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ABOUT THE COVER
In this issue of Israel My Glory, our outstanding authors deal with contemporary issues in Israel and the Middle East. Unfortunately, the current media climate reflects, in large measure, liberal, secular ideologies that are often at odds with the facts in the region. It is, therefore, imperative that Bible believers be exposed to developments through the grid of sound, biblical, prophetic revelation. Our cover photograph of Tel Aviv, by brilliant Israeli photographer Hanan Isachar, reminds us of the spectacular future yet in store for God’s land and His

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PEACE–PRESENT AND PROMISED

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Lk. 2:13–14).

The place and events touch Christians and Jewish people and, in a way, bind the two in a yet-to-be-realized quest for peace. Bethlehem and the adjacent shepherds’ fields saw and heard the stunning announcement: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:11).

For those Jewish keepers of the sheep, it was as the Scripture had said it would be:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Mic. 5:2).

For Christians, little Bethlehem became the symbolic embodiment of the peace promised in the Messiah and, for 2,000 years, endured as a home and haven for Christian Arabs.

At this time of year, although expressed in differing commemorations, Jews and Christians share a season of celebration. For Jewry, it is the occasion to commemorate the nation’s deliverance from the tyranny of the infamous archetype of the Antichrist, Antiochus Epiphanes. That deliverance brought peace once again to the ravished nation. For Christians, it is the season to celebrate the birth of the Christ and the peace He brings to believers the world over.

As has been the case so often in the past, the blood of innocent Jewish people has flowed in the streets of Israeli villages and major population centers. And though the dream of peace is not dead, it seems more an unattainable longing than a reality.

Today, if you survey the scene from a purely human point of view, the words expressed in the familiar Christmas carol “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” might seem more appropriate than the inspiring words of Scripture or ancient history:

For hate is strong, and mocks the song Of peace on earth, goodwill to men.

Bethlehem is no longer a quiet little town with arms extended to an endless stream of buses filled with Christian pilgrims from around the world. It is a Muslim enclave that has become a war zone and has caused the majority of Christian Arabs to flee their homes and businesses. For many bitter months, Jerusalem and the Holy Land have been under siege and brutal attack by forces bent on the destruction of the State of Israel and its people. As has been the case so often in the past, the blood of innocent Jewish people has flowed in the streets of Israeli villages and major population centers. And though the dream of peace is not dead, it seems more an unattainable longing than a reality.

Leaders of the Western world pursue frustrating and futile efforts in a quest for peace that is never fully achieved. Agreements, solemnly signed and duly photographed for public consumption, seem made solely to be broken. Appeasement and concessions to tyrants, terrorists, and other such emissaries of the dregs of humanity only encourage more mayhem,
death, and devastation. Yes, from a strictly human, horizontal perspective, “hate is strong” and appears to mock our cheerful songs of the season hailing peace, deliverance, and goodwill. But, thankfully, this is not the final chapter. It is, in fact, an obvious prelude to better days and the entrance of real and lasting peace.

The theme that should dominate the season is not despair and cynicism. What we are witnessing in ever intensifying ways only verifies what God has warned us of all along. Fallen man, left to his own devices, is completely incapable of creating and maintaining orderly societies devoid of greed, hatred, and a lust for power at the expense of the innocent. No, such an appraisal of the obvious should not cause us to abandon hope. Rather, it should cause us once again to turn our eyes toward Bethlehem and listen carefully to what reverberated from the heavens that night.

An angelic herald announced that what was occurring in David’s city brought “good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people” (Lk. 2:10); and then he gave the reason why:

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk. 2:11).

With the coming of this Savior and Lord, Jehovah would accomplish a second phase of His Great Design:

“And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Lk. 1:33).

A Savior and a King. That was and is the essence of Bethlehem. It is why we keep looking back and singing our songs of joy, peace, and expectation. We do well to note that there was no announcement concerning the timing of the total fulfillment of these promises. That information rests in higher hands than ours. What we do possess, by faith in the Messiah, is the presence of perfect inner peace that is the harbinger of the final peace to be achieved when He returns to mount His throne.

Did you know there’s a very special way you can express your condolences, thanks, or respect for someone? For only $10 per tree, you can have trees planted in The Friends of Israel Forest in Jerusalem. You’ll receive a beautiful certificate that you can send as a tangible expression of your gift. Won’t you take this opportunity to provide a living memorial for a family member, friend, or associate? You may even wish to plant one or more trees in someone’s honor or on your own behalf. It is a thoughtful and meaningful way to say “I care,” and you will share in helping to make the desert of Israel bloom.

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God established to bring blessing to the entire world was to pass from Abraham to Isaac, then on to his posterity, the Jewish people:

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

Thus we Christians have scrupulously followed the history of the descendants of Abraham and Isaac with fidelity and unbridled fondness because it was through their seed that the Lord moved toward us in grace and mercy.

For Jewish people, the covenant brought scores of irrevocable promises—promises of a land, a people, a King, and ultimately a Kingdom that will encompass the earth with an era of millennial bliss that has never been experienced on this planet.

And so, during the long pilgrimage of Isaac’s seed across the centuries, true believers have glori ed in the Jewish people’s triumphs, marveling at the precision of prophetic fulfillment and divine preservation. And when Israel anguished in the caldron of suffering, we wept as Rachel wept for her children millennia ago.

*And she went, and sat down apart from him a good way off, as it were a bowshot; for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat apart from him, and lifted up her voice, and wept* (Gen. 21:16).

*The woman was, of course, Hagar. The child was Ishmael. Hagar was the handmaid of Sarah, Abraham’s wife. We often speak of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac. For Christians and Jewish people, the affinity for this family is well understood. The Bible makes it emphatically clear that the covenant*
At the same time, particularly when such trauma now grips the Middle East, we must wonder, Who weeps for Hagar’s children? The 21st chapter of the book of Genesis is extremely enlightening because, for all that we witness in God’s aligning the future course of world history with the heirs of Isaac, there is another story. It is one that unveils a magnificent portrait of a caring God who extends grace and mercy in the midst of trial and encodes the history of another people.

It begins, as is so often the case, with well-meaning individuals trying to assist the Lord by moving His program along when He didn’t seem to be proceeding at a pace quite to their liking. Hagar seemed, to Sarah, to be the answer to her own barrenness and Abraham’s need of an heir. The result of Abraham’s union with Hagar was Ishmael (“God will hear”). After Isaac came on the scene, however, there was rivalry between the boys; and Hagar and her son received their eviction notice:

Wherefore she [Sarah] said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac (21:10).

With no more than a container of water and a portion of bread, Hagar was sent into the wilderness. Seeing their supply of water exhausted and believing Ishmael was going to perish, she sat, as we found her, weeping for her son. And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation (21:17–18).

Ishmael was given a name with promise (“God will hear”); that promise was fulfilled when God heard the boy’s cry. The Lord’s response was to provide a well of water, a place of shelter, and a divine pledge: Ishmael would live, and God would make him a great nation. As surely as God has kept the promises He made endured, so did the animosity between the brothers’ seeds. As we witness every day, the hostilities seem to multiply in intensity.

### A Parting of the Ways

In A.D. 610 a camel driver named Muhammad secretly began to preach a new religion in Mecca in Arabia. His god was the astral tribal god of the Bedouin Arabs—Allah. What became his holy book, the Quran, proclaimed the superiority of the Islamic faith and declared Judaism and Christianity “infidel” religions. Although it recognized the Jews as “the people of the Book,” Islam always made them subservient to the Muslim religion. The Quran endorsed conquest by the sword, and soon the new religion swept across the Arab world and far beyond in a war designed to subjugate the “infidels.”

Thus Judaism, Christianity, and Islam truly took very different courses. The result was centuries of bloodshed and hostility that stand as some of the darkest periods in the history of the world.

Although the Arabs never designated Jerusalem as a seat of Muslim authority or laid claim to an Arab state in what came to be known as Palestine, the establishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948 sent shock waves throughout the Arab world. The Jews were back in their ancestral land, creating an intolerable situation for Muslims, who had claimed the area for Allah and Islam. For Muslims the world over, the answer was annihilate Israel. Their obsession became to drive the Jews into the sea. It sounded like a simple proposition. After all, these were the emaciated children of the Holocaust, hardly formidable opponents.
That Palestinians are fleeing for their lives. Requests for Palestinian visas were up 51 percent for the first six months of this year, compared to 35 percent for the same period a year ago. The little town of Bethlehem, an Arab-Christian community until Arafat took over, is now Muslim. Another prime example of this situation is the Christian-Arab village of Beit Jalla, which has become a post for Arafat’s terrorists to fire into the Jewish neighborhood of Gilo. An Arab Christian from Beit Jalla, who is leaving the region with his family, said more than 30 percent of Beit Jalla’s Christians have fled their homes since Palestinian gunmen have repeatedly entered the village to fire on Gilo.

But what of those left behind? Since Israelis have been targeting known terrorists, Arafat’s people have initiated a reign of terror against Palestinian Arabs marked as “collaborators.” Exactly what does this mean?

It is an old story with Arafat and his cohorts. For the past 20 years, Palestinians suspected of considering selling land to Israelis have been summarily executed, some in the most gruesome ways on the streets of Palestinian towns. Unfortunately, the Western media have ignored this reality as well as the fact that today Palestinian Arabs are being rounded up and killed as suspected “collaborators.”

After Israel recently targeted two Hamas terrorists—men who had killed and maimed hundreds of innocent civilians and who were planning more such attacks—Arafat’s forces rounded up scores of people and, after 10-minute trials with no opportunity of appeal, began executing them. Furthermore, roving bands of Arafat’s Fatah henchmen began killing anyone they suspected of collaboration. Of course, none of these facts were found worthy of international news coverage.

As believers, we have a mandate to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and stand with the Jewish people. And so we do. But let us not forget that Hagar’s children suffer too. And as we weep for Rachel’s children, let us remember our obligation to pray for and reach out to Hagar’s children. We cannot help but remember the words of Genesis. When speaking of the basic nature of Ishmael and his children, the Bible says, And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren (16:12).

That prophecy is the legacy of the sons of Ishmael. Who should weep for them the most? The answer is obvious: believers—who care for the souls of men.
by David Dolan

commerce? Such may be the stuff of storybooks and screenplays, but not of real life. And yet it is real. Indeed, it is Israel.

Yet the Jewish return to the Promised Land has hardly been easy. Israel was reborn in 1948 amid the billowing flames of war. And the world’s only Jewish state has experienced the trauma of war every decade since then: the Suez Canal conflict of 1956; the intense Six-Day War of 1967; the surprise 1973 Yom Kippur Arab attack; the Israeli incursion into Lebanon in 1982; and finally, Saddam Hussein’s 1991 Scud attacks on Tel Aviv and other urban centers.

Today we are barely into the new decade (and millennium), but already a new war looms on the horizon. Soon after the newest Palestinian uprising began in September 2000, various Arab states reduced or entirely severed fledgling diplomatic ties with beleaguered Israel. Massive anti-Israel demonstrations swept Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Amman, Fez, and other Arab cities. The dank smell of war once again scented Middle Eastern skies.

Yet only a couple of years earlier, most political analysts and world leaders spoke of an imminent and inevitable peace taking hold in the region. The Arab world’s main diplomatic and military backer—the Soviet Union—was no more, leaving Israel’s close ally, America, sitting
alone atop the new world order. Working closely with European leaders, with full support from the humbled Kremlin, U.S. President Bill Clinton happily embraced the Oslo peace talks taking place between Israeli and Palestinian leaders in Norway. The talks led to the preliminary Oslo peace accord signed on the White House lawn in September 1993.

The agreement surprised most Israelis and Palestinians. They had no inkling of the secret negotiations. Among the most surprised were all but a handful of Israeli cabinet members who deliberately had been kept in the dark. The most disturbing aspect to many Israelis was the apparent resuscitation of PLO leader Yasser Arafat, whose terrorist group had attacked hundreds of Israeli targets for almost three decades. Arafat seemed on the verge of being forced into the political wilderness when Israeli leaders Shimon Peres and Yossi Beilen pulled him into the center of the peace process, arguing that no accord could succeed without him.

When details of the preliminary Oslo accord surfaced, the biggest shock to most Israelis was that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had agreed to negotiate the final status of Jerusalem with Arafat. Former President Jimmy Carter had successfully jettisoned the explosive issue of Jerusalem at the 1978 Camp David peace talks between Egypt and Israel. It seemed safely fixed in orbit until the Oslo pact was signed in Washington.

**Dashed Hopes**

With world leaders hailing Oslo as a major breakthrough, many Israelis dared to hope that the agreement finally signaled the end of the country’s long and difficult quest for peace. If a bitter foe like Arafat could sign a peace agreement, then other Arab leaders eventually would follow, they thought. These optimistic assessments seemed warranted when Jordan’s King Hussein eagerly jumped on the peace train just one year later in 1994. Most Israeli political analysts said the Jewish state’s remaining enemies, especially Syria, now would be forced to leap on board as well, since the peace train was virtually unstoppable. And even if Saddam Hussein of Iraq and several others remained as holdouts, they would become insignificant bystanders as the train rushed inevitably forward.

But Syria did not jump on board. Its crafty dictator, Hafez al-Assad, rebuffed the proposals Clinton and European officials put forward. Assad missed an opportunity to get back most, if not all, of the Golan Heights and missed it again under Rabin’s successor, Shimon Peres. When the more reticent Benjamin Netanyahu was elected prime minister in May 1996, Assad smugly announced that there was no use even trying to make peace with Israel. Indeed, Netanyahu was far less willing to give back the strategic Golan plateau that rises above the Sea of Galilee and northern Galilee panhandle and which supplies much of Israel’s vital fresh water. Still, Netanyahu backed the continuing clandestine American attempts to bridge the gaps dividing Middle East foes.

In the wake of his exposed affair with a White House intern, a disgraced Bill Clinton was more eager than ever to seal a final peace deal. But Netanyahu was not ready to negotiate with Arafat until the Palestinian leader anted up for earlier Israeli land concessions that had given him control of around 90 percent of the Gaza Strip and 40 percent of Judea and Samaria, the former West Bank annexed by Jordan in 1950.

Netanyahu knew Arafat was violating important Oslo commitments. Arafat even had twice the armed security personnel permitted under the preliminary peace pact, and many were members of illegal paramilitary forces loosely connected to Arafat’s PLO Fatah faction. Another significant violation Netanyahu emphasized was Arafat’s failure to curb the activities of militant anti-Oslo Muslim groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

For most Israelis, the worst Palestinian Oslo violation was the continued terrorist attacks on hapless Jewish civilians. Arafat and his PLO colleagues had sworn in writing that they recognized Israel’s right to exist within secure borders in the mostly Muslim Middle East and had pledged to fight terror by all means possible.

Few analysts doubted that Netanyahu’s electoral victory was due mainly to the intense wave of Islamic terror attacks in early 1996 that left scores of Israelis dead and wounded. Arafat seemed incapable of, or at least uninterested in, halting the carnage. Netanyahu pointed out that Israel had relinquished tangible assets—land—in exchange for Palestinian promises of peace. That land was not some far-off island or a mere sliver of a vast continental empire. It was territory located just a couple miles from Israel’s capital city, Jerusalem, and a few miles east of the Israeli coastal towns of Netanya, Tel Aviv, Kfar Sava, Hadera, and other urban centers.

Until Arafat kept his end of the bargain and stopped the violent Islamic assaults, Netanyahu refused to hand over any more land to the Palestinian Authority. Under
intense international (especially American) pressure, Netanyahu nonetheless agreed to withdraw his troops from most of the Judean town of Hebron, Judaism’s second holiest site on earth. The concession shocked many of Netanyahu’s coalition partners, who ultimately caused the early demise of his government. They warned that armed Palestinians would use the evacuated hills to launch armed attacks on the small Jewish community in the town below—a warning that came true during the newest uprising.

Benjamin Netanyahu was swept out of office prematurely by Ehud Barak’s landslide victory of May 1999. Ironically, Barak won largely due to his opponent's success in partially quelling the terrorist violence that had plagued the previous Peres and Rabin governments. Actually, the attacks did not subside because Netanyahu took special steps to suppress them but because the Islamic militants and their Iranian and Iraqi backers viewed the peace process they were trying to destroy as dead anyway under Netanyahu.

With the original Oslo architects now back in office, the peace train got rolling again. Lulled to sleep by the relative calm under Netanyahu’s rule, a majority of Israelis were again willing to take serious risks in exchange for Arafat’s promises of peace. They supported Barak’s efforts to negotiate a final-status peace accord with the aging PLO chairman, even when Barak explained it would mean making “painful concessions” to the Palestinians. These probably were to include evacuating the strategic Jordan Valley; abandoning most Israeli settlements in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip; and even handing over control of parts of Jerusalem to Arafat.

A majority of Israelis also backed Barak’s negotiations with Syria (conducted personally by Bill Clinton) in late 1999 and early 2000, even giving their full, if excruciating, support to the fact that most, if not all, of the beloved Golan Heights would have to be returned to Syrian control. Indeed, Barak offered to give back to Assad all of the high ground over a period of several years, excluding a vital strip along the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee that Syrian troops captured from Israel during skirmishes before 1967. The Syrian strongman, who would die a few months later, said no to the generous offer, wanting no part of Barak’s deal unless he got back his ill-gotten lakefront property.

### Al-Aqsa Uprising

With Barak in tow, an astonished Bill Clinton then turned his negotiating attention to the languishing “Palestinian peace track.” He thought he had secured a real breakthrough when the Israeli leader agreed to meet virtually all of Arafat’s demands at a Camp David summit in July 2000. Barak handed the Palestinians full control of the Gaza Strip and over 95 percent of Judea and Samaria, uprooting most Jewish communities but annexing those in three settlement blocks located just south and east of Jerusalem and around the town of Ariel, northeast of Tel Aviv. Israel also agreed to make up the missing five percent by ceding an equal amount of territory adjacent to Arafat’s zones. Most amazing to many Israelis, the Palestinian leader was to receive full administrative control over Arabs living in eastern Jerusalem and over much of the historic, walled Old City.

To the complete chagrin of Clinton and Barak, Arafat turned down the far-reaching offer, demanding that all Jewish settlements be evacuated and that Palestinian refugees and their offspring be allowed to return to ancestral homes inside Israel proper. Barak rejected the latter demand as a thinly veiled attempt to destroy Israel from within by flooding it with millions of Arabs. He and Clinton said that Israel and the United States were willing to help Arafat absorb the refugees in his emerging state, but the Palestinian leader flatly rejected the offer.

The resulting stalemate quickly turned into the new Palestinian uprising. It was named the Al-Aqsa Intifada, revealing that its main goal is to fulfill Arafat’s frequent pledge to make the revered Temple Mount in “holy Jerusalem” the center of the emerging Palestinian state, “whether Israel likes it or not.”

After months of bitter clashes with Israeli forces that left hundreds of Palestinians dead, Arafat seems no closer to achieving by violence the goal he let slip through his fingers at Camp David. Following a series of hideous suicide terrorist attacks, including two horrendous slaughters (one in Tel Aviv in June and the other in Jerusalem in August), the tense Middle East seems once more headed for war. The only comfort for many conflict-weary Israelis is the certain knowledge that the God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps and that He will continue to watch over and build up His special ingathered nation, no matter what Muslim and world leaders say or do.

David Dolan is a Christian author and journalist living in Israel.
On September 28, 2000, Israeli leader Ariel Sharon inspected the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Subsequently, a Palestinian uprising, the Al-Aqsa Intifada, erupted. The Palestinian Authority (PA)—the acknowledged leadership of the Palestinian people—accused Sharon of incitement and blamed him for the violence. However, an international committee headed by former U.S. Senator George Mitchell determined that “the Sharon visit did not cause the ‘Al-Aqsa Intifada.’” In fact, the evidence shows quite the contrary: The PA had planned for some time to use an intifada as part of its political strategy.

Accusing Israel of causing the intifada while its leaders instigated it themselves is just one example of the Palestinian Authority’s overriding strategy—duplicitity. Its goal, as declared in the Palestinian National Charter, is nothing less than the total destruction of the State of Israel.

PROMISES: It Agrees to Terms, Then Reneges

(1) The PA has pledged itself to the process of peace, while enlisting in war.

In a 1995 agreement, PA President Yasser Arafat concurred that no other armed forces would operate in the West Bank and Gaza Strip “except for the Palestinian Police and the Israeli military forces.” Yet Arafat’s political party, Fatah, has its own security militia, the Tanzim, which has been responsible for organizing and conducting armed conflict with Israeli forces.

The same agreement specified the total number of Palestinian Police allowed—30,000—and the types of weapons they were permitted to carry—mostly small arms. However, the PA openly reported it has close to 40,000 policemen, excluding the Tanzim and other militia. And it is known the Palestinian Police possess such illegal armaments as grenades, antitank missiles, antiaircraft missiles, mortars, mines, and high...
According to the same agreement, the Palestinian Police were to protect Jewish holy sites located in Palestinian-controlled areas. Yet shortly after the commencement of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the Palestinian Police did little to stop the destruction of Joseph’s Tomb in the town of Nablus or that of the Shalom Al Yisrael Synagogue in Jericho.

Yasser Arafat later affirmed, “We are for a just, full and comprehensive peace in our region and on all Arab tracks.” Yet, from the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada to when he made that assertion, there were a total of 5,289 violent Palestinian attacks against Jewish targets in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip (not counting rock throwing)—an average of 22 per day.

Violence has long been a key component of Palestinian methodology. The Palestinian National Charter refers to an “armed” struggle or revolution nine times. Specifically, article nine pronounces, “Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine and is therefore a strategy and not a tactic.”

Arafat may have renounced terrorism in a 1993 letter to Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and he may have received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994; but his pledge to peace hardly seems sincere. (1)

Violence has long been a key component of Palestinian methodology. The Palestinian National Charter refers to an “armed” struggle or revolution nine times. Specifically, article nine pronounces, “Armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine and is therefore a strategy and not a tactic.”

(3) The PA has pledged to rectify the Palestinian National Charter but always defers action on the matter.

Arafat promised Israeli leader Yitzhak Rabin, “Those articles of the Palestinian Covenant which deny Israel’s right to exist, and the provisions of the Covenant which are inconsistent with the commitments of this letter are now inoperative and no longer valid.” It was also promised, and reiterated in later agreements, that the Palestinian National Council would take action to amend the charter. In 1996 the Council overwhelmingly voted to “amend the articles in the National charter” and “to draft a new charter.” To date, however, no new charter has been approved. The old charter, which calls for violence and the destruction of Israel, still defines the core identity of Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority.

In the book Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Westerners (Intercultural Press), Margaret K. Nydell observes, “In the Arab culture, an oral promise has its own value as a response. If an action does not follow, the other person [the one making the promise] cannot be held entirely responsible for a ‘failure.’”

It seems the Palestinian Authority often makes use of such a philosophy regarding its unkept promises to Israel.

**PROPAGANDA: It Plays the Victim While Being the Villain**

The PA misinforms the news media in order to appear as freedom-loving, oppressed underdogs while at the same time perpetuating its conflict with Israel.

(1) The PA disseminates conflicting and exaggerated figures of Palestinian injuries.

On May 26, 2001, Arafat announced that more than 28,000 Palestinians were wounded from “Israeli aggression” during the intifada. However, over the same period, the PA’s own Ministry of Health recorded 14,731 wounded, a difference of more than 13,000.

(2) The PA distorts facts.

When 12-year-old Mohammed Al-Durreh tragically was killed and his father injured in crossfire between Israeli and Palestinian security forces, the PA quickly accused the Israelis of intentional, cold-blooded murder even though no one yet knew whether Israeli or Palestinian bullets had killed the boy. When Palestinian media dispersed a Reuters photograph showing a terrified, Palestinian child who had wet his pants while being arrested by Israeli soldiers,
they withheld another Reuters photograph, taken just minutes earlier, of the same boy throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers.39

When three Palestinian women accidentally were killed by an Israeli tank shell, the PA reported they had been “murdered by the Israeli occupation army.”40 They did not report, however, that the Palestinians previously had initiated a gun battle that lasted more than an hour, during which the tank shell was fired.41

In its attempt to garner international support, the PA usually fails to explain why an event took place. It says only that it did and that Palestinian people were hurt. Nor does the PA distinguish between motive and effect (e.g., equating accidental deaths with deliberate homicide) or between forms of activity (e.g., equating Israeli settlement with acts of violence).42 Such deliberate distortion effectively gives the impression that Israeli forces purposefully target innocent civilians.43 Nothing could be further from the truth.

(3) The PA spreads blatant lies.

Arafat accused Israel of using “depleted uranium, poison gases and radioactive material” against Palestinians,44 a charge levied with no proof and one the Israeli government strongly denied.45

(4) The PA shamelessly abuses its own children for propaganda fodder.

Television news media portray the stone-throwing children of the Palestinians as “Davids” and Israel’s army as “Goliath.” What the news media usually do not show, however, are the Palestinian Police who are firing from behind and in the midst of the children, using them as cover.46 The PA is fully aware it is endangering the children; yet it values the political points scored when the world sees another injured child or another funeral.

We could ask, Why are the children there in the first place? The answer is that parents,47 teachers,48 government officials,49 and other adult role models often encourage the children to enter the fray, praising them if injured, bestowing martyrdom if killed.50 Palestinian children also watch a Sesame Street-like children’s club where puppets lead them in songs that speak of becoming suicide bombers.51 Palestinian textbooks instruct children to sacrifice their lives for the national resistance movement.52 Palestinian children are sent to summer camps where they are trained for armed conflict.53 As NBC News reported, television commercials beckon children to “drop their toys, pick up rocks, and do battle with Israel.”54 There is even a commercial of Mohammed Al-Durreh, shown in paradise, “urging other children to ‘follow him.’”55

Despite the fact the PA agreed to abstain from incitement,56 Palestinian children are stoked with fear and hatred. They are told it is Israeli policy to “hunt down children and kill them.”57 In school they “ask Allah to destroy the Jews.”58 The PA’s highest-ranking cleric preaches that “the Muslim loves death and martyrdom.”59

One well-known PA member, Hanan Ashrawi, wrote a feigned letter from Ariel Sharon to the Palestinian people. “YOU are my target,” it said. “You will be made to suffer; and you shall pay for the original crime of being a Palestinian. . . . We [Israelis] . . . should be free to inflict any type of pain and brutality on you, and it should be your lot to lie down and die quietly.”60 With such inducement to hate, it is no wonder Palestinian polls show 76 percent of adults61 and 90 percent of youth62 support suicide bombings.

Not all Palestinian parents want their children to grow up to become martyrs. One Palestinian women’s group sent a letter of protest to Arafat, demanding that his police “stop sending innocent children to their death.”63 Most parents, however, do not object for fear of reprisals and being labeled as traitors.64

Since a principle of the Palestinian Vision for Health Development is to “support national programs aimed at improving the status of the Palestinian women and children,”65 teaching them not to hate would seem a natural place to start. Keeping them out of harm’s way would seem a natural second.

Margaret K. Nydell observed, “An Arab will rarely admit to an error openly if it will cause him to lose face. To Arabs, honor is more important than facts.”66

If that is true, then the aspiration for honor may shed light on why the PA is so duplicitous and manufactures such blatant propaganda.

Yasser Arafat and the PA say they want peace, but they make war. They say they keep their word, but they break their signed agreements. They say they believe in democracy, but they practice despotism. They say they are victims of Israeli oppression, but they instigate most of it themselves.

They exemplify the personage of Psalm 55:21: “The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords.” But God is not mocked. “For whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

Bruce Scott is a field representative with The Friends of Israel in New Hope, Minnesota.
While Haifa pays, Tel Aviv plays, but Jerusalem prays.

It is an old ditty spoken of the three largest cities in Israel, but one that reflects the serious and growing nature of an internal, religious struggle that is eating at the very vitals of Israeli society. Many secular Israelis call it a “culture war.” But at stake is Israel’s future.

The struggle is a political one that divides even the secular community into battling camps that are waging ideological war over how best to manifest their differing visions of what it means to be a Zionist in modern Israel. Today the nation faces a crisis within itself that may, in the end, be even more serious than the threat from its Arab neighbors.

For years, in Jerusalem in particular, the Orthodox—the more religious segment of the Israeli population—have exercised their religious-political muscles by barricading their neighborhoods to traffic on the Sabbath. In the early 1980s, they expanded their efforts bystoning cars that drove to a secular suburb named Ramot on that holy seventh day.

But the Orthodox are concerned with more than just the Sabbath. In the last two decades, Israeli archaeologists have had to contend with religious zealots who stone their workers for uncovering human bones that the Orthodox believe cannot be “defiled” by being disturbed. The excavator of the City of David, Yigal Shiloh, was seriously injured by such a stone, thrown by one of these “archaeology police.” Sometimes these religious demonstrators uphold commendable, moral causes; but they use questionable and destructive methods. A few years ago, zealots torched a large number of Jerusalem bus stops because the walls displayed advertisements for swimwear worn by scantily clad models.

Not all violence and mayhem, however, come from the religious sector. Orthodox worshipers arriving...
remarkable, although slow, transformation has taken place. The Orthodox have begun to amass political power while the secular politicians are trying to wrest marriage and conversions away from the Orthodox.

Probably fewer than 25 percent of all Israelis could be called religious in the Orthodox sense. Even within the religious camp, some people are far more extreme than others. The secular majority argues that, while it is pushing for pluralism, the ultra-Orthodox are trying to impose their will on everyone.

Insightful observers of the Israeli scene, however, realize that the issue involves more than religion. It involves political power at that. How is it that a distinct minority can wield such a forceful influence in the life of a nation? The answer lies in the nature of the Israeli political system.

Israel is made up of a mosaic of political parties—at least a dozen by current count, with new ones appearing periodically and others dissolving and merging. No single party ever has won the majority of the Israeli popular vote. Therefore, every administration since the state began has needed to form a coalition government. This means the main party (Labor or Likud) that wins the most votes must assemble a coalition with other smaller parties to secure a majority of the 120 seats in the Knesset (Parliament), so a government can be formed. The Labor coalition ruled the country from 1949 to 1977, when Menachem Begin’s Likud coalition took over for the first time. Alternations of those two coalitions have ruled since, with Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud coalition in power for several years until dethroned by Ehud Barak’s Labor coalition in 2000, which, in turn, was replaced by Ariel Sharon’s Likud coalition in 2001. Each of these coalitions depended on one or more small religious parties for its power. Therefore, a minor party may wield much more influence than warranted by its small number of constituents or its few members in the Knesset.

Presently, three main religious parties hold seats in the Knesset—the National Religious Party, the Shas, and United Torah Judaism. Because no administration can afford to alienate its religious parties, Israel’s secular majority is unable to pass laws opposed by the minority.
Perhaps no better illustration of this situation can be found than when Menachem Begin’s government almost toppled in the late 1970s over the issue of Israel’s airline, El Al, flying on the Sabbath. For years the airline had done just that, to the ineffective disapproval of the religious. But the religious knew their support was so essential to Begin’s administration that they threatened to bolt from the coalition until the Likud agreed to back a no-Sabbath flying policy in the 1981 elections. The new policy nearly bankrupted the airline, which had to be rescued by massive national subsidies. Today El Al does not depart or land on the Sabbath, to the delight of the Orthodox and the airline’s competition, but to the frustration of nearly everyone else.

The divisions between religious and secular Israelis are not the only conflicts in Israeli society. Secular Israelis often oppose each other virulently regarding such issues as how best to wage the continuing struggle against those Arabs who resent even the least bit of Israeli control over their lives. In the last election, the two candidates, Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon, both very secular in their religious views and commitments, differed widely concerning how the modern state should insure its survival. Barak, true to his Labor associations, followed a policy of appeasement and restraint. He believed fervently that returning land to the Arabs was the only way to achieve a lasting peace (as did the late Yitzhak Rabin, also of the Labor party). Sharon, however, true to his Likud loyalties, has advocated a more hard-line approach of no Arab sovereignty over Jerusalem and very little, if any, further return of hard-won land to the Palestinians.

These ideological disagreements lie deep within the fabric of Israeli society. A historical survey documents them thoroughly in a book by noted Israeli political scientist Ehud Sprinzak titled Brother Against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from the Altalena to the Rabin Assassination (The Free Press).

Sprinzak documents the famous feud between Menachem Begin and David Ben-Gurion. (Begin never spoke publicly with Ben-Gurion again after Ben-Gurion’s order to sink the Irgun ship, Altalena, in June 1949—a ship Begin was aboard at the time!) Sprinzak also traces how that ideological conflict has continued for more than 50 years and how the quarreling Israelis only unite when their common enemies—such as the Arab countries or Palestinian Authority—force them to do so.

The most recent issue dividing Israelis has been the vexing matter of settlers in the area of biblical Judea and Samaria, commonly called the West Bank. These Jewish settlers, most of whom are religious, today number almost 200,000. Israelis who favor a Jewish presence in towns and settlements near Nablus, Hebron, Bethlehem, and Ramallah view the settlers as a strategically placed buffer between Israel and the large, nearby Arab cities. Israelis who oppose the settlers being there see them as an impediment to peace, saying they constitute a provocative element that serves as a thorn in the Arab side.

The most heated debates in the Knesset do not arise over issues of “sacred” versus “secular”—as real and serious as these matters are. The most hostile exchanges come over how to deal with the Arabs who desire complete independence from Israeli control.

In one sense, the Palestinians’ so-called Al-Aqsa Intifada, launched in September 2000, has galvanized some of these divisions. On the other hand, it has served to further polarize politicians regarding how firmly Israel should respond to the Arab violence.

For an outsider like me who loves Israel, such internal conflicts seem grievous. On the other hand, I have lived long enough to see the State of Israel survive not only the external attacks of its enemies but the political attacks from within as well. Israel will survive somehow, even in spite of itself.

A “Dry Bones” cartoon that once ran in The Jerusalem Post probably epitomizes Israel’s uncanny ability to rise above its internal strife, even though it sometimes seems the nation again has sabotaged itself. Two angels are looking down from heaven to Earth, when one of them remarks, “Oh, my, can you believe what the children of Israel have gotten themselves into now?” The other angel responds, “I wonder how He is going to get them out of this!”

God undoubtedly has protected and provided for little Israel more often than the nation realizes. If the Lord tarries and internal struggles persist, it will be interesting to see what type of state Israel will be 50 years from now. Will it be a nation where respect for the Sabbath is legislated and Jewish law adopted or a live-and-let-live state of civil laws for Jewish people of all persuasions? And which group’s philosophy will prevail in the Arab-Israeli struggle? Time will tell.

William C. Varner is a professor of Old Testament at The Master’s College, Santa Clarita, California.
SYRIA: Certain Foe, Uncertain Future

Its Varied History

The Biblical Period. The biblical region of Syria included the land north and east of Israel, reaching into what is known as Mesopotamia. The Hebrew name was Aram, and the people were Arameans. Jacob fled to this area and found his uncle and the women who would become his wives (Gen. 28—31). Years later the kings of Damascus (the capital of Aram) attacked the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The well-known account of Naaman in 2 Kings 5 describes the conversion and healing of a great Syrian (Aramean) general.

During the Babylonian Captivity, Ezekiel described Israel’s future...
kingdom as extending farther to the north than its historical borders, encompassing several Syrian cities (Ezk. 47:15–18). God already had promised the area to the Israelites (Ex. 23:31; Dt. 11:24). The Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks later conquered Syria. Rome subjugated the western part of Syria in 64 B.C. The New Testament describes how Paul was in Damascus and escaped persecution by being lowered over a wall in a basket (Acts 9:22–25). “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,” which was in Syria (Acts 11:26).

The Roman and Islamic Periods. Christianity took root in Syria and flourished after Constantine legalized the religion in the Roman Empire in 313. But the 636 invasion of the Islamic Arabs changed Syria and the Middle East. Islam replaced Christianity as the official religion, and Damascus’ Great Mosque was built on the ruins of the Church of Saint John the Baptist. The land continued under Muslim rule until the Crusades. In 1099 the Crusaders incorporated part of Syria into the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem. The attempt was short lived, for the sultan of Egypt, Saladin, conquered the Crusader’s kingdom around 1180 and returned the entire area to Muslim control. Syria faded from importance and lost its final strength when the Mongols invaded in 1260. Later the Ottoman Turks included Syria in their vast kingdom that arose in 1517 and lasted 400 years.

During the First World War, Turkey joined the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary, which fought against the Allies (Great Britain, France). To gain support against the Turks, the British agreed that, if the Arabs under Turkish domination fought with the Allies, all Arab lands would gain their independence. This promise aided the Allies’ victory, and soon the British and French managed the former Turkish lands (which included Syria) in the Middle East.

The French Period. The League of Nations granted France a temporary mandate in 1920 over the land of Syria and Lebanon. During this time, the modern boundaries were drawn: the northern border with Turkey, the eastern with Iraq, the southern with what is now Jordan and Israel, and the western with Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea. French oversight continued with much Syrian resentment (with much Syrian resentment) until after World War II. France agreed to Syrian independence in 1941, but French influence continued to prevent self-determination. Finally the Syrians asserted themselves, forced the French out, and became a charter member of the United Nations. The recurrence of other nations’ claims to Syria’s land finally stopped—no longer would it be “an imperial doormat.”

The Modern Period. The independent nation of Syria was created in 1946 when the French totally withdrew after their 26-year stay. Now officially called the Syrian Arab Republic, Syria began its rocky road to statehood. Within the first 10 years, numerous governments came and went under at least five military coups. During the mid-1950s, Syria found an ally in the Soviet Union, which promised massive funding for military and civilian projects. Beginning in 1958, Syria formed an alliance with Egypt. This federation, headed by Gamal Abdel Nasser, then president of Egypt, was called the United Arab Republic (UAR). However, after unpopular attempts at socialism, the Syrian army ousted the Egyptians and declared Syrian independence in 1961.

It was then the Baath Party (or the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party) came to power. Again political intrigue and military coups reigned. In 1970 Defense Minister Hafez al-Assad usurped total power and, the next year, was elected president. The people of Syria had experienced 21 military coups from the
time of their country’s independence until Assad’s takeover. His background was Alawite, an offshoot of Islam that both the traditional Sunni and Shiite Muslims view with suspicion. He continued as president, or “dictator,” until his death in 2000. His son Bashar now occupies that office.

About 18 million people live in the land that covers some 70,000 square miles. The two largest cities are Halab (also known as Aleppo, population about 2 million) and the capital city, Damascus (population about 4 million to 6 million). Most Syrians are Arabs, but the largest minorities are Kurds and Armenians. Other ethnicities include Druze (a mystical Muslim offshoot), Turks, Circassians, Assyrians, and Jews. Syria also has about 300,000 Palestinian refugees.

The Syrians are almost exclusively Muslim. The Sunni branch of Islam represents 73 percent of the population, with Shiite, Alawite, and other Muslim factions at 13 percent. Christians (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) account for 10 percent, and Druze represent 3 percent. The tiny Jewish population now numbers about 150 people, down from 4,500 in the 1990s.

### Its Vitriolic Hatred

**As Seen in Wars.** Political dissent in Syria is forbidden. Martial law has been in place since 1963 to stem internal dissent. When Hafez al-Assad ran for his last seven-year term of presidency, he was undefeated—he ran unopposed.

In the eyes of the United States, one word characterizes Syria—terrorism. Syria has been on the U.S. list of sponsors of terrorism since its inception. The U.S. State Department states,

> Concern remains over the continuing presence of terrorist groups in Syria and Syrian-controlled areas of Lebanon, Syria’s human rights record, and Syrian involvement in narcotics activity in Lebanon. Syria’s relations with Western nations were particularly strained in the past decade because of Syrian support for groups involved in international terrorism, including the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, the Palestine Islamic Jihad, the Abu Nidal Organization, [and] Hizballah.²

This last group is an Iranian-backed militia that uses Lebanon’s close border with Israel to stage rocket attacks into Jewish population centers. Recently it captured Israeli soldiers and mocked the peace process and cease-fire agreements.

While terrorism is Syria’s blood sport, another pastime has become an addiction—hatred of Israel. Syria is one of the bitterest enemies of the State of Israel. The two countries have fought in Israel’s three major wars: the War of Independence (1948), the Six-Day War (1967), and the Yom Kippur War (1973). Syria’s loss of the Golan Heights in the Six-Day War remains a thorn in its side. It was from these high mountains near the Sea of Galilee that the Syrians shelled Israeli villages without provocation for 20 years. Elie Cohn, the late master spy for Israel, provided the key to Israel’s victory against Syria. The Golan Heights are considered an indispensable part of Israel’s defense.

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² This refers to the Palestine Islamic Jihad, a militant group supported by Iran. The term “Iranian-backed” reflects the group’s ties to Iran, which has provided financial and logistical support to the group. The group is also known as the Palestine Islamic Jihad and operates in Lebanon and other parts of the Middle East. This group views Israel as a major threat and frequently launches attacks against Israeli targets, including attacks on Israeli settlements during the 2006 Lebanon War. The term “Hizballah” refers to the militant group Hezbollah, which is also supported by Iran and is known for its involvement in various conflicts in the Middle East. The group is active in Lebanon, Syria, and other parts of the region and is considered by Israel and Western governments as a terrorist group. The term “Palestine Islamic Jihad” refers to a militant group based in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that is also supported by Iran and is known for its involvement in various conflicts in the region. The group is active in both territories and is considered by Israel and Western governments as a terrorist group. The term “Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command” refers to a militant group based in Lebanon that is also supported by Iran and is known for its involvement in various conflicts in the region. The group is active in Lebanon and is considered by Israel and Western governments as a terrorist group. The term “Abu Nidal Organization” refers to a militant group based in Lebanon that is also supported by Iran and is known for its involvement in various conflicts in the region. The group is active in Lebanon and is considered by Israel and Western governments as a terrorist group.
A state of war between the countries continues to this day, as illustrated in the U.S. State Department’s warning: “Travelers with Israeli stamps in their passports . . . or cachets from other countries that suggest prior travel to Israel will cause Syrian immigration authorities to refuse the traveler admission to Syria.” This vitriolic hatred for Israel manifests itself in Syria’s outright denial of Israel’s existence. The Syrian press avoids the name Israel and substitutes “the Zionist entity,” “the enemy,” or “occupied Palestine.” Such propaganda displays a desire to avoid even pronouncing the name of Israel and refusing to recognize its right to exist.

As Seen in Peace. As an aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, many Arab countries began peace talks with Israel. These produced the 1993 Oslo agreements that declared peace between Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and Jordan. At the same time, secret talks with Syria were underway in hopes of securing a true peace between Israel and its northern neighbor. (Syria had joined the United States in 1991 to fight Iraq’s Saddam Hussein.)

With the breakdown of the Soviet Union’s support, the clever Assad needed to reposition himself on the world scene. So he turned “peace maker.” However, as a precondition to discussions with Israel, Assad demanded Israel return the Golan Heights captured in 1967. He refused to compromise. Talks between the two countries reached a standstill under Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. But in 1999, Israel’s next prime minister, Ehud Barak, resumed peace talks.

In the eyes of the United States, one word characterizes Syria—terrorism. Syria has been on the U.S. list of sponsors of terrorism since its inception.

However, not even pressure from U.S. President Bill Clinton could revive Assad’s interest in making peace with his most bitter enemy. As one Syrian intellectual said of the situation, “War is suicide, but peace is surrender.” Two months later, in June 2000, Assad died.

Assad’s son Bashar, a London-trained eye doctor, quickly was elected the next president. Observers wonder if he represents hope for peace or a return to his father’s hard line. His recent statements align him with his father. Addressing the nation at his inauguration, he said Syria must continue “rejecting Zionist existence in all its forms and we say to them [former Syrian residents of the Golan Heights] we are with you and our steadfastness together is the guarantee that our land will be liberated.”

When Pope John Paul II visited Syria in 2001, Bashar’s words provoked international rage. He said, “The Jews who tortured the early Christians are now torturing the Palestinian people”; and the Jews “tried to kill the principles of all religions with the same mentality in which they betrayed Jesus Christ and the same way they tried to betray and kill the Prophet Muhammad.”

Syria remains a certain foe with...
Hardly a Jewish person alive would fail to recognize the name Auschwitz. Although more than 50 years have passed since the Allies liberated the vile death factories of the Third Reich, the mere mention of the concentration camp in Oswiecim, Poland, still chills the blood of decent people who know the horrifying atrocities that took place behind its barbed wire.

In 1942 Auschwitz became the chief center for the total extermination of Europe’s Jews. While still alive, they were subjected to criminal “medical” experiments, torture, starvation, and a multitude of cruel and sadistic Nazi torments. However, killing them—as quickly and efficiently as possible—was the main goal of Auschwitz and neighboring Birkenau. Usually the Nazis penned up about 2,000 people at a time in a room of 235 square yards (210 square meters), then pumped in Cyclon B gas, which took 15 to 20 minutes to kill everyone inside.

The corpses then were cremated. The victims’ hair was sent to German firms that turned it into bolts of lining (hair-cloth) for clothing. The gold fillings in their teeth were melted into ingots; their ashes became fertilizer and fill for ponds and riverbeds; so on and so forth. It seems there is no limit to the twisted ingenuity that lurks in the evil heart of man.

I visited Poland recently with our foreign ministries director, David Levy, to spend time with our workers there. I also visited Auschwitz and Birkenau. So that we never forget, here are some photographs taken on that trip.

1 - The cynical sign above the main gate at Auschwitz: “Work Brings Freedom.”
2 - Fortified rows of barbed-wire fences stood guard over 20,000 prisoners jammed into Auschwitz’s 28 buildings.
3 - The majority of European Jews deported to Auschwitz were gassed immediately upon arrival and their bodies burned in furnaces.
4 - Birkenau, sometimes called Auschwitz II, covered 425 acres. Its 300 buildings housed approximately 100,000 prisoners in August 1944.
5 - I am standing at the “end of the line,” where railroad boxcars jammed with Jewish people arrived from all over Europe. As the cars were unloaded, those deemed “fit” were put into forced labor. Those judged “unfit” were sent to the gas chambers.
6 - Guard towers, barbed-wire fences, and constant surveillance of the prisoners virtually eliminated any hope of escape.

The Nazis, of course, were not Christians. They were Gentiles in dire need of biblical conversion to Jesus Christ. And the contemptible atrocities they so eagerly committed stand as grim reminders of how criminally depraved a “civilized” society can become when it abandons genuine faith in God and His Word.

William E. Sutter is executive director of The Friends of Israel.
Until the Al-Aqsa Intifada erupted in Israel a year ago, the Arab-Christian village of Beit Jalla, just outside Bethlehem, was a quiet place overlooking Jerusalem’s Jewish suburb of Gilo. With the intrusion of a new wave of radical Islamic terrorism, however, all of this was to change. Gunners from Islamic terrorist organizations decided they could penetrate the Arab village and harass and kill Gilo’s residents from Beit Jalla’s strategic position above the Jewish town. Before many days passed, at least 30 percent of Beit Jalla’s Christians opted to leave their homes and flee for their lives.

When you consider the dire situation of Christians in the world of militant Islam, these individuals are among the most fortunate. To be displaced from ancestral homes is one thing; to be indiscriminately slaughtered because of your faith is quite another.

In Havana, Cuba, two agencies have reported that Cuban soldiers are burning Bibles. The Voice of the Martyrs has received information that military troops have burned thousands of copies of God’s Word. The Bibles, captioned “Cuba Para Cristo,” (Cuba for Christ) were destroyed as “subversive” material. Even though Fidel Castro, now a mellowing senior citizen 75 years old, is being heralded as the lone survivor of doctrinaire Communism, his hatred for the Word of God and Christian believers remains as militant as ever.

In Jaffna, Sri Lanka, following a death threat sent to the Canaan Fellowship Church, three young Hindus lay in wait for the minister and murdered Pastor Vasu Sritharan. The motive for the killing was the pastor’s work among the Hindu people of Sri Lanka. Before another month had passed, another man from the same congregation was found dead, his throat slashed.

In Indonesia, the slaughter of Christians continues unabated. When Bible school student Dominggus Kenjam was nearly decapitated by Muslim attackers, he was given up for dead. Miraculously, he survived. Other believers in the island nation, however, were not so fortunate. Like Dominggus, many who escaped death at the hands of Muslim warriors will bear the scars of their torment for the rest of their lives.

With these barbaric acts of murder and brutality, can we conclude that “civilized” people of the 21st century are moving toward a more enlightened, humane, and tolerant attitude toward their Christian counterparts? The answer is a most emphatic no. It is a matter of record that hate crimes, persecution, and murder of Christians is...
on the rise, not on the wane. And for believers, there is no respite in sight.

In the West, believers continue to be beguiled by a false sense of security. Insulated by affluence, most pay scant attention to the suffering of brothers and sisters in the faith who are making the ultimate sacrifice. We continue to pose the question, Why is this true? The answer is complex and certainly not easily answered. The facts, however, are there for all to see—for all, that is, who are willing to open their eyes to reality.

Can it happen here in America? We may insist that it cannot. But, as was the tragic commentary against ancient Israel, we are not unlike those who were at ease in Zion while catastrophe lurked at the door. We cannot say we have not been warned. Even secular journalists and politicians have sounded the alarm that Christian leaders, for the most part, have failed or refused to ring. It is ironic (but biblically accurate) to say there are times when, as Jesus said, “The sons of this age are in their generation wiser than the sons of light” (Lk. 16:8).

It cannot be repeated often enough. In an age of international secular assimilation, evangelical Christians are an increasingly marginalized and despised minority. To be sure, we are living in an era where bizarre minorities are lauded, embraced, and pushed to the forefront of social and political life. For example, who can understand why the homosexual community wears HIV infection as a badge of honor while millions die of AIDS? Who can understand why this segment of the community has become a dominant force in Western society? However, because the evangelical community does not share the world’s feelings of adulation and respect for the movers and shakers in the new Global Village, we are tagged as misfits, bigots, and insufferable religious Neanderthals.

We well understand that many of our contemporary shape-up, fit-in, and seize-the-moment brethren will scorn these comments as just another example of pessimistic doomsday blather. But so did generations before us—and they lived to endure the consequences. God forbid that we do the same.

Elwood McQuaid is editor-in-chief for The Friends of Israel.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. William E. Sutter, President
A number of years ago, I attended the funeral of a dear Jewish friend named Max. I had met him through mutual friends shortly after his right side had become crippled by a stroke. During those last physically challenging years, Max and I got to know each other quite well. Although his death was not unexpected, it was, for many, a very emotional experience. He had left an impact on countless friends and business associates, and a great many came to pay their final respects.

Max was a by-product of his era. He had risen from the rampant anti-Semitism of Eastern Europe and the poverty of an immigrant to become a highly successful and greatly loved businessman. He treated everyone well, customers and employees alike.

At his funeral, many paid him tribute. As the service drew to a close, the rabbi shared some personal information about Max’s life. Then he said something I will never forget: “I do not know where Max is right now; but if there is a heaven, I know he is there, happy and rested.” The rabbi—a spiritual teacher of his people—had just confessed that he was ignorant concerning
immortality comes through their deeds, as this Talmudic story explains:

A hungry fox was eyeing some luscious fruit in a garden, but to his dismay he could find no way to enter. At last he discovered an opening through which, he thought, if I fast three days I will be able to squeeze through. He did so; and he now feasted to his heart's delight on the grapes and all the other good things in the orchard. But lo! When he wanted to escape before the owner of the garden would find him, he discovered to his great distress that the opening had again become too small for him. Poor animal! Again he had to fast three days, and as he escaped, he cast a farewell glance upon the scene of his late revels saying, “O garden, charming art thou, delicious are thy fruits! But what have I now for all my labor and cunning?” So it is with man. Naked he comes into the world; naked must he leave it. After all his toil therein he carries nothing away with him except the good deeds he leaves behind.

Such teaching has led many Jewish people to state simply, “I will live on through my family’s memory of me.” Though that thought may comfort some, it scarcely approaches the true hope found in the Bible and echoed by the voice of traditional Judaism. In fact, the Amidah, a standard prayer recited in synagogues the world over, asserts, “God keeps faith with those who lie in the dust and will, according to his mercy, raise the dead, restore them bodily, and grant them eternal life.” This prayer was written by Rabbi Moses Ben-Maimon (Maimonides), the 12th-century Jewish philosopher and physician whose immense contribution to Judaism included the Thirteen Articles of Faith that many Orthodox Jews still adhere to today. In addition, the Talmud teaches that “all Israel has a portion in the world-to-come.” Indeed, some Jewish people believe in a future resurrection. They believe it will occur when Messiah comes. Then all Jewish people will be brought back to Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel. Some Hassidim (ultra-Orthodox) say resurrection is not a one-time event. Instead, it is a process called gilful neshamot, the turning, or rolling, of souls. They believe “the souls of the righteous are reborn in the process of tikkun olam, the mending of the world.” Such a belief tries to answer Max’s future; and most of the congregation seemed comfortable with that. As we left the service, I heard people comment on the “beautiful sermon” the rabbi had given.

Unfortunately, their reactions did not surprise me. Many Gentiles, Christians, and Muslims spend a good deal of time teaching about the afterlife. Judaism, however, does not. A common and popular idea held by many Jewish people is “deed rather than creed.” Consequently, many Jewish people resent hearing about death and dying, preferring, rather, to discuss life and living. One rabbi put it this way: “We invest more of our belief in this world (olam ha-zeh) and rely less on a world to come (olam ha-ba).”

Many Jewish people strongly believe there is no life at all after death. “When you’re dead, you’re dead,” they say. One rabbi has said, “Even as a rabbi I have never parted from my early feeling, when I die the whole world of my existence would die with me.” In a published sermon titled “A Jewish View of Immortality,” Rabbi Bernard Rascus wrote,

What is this immortality in which I believe? I believe that a person lives on in his or her family. . . . I believe there is a form of immortality in the institutions we build and the causes we espouse. . . . I believe in the immortality of friendship and helpfulness. . . . I believe in the immortality of existence. . . . I find immortality in my people.

Another great sage who lived in Jerusalem in the second century stated, “A man will live on through his children.” Others believe their
questions about injustice in the world and states that tikkun olam cleanses the soul.

Reincarnation is alien to most Jewish people. Their most commonly held belief is that good deeds will lead to a place called Gan Eden (Garden of Eden, not where Adam and Eve were but a place of spiritual perfection); and continual evil will lead to Gehinnom, or hell. Both are found in the Talmud. Gan Eden is where the righteous will sit at golden tables on stools of gold, participating in lavish banquets. It has been described like this: “Tables and candlesticks, thrones and crowns were there to be seen... they were there for the souls that were pure and clean.”

Gehinnom (also called Gehenna) is a place so awful that a single day there feels like an eternity. That is why the great Rabbi Akiba (A.D. 50–135) said the judgment of the wicked there “shall endure [only] twelve months.” “If one day was like an eternity, one year will be unbearable.”

Although much Jewish thinking focuses on rabbinic thought, we need to see what the Jewish Bible actually teaches. The Torah (five Books of Moses) uses the expression “gathered to his people” for such personages as Abraham (Gen. 25:8), Ishmael (Gen. 25:17), Isaac (Gen. 35:29), Jacob (Gen. 49:33), and Moses and Aaron (Dt. 32:50). Conversely, the sinner is “cut off from his people.” This punishment is referred to as kareit (literally, “cutting off,” but usually translated “spiritual excision”), meaning the soul loses its portion in the world to come.

The word Sheol is used in numerous passages in the Hebrew Bible to describe the abode of the dead. Sheol literally means “the grave”; and from an earthly perspective, that is what it is. Yet from God’s perspective, it describes a place of sorrow.

In addition, the Hebrew Scriptures tell of two people whom God took alive from the earth: Enoch, who “walked with God, and he was not” (Gen. 5:24); and Elijah, who “went up by a whirlwind into heaven” in a chariot of fire (2 Ki. 2:11).

The book of Daniel provides further insight on the afterlife: “And many of those who sleep [are dead] in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2). Daniel does not name the two places he clearly describes as heaven and hell. It is evident, however, that the first location is preferred over the second. The people there have risen from the dead to receive everlasting life, as further understood by the word awake (conscience), which follows the word sleep (death).

The prophet Isaiah said, 

**Thy dead men shall live,**
**together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead** (Isa. 26:19).

Isaiah makes it clear that a future exists for those who have perished. Job, a contemporary of Abraham, also had a steadfast hope beyond this life when he said, “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:26). Clearly, biblical Judaism holds to a strong doctrine of a defined afterlife.

I left Max’s funeral with mixed emotions. I felt sad that so many educated, gifted people seemed satisfied with their uncertainty concerning life beyond the grave. I also felt sorry for the rabbi, who, for all his knowledge, could offer so little encouragement to the family.

On the other hand, I had a genuine sense of joy. You see, I knew something the rabbi did not know. I knew that Max had trusted Jesus as his Messiah. Max knew where his new home would be when death claimed his body. He had tried to tell people about his life-transforming decision and the hope he had in his heart. In fact, many of the people who attended his funeral had received a telephone call from him, telling them of his relationship with Jesus. But most, if not all of them, did not believe it. They thought the stroke had affected his mind.

But I knew differently. There was nothing wrong with Max’s mind. Max had told me that he had searched a long time to find the answers about life after death. Much of that search was conducted within Judaism. I am privileged to possess many of the Jewish books he looked to for help. But it wasn’t until two former employees, both faithful, Bible-believing women, opened the pages of the Hebrew Bible with him that he knew he had found the truth.

So, while many still say, “when you’re dead, you’re dead,” those of us who believe God’s Word joyously echo Paul in Philippians 1:21: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” I know Max agrees.
Although nations do not intentionally commit suicide, Israel was headed that way. Gross idolatry insulted the covenant relationship God had established with the Israelites, and their ingratitude toward Him for His grace and goodness had given them a spirit of pride and self-sufficient smugness. Thus Israel forgot the God who had lavished her with power and prosperity.

Hosea’s warning of judgment fell on deaf ears. His preaching produced no change in the nation’s commitment or conduct toward God. In chapter 13, Hosea reiterated and reinforced the message of the inevitable judgment that would result in ancient Israel’s demise.

Detestable Religion

After the split within the 12 tribes of Israel, Ephraim rose to superiority over the 10 tribes that became the northern kingdom. Hosea said, “When Ephraim spoke, [there was] trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died” (v. 1). The tribe of Ephraim had become great and was the leading tribe in the northern kingdom. The other nine tribes in the North paid deference to its authority and power. When one man in Ephraim spoke, fear and trembling seized the men of other tribes. But Ephraim instituted calf and Baal worship, sowing the seeds of death and sealing the nation’s doom. It was only a matter of time before Israel’s spiritual decay resulted in the nation’s demise.

God’s warning had no effect on Israel. The Israelites continued to sin more and more and made “melted and cast images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen” (v. 2). Idols filled their houses and groves. Instead of worshiping God, they worshiped molten images and prayed to deaf and dumb statues. They even paid homage and respect to the idols by kissing (v. 2) them—a sign of
their total devotion to the pagan deity of Baal.

The prophet used four similes to describe the nation’s impending judgment:

*Therefore, they shall be like the morning cloud [mist], and like the early dew that passeth away, like the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and like the smoke out of the chimney* (v. 3).

Israel would vanish as quickly as morning mist and “early dew,” which evaporate quickly when the sun rises. Israel would be swept from its land suddenly and violently, “like the chaff” on the threshing floor is scattered by a whirlwind or “like smoke out of the chimney” is vaporized into nothingness. Hosea’s stern warning should have provoked Israel to repent, but the nation remained untouched by the prophet’s graphic illustrations.

**Divine Rejection**

The Lord reminded Israel of His unique relationship with the nation:

*Yet I am the LORD, thy God, from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me; for there is no saviour beside me* (v. 4).

First, He told the Israelites that He and He alone had shown them grace and goodness from the time of their inception as a nation. He was the One who had delivered them from their oppressive slavery in the land of Egypt. And He reminded them of the first commandment He gave them: “Thou shalt know no god but me” (v. 4; cf. Ex. 20:3). Israel had a special, exclusive, covenant relationship with the true and living God. No other deity had delivered the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt. Jehovah was their only savior.

preserved them in the harsh wilderness by providing for their physical needs and protecting them from all who sought to destroy them.

Third, God prospered Israel in the land of Canaan: “According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; therefore have they forgotten me” (v. 6). When Israel was “filled,” she became satisfied, self-sufficient, and self-exalted, forgetting that God was her benefactor. Not only did Israel forget the Lord, but she ceased to worship and serve Him (cf. Dt. 8). The metaphor in 13:6 speaks of a domestic animal that, in a luxuriant pasture, became headstrong and unmanageable. As did many before and after them, the people of Israel enjoyed the gifts but ignored the Giver.

Throughout Israel’s history, God was like a tender, loving shepherd, protecting and providing for His people. However, that situation would change. Because they failed to accept His gentler means of correction, God’s next method involved turning on them like a vicious animal and devouring them.

In verses 7–8, the Lord likens Himself to five wild beasts in His dealings with Israel. Like a fierce and hungry lion, God would rend the northern kingdom. With the swiftness of a leopard, He would lurk in hiding, watching for the appropriate time to spring on the defenseless nation and devour it. Like “a bear that is bereaved of her whelps [cubs],” He promised to “tear the fat of their heart” (v. 8). When robbed of her cubs, a she-bear strikes at the perpetrator’s breast with vengeance; and her claws tear open the person’s chest, exposing his heart. Like a lion who slowly and methodically eats its prey in the safety of its den, God would consume Israel; and like “the wild beast [God] shall tear them” (v. 8). That is, as a pack of wild animals descends on its prey, God in His fury would descend on and devour Israel. Such a vivid picture is a fearful reminder of God’s wrath, which will fall on all who reject His mercy and grace for a life of sin.

**Declared Destruction**

Israel orchestrated its own destruction: “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help” (v. 9). A more literal
translation of this verse is, “It hath destroyed thee, O Israel, that thou hast been against me, against thy help.” Israel’s sin led to its demise. The nation trusted in idols and alliances with other countries, alienating itself from the Lord. The Israelites’ prideful self-reliance severed them from God—the only One who truly could protect and deliver them from destruction.

Early in its history, Israel had exchanged God’s gift of an infallible theocracy for a fallible monarchy (cf. 1 Sam. 8). With intonations of sarcastic scorn, God asked Israel two rhetorical questions concerning the rulers they had chosen to save them:

I will be thy king; where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities? And [where are] thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? (v. 10).

The implied answer is that these elected leaders were nowhere to be found. Moreover, they were totally incapable of delivering Israel from the coming invasion of Assyria. But the Lord, who alone is Israel’s King forever, will be the nation’s only hope for deliverance.

God honored Israel’s request for a king after the 10 tribes split from Judah: “I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath” (v. 11). Although God gave Israel a succession of kings, beginning with Jeroboam I (1 Ki. 12:17) and ending with Hoshea, He removed them all because of their extreme wickedness.

God informed Israel that she would not escape judgment: “The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hidden” (v. 12). The document describing Israel’s sin and sentence would be recorded, bound up, and stored in heaven (as a precious treasure is secured in a safe) until the day of God’s judgment.

Time was running out. If Israel was to experience deliverance, she had to turn to the Lord immediately. Otherwise, the nation would become as a “travailing woman” and an “unwise son” (v. 13). Her suffering would be as inescapable and agonizing as the pain of childbirth. The baby, referring to Israel, is described figuratively as an “unwise son” who does not know enough to be born at the proper time. Such a delay results in the baby’s death.

Hosea continued,

I will ransom them from the power of sheol; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues; O sheol, I will be thy destruction; repentance shall be hidden from mine eyes (v. 14).

Some believe this verse teaches that Israel is irreversibly doomed. They support their position from the context of chapter 13 (vv. 7–13, 15–16) and interpret the first two clauses as interrogatives: “Shall I . . . ransom them from the power of sheol? Shall I redeem them from death?”—expecting a negative answer.

Others interpret verse 14 as a promise of hope for Israel’s deliverance. The latter interpretation is supported by a long history of Bible translations going back to the ancient Septuagint. Also, there is no indication from the text that the first two phrases are interrogatives.

As for the objection that the promise of redemption is out of context with the pronouncement of doom in this chapter, we should keep in mind that God often injects a word of hope in judgment passages. The phrase repentance shall be hidden from mine eyes means that God will not change His mind or His promise to redeem Israel. Paul used this verse in 1 Corinthians 15:55–57 to declare the believer’s triumph over death through Christ’s death and resurrection. The ransom price for Israel’s sin has been paid through Christ. One day Israel will receive Jesus as her Messiah and experience redemption and resurrection as a nation.

The closing verses of this chapter present Hosea’s final judgment speech. The prophet described judgment as “an east wind [a sirocco]” (v. 15) from the Lord. The wind is a picture of the Assyrian invasion that completely and unexpectedly will destroy Israel’s kingdom like an east wind that dries up “spring” and “fountain” (v. 15). Assyria will spoil the “treasure of all pleasant vessels” (v. 15) of Israel by carrying off the country’s gold, silver, jewels, and precious treasures.

The prophet concluded chapter 13 with a specific word of judgment against Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom:

Samaria shall become desolate; for she hath rebelled against her God. They shall fall by the sword; their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up (v. 16).

Samaria was responsible for promoting Israel’s rebellion against the Lord. She will suffer dearly for her sin. Her city will be destroyed; her people slaughtered inhumanly; her babies smashed on the rocks without mercy; and her pregnant women ripped open to deprive Israel of a future generation.

Nations today should take notice of Israel’s sad experience and the high price she paid for forsaking God. When a nation smugly strutts its self-sufficiency and forgets that it is God who provides its prosperity, peace, and power, that nation treads a path of spiritual and physical suicide. Pray that the nation you live in will heed this warning from God’s Word.

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Second Peter’s three chapters embody virtually everything we need to know to be equipped to function in these climactic days prior to the consummation of events on this planet. Chapter one addresses the program God has created to insure believers are fully furnished through His provision and their potential. Chapter two is, without question, the premier passage in Scripture exposing false teachers, their character, methods, and the carnage they create. It reveals the principles of deception practiced by contemporary charlatans and makes it easy to identify and respond to them. Chapter three sweeps us into the future with an awe-inspiring sense of grandeur. Why Messiah has tarried His Coming, how you can help hasten His appearance, and what eternity holds are all set before us in vivid, descriptive patterns. In short, II Peter: Standing Fast in the Last Days will become an invaluable addition to your life as well as your personal library.
Christmas is approaching. And as people the world over look forward to the gifts, decorations, and tinsel of the season, those of us who love the traditional carols anticipate with joy the sweet strains of such matchless hymns as “Silent Night, Holy Night,” first sung in St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria, in 1818.

Franz X. Gruber composed the music at the request of a young German priest named Joseph Mohr, who wrote the poem in 1816 and wasted no time in articulating a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith: “Round yon virgin mother and child.”

The doctrine of the virgin birth is so central to salvation that it’s a wonder anyone who professes to be a Christian would dispute it. Yet dispute it they do. According to a report posted on the Internet, a poll of 7,441 Protestant clergy turned up the following statistics: Sixty percent of the Methodist ministers surveyed do not believe that Jesus was virgin-born; Presbyterian, 49 percent; Episcopalian, 44 percent; American Baptist, 34 percent; and American Lutheran, 19 percent.¹

Was Mary a virgin? First, the Gospel of Luke says she was:

In the sixth month the angel, Gabriel, was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin [parthenos] espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary (1:26–27).

Second, Mary said she was. When Gabriel (the same angel whom God had dispatched to the prophet Daniel, Dan. 8:16; 9:21) told Mary she would bear a son, she replied, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Lk. 1:34).

Then comes Isaiah 7:14, probably one of the most maligned prophecies in Scripture. Critics have thrashed it around for centuries and tried to rip it to shreds...
by claiming that the Hebrew word almah, used for “virgin,” really means “young woman.” The truth is that before the birth of Jesus, Jewish scholars widely considered Isaiah 7:14 to be Messianic.

The prophecy arrived during unusual circumstances. The Davidic dynasty—the exclusive possession of the southern kingdom of Judah—was in danger of annihilation. The northern kingdom of Israel had conspired with Syria to depose King Ahaz and end the Davidic dynasty through which God had promised to bring the Messiah. Though evil and faithless, Ahaz was, nevertheless, King David’s legitimate heir.

So God sent Isaiah and his young son, Shear-jashub, to Ahaz. “Fear not, neither be faint-hearted. . . . Thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass” (Isa. 7:4, 7). Isaiah assured Ahaz the Davidic monarchy was safe and urged him to confirm God’s promise by asking for a sign. But Ahaz could not have cared less about a sign from God. He already had gone to Assyria for help (2 Ki. 16:7–9).

However, God graciously gave a sign anyway—not merely to Ahaz, but to the entire house of David (v. 13):

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [meaning “God with us”] (Isa. 7:14).

The sign was Jehovah’s unbreakable promise to the Jewish people that He would bring the Messiah . . . through a miraculous birth, . . . just as He miraculously had birthed the nation of Israel itself.

Long before Jesus was born, 72 Jewish scholars translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. The celebrated work, called the Septuagint, left no room for doubt concerning Isaiah 7:14. The men had translated almah into the Greek word parthenos, which irrefutably means “virgin.” The Septuagint was the Bible Matthew used when he wrote,

Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us (Mt. 1:22–23).

Was Mary a virgin? Indisputably. But in the end, we don’t believe based on fact; we believe based on faith. It takes faith to believe that God created the universe in six, 24-hour days. It takes faith to believe that Moses led the Israelites through the midst of the Red Sea on dry land; that God gave the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai; that the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is God’s Word; and that God so loves you and me that He came to Earth as Messiah of Israel, born of a Jewish virgin, and became the final sacrifice for even our most grievous sins.

Soon people will sing “Silent Night, Holy Night,” declaring anew the virginity of a Jewish girl whom God used to fulfill a promise He made to the Jewish people. Through them, He brought salvation to a needy, sin-ful world. Was Mary a virgin? The Bible says she was indeed. It also says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1) and that “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6).

God once asked Abraham, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14). Perhaps on that answer rests the difference between eternal life and eternal death.
As one of the premier Bible-teaching organizations in the world today, The Friends of Israel has a wide array of books, brochures, and audio and video cassettes designed to help you deepen your understanding of your faith and assist you in sharing your faith with others. A number of these materials are now available in Spanish. *Israel Mi Gloria* is the world’s finest Spanish magazine on Bible study, Israel, and prophecy. Each issue is packed with timely editorials, sound biblical teaching, news and special reports from Israel. Why not sign up your Spanish-speaking friends and relatives today?
In a matter of minutes on September 11, Americans were led into the violent world Israelis have occupied in the Middle East for more than half a century. Despite the fact that terrorist murder-merchants repeatedly declared their intentions to kill and maim Americans in massive numbers, few people took them at their word. It just couldn’t happen here, they thought. But porous airport security and authorities indifferent to ominous intelligence warnings made it all too easy to accomplish the “impossible.” So last month, fuel-heavy, highjacked jetliners slammed into the heart of America. It was a black day for the United States and freedom but a spectacular win for international terrorism.

Radical zealots in the Muslim world viewed the tragedy with unbridled glee and trumpeted their contempt for the United States. They were collectively convinced that the Great Satan was at last being brought to its knees. Their disdain for our dead and their intemperate threats of future carnage were monumental mistakes.

In a very real way, the United States suddenly emerged from decades of apathy and shook off the fiction that the threat of attack from abroad died with the end of the cold war. Those who said America has been forever changed were not far off the mark. Certainly, with time, the acute rage, frustration, and demands for an immediate, retaliatory, military strike will begin to subside. But the dangers America and democratic societies face will not. Rogue, radical Islamic nations are racing to achieve nuclear capability, which will give them delivery systems for weapons able to hit Tel Aviv; New York; Washington, D.C.; London; and whomever else they deem offensive to their demented way of life.

Israel’s 1981 air attack on Iraq should be a pattern for future long-term actions by the United States and its allies. When Israeli jets swept down on the Iraqi nuclear plant to deliver a preemptive knockout blow, most of the international establishment cried “foul.” But the intervening years have proven, to the relief of those same thin-skinned bureaucrats, that the Israelis did us all a tremendous service. One can predict that the same hue and cry will be raised in some quarters when allies begin to bomb the death factories of Saddam Hussein, the Mullahs of Iran, and their big-time-terrorist wannabe pals.

Today two words ring in my ears. I have heard them repeatedly over the years from Israeli friends in the military when discussing the final objective of unavoidable combat. They are these: “Finish it!”

President Bush has been given carte blanche to use every means available to repay the perpetrators for the evil they have committed and to expose and shut down those who have provided support, safe haven, and a green light to keep on killing. We now say to the president, “Finish it!”

Continued on page 43
Our two previous articles examined the biblical claim that nature (the universe) reveals the existence of a divine being (God) who possesses eternal power. Thus nature is one means that God uses to reveal knowledge concerning Himself to mankind.

Now we will consider other means God uses to reveal such knowledge.

History

Several biblical passages indicate that God uses history to uncover knowledge.

First, in Exodus 7:4–5, God signified that, through His judgments on Egypt in conjunction with Israel’s Exodus, He would reveal truth about Himself to the Egyptians. Years after Israel left Egypt, statements by the Jericho harlot, Rahab, demonstrated that when God parted the waters of the Red Sea for the people of Israel and enabled them to destroy two Amorite kings, He revealed knowledge concerning Himself to the Canaanites (Josh. 2:9–11).

Second, in Isaiah, God calls the nation of Israel “Israel, my glory” (Isa. 46:13). He also states that He created Israel for His glory (Isa. 43:7) and glorified Himself in Israel (Isa. 44:23). The glory of a person is whatever is impressive or influential concerning that person. Thus, these statements indicate that through Israel, God reveals impressive, influential knowledge about Himself to the rest of the world.

God uncovers this knowledge through His historic dealings with Israel. In Deuteronomy 28, God mapped out His future dealings with the nation from Moses’ time to the Second Coming of the Messiah. In verses 1–14, God promised that, if Israel heeded and obeyed His revealed Word, He would bless it more than any nation. It would be the head nation above all others, not the tail nation (v. 13).

By contrast, in verses 15–68, God warned that, if Israel did not heed and obey His Word, it would experience many curses. For example, God would bring oppressive enemies against the Israelites and scatter them among all the nations. There they would have no permanent rest, would be gripped with fear and sorrow, and would have no assurance of life from day to day.

In verse 10 God states the result of His blessing Israel above all nations, if it would heed and obey His Word: “All people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD.” The Gentile nations would investigate why Israel was blessed more than they and discover that it was because of Israel’s obedience to God.

In verse 37 God states the result of Israel’s experiencing many curses for failing to heed and obey His Word: “Thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations to which the LORD shall lead thee.” The number and nature of the curses would so astonish the Gentile nations that they would regard Israel proverbially as the nation of curses.

These statements indicate that God uses these historic dealings with Israel as object lessons to impress the world with two significant truths concerning Himself: (1) He blesses those who heed and obey His Word; (2) He curses those who do not.

In light of this twofold revelational purpose of God’s historic dealings with Israel and the intended worldwide audience of that revelation, it is no accident that God placed Israel in the most
strategic geographical location on Earth in ancient times—the crossroads of three of the world’s great continents—Africa, Asia, and Europe. The nations of the ancient world called that location the navel of the Earth. In addition, it is no accident that Israel was restored as a nation-state to that same location in the 20th century. It is significant that the world’s attention is drawn repeatedly to Israel in the Middle East.

A third biblical passage that indicates God uses history to reveal knowledge is Daniel 4. This chapter records God’s intervention into world events to humiliate Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the most powerful man of his time. Because of this ruler’s arrogant pride, God inflicted him with a mental illness that made him act like an animal. God had an ultimate purpose for this historic event: “to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (v. 17). In this instance, God used history to reveal that He is the One who is in sovereign control of human affairs in this world.

Human Conscience

The apostle Paul referred to the human conscience in Romans 2:14–15. Every person is born with a conscience; therefore, God can use the conscience to reveal certain truths to all mankind. Through the conscience, God reveals that right and wrong actually exist and that people are responsible for what they do and do not do. The conscience gives people a sense of guilt when they do something contrary to it. It also gives them peace when they act in accordance with it.

Through the conscience, God reveals that right and wrong actually exist and that people are responsible for what they do and do not do.

Miracles

Scripture records many miracles that God performed directly or enabled people to perform. Examples include the following: God parted the waters of the Red Sea to enable the Israelites to pass safely from Egypt to the Sinai Peninsula (Ex. 14); He caused the wall of Jericho to fall without the use of siege equipment (Josh. 6); Jesus healed many diseases (Mt. 9:35) and brought dead people back to life (Mk. 5:22–24, 35–43; Jn. 11:1–46); Jesus gave the apostles the ability to heal all types of illness, to cleanse lepers, to cast out demons, and to raise the dead (Mt. 10:1, 8); the Holy Spirit instantly moved Philip bodily from one geographical location to another (Acts 8:39–40); the apostle Paul healed a lame man (Acts 14:8–10). Miracles revealed God’s existence and power. Jesus’ miracles specifically revealed that He was the Messiah, the Son of God (Jn. 20:3–31; Acts 2:22).

Dreams and Visions

In Bible times God occasionally used dreams and visions to uncover knowledge to human beings. Through a dream He gave to King Nebuchadnezzar, God revealed the course of Gentile world domination from the time of ancient Babylon to the Second Coming of the Messiah and the future Kingdom of God (Dan. 2). Through visions given to Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and the apostle Peter, God clearly revealed that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

Direct Speech

At times, God imparted knowledge to people by speaking directly and audibly to them. Through direct speech, God revealed specific knowledge to Noah concerning the flood and told him how to build the ark (Gen. 6:13—7:4). Through direct speech, He called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt (Ex. 3:1—4:17) and, centuries later, clearly identified Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God (Mt. 3:17; 17:5).

Angels

The Bible records several incidents of God sending angels to deliver specific revelation to people. God sent the angel Gabriel to reveal to Daniel His long-range program for Israel and Jerusalem and the specific time Messiah would be on the earth, officially
presenting Himself to Israel as its Prince. Gabriel’s message also revealed Messiah would be cut off with a violent death (Dan. 9:20–27). God also sent Gabriel to inform the virgin Mary that she was the woman whom God had chosen to give birth to the promised Messiah (Lk. 1:26–38). It was an angel who revealed to shepherds the birth and location of the Messiah (Lk. 2:8–16).

The Holy Spirit

God also has delivered significant revelation through the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, God revealed to the apostles and New Testament prophets a body of knowledge that the apostle Paul called “the mystery” that was hidden from mankind prior to apostolic times (1 Cor. 2:6–10; cf. Eph. 3:3–9). Jesus declared that the Comforter—the Holy Spirit—would make the unsaved world aware of its sin, its need for righteousness, and its future judgment (Jn. 16:7–11). Jesus also indicated that, during the corporate lifetime of His apostles who were with Him in the upper room, the Holy Spirit would uncover to them “all truth,” all the teaching the Lord wanted the church to have (Jn. 14:26; 16:12–15).

Prophecy

In Bible times God also used prophecy to uncover knowledge. Through the prophet Moses, God revealed how He would deal with the nation of Israel throughout its history (Dt. 28—30). God sent a prophet to the Israelites to reveal the reason for their severe oppression by the Midianites (Jud. 6:7–10). Through the New Testament prophet Agabus, God foretold the coming of a great famine (Acts 11:27–28).

The Scriptures

The Scriptures are an extensive means of revelation of God’s truth to mankind. They present all that people need to know about God in order to be saved, to live godly lives, and to minister effectively (2 Tim. 3:15–17). It is significant that the longest chapter in the Bible (Ps. 119) is devoted to the importance of the Scriptures. God required the leaders of Israel to read and meditate on the Scriptures daily (Dt. 17:18–20; Josh. 1:8).

The Historic Life of Christ

The historic life of Jesus Christ on Earth was an incredible revelation of God to mankind. The apostle John indicated this fact when he called Christ “the Word” (Jn. 1:1, 14). John’s point was that Jesus Christ had the same function as words. Just as words constitute the outward expression of invisible thoughts, so Jesus Christ, through His life on Earth, constituted the outward, visible expression of invisible God the Father to mankind (Jn. 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:17). Jesus indicated the same thing when He said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). Paul taught that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15); and the writer of Hebrews declared that Jesus, as God’s Son, was “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:3).

God uses . . . historic dealings with Israel as object lessons to impress the world with two significant truths concerning Himself: (1) He blesses those who heed and obey His Word; (2) He curses those who do not.

The Christian’s Life

Since Christians, as God’s spiritual children, have been made partakers of God’s holy nature (2 Pet. 1:4), we are to reveal that nature through our world-life view, values, and lifestyle (1 Pet. 1:14–16; 2:9–12). For this reason, Jesus told believers, “Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven” (Mt. 5:14, 16). The apostle Paul told church saints that they are Christ’s letter to the world, “known and read of all men” (2 Cor. 3:2).

God, indeed, has used various means to reveal the reality of His existence and other knowledge concerning Himself to mankind. Future articles will examine what that other knowledge tells us about God.

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Moslems may have damaged southern wall of Temple Mount

Engineers have found that sections of the southern wall of the Temple Mount, Judaism’s holiest site, are in “intermediate” danger of collapse, possibly due to the Moslem Wakf Authority’s significant construction work directly above, in the area called Solomon’s Stables.

To protect the site, a Republican congresswoman from Virginia has introduced a bill that will withhold U.S. funds from the Palestinian Authority (PA) if the excavation continues.

Israel’s Antiquities Authority conducted tests on the wall after sections surrounding the Temple Mount were clearly protruding.

The Wakf has been building and excavating illegally on the Mount for some time and pitching priceless Jewish artifacts, unearthed from underneath the Mount, into the trash. Amir Drori, head of the Antiquities Authority, said such unprecedented destruction has not been seen since the destruction of the Second Temple.

Calling the current activity “one of the most unprecedented attacks on religious heritage of our time,” U.S. Rep. Eric Cantor introduced legislation in July to withhold American aid from the PA “or its instrumentalities unless the [U.S.] President certifies that no excavation of the Temple Mount in Israel is being conducted.”

According to The Jerusalem Post, the United States has earmarked $125 million in PA-bound aid this year as part of a three-year, $400-million package appropriated by Congress in 2000, as well as an additional $75 million in indirect aid through the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The Post also reported that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon rejected a proposal to remove all heavy building tools, including a stone-cutting machine the Wakf used last year.

Israel gave the Wakf responsibility for the Temple Mount after the 1967 Six-Day War. The site housed Jewry’s first and second Temples and now houses Islam’s Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Wakf refuses to allow Jews to pray on the Mount.

In August the Israeli Supreme Court rejected another petition for Jewish people to visit the Temple Mount, Arutz-7 reported. The court accepted the police position that granting permission would lead to "severe disturbances." Justice Levine, however, said he is greatly troubled that the Mount is closed to Jews and fears it is the beginning of a "slippery slope" of capitulation to threats of violence, Arutz-7 reported.

Kishon catastrophe may lead navy to train its men outside Israel

The Kishon River that God used to mire Sisera’s chariots in the mud in the days of Deborah and Barak has become such a cesspool that it is being blamed for the cancer of some 90 men from Israel’s elite Naval Commando Unit and may induce the navy to train outside Israel.

About 30 of the men have died. They were diagnosed with cancer after diving into the deadly, smelly Kishon, which receives sewage, pesticide runoff, toxic sludge, and industrial wastewater from some of the country’s biggest chemical plants. No fish have lived in the Kishon for at least 30 years.

The Jerusalem Post reported that local fishermen and naval divers are suing the Israeli government for compensation for cancers they say were caused by the toxic waste that flows freely there.

A government commission of inquiry, headed by former Supreme Court President Meir Shamgar, recently released the first chapter of its report in the ongoing investigation. It holds the Israeli navy responsible for the cleanliness of any waters into which it leads soldiers while they train.

The trouble apparently began in the 1940s under the British Mandate, when the British built the nearby seaport. "This has been Israel’s most heavily polluted area since the day the state was born, and the entire population of Haifa is affected," the Post said.

Navy Commander Adm. Yedidya Ya’ari said he hopes to convince Shamgar to ease some of the restrictions on the navy or its operational abilities will be seriously hampered, at least temporarily. A possible solution would be to train the navy outside Israel’s territorial waters. Speaking to Israel Radio recently, Israel’s Defense Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer said one possibility would be Turkey.

Israeli pilots are already training regularly in Turkish air space and using local
First Israeli astronaut to blast off in May

Ilan Roman will become Israel’s first astronaut when he blasts off in May 2002 on a U.S. space shuttle, U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Administrator Daniel S. Goldin has announced. Roman has trained extensively with NASA and has been assigned chief responsibility for eight payload projects, including an Israeli-conceived project on aerosols and dust, according to The Jerusalem Post. He also has been made deputy head for nine other projects. Roman’s backup is Yitzhak Mayo.

The Post reported that Roman’s mission had been postponed for about a year due to technical difficulties.

Goldin was in Israel in August and praised the Israel Space Agency for “some really world-class research.”

Hezbollah builds town near village that’s half Israeli, half Lebanese

The terrorist organization Hezbollah is setting up a village on Israel’s northern border in Lebanon near a Muslim town that pleaded to be annexed to Israel following the Six-Day War in 1967.

Now Hezbollah’s yellow flag can be seen waving in the breeze near the tiny town of Ghajar, where residents are so upset they have arranged for a contractor to build a fence to surround the northern part of their village to prevent Hezbollah from penetrating it, Ha’aretz reported.

Lebanese citizens, the majority of whom appear to be Hezbollah activists, originally set up a tent at the site of the new village of Adisiya but now have started building permanent buildings, Ha’aretz said.

In 1982 Ghajar residents finally received blue identity cards saying they were Israelis. But after Israel withdrew from Lebanon more than a year ago, UN maps showed the border running right through the village.

Consequently, to comply with the UN, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) withdrew from the northern half of the town, erected an outpost in the heart of the village, and built a new fence around the southern, Israeli side, Ha’aretz reported. But the residents vehemently opposed the fence and said the situation made it easier for Hezbollah to penetrate the northern half of their tiny town.

Immigration to Israel steady despite violence

Immigration to Israel from North America rose in July and August despite suicide bombings and violence that killed many Israelis and maimed hundreds more.

According to the Jewish Agency, 261 North Americans immigrated to Israel in July of this year compared to 258 in July 2000. During the first seven months of 2001, 881 immigrants came from North America, only 30 fewer than arrived during the same period last year.

From November 2000 through August, 41,224 new immigrants arrived. Of that number, 1,000 specifically chose to live in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, the areas most plagued by Arab violence.

Akviva Werber, responsible for North American Aliyah on behalf of the Jewish Agency, said the new arrivals are “motivated by positive ideological considerations and strong attachment to Israel,” reported Arutz Sheva.

Thousands participate in drive for freedom

The Jerusalem Post—Dozens of Israeli Arabs joined Jews recently in a motorcade demonstration from the North to Jerusalem to press world leaders to intensify efforts to secure the release of four Israelis being held by Hezbollah.

“This was not initiated by any official body, group or association but by ordinary people who felt they had to and wanted to do something to press for the release of the hostages,” said Gilboa Regional Council head Danny Atar, who was among the organizers.

He stressed that the Gilboa region was well known for the harmonious relations between Jews and Arabs, who compose 40 percent of the population in the region.

“These relations were put to the test during the riots last October [2000]. In the Gilboa region there were no disturbances and people continued their daily lives as usual,” said Atar.

The motorcade was composed of 16 full-trailer trucks plastered with huge photographs of the hostages and placards calling for their release, as well as five bulldozers of Jewish and Arab teenagers and more than 30 private cars.
In Deuteronomy 25:17–18 it is written, "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, and smote those behind thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God.

World War II is over. But I will never forget the terrible years I lived through the Holocaust. Many times I longed to die and envied those who went to their graves. Yes, I remember "Amalek."

Then I came to this Promised Land, Eretz Yisrael, which God gave to Abraham (Gen. 13:14–17) and his descendants forever (Gen. 26:3–4; 28:13). He gave this land to my people, the Jewish people; but as soon as I arrived in 1947, "Amalek" was here and gave us no rest. Still, the Lord told us not to be afraid of our enemies: "For the Lord thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp, to deliver thee, and to give up thine enemies before thee" (Dt. 23:14).

I fought in all of Israel’s wars. And our enemies tried to butcher us and destroy us and cast us into the sea. We were so few, and they were so many. But still we are here. Why? Because the Lord fought on our side (Ex. 14:14; Ps. 124; Isa. 49:25). I have seen with my own eyes what great miracles God has done for us.

But few of the people who endured the Holocaust want to hear about God and His miracles. I speak to many who suffered in the death camps of Europe. Today they still suffer, but in a different way. When I began to talk to them recently about the Lord and the wonderful things He has done for us in Israel, several Holocaust survivors said to me, "You are one of those Christians, and you are trying to make us Christians." They understand so little about true faith in the living God and are so afraid of Christians and Christian books.

So I showed them my Bible and began to read from Psalm 96:2–3: "Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his wonders among all peoples." I told them it is our obligation as Jews to praise the Lord and speak of His miracles.

They said the Bible speaks about God, not about "this man," meaning Jesus. I always wait for them to mention Christ, so they cannot accuse me of trying to make them Christians. They like so much to hear God’s Word from the book of Zechariah, but they cannot see the truth about whom the prophet speaks.

So I read to them Zechariah 12:10, which says that they will "look upon me whom they have pierced."

"Please," I said, "tell me about whom this is written."

They looked at one another, and one replied, "Tomorrow, when we go to the synagogue in the morning to pray, we will ask our rabbi. He will give us the right answer."

Several of their friends arrived, giving them more courage to argue with me. "Here is the Bible," I said, opening to Isaiah 53. "About whom is this written?" And I read,

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our
iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (vv. 5–6).

They began eyeing me suspiciously, and one asked, “Which priest wrote this?”

“I am so glad you asked me this,” I replied. “Here is the Bible. You can see who wrote this and about whom it is written.” They continued to look at me, but no one said anything.

Finally someone broke the silence. “If you knew what we went through in the Holocaust, you would not try to come and speak to us about ‘this man.’”

“You think I do not know?” I asked. So God gave me an opportunity to tell them about myself and what I endured. I told them how I was orphaned at age 10 when the Nazis overran Poland; how I ran for my life for six long years, surviving only by the grace of God. I had no parents. I had no family. I was in the Warsaw Ghetto for a time and longed for death.

“Even with all this,” I said, “I have believed in Christ because He alone gave me peace in my heart. And I can stand here today and tell you that faith in Jesus is the only way to have true joy and be happy. It is only through Him that you can know God personally and be free from all types of superstitions that bring only hatred and fear, not joy or love.”

Then they asked me if I would give them my Bible. I did so with gladness. I pray that God will speak to their hearts as He spoke to mine about 50 years ago when I gave my life to Jesus Christ my Savior—my people’s only hope—though they do not understand that yet.

Eye on the Middle East
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In the process, we must not forget that, despite the understandable reticence to offend Arab leaders who have been asked to join the coalition, Israel cannot be treated as a separate case. Backing off on using such words as crusades and infinite justice to avoid offending Muslims may be a small matter. But excluding Israel as a full partner is quite another.

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, the people of the United States, as well as many hundreds who were here from other countries, fell prey to unspeakable aggression. On that day, the die was cast. No longer can anyone doubt that these attacks have placed in jeopardy two bastions of democracy (the United States and Israel) as well as religious freedom; civil liberties; and moral, ethical lifestyles. Let us not forget that the same radical Islamic network that killed hundreds aboard the highjacked airliners and cut down thousands in the World Trade Center towers and Pentagon also have scattered the bodies of scores of innocent Israeli civilians at the Dolphinarium Disco in Tel Aviv, Sbarro Restaurant in Jerusalem, and along the roads of Israel.

Sensitivities aside, Israel will be there, standing for us and with us, when many others in the region have taken their leave. In a recent speech, President Bush said, “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” Israel, without reservation, is with us. And we must allow Israel to help us “Finish It.”

The compelling message for Christians relates to the current wave of terror afflicting our fellow believers in many parts of the world. The same terrorist network that attacked America and is waging relentless war on Israel is slaughtering, incarcerating, and selling into slavery Christians in numbers unheard of in modern times. To kill us and/or drive us from the Islamic world is their fondest obsession. Therefore, we must recognize that the scope of this conflict extends beyond the two fronts of Israel and America. We are the third front; and we must respond accordingly.