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TIME TO RENEW?
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Israel My Glory is also available in Spanish.

ABOUT THE COVER
Saddam Hussein regaled himself with images and declarations of being the “new Nebuchadnezzar.” And though his demented dream crumbled with the collapse of his reign of terror, it is fascinating that after millennia of history, the dream of recreating Babylon lives on. The Ishtar Gate, depicted on our cover, conveys the splendor, power, and promise of a new end-times, global Babylon (Francoise de Mulder/Corbis; digital enhancement, Thomas E. Williams).

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There’s never been a better time to visit www.foi.org.
“Israel Has Your Heart. Now Is the Time to Lend Your Hands.”

Thus reads the headline on the brochure from Volunteers for Israel (VFI). Since VFI’s inception in 1982, more than a hundred thousand people from thirty countries have volunteered their time and energy to immerse themselves in Israeli life. They work alongside soldiers through hands-on, civilian volunteer work. The majority of the volunteers are Jewish Americans. However, in recent years an increasing number of Bible-believing Christians have joined the program. In addition to their important commitment to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6), these Christians have taken action to support Israel by helping meet essential manpower needs.

Known in Israel as Sar-El, the program was conceived in 1982 as a way to help relieve a critical manpower shortage. Israeli General Aharon Davidi sent emissaries to the United States to enlist volunteers to help harvest crops in the Galilee and keep the economy going while workers were away serving in the army. General Davidi’s experiment was such a rousing success that it continued and expanded. Today volunteer programs are conducted throughout the year.

Most participants work alongside Israelis for two or three weeks doing noncombat, civilian work on an army base. Others give a full month to helping at a hospital.

The benefits to Israel are abundant. The program boosts:

• Economics—Volunteers serving on VFI army bases enable Israeli reservists to stay on their jobs. Israel saves millions of dollars yearly in the value of the work performed by the volunteers.

• Morale—The morale of Israeli soldiers climbs as they see volunteers who are hardworking and committed, giving not only of their money but of themselves.

• Solidarity—The program is a celebration of unity. Volunteers come from many locations, vocations, and backgrounds, all to demonstrate solidarity with Israel.

• Support—By working side by side with Israelis, volunteers see, understand, and appreciate Israel’s people and culture. They return home as enthusiastic ambassadors of the Jewish state.

Earlier this year, three participants in our fall 2003 Friends of Israel Up to Jerusalem tour returned to Israel as workers under the Volunteers for Israel program. They were assigned to an army base near Tel Aviv. It was Dr. Wesley Walker’s seventh volunteer trip to Israel since 2000. As a physician, he was well suited for his work there with medical supplies. Said Dr. Walker, “My heart is in Israel, where I feel so much at home. I have a God-given love for the Jewish people, and this is my way of helping.”

Sherry Vance was a first-time participant. She performed a wide range of duties in the kitchen where three hundred to four hundred military personnel were served each mealtime. Sherry testified, “At each morning flag-raising, I felt the pride of wearing the uniform and being in Israel to help. I experienced a tremendous bond with the soldiers and have established lasting friendships with several who now call me ‘mother.’”

It was also Mary Morgan’s first volunteer experience in Israel. She worked with a team of six people who were sorting and packaging medicines for the troops in the field. Mary explained, “My service in Israel was the greatest experience I could ever imagine. I wanted to help Israel in any way I could. It was so special to be able to serve with the men and women in the Israeli military.”

You may join a Volunteers for Israel group any Sunday or Monday during the year except for blackout periods over Jewish holidays. Room and board are provided during the program. Participants are responsible for airfare and the expenses of activities when they are on their own on the weekends.

If you would like to consider serving as a Volunteer for Israel, please contact Jeanne S. Schachter at VFI toll free at 888-473-6527; or fax her at 215-473-4473. Applications are also available on the Volunteers for Israel Web site at www.vfi-usa.org.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
Full Page The Temple Book Ad
(Waveline)
Where Do We Sign Up?

Colonel Teddy Roosevelt, later to become the twenty-sixth president of the United States, was certified as an American icon during the Spanish-American War of 1898. The Spanish presence in North America, especially in Cuba, was one of iron-fist suppression and brutal efficiency. An officer commonly known as “Butcher” Weyler because of his ruthless tactics commanded the Spanish garrison.

America’s conflict with the Spanish was its first major step into the international arena. Roosevelt, a vigorous patriot and champion of American values, entered the war in the lead column of his Rough Riders—men who were destined to ride into the lore of American history on their bloody but victorious charge up Cuba’s San Juan Hill.

For his part, the colonel chose to lead from the front. It exposed him to great personal danger, but he insisted that leadership meant just that—leading men, not bringing up the rear.

Along with portraits of his great courage and penchant for the daring-do, the colorful Rough Rider left a catalog of quotations worthy of applying to the current situation facing America and those individuals who believe in solid principles to live by. For example,

*Far better it is to dare things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who... live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat.*

It is a real-time issue that we have a great deal of difficulty comprehending. Yet the answers to the problems at hand are not hard to come by. At the core is the fact that, for our enemies, there is no status quo. They are not satisfied with the way things are, nor will they be until they are in possession of what we have, altered to fit their concepts of what constitutes the “good life.”

We may have no desire to confront the bloody realities of terror, war, and mayhem. But we need not be deceived into thinking that we have the ability to talk our adversaries into sharing our perceptions of peace and tranquility. It will not happen. To take this route is intemperate and self-delusional. Our propensity to talk much and dispense random acts of kindness may have the ring of pop-culture political correctness, but it will not placate the people whose chief goal in life is to snuff out our lives.

A perpetual failing of free, democratic societies is their pursuit of the idea that the entire world essentially thinks and reasons as they do. We made this mistake with the Nazis, then went to the edge of a catastrophic nuclear confrontation with the Communists, and are currently repeating the same potentially fatal error with Islamists bent on global domination.

A serious deficiency in American thinking lies in the idea that people are basically good and that a quiet sit-down over a cup of coffee and a season of reasonable negotiation done in good faith will enable us to work out even the most difficult issues to everyone’s satisfaction. It doesn’t work that way. Men are not good by nature. Some very bad people operate in this arena, and they have no intention of negotiating solutions that will create peace in our time.

Unfortunately, many of those suffering from the give-them-what-they-want dementia need a refresher course in historical reality. Empires and nations afflicted by the status-quo syndrome have consistently passed into the mists of history.

The old Rough Rider understood the issues. Somewhere along the line there is a choice to be made. Do we camp with those poor spirits who “live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat”? Or do we have the courage and tenacity to take the high road and ride to the front of the column and lead rather than follow?

If the latter option is our choice, where do we sign up?
Full Page In Defense of the Faith Ad (Waveline)
Much has been made recently of the so-called easing up on Christian persecution in Sudan. The West relishes taking comfort in such insipid reports from insufferably cruel Islamists in Khartoum claiming things are looking up, that there is a widening stream of benevolence flowing from Islamists toward Christians and aninists in Southern Sudan. Don’t believe a word of it.

While reporting on the fragile calm heralded as a harbinger of peace in the western province of Darfur, a UN official stated that the calm only exists because “there are no more villages to burn.” The facts tell a far different story. There are plenty more villages to burn, but most people don’t care.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported recently that the UN human rights chief accused the Sudanese government of conducting a “reign of terror” and committing “repeated war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

“As an estimated one million people [probably a low estimate] have been displaced inside the country, and a UN report has said the government was deliberately starving some of them. More than 100,000 others have fled across the border into Chad,” AFP reported.

To focus on this tip of the iceberg almost insults the integrity of the people who know what actually is taking place on this planet, particularly those caught in a life and death struggle for survival in the countries of their birth.

In a perceptive article titled “Column One: Stop Navel Gazing,” Jerusalem Post columnist Caroline Glick wrote, “We are in a world war and yet we do not notice it.” Glick is correct. What is happening in Sudan is only one small instance of what is taking place all over the world.

Consider Africa:

Today 11 of Nigeria’s 36 states are governed by Sharia law. Rights of women and non-Muslims in these areas have been summarily destroyed. Nigeria’s turn to Jihad has been spurred on by foreign Arabs, Palestinians, Saudis, Syrians and Sudanese have all been acting as advisers to the mullahs in Nigeria and have been actively funding and training the Muslim militias that have killed thousands of Christians there over the past few years.¹

Nonie Darwish, an Arab American and former Muslim, delineates the differences and dangers faced by indifferent and uninformed Americans:

Having grown up in the Arab world myself, I believe that expectations in the Muslim world are often hypocritical. Arab Muslims especially do not reciprocate much of their demands from the West. They demand tolerance for Muslims in the West while their religious leaders call on murder of the infidels. They demand freedom to build mosques in the West, but prohibit the building [of] churches and synagogues in Muslim countries. They jail and kill missionaries in the Muslim world, while they freely preach Islam and extremism to our citizens, even to our vulnerable and angry prison population. . . . There is something very wrong with this picture and many Arabs and freedom loving Americans don’t see it. It is time for Americans to wake up.²

Not long ago I looked up a partial list of atrocities perpetrated against Christians in Africa. That list documents at least sixty-three recent instances of severe persecution at the hands of
Muslim militants. Countries where these vicious crimes occurred were, among others, Ethiopia, Sudan, Nigeria, Mali, Zimbabwe, Brunei, Mozambique, Egypt, and Sierra Leone.

A personal portrait came to me while I was involved in a broadcast interview with a Christian bishop, James Barclay, who recently fled his lifelong home in Liberia, a country created in the aftermath of the American Civil War as an enclave of peace and democracy for former black slaves. The bishop shared the emotional story of how he had been forced to leave his country because militant Muslims had marked him for death in an Islamic coup sponsored, funded, supplied, and trained by Mohammar Quaddafi and the Libyans.

But do Muslim militants have their sights set only on Africa and the Middle East? No. They are engaging the entire world in an unrelenting conflict. Columnist Daniel Pipes has spoken to the fact that Europe is on the brink of Islamic colonization:

“Europe becomes more and more a province of Islam, a colony of Islam.”

So declares Oriana Fallaci in her new book, . . . The Force of Reason. And the famed Italian journalist is right: Christianity’s ancient stronghold of Europe is rapidly giving way to Islam.5

Wrote Pipes, “Two factors mainly contribute to this world-shaking development”: the “hollowing out of Christianity” and an “anemic birthrate.”

Europe is increasingly a post-Christian society, one with a diminishing connection to its tradition and its historic values. The number of believing, observant Christians has collapsed in the past two generations to the point that some observers call it the “new dark continent.” Already, analysts estimate Britain’s mosques host more worshippers each week than does the Church of England.4

Why?

Current trends suggest Islamization will happen, for Europeans seem to find it too strenuous to have children, stop illegal immigration, or even diversify their sources of immigrants. Instead, they prefer to settle unhappily into civilizational senility.

Into the void are coming Islam and Muslims. As Christianity falters, Islam is robust, assertive, and ambitious. As Europeans underproduce at advanced ages, Muslims do so in large numbers while young.5

Peter Hitchens underscores the impact of the “hollowing out” plague in England leading to the spiritual sterility that has opened the door for the current, no-contest struggle between Islam and Christians:

Hell was abolished around the same time that abortion was legalized and the death penalty was done away with . . . After all, nobody went to Hell any more, did they? For by the 1960s, eternal damnation, like most of the more worrying aspects of the Christian religion, had apparently fallen into disuse. Bishops . . . had begun to admit, rather coyly to start with, that they were not sure about the existence of God or the truth of their religion’s central beliefs.6

And when an unbelieving clergy staffs the pulpits, the fallout among parishioners becomes a fact of religious life. Furthermore, when establishment Christianity relegates itself to an irrelevant, self-destructive, also-ran
body of secularized social reconstructionists, why should true believers bother to fill the pews?

When there are no souls to be saved, only bodies . . . there is only one object: to make their living conditions better, even if they then grow up . . . in grave moral poverty . . . . If you do not believe in sin, then you can hardly be expected to use up much energy fighting against it. And if you do believe in sin, then you are “judgmental,” and automatically excluded from the debate.7

We are well aware that this “hollowing out” process Mr. Pipes writes about also plagues the evangelical community in America. To single out England as the chief advocate of theological and spiritual capitulation is unfair. The situation, however, does illustrate the growing problem endemic in the West, including the United States; and if the phenomenon is less evident in America than in Britain, it is only because of differences in size and population.

Perhaps the most telling portion of Hitchens’s analysis is this: “And if you do believe in sin, then you are ‘judgmental,’ and automatically excluded from the debate.” This is the crux of the difficulty—a line of demarcation that separates Bible-believing evangelicals from mainline Protestants in whatever countries they reside. The issue is not one of semantics and superficial, theological differences of opinion. People who steadfastly believe in the major tenets of the Christian faith are viewed with hostility as intolerable, “judgmental” adversaries and impediments to the new, liberal age of “enlightenment.”

In the process, innocent believers the world over are being slaughtered in incomprehensible numbers, while some of our own “Christian” luminaries act as apologists for the supposedly downtrodden religious radicals of every stripe who delight in mutilating and murdering the very people these luminaries consider their brothers and sisters in the faith. Consequently, the “mainline churches” (they are badly misnamed) are virtually silent in the face of the slaughter of innocent believers.

So who is going to stand in the gap and demonstrate a depth of compassion, love, and genuine concern for victims in Darfur, Sudan, Nigeria, Indonesia, Liberia, and in the great host of other afflicted countries?

Looking to the Past

During the demonic days of the Holocaust, lessons abounded regarding religious indifference to suffering.

In May 1939, 937 passengers, mostly Jewish, left Hamburg, Germany, on the ocean liner SS St. Louis, en route to Cuba in hopes of escaping the wrath of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi death machine. Most of them planned to immigrate to the United States. When they arrived in Cuba, they were refused entrance. When the captain appealed to the United States for help, he was turned away. The hapless passengers were forced to return to Europe where most fell into the hands of the Nazis and ended their journey in the death camps they were attempting to avoid.

Did religious officials intervene on their behalf? No. Did government officials grant them safe haven? No. In fact, the world turned its back on them entirely.

During the dark days of the Holocaust, evangelicals who reached out to these desperate and suffering Jewish people often wound up caged with them behind the same electrified barbed wire.

Today, with malignant anti-Semitism on the rise, there is a parallel hatred for evangelicals who value Christ more than life in this troubled world and are willing to forfeit their lives rather than deny their faith.

Such Christians share the life philosophy of Jim Elliot, one of five missionaries murdered by the Auca Indians in Ecuador in 1956.

“If not me, who? And if not now, when?”

He is no fool,” Elliot said, “who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Is It Nothing to You?

The prophet Jeremiah asked that question centuries ago. It is appropriate that we repeat it:

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me (Lam. 1:12).

You can be sure that, as persecuted brethren like James Barclay and others look to the West, their cry is the same.

Where will they find those who will say, “Yes! It is something to us, and we will not be among those who will pass you by”? Their help will not come from the liberal religious establishment. Nor will it emanate from the denizens of the UN or political movers and shakers in the capitals of the world.

If help is to come, it must come from us. It must come from the scorned, “judgmental” remnant that has been “excluded from the debate.” Has life truly come to this in America and the free world? Yes, it has. And the evidence lies in the pallid faces of the dead and the anguished cries of the starving.

Who will help the other villages that will be burned? We must. There are no alternatives.

Here is the question: “If not me, who? And if not now, when?”

Endnotes


4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Peter Hitchens, The Abolition of Britain: From Winston Churchill to Princess Diana (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000), 34.

7 Ibid., 34–35.

Elwood McQuaid is editor-in-chief for The Friends of Israel.
### 627–586 B.C. Jeremiah Prophesies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>612</td>
<td>Habakkuk begins prophesying; Assyrian capital of Nineveh falls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>609</td>
<td>King Josiah dies in battle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>605</td>
<td>Nebuchadnezzar defeats Pharaoh Neco at Carchemish, then becomes king.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>603</td>
<td>King Jehoiakim becomes Babylonian vassal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>597</td>
<td>Prophet Ezekiel taken to Babylon in 2nd deportation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>592</td>
<td>Ezekiel begins prophesying to exiles by River Chebar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>586</td>
<td>Jerusalem sacked; Temple destroyed; 3rd deportation. Jeremiah taken to Egypt. Times of the Gentiles begin.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The Times of the Gentiles—586 Until 2nd Coming of Christ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>580</td>
<td>Nebuchadnezzar builds the famous hanging gardens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>563</td>
<td>Prince Siddhartha Gautama, known as Buddha, is born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>562</td>
<td>Nebuchadnezzar dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>560</td>
<td>Aesop’s fables are written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>559–530</td>
<td>Daniel has vision of 4 beasts; Belshazzar reigns in Babylon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>553</td>
<td>Daniel has 70-weeks vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>551</td>
<td>K’ung Fu-tzu, known as Confucius, is born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>539</td>
<td>Greeks defeat Carthaginians; Babylon falls to Media-Persia; Daniel has 70-weeks vision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 539–515 B.C. The Returns Begin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>539</td>
<td>Daniel in the lions’ den.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>538</td>
<td>Cyrus’s edict allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>536</td>
<td>First exiles return with Zerubbabel; altar and Temple foundations built; Daniel dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>530–522</td>
<td>Cambyses rules Media-Persia; conquers Egypt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>522–486</td>
<td>Darius rules Media-Persia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>520</td>
<td>Haggai prophesies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>520–518</td>
<td>Zechariah prophesies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>515</td>
<td>Temple reconstruction completed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 515–430 B.C. Esther to Malachi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>490</td>
<td>Darius loses to Greeks in Battle of Marathon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>486–465</td>
<td>Reign of Persian Xerxes I, known as Ahasuerus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>479</td>
<td>Xerxes crowns Esther queen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>474</td>
<td>Haman plots to destroy the Jews; first Purim celebration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>458</td>
<td>Ezra leads 2nd return during reign of Artaxerxes I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>447</td>
<td>Parthenon built in Athens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>445</td>
<td>3rd return; Nehemiah rebuilds Jerusalem’s walls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>430</td>
<td>Herodotus completes his Histories; Malachi begins prophesying.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*by Thomas C. Simcox, Northeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.*
The pivotal events in the Old Testament history of the Israelites are the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians and Judah’s subsequent captivity in Babylon.

How could these tragedies have happened to God’s people? How could the Davidic kingship be cut off? How could the Temple, indwelled by the Lord Himself, be destroyed?

The issues surrounding Judah’s destruction are central to the Lord’s relationship with Israel and take us from history to theology. They involve the Abrahamic, Davidic, and Mosaic Covenants, namely, Judah’s disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant and the Lord’s faithfulness to the promises He made to Abraham and David.

Reason for the Captivity

When Israel was established as a nation under the Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai, it entered into a treaty with the Lord modeled after a Hittite treaty form called a Suzerain-Vassal Treaty. Hittite kings used this treaty form when they subjugated smaller nations. The king would promise to protect the vassal nation in exchange for a promise of loyalty and tribute.

The book of Deuteronomy is structured like such a treaty. The Lord promises to protect and dwell personally with Israel if it will be loyal to Him alone (keep the Ten Commandments and Mosaic Law) and give Him tribute, such as sacrifices of worship.

As in a Hittite treaty, there are consequences for the vassal’s disloyalty. In Israel’s case, the cursings of the covenant, listed in Deuteronomy 28:15–68, were the legal consequences.

Unfortunately, the Old Testament reveals that Israel continually broke the Mosaic Covenant, thus obligating the Lord to discipline the nation with the curses. But despite this discipline, the Lord always preserved a remnant of Israelites because He also had made unconditional promises to Israel through the Abrahamic (Gen. 12; 15) and Davidic (2 Sam. 7) Covenants. The Old Testament is really the story of the interplay and relationship of God’s dealing with Israel based on these covenants.

During the reign of Solomon’s son Rehoboam, the Jewish nation split in two. Jeroboam took the ten tribes in the north and founded the northern kingdom of Israel. But Jeroboam also established idolatry, setting up golden calves at Dan and Bethel and calling his people to worship them as “the Lord.”
a mixed population known later as the Samaritans (2 Ki. 17).

Judah should have known the consequences of breaking the Mosaic Covenant after what happened to the northern tribes. Judah was warned. God kept His promise to David that, despite evil kings in Judah, the Davidic kingship would be preserved. Finally King Manasseh, Hezekiah’s son, was so evil, practicing child sacrifice in the Hinnom Valley, that God proclaimed judgment on Judah (2 Ki. 21:1–18).

Isaiah had already prophesied that Babylon would plunder Jerusalem after Hezekiah had shown all his treasures to the Babylonians (2 Ki. 20:12–21). Judah had failed to repent. Its judgment was certain. King Josiah’s revival postponed the destruction for a time, but God’s Word would stand (2 Ki. 22:1—23:27).

The First Deportation (605 B.C.)

Judah’s initial deportation was a part of the larger geopolitical battles of the seventh century B.C. The Assyrian Empire, which had ruled the Middle East for more than a hundred years, was disintegrating. A coalition of Medes and Babylonians rebelled in the east and by 612 B.C. had sacked Nineveh. The Assyrian army retreated to Haran to try to stop the invading Babylonians.

In 609 B.C. Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt and his army attempted to reinforce the Assyrians but was met by King Josiah at Megiddo, who then died in battle (2 Chr. 35:20–27). The Babylonians were again victorious; and after a final battle at Carchemish in 605 B.C., the entire land of Israel came under Babylonian hegemony.

After Josiah’s death, his son Jehoahaz became king but lasted only three months. Pharaoh Neco, on his return from the battle of Haran, deposed Jehoahaz and installed Jehoiakim his older brother as king. Jehoiakim, a vassal of Egypt, was ruling when Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar expelled the Egyptians and brought Judah under Babylonian rule in 605 B.C. with a pledge of Jehoiakim’s loyalty to Babylon.

As was the custom and, in part, to ensure loyalty, Nebuchadnezzar took the sons of the Judean nobility to Babylon as hostages, seeking to employ them in his service. Included in this initial deportation were Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1:1–7).

As the book of Daniel indicates, these young hostages were not mistreated but pampered in an attempt to induce them to adopt Babylonian culture so as to better serve Babylon. Daniel’s test was how to truly serve God and Nebuchadnezzar at the same time.

Through God-given wisdom, he did so first by declaring he would follow God’s law (Dan. 1) and then by proving himself a valuable asset to the king through the gifts God had given him (Dan. 2).

God revealed to Daniel that Babylonian rule was the beginning of the Times of the Gentiles (Dan. 2, 9) under which Judah would have to learn to live until its ultimate restoration in a future Kingdom.

The Second Deportation (597 B.C.)

After three years of loyalty to Babylon despite heavy taxes, Jehoiakim rebelled. Initially, the Lord afflicted Judah by sending neighboring countries against it. Then Nebuchadnezzar came again. He had Jehoiakim bound in chains and the Temple robbed of its treasures (2 Ki. 24:1–5; 2 Chr. 36:5–8).

But Nebuchadnezzar’s wrath still burned against Judah; and he besieged Jerusalem, during which time Jehoiakim died. Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim’s son, took the throne but ruled only three months then surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. Jehoiachin and ten thousand captives from the highest level of Judean society were then deported to Babylon (2 Ki. 24:10–16).
Judah considered Jehoiachin the last legitimate son of David to rule on the throne in Jerusalem. After him, Nebuchadnezzar placed Jehoiachin’s uncle Zedekiah, a remaining son of Josiah, on the throne as a puppet king.

Among the captives deported to Babylon in 597 was the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1–3). Ezekiel then joined Daniel as a prophet in exile, although they ministered to different groups of people. As a court official, Daniel was used by the Lord to proclaim His Word to King Nebuchadnezzar and later the rulers of the Medes and Persians.

Ezekiel lived with the exiles in Tel Abib (also spelled Tel Aviv, meaning “hill of the flood”) by the River Chebar, apparently a canal south of Babylon near Nippur. The Lord spoke through Ezekiel to these exiles over the coming years through the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

Since the exiles yearned to return to Judah, firmly convinced the Lord would never let Jerusalem be destroyed, Ezekiel prophesied of Jerusalem’s coming judgment as pictured by the Glory of the Lord leaving the Temple and the city (Ezek. 9–11). Ezekiel tried to explain to the exiles God’s plan that, through their captivity, the Lord had actually preserved a remnant that eventually would return to the land and be blessed with the coming of a future and final Son of David who would restore Israel and Judah and establish His rule (Ezek. 33–37). But the exiles resisted Ezekiel’s message, continuing to hope in Babylon’s defeat and their return to Jerusalem.

The Third Deportation and Destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.)

From the time of King Josiah, Jeremiah was the Lord’s prophet in Jerusalem. None of Judah’s last four kings trusted in the Lord, so Jeremiah’s ministry was rejected by all of them. That Jeremiah prophesied the doom of Judah and Jerusalem did not endear him to these kings but did enshrine him as the “weeping prophet,” the one concerned with Jerusalem’s fate.

King Jehoiakim actually cut up one of Jeremiah’s scrolls and burned it (Jer. 36). During the siege of Jerusalem, when Jeremiah prophesied its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar, King Zedekiah even had Jeremiah imprisoned and thrown into a cistern to silence him (Jer. 37–38). When the city fell, Jeremiah was among the captives to be sent to Babylon but was freed by the Babylonians (Jer. 40:1–7). However, after Babylon’s appointed ruler of Judah, Gedaliah, was assassinated by a renegade army officer, Jeremiah was taken by the remnant of Judeans fleeing to Egypt for safety. From there he uttered his last prophecy.

The fall of Jerusalem is recorded in detail in 2 Kings 25:1–21. The siege of Jerusalem began on January 15, 588 B.C. and continued until the city fell on August 14, 586 B.C., more than two and one-half years later. Zedekiah tried to escape but was captured. His sons were killed, and he was blinded and brought to Babylon in chains. The city and Solomon’s beautiful Temple were burned. The walls were broken down, and the people remaining in the city were taken in exile to Babylon. As was prophesied by Jeremiah in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign over Jehoiakim (605 B.C.), Judah would serve Babylon for seventy years (Jer. 25:8–14; 2 Chr. 36:20–21).

Epilogue

A generation of Jews came and went in Babylon before another geopolitical shift occurred. Just as Babylon rebelled against the Assyrian Empire, so the Medes and Persians revolted against the Babylonian Empire. As Isaiah had prophesied more than 150 years earlier (Isa. 44:24–45:7), King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon (cf. Dan. 5) and in 538 B.C. passed an edict allowing Judah and all the other captives to return home (2 Chr. 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4).

This restoration to the land was due to God’s graciousness to the Jewish people according to His promises to Abraham and David that they would always be His people and that a son of David would always rule in Jerusalem (Ezek. 37:15–28; Mic. 7:19–20). The people returned to the land repentant. They would never break the covenant again because of idolatry. But the nation still had to trust the Lord wholly before His promises could be completely realized.

The Lord chose Abraham and his descendants in order to bless them that they might be a nation of priests to Him, through which He would bless the world (Gen. 12:1–4; Ex. 19:6). On the one hand, the Lord made unconditional promises that He would make the Israelites a nation and give them the land of Canaan. On the other hand, for the Jewish people to live there in blessing, they would have to be wholly devoted to the Lord and live holy lives according to the Mosaic Law (Ex. 19:5; Lev. 19:2).

The relationship between the Lord and Israel is a story of spiritual education: Israel has to know who the Lord is so that God can bring Israel to complete faith and obedience so that He might bless the nation as He promised. Part of the story involves the realization that Israel could never be righteous on its own, as demonstrated by its failure to uphold its end of the covenant with the Lord, which led to continual covenant discipline. The only way Israel could be righteous and blessed was for the righteous Servant of the Lord to atone for Israel’s sin so the nation could be forgiven (Isa. 52:13—53:12) and a New Covenant established with it (Jer. 31:31ff). In this sense, we are still waiting for the end of the story.

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In 1492 King Ferdinand of Spain issued the expulsion decree that set Tisha B’Av as the final date for all Jews to leave Spain, thereby destroying one of the largest Jewish communities in the world.

That date also saw the beginning of the infamous Spanish Inquisition, instituted to force Jewish people to embrace Catholicism or face horrific torture. Despite submission to forced conversion, however, thousands were tortured anyway and burned alive.

Although the Bible does not give the date, Jewish students of Scripture also believe the sin of the spies at Kadesh-barnea, which caused the Lord to make the nation wander in the desert for forty years, occurred on Tisha B’Av.1

To this day Tisha B’Av remains a day of sadness and denial of physical pleasures. Everyone is supposed to fast except for the young and those who are ill or have physical limitations. The fast of Tisha B’Av is similar to that of Yom Kippur, and those who fast even deny themselves water. They refrain from washing, shaving, cutting their hair, wearing leather shoes, and using lotions and cosmetics.2 The custom is to sit on the floor or stools, as when sitting shiva, the seven-day period of mourning for those who have died.3

Early in Av, some Jewish people refrain from eating meat and drinking wine, except on the Sabbath.4 And weddings, parties, and joyous celebrations are all put on hold until after the ninth of the month.5

In the synagogue the book of Lamentations is read. Also, the ark where the Torah scrolls are kept is often draped in black cloth to indicate mourning.6

Jewish teachers see a special blessing in mourning over Jerusalem. They believe that all who mourn over her will rejoice in her future glory and exaltation,7 citing Isaiah 66:10–12: 

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her; rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her . . . . For thus saith the Lord: Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like a flowing stream.

These verses look forward to the future Messianic Kingdom, when Jerusalem will be inhabited by David’s Greatest Son; and the city will never mourn again.

ENDNOTES
2 “Tisha B’Av,” [www.jewfaq.org/holidayd.htm].
3 “The Ninth of Av.”
4 Ibid.
5 “Tisha B’Av.”
6 Ibid.
7 “The Ninth of Av.”

by Thomas C. Simcox
On the evening of October 12, 539 B.C., a drunken party raged inside the city of Babylon. Belshazzar, son of King Nabonidus, emceed the event.

For the previous fourteen years, Belshazzar had enjoyed all of the perquisites of being coregent over the Neo-Babylonian Empire. But by the time the wine began to flow that evening, the Medo-Persian army under Cyrus II had overrun most of Belshazzar’s kingdom. Belshazzar’s own father had fled before the foreign juggernaut. And the enemy was literally at the gates.

This trouble did not deter Belshazzar. After all, the city of Babylon was heavily fortified with more than a hundred towers, a surrounding moat, and double walls. The inner wall alone was twenty-one feet thick.1

Overconfident, Belshazzar went too far. He and his guests drank their fill from the gold cups Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem years before, thumbing their noses at the invisible God of their Judean captives and praising their gods made of gold, silver, and other tangible substances.

Then divine judgment fell. That same evening, fingers like those of a man scrawled Belshazzar’s condemnation on a plaster wall of the king’s palace (Dan. 5:5). The prophet Daniel interpreted the writing, which declared the doom of Belshazzar and his kingdom. That same night God gave the kingdom to the Medes and Persians.

It happened exactly as God had said it would. Historians say the Medes and Persians diverted the waters of the Euphrates River, which ran down the middle of the city, and entered Babylon through the channel depression. They took the city without a struggle, killed Belshazzar, and ended the Babylonian Empire. The Persian Empire took its place and lasted two hundred more years, becoming the second world empire as prophesied by Daniel (Dan. 2:39; 7:5).

**Cyrus II—First Return**

After his forces took Babylon, Cyrus II, also called “the Great” (r. 559–530 B.C.), entered the city on October 29, 539 B.C. to a liberator’s welcome. The people had disliked Nabonidus (Belshazzar’s father) because he had emphasized worship of the moon god, Sin, to the neglect of the popular Babylonian god, Marduk.

Cyrus treated the people well. He restored dilapidated buildings and created an atmosphere of peace. He also initiated the Persian policy of pluralism. Instead of exerting dominance over foreign gods, he actively sought their beneficence, along with Marduk’s. He restored sacred objects, rebuilt sanctuaries, and repatriated exiles. An inscription on an ancient clay barrel, known as the Cyrus Cylinder, recorded Cyrus’s efforts:

I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations.2

This inscription gives insight into Cyrus’s decree that allowed the Jewish
people to return to Judah and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1–4, 7). It also indicates that Cyrus’s kindness was not extended to them alone.

Nevertheless, behind the political move, God’s unseen hand was at work. Ezra the scribe wrote, “The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia” (Ezra 1:1).

More than a hundred years earlier, through the prophet Isaiah, God foretold that a ruler named Cyrus would be His “shepherd” (Isa. 44:28) and “anointed” (45:1), who would “perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid. He shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives” (44:28; 45:13).

The ancient historian Flavius Josephus believed it was by reading Isaiah’s prophecy that Cyrus’s spirit was stirred to allow the Jewish captives to return.3 Thus, some one hundred years before Cyrus was even born, God called Cyrus by name—an amazing prophetic testimony to the inspiration and authority of God’s Word. God’s sovereignty over Cyrus recalls Proverbs 21:1: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; he turneth it whithersoever he will.”

Thus in 536 B.C., under the leadership of Zerubbabel, about fifty thousand Jewish people returned to Jerusalem and laid the foundation of the
At the beginning of Xerxes’ reign, enemies of the Jews in Judah wrote him “an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem” (Ezra 4:6). Scripture does not give specifics regarding the accusation, nor does it tell Xerxes’ response.

After a military disaster against Greece, Ahasuerus came home and chose Esther to be his queen (see the book of Esther). Xerxes eventually was assassinated by the captain of his bodyguard.

Artaxerxes I—Others Return

Artaxerxes I (r. 465–424 B.C.), Xerxes’ third son (Esther’s stepson), came to the throne after removing his two brothers and killing his father’s assassin, who had tried to murder him as well. Shortly after taking power, Artaxerxes had to deal with a revolt in Egypt that lasted ten years. During that time Artaxerxes gave Ezra his royal commission (Ezra 7:11–26); and in 458 B.C. Ezra led the second return to Judah with about sixteen hundred men plus women and children (Ezra 8:1–14).

Artaxerxes’ concern that his subjects in Judah adhere to the laws of their God (Ezra 7:26) harmonizes with the traditional Persian policy of placating foreign deities out of self-interest. In his decree commanding the Israelites to resume their Temple worship, he declared, “For why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?” (Ezra 7:23).

Proverbially sometime within the next thirteen years, the Judeans attempted to rebuild Jerusalem and its wall. But certain Samaritans thwarted their efforts by writing a letter to King Artaxerxes accusing the repatriates of conspiring to revolt. Already dealing with a rebellion in Egypt and not wanting another hot spot to flare up, Artaxerxes put a stop to the reconstruction (Ezra 4:7–24).

Then Nehemiah entered the picture. By Artaxerxes’ twentieth year, Nehemiah had been promoted to the prestigious office of king’s cupbearer. The position implies that Nehemiah was probably handsome, trained in court etiquette, a connoisseur of wines, a good listener, and a man of influence.

Cupbearers were responsible for tasting wine before the king drank it to ensure it had not been poisoned. Artaxerxes knew firsthand through his father’s experience the potential for assassination. Being only one sip away from death, Artaxerxes depended on Nehemiah for his life. The position of king’s cupbearer, therefore, was important, for it held the king’s deepest trust.

Nehemiah also knew the Scriptures and had compassion for his people. His heart was broken when he heard of the desperate condition of his kinsmen who had returned to Judah:

> I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven. O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who delight to fear thy name; and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man [Artaxerxes]. For I was the king’s cupbearer (Neh. 1:4, 11).

After four months of prayer, Nehemiah approached the king in 445 B.C., thirteen years after Ezra’s return, and received permission to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city’s wall.

ENDNOTES

* Signifies reigning years.
3 Flavius Josephus, Antiquities 11.1.2.
4 Herodotus, Histories, 3.159.1.

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Daniel in the lions’ den (Dan. 6) is probably one of the best-known accounts in the Bible. It’s the encouraging, satisfying triumph of faith, righteousness, and justice over wickedness and evil in high places. Yet some people use it as a weapon to try to discredit the Scriptures.

Their chief quarrel is with the historicity of Darius the Mede, the king who befriended Daniel and sought unsuccessfully to keep him from being thrown to the lions. Because it was Cyrus II who conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., some claim Darius never existed or was confused with Darius I, who ruled many years later.

The Bible, however, speaks of both Cyrus and Darius. Second Chronicles 36:22 and Ezra 5:13 name Cyrus II, known as “the Great,” as the first Persian king to rule the conquered Babylonian empire. But Daniel 5:30–31 says, “In that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans [Babylonians], slain. And Darius, the Mede, took the kingdom, being about threescore and two [62] years old.”

So who was it—Darius or Cyrus? Who was Darius the Mede? There are two predominant views regarding his identity.

The first, and least likely, is that Darius and Cyrus are one and the same. Variations in names were common in ancient times. For example, the Greeks knew Esther’s Ahasuerus as Xerxes. Also, the word Darius could be a throne or titular name.

This view has problems, however. Darius is identified as being “of the seed of the Medes” (Dan. 9:1), while Cyrus is identified as a Persian (Dan. 6:28). Although it is true that Cyrus had a Median mother, Persian kings claimed ancestry through the father. Darius’s father was Ahasuerus (Dan. 9:1, not Esther’s Ahasuerus), while Cyrus’s father was Cambyses I.

The second, and probably correct, explanation is that Darius was Gubaru, a Mede whom Cyrus appointed to rule the province of Babylon for fourteen years.

Bible scholar John C. Whitcomb believes Darius the Mede fits the historical records related to Gubaru.1 Gubaru’s appointment also coincides with Daniel 5:31, which many scholars say is better translated “Darius received the kingdom,” rather than “Darius ... took the kingdom.” Also, Daniel 9:1 states, Darius “was made king” (passive).

Interestingly, Gubaru is said to have been born in 601 B.C., which would have made him sixty-two, coinciding with Daniel 5:31.2 In addition, the ancient historian Flavius Josephus wrote, Babylon was taken by Darius, and when he, with his kinsman Cyrus, had put an end to the dominion of the Babylonians, he [Darius] was sixty-two years old. He was the son of Astyages, and had another name among the Greeks.3

For many years skeptics did not believe Belshazzar existed. But they changed their minds when, in the late nineteenth century, cuneiform tablets were published that clearly referenced him.

Darius the Mede stands out in Scripture as a Gentile ruler who glorified the God of Israel because of the prophet Daniel’s faithfulness. Daniel had been taken to Babylon as a mere youth in 605 B.C., during Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege of Jerusalem. He outlived the Babylonian empire and, in his eighties, rose to preeminence in the successor realm, the kingdom of the Medes and Persians.

Jealous of Daniel, his coworkers decided to orchestrate his demise. They arranged the passage of an irrevocable law making it illegal to pray to anyone but the king. Knowing the law had been passed, Daniel nevertheless continued to pray on his knees to God and was arrested. His enemies forced the unwilling Darius to throw the lions the man he knew to be his most loyal and trusted employee. Darius’s parting words to Daniel were, “Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee” (Dan. 6:16).

The Bible says that Darius the Mede lay awake all night, rejecting food and entertainment. Then, “very early in the morning,” he went to the lions’ den, where he cried to Daniel “with a lamentable voice” (vv. 19–20).

Daniel answered. He told the king that God had sent an angel and “shut the lions’ mouths” (v. 22). When the prophet was lifted from the den, “no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God” (v. 23).

Darius promptly tossed Daniel’s accusers, their wives, and children into the den; and before they hit the bottom, the lions ripped them to shreds (v. 24). Darius proclaimed Daniel’s God to be the “living God, and steadfast forever, and his kingdom that shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end” (v. 26).

ENDNOTES

1 John C. Whitcomb, Jr., Darius the Mede: A Study in Historical Identification (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).
It must have felt like a dream. After so many years in a foreign land, the Jewish people could go home. Their release from captivity in Babylon, now part of the Medo-Persian Empire, should not have come as too much of a surprise; after all, it had been predicted in a song (Ps. 126:1–6).

The return of the exiles to Judah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem were carried out in three waves. The first return was around 538 B.C. under the leadership of a man named Zerubbabel. It was during this period that the people of Israel built the second Temple.

About eighty years later, a second group, under the priestly leadership of Ezra, returned to the land. Spiritual and religious reformation occurred at that time.

Finally, under the leadership of Nehemiah, a king’s cupbearer, many more returned. Nehemiah’s focus was to repair Jerusalem’s walls and gates.

**THE FIRST RETURN: Fearless Faith**

God stirred Cyrus, king of Persia, to proclaim in writing that all captives of Israel could return home (Ezra 1:1–2). The prophet Daniel may have shown him Jeremiah’s prophecy about Babylon’s fall and Israel’s seventy-year captivity (Jer. 25:12–13). He also could have shown the king’s name in the book of Isaiah as the one prophesied to allow Jerusalem and the Temple to be rebuilt (Isa. 44:28).

Zerubbabel was to lead the first *aliyah*. The Hebrew word *aliyah* means “ascension” or “going up.” Today it commonly refers to the act of Jewish people returning to live in Israel from other parts of the world. The call of Cyrus, king of Persia, has been used as an adage for *aliyah*: “Who is there among you of all His people? The LORD, his God, be with him, and let him go up” (2 Chr. 36:23; cf. Ezra 1:3).

Zerubbabel was a descendant of King David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ (Mt. 1:6, 12). His name probably means “seed of Babylon”; but his Persian name was Sheshbazzar, suggesting he may have been in the service of the king (Ezra 1:8–5:14). Yet Zerubbabel left all the comforts of Babylon behind to take on this challenge.

Scripture states that 42,360 people returned to Judah, accompanied by 7,337 slaves and two hundred singers (Ezra 2:64–65), including members of the ten northern tribes taken into captivity by Assyria in 722 B.C. (Ezra 2:70). Still, they were only a small remnant.

Why wouldn’t the opportunity to return to the Promised Land cause a massive exodus from Babylon? Because the Jewish people were not slaves in Babylon but were full and active members of Babylonian society. Many prospered. It is easy to imagine that many second- and third-generation Jewish Babylonians had no interest in leaving.

With the exception of the few, most of the Israelites born in captivity probably had lost the love for the homeland. Perhaps their desire to fit in caused many to discard God’s Word.

Nevertheless, there were men and women like Zerubbabel who turned their backs on the comforts of a pagan world and turned their faces toward the God of Israel and the land He had promised would be theirs forever.

An analogous situation exists today among Christians. Many second- and third-generation believers live comfortably in their spiritual complacency. They are still “captives” to a God-hostile world. A sure way to break free is to focus all our devotion on Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

At Jerusalem the first order of business was to rebuild the altar of the Lord and reestablish sacrifices. Also, the Temple...
Most of the returnees rejoiced to see the finished Temple. But some of the older folks wept when they compared the humble structure with the magnificence of the first Temple. To them it was simply too inferior (Hag. 2:3; Zech. 4:10).

Even today people are quick to judge the quality of a work of God by its size and grandeur. Yet Scripture admonishes us not to despise the day of small things (Zech. 4:10). Whether large or small, God’s work is accomplished “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6).

**THE SECOND RETURN: Spiritual Shake-Up**

A priest had a burden. He wanted to teach God’s laws and regulations to the people already in Jerusalem (Ezra 7:10). With letters from a new Persian king, Artaxerxes, Ezra the priest and scribe led a second expedition back to the Promised Land.

Ezra was a man with credentials. Scripture calls him “a ready scribe in the law of Moses” (7:6); “the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel” (v. 11); and “a scribe of the law of the God of heaven” (v. 12). He had a profound love for God’s Word, deplored sin, and trusted God every step of his life. He exemplified the principle of Ecclesiastes 12:13: “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.”

The king’s commission invited all the Jewish people who so wished to accompany Ezra. The male registry showed that about 1,754 or fewer responded. As Ezra examined the list, he noticed that members of a special group were missing. There were no Levites.

Although the Levites were men with many privileges associated with Temple service, not one chose to go. Ezra probably exerted his priestly muscle and sent a delegation to find volunteers (Ezra 8:15–20).

It is a sad situation when people fail to use their God-given abilities for His glory. As believers, we should be active and willing to do God’s will, “for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Lk. 12:48).

Unfortunately, there was trouble in Jerusalem. Many had violated the law concerning mixed marriages (Dt. 7:3–4). Priests, Levites, princes, and rulers were some of the worst offenders. This sin was serious because it encouraged idolatry. It also broke down the separation that God had designed for Israel as a unique people (Ezra 9:1–2).

Full of grief, Ezra threw himself on the ground in front of the Temple entrance. Many joined him in his cry to God for mercy and forgiveness. Finally, under a heavy rain, hearts came under conviction. Confession was made, and action was taken to put away sin. With the exception of a few, the offenders separated themselves from the heathen people of the land and their own pagan wives (Ezra 10).

Many of the marital problems believers have today could be avoided if we obeyed God’s command: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14).
THE THIRD RETURN:
Singleness of Purpose

A cupbearer in the Persian summer court at Shushan was sad. Nehemiah had received bad news. Jerusalem’s walls and gates were still in ruins. Strengthened by prayer, he spoke to the king and, in 445 B.C., was granted permission to go to Judah (Neh. 2:5–8). It was Nehemiah, during this Persian period of Israel’s history, who opened the door for more Jews exiled in heathen countries to return to the Promised Land (cf. Neh. 5:17).

The name Nehemiah means “Yahveh consoles.” Comfort in the name of the Lord was exactly what Nehemiah determined to offer his fellow countrymen. He was willing to leave a position of wealth, power, and influence to share in the hardships of his people.

Scripture reveals that Nehemiah knew his God: “I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awe-inspiring God, who keepeth covenant and mercy for them who love him and observe his commandments” (Neh. 1:5).

While at Jerusalem, he was challenged by enemies from without as well as from within (Neh. 4—5). Again, as in the days of Zerubbabel, God’s enemies were active. Nevertheless, the work continued under Nehemiah’s tenacious leadership. In only fifty-two days, the walls were restored (Neh. 6:15).

With the help of Ezra and, later, the prophet Malachi, Nehemiah encouraged spiritual reforms. He enforced the separation law concerning mixed marriages, as well as the Sabbath observance. He kept the sanctuary free from infidels and arranged support for the Temple services (Neh. 13). He stood fast in the Lord and would not be distracted from his goal (cf. 1 Th. 3:8). Nehemiah had singleness of purpose. He sought divine blessings and gave thanks to God for all his successes.

The significance of these three returns can be appreciated in the light of three unique men: Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It is not the position or office but the condition of the heart that God seeks and uses for His purposes. Israel’s returns reveal how easily God can conform the hearts of kings and rulers to His will (Prov. 21:1). God’s enemies could not stop His work (Prov. 21:30). In spite of the opposition, the Temple and walls of Jerusalem were restored.

Supported by the ministries of three great prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the leaders of the returns set a practical pattern for courage, conviction, and commitment: “For whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope” (Rom.15:4).

Peter Colón is the Southeastern States director for The Friends of Israel.

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The following column by Nonie Darwish says it all. She wrote it as an open letter titled “Shame on You” in response to a PBS television documentary aired on its program Frontline. We are privileged to reprint it here with the author’s permission.

I am a former Moslem, born and raised in the Middle East. I am very disappointed and almost scared after watching your presentation about Islam. One of the reasons I fled to the United States of America was to escape the oppressive regime of Islam in the Middle East. From a former Moslem, these people are in the U.S. to Islamize America and have a scary agenda. They audaciously buy churches and convert them into mosques!

I think your show was insensitive to the Judeo-Christian community of the United States. Islam is cruel, anti-women, anti-religious freedom and anti-personal freedom in general. How could you sympathize with a religion that kills adulterers, homosexuals and people who convert out of Islam? How could you present Islam with such affection? I am sorry that PBS failed to represent the oppression, fear and the straight jacket I had to endure when I lived under that crazy regime.

In the show, you stressed how the West should understand Islam. Why is America responsible for understanding every little and big culture and religion around the world, failing which we are branded bigots and racists? How about asking the Moslems if they could open their minds and hearts and understand the West? Perhaps they will slow down their terrorism, burning our flags and hijacking airplanes. Unfortunately, the Middle East has no clue about the American culture and they only judge us by Hollywood! How about U.S. media educating Moslems about U.S. culture and the virtues of our Constitution? Did that ever occur to you?

When I married a Christian man in my home country twenty-five years ago, I could have been killed by Moslems for a religion that declares a fatwa, or death sentence, to anyone who is critical of the religion? How could you defend a religion that inspired 9/11? Of course not all Moslems are terrorists, but unfortunately, the majority of “moderate” Moslems respect the fundamentalists as “true” Moslems and even feel guilty toward them. If this were not true we should be seeing massive displays of support for the U.S., strong denouncements of radical Islam by the moderates. This has not happened. Instead, the most vocal Islamic groups in the West are taking a confrontational stance, complaining of discriminatory treatment, taking their cue from liberal civil-rights groups.

The liberal media is only too eager to egg them on.

I now write articles critical of Islam and speak to many groups about the Middle East but have to use a pseudonym so I do not get killed by some of your Moslem friends in the U.S. mosques you were interviewing! They have no shame to be complaining of discrimination after 9/11, thanks to media outlets like you who gave them a voice. The U.S. goes out of its way to protect them. What discrimination? Are you kidding? These mosques in the U.S. are financed by Saudi money and have an agenda and they scare people like me who want to write and speak freely. Scared and oppressed former Moslems like me could be killed by these Moslem extremists in U.S. mosques. There are many moderate Moslems and former Moslems like me who feel intimidated by some U.S. Moslem extremists. Former Moslems have to be given a voice on why they escaped Islam. People like me and oppressed Christians and Jews in the Moslem World had no say on your show. That is very sad. I wish you had defended my right to choose or reject Islam without getting killed.

Is Islam now the “in” thing to defend to sabotage America, or did Saudi money corrupt you?!

The phrase *the lost tribes of Israel* emits a certain ring of mystery that romanticizes the disappearance of the Israelites taken captive by Assyria in 722 B.C. Although the phrase is nowhere in Scripture, it is indispensable to a false teaching known as British-Israelism.

British-Israelism, or Anglo-Israelism, came into existence more than 150 years ago. Richard Brothers (1757–1824), an Englishman, is given the dubious distinction of originating this method of biblical interpretation. It is a theological anti-Semitism that contends the Anglo-Saxon people are, in fact, Israel and, consequently, the true heirs of all of God’s promises to the Jewish nation.

British-Israelism rests on four erroneous postulates:

The Four Main Falsehoods

1. **Not a single Israelite remained in the land after Assyria deported the ten northern tribes of Israel.**

It is essential to British-Israelism that this statement be historically true. Furthermore, none of the Israelites thereafter could have mixed with Judah or returned to the southern kingdom. Accordingly, British-Israelism teacher Herbert Armstrong (1892–1986) stated, “When the southern kingdom of Judah was taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Assyrians had migrated northwest—and the ten-tribed Israelites with them! Utterly lost. They were utterly gone! They were lost from view!”

Again he declared, “The house of Israel did not return to Palestine with the Jews in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, as some erroneously believe.” With the decline of the Assyrian Empire, he said, the tribes began to wander westward across northern Europe and eventually lost their identity. Later they became the Saxe, or Sythians, who subsequently moved through Europe and eventually invaded England as the Saxon people.

2. **The British are Israelitish Ephraim, with the fledgling United States later installed under the mantle of Manasseh, thus fulfilling Jacob’s prophecy regarding Joseph’s two sons in Genesis 48.**

In this relocation process, David’s throne was supposedly transferred from Jerusalem to England. Armstrong endorsed a concept by Herman L. Hoeh: “Elizabeth II actually sits on the throne of King David of Israel—that she is a direct descendant, continuing David’s dynasty—the very throne on which Christ will sit after His return.” Other devotees identify biblical Bethel with Glastonbury, England, and Jerusalem with Edinburgh, Scotland.

3. **Israel (the ten northern tribes) is forever distinguished from the house of Judah (Jews), which has been left under a permanent curse emanating from the idea that it was Judah and Levi who put Christ to death saying, “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Mt. 27:25).**

Therefore, say British-Israelism advocates, the terms Israel and Jews
lost! Certainly, the Jewish people have wandered far and wide across the face of the earth, and evidences of their religion and culture have been deposited and endure. However, to cite these evidences as confirmation of the British-Israel hypothesis is preposterous. The Scriptures and corroborating historical records widely confirm that the majority of the northern tribes’ population never left Israel at all. Ephraim and Manasseh did not move to England and America, portions of the northern tribes were assimilated by Judah, and Israel and Judah eventually fused as one national entity.

All Israel Was Not Taken Captive

Israel’s demise and subsequent deportation are recorded in 2 Kings 17. The chapter, however, lacks specifics concerning who was carried away by Assyria.

It is claimed that the statement “the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah only” (v. 18) suggests the nation was removed in its entirety. However, this verse must be applied contextually, like such statements as “all Israel went to battle” and “all Israel appeared before the Lord.”

All of Israel did not go to battle; only the military went. Nor did every Israelite appear before the Lord; only those who constituted a proper representation appeared. So it was in the case of Israel’s going into captivity.

Other Scriptures confirm the deportation was partial and restricted to the ruling political and military class. In fact, during the reign of Judean King Hezekiah who came to the throne in 715 B.C., seven years after Sargon II of Assyria conquered Israel, many from the north moved to Judah at Hezekiah’s invitation (2 Chr. 30).

In 622 B.C., more Israelites came to Jerusalem to help repair the Temple. Even later, Hezekiah issued a Passover invitation from “Beer-sheba even to Dan . . . throughout all Israel and Judah” to the “children of Israel . . .

who are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria” (2 Chr. 30:5–6). In response, many came to Jerusalem, “even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover” (2 Chr. 30:18). Also, “all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation who came out of Israel” (2 Chr. 30:25) participated in the feast.

Eighty years later, Josiah led Judah through a period of religious revival. In the process of repairing the Temple, monies were collected from “the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin” (2 Chr. 34:9). By then many pious Jews from the northern kingdom had moved to Judah to escape contamination from the heathen people the Assyrians had settled in Israel.

Further documentation of this partial deportation comes from Sargon II himself: “I besieged and conquered Samaria, led away as booty 27,290 inhabitants of it.” Estimates of the northern kingdom’s population at that time range from 400,000 to 500,000, meaning only 5 percent of the population was deported, primarily the leaders from the area around Samaria.

The captives settled to the northeast, around the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In 612 B.C. the Babylonians under Nabopolassar destroyed the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. Thus the northern exiles joined their Judean brothers under the rule of the Babylonians and later the Persians. Some were among those who returned to Jerusalem in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. Cyrus, king of Persia, ruled the territories formerly held by the Assyrians. He decreed that all Jews “throughout all his kingdom” who wished to return and help rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem were free to do so. At the dedication that followed the exiles’ return, Scripture records,

And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication . . . twelve he-goats, according to the number of
The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.
Statement of Activities Year Ended December 31, 2003

Changes in unrestricted net assets:
Public support and revenue:

Public support:
Contributions:
General ministry contributions ........................................... $ 3,603,514
North American ministry contributions ......................... 1,172,613
Foreign ministry contributions ........................................... 737,190
Institute of Jewish Studies ........................................... 18,558
Legacies, gift annuities & other ........................................... 1,041,553
Total public support ............................................................. 6,573,428

Revenue:
Ministry publications, audio, and video ........................... 1,532,180
Conference and special functions ...................................... 59,524
Investment income ........................................................... 76,500
Other revenue ................................................................. 88,716
Total revenue ................................................................. 1,756,920
Total public support and revenue ........................................... 8,330,348

Net assets released from restrictions:
Satisfaction of program restrictions ........................................... 321,964

Expenses:
Program services:
Outreach ministries ........................................................... 3,661,749
North American ministries ................................................. 1,536,308
Foreign ministries ........................................................... 975,396
Institute of Jewish Studies ........................................... 206,628
Special functions and banquets ........................................... 208,804
Total program services ....................................................... 6,588,885

Supporting services:
Management and general ................................................... 1,535,162
Stewardship and fund-raising ............................................... 389,347
Total supporting services ..................................................... 1,924,509

Total program and supporting services ..................................... 8,513,394

Increase in unrestricted net assets ........................................... 138,918

Changes in temporarily restricted net assets:
Contributions ................................................................. 261,855
Actuarial adjustment on annuity obligations .................... (375,518)
Net assets released from restrictions ................................. (321,964)
Decrease in temporarily restricted net assets ....................... (435,627)

Decrease in net assets ....................................................... (296,709)
Net assets at beginning of year ........................................... 4,079,483
Net assets at end of year .................................................... $ 3,782,774

Our financial statements were audited by the accounting firm of Lambrides, Lamos & Moulthrop Co., Certified Public Accountants. Their report on the audit for the year ended December 31, 2003, was rendered on March 26, 2004, with an unqualified opinion. The above figures are taken from that report.

the tribes of Israel (Ezra 6:16–17).

The New Testament records that individuals in the first century still maintained their tribal identities—some of whom were members of the so-called lost tribes. For example, Anna, who beheld the baby Jesus in the Temple, was “of the tribe of Asher” (Lk. 2:36).

Israel unquestionably remained in the region of its inheritance without a massive and mysterious exodus into Europe.

Synonymous Terms

With the Babylonian Captivity came the dissolution of a dual national identification for Israel. The divided kingdom ceased to exist, and Israel and Judah became synonymous terms frequently used to identify the entire host of Jewry.

British-Israelism heatedly denies this indisputable fact because its entire system of interpretation hinges on its being correct on this point.

Walter Martin, in his book Kingdom of the Cults, fully exposed this fallacy: “After the Babylonian captivity, from which the Jews returned, Ezra records the remnant were called by the name of Jews eight times, and by the name Israel forty times. Nehemiah records eleven times they are Jews, and proceeds to describe them as Israel, twenty-two times.”

The New Testament is no less emphatic. At Pentecost, Peter addressed himself to “all the house of Israel” (Acts 2:36). In this one chapter alone, “Jews” (v. 5), “men of Judea” (v. 14), and “men of Israel” (v. 22) are mentioned, followed by the reference to “all the house of Israel.” Later, referring to his Jewish brethren, the apostle Paul spoke of a common promise and a common hope, “unto which promise our brethren, the apostle Paul spoke of a common promise and a common hope, “unto which promise our

Ephraim and Manasseh Are Not England and America

Ephraim and Manasseh are prominent in Scripture. They are repeatedly said to have been in Israel following the captivities—not in London or New York. Ephraim is specifically identified and related to God’s future purposes for the Jewish people.
Nehemiah was a contemporary of Ezra and cupbearer to the king of Persia. He heard of the sorry situation in Jerusalem and the pitiful plight of its inhabitants, was moved with compassion for his countrymen and God’s city, and interceded for them with tears.

Sensing a specific call from God, Nehemiah embarked on a bold strategy: He requested leave of the king to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. The king granted him permission.

Once in Jerusalem, Nehemiah quietly surveyed the circumstances by night and formulated a plan. Later he challenged his compatriots to reconstruct the shattered city walls.

With precision and strategy, this godly leader coordinated the entire process. Despite external opposition from his nefarious detractors and carping criticism from within the ranks of his own people, he completed the task in merely fifty-two days. Were the enablement could explain such a significant feat (Neh. 1—7).

Nehemiah’s confidence was in God’s empowering and enablement. In prayer, amid tears and enemy tactics (2:17—20; 4:1—3), or combating spiritual compromise (13:23—31) and slanderous criticism (4:3—6), Nehemiah always stepped up so doing, he enabled others to do likewise.

13. Committed to Glorify God in Everything. This faithful servant sought to glorify God in all he did. With humility and self-abnegation he came (like Jesus, Phil. 2:5—11) as a servant to his people. He identified with them. He shared in their trials, burdens, and dangers. He was never self-opinionated or self-promoting. Like Isaiah, Nehemiah knew that God never gives His glory to another (Isa. 42:8; 48:11). And Like Ezra, Nehemiah, too, prefigured Israel’s Messiah:

Like Ezra, Nehemiah portrays Christ in His ministry of restoration. [He] illustrates Christ in that he gives up a high position in order to identify with the plight of his people; he comes with a specific mission and fulfills it; and his life is characterized by prayerful dependence on God.

In this book, everything is restored except the king. The temple is rebuilt, Jerusalem is reconstructed, the covenant is renewed, and the people are reformed. The messianic line is intact, but the King is yet to come. The decree of Artaxerxes in his twentieth year (Neh. 2:1) marks the beginning point of Daniel’s prophecy of the Seventy Weeks (Dan. 9:25—27).

. . . The Messiah will come at the end of the sixty-nine weeks, and this is exactly fulfilled in a.d. 32.

Nehemiah was a godly servant-leader whose life, ministry, and testimony pointed to his Lord. Let us “follow the leader” in our walk and service for Him.

ENDNOTES

1. Convinced of God’s Call. Nehemiah 1:1—2:10 tells of Nehemiah’s sense of divine call to his specific ministry. In prayer, amid tears and a heart burdened for his beloved city and people, God’s chosen servant was commissioned. God’s call always carries with it the guarantee of His enablement.

2. Dependent on God in Prayer. Nehemiah knew the Source of power for his ministry. It was God alone. That Source was indispensable, accessible by prayer, and utterly dependable. The book opens and closes with prayer: some prayers short, some longer, others praise and doxology (1:4; 2:4; 4:4, 9; 5:19; 6:9, 14; 9:5—37; 13:14, 22, 29).

3. Focused in Vision. Nehemiah possessed God-given vision. He was always able to see the big picture clearly and discern situations and people from the divine perspective. His classic response to his enemies in Nehemiah 6:3 says it all: “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.”

4. Upright in Integrity. Not once did Nehemiah compromise his integrity. He realized his ultimate accountability was to God. The mixed marriages (10:28—31; 13:23—31) and unholy alliance in the Temple (13:1—8) are obvious examples. Character is seen in conduct.

5. Submissive to Authority. This exemplary leader readily submitted to God-ordained authorities: the king (1:1—2:8), the Word of God (8:1—18), and His will and ways (9:1—13:31). He was not a “loose cannon.”

6. Driven in Purpose. Nehemiah planned carefully (2:11—15), prioritized systematically (2:16—18; 3:1—32), and pursued his objectives prayerfully (4:9; 8:1—8). He was unflappable, composed, and secure. Every aspect of his ministry was intentional. When and the walls were built, he joined the people in thankful and thoughtful celebration (7:1—6; 8:12).

7. Compelled to Discern Wisely. God’s servant was a wise discerner of people, circumstances, and enemy tactics (2:17—20; 4:1—3, 7—23). In New Testament terms, he was “not ignorant” of Satan’s devices (2 Cor. 2:11; cf. Eph. 6:11). His “spiritual radar” was always on.

8. Available to Serve. Whether traveling (Neh. 2:5—11), confronting opponents (2:19—20; 4:1—23), or combating spiritual compromise (13:23—31) and slanderous criticism (4:3—6), Nehemiah always stepped up courageously to fulfill his obligations.

9. Exemplary in Conduct. In every aspect of his life and ministry, Nehemiah was commendable. He is blameless though not sinless (cf. 9:13). What a testimony to God’s grace in his life.

10. Confident in God. Nehemiah’s confidence was in God alone. Out of this confidence, he worked hard and sacrificially, even extending hospitality to more than 150 compatriots on one occasion (5:17). He proved that God is no man’s debtor.

11. Able to Delegate. Nehemiah co-opted people and delegated responsibilities to them. With sword and trowel they stood side by side to get the wall built (4:6—23). Spiritual leaders are team builders, for not even the most competent or experienced can get the job done alone.

12. Filled With Determination. With Jerusalem a city of desolation (yet now in reproach) and the Jewish people strategically placed in God’s plan of salvation for the world through Messiah (Gen. 12:1—3; Dt. 7:6—8; Jn. 4:22), Nehemiah recognized the great work he was doing as God’s chosen servant (cf. 6:3). With dogged determination, he fulfilled his ministry. And in so doing, he enabled others to do likewise.

Deane J. Woods is a representative of The Friends of Israel in Australia, Southeast Asia, and New Zealand.
God specifically chose Israel to be a holy nation in which He could manifest His grace and truth to mankind (Ex. 19:5–8). Failing to live up to her elective calling, Israel committed gross immorality and idolatry, resulting in her captivity in Babylon for seventy years. After King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon (539 B.C.), the Jewish people were granted permission to return and rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4).

Zechariah’s call to repentance (Zech. 1:1–6) indicated that the returnees were not spiritually prepared for their new life in Jerusalem. It was not enough for Israel to be restored to her land; she needed to be cleansed from the Babylonian culture and defilement of sin in order to experience total restoration and renewed communion with God. Israel’s cleansing is the theme of vision four.

Vision four is unlike the first three visions. In the first three, Zechariah asked questions because there was an interpreting angel to answer them. Vision four contains no questions and no interpreting angel. Instead, the meaning of this vision is revealed as the text unfolds.

**JOSHUA’S CONDEMNATION**

The vision opens with Zechariah witnessing a trial in the court of heaven. Three figures are present. The prophet wrote, “And he showed me Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him” (v. 1).

**The Accused: Joshua.** Joshua was Israel’s high priest. He journeyed with Zerubbabel in the first wave of returns from Babylon and is presented as standing before the Lord, which, for a high priest, was the place of service.

However, before the high priest can minister, he must be ritually clean (Lev. 21:10–15). In this court scene, Joshua stands before the Lord “clothed with filthy garments” (v. 3). Actually, they are covered with excrement, the vilest type of uncleanness. Such defilement makes Joshua ritually unclean and disqualifies him to function as Israel’s high priest before the Lord.

No specific charge is brought against Joshua. But the priest’s filthy garments represent both his and Israel’s unclean state. Like Joshua, sinful Israel must be cleansed and reinstated to its priestly office before God can dwell in the midst of Jerusalem (2:10).

**The Prosecutor: Satan.** Satan stands at Joshua’s right hand, ready to resist or accuse him (3:1). The right hand was the traditional place an accuser stood in a Jewish court of law. In Hebrew, *Satan* means “adversary” or “accuser.” Although he is pictured as standing ready to accuse Joshua, no accusation appears in the text.

Satan has access to God’s throne, where he accuses God’s people day and night (Job 1—2; Rev. 12:10). Likewise, in his zeal to charge Joshua with sin, Satan charges Israel as well. He stands ready to reveal Israel as unworthy of God’s elective calling and blessing.

Satan’s evidence against both Joshua and Israel is indisputable before the court of a holy and just God. Yes, Satan is right. Joshua and Israel are guilty of sin and worthy of judgment. Satan would rest his case, confident of a guilty verdict, if it were not for God’s grace. It has been rightly said, “When Satan talks to us about God, he lies, but when he talks to God about us, he tells the truth!”

**Israel’s Advocate: The Angel of the Lord.** The personal advocate for Israel answers the accuser: “And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan, even the Lord, who hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” (v. 2).

The word *Lord* appears three times in verse 2. But it applies to two persons. The first *Lord* is “the angel of the *Lord,*” who has already been identified as the preincarnate Christ (1:11–12). He is a different person from the *Lord* who rebukes Satan. That *Lord* is God the Father. God administers the rebuke directly, decisively, incisively, sternly, and with finality. The rebuke is mentioned twice to enforce its meaning.

God’s elective grace and purposes for Israel take precedence over any
accusation or attack Satan might bring against the nation. Divine, unmerited grace is the only basis for the Lord’s election of Israel (Dt. 7:6–11). The Lord’s grace and covenant relationship with Israel guarantee the nation will survive Satan’s continual attempts to annihilate it as long as the earth exits (Jer. 31:35–37).

God substantiates Israel’s survival by posing a rhetorical question: “Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” (v. 2). Pulling a burning branch from a fire rescues it from complete consumption. Israel has often been delivered from destruction: the Egyptian captivity (Dt. 4:20); the Assyrian invasion of the ten northern tribes (Amos 4:11); the Babylonian Captivity (Isa. 48:10); and, in the future, the Great Tribulation (Zech. 13:9). God promises to defend and deliver Israel from all her enemies, especially Satan. Israel, like the burning bush in Exodus 3, will go through the fires of affliction but will never be consumed.

JOSHUA’S CLEANSING

Standing before the court in loathsome garments stained with excrement, Joshua and Israel are unworthy of God’s mercy, defense, acquittal, and blessing. Both stand helplessly condemned in sin, unable to defend or deliver themselves.

Then Israel’s advocate, the Angel of the Lord, addresses Joshua’s uncleanliness:

Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spoke unto those who stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. And I said, Let them set a clean turban upon his head. So they set a clean turban upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by (vv. 3–5).

At the Lord’s command, angels remove Joshua’s soiled garments and replace them with clean, rich, festive robes—a symbol of purity and righteousness. Zechariah, caught up in the thrilling prophecy, boldly interrupted the proceeding and said, “Let them set a clean turban upon his [Joshua’s] head” (v. 5).

The glistening clean turban was a large head wrap worn by the high priests. Tied on it was a gold plate engraved with the words HOLINESS TO THE LORD (Ex. 28:36–38). Placing the turban on Joshua’s head is symbolic of his moral and spiritual cleansing, making him fit to be reinstated as Israel’s high priest. It also symbolizes Israel’s future cleansing and reinstatement as “Priest” and “Ministers” of God (Isa. 61:6; cf. Ex. 19:6) in the Millennial Kingdom. The Angel of the Lord (preincarnate Christ) stood by, blessing the procedure.

JOSHUA’S CHARGE

The Lord charges Joshua concerning his obedience and faithfulness:

And the angel of the LORD protested unto [admonished] Joshua, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these who stand by (vv. 6–7).

Three divine blessings were promised to Joshua if he fulfilled two conditions spoken in this charge. The first condition was to “walk in my [God’s] ways.” Joshua was to conduct himself in keeping with the Lord’s commandments. The second condition was “to keep my [God’s] charge,” or faithfully perform his priestly service with fidelity to the Lord. Then Joshua would enjoy three blessings: He would be a ruler of God’s Temple; be a protector of the Temple from idolatry and ungodly practices; and, like the angels, have access to God.

God Himself addresses Joshua and his fellow priests with a long-awaited announcement:

Hear now, O Joshua, the high priest, thou, and thy fellows who sit before thee; for they are men wondered at; for, behold, I will bring forth my servant, the BRANCH (v. 8).

“Hear now,” indicates that this message was extremely important and must be given full attention. The men sitting with Joshua are “wondered at”; that is, they are a sign or foreshadowing of Israel’s future conversion, cleansing, and ministry.

When will this great transformation take place? It will occur at Messiah’s Second Coming, when He redeems Israel and cleanses her from sin. Three Messianic terms are used to describe the Messiah, who will bring cleansing to Israel.

First, He is called “my servant” (v. 8). Christ is clearly identified as the Servant of the Lord, who came to do the Father’s will by redeeming mankind (Isa. 42:1; 49:3–4; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11).

Second, He is called “the BRANCH” (v. 8). The word Branch is a proper name for the Messiah and is used by Zechariah (cf. 6:12) and Jeremiah (Jer. 23:5–6) in this way. Messiah, “the Branch,” will remove Israel’s iniquities and bring cleansing to the nation at His Second Coming. More will be said of Christ the Branch in chapter six.

Third, He is called “the stone.” Zechariah describes the stone and its application:

For, behold, the stone that I have laid before [held out to] Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes; behold, I will engrave the engraving of it, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day (v. 9).

continued on page 34
Targeting Hamas

The goal of Hamas is clear. As stated in the organization’s covenant, the Islamic Resistance Movement “strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine.” No negotiations or compromises are possible. Hamas sends women and children to carry out suicide attacks against Israeli civilians, it has tried to blow up Israel’s tallest building and add poison to explosives, and it is now attempting an attack that it hopes to be on a par with 9/11.

The media frequently describes the killings in the Middle East as a “cycle of violence.” This is inaccurate. If the terror stops, Israel will have no need to engage in targeted killing or other military measures. The terrorists are like arsonists and the Israelis like firefighters. You would not accuse the firefighter who puts out an arsonist’s fire, or tries to prevent him from setting one, of perpetuating arson.

If the Palestinian Authority were fulfilling its principal Road Map obligation to stop terror, the members of Hamas would be in jail and the organization dismantled.

Hamas is trying to kill Jews every day. It is prevented from doing so only by Israel’s deterrent actions. Terrorists will always threaten retribution for Israeli actions, but it is not the targeted killings that provoke attacks, it is Israel’s existence.

The United States maintains a policy of self-defense similar to Israel’s. Osama bin Laden has openly been targeted, and the same day Israel eliminated Hamas leader Abd al-Aziz Rantisi, the spokesman for the coalition forces in Iraq publicly announced their intention of killing the leader of the insurgency there.
Hamas spokesmen may boast that aged its infrastructure, and eliminated policy has disrupted the logistical Israel’s actions. Undoubtedly, Israel’s choose a different life as a result of or how many potential terrorists carried out, how many are disrupted, necessarily the case. It is impossible to terror proves the policy of targeted Rantisi is no longer around to repeat that claim. had forced Israel out of the territory. organization had won a victory and leaving on its own terms from a position to withdraw from Gaza and is leaving on its own terms from a position of strength. Rantisi had claimed that Sharon’s decision meant the organization had won a victory and had forced Israel out of the territory. Rantisi is no longer around to repeat that claim.

Critics argue that the persistence of terror proves the policy of targeted killings doesn’t work. This is not necessarily the case. It is impossible to calculate how many attacks are not carried out, how many are disrupted, or how many potential terrorists choose a different life as a result of Israel’s actions. Undoubtedly, Israel’s policy has disrupted the logistical capability of Hamas, severely damaged its infrastructure, and eliminated its principal leadership. Though Hamas spokesmen may boast that leaders can be replaced, the truth is different; generals are not easily replaced by privates.

As Israeli journalist Ehud Ya’ari noted, the liquidation of Hamas leaders has prevented them from achieving their goal of a balance of terror against Israel. They believed they were immune from attack and could casually go about the business of sending other people’s children to die (Hamas tried to recruit Rantisi’s son, and his wife said to find someone else). The Hamas firebrands who threaten to unleash all manner of plagues on Israel have failed to scare the Israeli people; it is the terrorists who are cowering in fear of Apache helicopters.

Contrary to claims that Hamas cannot be defeated militarily, Ya’ari observed that Israel did just that in the West Bank, where “90 percent of the Hamas infrastructure has been shattered” and its leadership “has either been wiped out in targeted killings or is sitting in jail.”

The Israeli policy does raise moral issues, and these are regularly debated by the Israeli public. Still, despite reservations about the tactic, and the expectation that it could lead to reprisals, polls show that the overwhelming majority of Israelis support targeting the terrorists.

Israel’s detractors often suggest that targeted killings inflame the Arab world and create problems for the United States in the Middle East. The day after a killing, the Arab press will typically whip the masses into a frenzy; and there are the prerequisite demonstrations burning American flags. But relations between the United States and the Arab states remain unchanged. Israel may serve as a convenient scapegoat, but the insurgency in Iraq, the opposition of authoritarian Arab regimes to democratic reforms, and the radical Islamic hatred of the West have nothing to do with Israeli actions.
The Scriptures repeatedly associate what is true and truth with God. The primary Old Testament word used for this association is *emet*. Its foundational concept is “certainty, dependability”; and it is used “in several categories of contexts, all of which relate to God directly or indirectly.”

Furthermore, the word “is used absolutely to denote a reality which is to be regarded as *emet* firm,” and therefore ‘solid,’ ‘valid,’ or ‘binding.’” It can have “reference to facts which always demand recognition by all men as reality, to the normal state which corresponds to divine and human order, and which is thus to be respected.” “It thus signifies what is ‘true.’”

Other related Old and New Testament words that are translated “true” and “truth” communicate the following concepts: “total dependability,” “‘faithfulness,’” “certainty,” “trustworthiness,” “revealed reality,” “truth of statement,” “true teaching or faith,” “divine reality,” “constant,” “real or genuine,” and “righteous.”

**Associations of ‘True’ With God**

**Associations With God Personally.** In the Old Testament the Spirit of God moved the prophet Azariah to identify the Lord God of Israel as “the true God”—true in the sense of being “the absolute and exclusive God” (2 Chr. 15:3–4). The prophet Jeremiah indicated the same when he declared, “the LORD is the true God; he is the living God” (Jer. 10:10).

In the New Testament the apostle Paul referred to “the living and true God” (1 Th. 1:9), and the apostle John wrote about “him that is true; . . . the true God” (1 Jn. 5:20). Jesus stated, “he that sent me is true” (Jn. 7:28). These were assertions to the effect that the God of the Bible is “genuine” or “real,” “in contrast to other gods, who are not real.”

**Associations With the Word of God.** The words of the only God who truly exists are true. After David received specific revelation from God in the form of verbal promise of blessing, he wrote, “O Lord GOD, thou art that God, and thy words are true” (2 Sam. 7:28).

David was saying that God’s words of promise were true in the sense of certain to be fulfilled. Through his assertion, “the ordinances of the LORD are true” (Ps. 19:10), David referred to “Holy Scripture.” He thereby claimed that the Bible is God’s trustworthy, reliable Book of truth for mankind.

Psalm 119:160 claims that every word God has given to mankind from the beginning is true and will endure forever.

The person who accepts “the words of God” that Jesus spoke during His earthly life thereby indicates his conviction that “God is true” (trustworthy, reliable) in that verbal revelation He gave to the world through His Son (Jn. 3:33–34). Jesus claimed the same thing about God when He said, “He that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him” (Jn. 8:26).

The apostle Paul indicated that, just “as God is true” (trustworthy, dependable) in His Word that He revealed to mankind, so the “word” (message) concerning Jesus Christ that he preached to the Corinthians was true (2 Cor. 1:18–19).

The apostle John was given a preview of the souls of Tribulation saints who “were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held” (Rev. 6:9). In asking God how long it would be before He would judge their murderers, they asserted that He is “true” (Rev. 6:10). They indicated that they could depend on Him to keep His word to judge the wicked.

An angel spoke of “the true sayings of God” (Rev. 19:9). The word translated “sayings” is the Greek term for “words.” This was the angel’s way of referring to genuine words of God.

**Other Associations of ‘True’ With God.** Peter indicated that the grace of God in which believers stand is “true” (real, genuine; 1 Pet. 5:12). God’s ways of ruling and administering wrathful judgments on the wicked and aspects of their godless world system are declared to be true (done in harmony with absolute truth; Rev. 15:3; 16:7; 19:2).

**Associations of ‘Truth’ With God**

**Associations With God Personally.** When the Lord passed by Moses on Mount Sinai, He said, “The LORD, The LORD God, . . . abundant in . . . truth” (Ex. 34:6). God thereby indicated
that truth is an essential aspect of His nature. The fact that God is “abundant” in truth implies that He is the fountainhead or ultimate source of truth. Thus truth is “the very essence of God”; and truth “has its essence in God.”

God referred to Himself twice as “the God of truth” in Isaiah 65:16. He thereby emphasized the fact that He is the God who really exists in contrast with all other gods, which are nonexistent.

In response to the unique way God led Abraham’s servant to find Rebekah as a wife for Isaac, the servant referred to the Lord God’s truth (Gen. 24:27). He had in mind God’s dependability to lead people in the right path to accomplish His purpose.

Moses declared that God is “a God of truth” (Dt. 32:4), totally dependable. David referred to God as “LORD God of truth” (Ps. 89:49). Psalm 132:11 indicates that God had sworn a verbal promise in truth to David and “will not turn from it.” Both of these passages emphasize that God is absolutely dependable and keeps His Word.

For this reason the Lord moved Balaam to state, “God is not a man, that he should lie; . . . Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Num. 23:19). In line with this statement, the Scriptures assert that in the future, God will “perform the truth” that He swore to Abraham and Jacob long ago (Mic. 7:20).

When God glorifies Himself by keeping promises He has made or fulfilling revealed prophecies of future events, He demonstrates that His Word is truth (Ps. 115:1). The Scriptures declare that God’s “law is the truth” (Ps. 119:142), all His “commandments are truth” (Ps. 119:151) and “are done in truth” (Ps. 111:7–8), and His “counsell of old are . . . truth” (Isa. 25:1).

A heavenly being revealed to Daniel things that were recorded in “the scripture of truth” (literally, “the writing of truth”; Dan. 10:21). This verse refers to a written record of truth in heaven concerning future events that God had decreed. These events that were certain to occur became part of the Scriptures as Daniel recorded them in chapters 11—12 of his book.

Jesus declared that God’s “word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). Paul referred to “the truth of the gospel” (Col. 1:5) and claimed that his apostolic teaching was “in truth, the word of God” and “not as the word of men” (1 Th. 2:13).

**Conclusion**

This study prompts the following conclusion expressed by Jack B. Scott: “It becomes manifestly clear that there is no truth in the biblical sense, i.e. valid truth, outside God. All truth comes from God and is truth because it is related to God.”

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**Endnotes**

3. Ibid., 234–235.
4. Ibid., 233.
7. Quell, 236.
9. Quell, 236.
16. Quell, 237.
17. Bultmann, 249.
20. Quell, 236.
Ezra, a Levitical priest and scribe (Ezra 7:6–11), exercised a central role in rebuilding the spiritual condition of the Jewish people who returned from Babylon (Ezra 7—10).

How was he equipped for such a task? First, he was a man of God—a patriotic Jew. Three times Scripture testifies, “the hand of the Lord, his God, [was] upon him” (Ezra 7:6, cf. vv. 9, 28). His preparedness to return to Jerusalem demonstrated his faith (cf. Rom. 10:17).

Second, he was saturated in the Scriptures. He was a man of the Word:

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances (Ezra 7:10).

God’s Word pervaded every area of his life and ministry. He was diligent in persistent preparation (“prepared his heart”), personal application (“to do it”), and purposeful communication (“to teach”).

Third, Ezra was a man of prayer who fell on his face weeping in prayerful confession for his people (Ezra 10:1). At other times, he praised God for answered prayer. His doxology in 5:39, the Scriptures testify of Christ. Luke 24:27 and 44 attest the same truth.

Ezra reveals God’s continued fulfillment of His promises to keep David’s descendants alive. Zerubbabel himself is part of the messianic line as the grandson of Jeconiah (Jehoiachin, 1 Chr. 3:17–19; see Mt. 1:12–13). There is a positive note of hope in Ezra and Nehemiah because the Remnant has returned to the Land of Promise. In this land the messianic promises will be fulfilled, because they are connected with such places as Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Zion. Christ will be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2), not in Babylonia. Bible teacher Charles Swindoll concurs: “His birth in the preservation of the Davidic line and the remnant’s return to the Promised Land” prefigure Christ in Ezra. He proffers two further observations:

[The Messiah’s] work as spiritual rebuilders and restorers [is] pictured in Zerubbabel and Ezra. His mediatorial presence and glory [is] pictured in the altar and the temple. Ezra, then, was a man of the Word whose life, ministry, and book point inexorably to David’s Greater Son, Jesus Christ.

So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading (Neh. 8:8).

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ENDNOTES

1 A nearly a quarter of the book of Ezra was written in Aramaic, the rest in Hebrew. The Aramaic sections (67 of 280 verses) are 4:8—6:18 and 7:12–25.


4 Ibid., 2.

Vision Four: Israel’s Cleansing

Throughout Scripture the Messiah is seen as a stone of stumbling (Isa. 8:14; Rom. 9:32–33), rejected stone (Ps. 118:22–23; Mt. 21:42), smitten stone (Ex. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4), a smiting stone at His Second Coming (Dan. 2:34–35), and the cornerstone (Ps. 118:22–23; Mt. 21:42).

Evidence is provided by God the Father to confirm that the Stone refers to the Messiah: (1) “Seven eyes” on the stone denote His infinite intelligence and omniscience (Isa. 11:2; Zech. 4:10; Rev. 5:6). (2) The engraving on the stone is not revealed, but the statement must have something to do with the Messiah’s future removal of Israel’s iniquity. (3) The sentence I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day refers to Israel’s redemption at the Messiah’s Second Coming. God will pour out His Spirit on the people of Israel, and they will repent bitterly over their sin and be saved (Zech. 12:10—13:1; Rom. 11:25–27).

The phrase in that day (v. 10) is eschatological. It pictures the time when Israel will experience peace, prosperity, and productivity in the Messianic Age. Neighbors sitting under “the vine and under the fig tree” (v. 10) speak of the peace and contentment that will characterize this period.

God’s divine purpose for Israel continues to be immutable and secure. In that day, Israel will be like a burning branch rescued from the fire of annihilation. She will be cleansed from sin, clothed in righteousness, and forged into a kingdom of priests who will minister to the world. This revelation of God’s faithfulness to Israel gave Zechariah and Joshua hope and encouragement. In every age, Jewish people who anticipate the Messiah’s return and reign can likewise take hope in His promises. God has kept, and will keep, His promises to Israel.
From the moment the Lord formed the nation of Israel after the Exodus, He desired to dwell with His people as their King. Hence, the Tabernacle was built; and the Lord’s Glory indwelled it (Ex. 36—40). For more than four hundred years, the Tabernacle served as the Lord’s “palace.”

After King David made Jerusalem his capital, he desired to build the Lord a house. Although he purchased the ground for the Temple from Araunah the Jebusite to offer sacrifices to stop a plague on Jerusalem (2 Sam. 24; 1 Chr. 21), David was not allowed to build the Temple because he had been a man of war. That task was left for his son Solomon.

**Solomon’s Temple (959–586 B.C.)**

Solomon began building Israel’s first Temple in 966 B.C., finishing it seven years later when the Lord’s Glory came to dwell within it (1 Ki. 6:1, 37–38; 8:10–11). He built it on the land David had purchased, the threshing floor of Araunah on Mount Moriah (2 Chr. 3:1). Moriah was where Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:2). After a ram was substituted for Isaac, Abraham named the place “the Lord will Provide,” meaning, “on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided” (Gen. 22:14). It is not surprising, then, that this spot, which pictured the Lord accepting substitutionary atonement, became the place where the Day of Atonement ceremony was celebrated.

Despite the beauty of Solomon’s Temple and the Lord’s presence there, Judah’s idolatry caused the Lord’s Glory to forsake the Temple and give it over to the Babylonians, who destroyed it on August 14, 586 B.C. (Ezek. 9—11).

**Herod’s Temple (516 B.C.—A.D. 70)**

When Cyrus allowed the Judean captives to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C., they immediately began to rebuild the Temple. But due to local opposition, construction stopped until the prophets Haggai and Zechariah exhorted the people to begin again and a decree was found, authorizing its construction (Ezra 5—6). Work resumed on September 21, 520 B.C. (Hag. 1:15), and the second Temple was completed four years later on March 12, 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15).

However, God’s Glory did not indwell this Temple. Neither does Scripture reference the Ark because this Temple was built with a view to the Messiah coming to fill it with His Glory (Hag. 2:1–9). When Herod the Great became King of Judea in 37 B.C, he desired to win the people’s affection (he was an Idumean [Edomite]) by adorning Judea with great buildings. His greatest project was to renovate the Temple in Jerusalem.

Herod began renovations in 20 B.C., completing the sanctuary in eighteen months. He constructed a huge platform around the Temple by building large retaining walls around the mountain and filling the space with dirt or archways. This was the Temple of Jesus’ day, and it was not officially completed until A.D 64.

As Israel had hoped, the Glory of the Lord came to the Temple—in the person of Jesus. But Jesus was rejected. And, as He prophesied (Lk. 21:20–24), the Temple was destroyed. The Romans sacked it on August 14, 70, the exact date Solomon’s Temple was burned more than five hundred years earlier (see “Tisha B’Av,” page 15).

Although the buildings on top of the Temple Mount were destroyed, the retaining walls Herod built still support the Temple Mount area in Jerusalem today.

**The Third (Tribulation) Temple**

According to Revelation 11, there will be a future Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. This is the Temple that will be occupied by the Antichrist, as Jesus warned when He spoke of the Abomination of Desolation (Mt. 24:15). The drama of modern-day Israel plays into this prophecy. Orthodox Jewish groups, such as the Temple Institute in Jerusalem, are already preparing priests, garments, and instruments for this Third Temple. In view of today’s politics concerning the Temple Mount and the Muslim structures on it, particularly the Dome of the Rock, which sits on the site of Solomon’s and Herod’s Temples, it will be extremely interesting to see how God will arrange for this building’s construction and fulfill this prophecy.

**The Millennial Temple**

Since Ezekiel was the prophet who saw God’s Glory depart from Solomon’s Temple, it is fitting that he also envisioned the Glory returning to a new Temple (Ezek. 43:5). Ezekiel 40:1—47:12 describes this structure, the place from which Jesus will rule during the Millennium after He returns from heaven to set up His Kingdom in Jerusalem (Mt. 25:31). All the nations of the earth will then worship the Lord at this Temple during the Millennial Kingdom.

by Herb Hirt
“We will not deny Christ!”

That stand has led to extreme persecution in Communist Laos. Since 1975, Laos has been under the control of the Communist Pathet Lao. As is the norm for Communist-controlled countries, there is a one-party, single-candidate system. This is bad news for people of non-Communist persuasion, particularly Christians.

Communist Laos is high on the list of severe abusers of religious rights. It is, in fact, one of the few countries in the world where the government has expressly declared its intent to eliminate Christianity. A recent report illustrates the government’s determination to carry out its mission.

According to World Help President Vernon Brewer, twelve Laotian Christians have been thrown into prison because they refused, under pressure, to renounce their faith in Jesus. On May 15 three others believers “were forced to appear before police . . . and were arrested,” Brewer wrote. Nine others were imprisoned over a three-week period.

At issue in every case was the Communist demand to forsake the faith. In every instance, these believers steadfastly refused to do so. Their resolve so enraged the authorities of the prison where they were being held that many were forced into around-the-clock hard labor while being fed only one meal per day, Brewer reported. Others were bound in wooden stocks, as if they were common criminals.

Such brutal treatment of believers is reminiscent of the practices of tyrannical, pagan atheists two thousand years ago. Often the matter simply held out two options: Renounce the faith or die. And it is striking that no matter who makes the demand—be it Communists, as in much of Southeast Asia; militant Islamists, as in a host of other countries; or fanatics from other religions—the modus operandi is the same. Believers can either reject their allegiance to Jesus Christ or face death; torture; imprisonment; starvation; slavery; or expulsion from their homes and, in many cases, their country.

And what does this persecution prove? First and foremost it confirms the existence of Satan who, since the Garden of Eden, has conspired to eliminate any semblance of faith in Jehovah and His Messiah. History tells the story. The war on biblical Judaism and the Hebrew people, followed by the relentless obsession to stamp out Christianity, confirms the fact of a personal devil and his demonic cohorts. This war—this demonic terrorist-attack pattern, if you will—has been pervasive, vicious, and carried out to one degree or another in virtually every empire, nation, and society in the world.

With each issue of Israel My Glory we walk the world, reporting only small fragments of the campaign to destroy Christians and everything we stand for. Coupled with this is the incomprehensible tide of anti-Semitism rising in disparate areas of the globe. And the fact that many liberal Christian theologians and clergymen deny there is a personal devil, profess belief in the inherent goodness of man, and ignore the war against believers underscores yet another biblical reality: the total depravity of fallen humanity. That people pursue a passion to slaughter innocent fellow human beings while claiming superiority of sophistication, education, and devotion to the welfare of mankind places an explanation point after the word fallen.
The ground in front of the Eastern Gate of the Temple Mount was still soft from the heavy rains. Confidently, the archaeology student stepped back from the gate to capture its entire view in his camera. It never crossed his mind that on this beautiful spring day of 1969 in Jerusalem, he soon would fall knee-deep into human bones.

The present Eastern Gate is located on the eastern wall of the Old City, opposite the Mount of Olives. The massive masonry is an impressive structure. Some sections date to the time of Nehemiah in the sixth century B.C.; other sections, to the time of King Herod.

According to Jewish tradition, the gate had been called the Shushan Gate. Interestingly, Nehemiah was at the Persian summer palace in Shushan when he heard about the situation at Jerusalem (Neh.1:1). It was said that the gate’s entrance bore an embossed sculpture of that ancient Persian summer palace. Rabbis have suggested that its purpose was to make the people ever mindful of where they came from and to commemorate the 538 B.C. decree of Persian King Cyrus, who ended Israel’s seventy-year captivity and allowed the Jewish people to return to their land and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1–3).

In A.D. 70 the Romans destroyed the gate. In A.D. 629 a ceremonial gate was constructed to receive a Byzantine emperor who allegedly was returning the “true cross” stolen by the Persians in 614. Later, during the Crusader period, the Muslims sealed the gate, ostensibly for security reasons. Yet some Jewish people feel the Muslims believed it would prevent the Messiah from entering. The present sealed gate was the work of the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman in 1538.

According to Bible prophecy and tradition, the Messiah will come from the east of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4). It was also taught He would ride in on a donkey (Zech. 9:9). The general understanding has been that Messiah will enter the Temple through the Eastern Gate. Thus this gate became associated with Messianic anticipation.

In fact, someone recently put an unsightly graffiti on a stone of the sealed gate. Spray-painted in Hebrew is the word Moshiach (Messiah).

Shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus mounted a donkey at Bethphage on the Mount of Olives and rode toward the Temple (Mt. 21:1–5). Amid shouts of Hosannas from the people, Jesus presented Himself as their Messiah-King.

It is probable He rode through the Eastern Gate. Interestingly, God referred to Cyrus as his “shepherd” and “anointed” (Isa. 44:28; 45:1). This designation makes Cyrus a type of Israel’s true Shepherd and Messiah who will one day come to this gate and set Israel free.

Many in the Christian community see the present sealed gate linked with the prophecy of Ezekiel 44:1–3, which says that the gate “toward the east . . . shall be shut . . . because the LORD, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore, it shall be shut. It is for the prince; . . . he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate.” Since Jesus, the God of Israel, had already entered through that gate (Palm Sunday), it will remain shut until Jesus the King returns.

The archaeology student, slightly disoriented from his eight-foot fall, was uninjured. He adjusted his eyes to the semidarkness of the tomb. Judging from the many bones and skulls, the remains of thirty or forty people must lie there. Some of the bones were still grotesquely connected by cartilage. By chance, he saw an arch of smooth, wedge-shaped stones that could well have been part of an ancient gate. It was directly below the present sealed gate.

He took his picture and scurried out of the hole. The next day he returned to find the tomb resealed. Only the dim photos of the arch remained. Tantalizing to imagine, it just could have been a part of the original gate—the very one the Prince of Peace entered and one day will enter again (Ps. 24).
I’m not much of a shopper. My favorite place in the mall is probably the ice cream parlor, where I’ve spent many a pleasant moment contemplating the virtues of hot fudge versus butterscotch and mocha almond crunch versus just plain mocha. I’ve also found it a good place to observe human behavior.

Many years ago, when my daughter Jamie was fifteen, we stopped there briefly so Jamie could buy a scoop of ice cream. I sat on a bench in the mall while she stepped up to the take-out counter, patiently waiting her turn. The woman ahead of her must have been quite a shopper because a slew of packages dangled from her left wrist as she held a cone, precariously laden with a double dip of chocolate ice cream, in the same hand. With her right hand she tried to fish around in her shoulder bag, desperately trying to come up with the last ten cents she needed to pay for her snack.

Jamie watched her. Then, without a word, my daughter reached into her wallet, smiled at the woman, and handed her a dime. The woman smiled back gratefully, completed her purchase, and left.

When Jamie returned to me with her ice cream, I said, “I saw what you did. That was really nice of you, honey.”

She shrugged. “It was nothing,” she said. “I’ve seen you do the same thing.”

It was then I fully realized, perhaps for the first time, that my actions truly spoke louder than my words. Not once had I ever taught Jamie to do what she did. She did it purely because she had seen me do it. All the years I sat in the ice cream parlor observing others, it never occurred to me that others probably were observing me.

It occurred to Jesus, however. He commands us, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven” (Mt. 5:16). The testimony of a godly life may do more to attract unbelievers to Christ than the words of a hundred lectures.

Ruth, after whom the biblical book of Ruth is named, is a case in point. Scripture says she clung to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and would not leave her. Why? Surely not because Naomi preached at her, but because Naomi “let her light shine” and was a woman of excellence.

The story of Ruth and Naomi is a beautiful interlude in the otherwise degenerate, faithless, and chaotic time of the judges, a 370-year period in Israel’s history when the Israelites repeatedly strayed from God and returned only under the intense pressure of divine discipline.

Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, lived in Bethlehem of Judah. But food was scarce in Israel due to a famine. So Elimelech, whose name means “my God is King,” took Naomi and their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, across the Jordan to Moab, where his God was not worshiped as King or God.

Soon Elimelech died, and Mahlon and Chilion married Moabite women. Scripture says they lived in Moab (present-day Jordan) about ten years (Ruth 1:3–4). Then Mahlon and Chilion died. All Naomi had left were her two daughters-in-law. Old and bereft of her husband and sons who loved and supported her, Naomi faced a bleak future. When word got to Moab that the famine was over and “the Lord had visited his people in giving them food,” Naomi decided to return home (Ruth 1:6).

Interestingly, both her daughters-in-law started to go with her (v. 7). Yet they had every reason to stay behind. They were not Israelites; and, as Bible scholar
Alfred Edersheim explained, Naomi “could offer them no prospect of wedded happiness in her own family, and . . . no Israelite in his own land would ever wed a daughter of Moab.”¹

In a tender gesture of selflessness and love, Naomi urged Ruth and Orpah to abandon her and return to their families in Moab, since they were still young and could remarry. She would go on alone. “Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept” (v. 9).

It is a testimony to Naomi’s godly character that neither woman wanted to leave her: “Surely we will return with thee unto thy people,” they said (v. 10). But Naomi insisted, feeling they had no hope of happiness in Israel: “For it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD [Jehovah] is gone out against me” (v. 13). They all wept with each other again, and Orpah left.

Returning to Moab, of course, meant returning to Chemosh, the vile, disgusting national god of the Moabites that Scripture calls “the abomination of Moab” (1 Ki. 11:7). In fact, several hundred years later, the king of Moab sacrificed his own son and heir to the throne in a burnt offering to Chemosh in hopes of winning a battle against the Israelites (2 Ki. 3:21–27).

Orpah left Naomi, but Ruth clung to her. Something in her mother-in-law’s behavior knit Ruth’s soul to Naomi’s and drew her more deeply to Naomi and the God of Israel than all she would leave behind:

Entreat me not to leave thee, or to turn away from following after thee; for where thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried; the LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death part thee and me (vv. 16–17).

As Edersheim so eloquently wrote, “Unless the Moabitess Ruth had learned to know and love the land and the faith of Israel . . . she would not have followed so persistently her mother-in-law, away from her own home, to share her poverty, to work, if need be, even to beg, for her.”²

Naomi’s life changed Ruth’s, not so much because Ruth later married an Israelite and bore a child, but because Naomi’s disposition drew Ruth toward the only true and living God—the God of Israel.

I have no idea what all my actions have taught my two daughters over the years. Sometimes I shudder to think about it. But I learned from Jamie at the ice cream parlor that when God tells us to let our “light” shine, He intends for us to flood those around us with a Christlike beacon that lights up the path to Him, as Naomi lit the path from Chemosh to Jehovah.

But Naomi did something else as well.

continued next issue

ENDNOTES

² Ibid., 391.

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Palestinian rocket kills 3-year-old

An Israeli toddler being dropped off at nursery school by his mother was killed when a Palestinian Kassam rocket exploded in the heart of Sderot in the Negev. More than 20 others, including youngsters and the child’s mother, were wounded.

Three-year-old Afik Zehavi and Mordecai Yosefov, 50, were killed. Afik’s mother, Ruth, remained unconscious after having a leg amputated in an attempt to save her life.

According to a report filed by United Press International’s Joshua Brilliant, Afik’s mother “was lying on her back, eyes wide open, motionless. Little Afik lost an arm and a leg. What was left of his right arm was lying on her.” Yosefov “was lying on a pool of blood. . . . shrapnel was stuck in Yosefov’s skull. He had just taken his grandchild to kindergarten.”

Brilliant said the missiles “were the latest in more than 200 fired at Sderot and its environs since April 2001.”

Said Justice Minister Tommy Lapid, “It is unacceptable that we are a country whose citizens die from rocket attacks and we don’t retaliate. Things like this can’t happen without some kind of response,” reported The Jerusalem Post.

The Post reported that the Kassam attacks on Sderot came just 12 hours after a tunnel bombing that killed a 20-year-old Israeli soldier and wounded five others. The Kassam attacks are also reported to be much more sophisticated than in the past.

Reported the Post, “Municipality psychologists and social workers met and spoke with parents of children at the kindergarten and especially with the youngsters, many of whom were in a state of stress after the rocket attacks.”

Splitting Jerusalem?
The International Jerusalem Post—Deputy Prime Minister and Industry, Trade, and Labor Minister Ehud Olmert said he envisions at least six outlying east Jerusalem Arab neighborhoods being transferred to full Palestinian control in the future.

The move represents a dramatic about-face for the formerly hawkish Jerusalem mayor, who for years had declared that the capital must not be divided.

A close ally and confidant of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Olmert has often been the first to go public with future government policy. In what was widely viewed as a trial balloon, he called for unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank just weeks ahead of a similar move by Sharon.

Olmert said he would “absolutely” retain full Israeli control over the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives, as well as other “more central” Arab neighborhoods.

Olmert conceded that bringing PA-controlled territory so close to Jewish neighborhoods of Jerusalem might be dangerous, but he said that the security risk is ever-present.

Dying to kill
The International Jerusalem Post—in its first week of recruiting, Iran registered at least 10,000 young volunteers for “martyrdom operations” against Israel and U.S. forces in Iraq, according to the recruitment group, the Committee for the Commemoration of Martyrs of the Global Islamic Campaign.

The calls to join the “Army of Martyrs” began at mosques recently after Friday prayers, after which registration forms were distributed by the tens of thousands at local Islamic universities to prospective male and female suicide attackers.

New low in bestiality
The International Jerusalem Post—in an attack that seemed to mark a new low in terrorist bestiality, a pregnant mother and her four daughters were shot dead on the Kissufim road in the Gaza Strip recently.

Tali Hatuel, 34, who was eight months pregnant with a boy, and her daughters, Hila, 11; Hadir, nine; Roni, seven; and Merav, two, were shot at point-blank range after initial gunshots brought their car to a halt. The terrorists then sprayed the vehicle with bullets to ensure that all the occupants were dead.

The phony ‘sick’
The International Jerusalem Post—Israeli police have uncovered a network of fake ambulances used to smuggle into Israel Palestinian Authority officers disguised as patients, including members of Yasser Arafat’s personal presidential elite Force 17.

Police said it is possible the ring, which they believe may have been directly linked to Arafat, has also smuggled terrorists into Israel using the ambulances as cover.

The “patients” were hooked up to oxygen bags and other medical devices inside the ambulances and had ink spilled on them to create the impression that they were wounded and in need of urgent medical care. Police said that the ambulance drivers carried forged medic licenses and that the vehicles’ license plates were also fake.

“There is a strong possibility that Yasser Arafat was directly involved in the ambulance smuggling ring,” Judea and Samaria Police spokesman Doron Ben Amo said, adding that documents allegedly signed by Arafat and connected to the ring were found during a raid on a Force 17 office.

How hypocritical can you get?
Arutz—Former Mossad agent Gad Shimron reports that while the European Union (EU) attacks Israel mercilessly for the partition...
fence it’s building to protect Jewish lives, the EU itself funds and operates a similar fence designed only to protect itself from illegal immigrants.

The fence is located in a Spanish enclave in northwestern Africa, the coastal city of Ceuta just across the Straits of Gibraltar from Spain. Unknown to most of the world, when Spain handed over most of northern Morocco to the newly independent kingdom in 1956, Spain retained Ceuta and Melilla (about 250 kilometers further east). Thus the EU is present in Africa as well.

Poverty-stricken Moroccans attempting to cross into Ceuta, from where they will then be able to work anywhere in Europe because of the EU’s no-checkpoints policy, are stopped in their tracks by the eight-meter-high, double layer fence. Funding for the fence, some 60 million Euros, came from European Union coffers.

Frequent Spanish patrols, together with policemen who do not hesitate to beat potential infiltrators, render crossing the partition a nearly impossible mission, but the needy say they will continue to try.

The EU, which continues to oppose Israel’s fence to protect against murderous terrorists and suicide bombers, even plans to build another fence of its own around Spain’s second enclave in northern Africa, the Moroccan town of Melilla.

German institute teaches Christians about Israel

The Jerusalem Post Internet Edition—
For the first time, an academic institute has been established in Germany to further the study of Israel among Christian pastors and theology students.

Known as the Institute for Israelology, it will be based at the Free Theological Seminary in Giessen, north of Frankfurt, and will focus on subjects such as Israel in the light of biblical prophecy and the roots of Christian anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism.

The moving force behind the institute is Dr. Fritz May, a well-known pastor who founded and directs Christen Fur Israel, a German-based pro-Israel group.

May said he decided to establish the institute “to do something about the serious lack of teaching and information about Israel among students of theology, pastors, and their congregations.”

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

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In the book of Isaiah it is written, “for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all peoples” (56:7).

But to my regret, this is not so. From time to time I visit the ultra-Orthodox at their synagogues, which they call “holy of holy.” But when I arrive there, even though I am Jewish, some look at me strangely. Recently one man asked, “Why do you come here? Do you not know that this is a holy place? And we can see plainly that you are not one of us. You are a goy [Gentile]! Do you not know that this synagogue is for us only?”

I replied, “You call this holy? Have a good look around you, so you will see where you are. This place is far from holy.”

The rabbi, too, had been looking at me. When he heard what I said, he asked, “Who are you? You come here from the outside and dare say such things, that this place is not holy! Why do you say this?”

I answered with a question, knowing what their answer would be. “Have you read today from Deuteronomy 6:13–16?”

“This is one of our most important prayers,” the rabbi said. “We pray this three times each day!”

“Well,” I asked, “what did you read? What is really written there?” Again they were surprised by my question. But I know that they read so quickly, like a machine gun, that they do not even know what they are reading. So I said, “I will read this for you myself.”

I reached for my Bible, the one I always bring with me, and read the passage for them: “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him. . . . Ye shall not go after other gods” (Dt. 6:13–14).

“You do not obey this commandment,” I told them.

“How can you say such a thing?” one asked. “You are a stranger to us, and you want to teach us how to pray? And what is more, you come to us and expect us to be quiet?”

This time I read to them Isaiah 56:7. “It says here ‘mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all peoples,’ yet you make this a private house where only you yourselves are welcome.”

They were not happy with my words. The rabbi was even less happy. “Yes!” he shouted. “Yes! This is a house of prayer, but only for us. People like you have no right to come here! What more have you to say?”

So I continued from Isaiah 56: “The Lord GOD, who gathereth the outcasts of Israel, saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him. His watchmen are blind; they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. Yea, . . . shepherds that cannot understand” (vv. 8, 10–11).

Then I said, “You call this a house of prayer. But you do not have even one
Bible here, only books filled with rabbinical traditions of men. You call this a holy place?”

And so it began. They asked to see my Bible. When I showed it to them they became extremely angry because my Bible is complete. It has both the Old and New Testaments.

“You see this!” one shouted, showing it to the rabbi. “He calls this the Holy Bible!”

“Do you know about whom it is written here?” the rabbi asked me.

“Yes, I know.”

“So, you believe in This Man!”

“I believe in Jesus,” I said. “I have believed in Him because of what is written here, in the Bible.”

“How can you dare to come here with such a dirty book?” someone shouted at me. “How can you call this the Bible?”

Now we had arrived at the point I was waiting for. However, I was certain they would grab hold of me and throw me out. But they did nothing of the sort. They wanted to know what I had read that caused me to believe in “This Man.”

So I opened the Bible to Isaiah 53 and read the entire chapter.

“What you are afraid of,” I said, “is the truth.”

“Come,” one said to me. “Let us all sit and think about this. How did you come to this conclusion that this one, whose name we are even forbidden to pronounce, is the one written about here?”

We had a nice talk. I explained that they must examine the Bible itself, not the many commentaries written by rabbis. And they must believe the Bible because it is God’s Word.

“Who gives you the right to boycott chapter 53 of Isaiah? God’s Word is eternal. As it is written, ‘Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven’” (Ps. 119:89).

“So, where have you placed your faith?” I asked. That was enough for that day. These pupils were so interested in hearing the truth. They listened carefully, even though their rabbi was not pleased. Now it is up to the Holy Spirit to change their hearts.

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