Christmas and Hanukkah Cards by BSC
Turning Back the Clock
by Elwood McQuaid

For thirty years, Israeli farmers in northern Israel have lived in relative safety. Now those days may have ended.

The Rapture Question
by David M. Levy

Confused by the many views on the Rapture? This illuminating article will help you understand what the Scriptures teach about this exciting event.

Perhaps Today
by Herb Hirt

Is the idea that the Lord can return at any moment just wishful thinking? Read this article and learn what the Bible has to say about imminency.

Caught Up With Christ
by William L. Krewson

Gone in an instant! How can that be? But it can be, and it has happened before.

Aftermath of the Rapture
by Mark Robinson

When the Lord returns to take His church, the world will become a very different—and frightening—place to live.

TIME TO RENEW?
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Speaking of Israel’s adversaries, someone once commented that “they never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity!” If anyone wants proof of that wry observation, he need only consider the events that took place during the Palestinian riots in May.

Israelis had observed their annual Independence Day celebration—fifty-two years as a sovereign nation. In response, Yasser Arafat’s Fatah organization announced a special day of its own. It was dubbed “Nakba Day” (Day of Catastrophe). The “catastrophe” referred to was the day Israel officially joined the international community as a nation on May 14, 1948.

To commemorate Nakba Day, Arafat ordered demonstrations that resulted in Palestinian rock-throwing, Molotov cocktail showers, and Palestinian police firefight with Israeli police and military. In the end, several lay dead and more than 350 were injured. Since the riots subsided, there have been other incidents where Palestinian police open fire on Israeli authorities. One of Yasser Arafat’s Fatah leaders was quoted as saying that the demonstrations will continue until Chairman Arafat says to stop. That order, he reported, has not yet been given.

In light of these astonishing circumstances, some serious head-scratching should be going on in Washington, D.C., Jerusalem, and at the UN. This man Arafat wants his own state. And, no doubt, he will expect Israel and the remainder of the world to dignify any declaration of Palestinian statehood ratified by the UN. What would he and the rest of the international community say if Israel launched a counter-celebration by unleashing a hail of bullets, stones, firebombs, and other lethal missiles?

One need not speculate about where the wrath would fall. And what of the Palestinian paramilitary police shooting at their Jewish counterparts? This is the second occasion when such action has incited civil disruption. Is this what Israelis can expect when the Palestinians finally have a fully equipped standing army at their disposal?

To assert that these demonstrations are borne from frustration with the slow pace of the negotiations will not wash. These people are getting everything they want—except, that is, the whole of Israel. And that is precisely the point. Whenever Israel delivers yet another town or slice of land, Palestinians weep rather than rejoice. It is never enough. So, in a somewhat baffling conundrum, Israeli politicians caucus with their mentors in the West and decide to offer yet more land and more towns.

The same process goes on with the Syrians. The late Syrian President Hafez al-Assad made no secret of how much he would accept before he would consider serious talks with his Jewish neighbors. While Assad claimed that everything was on the negotiating table, he quickly added, everything, that is, except every inch of land you took while my troops were trying to annihilate you. And, incidentally, throw in a piece of the Sea of Galilee too. Thus far, his successor has held firmly to Assad’s demands.

If peace depends upon maintaining an attitude of goodwill between the parties involved, there seems to be little hope of an amicable settlement between Israel, Syria, and the Palestinians.

There is a biblical basis for this frankly pessimistic appraisal. One need but turn to the opening chapters of the book of Judges to find it. Israel had a land that had been deeded to them by God in perpetuity. The same can be said of that land called Eretz Yisrael today. Israelis returning from slavery and humiliation in Egypt were instructed to move into their land and possess their possession.

That’s where the rub came. Through timidity, naiveté, indolence, or the lack of fortitude to fight for what was theirs, they refused to obey the divine mandate. Perhaps they even
acquiesced to a council of friends who made the mistake of believing that the Israelites could achieve more by talk and fraternal demonstrations than by asserting their rights as a nation. Whatever the case, the Scriptures record a sad chronicle.

“And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites... Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean... Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites” (Jud. 1:21, 27, 29). And on and on that sad tale goes. The result was that the Jews became isolated from one another, their enemies often held the high ground, and Jerusalem remained entrenched in the hands of adversaries.

To see a modern corollary, look well at the map that accompanies this editorial. The courageous Israeli settlers who have risked virtually everything to “possess their possessions” also should study it well. The realities etched on the map illuminate their future and that of their children. Every leader in Israel should have this map burned into his mind. Western political “facilitators,” many of whom have never walked the Golan or visited the settlements, should hang it on the walls of their offices for their staffs and constituents to view.

Perhaps this time around, it is men of good will and good intentions who are taking the opportunity to miss an historic opportunity to bring sanity and stability to a desperately needy part of the world.
When is Enough Enough?

Since the War in Lebanon ended and the southern security zone was established in 1978, the Muslim Arabs, the United Nations, and Western leaders have all contended that Israel occupied the territory of a sovereign country, and they demanded the Jewish nation implement UN resolution 425, calling for the Israel Defense Forces to evacuate the area. Yet, while Israel maintained the security zone, there was not one successful infiltration into northern Israel by terrorists. The Hezbollah had to lob their Katyusha rockets into Kiryat Shmona and other Israeli towns from the other side of the zone.

Understandably, the Israelis wanted out of the quagmire now being referred to as Israel’s Vietnam. They hoped that giving the Lebanese, Syrians, and Western politicians what they demanded would open a window for peace. Perhaps, they reasoned, sacrificing another slice of security might be enough. But the Jewish people, of all people, should know that enough is never enough for virulent anti-Semites—be they Muslims, Nazis, or the like. Such people have but one goal—a world with no Jews and no Israel. The immediate aftermath of the IDF pullout makes the point.

More Land—

The moment Israel announced it would return to the international
The argument that Israel is culpable for the displacement of Palestinian Arabs and dispassionate toward their plight is gaining momentum among some sincere but uninformed people in the West. Why, they reason, shouldn’t Israel be responsible for resettling the refugees or at least paying a heavy penalty for appropriating their properties? Some contend that Germany’s reparations to Jewish families from the Holocaust era should serve as a model for Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians.

But at least two salient facts stand out here: (1) Israel has said it will pay all legitimate claims registered with the state; (2) Germany has paid some reparations but has made no move to restore land or properties owned by Jews before World War II. Nor, we might add, has the UN or any other nation pressured Germany to do so.

Finally, there is one question almost no one raises. What about Arab reparations to Jews who became refugees because of the Arab wars against Israel? Half-a-million Jewish people fled Arab countries as a result of the wars of 1948 and 1967—approximately the same number as Arabs who fled Israel.

Those half-million Jews left with little more than the clothes on their backs. Yet these Jewish refugees were assimilated, at great expense, into the tiny State of Israel—with little notice from those decrying the Palestinian plight. Certainly, no Arab country is amenable to doing for displaced Jews what it demands for displaced Arabs.

Syrian Intransigence—

A key component in Israel’s continuing struggle for survival is Syria. Why the late Syrian President Hafez al-Assad was regarded as a legitimate, potential peace partner by Israel, the United States, or the UN remains a mystery. His intentions were never a secret. He demanded every inch of the Golan lost as a result of his aggression against Israel. Since his death, Syrian demands have remained unaltered.

Furthermore, Syria maintains a military occupation force of some 35,000 troops in Lebanon; and few, except Israel, seem to mind. The U.S. State Department has asked Syria to remove its troops, but there is no indication it plans to do so. Syria has declared Lebanon a part of Greater Syria and evidences no desire to leave. One reason for Syria’s determination to stay in Lebanon is the rich harvest of heroin it reaps from the Bekaa Valley and sends West at enormous profit. How ironic that while America fights a desperate battle against drugs, American diplomats court one of the world’s biggest suppliers of heroin to addicts in the United States.

Add the fact that Syria plays host to the world’s most notorious terrorist groups, and the mystery thickens.

In a report published by the Jerusalem Post on May 29, it was revealed that “officers of the 14th Syrian commando division have been training Palestinian guerrillas at camps near Damascus. . . . The Syrians are believed to have created a new
terrorist organization called the Izzadin Kassam Brigades... This new Palestinian organization consists of people who oppose Yasser Arafat’s peace agreement with Israel.”

Syria also has received new Scud-type missiles from North Korea capable of reaching any chosen target anywhere in Israel.

Peace With Security

Many political factions lambasted former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calling him an intransigent obstructionist because he insisted on a negotiating policy based on security and reciprocity. But these principles are not difficult to understand. Negotiation demands that each party be responsible to respond in kind, quality, and spirit to every concession made by its opponent. When the Palestinians refused to uphold its end and abide by its promises, the negotiations were halted. This move so incensed those who sought peace through one-sided concessions that they demanded Netanyahu’s demise as prime minister. Furthermore, the administration of President Clinton dispatched its top political operatives to Israel to help insure his defeat.

Liberal thinkers who are attempting to manipulate the peace process harbor at least two major misconceptions. First is the matter of the nature of man. In their view, humanity is inherently good. They believe that if Israel’s adversaries are shown enough goodwill, forbearance, and prosperity, they will embrace social and political civility and become neighbors with warm hearts and helping hands. However, this view is at odds with all that Scripture teaches and history certifies about man’s capacity for evil. Jeremiah the prophet knew something about the human proclivity toward unseemly conduct and commented thusly: The heart [of man] is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? (Jer. 17:9).

That statement sums up the substance of the Hitlers, the Sadaam Hussein’s, and all like-minded tyrants who walk among us.

The next misconception—one widespread in the West—is that religion is incidental to the basic conflict between Israel and her Islamic antagonists. Islam, however, differs from Judaism and Christianity in that the Koran sanctions the right to kill in the name of Allah. While millions of Muslims may not be disposed to killing those who disagree with them, the radical Islamic elements operating in the Middle East and places like the Sudan are driven by Jihad (“holy war”). For them, Christians represent infidels to be subjugated or eradicated in the name and for the glory of Allah. Jews in the Middle East are painted with the same brush and marked for eventual annihilation.

Palestinian leaders articulate this commitment many times daily. Abu Ali Mustafa, the heir apparent to the leadership of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said it again in the immediate aftermath of Israel’s pullout from south Lebanon. In an interview published on the Web site of the Middle East Media and Research Institute [MEMRI], Mustafa said, “We do not view the Palestinian State that may be established now, and that we are told will have the June 4 [1967] borders as the final goal of the Palestinian people. This is a more forward point on our way to... the Palestinian and Arab unified democratic state.”

In simple terms, he was echoing what Yasser Arafat and others have declared consistently: The fight will continue until the Palestinian flag flies over Jerusalem and, indeed, the whole of Israel.

Winners and Losers

The most notable losers will be the Arabs and the Palestinian people. One reason why Assad hesitated to make peace with Israel is that he would no longer be able to squander national resources in the name of protecting Syria against the “Israeli aggressor.” Instead, he would be forced to address the needs of his poverty-stricken people who, in the process, might defect to more benevolent forces. The Palestinians have lost much already and will continue to pay an exorbitantly high price because of their belligerent leaders who consistently create hysteria then manipulate it, driving these people and their children to the streets on rock-throwing escapades and terrorist campaigns against Israel.

Nevertheless, there can be winners. The key lies in the hands of the Palestinians and Arabs themselves. If those who long for peace, as did Egypt’s late President Anwar Sadat and Jordan’s late King Hussein, will assert themselves and deal decisively with the radical elements in their midst, they can have a better day. Neither Israel, America, nor the United Nations can do this for them. As long as they chose to be intimidated or sympathetic to these types, the conflict will continue.

We who are Christians continue to pray and labor earnestly for the peace of Jerusalem today and for the time when the entrance of the Messiah will ultimately turn the clock forward to a pristinely better time.
Elwood’s
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Many Christians are confused about what is meant by the Rapture of the church and Christ’s Second Coming. Are they one event or two separate events? Some people are even asking, “What is the Rapture of the church?” “Why do Christians hold different views on the Rapture?” Today, more than ever, these questions and many others arise as believers anticipate the Coming of the Lord.

The word rapture is not found in the Bible. It is the Latin verb rapto, which means “to seize” and “to carry off,” taken from the phrase “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The Rapture can be defined as Christ’s descending from heaven in the air, whereupon Christians (dead and alive) will be caught up suddenly from the earth to meet the Lord. At that time, Christians, both dead and alive, will receive their glorified bodies, be taken to heaven, and dwell with Christ forever.

The key question is not whether there will be a Rapture of the church but when the Rapture will take place. Because no specific Scripture in the Bible pinpoints the exact occurrence of the Rapture, Christians differ concerning the timing of this event. Following is a cursory look at the four major views on this subject.

### The Pretribulation Rapture

The Pretribulation Rapture view is widely held by Christians. Pretribulational rapturists believe the church will be removed from the earth before the seven-year Tribulation of Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan. 9:24–27). “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump” (1 Cor. 15:52), believers in Christ (both dead and alive) will be caught up together, meeting the Lord in the air to be with Him forever. This view teaches that the seven years of the Tribulation are divided...
into two sections of three and one-half years. The first division is called the beginning of birth pangs, and the second is the Great Tribulation.

Those who hold the pretribulational view do so for the following reasons. First, they believe that the Scripture passages dealing with the Rapture must be interpreted literally, not allegorically.

Second, they believe the Rapture of the church is imminent. It could occur at any moment. That is, no signs or events must precede the Rapture. James said, “the coming of the Lord draweth near [is at hand], . . . behold, the judge standeth before the door” (Jas. 5:8–9). The apostle Paul taught an imminent Rapture when he said “that we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them who are asleep” (1 Th. 4:15).

Third, they believe the Rapture and Christ’s Second Coming are separate events. In the Rapture, Christ does not come to earth; Christians meet Him in the air, go to dwell in heaven, are taken out before the Tribulation, and receive their glorified bodies at that time. At the Second Coming, Christians descend from heaven with the Lord to the earth in their glorified bodies.

Fourth, a division of time must exist between the Rapture and Christ’s Second Coming for specific events in heaven to take place: Christians are living with the Lord in their dwelling place in heaven during the Tribulation (Jn. 14:1–3), and the church will experience the Bema Seat Judgment and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in heaven during the time the Tribulation is taking place on earth.

Fifth, the church will not experience any form of God’s wrath. Paul said, “For God hath not appointed us to wrath” (1 Th. 5:9). Earlier in 1 Thessalonians, Paul said that Jesus “delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Th. 1:10). The apostle John told the church at Philadelphia that God would “keep thee from the hour of temptation [testing], which shall come upon all the world” (Rev. 3:10). This promise has much broader application than to the church at Philadelphia because it refers to a specific period of testing, or tribulation, that will afflict the whole world. To be protected from ("out of," not “in”) this time, the church must be removed from the earth prior to it.

Sixth, it is clear from Scripture that the church and Israel are not identical. God has a separate program for each, especially during the Tribulation period. This is indicated in Daniel 9:24–27, a key passage giving an overview of the Tribulation. The angel Gabriel informed Daniel about God’s future program for Israel. Gabriel said that God would deal with Israel for seventy weeks of seven years each, or four hundred ninety years. Those years are divided into three sections. The first seven weeks of years (49 years) deal with the return of the Jewish people from Babylon and the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. The second section of sixty-two weeks (434 years) covers the rebuilding of Jerusalem until the Messiah is cut off (Jesus’ crucifixion). Between the end of the sixty-nine weeks (483 years) and the beginning of the seventieth week is a gap of at least two thousand years.

This third, one-week section, known as Daniel’s seventieth week, or the Tribulation period, has not taken place yet. During this two thousand-year interval, the church came into being. The seventieth week of Daniel will not begin until the Antichrist will “confirm the covenant” (Dan. 9:27) with the nation of Israel. Daniel’s seventieth week is clearly central to Israel’s redemption and blessing, not to that of the church. Daniel 9:24–27 deals exclusively with Israel; the church does not fit into the context of this passage in any form.

Furthermore, the church is never mentioned or eluded to in any of the key passages dealing with the Tribulation. This fact is clearly evident in Revelation chapters 6–19 where Israel and the nations are mentioned, but the church is conspicuously absent.

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The Partial Rapture

Those holding a Partial Rapture view teach that some Christians, not all, will be removed from the earth before God pours out His wrath during the Tribulation. Only those who are faithfully living for Christ and counted worthy will be raptured. Christians left behind will be raptured throughout the Tribulation as they set their lives in order. According to this view, the Tribulation will purify worldly Christians, qualifying them to be raptured. These Christians, called “overcomers,” will be waiting and watching for the Lord to rapture them to heaven.

Those holding a Partial Rapture view use the following passages as a Scriptural foundation to try to prove their point: Matthew 24:40–51; 1 Thessalonians 5:6–10; 2 Timothy 4:8; and Revelation 3:3–10. However, these passages are often misinterpreted...
Midtribulation Rapture

Adherents to this view believe the church will be raptured at the midpoint of the seven-year Tribulation period, after three and one-half years have elapsed. Since the latter half of Daniel’s seventy week is when God’s wrath will be poured out, midtribulationalists believe the church will not be lifted out of the world before then. Thus this position is called midtribulational.

Midtribulationalists hold this view for the following reasons: First, they believe the church has been promised tribulation and persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). Second, the seventh trumpet that sounds in Revelation is the same trumpet mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:52, whereupon the church is at the midpoint of the Tribulation. The sounding of the seventh trumpet heralds the beginning of the Great Tribulation of God’s wrath on the earth (which the church will escape), for John declared that the time of God’s wrath “is come” (Rev. 11:18). Midtribulationalists believe that the use of the word wrath here means that nothing preceding the seventh trumpet judgment is considered God’s wrath. Therefore, the seven seal and six trumpet judgments poured out earlier in the book of Revelation do not constitute the wrath of God but rather are man’s or Satan’s wrath on humankind. Thus this view holds that the church will experience the wrath of man and Satan during the first three and one-half years of the Tribulation, but it will be removed before God’s wrath begins in the second half of the Tribulation.

Posttribulation Rapture

The Posttribulation Rapture view is widely held by many Christians today. Its proponents believe that the church will endure Daniel’s seventy week and will be raptured at the end of the Great Tribulation. They also teach that the Rapture of the church and Christ’s Second Coming are the same event.

Yet posttribulationalists hold differing positions of this view. Some teach that events of the Tribulation are not to be taken literally or futuristically, for the church has always undergone tribulation since its inception and is in the Tribulation now.

These people embrace the imminent return of Christ, seeing the Rapture and the Second Coming as one simultaneous event. This position employs both literal and allegorical interpretations of Scripture.

Others teach that the church is in tribulation now; but since some prophecies still need to be fulfilled, the Rapture/Second Coming is not an imminent event. Adherents to this position believe in a seven-year Tribulation before Christ’s Second Coming but are unclear on the sequence and literalness of the events leading up to Christ’s Coming. They, too, mix literal and allegorical interpretations, providing differing interpretations within the position.

Still others who teach that the church will go through a seven-year period of tribulation prior to Christ’s Second Coming interpret the books of Daniel and Revelation more literally than the other posttribulationalists, but make no distinction between the church and Israel.

Those holding this view do believe, however, that the Rapture of the church and Christ’s Second Coming are separate events.

A final view tries to harmonize Dispensationalism (a view of theology that teaches a strong separation between Israel and the church) and Posttribulationalism (which usually does not). This approach sees distinctions between the church and Israel. The church will go through the seven years of tribulation but will escape the wrath of God during this time because most of the Tribulation events are considered a result of Satan.

Some Posttribulationalists are premillennial and believe that immediately after the church meets the Lord in the air, it will return with Him to live on earth throughout the Millennium (Christ’s thousand-year reign on earth). Others believe that the church meets the Lord in the air and goes directly to heaven to live there eternally.

Despite this proliferation of views, Christians need not be confused regarding the correct teaching of Scripture. The Pretribulation Rapture interpretation is the strongest position because it takes a literal interpretation of key Scriptures bearing on the Rapture of the church. Most advocates of a Posttribulation Rapture do not interpret Scripture literally but allegorically, making the interpreter, not the Scripture, the final authority. Also, although some of the other positions claim to maintain that the Rapture of the church is imminent, only pretribulationalists hold that Christ’s imminent return is a signless event. And lastly, the pretribulational view is the only view that consistently separates God’s program for the church from His program for Israel.

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This early Christian Aramaic prayer encapsulates the desire of every Christian since the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven almost two thousand years ago. Innumerable generations of Christians have thought that they were living in the last days and were looking for the return of Christ. Indeed, the Second Coming of Christ for His church is one of the basic tenets of Christian doctrine.

However, is this Second Coming of Christ “imminent”? Can believers really expect the Lord to return at any moment, or must we wait until certain prophetic signs have been fulfilled? If the former is true, then believers need to be ready at all times to meet the Lord. If the latter, then Christians can look forward to a future time when He will come; but certain events, such as the Tribulation period, must take place first.

What was the belief of the apostles and the early church? Naturally, they looked for the return of the Lord. James exhorted believers to be patient while suffering through trials because “the coming of the Lord draweth near” (Jas. 5:8). Paul talked about the Day of the Lord coming “as a thief in the night” (1 Th. 5:2) and said that believers are to live godly lives in this age, “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ” (Ti. 2:13).

Likewise, Peter instructed his readers to live holy lives, “Looking for and hastening [hastening] unto the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet. 3:12). John believed that the visions shown him on Patmos (where he was exiled) of the Lord’s Coming would “shortly come to pass” (Rev. 1:1) because “the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3). Echoing the Aramaic prayer, John prayed in Greek, “come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). This expectation is based
future prophetic events, such as the Tribulation period, were yet to occur. Does this scenario then make the doctrine of imminency a logical impossibility? If certain things must happen before the Lord returns, is the idea that the Lord can return at any moment just wishful thinking? Paul himself taught the Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord will not come until the man of sin (the Antichrist) is revealed (2 Th. 2:1–12). Even Jesus taught the disciples about the sign of His Coming (Mt. 24:29–31). If there are signs that signal the return of the Lord, how can His return be imminent? Should we then be looking for the signs?

There appears to be a purposeful tension in Jesus’ teaching on His Coming in the Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24—25). The disciples asked Jesus directly, “Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?” (Mt. 24:3). Jesus’ answer to these questions is very interesting. He told his disciples about future events—earthquakes, wars, the Great Tribulation, the abomination of desolation, the sign of His Coming (Mt. 24:4–31). But then He told them that He Himself did not know the time of His Coming, so they should be on the alert at all times (Mt. 24:36–44). Again, isn’t this a logical inconsistency?

Some interpreters solve this dilemma by seeing the prophecy in the Olivet Discourse as having a near view (the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70) and a far view (the Second Coming), so that the signs of judgment and the unknown time of His Coming are kept separate (or partially fulfilled). It appears, however, that the whole prophecy, from Matthew 24:3 onward, speaks of the future period and not the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 because, in Matthew 24:15, Jesus referred to the disciples (future Jewish disciples alive during the Tribulation period) and said that when they see the abomination of desolation set up in the Temple, they are to flee Jerusalem. According to Josephus’ account of the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, by the time the Romans and Titus (the Roman general) arrived at the Temple, the battle was over and the city was destroyed. The time to flee was well past. This prophecy, therefore, obviously describes the future appearance of the image of the Beast in the Temple as spoken of in Revelation 13:11–18, which coincides with the woman (Israel) fleeing into the wilderness in Revelation 12:13–17. Thus the dilemma is not resolved by separating the prophecy into a near view and far view.
Jesus’ seemingly illogical teaching about signs while warning believers to be ready at any moment must be intentional. Why? A close look at Matthew 24:4–31 reveals that Jesus’ main concern when teaching about signs was that the disciples not be deceived (24:4, 11, 24–26). Jesus’ teaching about future signs and events was not to tell the disciples when He was coming back, but rather to tell them not to be misled and mistaken about His Coming in view of Messianic pretenders (such as Antichrist).

When Jesus dealt with the question of the time of His Coming, His answer was astonishing. Loosely paraphrased, He said, “I can’t tell you, because I don’t know” (Mt. 24:36). Since the time of His Coming is unknown, Jesus exhorted His disciples to “Watch [be alert], therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Mt. 24:42). This exhortation is followed by three parables, all having to do with how believers should show their faith and obedience to Christ by being ready at all times for His return (Mt. 24:45—25:30). Repeatedly, the warning is to be ready. Jesus says, “But know this, that if the householder had known in what watch [time of the night] the thief would come, he would have watched [been on the alert], and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh (Mt. 24:43–44).

How can Jesus exhort His disciples to be ready at all times for His return when He just finished teaching them about all the future things they must watch for before He comes back? Is Jesus merely using the threat of an imminent return to engender godly fear and moral living—much like parents tell their children to be good all year because Santa is watching? Three reasons suggest not.

First, it would be inconsistent with the Lord Jesus’ character to hide truth or deceive us, even for our own good. Second, Jesus Himself said He does not know when He is returning, so He can honestly say, “Be ready at all times because even I do not know the time of my return.” Third, the hope that the Lord could return at any moment gives believers a proper impetus toward sanctification. As Jesus illustrated in the parable about the wicked slave, the faithless say in their hearts, “My lord delayeth his coming” (Mt. 24:48) and therefore act wickedly (Mt. 24:48–51). Our sinful hearts need the accountability provided by the realization that the Lord can appear at any moment.

This exhortation by Jesus to “be ready” despite His teaching about future signs and events is one of the basic and important reasons for arguing that the Rapture of the church constitutes the first part of Christ’s Coming. It resolves the tension between the future signs and the teaching on imminency. Jesus taught His disciples to be ready because He will gather them out of the world before the Tribulation signs appear (1 Th. 4:13–18).

In addition, the doctrine of imminency is extremely important for the church regardless of eschatological bent. In fact, it is unfortunate that this doctrine, in a sense, has become associated with a particular eschatological position and has become a theological point of contention. Why? Because imminency is important for the spiritual health of every individual believer and the church as a whole. When Jesus tells us to be ready because we do not know when He is coming, it becomes our responsibility to believe His Word and to make sure that we are ready. We should not be caught by surprise because we mistakenly were looking for something else and were not looking for his Coming. Ultimately, the doctrine of imminency is not a question of eschatology as much as it is a question of obedience and faith. Will we, as believers, live our lives in a way that prepares us to meet the Lord at any moment? Jesus’ desire and warning is that we must.

So let us say, without any hesitation and with a heart of hope, Maranatha, Our Lord, Come!

Herb Hirt is the Director of The Friends of Israel’s Institute of Jewish Studies.
And he died.” This terse statement echoes eight times throughout the fifth chapter of Genesis as a reminder of sin’s deadly price. Yet in contrast with this chorus of death is a solo voice of hope. In the seventh generation from Adam, the words change. Enoch did not die “for God took him” (Gen. 5:24).

Early in God’s dealings with mankind, the Scriptures teach of a way to escape the curse of death and dust (Gen. 2:17; 3:19). Enoch “walked with God” (Gen. 5:22) and eluded the curse of physical death.

This small hint of hope reappears once more in the Old Testament. The prophet Elijah “went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Ki. 2:11). These two men foreshadow an entire generation of believers who will enjoy the unique blessing of instant transference into God’s presence.

To be removed bodily from the earth to meet the Lord Jesus Christ—is that a strange notion? For many in this technological age, it sounds like science fiction. To skip the normal process of dying and death seems quite farfetched. Yet this phenomenon is exactly what the Scriptures clearly present. God’s people have always believed in the ultimate hope beyond the grave. New Testament Christians have clung to a further promise held out to every generation of believers in Messiah Jesus—He may come today and take you to heaven in an instant! When we understand what the next three portions of Scripture teach about this exciting subject, the truth will flood our hearts with hope.
The scene was grim. Jesus had told His disciples that He would soon die and leave them, that one of them would betray Him, and that Peter would deny Him. Those men had just witnessed Judas’ departure from the Upper Room. Things were about to unravel in ways unforeseen by these loyal men. Jesus provided words of comfort and hope that look far beyond their own day: “Let not your heart be troubled” (v. 1).

Jesus reassured His followers that His own departure from this life involved the preparation of a place for them: “In my Father’s house are many mansions [dwelling places];...I go to prepare a place for you” (v. 2). These dwelling places would become their new homes someday. After He finished His task, He promised to return for them. In memorable words, Jesus described this loving regathering: “I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also” (v. 3). Those early believers kept that promise alive. They looked for that day with longing and excitement.

It is crucial to note the impact of this simple promise, which points heavenward. Jesus will take believers to heaven. Nothing is said of their death, of His return to the earth, or of any events that need to occur before He takes believers home with Him. The promise is simple and clear—Jesus will return to take His people to heaven.

“Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed” (v. 51). The apostle Paul added further details to Jesus’ teaching about His Second Coming and His removal of believers from the earth. The term mystery describes something formerly hidden but later revealed. Some truths about Jesus’ return were not revealed in the Old Testament but were made known only through Jesus and His apostles in the New Testament.

One of these truths is that, at our Lord’s return, believers’ bodies will not “sleep” (experience physical death) but be instantly transformed. This spectacular event will happen in “a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (v. 52). Imagine what it will be like for someone who is looking at another person when, in a split second, as fast as a blink of the eye, the person vanishes!

After Messiah Jesus returns to receive His bride (all born-again believers), only those who have not trusted in His gift of salvation will be left on earth. Other Scriptures indicate that these unbelievers will enter a seven-year period of tribulation that will be the time of God’s wrath.

The second truth Paul revealed was that deceased believers in Christ will be raised at Jesus’ coming. This transformation will occur “at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible” (v. 52a). The curse of death will be permanently reversed for them, and believers living at that time “shall be changed” as well (v. 52b). All these people will receive new bodies that will not be subject to sickness, pain, or death. Paul quoted the prophet Isaiah (25:8) at the end of verse 54:

So, when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

What God desired in the Garden of Eden and what He graciously gave to Enoch and Elijah is what an entire generation of believers will one day experience—instant transfer to heaven. At the same time, those believers who have died will experience complete victory over death.

In this passage, Paul presented many details about Jesus’ return and our participation in that great event. The reason for Paul’s lengthy explanation lies in the Thessalonians’ concern for their departed loved ones. They were grieving because they thought that their deceased friends would not share in the blessings of the Second Coming of their Lord and Savior. While believers do indeed sorrow over death, it is not an empty grief. Paul wrote so “that ye sorrow not, even as others who have no hope” (v. 13). Hope transforms sorrow.

The anticipation that Paul presented to the Thessalonians and, indeed, presents to us as well is that, when Jesus returns, all who have received Christ as personal Savior throughout the ages will be together. Those who have departed this life will not be for-
gotten, for God promises to unite with Jesus all those who have died in faith and to give them future blessing (v. 14). In fact, deceased believers will be the first to meet the coming Christ: “we who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them who are asleep” (v. 15).

It is important to remember that Paul thought Christ might indeed return within his own lifetime. Jesus Himself taught that the time of His return is unknown to all but the Father. Thus believers must constantly be ready (Mt. 24:36, 44; 25:13). The hope of the imminent appearing of our Lord Jesus is found throughout the New Testament (Rom. 13:11; 1 Cor. 16:22; Phil. 4:5; Jas. 5:7–9; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 22:20). Notice the details Paul described. First, Jesus will come down from His present home.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first (v. 16).

The dead will be roused by the archangel’s command and trumpet blast. This authoritative call to resurrection is what Paul called “the last trump” in 1 Corinthians 15:52.

Next, “we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (v. 17). All Christians who are alive at this time will be “caught up” into the clouds with Jesus and the resurrected believers. The term rapture (from the Latin verb rapio meaning “to pluck up, to snatch away”) is used to describe this momentous event. Just as Enoch and Elijah were raptured by God, so, too, will a future generation of Christians avoid the walk through the valley of the shadow of death. They (or, perhaps, we) will thereafter experience the unbroken presence of our Lord.

In an obvious application, Paul concluded by commanding Christians to “comfort one another with these words” (v. 18). This passage holds immediate hope for all God’s people. Since Paul’s day, all believers in Jesus the Messiah have looked forward with expectancy to the next event on God’s prophetic calendar—Jesus’ return at any moment.

This Rapture promise finds a fascinating parallel in ancient Jewish marriage customs. In his book Maranatha Our Lord, Come! (The Friends of Israel) Dr. Renald Showers describes these customs in detail. The betrothal of a bride and her bridegroom first required the young man to pay a negotiated price for his fiancée. The paid dowry formalized the marriage covenant, and the couple became husband and wife. Then the bridegroom returned alone to his father’s house and spent about one year preparing a dwelling place for his bride. When the abode was ready, he secretly returned at night to take his bride home with him.

This joyous reunion involved many attendants and festivities to celebrate the consummation of the marriage. The couple remained secluded from the guests for seven days, after which both the bridegroom and the unveiled bride came out to greet the public.

The wedding analogy is clear. Jesus left heaven to seek His bride and pay for her with the price of His sinless life, death, and resurrection. The church is presently separated from her betrothed, ever guarding her purity, while He prepares to return. Some day Jesus Christ will snatch His bride from the earth. That event will hasten the world’s plummet into outright rebellion, headed by the Antichrist. Only after seven years of tribulation will our Lord Jesus return “with power and great glory” (Mt. 24:30; cf. Rev. 19:7–16). That coming with His bride will be unlike the Rapture when He comes for His bride. At His Second Coming, Jesus will return to the earth with His bride to judge the world and establish His Kingdom on earth. The love of the Bridegroom for His bride will someday be seen visibly in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

May believers in Messiah Jesus continue to be faithful, loving, and
Millions vanish! Confusion reigns! World religious leaders divided about event!

These and many other similar reports may well become the headlines in newspapers around the world after the Lord Jesus Christ raptures His church. In “the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52), true believers will disappear to meet the Lord in the air (1 Th. 4:16–17), ending forever the Church Age that began at Pentecost and leaving behind a world of stunned and unregenerate people.

What will it be like on earth after the Rapture? What if the Rapture occurs in our lifetime? What effect will the Rapture have on the Middle East? The economy? The nations? Political systems? The religions of the world? The Bible has much to say on these issues and can help Christians put this exciting event and its consequences into perspective.

**Chaos**

The Rapture of the church will precede the seven years commonly known as the Tribulation period. However, the Rapture is not the event that marks the beginning of the Tribulation. That event will be the confirmation of a peace accord between Israel and her eventual enemies, principally, the Antichrist (Dan. 9:27).

One can only speculate on the length of time between the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation. More than likely, it will be brief. An indication of this possibility is the period of transition from the end of the era of Law (Eph. 2:14–15) to the beginning of the Church Age (Acts 2). This interval lasted only fifty days. Consequently, it would seem the transition from the Church Age to the resumption of Daniel’s seventy weeks (see David M. Levy’s article, p. 10) would also be brief.

The period from the Rapture to the start of the Tribulation will undoubtedly play an important role in establishing the Antichrist’s reign. All born-again believers will have disappeared. Considering the millions of Christians who will be raptured worldwide, the devastation to the economies, militaries, and social structures of nations could be potentially significant. If the Rapture were to occur today, the United States would be particularly affected, as would South Korea, Canada, and other countries with large numbers of born-again Christians.
Generally, the Rapture and the resulting calamities will send the world reeling. Recent history teaches how unruly people can become when the infrastructure they are so used to collapses, even for a brief time. Ask any New York City resident who endured the summer of 1977 when the electricity went out for two days. Looting, robberies, muggings, and the like became epidemic. The Rapture of the church will more than likely produce similar events around the world.

Economies of the World

At present, the United States is the major economic power in the world. Pronouncements by Alan Greenspan, head of the Federal Reserve Board, carry so much weight they have the power to produce major shifts in the U.S. stock market. These shifts, in turn, affect the markets of the world. If a word spoken by one individual can send euphoria or turmoil into our economies, what will happen with the sudden loss of millions of people? Worldwide economic collapse and depression are a possibility.

The Bible is not silent about the coming economic problems in our world after the Rapture. The third seal judgment of Revelation 6 tells of the extreme expense of just a day’s supply of food. “And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures say, A measure of wheat for a denarius, and three measures of barley for a denarius, and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine” (6:6). Professor and author Robert Thomas’s comments on this verse are helpful: “This much wheat was only enough to sustain for one day a person of moderate appetite . . . the minimum daily food requirement of barley was three measures.” Thomas continues, “a denarius was the average day’s wages for a working man.”

According to this verse, the average working person at the end of the day would have only enough money for basic food requirements. This severe economic crisis can only lead to looting, stealing, and worse. Yet it seems as though the wealthy will not be affected, as “the oil and the wine,” symbolic of wealth and luxury, are not touched.

The financial disarray and disparity within the world will most likely become a main cause in the establishment of a one-world monetary system. The need to bring sanity to an obviously desperate situation will prompt the nations and their citizens to adopt a universal system of control so all can have the basic needs of life. The lawlessness of the times will be brought under control through the fair, equitable distribution of goods. In a period of such upheaval, the world’s citizens will consider it only reasonable and logical to install a strong, controlling authority. Anarchy leads people to give up their freedoms in exchange for peace.

We are told that “he [Antichrist] causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and enslaved, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads, And that no man might buy or sell, except he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Rev. 13:16-17). The world’s leader will introduce a system where none can buy or sell without the mark of the ruling authority. On the surface, the system will bring an end to the strife as well as provide for the people of the world.

Political Systems

The Rapture will also undoubtedly cause political upheaval. If the Lord were to remove His church from the earth today, the United States would be among the countries most heavily affected. Many Christians hold positions of importance in every segment of American society. The Rapture could leave the U.S. critically wounded and possibly reduce it to a second-rate power. With the United States—the world’s policeman—crippled, many political changes could occur across the globe.

Scripture teaches that the countries of Europe will consolidate
Religions

In times of great distress, people tend to seek answers and comfort in religion. After the Rapture, many will flock to the religious leaders of the world. Unfortunately, all those left on earth will be false prophets. The Bible calls them “wells without water, . . . to whom the mist of darkness is reserved forever. . . . they speak great swelling words of vanity [emptiness] . . . they themselves are the servants of corruption” (2 Pet. 2:17–19). All the men who believed the Bible and preached it will be gone. And the religious leaders who will be left will have no answers.

God, however, has never left this lost and helpless world without some way to hear the truth. During the Tribulation, He will provide 144,000 Jewish men who will speak the truth in contrast to the false prophets who will seduce the world to embrace unified worship and the end of religious division. These false prophets will claim that if the religions of the world can accomplish this feat, world peace and prosperity will be at hand. And the deceived will believe this lie. A one-world religion (Rev. 17) will emerge from the pandemonium of the times.

Furthermore, an alliance will develop between the Antichrist (the world’s political ruler) and the religious system of the world (Rev. 17:3). The leading religious figure, known as the false prophet (Rev. 19:20), will use signs and miracles (Rev. 13:11–15) to cause the people of the world to worship the Antichrist, who will actually claim to be God at the middle of the Tribulation period (2 Th. 2:4). Because of his insatiable appetite for the world’s worship, this satanically empowered man will then destroy the religious system that helped bring him to power (Rev. 17:16).

The true believers who will emerge during the Tribulation period will be persecuted by this combination of darkness. Many of them will become martyrs for their faith (Rev. 6:9–10; 12:11, 17).

The Middle East

The focal point after the Rapture will be the Middle East—especially Israel. The seemingly irreconcilable animosity between Israel and her Islamic neighbors will be temporarily quieted. The Antichrist will use his charm and persuasive powers to bring a much-longed-for, albeit temporary, peace to the Middle East (Dan. 9:27).

Jerusalem, though, will remain a stumbling block for the nations surrounding Israel and even for the world (Zech. 12:3–4). The Jewish people and Israel will be blamed for the continuing problems of the world. Anti-Semitism will reach its worst heights after the Rapture (Rev. 12), culminating with the Antichrist marshaling all the forces of the world into Israel in an attempt to destroy her (Zech. 12:8–10; 13:1–3; Rev. 16:14–16).

What will start out very encouraging for Israel and the Jewish people (prosperity, peace, a rebuilt Temple [Dan. 9:27; 2 Th. 2:4]) will turn into their worst nightmare—worst, that is, until their Messiah comes (Zech 12:8–10: Rev. 19:11–21) and delivers them from destruction.

The Mercy of God

The aftermath of the Rapture will bring great distress, turmoil, and even death to the world. Yet the mercy of God still will be abundantly present.

Many Jewish people will recognize that Jesus is the Messiah and find forgiveness of sin. Initially, the 144,000 Jewish men will come to the Lord at the beginning of the Tribulation (Rev. 7:1–8). Ultimately, millions more will receive Jesus as their Messiah during this time period (Zech. 12:10; 13:9).

The aftermath of the Rapture will produce a horrific time on earth. The Lord Jesus Himself called it “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Mt. 24:21). It is with thanksgiving that born-again believers can rest in the knowledge that God will not allow His church to go into that terrifying period of unparalleled suffering. “For God hath not appointed us to wrath but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Th. 5:9). If you are a believer, you will not be around for the “aftermath of the Rapture.” If you are not a believer in Jesus as Messiah and Savior, you need to become one. You can come to Him now. He is waiting.

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Once a year an Orthodox community in Israel assembles to honor the boys from fatherless families who are ready for bar mitzvah. The fathers of these boys all lost their lives in service to their country. On one such occasion twenty-three years ago, a young boy nicknamed Shai was chosen to deliver the special address to this assembly. Shai (meaning “gift”) is the name his mother lovingly called him because she felt he was an extra special gift to her. Shai never knew his father because he had died in Syria just a few weeks before Shai’s birth.

In his speech, Shai said he would have liked to have been like other children because then, he said, “I would have had a father whom I knew and who lived with us like other fathers.” Shai then spoke not to the guests, but directly to his father when he said, “I promise you, Father, that in my life I will never fail you. I will do my duty with all my strength and my devotion to the nation of Israel.” There was not a dry eye in the synagogue.

Such courage and devotion help explain Israel’s survival and testify to the tenacity of her people and the faithfulness of her God. Hostile nations so dwarf the country that it is even difficult to locate the Jewish nation on a world map. Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu provides a startling statistic in his book, A Place Among the Nations (Bantam). Beneath a chart of four facsimiles of recognizable land masses, he lists the number of square miles each area encompasses:

- Israel ..................10,840
- California ..............160,000
- France ..................213,613
- Iraq ...................280,000

Population differential is also striking. Currently, the total population of Israel just breaches six million people, of which about five million are Jewish. The neighboring Middle Eastern communities number about 150 million people, most of them Muslims. If the Middle East were a place of serenity and peace, size and population differences would be insignificant. But many years of turbulent Israeli history prove that Israel’s enemies would like nothing more than to drive the Jewish homeland into the Mediterranean Sea.

Throughout its fifty-two years of existence, Israel has relied more on its knowledge of enemy activities than on its artillery, jets, and missiles.
Espionage—the gathering of accurate and reliable knowledge—is regarded as a first line of defense.

Espionage is not new to Israel’s history. Thousands of years ago, God directed Moses to send out twelve undercover agents to foreign soil for a fact-finding mission. “Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel” (Num. 13:2). They were to “see the land, what it is; and the people who dwell therein, whether they are strong or weak, few or many” (Num. 13:18). The only difference from then until now is that now, twelve men are simply not enough.

Included in this first line of defense is an organization called The Institute for Intelligence and Special Tasks, comprised of an estimated fifteen hundred people. Better known as Mossad, it was born in its present form by the late Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion at the time Israel became a nation. Its responsibilities include human intelligence, covert action, and counterterrorism. To be successful, the work must be accomplished unnoticed. Yet there have been times when Mossad’s success has been so amazing that secrecy was impossible.

One of the Mossad’s most brilliant coups involved the capture of Adolf Eichmann, whose name even today sends shivers down the spines of most Jewish people. As chief of the Jewish Office of the Gestapo and prime architect of Hitler’s “Final Solution,” Eichmann was responsible for engineering the deaths of millions of Jewish people. While many Nazi criminals were brought to trial after World War II, Eichmann managed to hide his identity and elude capture. In 1959, fourteen years after the war had ended, the elusive Eichmann was finally found. Although a painstakingly difficult and intricate case, Mossad was able to accumulate the information necessary to pinpoint his exact location, a house on Garibaldi Street in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

To capture and extricate him from the country required precision down to the minutest detail. It was necessary that Eichmann appear to be leaving Argentina voluntarily. Thus the plan required a partially drugged Eichmann to walk through the airport and board an El Al plane destined for Israel.

Commenting on his capture and kidnapping, Eichmann himself stated, “My capture was carried out in a sporting fashion and was outstanding for its organization and exemplary planning.”

In May of 1960, David Ben-Gurion made an emotional announcement to the Knesset. “I have to announce that...one of the greatest of Nazi criminals was found by Israeli secret service: Adolf Eichmann, who was responsible, together with the Nazi leaders, for what they called the ‘Final Solution to the Jewish Problem.’” His capture, trial, conviction, and execution were an integral step toward healing a people scarred by the Holocaust.

Espionage is dangerous, daunting, and difficult because it requires pilfering information while in enemy territory. Nevertheless, Israel has managed many successful and even amazing thefts of enemy hardware in enemy country. The Russians, for example, had been supplying Israel’s enemies with top-secret Mig planes, which were superior to anything in the Israeli Air Force. Israel needed to capture one for defense purposes. In an operation carried out in 1966, the unbelievable became believable when a female Mossad agent convinced an Iraqi pilot to fly a top-secret, Russian Mig directly to Israel. The complex operation required smuggling the pilot’s family out of Iraq to safety in Israel, planning the timing and execution of the theft, and securing the pilot after completion of the mission. That theft provided military intelligence with valuable information that later helped Israel win the Six-Day War. Israel also shared the knowledge gained from the seizure with her best friend—the United States.

Of all the stories told about Israel’s Mossad, the account of the work of Eliahu (Eli) Cohen is among the most well-known. To this day, the book Our Man in Damascus, the story of Eli Cohen, is a must-read for any tourist to Israel.

Born into an Orthodox Jewish home in Alexandria, Egypt, on December 16, 1924, Eli seemed destined for the rabbinate. He became a star pupil in the Hebrew school run by the chief rabbi. His keen mind also helped him in secular school, earning him a scholarship to the French high school in Alexandria where he excelled in mathematics and engineering. His gift of memorization enabled him to become fluent in several languages.

During World War II, Egypt’s loyalties were divided between the Allies and the Nazis. Due to increasing anti-Semitism, many Jews tried to immigrate to Palestine. Eli helped the Haganah, the military of the pre-state of Israel, to smuggle many Egyptian Jews into their national homeland. He always considered himself a loyal Egyptian; and in 1947, just one year before Israel was forced to fight for her independence, Eli enlisted in the Egyptian army. But the military declared him ineligible due to “mixed loyalties,” undoubtedly alleged because he was Jewish.

The anti-Semitic atmosphere in Egypt did not prevent the brilliant Eli from earning an engineering degree
in 1950. By then he was convinced that being Jewish and Egyptian were not compatible. So when Israeli intelligence approached him to work for them, he accepted. His command of languages made him extremely effective. Eli remained in Egypt through the Sinai campaign of 1956. When he was discovered working for the Jewish state, he had to flee for his life.

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Evidently Mossad was satisfied, for in 1960 Eli Cohen was hired, this time on Mossad’s initiative. After six months of extensive training, Eli Cohen was sent to Syria. In 1961, Egypt and Syria were Israel’s foremost enemies. Eli was a perfect fit for this assignment because he spoke perfect Arabic and had excellent knowledge of the customs of the Arab people. His assignment was to infiltrate the Syrian military. He was to pose as an exporter, using the name Kamil Amin Taabes. As Kamil Amin Taabes, Eli established himself in Argentina as a wealthy businessman. His cover was meticulously fabricated by the Mossad. With the success of the Eichmann kidnapping, many countries were particularly suspicious of anyone who was allowed near classified information. The Syrians carefully scrutinized Kamil’s identity while he was living in Argentina, and he passed with flying colors.

Eli managed to smuggle into Syria a radio transmitter that relayed information to Tel Aviv regularly. Kamil had become a confidant to a number of high-ranking Syrian officials and ingratiated himself to his many friends with parties and entertainment, keeping a closed mouth about their social activities.

Over a two-year span, he was often taken to high security areas, including the Golan Heights, a mountainous range on the eastern coast of the Sea of Galilee. Militarily, this was a superior piece of real estate for Syria because it was ideally situated for bombard- ing Israel. The Syrians had placed thousands of land mines, bunkers, and key military installations there and were constantly terrorizing the Israeli kibbutzim down below.

Kamil was given total freedom to walk the Golan and gaze down at Israel. To demonstrate his support for Syria, Kamil encouraged its leadership to plant trees over the bunkers to provide shade and camouflage for them. His suggestions were implemented.

Thanks to his acute memory, Eli was able to radio exact information for locating enemy targets. He remained on the Syrian scene on and off for about four years. Although Mossad had felt for some time that Eli should come home, Eli felt he should stay a little longer. In January of 1965, a little longer proved too long.

A crack military team came crashing through his door while he was broadcasting information to Israel. Unknown to him, all radio messages had been temporarily halted, making it possible for Syria to trace his transmission.

Eli Cohen was tortured, then executed by hanging. He had so greatly embarrassed the Syrians that they did not permit the normal negotiations for captured spies. Even Israel’s offer of one million dollars for his body was denied.

But Eli’s contribution to his country lived on. The information he provided was invaluable for helping Israel win the Golan Heights in 1967. Israeli jet pilots received instructions to bomb the trees. They were the eucalyptus trees planted at Eli’s suggestion. They clearly identified every Syrian bunker, thus providing Israel with a high percentage of direct hits on enemy targets. Eli Cohen was a national hero. But he was also one of many soldiers whose wives became widows and whose children became fatherless.

That is why the words spoken at the bar mitzvah in the Orthodox community were particularly moving. The young man nicknamed Shai, who spoke so eloquently to the father he never knew, pledging to him his devotion to Israel, was Shaul Cohen, the son of Eli Cohen, born just weeks before his father’s death.

It was a difficult speech to give because he knew the pain of even mentioning his father in the presence of his mother. In the audience that day was Menachem Begin, the prime minister of Israel, who was moved to tears. Mossad continues even now to provide Israel’s first line of defense.

But there will come a day when Israel will have everlasting peace with God’s sanctuary in its midst forever (Ezek. 37:26). One day, when Messiah comes, Israel will no longer need a Mossad. That will be a blessed day!

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A doctor once stated, “Three hundred of my patients, when notified they were dying, repented of their sins and professed faith in God. Once they were restored to health, only ten of the three hundred manifested any evidence of a changed life.” This unfortunate statistic is true not only of people but of nations as well.

In chapter five of Hosea, God pronounced judgment on Israel; He sentenced Ephraim to be consumed slowly and silently like a woolen garment eaten by a moth. God also said He would allow Israel to be torn in pieces and carried away to the den of her oppressors. And as a lion returns to its den, God would return to His place in heaven and ignore Israel’s cries for restoration until “they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face” (v. 15). It has always been God’s purpose to use judgment not to destroy Israel but to bring the nation to repentance (cf. 2:5–7). In judgment, God leaves the door of His grace open, providing Israel with the opportunity to return to Him in sincerity.

**ISRAEL’S Immediate Response**

Sensing her hopeless condition, Israel cried out, “Come, and let us return unto the LORD; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up” (6:1). The people realized that if they were to survive their affliction, only God, the Great Physician, could heal their deadly wound (Ex. 15:26; Dt. 32:39). The Israelites appeared to be coming before the Lord in true repentance but, in actuality, did not. Theirs was a superficial repentance. The text gives no indication that they ever confessed wrongdoing or turned away from practicing paganism, immorality, and murder. Their words lacked sincerity, as evidenced by their unchanged lifestyle.

Israel was confident of a swift restoration once she returned to God. “After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight” (v. 2). The phrase two days... in the third day is a Hebrew idiom used in reference to an expected swift and certain recovery from judgment. Some interpreters spiritualize it to refer to Christ’s resurrection after being three days in the grave. However, this interpretation is totally foreign to the context of the passage. Others teach that God’s wrath will be short and temporary, then Israel
It has always been God’s purpose to use judgment not to destroy Israel but to bring the nation to repentance.

Israel’s Insincere Repentance

Thus the Lord, who knows the hearts of all men, asked Israel and Judah a rhetorical question: “O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness [faithfulness] is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goeth away” (v. 4). God had tried everything to woo Israel and Judah away from their idolatry and bring them to repentance and commitment to Him, but His attempts were futile. If severe punishment did not bring them to repentance, what more could be done? God asked the question to draw Israel’s attention to her lack of love and piety toward Him. Her faithfulness was like a morning cloud that does not deliver rain and like the drops of early morning dew that promise refreshment but dry up in the rising sun. Such “faithfulness” was neither consistent nor permanent but superficial and fleeting.

Hosea warned Israel and Judah that God cannot be propitiated by a multitude of sacrifices and offerings. Presented without love of God and sincere holiness, they are unacceptable to the Lord. God said, “For I desired mercy [loyal love], and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (v. 6). Pleasing God can only be accomplished by knowing Him personally and ordering our conduct according to His will. Israel was unable to experience or express this kind of commitment to God because they had lost their knowledge of Him. After...
King Saul had transgressed against God, Samuel told him,

*Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD?* Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry (1 Sam. 15:22–23).

Soulless sacrifice offered by men steeped in sin was and is, even today, an abomination to God.

**ISRAEL’S Immoral Rebellion**

In the following verses, God provides a number of similes and metaphors to illustrate the gross paganism, immorality, and murderous actions of ancient Israel. First, the Lord said, “But they, like men [lit. Adam], have transgressed the covenant; there have they dealt treacherously against me” (v. 7). Some believe that the word *Adam* refers to the man Adam. In the Edenic Covenant, God set forth the conditions of life that fallen man must now endure until the Kingdom Age (Gen. 3:15–19). Like Adam, Israel forfeited the blessings Adam would receive by obediently following Him. But in the Adamic Covenant, He set forth the conditions of life that fallen man must now endure until the Kingdom Age (Gen. 3:15–19). Like Adam, Israel forfeited the blessings of her covenant relationship by disobeying God.

Other commentators, however, believe that the word *Adam* refers to a city of the same name—a town close to Jordan (beside Zarethan), near the mouth of the Jabbok River and eighteen miles above Jericho. It was here where the waters miraculously parted as the Israelites crossed the Jordan River (Josh. 3:16–17). The phrase *have they dealt treacherously [deceitfully] against me* (v. 7) could apply to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden or to Israel at the city of Adam. Commentators disagree on the meaning of this verse.

The second illustration refers to the city of Gilead. “Gilead is a city of those who work iniquity, and is polluted [tracked] with blood” (v. 8). Gilead is a mountain region stretching about sixty miles long and twenty miles wide, bounded on the north by Bashan and on the south by Moab and Ammon, extending from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea (Gen. 31:21, 25; Dt. 3:12–17). Hosea 6:7 probably refers not to the area of Gilead but to the city of Ramoth Gilead, which had become a rendezvous for wicked men. Ironically, it was one of the cities of refuge (Josh. 21:38) but was now a city known for its brutal murders.

The third illustration refers to Shechem, another city of refuge located between Ebal and Gerizim (Josh. 21:21). It had become an area where “troops of robbers [marauders] wait [in ambush] for a man” and “the company [band] of priests murder in the way by consent; for they commit lewdness” (v. 9).

Shechem lay to the north of Jerusalem and was located on the main road that pilgrims used to travel to the annual feast days in Jerusalem. It was in Shechem where priests from Israel, steeped in Baal worship, waited to plunder those going to Jerusalem. If the people offered any resistance, these priests often murdered them. Furthermore, the priests committed *lewdness*, meaning the vilest of sexual sins—incest (Lev. 18:17), cult prostitution (Lev. 19:29), rape (Jud. 20:5–6), and adultery (Job 31:9–11).

Chapter 6 closes with God’s condemnation of the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. Speaking on behalf of the Lord, Hosea said, “I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel; there is the harlotry of Ephraim, Israel is defiled” (v. 10). Ephraim was the major tribe of Israel that practiced harlotry—religious prostitution connected with fertility rites found in Baal worship. This practice had spread from Ephraim throughout all Israel and eventually to Judah.

Thus Judah would not escape judgment. “Also, O Judah, he hath set an harvest for thee” (v. 11). Judah had committed the same sins as Israel and would reap a harvest of destruction.

Yet destruction is not the final destiny of Israel, for God said He will return “the captivity of my people” (v. 11). One day God will restore both the northern and southern kingdoms. This return will come to ultimate fruition at the inception of the Millennial Kingdom (Ezek. 37:15–22).

Israel’s superficial repentance carries an important lesson for us today. It is not enough for a wayward believer to feel sorry for his or her sin and simply say, “I will return to the Lord and He will take away my sin.” This is not true repentance. True repentance takes place when we feel the awesome convicting power of the Holy Spirit deep in our souls and realize that we have sinned against Almighty God. Truly repentant sinners will not only confess and forsake their evil ways but exhibit a turnabout in their lives and alter their conduct accordingly.

Do you, like Israel, tolerate sin in your life? If you do not deal with it, God will!

David M. Levy is the Director of Foreign Ministries for The Friends of Israel.
Ehud Barak’s government is on the verge of collapse. With the sporadic departure of parties from his coalition, the prime minister faces the distinct possibility of calling early elections. He vows that in that case, he will put together a much more stable administration, perhaps without the nettlesome ultra-Orthodox religious parties. The nation as a whole seems to agree that the government is in need of major surgery but with quite a different twist than envisioned by Mr. Barak.

In a recent Gallup poll, the majority of respondents indicated they would prefer a national unity government of both the One Israel and Likud parties, minus the religious parties. Among those who identified themselves as supporters of the prime minister, 67.5 percent said they favor the unity government concept without the religious additives.

Some heavy-hitters in the government support the idea. The popular Natan Sharansky, minister of the interior, has called for the establishment of a national unity government, explaining that it is the only solution to the current political situation.

Foreign Minister David Levy weighed in on the subject in a June 15 article in The Jerusalem Post (Internet Edition): “I believe that the situation makes it necessary for all of us to find the way to national unity at a difficult time like this.”

In view of the critical decisions Israel is now making, a national unity government seems to make sense. And it would not be the first time such an arrangement has been tried. In a unity government, the major parties, One Israel and Likud, would share the office of prime minister on a rotating basis. The cabinet would be comprised of members from both parties, hopefully providing a consensus representing a more balanced national view.

One serious problem the State of Israel has endured since its inception has been the necessity of including ultra-Orthodox parties in order to establish a viable coalition. But their inclusion has allowed these minority, ultra-religious groups to hold the government hostage to their demands in the name of political survival. This situation often worked to the detriment of Jewish believers and Christian organizations. Israelis who are not Orthodox have long called for a government less beholden to those espousing what they consider radical views—views they feel impinge on how they conduct their daily lives.

The biggest hurdle to a national unity government may be the Likud Party. To this point, party leader Ariel Sharon has said no to the idea. He prefers to hold new elections and attempt to regain the power lost when Ehud Barak defeated Likud incumbent Benjamin Netanyahu.

But politicians have a way of assessing shifting winds in the light of what’s possible. Therefore, both sides may arrive at the conclusion that a national unity government is the way the wind is blowing and make a new start toward achieving a genuine national consensus on peace.
Jesus Christ and the Future Kingdom of God

(Part 9)

The previous article noted three distinctions between the gospel of the Kingdom that John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and the apostles preached and the gospel that Paul defined in 1 Corinthians 15. These distinctions were in content, commission, and preparation for ministry:

- The gospel of the Kingdom contained nothing about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, the gospel defined in 1 Corinthians 15 focused on His death and resurrection and said nothing about the Kingdom of God being at hand.

- When Christ sent the apostles to preach the gospel of the Kingdom just to Israel, He forbade them to take extra provisions for their ministry (Mt. 10:9–10). By contrast, when it became obvious that Christ and His offer of the Kingdom would be rejected and that the gospel of 1 Corinthians 15 would become reality, He commanded the apostles to take extra provisions (Lk. 22:35–36).

The Reasons For These Distinctions

Content. Why did John the Baptist and Christ preach a gospel that declared “the kingdom of God is at hand” but said nothing about Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection? Why did Christ send His apostles to preach that distinct gospel? There are four likely reasons.

First, the primary purpose of Christ’s miracles was to demonstrate that He was the promised Messiah who could establish the theocratic Kingdom and its prophesied transformation of nature. Those miracles supported the gospel-of-the-Kingdom message that the theocratic Kingdom was near in the sense of its potential for establishment. It was near because the Messiah, Jesus, who possessed the power necessary to establish that Kingdom, was present.

Second, John the Baptist (Mt. 3:1–2), Jesus Christ (Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:15), and the apostles (Mt. 10:1–3, 7) all implied that the hearers of that gospel must fulfill two requirements for the theocratic Kingdom to be established. First, they must believe the gospel’s declaration that the theocratic Kingdom was near, in the sense of its potential for establishment (Mk. 1:14–15). This faith would involve belief that Jesus was the Messiah who had the power necessary to establish the Kingdom. Second, they must repent (Mt. 3:2; 4:17, 23).

Third, through His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey’s colt, Jesus officially presented Himself to Israel as its Messiah Prince—the one who, as King, would administer God’s rule over all the earth in the theocratic Kingdom (Lk. 19:29–40). He thereby fulfilled Zechariah 9:9,
which foretold that this was how Jerusalem’s King would come (Mt. 21:4–5).

Fourth, on the day of His triumphal entry, Jesus wept over the city and said, “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hidden from thine eyes” (Lk. 19:42). Then He warned Jerusalem that the city and its inhabitants would later be destroyed by an enemy “because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Lk. 19:44).

Christ’s weeping and His statements indicated the incredible significance that specific day would hold for Jerusalem and its inhabitants. The word translated “time” in the expression the time of thy visitation connotes the basic sense of a “fateful and decisive point” in time. It implies that the point in time was “ordained by God” and that, if people missed its significance and did not act accordingly, there could be “no second chance.” The word translated “known” and “knewest” in Christ’s statements refer to “acknowledgment, and obedient or grateful submission to what is known.”

In light of these meanings, Christ no doubt was saying that the day of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem was a fateful and decisive point in time ordained by God for the capital of the nation and its inhabitants. It was a specific point in time that would determine their fate. For more than three years, the gospel of the Kingdom had been preached to the nation, and many miracles had substantiated the truthfulness of that message. Now, on the day of His triumphal entry, Christ officially presented Himself to the nation as its Messiah Prince in the exact manner that Israel’s Scriptures had indicated the Messiah could be identified (Zech. 9:9). In addition, Jesus did so on the exact day that Scripture foretold the Messiah would present Himself (Dan. 9:24–25).

In light of this knowledge, the time had come for the nation, through its governing rulers in the capital city, to make a fateful, decisive decision. Would it acknowledge the truth that the future theocratic Kingdom was near in the sense of its potential for establishment and that Jesus was the Messiah who had the power necessary to establish the Kingdom? Would it render obedience or grateful submission to that acknowledged truth by repenting?

If, on that day, it would have fulfilled both these requirements, it could have enjoyed a future of peace—because the theocratic Kingdom would have been established. Failure to fulfill these requirements on that day, however, meant the nation would suffer future destruction because God would withhold the establishment of the theocratic Kingdom.

Together, these four factors constitute the reason for preaching that the gospel of the Kingdom “is at hand.” It was Christ’s way of offering the future theocratic Kingdom to Israel and telling the nation the requirements for its establishment at that time.

Commission. When Christ sent the apostles to preach the gospel of the Kingdom, why did He give them a restricted commission? Why were they to preach the gospel of the Kingdom exclusively to the people of Israel, not to the Samaritans or Gentiles? The reason was that God had determined that the theocratic Kingdom not be established until Israel acknowledges the true Messiah and repents (Zech. 12—14; Acts 3:12–21).

But why must Israel do so before the establishment of the theocratic Kingdom, but not the Samaritans and Gentiles? The Old Testament reveals the reason. When God established a unique covenant relationship with Israel at Sinai, He signified His ordained purpose for that nation: “ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). In ancient times, Israel’s priests were to be spiritual leaders, helping the people maintain a right relationship with God. Thus God had designated the nation of Israel, not the Samaritans or Gentiles, to be the spiritual leader of the world, helping all other peoples maintain right relationships with God.

Tragically, because of its own spiritual failure, Israel has not yet fulfilled that purpose. But other Old Testament passages foretell that it will fulfill that purpose in the future theocratic Kingdom. For example, Isaiah 61:6 declares that in the future, the people of Israel “shall be named the Priests of the LORD;
men shall call you the Ministers of our God.” Zechariah 8:22–23 states, “Yea, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts: In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you.

In addition, Isaiah 2:1–3 and Micah 4:1–2 indicate that “in the last days” Jerusalem will become the spiritual center of the world. Many nations will come there to be taught God’s ways, “for the law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Mic. 4:2).

For Israel to be the spiritual leader of the world in the future theocratic Kingdom, Israel itself must come into right relationship with God. That is why God will not establish the theocratic Kingdom until Israel acknowledges the true Messiah and repents. And that is the reason Christ commissioned the apostles to preach the gospel of the Kingdom only to Israel.

Preparation for Ministry. When Christ sent the apostles to preach the gospel of the Kingdom, why did He forbid them to take extra provisions for their itinerant ministry? Why did He command them to do what was contrary to the practice of those whose work required them to travel from place to place over long periods of time? In Matthew 10:10, Christ told them why: “for the workman is worthy of his food.” His point was that He was sending them out as representatives of Himself and His Kingdom message. Thus their daily food would be provided in a manner fitting His claim to be the Messiah and His message that the theocratic Kingdom of God was at hand.

The Old Testament prophets foretold that when the Messiah will establish and rule over the future theocratic Kingdom, He will bless the earth with a superabundance of food. The daily provision of the apostles’ food, contrary to the normal practice of storing extra provisions, would support the truthfulness of Jesus’ Messianic claim and His gospel of the Kingdom.

Thus these three distinctions show that, through the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom and the supporting miracles, Christ offered the future theocratic Kingdom to the nation of Israel. The next article will examine Israel’s response to that offer.

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Russians rescue Israeli boy after 10-month ordeal

_Haaretz_—Prime Minister Ehud Barak expressed his gratitude to Russian President Vladimir Putin for the freeing of Adi Sharon, a 12–year–old Israeli boy. According to Russian news agencies, the 13 gang members responsible for the kidnapping were arrested.

However, Israeli security sources expressed their dismay at the decision of the Russian anti-terrorist unit to delay their operation to free the boy, whose location they allege was known to the Russians as early as December.

Adi Sharon travelled to Moscow to visit his father, who lived there. On August 23, 1999, during his visit, the two were kidnapped by a gang of men. The father was quickly released and a ransom was demanded for the boy. Following negotiations with the Russian Interior Ministry, the kidnappers, a mix of Chechens and Russians, agreed to lower their ransom demand.

Israeli Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh was also brought into the picture because of his links with the MVD, the Russian anti-terrorist unit.

Sneh requested that the MVD act to rescue the boy as early as December, when the location was known, he had not seen daylight for ten months, and had subsisted on bread and water.

A special unit broke into the basement where Adi was kept, while the cameras were rolling. Russian newsreels ran coverage of the operation.

In addition to the difficult conditions in which the boy was kept, the kidnappers tried to pressure his father by sending him two severed fingers from the boy’s hand. According to the Israeli Consul in Moscow, Moshe Bachar, Adi is in stable condition, but weak and terrified.

According to the Consul, Adi suffers mostly from malnutrition. He also says that he believes that Adi was the last Israeli kept by kidnappers in Russia.

In their conversation, Prime Minister Barak and President Putin discussed the details surrounding the boy’s rescue. Putin said that the whole Russian nation was concerned with developments in the case and that Russians were shaken by the affair. Barak told Putin that the rescue operation signals the determination to fight against terror and that serious governments around the world will not cave in under any form of violence.

Egypt will recognize Palestinian state

_The Jerusalem Post_—President Hosni Mubarak said that Egypt would recognize a future Palestinian state, whether it emerged by agreement or was declared unilaterally.

“If a Palestinian state is announced we will recognize it... under any circumstances we will recognize it,” Mubarak told reporters at a news conference with outgoing Israeli President Ezer Weizman, who was on a brief farewell trip to Cairo.

Israel, African Jews to help victims of Mozambique flood

_The Jewish Telegraphic Agency Online_—Israel and the African Jewish community have pledged their support to Mozambique after recent flooding in the southern African nation.

The chairman of the African Jewish Congress and Israel’s ambassador to six African states assured Mozambique’s president, Joaquim Chissano, that aid to his country will continue.

“Thank you for your concern—we are optimistic because we have this international aid,” Chissano told an AJC delegation visiting Maputo.

Delegates to the AJC conference from the South African Jewish Board of Deputies handed over money collected from world Jewish communities—particularly in the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand—to the Red Cross in Mozambique.
Gift Annuities

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

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

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

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

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

Name _____________________________________________
Address ___________________________________________
City/State/Zip ______________________________________

Date of Birth (month/day/year) _______________________________
(Suggested minimum age of 60)

Name of Joint Annuitant ____________________________
Date of Birth (month/day/year) _________________________
(Suggested minimum age of 60)

Relationship to First Annuitant ______________________

Phone ( ) ______________________________________
Possible Amount of Annuity $ _______________________
(Minimum annuity amount is $5,000)

Income to be paid:
○ Quarterly   ○ Semiannually
○ Annually
○ I would like a Friends of Israel representative to contact me.

The proceeds will be used to establish a water purification plant in one of the resettlement areas.

About 19 Jews currently live in Mozambique and efforts are being made through the AJC, which is part of the World Jewish Congress, to reorganize this fragmented community.

Out of Mozambique’s total population of 4.5 million, 760,000 have needed assistance. Some 700 people have died as a result of the floods.

Sixty years after Holocaust daughter receives father’s will

IsraelWire—Batya Tiemens, a Jerusalem resident, received a surprising phone call: the caller from Holland told her that she had found the will written by Tiemens’ father, who died 60 years earlier in the Holocaust.

Tiemens, who was born in Holland, recently wrote a book titled Struggle and Victory about her life under the shadow of the events of the Holocaust. The book was publicized in Holland’s newspapers, and the name caught the eye of Marion Tan-Toya. Ten years ago, when Tan-Toya and her husband were renovating their home, they found a double bottom in a closet in the bathroom. Hidden there was a document case with the name Tiemens written on it. Tan-Toya made contact with Batya Tiemens and said that she wanted to visit Israel and personally deliver to Batya the last remnants of her parents and four siblings, who all perished in the Holocaust.

During the emotion-filled meeting between Tan-Toya and her husband with Batya Tiemens and her family, Batya told of the last time she saw her parents and siblings. Her father had been summoned to a work camp and knew that that meant death. Her father, mother, and four younger brothers went into hiding in another part of the city. Batya and her older brother went to hide in a different location. That was the last she saw of her parents and siblings. Later on, she heard that her family had been informed upon and were taken and shot in the street.

When Batya opened the document case, she found many family photographs, documents, and a will by her father, in which he divided his effects between his wife and children.

Hamas asks for free hand to fight Israel

Reuters—The spiritual leader of Hamas called on the Palestinian Authority to allow the militant Islamic group to fight Israel. Sheik Ahmed Yassin urged the self-rule authority to stop security coordination with Israel and the United States which he said had “aborted and undermined” Hamas activities. “The Authority is required to stop coordination against Hamas so it can use the language Israel understands,” Yassin told Reuters. Hamas opposes Israeli-PLO peace accords and has killed scores of Israelis in suicide bombings since the signing of the 1993 Oslo
The days are fast approaching when Jewish people all over the world will come to the synagogues for the holy day of Yom Kippur. Before this great Day of Atonement, many Orthodox people cluster around their rabbis and are afraid even to speak without the permission of these men whom they believe are so righteous and holy.

During this time, many people come to the selichot services, where they recite the penitential prayers asking for forgiveness. So I went to the synagogue to speak to these people. This time I brought with me an article from a well-known newspaper where it was written, in black and white, that for 520 shekels, a certain rabbi would erase all your sins for the past fifty years. The offer was only good through Thursday. So you could sin through Thursday and then pay the rabbi and receive forgiveness.

I asked a rabbi in the presence of his students, “So, what do you think about this?” All the Hasidic (ultra-Orthodox) pupils were looking at the article. Then they asked the rabbi, “Is this according to the Law, or is this rabbi a law-breaker?”

“No,” he said. “This is the only day in the year—on the day of selichot.”

“And what of the other months of the year? Are you free to sin, then you wait for this day of selichot to pray for forgiveness?”

When I spoke with this man, other ears were listening also. I was waiting for this. So another man said, “Are you so sure that you are so clean that you do not come asking God for forgiveness during these special days of selichot? Have a good look at these people. All of them are tzadikim [righteous ones].”

This time I said that it is written in Ecclesiastes 7:20 that there is not a righteous man on earth who does right and never sins. “Let us go into the synagogue yard,” he said, “and we will have a nice conversation.”

So we walked outside. He did not come by himself but brought eight others just as fanatical as he. First they asked me, “Do you think God will forgive our sins in the days of selichot?”

“First,” he said, “tell me who the rabbi is.”

By now all the students were standing around me, and I had a good opportunity to read to them from Isaiah 52:3 about the One who forgives our sins without taking money. He forgives us because of His love for us all. It is the Lord who said He will blot out our transgressions and remember our sins no more (Isa. 43:25). “None of those rabbis,” I said, “have a right to put such a crazy report in the newspaper and make so many spiritually blind people even more blind and bring them to such great confusion.”

“How can you say that our rabbis do not teach truth?” they asked.

I told them their rabbis come like the false prophets spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah. “They are not better than you,” I said. “In fact, they are much worse, because they will bring you to destruction if you listen to such false instruction. I come here to warn you. As it is written in Jeremiah, “I have heard what the prophets said, who prophesy lies in my name, . . . Yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, Who think to cause my people to forget my name” (23:25–27).

“You are not one of us,” they said. “I do not even want to be one of you,” I answered, “because you worship false teachers and not God. Do you pray every day?” I asked.

All of them answered yes. I told them it is written in Deuteronomy that we are to fear the Lord and serve Him only. “So open your eyes and look whom you are serving. You are superstitious and spend most of your lives reading the fictitious stories of rabbis. How many of you have read Isaiah chapter 53? Probably not one of you!”

Then I slowly approached an older man who was busy praying. I asked him, “Do you pray this way every day?”

“No,” he said. “This is the only day in the year—on the day of selichot.”

And what of the other months of the year? Are you free to sin, then you wait for this day of selichot to pray for forgiveness?”

When I spoke with this man, other ears were listening also. I was waiting for this. So another man said, “Are you so sure that you are so clean that you do not come asking God for forgiveness during these special days of selichot? Have a good look at these people. All of them are tzadikim [righteous ones].”

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This time I said that it is written in Ecclesiastes 7:20 that there is not a righteous man on earth who does right and never sins.
God, I told them, is ready to forgive our sins every day if we will come to Him with all our hearts, our souls, and our strength, as it is written in Deuteronomy 6:5. Jeremiah 31:34 says, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." And this is not written only for the month of Elul and the first day of Tishri.

Then they asked me to which rabbi I belong. I told them I never put my trust in rabbis. As it is written in Psalm 118:8-9, "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes." They began to look at me very oddly. This was what I had been waiting for.

"Tell me," they asked, "who is your God?"

"How many Gods do we have?" I asked.

"As I read to you before from Deuteronomy 6:4, 'The Lord our God, the Lord is One' [Masoretic Text]. And in Him I believe."

"But you do not look like one of us," they said.

"The difference between us is that I believe in God according to the Bible not like you, who follow the explanations of your rabbis. You are living in uncertainty. But if you will turn back to the Lord as our great King David did, with all his heart, He will forgive you. David did not look on the calendar to see if it was the month of Elul or another month. He opened his heart before God and said, 'Unto thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee' [Ps. 25:1-2]. And this was not written in the book of selichot. So, also, do I believe in the God of mercy, this One who suffered for our transgressions."

So they said, "Tell us how God suffered. Have you the answer?"

"This is written in the Bible," I said. "I will read it for you. For me it is permitted to read this because I put my trust in God. But for you it is forbidden because you put your trust in man." (The rabbis forbid the reading of Isaiah 53.) And all eight of them focused their eyes, like a big lantern, on my Bible and read Isaiah 53 and wanted to know how I came to believe in Yeshua Hamashiach.