the revolt against Rome. Once at Jerusalem, Menahem displayed great cruelty, murdering anyone who resisted his authority. His oppression became so intolerable a number of the Jerusalem Jews, considering his tyranny worse than Rome’s, rose up and executed him. Many of Menahem’s followers, including a relative named Eleazar ben Yair, fled to Masada, where Eleazar became the leader of the Sicarii holed up there.

Over the next six years, the Sicarii on Masada showed fervent religious devotion. However, in stark contrast to their piety, Eleazar and his men often raided surrounding villages, even Jewish ones, to fill their storehouses. Their most nefarious raid was on the village of En-gedi, 15.5 miles north of Masada. The Sicarii attacked during the Feast of Unleavened Bread; robbed the town of foodstuffs; drove out the Jewish inhabitants; and, according to Josephus, killed seven hundred people.

When Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70, a few of the survivors made their way to Masada. By the time the Romans attacked the mountain fortress in late A.D. 72, the Jewish population there had grown to 967.

The Siege

After they took Jerusalem, the Romans began mopping up. Two remaining Jewish strongholds—Herodion and Machaerus—were quickly smashed. Masada was left for the new procurator, Flavius Silva.

Silva marched towards Masada with the Tenth Legion, thousands of auxiliary troops, and thousands of Jewish prisoners to be used as slave labor for hauling food and water.

Upon reaching the foot of the Masada fortress, Silva determined to tackle the daunting task ahead...
of him. Sizing up the situation, he built eight base camps around the mountain. One was placed on the mountain overlooking Masada from the south. It provided a good vantage point for spying on Sicarii activity. Silva’s headquarters was located in one of the larger camps northwest of the fortress.

Silva’s first objective was to prevent the Sicarii from escaping. He constructed a two-mile-long, six-foot-thick siege wall around the entire mountain.

Silva’s second objective was to break through the wall on Masada’s summit. He knew a protracted siege was out of the question since Masada had abundant provisions. So he built an assault ramp on the natural geological spur that jutted out from Masada’s western side. This job was no small feat. Using two-to three-foot-long tamarisk timbers to support the rubble, Silva’s troops brought in enough dirt and stones to construct an assault ramp that may have been 510 feet long, 50 feet wide, and 26 feet deep.

The Sicarii were not unaware of Roman intentions, nor did they sit idly by. As the Romans attempted to build their ramp, Jewish defenders rolled huge stones, weighing a hundred pounds each, down on them. Other Sicarii cast smaller stones with slingshots.

But their resistance was to no avail. The ramp eventually was completed. The Romans then rolled their siege engines into action. One tower was 70 to 90 feet high. From that height, the Romans rained arrows and ballistic stones down on the scurrying rebels.

They also used a massive battering ram. A typical Roman battering ram consisted of a huge wooden beam with an iron tip shaped like a ram’s head. Suspended by ropes inside the siege engine, the beam was pulled back by soldiers, then thrust forward with great power. Josephus commented that no wall or tower could withstand such pounding.

Knowing this, the Sicarii reinforced their outer stone wall with an ingenious device. Using the beams from the ceilings of 90 percent of the buildings on Masada, the Sicarii built another double wall of wood, with earthen fill in between. It “could have been 70 to 80 feet long, about 60 feet wide and 24 to 27 feet high.” Apparently the battering ram had little effect on this type of wall, other than actually compacting the dirt fill even more with each strike. The success of this new wooden wall was short-lived, however, for it had one major weakness: It could burn.

Silva ordered his troops to throw torches on it. Soon it was ablaze. When a north wind suddenly blew the fire back onto the Romans, the Jewish defenders felt a surge of hope. But the wind changed again, driving the flame back onto the wall. As the wall burned ferociously, the Sicarii realized the end was near.

Instead of charging in for the kill, the Roman legionnaires returned to their camps for the night, looking forward to the final attack on the morrow. During the night, however, Eleazar ben Yair convinced his compatriots, though with some difficulty, that it was better to die free than suffer the Roman torture that was sure to come upon them and their families. Mass suicide was preferred to slavery. With great sorrow, each man took the lives of his own wife and children. Ten men were then chosen by lot to execute the remaining males. Of those ten, one was selected to slay the other nine, burn the palace where they had all fallen, and kill himself.

At morning light, Roman troops poured through the broken wall only to be met with complete silence. Puzzled, they let out a shout, expecting a combative response. Instead, two women and five children appeared, having escaped the night’s slaughter by hiding in underground caverns. They recounted to the Romans what the Sicarii had done. The Romans could not believe it until they entered the burning palace and saw the heap of bodies.

The deaths occurred on the fifteenth of the Jewish month Nisan, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, A.D. 73.

Today the modern State of Israel—the only true democracy in the Middle East—memorializes Masada, not necessarily for its defenders but for its ideals. The words of the Israeli national anthem express the yearning in the heart of every Jewish person since the Romans breached Masada’s wall—“To live in freedom in the land of Zion and Jerusalem.”

ENDNOTES


Bruce Scott is a field representative with The Friends of Israel in New Hope, Minnesota.
More Than a Prophet
book Ad
(Waveline)
Her reasons to do so were many, not the least of which was that, upon her death, she would be assured of being buried next to her husband in a Workmen’s Circle cemetery. That is one of the many benefits of being a member in good standing, and it brings my aunt much comfort. Nor is she alone. For more than a hundred years the attraction to Circle membership has been the security its many benefits provide.

Workmen’s Circle began on the Lower East Side of New York City in 1892. It was nationalized in 1900, holding its first convention in 1901. By 1905 the organization had grown to 6,776 members. That number increased dramatically to 45,666 by 1913 and just twelve years later reached its all-time high of 87,000. What moved so many in such a short time to become so attracted to this organization?

The children of Israel provided an interesting name for the heavenly bread sent to them from the Lord. They called it manna, which means “What is it?” (Ex. 16:15). The same question is asked today when people hear the name of an organization called Workmen’s Circle. Despite a national membership of about twenty thousand, most Jewish people, like their wandering brethren of the past, wonder, “What is it?”

The name was familiar in my household, but as a youngster I could never really grasp what the organization was all about. I knew it was a Jewish association to which some of my family belonged. If I asked about it, the only answer I ever got was, “It is not Communist!” That was certainly good news. But the organization has much more going for it than the mere fact it isn’t Communist.

Workmen’s Circle was started more than a hundred years ago by Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants who were trying to make America their home. My Uncle Sam was a committed member for more than fifty years, devoting countless evenings to serving on many of the different organizational committees. He also offered his carpentry skills free of charge when they were needed for any of the many Workmen’s Circle projects. When he passed away eighteen years ago, there was no question that my aunt would maintain the $75 yearly membership fee.

Most, if not all, of the Circle’s early members were socialists. That fact is not surprising since they had come largely from Eastern European countries where terrible anti-Semitism afflicted them night and day. Eventually it drove them out and brought them to the United States.
In Russia, where Jewish people were ruthlessly slaughtered in government-sanctioned persecutions called pogroms, socialism seemed far more attractive than the brutal rule of the czar. Workmen’s Circle (in Yiddish, Der Arbeter Ring) began in the midst of the largest immigration of Jewish people to the United States. Some two million Jews made the difficult journey between 1883 and 1917.

After arriving in America, they were processed through Ellis Island off the shores of New York City. Then many boarded nearby trains and set out for other parts of the country. There they hoped to realize their dreams in what they called in Yiddish, the goldenah medinah—the “golden land.”

Thousands, however, stayed in New York City, daring to dream there. For most, life in the goldenah medinah turned out to be a struggle for survival in the tenements of New York City. To survive in a new country with a new language and few resources was difficult. But these Jews, most of them young, brought two strong convictions with them from the Old Country. First, as secular socialists, they were freethinking and tough but possessed enough humility to realize survival meant working together. Second, they were fiercely determined to maintain their Jewish identity.

Dr. Emanuel S. Goldstein, professor of Yiddish at Queens College, stated it this way: “The real raison d’etre of Workmen’s Circle became the fight against assimilation.”

Yiddish, the language of most Jews in Europe, became the language of most Jews in Workmen’s Circle. At first they used it almost exclusively. Their slogan, “a shenere un besere velt”—“a more beautiful and better world”—nicely characterized the organization’s purpose. In the words of its current president, Robert Kestenbaum,

The essence of the Workmen’s Circle/Arbeter Ring’s dedication to Jewish community, Yiddish culture and social justice is not simply a tag line printed on a letterhead. Rather, it is a way of life and the fundamental reason we and others like us exist. The pursuit of a shenere un besere velt, a better and more beautiful world, serves as a call for all to adopt in their own way to fulfill personal and collective responsibilities.

With an understood objective of providing mutual aid and assistance to those of like mind and circumstance, Workmen’s Circle provided the additional benefits of camaraderie and friendship. Membership brought people together. Before networking became a familiar business term, members of the Circle did it, not to get ahead but because it was a good thing. As a result, membership increased rapidly.

Social Services

Cash gifts. The life of a new immigrant was difficult. Even if it was only a few dollars, a monetary gift was an incredible help to a stranger starting off in America. Many Jewish people can tell you how a $5 or $10 bill donated from the Circle gave them their start.

Union Involvement. When immigrants arrived in America they needed jobs. In those days working conditions were poor; the hours, long; the pay, low. There were no laws or unions protecting workers against employers who wished to
take advantage of them. With its strong commitment to labor, Workmen’s Circle worked to end sweatshops, organizing when it became necessary and even boycotting businesses when expedient to apply the financial pressure needed to change conditions. In many cases this pressure worked. To this day, the Circle still works hard to support labor and social justice.

Medical Care. Today most people have access to medical care, which is almost regarded as a national right. In the early days of the Circle, it established medical clinics for its members. Thousands of people used them for decades. When these clinics finally were forced to close because of finances, the Circle offered health insurance in their stead. For the many who have benefited from this program, “a better and more beautiful world” became a reality.

Homes for the Aged. Who among us does not have a concern about the senior season of life? It can become an overwhelming consideration. Workmen’s Circle makes it possible to alleviate that concern. Its homes for the aged have met a tremendous need over the years.

Cemeteries. Workmen’s Circle provides cemetery plots for members—like my aunt and uncle.

Education. Jewish immigrants brought with them a respect and desire for good education. For more than seventy-five years the I. L. Peretz schools have helped children “establish kinship with their Eastern European culture and Jewish people worldwide.” These schools, called shuln in Yiddish, offer a wide range of subjects. In fact, they constitute “the largest network of Jewish secular schools in the United States.” They reached their peak enrollment in 1950 with 38,000 Jewish students.

Existing all across the country, these schools have high standards and a demanding curriculum. Originally teaching almost exclusively in Yiddish, today they emphasize Yiddishkite (Jewish culture), which they believe will help Jewish children stay close to their roots. Although enrollment has declined over the years, several thousand students still attend these schools nationally, with about 550 in New York City alone.

Adult education classes are also offered to help expand minds as well as opportunities in America. And no education would be complete without good books. Workmen’s Circle boasts a unique collection of Yiddish-language and other Jewish books, as well as reference works designed for serious study in Jewish history, literature, and culture. Appointments can be made to access the collection. Members receive a regular mailing from the Circle, which regularly recommends books the leadership feels will enhance quality of life for its people.

Cultural Activities

In addition to operating schools during the academic year, Workmen’s Circle also operates camps called Kinder Rings to provide children with wholesome recreation during the summer and foster a sense of pride in their identity as Jews.

Cultural pursuits historically have been important in the lives of the Jewish people. Workmen’s Circle still promotes Folksbiene (Yiddish theatre).

It also has provided many opportunities for its members to access the kinds of entertainment that will not only entertain but tap into the rich heritage of the Jewish people. The organization’s Web site states, “Singing timeless melodies in Yiddish and other songs known to Jews throughout the world, our choruses perpetuate our legacy as they expand their musical repertoires.” During the summer season Yiddish folksongs are performed publicly in parks where no admission is charged.

Workmen’s Circle has been a great help to the Jewish community. Consistent with the Torah’s commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Lev. 19:18), Workmen’s Circle has provided members with mutual aid and health and death benefits and has aligned itself with Jewish unions in an effort to help working-class Jewish people and with a Yiddish newspaper (The Forward) in an effort to inform and educate.

Christians can glean a great deal from humanitarian organizations like this one so that we can minister to people of like precious faith. Providing a measure of security for people is a good thing. But dependency on people must never supersede dependence on God. My aunt has maintained her membership in Workmen’s Circle for many years and is thrilled to know that someday she will lie next to her husband in their Workmen’s Circle plot. More important, however, is the fact that eight years ago, at eighty years of age, she placed her faith in her Messiah for the security of an eternal place in heaven.

ENDNOTES

3 “The Workmen’s Circle, Arbeter Ring.” [www.circle.org/wccjl.html].
4 “The Workmen’s Circle, Arbeter Ring.” [www.circle.org/wccjl.html].
5 “The Workmen’s Circle, Arbeter Ring.” [www.circle.org/wccjl.html].

Steve Herzig is the director of North American Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
Argentina is a beautiful country, rich in tradition and extremely hospitable to guests from foreign lands.

But the Argentina so many knew and loved to visit in years past shows a different face these days. The country is in an economic crisis that has drastically altered its social situation and disrupted the lives of millions.

Two large social sectors, which constitute more than 43 percent of the total population, have been profoundly affected: people living in poverty and a majority of the middle class, which now has no access to public health services or education.

The situation has been complicated further by floods that have ravished provinces and created, in the words of one official, “the worst conditions since the foundation of the town of Santa Fe in 1573.” An estimated sixty thousand people in central Argentina have been forced to evacuate their homes.

As was true when severe famine fell on the people of the Middle East during the time of Joseph, most people did not see it coming and, as a result, were totally unprepared. But the Lord knew it was on the way and had Joseph in place in ancient Egypt to prepare the nation and minister life to those who otherwise would have been without help or hope.

A somewhat similar scenario has unfolded with Doctors Alfredo and Asunta Espinoza at The Friends of Israel Free Medical Clinic in Buenos Aires. Our new FOI medical facility was up and running when the crisis hit. Alfredo had a loyal staff that was trained and continued on page 30
Declaring Nineveh’s Destruction

In the days of the prophet Nahum, Nineveh was at the height of its glory. Its influence through trade, culture, and political conquest extended from Egypt to the Persian Gulf. The city was built by Nimrod (Gen. 10:8–11) on the east bank of the Tigris River, where the Tigris meets the Khosar River, opposite present-day Mosul, Iraq. As the capital of Assyria, Nineveh was a large city, stretching 2.5 miles along the Tigris River. It was eight miles in circumference and had a population of nearly 600,000.

The city had fifteen gates and 50-foot-high walls thick enough for three chariots to ride on side by side. And it was notorious for idolatry and immorality (Nah. 3:1, 19).

The Assyrians were a cruel people. King Ashurbanipal boasted of his violence and atrocities. These included tearing off people’s limbs, putting out their eyes, impaling them on poles, boiling them in tar, ripping out their tongues, and skinning them alive. Assyrians decapitated their enemies and piled the heads in pyramids as monuments to their victories. A conquered city was sacked and its survivors deported to Assyria as slaves.

Although the nation possessed a sense of invulnerability for almost three hundred years, by the sixth century B.C. Assyria’s prominence and power were waning.

God commissioned Nahum to proclaim Nineveh’s coming destruction. Nothing is known about the prophet. His background, family, and occupation are shrouded in silence. The text states only that Nahum was an Elkoshite (1:1), possibly a reference to Elkosh where he lived. Scholars have identified Elkosh as one of three cities: Al Qosh in northern Iraq near Mosul, Capernaum (literally, “village of Nahum”) in northern Galilee, or a city in southern Judah. Nahum’s hometown cannot be indisputably identified.

Nahum means “comfort,” an apt expression of the comfort his message brought to Judah.

The date of Nahum’s prophecy also is uncertain. It had to be written after Ashurbanipal destroyed No-amon (Thebes) in 663 B.C. (3:8) but before Nineveh’s destruction in 612 B.C. Thus scholars date the prophecy between 650–620 B.C.

The prophet’s style was pictorial and poetic. He used many metaphors, similes, rhetorical questions, and figures of speech to describe God’s judicial indignation toward Nineveh’s brutality and to proclaim its impending destruction. The book of Nahum is a sequel to the prophecy of Jonah.

Chapter 1 reveals Nahum’s commission, the character and power of Almighty God, and the collapse of the godless Assyrians.

Commissioned by God

The prophet began by saying, “The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum, the Elkoshite” (v. 1). Nahum spoke of God’s revelation to him as a “burden” and “vision.” The word burden means to “lift up” and was used to describe an object that was heavy to lift. When used by the prophets, the word referred to lifting one’s voice to proclaim a heavy prophecy from God, such as the announcement of judgment.

Nahum’s message was heavy indeed because it described the destruction of Nineveh—the most prominent, powerful nation in the Middle East at the time and a definite threat to Judah. The prophet’s message came from Jehovah in the form of a vision, that is, a mental revelation that Nahum immediately wrote down.

Character of God

Nahum began by describing God’s attributes, character, and inflexible justice. The prophet revealed that the Lord is an omniscient, omnipotent, sovereign God who is in total control of His creation. Nahum revealed that “God is jealous” (v. 2). He is zealous to defend His honor against all who try to rob Him of His righteousness and covenant relationship with Judah (cf. Ex. 20:5).

God also will punish wrongdoers: “The L ORD avengeth, and is
furious [master of wrath]; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies” (v. 2). The words LORD and avengeth are used three times in this verse and reveal God’s vengeance toward His adversaries. Vengeance belongs to God alone. He does not vent vengeance and wrath to get even, but to vindicate His holiness in righteous justice against the offender. He never forgets the injustices of His adversaries and reserves His wrath for the proper time of punishment (Dt. 32:35, 41).

God patiently withholds judgment: “The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked” (v. 3). His slowness to implement judgment does not mean He is weak, indecisive, or capricious, but that He is patient and longsuffering toward the wicked, hoping they will repent. This attribute was illustrated when Jonah preached to Nineveh a century earlier. Revival broke out there. The nation repented, resulting in God sparing the city. God will never excuse or acquit the wicked who do not repent and will punish when He so chooses, with just indignation.

Verses 3–8 picture the Lord as a powerful, divine warrior who destroys His enemies but protects His people: “The LORD hath his way [path or road] in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet” (v. 3). When God marches out to do battle with Nineveh, He will be as destructive as a whirlwind and storm. He will move swiftly, covering vast areas; and clouds will seem like particles of dust under His feet. In His “rebuke” He simply speaks and the sea and rivers dry up (v. 4), as did the Red Sea before He brought it down on the Egyptian army (Ex. 14:20–31).

If God is powerful enough to dry up the pastures of Bashan, the fertile fields of Carmel, and the forest of Lebanon (v. 4) with only the word of His mouth, surely He can do the same to Nineveh.

When God vents His wrath, nothing on Earth is able to stand. Mountains shake apart, “hills melt [dissolve], and the earth is burned [heaved up] at his presence” (v. 5). That is, the earth trembles at God’s terrifying power. Nahum asked, “Who can stand before his indignation [rage]? And who can abide [endure] in the fierceness of his anger [wrath]?” (v. 6). The obvious answer is no one! When God displays His wrath, it “is poured out like fire” (v. 6) or like molten lava from an erupting volcano.

While one aspect of the Lord’s character involves anger, revenge, wrath, and punishment, another side is protective: “The LORD is good [innately and inherently good in His being], a stronghold [refuge] in the day of trouble, and he knoweth those who trust in him” (v. 7). Jehovah’s power is as awesome to His enemies as it is to destroy His enemies. To His enemies, such as Nineveh, God will be “an overrunning flood” and “will make an utter end of the place, and darkness shall pursue his enemies” (v. 8).

The word flood could refer to a literal flood or a massive army invasion. Both destroyed Nineveh. The destruction of the Assyrians was total. Without God, they will live eternally in the lake of fire.

**Collapse of the Godless**

Addressing the Assyrians through Nahum, God asked, “What do ye imagine against the LORD? He will make an utter end; affliction shall not rise up the second time” (v. 9). How ludicrous it was for them to think they could fight the God of Israel. The one who plotted evil “against the LORD” and Judah was “a wicked [worthless] counselor” (v. 11), a reference to Sennacherib, who failed to destroy Judah because the angel of the Lord destroyed his army. Sennacherib returned to Nineveh only to be assassinated by his sons. Assyria never had another chance to come against Judah (2 Ki. 9:13—19:37).

God assured Judah that He would keep His promise to deliver her from the Assyrians:

*Thus saith the LORD: Though they be quiet [safe and in full strength], and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down [shaved off], when he [Sennacherib] shall pass through [pass away from Jerusalem]. Though I [God] have afflicted thee [Judah, by means of Assyria], I will afflict thee no more (v. 12).*

Thus the Lord will “break his Assyria’s yoke from off thee [Judah], and will burst thy bonds [shackles] in sunder” (v. 13).

Assyria believed it was impregnable and fortified from invasion as a thick thorn hedge. But it revealed in a false security. While the Assyrians were in a drunken stupor, the Babylonians and Medes invaded Nineveh and destroyed it like stubble burned in the fire, as prophesied in verse 10.

The prophet further revealed, “And the LORD hath given a commandment concerning thee [Nineveh], that no more of thy name be sown” (v. 14). This direct edict from the Lord revealed that Nineveh and Sennacherib’s dynasty would become extinct and Assyria would cease to exist.

As the Assyrians destroyed the gods of those they conquered,
because it addresses Judah, not Nineveh. Judah was still under Assyrian oppression at the time of Nahum’s prophecy, but such oppression would soon be removed. Assyria, although powerful, will come to an end. The good news of Assyria’s coming judgment is pictured as being brought by the feet of a swift runner: “Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!” (v. 15).

News of liberation and peace should cause Judah to rejoice and keep her religious feasts and sacred vows to the Lord (v. 15). Isaiah used the same words (Isa. 52:7) to speak of Judah’s deliverance from Babylon. Paul quoted this verse in Romans 10:15 and applied the words good news to the preaching of salvation through faith in Jesus the Messiah.

Nahum said Judah should also rejoice because “the wicked [wicked one] shall no more pass through thee [Judah]; he is utterly cut off” (v. 15). Assyria would be destroyed, never to march through Israel again. The prophecy has an even greater application for modern Israel. It foreshadows the day when the Messiah will annihilate all Israel’s enemies. This event will occur at the end of the Great Tribulation, when Messiah returns to Earth to set up His Millennial reign. In that day Israel will be forever liberated to live in peace and worship the Lord in holiness.

The Hebrew Bible places verse 15 at the beginning of chapter 2 so their gods would be destroyed. The Lord said, “Out of the house of thy gods [temple of Ishtar or Nabu] will I cut off the carved image and the melted [molded] image” (v. 14). Assyria and her capital, Nineveh, along with her gods and house of worship, would be annihilated and pass into oblivion.

Nahum prophesied that Jehovah Himself would prepare Nineveh’s grave: “I will make thy grave; for thou art vile” (v. 14). Nineveh had been weighed on God’s scales of justice and was found wanting. God so loathed Nineveh’s vile heathen practices that He buried them out of His sight and that of the world.

The Hebrew Bible places verse 15 at the beginning of chapter 2

### Hope for the Hopeless, from page 27

**In our daily work at the FOI clinic we are in these days dealing with an increased number of people who come to us, maybe as a last attempt to preserve their lives—to keep living. We sense that they want to live, but we feel the desperation in their trembling voices as they express their needs. Not enough food, no shelter, no clothing, no access to medical care. . . Too many nos that they see as adding up to one big NO: No future.**

But thanks to many of you in the Friends of Israel family, the Espinozas are there to meet the real spiritual and material needs of the men, women, and children of Argentina. Not long ago, Alfredo looked through the clinic window to see, as he wrote, “the front yard of the FOI Free Medical Clinic bustling with people preparing to distribute small packs of powdered milk among the poor, a task that has been supported by believers during the last months and has relieved the situation of some desperate families. In many cases it has prevented small children from begging in the streets and likely adding exposure to more physical vexation and damage. The front yard was like a beehive buzzing with feverish activity.”

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Hearing these comments and seeing our medical team in action in the clinic, among flood victims, at the scenes of tragic accidents, or meeting needs on the streets of the cities and towns of Argentina gives us every reason to be grateful to our Lord for the privilege of having some small part in their great work.

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Elwood McQuaid is editor-in-chief for The Friends of Israel.
God is Sovereign (Part 3)

Previously we saw that God exercises sovereign rule over the universe, angels, and history. Now we will examine God’s sovereign rule over the nations.

Assertions of Sovereignty. The Bible records assertions of God’s sovereignty over the nations.

God Himself made such assertions. He declared,

>This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations. For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall annul it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back? (Isa. 14:26–27).

The Lord said, “I have cut off the nations, their towers are desolate; I made their streets waste, that none passeth by; their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is no inhabitant” (Zeph. 3:6); and “I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations” (Hag. 2:22).

Job stated that God “increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them; he enlargeth the nations, and leadeth them away” (Job 12:23).

King Jehoshaphat insinuated that God rules “over all the kingdoms of the nations” (2 Chr. 20:6).

David wrote, “For the kingdom is the Lord’s; and he is the governor among the nations” (Ps. 22:28).

The Psalms assert, “The Lord bringeth the counsel of the nations to nought” (33:10), “God reigneth over the nations” (47:8), and He “chastiseth the nations” (94:10).

Isaiah declared that, to God, “the nations are like a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. . . . All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity” (Isa. 40:15, 17).

Jeremiah called God “King of nations” (Jer. 10:7) and stated, “The Lord is the true God; he is the living God, and an everlasting king; at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation” (Jer. 10:10).

Relationships of Sovereignty. God’s significant relationships with the nations indicate that He is sovereign over them.

God laid the foundation for the formation of nations by confounding mankind’s language at Babel (Gen. 11). Prior to Babel, the human race had one universal language (v. 1). The building of the city and tower of Babel was mankind’s attempt to unify itself under a one-world system (v. 4). God knew that a unified, one-world system could lead to incredible evil (v. 6). To prevent that event from happening, He fractured the universal language into different languages that were unintelligible to one another (v. 7). God thereby separated mankind into small language groups that He scattered over the earth (vv. 8–9). Nations began to develop on the basis of those different languages.

As the Most High, God determined what portions of the earth the nations were to inherit and set their boundaries (Dt. 32:8; Acts 17:26).

He foretold and brought about the birth of a great nation through Abraham’s biological line (Gen. 12:2). It would be great in significance because, through that nation, God would fulfill His purpose for history and provide the Scriptures (Rom. 3:1–2), the Messiah (Rom. 9:4–5), salvation (Jn. 4:22), and other blessings to all families of the earth (Gen. 12:3; 28:14). That nation is Israel. God
Near the end of Israel’s wandering, God revealed how He would deal with it as a nation throughout its history. He would bless it more than any nation if it listened to and obeyed His Word, which He gave it. It would be the head nation, never the tail (Dt. 28:1–14). But if it would not listen to and obey His Word, then many curses would befall it. It would be conquered by foreign nations, removed from its homeland, and scattered among the nations where there would be no rest and life would be precarious (Dt. 28:15–68).

Through this twofold, historic dealing with Israel, God would impress the world with two significant truths about Himself (Dt. 28:10, 37). First, He will bless people who listen to and obey His Word. Second, He will curse those who do not. Thus it is no mistake that in ancient times God placed Israel in the most strategic geographical location on the face of the earth—the crossroads of Africa, Asia, and Europe. And it is no mistake that today Israel is in that same location, where the world’s attention is drawn repeatedly to it.

Just as He promised in Exodus 34:24, God gave Israel marvelous victories over the Canaanite nations in the land He promised to give to the Israelite descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 12:7; 13:14–15; 15:18–21; 17:8, 19; 26:1–3; 28:13; Joshua; Neh. 9:23–24).

Seven times God raised up foreign nations to chasten Israel when it disobeyed His Word during the period of the judges. And seven times He raised up judges to drive out those nations when Israel repented ( Judges; Neh. 9:26–27).

God made Israel a wealthy, powerful, influential nation in the Middle East during the reigns of David and Solomon (2 Sam. 5—8; 1 Ki. 2:12; 3:10–13; 4:20–34; 9:15—10:29).

Because the northern kingdom of Israel persistently rebelled against God from the beginning of its separation from Judah (1 Ki. 12:16—13:34), God raised up Assyria to judge Israel: 

O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, the staff in whose hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I command him, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets (Isa. 10:5–6).

Assyria warred against Israel from 734 to 722 B.C., when the northern kingdom was totally crushed. Many Israelites were killed, and most who survived were carried captive to foreign lands.

Because the southern kingdom of Judah kept reverting to rebellion against God after several revivals, God raised up Babylon, a more wicked nation, to judge Judah (Hab. 1:5–13). God called Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, “my servant” (Jer. 25:9) and said, “I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive into Babylon, and shall slay them with the sword” (Jer. 20:4).

Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah three times beginning in 605 B.C., which began the Babylonian Captivity of the Jewish people. In the third invasion (586 B.C.) he destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon’s Temple. Many Jewish people were killed, and most of those who lived were deported to Babylon (2 Chr. 36:14–21).

Then God raised up Medo-Persia as a great power when the
in 63 B.C. God used a Roman decree as His means of having the Messiah born in Bethlehem in fulfillment of a prophecy delivered some seven hundred years earlier (Mic. 5:2; Lk. 2:1–7). Roman crucifixion was God’s means of fulfilling the prophecy delivered about one thousand years earlier concerning the method of the Messiah’s death (Ps. 22:1–18; Mt. 27:22–50). Rome’s extensive road system and jurisdiction over the Mediterranean Sea made travel for the spread of the gospel and Scriptures safe and easier.

In “the latter years” and “latter days,” God will bring Gog, of the land of Magog; his army; and a massive, multinational military force against Israel (Ezek. 38:1–16). God will respond to that invasion of Israel with fury and wrath (Ezek. 38:18–19). He will destroy the invaders through a great earthquake, landslides, collapsing structures, soldiers killing each other in panic, pestilence, torrential rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone (Ezek. 38:19–22). God thereby will impress the nations and Israel with His greatness and uniqueness so that they will know Him (Ezek. 38:16, 23; 39:21–22).

Near the end of the Tribulation, God will play a role in drawing the rulers and armies of all nations against Israel (Zech. 12:2; 14:1–2). Thus He will (1) bring Israel to repentance regarding its Messiah (Zech. 12:10—13:1) and (2) administer His wrathful judgment on the rulers and armies of all nations through the Messiah at His Second Coming (Joel 3:9–17; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 12:2–9; 14:3–4, 12–15; Rev. 19:11–21).

**Conclusion.** God’s sovereign dealings with Israel and other nations has demonstrated that He has the authority and power to raise up, empower, and bless nations, but also to destroy their strength, curse, and cut them off. Thus any nation that does not genuinely acknowledge that the God of the Bible exists and does not heed and obey His revealed Word may be a candidate for judgment. Even if it draws near to God with its mouth and honors Him with its lips but keeps its heart far from Him, it has no right to expect blessing (Mt. 15:8–9).

Renald E. Showers is an author, professor, and international conference speaker for The Friends of Israel.
Christians in Nigeria, Africa, breathed a deep sigh of relief when the vote tallies from the April presidential elections were announced. A large majority of Nigerians reelected President Olusegun Obasanjo, a born-again Christian, over his Muslim challenger, Muhammadu Buhari. Buhari’s party protested the results of the election and promised that the struggle to control the country will continue. As is true in other African countries, the wave of Muslim militancy has been devastating to Christians in Nigeria.

Despite the fact that the country is officially forbidden from adopting a national religion and endorses freedom of religious belief, Nigeria recently joined the Organization of Islamic Countries, thus claiming status as a Muslim-oriented state. Under Obasanjo’s presidency, however, enforcement of the declaration has been greatly diminished.

In spite of the president’s position, twelve northern states have adopted Muslim Sharia law and are attempting to enforce it on all citizens. As a result, Christians,
particularly pastors and leaders of the Christian community, are experiencing severe persecution. In Kaduna State alone it is estimated that it will take billions of Nigerian dollars to rebuild the 260 churches damaged and destroyed. Since the election of President Obasanjo, there have been at least ten thousand deaths due to civil, ethnic, and religious violence. The stated aim of the Muslim political and religious opposition is to impose Sharia law nationwide. Already some Muslim-dominated states have closed Christian schools and churches and imposed Islamic dress codes on Christians.

Sharia law, where instituted as a part of the penal system, allows flogging, amputations, and beheadings for certain crimes. Though Muslim leaders claim these laws do not apply to Christians, there is evidence that Christians have already been affected.

On April 22, several days after the elections, a pastor and his family were killed in Kano in a house fire believed to have been set by Muslim militants. The pastor was known as a powerful preacher who had seen many Muslims convert to Christianity. This fact apparently made him a prime candidate for assassination.

A few days earlier a group of armed Muslims attacked the village of Fobur in Langtang. One woman was killed and several homes set on fire. The same group is believed to have burned down thirty homes in the village of Zambwar.

In November 2002 angry Muslims went on a rampage in Kaduna after an article in This Day, a leading independent daily newspaper published in Lagos, Nigeria, suggested the prophet Muhammad probably would have married a contestant in the Miss World pageant, then scheduled to be held in Abuja, the country’s capital. After wrecking the newspaper’s office, the mob began to attack Christians, damaging some twenty churches. More than two hundred people were killed and twelve hundred injured. Non-Muslims were reportedly singled out and stabbed, bludgeoned, or burned to death.

These are only a few isolated examples of the horrific conditions Christians are being subjected to in parts of Nigeria. Many of these Christians are devout evangelical brothers and sisters in Christ.

A few years ago a missionary who had worked for years in Nigeria brought several Nigerian-Christian families to study in the United States. Their presence was a blessing to everyone they touched with their open-hearted, fully committed love for Christ and fellow Christians. These dedicated believers returned to Nigeria to minister the Word and bring hope to their fellow countrymen. Today these families are in the middle of this awful situation.

Nigeria may well be turned into another Sudan, where radical Islamists have hunted and slaughtered Christians by the thousands.

Are we willing to stand idly by and allow these tragedies to occur? Or will we become involved as activists by praying, supporting agencies working in the country, and approaching public officials about their plight? We have an obligation. We must not fail.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.

A TREE For A LOVED ONE

Did you know there’s a very special way you can express your condolences, thanks, or respect for someone? For only $10 per tree, you can have trees planted in The Friends of Israel Forest in Jerusalem. You’ll receive a beautiful certificate that you can send as a tangible expression of your gift. Won’t you take this opportunity to provide a living memorial for a family member, friend, or associate? You may even wish to plant one or more trees in their honor or on your own behalf. It is a thoughtful and meaningful way to say “I care,” and you will share in helping to make the desert of Israel bloom.
W hen Israel, in accordance with its agreement with the new Palestinian government, pulled Israel Defense Forces troops out of Bethlehem recently, many residents of the Jerusalem suburb of Gilo feared the worst. And they had good reason.

When Yasser Arafat rejected former Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s overly generous offer for peace in 2000 and declared war on Israel instead, Gilo residents immediately came under attack.

Commandeering houses in the nearby Christian-Arab village of Beit Jalla, Arafat’s gunners shot directly into the living rooms of Gilo inhabitants and wreaked havoc with people on the street. Israeli forces finally drove out the attackers and built a wall to prevent enemy bullets from reaching the windows of homes and a nearby school. That wall has given residents of Gilo and their families at least a small sense of security.

It therefore came as a surprise when U.S. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, in the region on behalf of President George W. Bush, harshly criticized Israel for constructing such protection, especially in areas where security fences are being erected. Those fences are being built not to establish borders but to protect innocent Israelis from the terrorist attackers and suicide bombers who enter Israel from those areas.

But that fact didn’t seem to play into the case the American administration made against Israeli self-protection. Earlier, Palestinian officials complained to Rice about the existence of the security fence; and she in turn responded by telling Israeli officials to stop building the fence, even if it was not meant to create a border. Regardless of Israel’s reasons for constructing it, she said, the fence gives the impression of a border to the Palestinians. Her words were good news to the Palestinians, but perplexing to Israelis.

At the same time the Rand Corporation rated Israel’s security fence as the top “underattended international problem” in the world today. The report forecast grave consequences if Israelis continue to build protective barriers. For starters, said Rand, the barriers are infuriating the Palestinians—which will provoke more attacks, prompt violence against Israelis overseas, and escalate terrorist mortar and ground-to-ground missile attacks against targets inside Israel.

Apparently Rand, America’s largest “think tank,” failed to give any thought to why Israelis feel it necessary to build a security fence and protective walls in the first place. If it was to enlarge their borders, they could have accomplished that goal more easily by simply moving their army forward to whatever position they chose. That, however, was not the case.

They built the fence for one reason and one reason alone: to protect innocent men, women, and children from continually being slaughtered by Arabs infiltrating Jewish communities from the areas being fenced off. For international arbitrators to forbid, not only Israelis, but any people on earth from employing whatever measures are necessary to protect themselves is playing far outside the recognized rules of the road on international rights of self-preservation.

The arbitrators of peace in that troubled region, whoever they may be, are either unwilling or unable to understand the issues basic to the conflict that is actually a staged war to annihilate the State of Israel. Borders must be negotiated and respected by those who live on both sides of them. Until that feat is accomplished, building protective fences is a good and necessary thing to do. And anything that even hints at encouraging aggressors to believe rules are being made to allow them to continue their terrorism, guarantees more bloodshed on both sides.
What on Earth is God Doing? Ad (Waveline)
blamed for the collapse of the national economy. Muslims want to annihilate them. The UN condemns them every chance it gets and has all but tried to erase the Jewish state from existence. And in America, an alarming new hatred is turning college campuses into hotbeds of anti-Semitism.

But when has it ever been a good time to be Jewish? The twentieth century produced the Holocaust. Previous centuries gave us pogroms, crusades, the inquisition, and a multitude of other persecutions and expulsions.

Yet there was a day when it was glorious to
be a Jew—when Jewish people enjoyed peace in their own land, prosperity, honor, blessing, and a physical manifestation of Jehovah in their Temple in Jerusalem. It was the golden age in Jewish history. King Solomon was on the throne, and “all the earth consulted” him (1 Ki. 10:24).

His forty-year rule was as close as the Jewish people have ever come to tasting the blessings they will have in the future Millennial Kingdom. And the queen of Sheba’s visit is as clear a picture as we have of what Israel’s position will be like when Messiah rules on the throne of David. Israel will be the head, not the tail: “And the nations [Gentiles] shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa. 60:3). “The sons of foreigners shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee; for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favor have I had mercy on thee” (Isa. 60:10).

Isaiah 60—62, written two hundred years after Solomon’s reign, is filled with prophecies telling of the wonderful day when Messiah will rule and the glory of the Jewish kingdom will be restored. Today there is no kingdom. Nor is there a king. Unfortunately, as wise as Solomon was, he failed to heed his own advice. He slid into idolatry and sin, and the golden age in Jewish history came to an ignominious end.

When Solomon’s son Rehoboam ascended the throne, the Lord meted out His divine judgment by using civil unrest to split the nation in two. Then, after providing hundreds of years of unheeded warnings to live righteously, He sent the Israelites into captivity. The northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 B.C.; the southern (Davidic) kingdom, to Babylon in 586 B.C.

So ended the Davidic monarchy. The Jewish people have never again seen the blessing they enjoyed when the queen of Sheba made her pilgrimage to Jerusalem almost three thousand years ago. And it was only in 1948 that they again received the right to rule a portion of their own land.

When Jesus was on Earth, they were in their land but were subjects of Roman rule. The Jewish hierarchy rejected Jesus’ wisdom just as earlier leaders had rejected the prophets before Him. So Jesus told them,

The queen of the south [Sheba] shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the farthest parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here (Mt. 12:42).

Yet someday Messiah Jesus will return. His resurrection was well documented in the ancient world. His lineage and legal right to David’s throne have been preserved in God’s Word. And with greater wisdom than Solomon, He will rule from Jerusalem in justice and truth and will bless the nation of Israel:

For I, the LORD, love justice, . . . and I will direct their [the Jewish people’s] work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. And their seed shall be known among the nations [Gentiles], and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed whom the LORD hath blessed (Isa. 61:8–9).

The kings of the earth will again come to Jerusalem to see the great King who will sit on the throne of the Jewish Kingdom. Sheba again will bring its wealth to Israel, as will all the Gentile nations:

The forces of the nations shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; they all from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense, and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord (Isa. 60:5–6).

Gone will be anti-Semitism, suicide bombers, swastikas, and UN resolutions equating Zionism with racism. The fight for the little sliver of land in the Middle East will be over—and Israel will have won:

For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. . . . Thy people also shall all be righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified (Ezek. 36:24; Isa. 60:21).

Nations the world over will be as the queen of Sheba was, going up to Jerusalem to pay homage: “For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish” (Isa. 60:12).

The Jewish people will be in their land—all of it—with Messiah Jesus, the son of David, on the throne. And Israel will finally have peace, not for a mere forty years as in the days of Solomon, but for all eternity. Then “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:4). And it will again be a glori—

Lorna Simcox is senior editor for The Friends of Israel.
Had she been Palestinian, the entire world would be up in arms. But she was Israeli, so no one even noticed when seven-year-old Noam Liebowitz was shot to death while riding in her family car, returning home from a bar mitzvah celebration in Jerusalem. Noam’s three-year-old sister, eleven-year-old brother, and seventy-year-old grandfather were wounded.

It was the first terrorist shooting on the brand-new Trans-Israel Highway, the finest road in Israel. The shooter managed to get under a cement wall separating the highway from the West Bank town of Kalkilya and opened fire at the Leibowitz car around 11:30 P.M.

The Voice of Palestine, the Palestinian Authority’s official radio, described the child’s death as “the death by shooting of a female Israeli settler,” even though the “female” was a child; the family did not live in the disputed territories; and the car was not in the territories when the murder occurred. The broadcast did not condemn the murder.

The Jerusalem Post wrote: “The cold-blooded, deliberate murder of seven-year-old Noam Leibowitz in the back seat of her family’s car on a spanking new toll road inside Israel, protected by a tall solid concrete wall, didn’t cause much of a stir. The foreign media reported it dispassionately and very briefly. They didn’t broadcast Noam’s picture or mention her name.”

However, “The claimed wounding of a Palestinian girl during the recent Rantisi [Hamas terrorist Abed Aziz el Rantisi] targeted killing attempt tugged hard at the heartstrings of anchors and commentators. Noam didn’t elicit the same compassion. ‘Perhaps it’s time for collective resolve not to forget Noam and not sweep her murder under the rug. Our government must not be tempted to overlook it as another small sacrifice on the road to peace. That road isn’t sacrosanct if it exacts such an awful toll. It’s not a peace process if it demands, like Moloch, the sacrifice of a young child’s life.’

Rabbis plead to keep land

Some four hundred rabbis from all over the country gathered in Jerusalem recently to protest the road map plan to give up parts of Israel to foreign rule.

Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu said, “No one, from the simplest person to even the prime minister, has the right to cede even one granule of the land of Israel! The Holy One, blessed be He, gave it to us! To us alone He gave it!”

Said Rabbi Dov Lior, “There is no such excuse as ‘the nations of the world are threatening or pressuring us.’ In times of war, the [religious-national] obligation upon the nation is to absorb the threats and not give in. As an example, let’s recall that in the 1930s, the British and the Arabs wanted the Jews to sign away their rights to pray at the Western Wall—and that if not, there would be attacks, etc.

‘This was at the time when we had no army or security services, of course—yet Rabbi Avraham Kook, who is not suspected of lack of concern for Jewish lives, said, ‘Our security and safety is not to be made dependent on conceding our rights to pieces of our Holy Land.’

In English, Rabbi Sholom Goldtold the crowd, “Nearly ten years ago, we gathered here to express our opposition to the new-born Oslo Accords. We said that Arafat cannot be trusted, and that the PA would never fight terrorism, and that we must not trust the PLO to protect our lives. We warned that the PLO had not given up its plan to defeat Israel in ‘stages,’ and we pleaded with the government not to give them guns, and we warned that Jewish blood would flow in the Holy Land.

‘What was the reaction? ‘Rabbis, go back to your synagogues and yeshivas, and leave these issues to the people who really know—leave it to the military men, and the politicians, and the poets, and the talk-show hosts, and the other opinion-makers.’ But we all now see the truth! We know now how right we were, and how wrong they were! I say to the press: Read all the garbage that you wrote in the last ten years, and realize that the rabbis were right!”

‘We call on you [President Bush]: Don’t become the George Washington of a terrorist state alongside Israel! Please, listen to the words of the rabbis. Don’t repeat the same mistakes of the last ten years.

‘Mr. Prime Minister [Sharon]: Don’t do it! We’re not occupiers—this is our very own land! Tell the world the land is ours! Open up a Bible and read it to them—they’ll respect you for it. No one has
A little Disney in Herzliya?

**Arutz-7**—A unique new mall—the likes of which exist in only two places in the United States, according to the owners—has drawn much attention not only for its grandiose nature, but also because it is open on Shabbat.

The new Arena Mall on the Herzliya coast seems to have everything: game-halls, a rain forest, eight movie theaters, Disney-style rides and attractions, dozens of stores, public auctions, and much more.

“Ther’s something for everyone,” says Moti Zisser, one of the owners, and an observant Jew who says the mall will be open on the Sabbath, against his will.

Unfortunately, he said, non-Jews own the most stock and are not bound by the Sabbath laws. “Now, looking back,” he said, “I wish I had done what Lev Levayev did with his Achim Mall, and that is to specify that the stores would not be open on the Sabbath.”

**Solar energy planned for Negev**

**Israelis first solar power station, the world’s largest, is scheduled to be built in the Negev on a thousand acres near Ashdod, a 20-minute drive from Beersheba.**

The plant is expected to supply 100 megawatts of power and grow to 500 megawatts, **The International Jerusalem Post** reported.

Currently the world’s two largest solar stations generate 80 megawatts of power each.

The Negev plant will be built with technology developed in cooperation with the Ben-Gurion University’s National Solar Energy Center, part of the Blaustein Institute for Desert Research in Sde Boker.

**Israeli rodeos? It could happen!**

**The International Jerusalem Post**—The way Erez Yardeni sees it, trees aren’t the only way to make the desert flourish. Yardeni, a member of Kibbutz Sde Boker and director-general of the Economic Development Company of Ramat Hanegev, wants to realize David Ben-Gurion’s dream of settling the Negev by making it the country’s recreational wonderland.

His vision includes an equestrian-centered entertainment facility just south of Beersheba that will bring jobs, tourists, and shekels to the region.

The $8 million plan calls for a racetrack, horse show center, American-style rodeo attractions, and stables from which visitors take horses for a ride through the desert.

The proposed site, which would cover 2,000 dunams, sits along Route 40 near the Negev junction. Yardeni says that English, Austrian, French, and Israeli investors have been lined up for the project, which has been in the works “on and off” for the last four years.

The plans are “on track” so far, he says without irony, though there are many hurdles to clear before construction begins. Ben-Gurion, he’s sure, would be proud.

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We are again approaching Yom Kippur, this most solemn of days, when people ask the Lord to forgive their sins. And what is more, they are so sure that when they come with their “sacrifices,” their sins will be forgiven.

But what do they come with? They come with chickens. Many an ultra-Orthodox or Orthodox Jew here will take a poor little chicken, swing it in a circle over his head three times, and say something like this: “This is my sacrifice that dies for my sins. This rooster (or hen) shall go to its death; but I shall go to a good, long life, and to peace. This is my replacement; this is my healing; this is my atonement.” Then the chicken is slaughtered. Usually it is given to the poor for food.

In Yiddish this ceremony is called schlugg kapporus. And because of it, many generations of Jewish children have grown up in darkness, thinking their sins have been forgiven. They do not know the one who truly died for them because of His great love for them—the one who truly took their sins in His body and is able to forgive them. Therefore, I must tell them.

So when some of them finish sacrificing their chickens, I am there to speak with them. “Are you so sure that God has forgiven your sins because of what you have done today?” I asked them.

“How can you even ask such a question!” one replied indignantly. “Of course we are sure.”

This time I said, “Please, show me in the Bible where it is written that there is another atonement for our sins?”

Another answered me, “Can you show us where it is written that there is another atonement for our sins?”

Now, with their own words, they brought me to the right subject! This was exactly what I wanted to show them. But it is important to go slowly and let God’s Word speak for itself. So I opened the Bible and told them, “Read for yourselves.” I gave them the Bible and let them read Isaiah 53, especially verses 5–6, which read,

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the L ORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

“So,” I asked them. “Was this a chicken? Is God speaking here of a chicken? Do you still think you are now pure?” They had never read this portion of God’s Word.

I also read to them Micah 7:19: “He will turn again; he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”

Many of these people come from other countries where they never observed the holidays. Because they are in Israel, they think everything done here must be right; and they fall into the traditions of men without understanding that these go against the Bible. I told them they must be careful to learn the
Bible, so they can know what God truly expects of them and how He has provided for them.

“You must put your trust in God, not in men,” I told them.

“But you are a man,” one replied.

“That is correct. But what I am showing you is in the Bible. That is where you must look. You must not go to a big stack of commentaries or fictitious stories written by men. You must go directly to the Bible, which is written by the Holy Spirit of God. Think about what you have just read in the Bible. And you can see, I have no other books with me.

“Others come to you with many books and have had big success with you. See what you are doing? You are following the traditions of men and doing what they have told you to do. But what you are doing is not in the Bible. And the Bible is very clear. It says, ‘Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him. . . . Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people who are round about you’ (Dt. 6:13–14).

“Do not follow others who are around you. Here in the Bible you have a clear picture of whom you are to follow. Follow Him,” I said.

They were surprised to hear me speak this way and asked, “Are you a rabbi?”

“No,” I said. “I am one of those who have believed in the Lord according to His Word.”

After a long and friendly conversation, they thanked me. One said, “We are very new to Israel. We have only been here a few weeks and were like blind men. But we can see that you are telling us the truth. We are so thankful for this instruction. We are no more in darkness.”

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