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About the cover

Western evangelicals are living in extremely critical times. We are constantly ridiculed, accused of insufferable intolerance, and seen as misfits in the “Global Village.” It is by no means an overstatement to say that we are moving increasingly closer to becoming a disenfranchised minority. Our cover visualizes the situation in a graphic depiction that should cause us to stop; think; and take stock of where we are, what the future may hold, and what we should be doing about it.

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T
he leader of a Jewish organization recently asked me about the puzzling lack of support for Israel within mainline Protestant denominations. I explained that the root of the problem is theological.

A significant and disturbing development within 20th-century Protestantism was that many of its leaders denied the truth of Scripture. As they rejected the Bible’s authority, two other trends surfaced. First, the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was cast aside in favor of a different “gospel,” a false substitute that fell fatally short in meeting mankind’s most important needs—the spiritual ones.

Second, what the Bible teaches about Israel and God’s promises to the Jewish people became increasingly less important to these theologically liberal Protestant leaders. After dismissing biblical teaching and God’s specific promises, they then ignored the significance of key historical events, such as the founding of the modern State of Israel in 1948. To avoid the disastrous impact prophetic truth would have on their theologies of unbelief, they went to great lengths to deny God’s miraculous fulfillment of prophecy—specifically, Israel’s rebirth as a nation and the regathering of the Jewish people. At best, Israel became to them just another country, one among the many. At worst, they fell for the Palestinian myth, “Israel equals Goliath”; and they aligned themselves with Israel’s enemies.

Despite the facts, both biblical and practical, these liberal denominations became increasingly pro-Arab, pro-Palestinian, and anti-Israel.

Fortunately, liberal Protestantism has lost much of its influence and millions of its members to a growing evangelical body. The growth of evangelical churches and their support for Israel has been covered widely in the Jewish press, as well as in Christian and secular media throughout 2002. Rarely reported, however, is the fact that a significant number of evangelical Christianity’s new adherents are former mainline Protestants who found themselves uncomfortably out of step with their leaders. They knew something was terribly lacking in what they were hearing from their pulpits. And they were further frustrated by a radical, social activism that bore no resemblance to an expression of God’s love or to His standards of right and wrong as revealed in the Bible.

So they “voted” with their minds, their hearts, and their feet. Preferring to stand with God’s Word, they left the liberal churches, searching for proper places of worship and fellowship. Eventually they became part of the growing evangelical Christian community.

In doing so, they joined millions of Christians in Bible-believing churches whose primary personal relationships are not with a particular religious body but with the God of the Bible through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. In these evangelical churches, they found people who support Israel and have a unique and sincere love for the Jewish people. Here were Christians who understood the importance of Israel and the Jewish people in God’s plan for the ages. Many learned as children, as I did from godly parents, of God’s special, covenantal relationship with His people. It is a natural extension of our faith as Christians to support Israel and to love the Jewish people as God’s Chosen People.

As you are involved with the ministry of The Friends of Israel, you can be confident that we will always treat the Bible as God’s Word. You can rest assured that the gospel we proclaim is rooted in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. And you can depend on our commitment to teach that every promise God has made to Israel and the Jewish people will someday be fulfilled.

William E. Sutter is the executive director of The Friends of Israel.
1/2 Page Sketches of Jewish Life

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. William E. Sutter, President
EDITORIAL

Confused About Who the Bad Guys Are?

If you’re not confused, give America’s largest teachers’ union time to work on a few more lesson plans, and you can be sure that the next generation will be. As though it’s not enough that we have revisionists writing fiction and calling it history, now we have the National Education Association’s (NEA) deformed perspective to contend with.

It seems the NEA has looked at September 11 and decided to finger the wrong people. That’s right, the bad guys were not Muslim terrorists, as every lucid person on the planet knows full well, but Americans who inflicted themselves.

The NEA’s suggestions for lesson plans recommend that teachers “address the issue of blame factually.” “Blaming is especially difficult in terrorist situations,” says the NEA, “because someone is at fault. In this country, we still believe that all people are innocent until solid, reliable evidence from our legal authorities proves otherwise.”

In other words, let’s not blame the people who did it—Saudi nationals in league with Osama bin Laden. Rather, let’s pick transgressors more in line with our liberal political philosophy. They didn’t have to look far.

In another suggested lesson plan appearing on the teachers’ union health information Web site titled “Remember September 11,” educators are urged to “discuss historical instances of American intolerance,” such as the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the alleged resentment of Arab Americans during the Gulf War, so that the American public avoids “repeating terrible mistakes. . . . Teachers can do lessons in class, but parents can also discuss the consequences of these events and encourage children to suggest better choices that Americans can make.”

Perhaps the president of the United States should consult a panel of elementary schoolchildren to get their “better choices” before dealing with the likes of such archterrorists as Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden or Taliban mass murderers.

To their credit, many American teachers have bristled at the idea that they skirt the issue of blame and that they suggest American “intolerance” may in any way have justified the attacks. Whitley Finn, a seventh-grade social studies teacher in Westport, Connecticut, said, “I want to prepare them [students] for the truth, and the only way to do that is to keep talking to them and making sure that they have the correct information about what happened that day.”

James McGrath Morris, a twelfth-grade social studies teacher, said his lesson plan will trace the historic rivalry among the three dominant Western religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—and tell the students that the terrorists who flew planes into the World Trade Center and Pentagon were Muslims.

Students [American seventh-graders] were to simulate fighting mock battles of jihad against “Christian crusaders” and other “infidels,” . . . wear Muslim clothing, study and recite from the Quran, adopt the speech of pious Muslim believers, and use such phrases as Allah has power over all things.
A spokesperson for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) registered that union’s disagreement with the NEA, saying, “The AFT does not support a blame-America approach in particular and wishes to distance itself from the entire document.”

It is refreshing to know there is still a solid core of teachers and organizations in American education dedicated to teaching truth and resisting politically correct, liberal propagandizing.

But there is, unfortunately, a radical group of social engineers who fancy themselves the avant-garde of the current movement to tolerate everything at the expense of objective truth and common sense.

Last summer there was the issue of the three-week curriculum produced by Interaction Publishers, Inc., designed for schools across America. The course, geared for seventh-graders, encouraged the following: “Become a Muslim warrior during the crusades or during an ancient jihad (holy war).” Students were to simulate fighting mock battles of jihad against “Christian crusaders” and other “infidels.” Their cry of victory was “Praise Allah.” Students also were to wear Muslim clothing, study and recite from the Quran, adopt the speech of pious Muslim believers, and use such phrases as Allah has power over all things.

The Thomas More Law Center questioned the legality of the course and filed a federal lawsuit to prevent a California school district from using it.

The More Law Center had good reason to doubt the legality of promoting Islam and glorifying jihad. “Muslim warriors” are slaughtering Christians and Jewish people by the thousands the world over. Given the fact that even the mention of the name Jesus Christ in a public school is forbidden and posting the Ten Commandments is considered an intolerable transgression, the freedom to shout praises to Allah in public classrooms adds a new page to the chronicles of radical reverse-discrimination.

Don’t be left wondering what’s happening in the Middle East. Join the Tape-of-the-Month family today—and be informed!
Does the church have a future in our generation?...
I believe the church is in real danger. It is in for a rough day. We are facing present pressures and a present and future manipulation which will be so overwhelming in the days to come that they will make the battles of the last forty years look like child's play.

Francis A. Schaeffer
In the heyday of the 20th-century fundamentalist-modernist controversies, the greatest battles were fought in the fields of theology, the inerrancy of Scripture, evolution, the social gospel, and matters related to the radical liberal departure from traditional orthodoxy.

The conflict today, one might say, has moved to the street. We now grapple with what these battles have wrought. Dr. Francis Schaeffer wisely foresaw the “rough day” that was inevitable in a culture severed from the moorings of biblical absolutes, stabilizing moral and ethical values, and the restraints of Judeo-Christian order.

In an interesting way, the catalyst that exposes the basic issues marking the impassable gulf between serious Christian believers and liberal neopagans is evangelism. The freedom to propagate one’s faith openly among people with contrary beliefs and convictions was, in the past, a cherished principle of democracy—a given. This right has been a basic fact of life for some two hundred years of the American experience. For evangelicals, however, it is no longer something we can take for granted. Christian evangelism has received its eviction notice.

When the Southern Baptists announced plans to launch a campaign to share the gospel with Hindus and Muslims, they were condemned by the president of the United States. Speaking for then-President Bill Clinton, White House Press Secretary Joe Lockhart placed Baptists in the category of groups that “perpetuate ancient religious hatred.” The press secretary also leveled the charge that the great challenge of the 21st century would be to eliminate “intolerance . . . and religious hatred.”

It is no overstatement to say that the Clinton administration’s statements against the Southern Baptist view of the Great Commission represent one of the most outrageous White House attacks against evangelicals in our time.3

Camping with the Athenians

For reasons we shall explore, the prevailing mood in modern society is that every religion, cult, sect, or form of tribal ritualism is of equal value and should be accepted on its own terms. To presume, therefore, that Christianity is not simply another way but the only way to obtain eternal life and a right relationship with God is totally out of sync with contemporary, humanistic enlightenment. Consequently, to propagate the New Testament gospel and make Christ known is an unspeakable affront, totally unacceptable in this new land of many gods.

In many respects, we are revisiting the spiritual conditions experienced in the first century by the early emissaries of the Christian faith. In Athens the apostle Paul and his companions...
found themselves in an environment where the philosophical heavy hitters “spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21).

Those pagan denizens of Mars’ Hill in ancient Athens engaged in the same quest as modern philosophers. They searched for truth, which they never managed to find. To hear a new point that would titillate their intellect; a strange and novel concept; or a dark, new, mystery religion was the be-all and end-all of their daily lives.

Mars’ Hill was a place of altars erected for the veneration of many gods. And these polished pagans deemed themselves religious in the extreme. To cover all their bases, they even erected an altar of particular interest to the apostle of Christ:

For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:23).

That message revolutionized the Western world and became the basis of the democracy that liberated whole nations from the strangu- lation, deprivation, and barbarism that centuries of jaded paganism had imposed.

Now, it seems, we are experiencing a return to Mars’ Hill. Unfortunately, the journey is not an ascent for the better but a descent into a neopagan culture eager to stifle the very message that set us free.

When the term new world order metastasized into the mainstream of American vocabulary in the 1990s, few people actually understood the ramifications. The “Global Village” era we were entering was under construction, and we were constantly reminded to retool our thinking to adjust to the radical new reality. The nation was indeed on the cusp of a “new reality,” one that would require acute changes in our worldviews and lifestyles. The old nationalistic mindset was being ejected. It was a piece of debris seen as an obstacle to progress.

Newscasters, print journalists, and economic analysts were panic-stricken. Some commentators went so far as to compare the plunge to the crash of ’29. Others referred repeatedly to the anger in the streets of America over the corporate malfeasance of the Enrons and WorldComs and their book-cooking accounting cohorts. A traumatizing concern was how these events would affect the roles of leaders of the Free World.

How much of this chaos was real and how much was partisan political rhetoric is debatable; but one thing was painfully evident. A generation bred on self-centered ambition, situation ethics, no absolutes, and greed sanctioned by a culture without moral and spiritual moorings was coming home to roost.

Do Americans still possess the capacity for outrage? Yes, at least when it comes to money.

A secular television commentator recently said a day is coming when wars will not be waged based on military considerations but on economic ones. We may not agree completely, but we venture the opinion that future military confrontations will more likely be driven by economic expediency than humanitarian sensibilities. Bottom line: the name of the game in the global village is money.

The Global Economy

The prevailing money-means-everything philosophy was not difficult for pampered, secularized, Western neopagans to accept. After all, following the Cultural Revolution, weren’t personal wealth and security what life was all about? And the new prosperity fit the pattern perfectly. But there would be casualties, as was dramatically illustrated when the stock market plummeted in July.

In the new ecumenism, all religions, cults, and isms are credible, acceptable, and equal in merit, as are the gods and practices associated with them.

The New Ecumenicity

The new scheme of things in the international community mandates a leveling process. The “have” nations must drop to “have less,” while “have not” nations move up in status to “have more.” In other words, inclusivism is the standard, with diverse components operating in harmony. It is actually a kind
of global neosocialism, the unifying factor being economic. When we move into the arena of religion, however, the centralizing consideration is unity.

However, the kind of unity espoused in this new environment is not built on the familiar ecumenical model of the last century. In those days, upscale Protestant religionists came together in the spirit of interdenominational cooperation based on liberal interpretations of theology. Everything deemed “divisive” or “offensive” was set aside in favor of attacking the social-action agenda. Obviously, the key “offensive” elements heaved in the trash bin were, in the main, the historic doctrines and practices of the Christian faith.

A primary component of this mindset and a radical departure from biblical orthodoxy is belief in man’s inherent goodness—the idea that each human being possesses a divine spark. A demeaning sinful nature that degrades man’s nobility is nowhere to be found.

To the liberal way of thinking, all that is necessary to fan the “divine spark” into a radiantly glowing flame is the proper environment and a strong dose of do-goodism. While that flight of theological fantasy has long since been laid bare by the dreadful spiral of degeneracy we are experiencing, these wishful thinkers have not been dissuaded. Sadly, the goodness-of-man fiction permeates the thinking of all too many in the theological, psychological, political, and journalistic realms.

The ideology that framed such thinking and provided the basis for this old-line ecumenicity ravished mainline churches, drove congregants from the pews, and has proven a colossal failure. It is, for all practical purposes, passé. The new ecumenicity is an entirely different product.

While retaining the concept of unity at the expense of orthodoxy, the new fabrication is not confined to Protestant denominations and related organizations. It is global in outlook, inclusive to the core in nature, and espouses international unity with one notable exception: It is devoid of evangelicals who refuse to march in lockstep with the newly enlightened.

In the new ecumenism, all religions, cults, and isms are credible, acceptable, and equal in merit, as are the gods and practices associated with them.

In a real sense, the leveling process of secular global unity is reproduced in the world of religion. The reason for this is simple: Both systems operate from philosophies gutted of spiritual absolutes, significant moral values, and respect for Judeo-Christian beliefs and principles. Therefore, those who don’t agree are disenfranchised, ridiculed, and stigmatized as impediments to progress. You qualify for such a stigma if you cling to the inerrancy of God’s Word and believe that Jesus’ commission to evangelize is still an inescapable mandate—an obligation.

Come the Enforcers

As this code for “progress” becomes widely accepted, enforcement will become a primary issue. After all, if the world is being transformed into a truly unified global society—a global village, if you will—then significant disagreement cannot be countenanced. If the majority believes “everyone is divine,” those who attempt to convince people otherwise are troublemakers, disrupting the dignity of the gods and violating the rules of the game. Now the question becomes what to do with them.

The cold truth is that conscientious evangelicals today perform on an extremely precarious playing field; and like children walking against the light on a busy street at rush hour, many are completely oblivious to the danger.

As the lepers of ancient times were systematically segregated, so will we be. Yes, the days are coming when we will be the orphans in the global village.

ENDNOTES
3 Ibid.

Elwood McQuaid is editor-in-chief for The Friends of Israel.
Imagine this scenario. A preacher comes to your town. He’s dynamic and persuasive, but his message leaves you no little bit troubled. He insists that God has told him it’s time for a change, the institution of the local church has outlived its usefulness, and Christians everywhere ought to abandon the church and express their faith in an entirely new and different way. Would you not say to yourself, “Hold on. My New Testament commands me to be faithful to the local church”? And, “Furthermore, God has used that organism effectively to fulfill His purposes on Earth for two millenia. And now I’m told that it’s time to desert the church?” Would you not find it difficult to accept that teaching as being truly from God?

The parallel is certainly inexact. But perhaps it helps us appreciate what God demanded of believers in the early decades of the Christian era.

For fourteen hundred years the Temple in Jerusalem had been the divinely ordained focus of all worship of Yahweh. It was there God had placed His name, and it was through the ritual carried out in
those courts that He was to be approached. But now the time had come to abandon that system. The Mosaic Covenant had been shown to be the Old Covenant, fulfilled and rendered obsolete by the provision of a blessed and long-awaited New Covenant (Heb. 8:13). The Old was noble and precious, but it was never intended to be permanent or final. Indeed, much of it was designed to teach worshipers that the covenant could not, in fact, be all God would ever provide and to give worshipers a hunger for something better. Now, in Messiah Jesus, that better covenant had come. This synopsis is the message of the book of Hebrews.

No doubt it is difficult for 21st-century believers to understand how shocking, how radical, that message truly was. We stand some two thousand years removed from that day; the transition from Old Covenant to New has long since been so thoroughly made that it is easy for today’s Christians to forget such a transition was ever necessary. Thus the first-century dynamics that underlie the book of Hebrews are difficult to appreciate.

Return, then, for a moment, to the opening scenario. Imagine what it would have been like to confront such radical revelation, to struggle with the demand that you abandon something that for centuries had been at the very core of all of the worship and religious expression of your ancestors. Try to appreciate with what heaviness of heart and reluctance of mind you would have contemplated such a dramatic change in all that you had known. Consider how it would have broken your heart when, in A.D. 70 at the hands of the Romans, God put an exclamation point on the book of Hebrews, violently ending the physical exercise of the Old Covenant through the destruction of the Temple. In recovering some of the emotion and pathos of what God was expecting of that generation of believers, you will perhaps appreciate anew the blessedness of this truth: In what He is and in what He has provided, Jesus is better!

The Refrain of the Book of Hebrews

Throughout Hebrews, the same refrain surfaces again and again. Jesus is better than the angels (1:4); if the Word spoken through angels was steadfast (that Word being the Old Covenant, “ordained by angels,” Gal. 3:19), how much more ought we to heed the gospel message, “which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord” (Heb. 2:3).

Again, Jesus possesses a better priesthood, not after the order of Aaron but after the order of Melchizedek, because Jesus offers a better hope than what was available to those who knew only the ministry of the Aaronic priests (7:1–19). That better hope exists because Jesus has cleansed not the earthly Tabernacle but the heavenly, “with better sacrifices” (9:23, plural because “the one sacrifice [of Christ] stands as the complete fulfillment of all the different sacrifices in the old order”1).

The earthly Tabernacle was only a pattern of the heavenly realities; now that the work has been completed to afford access to God’s presence, that earthly pattern is unnecessary. The heavenly Tabernacle having been cleansed, Jesus can appear on our behalf before the face of God.

Furthermore, Christ’s sacrifice was better because it needed to be offered only once; it was full and final. As the book of Hebrews emphasizes, He came “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (9:26) and “was once offered to bear the sins of many” (v. 28). Thus those who claim His sacrifice as their own by faith can now eagerly wait for Him to “appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (v. 28).

But most central to the message of Hebrews is the happy reality that Jesus has become the Mediator of a better covenant, based on better promises (Heb. 8:6) . . . made possible through the shed blood of Messiah Jesus.
who offered Himself as a better sacrifice (9:23) and thus has afforded a better hope (8:6), it is time to acknowledge that the Old Covenant “decayeth and groweth old” and “is ready to vanish away” (8:13).

**Two Misconceptions**

Two misconceptions often arise from that remarkable proposition. First, believers sometimes wrongly conclude that the Old Covenant must have been wicked, flawed, or ignoble. This assumption is wrong. The Old Covenant constituted an outstanding expression of God’s grace and wisdom—perfect and effectual for the purposes for which God intended it. Under its terms, Yahweh became the real, functioning King of the nation of Israel. He took up residence in the nation’s midst in the person of the Glory Cloud and invited men to approach Him. But such an approach was exclusively on God’s terms. Consequently, the covenant included provisions for an animal of God’s choosing to die on behalf of a worshiper who deserved death. The covenant made it clear that the worshiper’s faith in God’s promise concerning that offering would be accounted to him for righteousness (a principle established in Gen. 15:6) and that atonement would thus be made (Lev. 17:11). All of this is wonderfully “good” (1 Tim. 1:8).

However, the Old Covenant’s “weakness and unprofitableness . . . made nothing perfect” (Heb. 7:18–19). That is, it could not perfect the sinner. Nor was it intended to do so. It was anticipatory, designed to teach men their sinfulness and hopelessness apart from God’s provision and thus to drive them to that provision.

Nor was the Old Covenant set aside because it was intrinsically wicked; God did not rid the world of some hideous mistake. Rather, He demanded that those who follow Him abandon the precious and efficacious covenant arrangement with which He had graced them for several hundred years, only because something infinitely better has now been provided. God did not begin providing something good for His people with the New Covenant; rather, He provided something even better. Thus the Old Covenant system was annulled (8:13) because Jesus brought something better in its place.

**The Old Covenant did not become old with the passage of time; rather, it was fashioned to be old—to look forward to . . . some greater provision capable of perfectly accomplishing that which the Old Covenant could only partially accomplish, something better.**

The Old Covenant did not begin providing something good for His people with the New Covenant; rather, He provided something even better. Thus the Old Covenant system was annulled (8:13) because Jesus brought something better in its place.

A second misconception is that the Law worked well for a time but later began to wane in its capacity to fulfill its function. Again, this theory is wrong. To be sure, the New Covenant was first explicitly foretold late in the Old Testament era by Jeremiah, who gave it the title new covenant (Jer. 31:31). It was then expanded on by Ezekiel under the heading of “a covenant of peace” (Ezek. 34:25; 37:26) and “the everlasting covenant” (Ezek. 37:26, cf. Heb. 13:20).

However, the Old Covenant actually began to grow old at Mt. Sinai. That is, elements of it were powerful and constant reminders that something more was needed, that the blood of bulls and goats could not fully or finally take away sins (Heb. 10:4). For example, (1) a priest had to offer sacrifices on behalf of himself (Heb. 5:3; 7:27); (2) priests died, demonstrating themselves to be sinners (7:23); (3) a priest had access only to an earthly Tabernacle, which is but a “shadow of heavenly things” (8:5), and could enter that earthly Tabernacle but once a year (9:6–9); and (4), perhaps most powerfully, the last sacrifice was never offered, the atoning work never fully and finally accomplished (9:25; 10:11). All of these elements, intrinsic to the Old Covenant, were intended to make the most devout worshiper hungry for something more.

Consequently, the Old Covenant did not become old with the passage of time; rather, it was fashioned to be old—to look forward to (indeed, to teach the worshiper to look forward to) something yet to come, some greater provision capable of perfectly accomplishing that which the Old Covenant could only partially accomplish, something better.

**The Blessedness of a Better Provision**

The book of Hebrews was penned to persuade first-century
believers to submit to God’s demand that they surrender the Old Covenant and see that demand as gracious and wise, made only because God had provided something even better. Believers today do not struggle with the temptation to cling to the Old Covenant and all of its rituals. Indeed, today’s believers are likely oblivious to the reality that the New Covenant they cherish is, in fact, built solidly on the revelational foundation provided in the Old Covenant.

Nevertheless, that struggle constitutes the historical setting of the book of Hebrews, the book that reminds us so carefully that Jesus is the better mediator of a better covenant based on better promises. Perhaps it would be beneficial to ponder the greater blessedness of the New Covenant against the lesser blessedness of the Old Covenant. Perhaps then we will become even more impressed with the overwhelming superiority of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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ENDNOTES


Douglas Bookman is a national conference speaker for The Friends of Israel.
The discussion was friendly but deep: “I just don’t understand why I have to go to a priest, who is a mere mortal, to hear my confessions and have my sins forgiven.”

It was an honest statement and needed to be answered. Indeed, no human priest, regardless of ecclesiastical authorization by ceremony or position, can forgive sins. Only God can (Isa. 43:25; Lk. 5:21, 24). Still, the doctrine of the priesthood is biblical. According to Scripture, we do need a priest to provide our salvation, security, and present peace (shalom). That priest is Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14).

**Salvation**

Some time ago a traveling evangelist was singing to himself the song “I’ve Been Redeemed.” A fellow passenger, hearing him sing,
joined in. Afterward the evangelist put the question to the stranger, “Have you been redeemed?”

“Yes, praise the Lord,” was the answer.

“May I ask how long since?”

“About nineteen hundred years ago,” the passenger said.

The reply stunned the evangelist. “Nineteen hundred years ago?”

“Yes sir. But I’m sorry to say it’s not much more than a year that I have known it.”

The Bible clearly teaches that all of humanity is plagued by a sin nature. Though sin manifests itself in different ways and degrees in each person’s life, the fact remains, “all have sinned” (Rom.3:23, cf. Eccl. 7:20). Christ, as our Great High Priest, came to provide a pardon for sin. Wherefore, in all things it behooved him to be made like his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:17).

The imagery used in the book of Hebrews to convey this basic truth is the solemn Jewish observance of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). According to Leviticus 16, the high priest performed several unique tasks on the Day of Atonement. First, he removed and set aside his garments of grandeur. Wearing only the simple outfit of an ordinary priest, he alone officiated the special sacrifices. Second, on the Great Altar of the Temple, he offered a perfect animal for himself and for the priesthood. Then followed the people’s offering. The blood of the sacrifice was carried behind the Temple’s inner veil and sprinkled on the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies. Finally, the high priest quickly exited from behind the curtains. The people rejoiced to see him alive. It was their proof that God had accepted the blood. The atonement was accomplished.

Yom Kippur was fulfilled in the person and ministry of Christ. First, He was not a human priest after the pattern of Aaron, who was Judaism’s first high priest. Rather, Jesus Christ set aside the outward manifestation of His glory and became the incarnate God, appointed by God as prophesied in the Old Testament: “The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4; cf. Heb. 7:21).

A well-known commentator explained the significance of this truth:

Not until the high priest had carried the atoning blood into the Holy of Holies, and had sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat, was the atonement complete. Likewise, our Lord’s atonement was not complete at the Cross. Not until He had entered heaven as the High Priest having made atonement for sin, was His atonement complete. He, glorified High Priest, in His body of flesh and bones but no blood, had to present Himself at the Mercy Seat in Glory in His bloodless body, the evidence that sin had been paid for.

Christ, our Great High Priest, provided something far superior and better than what was available under the Old Testament. He provided eternal salvation: “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (9:12).

The people rejoiced to see the high priest emerge from behind the curtains on Yom Kippur. It indicated that God had accepted the atonement. By the same token, Jesus’ resurrection was proof that the plan of redemption was complete and accepted: “And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2).

The world needs only one priest, the High Priest . . . to whom sinners can flee and in whom we can find true refuge and security. The eternal High Priest, whose purpose is to anchor our souls in true shalom.

Second, not only was Christ the High Priest, but He alone officiated the special sacrifice needed for an everlasting salvation—the sacrifice of Himself. Having done so, Christ passed through the heaven of clouds and stars into the heaven of heavens to present Himself (Heb 4:14).

Security

In Old Testament days, when a murder was committed unintentionally, the accused could flee to a city of refuge until his trial. God
commanded these cities be provided (Num. 35), and they were strategically placed throughout the land for quick accessibility. They prevented relatives and friends of the deceased from extracting revenge.

A council of elders reviewed each case and made a ruling. If the killer was found guilty of malice or premeditated murder, he was put to death. If, however, the killing was ruled unintentional, the offender was freed from the death penalty. Nevertheless, he had to reside within a city of refuge for his own safety and security. He was only free to leave on the death of the high priest. The high priest’s death was viewed as a substitute for the death of the offender. The offender was legally freed from the consequence of his sin. This Old Testament provision was good, but not perfect. The possibility always remained that those wanting revenge would find a way to take advantage of the exonerated person’s freedom.

Devotionally, the cities of refuge speak of security in our Great High Priest. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Therefore, we flee to Christ, the only place of true safety. The death of each successive human high priest symbolized the death of Christ by which we are freed from spiritual death. Currently Jesus Christ has a continuing and an unchangeable priesthood (Heb 7:17, 21). Because our High Priest lives, neither sin nor evil one can harm our souls. Our salvation is secure and cannot be taken away (Jn 10:28–29).

The ancient rabbis taught that all roads leading to those cities of refuge were to be carefully repaired and cleared of all obstacles once a year, to remove all hindrances in the way of those fleeing for their lives. Christ had come so all may believe. The path to Him is made clear. Our present peace and security are based on the fact that we have been redeemed through the death of our High Priest and secured by His never-changing, eternal priesthood (Heb. 7:24–25).

As hymn writer Ira Sankey wrote, *O Rock divine, O Refuge dear, A shelter in the time of storm; Be Thou our helper ever near, A shelter in the time of storm.*

### Shalom

Before departing for Earth, the astronauts of Apollo 11 placed a plaque on the face of the moon. It read, “We come in peace for all mankind.” This can also be said of Christ who came to Earth. His purpose was to provide peace (Hebrew: *shalom*) in the hearts of each individual. After Jesus had purged our sins, He “sat down” (1:3; 10:12). Commentator Kenneth Wuest explained the significance: *The seated posture indicates that His work was finished, in contrast to the Levitical priests who never sat down so far as their tabernacle work was concerned, and for the reason that their work was never finished, and this because the blood of bulls and goats could not pay for sin.*

The verb “sat down” denotes a solemn, formal act. It speaks of the assumption of position of dignity and authority.

His once-for-all offering of Himself can now provide *shalom* to all who accept Him. It is a peace this world can never understand (Phil. 4:7). Our peace rests on a number of facts. He is not ashamed to call us His own (Heb. 2:11). He can be touched with our infirmities and weaknesses. He was tempted Himself, yet He did not sin (2:18; 4:15). He is merciful and faithful (2:17). He also mediates as an advocate for all believers (7:25; 9:24, cf. 1 Jn 2:1).

These facts and many others about our High Priest show us that He is an anchor for our souls. The evangelist D. L. Moody once said, “Hope is a good anchor, but it needs something to grip. Anchor to the throne and then shorten the rope.” Many circumstances in life challenge our peace. God’s answer to our turmoil is to abide in Christ. He is our anchor, “both sure and steadfast” (Heb. 6:19); and as long as we cling to Him, we can know peace.

The world needs only one priest, the High Priest who can provide eternal salvation. The perfect High Priest to whom sinners can flee and in whom we can find true refuge and security. The eternal High Priest, whose purpose is to anchor our souls in true *shalom*. Jesus the Christ, our Great High Priest!

*Jesus, my great High Priest, Offered His blood and died; My guilty conscience seeks No sacrifice beside. His powerful blood did once alone, And now it pleads before the throne.*

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ENDNOTES


3 H. H. Hoover, cited by Tan, p. 1190.


5 Wuest, p. 41.


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It was the last Passover meal Jesus would celebrate with His disciples before His crucifixion. And as they ate, Jesus took a cup, gave thanks, and said, “This is my blood of the new testament [covenant], which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:28). Just how much the disciples understood of this prophetic proclamation is uncertain. However, it would soon become clear as they witnessed Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross and remembered His words over the cup. It was through His death and shed blood that Jesus established a New Covenant that would change the course of human history for both Jew and Gentile.

A Superior Sacrifice for Sin

Day after day a Levitical priest stood in the Temple and offered animal sacrifices for the atonement of sin, as set forth in the Mosaic Law. The Law, with its sacrificial system, only foreshadowed what Jesus would accomplish through His death on the cross. The book of Hebrews illustrates in two ways the Levitical sacrifices’ inability to remove sin. First, if a sacrifice for sin had perfected the worshiper who offered it, there would have been no need to repeat it (10:2).

Second, if the Israelites truly had been purged from sin through animal sacrifices, there would have been “no more consciousness [sense] of sins” (10:2). However, none of their sacrifices could make them perfect or free them from a sense of sin (9:9). Why? “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (10:4). Animal blood had no power to provide redemption; the ritual slaying could only purify the flesh, that is, provide ceremonial cleansing (9:13).

In bold contrast, the book of Hebrews explains how God provided a better sacrifice for mankind’s redemption. God the Father sent Jesus His Son to become a sacrifice for sin. With full involvement rather than passive endurance, Jesus entered into the work of redemption and became a sacrifice for sin. Thus Christ, in obedience to God the Father’s will, gave His body as a once-for-all offering, enabling man’s sin to be removed (10:5–10). The conclusion is self-evident: God took away the first animal sacrifice that He might establish the second sacrifice in Christ’s
make the New Covenant possible.

**A Superior Covenant for Saints**

Hebrews reveals that Christ is “the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (8:6). It is more excellent because the promises of the Mosaic Covenant were conditional, earthly, fleshly, and temporary; but the New Covenant promises are unconditional, spiritual, and eternal.

**What are the differences between the Old Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant?**

God entered into the Mosaic (Old) Covenant with the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. This covenant was not the first one God made with mankind, but it was the first one He made with Israel as a nation. The Mosaic Covenant was written 430 years after the Abrahamic Covenant and did not alter, annul, or abrogate the provisions of the first (Abrahamic) covenant (Gal. 3:17–19), which was unconditional, irrevocable, and everlasting.

Many people today confuse the Mosaic Covenant with the Abrahamic Covenant and claim that the Promised Land no longer belongs to the Jewish people because the nation lost it due to sin. However, God guaranteed Israel permanent ownership of the land, not through the Mosaic Covenant but through the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 15:7–21; 17:6–8; 28:10–14).

The Mosaic Covenant promises were conditional. The prerequisite was that Israel obey the commandments in order for God to fulfill His covenant promises to bless them (Ex. 19:5). But Israel failed to keep the covenant’s provisions. The fault was not with the Law, for the commandments were “holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). The fault lay with mankind’s sinful nature, which rebelled against the conditions stipulated in the covenant. The covenant itself was limited in power and could not impart spiritual life or righteousness to sinners (Heb. 8:7–9).

Christ, the once-for-all superior sacrifice, is the only sacrifice left for sin today. Those rejecting Christ’s sacrifice have three charges against them: (1) They despise Christ by trampling Him under their feet. (2) They regard the blood of Christ as worthless and unholy (common). And (3) they insult the Holy Spirit, who tried to draw them to Christ (10:29). Those rejecting His atoning sacrifice are considered adversaries. Adversaries under the Mosaic Covenant suffered judgment and died without mercy. Consequently, people who reject Christ await the fearful judgment of God (10:30–31).

Through His death, Jesus inaugurated a “new and living [life-giving] way” (10:20) for people to come into God’s presence with “boldness [confidence]” (10:19). Thus Christ’s superior priesthood and superior sacrifice

**Many people today...**

claim that the Promised Land no longer belongs to the Jewish people because the nation lost it due to sin. However, God guaranteed Israel permanent ownership of the land, not through the Mosaic Covenant but through the Abrahamic Covenant.
ing He will fulfill the covenant’s provisions. And its fulfillment depends solely on the integrity of God, not on the faithfulness of Israel.

**If the New Covenant was not made with the church, why was it presented in Hebrews 8?**

The writer of Hebrews was moved by the Holy Spirit to quote the New Covenant to point out the Mosaic Covenant’s failure and to show Israel that the promises incorporated in a better covenant await through Jesus Christ. The New Covenant was instituted at the Lord’s death (9:16–17), and the disciples ministered its concepts to the nation of Israel (2 Cor. 3:6). Israel’s national rejection of her Messiah resulted in a postponement of the covenant’s fulfillment; its complete fulfillment will come when all Israel receives Christ at His Second Coming.

**What does the New Covenant promise?**

First, the New Covenant provides an inner change of mind and heart that can only be produced through spiritual regeneration. God said, “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts” (Heb. 8:10). The former covenant was external, engraved in stone (Ex. 32:15–16); the New Covenant is written “in fleshly tables of the heart” (2 Cor. 3:3) through the Holy Spirit’s ministry. This aspect will take place for Israel as a whole at Christ’s Second Coming, when God will pour out His Spirit on unsaved Jewish people, bringing about their repentance from sin and acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah (Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:26).

Second, the Mosaic Covenant provided for the religious leaders alone to be taught the legal concepts of the Law with its complicated rituals and regulations. Those living under the New Covenant provisions are taught by the Lord through the indwelling Holy Spirit. They are empowered to walk in the way of the Lord and keep His statutes (Ezek. 36:27).

Third, under the former covenant there was a continual remembrance of sin each time an animal sacrifice was offered (Heb. 10:3). Under the New Covenant, Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb who, once and for all, took away sin (Heb. 10:15–18) through His blood of the New Covenant. The Lord said, “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:12; cf. Jer. 31:34). The words no more are a double negative in the Greek text, meaning “no, never, under no condition” will God remember the sins of redeemed Israel.

Fourth, Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant (Heb. 9:15–20). A mediator acts as a middleman or go-between to intervene between two parties of differing backgrounds who desire to come into covenant relationship. Mediators set aside their own interests for the sakes of the parties involved in the mediation. A mediator must be trustworthy, acceptable to the parties involved, and able to secure a covenant. Through His death, Christ became the Mediator of the New Covenant; and He has made reconciliation possible to all who put their trust in His atoning work on their behalf.

His mediation also reaches back to the saints under the Old Covenant as well as extending to those who will believe in the future. Christ bestows an eternal inheritance on all believers through the New Covenant. A bequeathal can be legally acquired only on the death of the one who bequeathed it. For the New Covenant to take effect and legally bestow salvation to sinners, Christ had to die (Heb. 9:15–17).

Even the Mosaic Covenant had to be inaugurated with blood to be effective. Moses mediated the first covenant by taking the book of the covenant; reading it before the children of Israel, who agreed to keep its precepts; then sprinkling both the book and the people with blood (Heb. 9:19–20). The Old Covenant, being dedicated with blood, showed that the sacrificial death of an innocent victim was required to consecrate and establish a covenant. That covenant was only a type and shadow, looking forward to the day when Christ would consecrate and establish a New Covenant through His shed blood. And He alone can mediate the New Covenant between God and mankind (1 Tim. 2:5).

The New Covenant, unlike the Mosaic Covenant, is eternal. The Lord said, “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them” (Ezek. 37:26). After serving its purpose, the Mosaic Covenant became inoperative. The words old, decayeth, and groweth old (Heb. 8:13) show that the Mosaic Covenant was worn out, antiquated, waning in strength, and ready to be dissolved.

Although the New Covenant was made with Israel and not the church, Christians have been granted the extraordinary privilege of experiencing certain provisions of the New Covenant that were inaugurated when Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross. Today the church enjoys the spiritual blessings of salvation found in the New Covenant. The physical blessings in the New Covenant will be fulfilled with Israel in the Millennium. Those who follow Christ are “ministers of the new testament [covenant]” (2 Cor. 3:6) and called to spread...
In July 1923 at Stoke-on-Trent, England, a gun sounded, marking the start of a 440-yard race between runners from England, Ireland, and Scotland. Just a few paces into the race, J. J. Gillies of England cut through the pack to get an inside position. As he did so, he inadvertently tripped a runner from Scotland, who fell to the grass. Gillies quickly took the lead, while the Scot sat forlornly on the ground, concluding he had been disqualified. It seemed the race was over for him.

When the book of Hebrews was written, many Jewish believers were much like the Scot. They were attempting to run the “race” of their new faith in Jesus the Messiah but were finding it difficult. Apparently they had experienced suffering, although not yet to the point of shedding blood (10:32; 12:4). Still, the reproaches and loss of property (10:33–34) were almost too much for some of them to bear. Despite the blessings they had found in Messiah Jesus, some were still considering retreating to the old, familiar ways of Judaism, where it was safe.

The writer to these discouraged Hebrews was led of God to “lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (12:12) and to urge these Jewish Christians not to become mentally “wearied and faint” (12:3). The first ten chapters of the book gives them overwhelming theological support for their decision to follow Christ, demonstrating that Christ is supremely better than anything they had in Judaism.

But then the writer exposed the crux of the matter: “For ye have need of patience [endurance]” (10:36). Instead of giving up, they needed to press on. He urged them to continue doing God’s will so that they might receive what God had promised (10:36). Their present difficulties were only temporary. Soon, they were told, the Lord will return to judge the wicked and reward the faithful (10:37). Meanwhile, they should continue to live by the same basic, scriptural principle they adopted when they originally had trusted Christ, namely, “the just shall live by faith” (10:38).

This call to endure was not an impossible one to follow. It was based on an accurate understanding of the essence of faith and was verified by scores of examples of
those who had gone before.

‘Now Faith Is’

Of the thirty-nine occurrences of the word faith in this epistle, thirty-one are in 10:22—12:3. The writer, as the Holy Spirit moved him, apparently was intent on making sure his readers properly grasped the concept of faith.

Hebrews 11:1 is not so much a formal definition of faith as it is a clarification of the essence of faith: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Biblical faith, at its core, is an assurance, a confidence, a certainty of the future realization of God-given hopes and blessings the eye cannot see. Thus, after receiving a promise from an angel of God, the apostle Paul could declare on the deck of a storm-tossed, sea-ravaged ship, “Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Acts 27:25). Paul could not physically see the outcome of what had been promised him, but he was certain of it nevertheless.

The Jewish believers in the book of Hebrews were mistakenly focusing their attention on what could be seen, namely, their problems, their pain, and their experiences. Just as “doubting” Thomas had done before them, they were falling into the trap of empiricism. If I cannot see it, taste it, touch it, hear it, or smell it, then it cannot be real, they thought. But Jesus said, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (Jn. 20:29).

Contrary to the old adage, seeing is not believing when it comes to biblical faith. Instead, believing is seeing because faith looks at life through spiritual eyes. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he told the Corinthians, “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18).

Only faith pleases God (Heb. 11:6). It communicates to Him that we believe He both exists and rewards those who seek Him. Our faith also reveals that we believe God is good and His Word sure. Thus we act on our belief by coming to Him, certain of what has not yet come to be.

The writer to these discouraged Hebrews was led of God to “lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” (12:12) and to urge these Jewish Christians not to become mentally “wearied and faint” (12:3).

‘So Great a Cloud of Witnesses’

After explaining the essence of faith, Hebrews 11 encourages us with a list of elders who obtained a good report (11:2). These were heroes of days gone by, people who indubitably ran the race of life with enduring faith. By examining their lives, God shows us what faith in action really looks like.

There was Abel who, by faith, obtained witness that he was righteous (11:4), again showing “the just shall live by faith.” Enoch’s faith pleased God to the point that he was raptured, escaping death (11:5). Noah’s faith saved his family, condemned the world, and enabled him to inherit the righteousness that comes by faith (11:7).

By faith, Abraham obeyed God and left Ur of the Chaldees, unaware of his destination (11:8). He endured in a foreign land because his eyes of faith looked to the city and homeland God had promised him (11:9–10, 16).

Sarah, his wife, conceived a child in her old age, the first of innumerable descendants. Why? Because “she judged him faithful who had promised” (11:11). When told to sacrifice his only child, Isaac, Abraham unhesitatingly obeyed. He was so certain of God’s promise to establish a nation through Isaac that he concluded God would raise Isaac from the dead in order to keep His Word (11:17–19).

The roster of “champions” includes Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, who all acted in faith because they were confident of the outcome (11:20–22).

Moses’ parents protected him as an infant for three months, demonstrating that the antithesis of fear is faith (11:23). Moses himself refused a pagan identity, choosing ill treatment and reproach over tangible riches. The reason? He was looking to an unseen reward (11:24–26). Likewise, when leaving Egypt, Moses did not fear the king’s wrath. He had already placed his faith in a far greater King. Thus “he endured, as seeing him who is invisible” (11:27). Moses’ faith also led him to keep the Passover, being convinced it would protect him from God’s impending judgment (11:28).

By faith, the children of Israel,
confident of the future realization of their God-given hope, witnessed a wall of water stand up and a wall of stone fall down (11:29–30).

Rahab the harlot, a Gentile, looked ahead to the certain victory the God of Israel would provide for His people, and she believed. Consequently, God spared her life (11:31).

These are but a few examples of people of faith. Even the writer of Hebrews recognized the list was endless and limited his enumeration (11:32). God’s Word speaks in generalities from this point forward, rehearsing miraculous deeds of valor and glory (11:33–35). But it also includes the stark realities of living by faith in a fallen and perverse world. Desperation, homelessness, mockery, beatings, torture, imprisonment, and various forms of execution awaited those who dared to see beyond their day (11:35–38).

Today is no different. Christians around the world are being tortured, maimed, and killed because they refuse to deny Christ. They are being beaten, imprisoned, driven from their homes, and snatched from their families. Yet God encourages us in Hebrews to hold tightly to our faith, endure hardship, and run the “race,” “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (12:1–2).

Despite the fact that God’s promises regarding Messiah’s Second Advent never came to pass in their lifetimes, the ancient saints still believed. They kept the faith. Therefore, “God is not ashamed to be called their God” (11:16).

**‘Let Us Run With Patience’**

After guiding us through the “hall of faith,” God’s Word gives us an important exhortation:

> Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us (12:1).

If those who have gone before us could persevere, so can we. If they could live and die by faith, so can we. If they could look beyond the visible and temporal to the invisible and eternal, so can we.

The key to perseverance, however, is not our faith, in and of itself. The key is the object of our faith. The Bible tells us to “run with patience the race,” but only by “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith” (12:2). Jesus Christ, the ultimate example of perseverance, having endured both the cross and the hostility of sinners, is to be the object of our spiritual focus (12:2–3). It is to Him we must look, unwaveringly.

The apostle Peter learned this lesson dramatically when he attempted to walk on water and began to sink when he took his eyes off the Lord (Mt. 14:30). But later his eyes of faith were pointed in the right direction: “Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8).

The 1923 athlete who thought he had lost the race was none other than Eric Liddell, known as the Flying Scotsman. A number of nearby officials urged Liddell to get up and keep on running. Despite the fact he was twenty yards behind, Liddell lifted himself up and ran with all his might. Amazingly, he passed Gillies, took the lead, and crossed the finish line two yards ahead of everyone else.

Eric Liddell was a Christian who not only persevered in athletics but also in the race of faith. He eventually became a missionary in China and died of a brain tumor in a Japanese concentration camp at the age of 43. Today he is with the Savior, enjoying all the blessings he was unable to see while here on Earth.

We live in uncertain times. Doubt and despair fill our world. In many places the name of Jesus Christ is despised and ridiculed, and those who love the Lord are in mortal danger. It can be tempting to give up. Yet, despite all the tumult and raging of the nations, we can still persevere in our faith. Others have done so before us. Jesus Himself endured the cross for our sakes. Let us, therefore, press on for His sake.

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At the beginning of the movie *Fiddler on the Roof*, Jewish people in the little Russian village of Anatevka ask their rabbi if there is a special blessing for the czar. The czar ruled the country and was no friend to the Jewish people. The rabbi ponders a moment, then breaks into a huge grin as he replies, “A blessing for the czar? May the Lord bless and keep the czar [short pause] far away from us!”

As most Jewish people know, Judaism has a *barukha* (blessing or benediction) for just about everything. For devout Jews, worship of the one true God is woven into every aspect of their lives. He is considered the Creator and Sustainer of all life and the One who holds the universe in the palm of His hand. It is said that the word *blessing* “is not a verb describing what we do to God; it is an adjective describing God as the source of all blessing.”

A blessing is viewed as a reminder of the incredible, awesome power of the Lord and as a declaration of the desire for Him to use that power for good. *Barukhas*, or *barukhot* (Hebrew plural), are good. Jewish tradition states that a person should recite one hundred *barukhot* each day. Thus there is no shortage of them in and out of the Jewish Scriptures.

The Hebrew word *barukha* comes from the verb *brikh*, which means “to fall on one’s knees.” It is a built-in reminder to the Jewish people of man’s position in relationship to God.

Jewish Scripture overflows with *barukhas*. Genesis 24:27 records the *barukha* of Abraham’s servant when he spotted Rebekah, the future bride for Isaac, Abraham’s son: “Blessed be the **LORD** God of my master, Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth.” Exodus 18:10 records the *barukha* of Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, when he said, “Blessed be the **LORD**, who hath delivered you out of
the hand of the Egyptians.” Ruth 4:14 records the women’s barukha over Naomi when they realized there was a near kinsman who could marry her widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth: “Blessed be the Lord, who hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.” These are but a few of the barukhas in the Bible.

A familiar barukha is often heard when someone sneezes. Most Jewish people nearby will immediately offer up a “God bless you” or “Gezundheit,” (“to your health”). Jewish legend associates the sneeze with life and death. Genesis 2:7 says God blew into Adam’s nostrils “the breath [soul] of life.” Since the nostrils are the portals through which life enters and departs, this blessing expresses the desire that God continue to sustain the sneezer.

Barukhas are key in the prayer lives of Jewish people. Although they can be recited when you’re alone, most blessings are recited in a gathering of at least ten people (a minyan).

**Blessings in the Morning**

Jewish observance requires that each day start with the recitation of blessings. The day begins with the blessing for washing the hands and continues with the blessings for God’s creation and sustenance and for the privilege of beginning a new day. During the day there are blessings for the study of Torah. Here are some examples:

**Barukh Hu**

The leader of the congregation begins the prayer by saying, “Barkh Hu et Adonai ha-mevorah” (“Bless the Lord who is blessed”). The congregants respond by bending their knees and saying, “Blessed is the Lord who is blessed for eternity.”

**Barukh She-amar**

The daily morning service includes the recitation of the Barukh She-amar (“Blessed be He who spoke”). It begins a prayer, wrote scholar Philip Birnbaum, “composed of eighty-seven words, a number suggesting the numerical value of [the Hebrew word for] refined gold.”

**Barukh Shem Kevod**

This phrase, Blessed be His glorious majesty forever and ever, accompanies the opening verse of the Shema (Dt. 6:4–9). The Talmud, an extrabiblical book, claims that Jacob spoke these words right before his death when he asked his sons about their spiritual condition. They reportedly quoted the Shema, and Jacob recited the benediction immediately afterward.

**Blessings for Food**

One of God’s wonderful blessings is food. Judaism encourages prayer both before and after eating. Deuteronomy 8:10 states, “When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee.” Thus all blessings recited for food begin with the words, Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam (“Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe”).

The blessings said prior to eating begin the same way but have different endings, depending on the food to be eaten. For wheat products, the prayer ends with hamotzi lechem mein ha-aretz, which blesses God for the wheat from the ground. For wine, the ending is borai pre hagofen, which blesses God for the fruit of the vine. For vegetables from the ground, the prayer is borai pre ha-a-da-ma, which blesses God for the food from the earth.

Perhaps unique to Judaism is the requirement for prayer after one eats. As a boy, I attended an Orthodox summer camp. One of my frustrations was how long it took for lunch. After saying the blessings before eating, then eating and praying after eating, it seemed as though the afternoon was over. Although that wasn’t really the case, the liturgy did require at least twenty minutes. This liturgy is known among Ashkenazi (European) Jews as benshn. It is a Yiddish word derived (by way of German) from the Latin word benedicere, meaning “bless, pronounce a benediction.” It is known as the Birka ha-Mazon (grace after meals).

There are four parts to this liturgy. Birka ha-Zan praises God for providing food for the world. Birka ha-Aretz expresses Israel’s gratitude for the good land God has given the Jewish people, for bringing them out of the land of Egypt, and for giving them the Torah.

Boneh Yerushalayim asks God to have mercy on Israel and to restore the Temple, the Kingdom of God, and the Messiah’s work. And finally, Ha-touv-ve-ha-metiv thanks God for His goodness and works and also includes a number of requests.

According to tradition, three of the blessings originated from actual events recorded in the Bible. They involve Moses and the manna,
Joshua and the land, and Kings David and Solomon and the kingdom. The fourth blessing came from the rabbis.

The Diaspora (scattering of the Jewish people) resulted in different barukhas developing in different areas of the world. According to the Talmud, this “barukha diversity” is limited in only two ways: Each prayer “must have the name of God, and . . . must also contain the attribute of God’s kingship.”

Noted rabbi Adin Steinsaltz defined prayer as a “direct and unequivocal act of relating to God. . . Prayer is essentially one thing: an explicit addressing by the human ‘I’ to the divine ‘Thou.’” It is, he said, “the salient expression of religious emotion in man and of his relationship with his Creator.”

The rabbi eloquently explained the essence of prayer.

Head Coverings

Understanding the place God is to hold in the prayer lives of Jewish people explains the use of blessings. It also sheds light on an important custom (some Jewish people call it a command) of covering the head.

“Jewish tradition regards bare headedness as a form of nakedness, and nudity as one of pagan indecencies and an instruction of propriety in worship,” explained Birnbaum.

This tradition is based on two Hebrew words used in Deuteronomy that refer to anything indecent. Not a single place in the Old Testament contains a command for men to wear head coverings. It is true that the high priest wore a mitre, and the priests covered their heads (Ex. 28:4); but that is all.

There are different names for the covering. Most Jewish people call it a yarmulke (pronounced yah-mah-kah). This is a Yiddish word, derived from the Aramaic phrase yira malka, which means “fear of the King.”

The Hebrew term is kippah.

Many reasons are given why Jewish men should cover their heads. While attending Hebrew school, I was told that Jewish men needed to cover their heads to remind them not to be such big shots—that someone is higher and mightier than they. Indeed, the covering is to be a reminder of the awesome power and might of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Today Hasidic and Orthodox Jewish men cover their heads at all times because the Talmud teaches that men should not walk four steps without their heads covered (Shabbath 118b.) They believe that once a male reaches the age of three, he should cover his head. In many synagogues, a box of kippot (plural) sits at the sanctuary entrance; any man who does not have his own kippah can borrow one from there since a kippah is required for all men who enter.

Conservative Jewish men wear head coverings only when they worship, whether at home or at synagogue. For other activities, covering the head is not required. Reform Jews are not obligated to cover their heads at all; and, as a result, most do not.

It is not necessary for Jewish women to cover their heads. Yet, because the Torah associates shame and punishment with uncovering a woman’s head (Num. 5:18), Hasidic and some Orthodox women choose to cover their heads with scarves or hats. Others will cover their heads only when they light the Sabbath or other holiday candles.

As we look at the Jewish liturgy, we see two important aspects regarding blessings: a great devotion to God and the ongoing expression of that devotion. As with any good thing, however, the practice itself can sometimes become more important than the reason for it. That is why, as Christians, we ought to identify strongly with our Jewish friends’ pursuit to worship while at the same time making sure the blessings we offer truly come from our hearts.

**ENDNOTES**

4. Ibid.
10. “Ask the Rabbi,” “Kippah Athletics,” “The Aish

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Micah 4:1-13

A Future Hope for Israel

Many questions must have troubled King Hezekiah and the leaders of Judah when they heard Micah preach of the nation’s impending demise. After all, if Judah were destroyed, how would God fulfill the irrevocable promises He made to the children of Israel in the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants?

In this chapter, God gives the people of Judah hope and assurance. He has not forgotten His promises to their forefathers. Although Judah will be destroyed, God will again redeem a remnant from under the iron heel of Gentile oppression and reestablish the nation in its promised land. This event will take place when the Messiah comes to rule the world from David’s throne.

Renewal

Micah shifted abruptly from his predictions of doom to give Judah hope of renewal “in the last days” (v. 1). The phrase the last days refers to the time when Jewish people will undergo great tribulation, followed by Christ’s Second Coming to restore the nation and establish Jerusalem as the center of His divine rule on Earth. Moses had prophesied this tribulation and restoration before Israel entered Canaan (Dt. 4:30).

Micah’s prophecy includes six predictions affecting Israel. First, “the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills” (v. 1). The mountains surrounding Jerusalem are higher than Mount Moriah, where the Temple once stood. At Messiah’s return all the mountains surrounding Jerusalem will be flattened (Zech. 14:4). Jerusalem, as well as the Temple Mount, will become elevated above the surrounding area.

Second, Israel and the nations of the world will worship in Jerusalem, “and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob” (vv. 1–2). During the Millennial Kingdom, all roads will lead to Israel as people from the nations of the world encourage one another to go up to worship in Jerusalem at the Millennial Temple.

Third, saved Gentiles the world over will be taught by the Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem: “And he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for the law shall go forth
ordered its conduct according to the Lord. In the future Kingdom, Judah will continue to put total trust in the Lord, while the nations of the world will put away their heathen gods and follow the Lord.

**Regathering**

In that day, saith the Lord, will I assemble her that is lame, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; And I will make her that was lame a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation; and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even forever (vv. 6–7).

The prophet did not say when this prophecy will be fulfilled. The “remnant” cannot refer to the Jewish people who returned from the Babylonian Captivity because the Lord did not reign over Judah “forever.” The words in that day must refer to the Millennium, when the Messiah will rule over Israel forever. The remnant of Israel that will be restored is compared to a flock of sheep that were “lame” (footsore), sick, afflicted, and dispersed—a picture of Israel’s condition during the Great Tribulation. Afterward, at the beginning of the Millennium, God will regenerate and restore one-third of the previous Jewish population—all who survive the Great Tribulation (Zech. 13:9). When the Messiah returns, this remnant will have the veil of unbelief lifted from its eyes and come to salvation (Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:26).

In keeping with the metaphor of sheep, Micah used a circumlocution to express Jerusalem’s elevation when the Messiah comes to rule during the Millennium: “And thou, O tower of the flock, the stronghold (Heb., Ophel) of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem” (v. 8).

The phrase O tower of the flock, the stronghold [Ophel] of the daughter of Zion refers to the southernmost section of the Temple Mount, opposite Zion, separated by the Tyropoeon Valley. The words tower and Ophel are used synonymously of the strongholds in the city of David, later fortified by Jotham and Manasseh (2 Chr. 27:3; 33:14). It was the place where David’s palace once stood and where the king’s men stood as watchmen over the people of Jerusalem. When the Messiah returns to Jerusalem, He will restore the daughter of Zion to her “first [former] dominion” (v. 8) and guarantee the nation of Israel protection, peace, political power, and prosperity. The picture is reminiscent of the Davidic and Solomonic Empires, which were strong, stable, and impervious to attacks from other nations. This prophecy gave hope to a nation that would soon suffer the...
pain of destruction and captivity.

**Redemption**

Micah abruptly switched tracks to predict again the destruction and captivity of Judah. The prophet asked three rhetorical questions concerning the time of the Babylonian siege: “Now why dost thou cry out aloud? Is there no king in thee? Is thy counselor perished? For pangs have taken thee, like a woman in travail” (v. 9). In other words, why did great wailing break out in Judah? Did they not have a king and counselor to call on for help during the Babylon threat? Yes, they had kings; but the kings were powerless to lead the nation or counsel it during the Babylonian siege. Jehoiakim and Zedekiah each reigned when Babylon occupied Judah; but both served Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (2 Ki. 24—25).

After Babylon destroyed Judah, the children of Israel were left without a king; and they will remain so until the time of their redemption (Hos. 3:4–5). Without leadership, pain and agony would grip the nation as birth pangs grip women in labor. Although the reference is to the Babylonian Captivity, the situation will be the same during “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:5–7; Rev. 12), the Great Tribulation.

Micah continued:

Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies (v. 10).

Judah’s captivity is pictured in stages. As the people of Judah are compelled to leave the city for captivity, they will cry out in panic like a woman suffering agonizing birth pains. On the forced march to Babylon, they will be made to “dwell in the field,” unprotected from the elements and predators. Multitudes will perish. After arriving at Babylon, the Judean remnant will be in captivity for seventy years (Jer. 25:11). And at the end of seventy years, a remnant will be redeemed, or allowed to return to Judah. This latter prophecy was fulfilled by edict of Persia’s King Cyrus in 538 B.C. (Ezra 1:2–4). Micah’s naming of Babylon is an amazing prediction in itself, for it came more than a hundred years before all of Judah ended up there (Isa. 39:1–8).

In the future, heathen armies will trample Jerusalem’s holy sites without pity: “Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion” (v. 11). The world will gloat with glee over Israel’s shame, suffering, and subjugation (cf. Dt. 28:37). This prophecy’s ultimate fulfillment will come during the Great Tribulation.

Someday the nations will storm against Jerusalem, ignorant of what God has planned for them: “But they know not the thoughts of the LORD, neither understand they his counsel; for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor” (v. 12). As sheaves are bundled and brought to the threshing floor to be trodden under the feet of oxen, so the nations that come against Israel will be destroyed. The annihilation they had planned for Israel will come on their own heads, especially during the Tribulation.

In verse 13 God directs Jerusalem to rise up and tread on her enemies as an ox treads out grain with his hoof. A horn of iron and hoofs of bronze symbolize the power and strength the Lord will give Israel to fight her enemies. This event likely takes place when the Messiah comes to destroy the nations at the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16; 19:19). Then Israel will gather the wealth of the world and devote it to the Lord, whose power will have accomplished the victory. The phrase unto the Lord of the whole earth refers to the Messiah (Christ) when He returns as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:16; cf. Ps. 2:8–9).

Micah prophesied a message of hope to the household of Judah. But before this hope is realized, Judah must be punished for her disobedience to the Lord. In the future, Israel will experience a glorious victory over her enemies and enjoy redemption through her Messiah. Then Jerusalem will be

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David wrote, “Among the gods, there is none like unto thee, O Lord” (Ps. 86:8). King Solomon told Hiram, king of Tyre, “Great is our God above all gods” (2 Chr. 2:5). The Psalms claim, “The LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods” (95:3); “the LORD ... is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols; but the LORD made the heavens” (96:4–5); the Lord is “exalted far above all gods” (97:9); “our Lord is above all gods” (135:5); and “Oh, give thanks unto the God of gods” (136:2).

After the prophet Daniel interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the king exclaimed, “Of a truth it is that your God is the God of gods” (Dan. 2:47). After God delivered Daniel’s friends from the fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar called Israel’s God “the Most High God” and declared, “There is no other God that can deliver after this sort” (Dan. 3:26, 29). Daniel referred to God as “the Most High God” (Dan. 5:18, 21).

Demon-possessed people also called God “the Most High God” (Mk. 5:7; Acts 16:17).

God Is Exclusive

The biblical claim that Jehovah is the only real God is based on several factors.

The Holiness of God

The holiness of God is His quality of being divided from everyone and everything else in the sense of being different, distinct, or unique. Hannah declared, “There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none beside thee” (1 Sam. 2:2). C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch claimed the latter part of Hannah’s declaration “explains the reason given for His holiness, viz., ‘there is not one (a God) beside thee.’” None is holy or unique as Jehovah is because He is the only God who exists.

Moses and the children of Israel sang that no one else is holy or unique like Jehovah: “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness ...?” (Ex. 15:11).

Tribulation saints will sing the song of Moses, “For thou only art holy,” and give the reason Jehovah is holy or unique in an exclusive sense: “for all nations shall come and worship before thee” (Rev. 15:4). The fact that all nations will come and worship Jehovah indicates that all nations will recognize that He is the only God who exists. Thus Jehovah is holy or unique in an exclusive sense because He is the only real God.
Assertions of One God

Assertions by God. God asserts that He is the only real God. He declares, “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me” (Dt. 32:39). Earl S. Kalland explained:

What was Israel to understand? That the Lord is God! This statement is made the more impassioned and emphatic by the repetition of the first personal pronoun, “I, even I” . . ., and the simple but profound assertion, “I am he” . . . an assertion of the reality and uniqueness of the Lord as God, readily seen in the line that follows, which asserts that no other God exists.2

God said to Israel, “I am he; before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and beside me there is no savior” (Isa. 43:10–11). Edward J. Young wrote,

They are thus to perceive that He who speaks to them is the I AM, the one who is, the existing, true, actual God. The old gods of Israel’s period of idolatry must go, and Israel must know that Yahweh of hosts alone is the true God. Before Him there was no true God formed, nor will there be any other after Him. The word “formed” may cast some reflection upon the fact that the idols are formed by molding. The God of Israel, however, is superior to them, for He has no beginning nor ending.3

God also declared, “I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me there is no God” (Isa. 44:6); “I AM the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me” (Isa. 45:5); “there is no God else beside me, a just God and a Savior; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:21–22).

Assertions by Others. Israelites and Gentiles asserted that Jehovah, Israel’s God, is the only real God. After hearing what Jehovah did for the Israelites at the Red Sea and in their conquest of the Amorites, Rahab, the Canaanite harlot, told the Israelite spies, “The LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Josh. 2:11).

David asserted that no one is God except Jehovah, asking rhetorically, “For who is God, except the LORD?” (2 Sam. 22:32).

After God healed Naaman, captain of Syria’s army, of leprosy, Naaman declared, “Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; . . . thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD” (2 Ki. 5:15, 17).

King Hezekiah prayed, “O LORD God of Israel, . . . thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth” (2 Ki. 19:15). He asked God to save Jerusalem from Assyrian destruction, “that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only” (2 Ki. 19:19).

A group of Levites, while addressing the God of Abraham, Moses, and Israel, declared,

Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are in it, the seas, and all that is in them, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshipeth thee (Neh. 9:6).

A scribe said to Jesus, “Thou hast said the truth; for there is one God, and there is no other but he” (Mk. 12:32).

The apostle Paul asserted, “Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, Seeing it is one God, who shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Rom. 3:29–30); “there is no other God but one” (1 Cor. 8:4); “God is one” (Gal. 3:20); and “there is one God” (1 Tim. 2:5).

James declared that people do well to believe “there is one God” and that demons believe there is one God and tremble (Jas. 2:19).

Since demons were created as holy angels by God and existed in His presence until they rebelled and became evil, they know there is only one real God and that He has unlimited power. That knowledge causes them to tremble with fear.
Assertions of the True and Living God

Several persons asserted that Jehovah is the true God. The prophet Azariah indicated that, when Israel forsook Jehovah, Israel was “without the true God” (2 Chr. 15:3). The Hebrew word translated “true” “is used absolutely to denote a reality which is to be regarded as amen ‘firm,’ and therefore ‘solid,’ ‘valid,’ or ‘binding.’”4 Jesus called the Father “the only true God” (Jn. 17:3). The apostle John asserted that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, has given human beings understanding so that they might know the God “that is true” (1 Jn. 5:20). The Greek word translated “true” in Jesus’ and John’s statements is “used of God in the sense of ‘real’ or ‘true’ in contrast to the vanity of idols.”5

Several persons asserted that Jehovah is the living God. After seeing God’s glory at Mount Sinai and hearing Him speak, the Israelites said, “We have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth” (Dt. 5:24) and claimed that they “heard the voice of the living God” (v. 26).

Joshua told Israel, “Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you” (Josh. 3:10). David declared that Goliath defied “the armies of the living God” (1 Sam. 17:26). King Hezekiah accused the king of Assyria of sending his spokesman “to reproach the living God” (2 Ki. 19:4). God foretold that the people of Israel would be called “the sons of the living God” (Hos. 1:10).

King Darius the Mede called Daniel “servant of the living God” (Dan. 6:20). After God delivered Daniel from the lions, Darius ordered the people of his kingdom to “tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God” (Dan. 6:26).

The apostle Peter called Jesus “the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16; Jn. 6:69). Caiaphas, the high priest, said, “I adjure thee by the living God” (Mt. 26:63). Paul and Barnabas exhorted the people of Lystra to turn from the vain worship of their false gods “unto the living God, who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them” (Acts 14:15).

Paul referred to “the Spirit of the living God” (2 Cor. 3:3); called Christians “the temple of the living God” (2 Cor. 6:16); mentioned “the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15); said, “We trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men” (1 Tim. 4:10); and charged the rich to trust “in the living God,” not in uncertain riches (1 Tim. 6:17).

The writer of Hebrews warned his readers against “departing from the living God” (3:12), talked about serving “the living God” (9:14), asserted that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (10:31), and called the heavenly Jerusalem “the city of the living God” (12:22).

The apostle John saw “the seal of the living God” (Rev. 7:2). God emphasized the reality of His existence by introducing many significant declarations with the expression as I live (Isa. 49:18; Jer. 22:24).

The prophet Jeremiah claimed that Jehovah “is the true God; he is the living God” (Jer. 10:10). The apostle Paul wrote about people who “turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God” (1 Th. 1:9).

Conclusion

The Bible leaves no room for doubt concerning its view of God. It unequivocally asserts that Jehovah, the God revealed in its pages, the God who brought Israel and the church into existence, truly exists; is exalted above all other gods; and is the only real God.

ENDNOTES

dispute raged a few years ago over whether to allow a manger scene in front of a local municipal building. A lady in town reportedly opined, “Isn’t it a shame that we have to ruin Christmas by bringing up the subject of Jesus.”

This is the season when millions of Americans prepare to celebrate Christmas. And we certainly celebrate in style. We dress up the country from coast to coast with bright, sparkling lights; elaborate decorations; and cozy nostalgia of hearth and home. On the outside, America is a sight to behold. But what has it become on the inside?

Ninth-century Zarephath was an unlikely place to find a prophet of the Lord. It was located in Phoenicia on the Mediterranean coast between the major
Phoenician cities of Sidon and Tyre. Far from being backward, Phoenicia was a thriving commercial center with an advanced, cultured, and prosperous society. The Phoenicians (also called Sidonians) were famous for their special purple dye; exquisite textiles and embroideries; highly prized cedar wood; and their skills carving ivory, working with metal, and making glass. They even developed an alphabet, revolutionized navigation by using the stars, and controlled the Mediterranean Sea with their ships.

But all was not well in Phoenicia. Its inhabitants not only worshiped the goddess Ashtoreth, “the abomination of the Sidonians” (2 Ki. 23:13), but they prostrated themselves before Baal; burned their children to death on his altars; kissed his image; and indulged in “horrendous and repulsive aspects of the worship—sexual excesses and perversions.”

And the Israelites, who should have known better, followed suit. King Ahab (874–853 B.C.) and his wicked wife, Jezebel, daughter of Phoenician King Ethbaal, elevated Baal worship until it saturated the northern Kingdom worship of the true God, Jehovah.

Part of the perversions of Baal worship were meant to coax the deity into providing the life-giving rains that Israel so desperately depended on. To convince the Israelites of the truth, Almighty God brought a three-and-a-half-year-long drought. Elijah the prophet told Ahab, “As the LORD, thy God, liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die” (v. 12).

Elijah comforted her and told her to feed him first, promising the Lord would provide:

As the L ORD, thy God, liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die (v. 12).

She believed and obeyed. And God, as always, was faithful. When her son died, she revealed her humble heart, acknowledging that she was a sinner; and God, through Elijah, raised her son from the dead (vv. 17–24).

Were there no widows in Israel who could have used Elijah’s help? Jesus said there were plenty (Lk. 4:25–26). But God was not pleased with ancient Israel, a nation that once knew the truth and forsook it to worship Baal. So He sent Elijah to a Gentile who never received the spiritual benefit of being part of Israel but who sincerely trusted the Lord. Then, about 130 years later, He sent the Assyrians to wipe the northern kingdom from the map.

God is not pleased by outward religiosity and inward apostasy. There was a time when Christmas in America revolved around Christ; when children prayed in school, universally pledged allegiance to their country as one nation “under God,” and learned to read from primers that taught the Bible. And God blessed America.

Israel once stood in a unique place of blessing also, but she apostatized. So the Lord sent Elijah to Zarephath, where He found someone of humble spirit and faith in the one and only, true and living God.

What will you celebrate this Christmas? Will it be the incarnation of Almighty God in the person of Jesus Christ, who came to redeem sinful, helpless humanity? Or will it be Santa and the “spirit of giving”? As God peers down from heaven this holiday season, will He find humbleness of heart and genuine faith in the God of the Bible, or will He have to look somewhere else? “For the eyes of the L ORD run to and fro through all the earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (2 Chr. 16:9).

ENDNOTES


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Dr. Moshe Daniel, said the operation was conducted on humanitarian grounds. Furthermore, the surgery was financed almost entirely by the hospital.

Today the [once blind] Palestinian girl is seeing the world through the eyes of an Israeli. Too bad some of our news people don’t see such “good news” events as clearly as the young lady now sees.

Depriving people of these inspiring stories and some less dramatic from the work-a-day world contributes to the perception that only hatred and animosity exist between all Israelis and Palestinians. Every day at The Hebrew University alone, 4,500 Arab Israelis and Jewish students attend classes, converse, and live together in peace. When there are no closures because of terrorist acts, thousands of Israelis and Palestinians work side-by-side. In hotels, restaurants, and other businesses, the same conditions apply.

Many Christian pilgrims to Israel may not realize that a large number of the friendly employees in the hotels are Palestinian Arabs. It is also a fact that there have been times when the perpetrators of terrorist attacks have been treated for their injuries in the same Israeli hospitals where their victims were recovering. And there have also been times when Palestinians have rushed to the aid of wounded or hurting Israelis.

With a new phase developing in what may well be the late stages of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the media would do well to rethink its “if it bleeds, it leads” style of journalism. Sincere people want to hear the whole truth about what is happening in Israel and the Middle East. It is a great disservice to deprive the international community of balanced reporting and, in the process, create a false or imperfect understanding of the situation.

Many Palestinians are as weary of the bloodshed and deprivation as are the Israelis, and that fact...
On a day in late July, students, faculty, and employees were taking a leisurely lunch inside the popular Frank Sinatra Cafeteria on the campus of The Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Without warning, a thunderous explosion ripped through the room. Terrorists from the Hamas organization had managed to infiltrate the restaurant and place a pipe bomb on one of the tables. When the smoke and dust cleared, seven people—five of them Americans—lay dead. Thirty-one more were found wounded. A few days later, two other victims died of injuries.

Hamas claimed it was striking back at Israelis for executing one of its high-ranking leaders, who was in the midst of planning a megaterror attack inside Israel. The assault at the university, however, was not only about killing innocent Israeli civilians whom these terrorists view as “soldiers” and, therefore, legitimate prey for their guns and suicide bombs. The Hebrew University has for years had a reputation for moderation. In fact, of the 25,000 students enrolled, some 4,600 of them are Israeli Arabs. Approximately 1,900 are from abroad. All of which says that the objective of this monstrous attack was to kill anyone who happened to be at the wrong table.

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

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Among the severely wounded at The Hebrew University in July were three devout Christians from South Korea. . . . The wives of the three men were a constant presence in the hospitals and bore radiant testimonies to their faith before doctors and hospital personnel.

Kuan Son Dal suffered extensive burns on his hands, legs, and face. Two weeks after the incident, he was still in a coma-like state. Kuan is the father of a five-year-old boy and a little girl who is a year old.

Zeng Se Ho also suffered serious burns on his face, hands, and legs. His condition was complicated by the fact that a table leg penetrated his body, necessitating the removal of three of his ribs. This married father of one daughter faces a long period of recovery.

The wives of the three men were a constant presence in the hospitals and bore radiant testimonies to their faith before doctors and hospital personnel. At one point, a group of Christian young people visited the men, sang Christian songs of encouragement, and prayed for their recovery. Once again their devotion to the Lord deeply impressed the patients and members of the hospital staff.

The positive response of these believers to the horrific and senseless affliction they suffered is a story that is being reenacted in a host of countries where Christians are suffering and dying for their faith. In many respects, their situation parallels that of the first-century church. The more pagan Rome attempted to destroy the followers of Jesus, the more people were drawn to the faith that could cause ordinary people to triumph in the face of terrible persecution.

And that remarkable truth should be a source of strength and courage for every Christian in this troubled world of ours.

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

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2 in National Review Online, writer Bat Yeor lists grisly incidents confirming Islamists’ indiscriminate slaughter of innocent people:

In Indonesia, some 200,000 deaths resulted from jihad violence in East Timor. Christians have been pursued, and massacred, and their churches burned down by jihadists in the Moluccas and other Indonesian islands. The death toll in these violent attacks is over 10,000, while an additional 8,000 Christians have been forcibly converted to Islam, including many who were circumcised. Atrocities are also being committed by jihadists in both the Philippines, and some northern Nigerian states. Hundreds of innocent people died when jihad struck at the Jewish Community Center of Buenos Aires in Argentina, and the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In Egypt, jihadists have massacred Copts in their churches and villages, and murdered European tourists. Christians in Pakistan and in Iran live in terror of accusations of blasphemy, which, if “proven,” can yield a death sentence. And a cataclysmic act of jihad terror resulted in the slaughter of nearly 3,000 innocent civilians of multiple faiths and nationalities in New York, on September 11, 2001.

Among the severely wounded at The Hebrew University in July were three devout Christians from South Korea. You Kad Song, married and the father of a three-and-a-half-year-old boy, spent nearly two weeks in the intensive care unit of the Ein Kerem Hospital before being moved to the plastic surgery wing for treatment of his severe burns.

Kuan Son Dal suffered extensive burns on his hands, legs, and face. Two weeks after the incident, he was still in a coma-like state. Kuan is the father of a five-year-old boy and a little girl who is a year old.

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Child suicide games
the latest PA fashion

**Arutz-7**—The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Web site has reported a new children’s outdoor game being played these days in the Palestinian Authority (PA) city of Ramallah. The name of the game was not reported, but “Blow Yourself Up” seems appropriate.

Tarek Hamida, a reporter for the PA weekly *Al-Aman*, is quoted by the IDF as saying that the usual games of “Arabs and Jews” have given way to improved versions: “We have noticed a new development in the children’s games. We saw how one of the children would stand next to his friend and say, ‘Strap me.’ The ‘engineer’ would then strap a toy explosives belt onto his friend, under his shirt or robe.

“The two of them then hug each other, and the ‘suicide terrorist’ then turns towards a bus or a group of his friends, screams *Allahu Akbar!* and presses a button. The children jump and fall on his right and left from the force of the ‘explosion.’ The game ends only when all the children have had their turn at being the suicide killer, wearing the vest, and pressing the button.”

Arafat's men execute Arab mother accused of collaborating with Israel

**Arutz-7**—An Arab mother of seven, 39-year-old Ikhlas Yassin of Tul Karem, has been executed by members of Fatah’s Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigades. Accused of “collaborating with Israel,” her bullet-riddled body was found lying in the central square of Tul Karem. She was the first woman among the dozens of suspected Arab collaborators killed in the PA in the past two years—a few of them by official PA bodies.

Gaza father tries selling his children

**The Jerusalem Post Internet**—A Palestinian father of seven from Rafah enraged Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority (PA) officials recently by insinuating the PA is not distributing financial aid to the needy when he advertised his children for sale or adoption because he can no longer afford to feed them. He has been forced to publish an apology.

Ahmed Dahir, 44, published the front-page advertisement, entitled “Children for sale or adoption,” in the PA’s mouthpiece, *Al-Hayat al-Jadeedah*. The PA has come under severe criticism, especially in the Gaza Strip, for failing to provide work and food for tens of thousands of unemployed Palestinians. Thousands of unemployed Palestinians have been staging demonstrations outside PA ministries in the Gaza Strip to protest the economic crisis. Some have accused PA officials of embezzling millions of dollars donated by Arab and European states to help needy Palestinians.

Temple Mount guide published as southern wall prepares to fall

**Arutz-7**—Unable to visit the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for nearly two years, non-Muslims can at least read a new comprehensive guide that describes the site’s 3,000 years of history.

Dr. Mazar, a third-generation archaeologist and the granddaughter of famed archaeologist Prof. Binyamin Mazar who headed the Temple Mount excavations between 1968 and 1978, says the southern wall probably won’t last the winter. It stands to the right of worshipers at the Western Wall. It is currently being propped up by scaffolding that she said can never hold it up.

Mazar has been one of the most outspoken and vociferous members of the non-partisan Committee Against the Destruction of Antiquities on the Temple Mount, which has decried the lack of archaeological supervision at the site for the past two years.

“It’s about to fall,” she said of the southern wall. When asked why, she said the dangerous bulge “is where the major works of destruction were carried out by the Waqf (the Moslem body that controls the Temple Mount) starting in 1996, when (Benjamin) Netanyahu allowed them to build the largest mosque in the ancient site of Solomon’s Stables, and the area was entirely changed.” She said the wall “looks like it can fall on those standing below.”

Dr. Mazar said the Jordanians and the Waqf are doing nothing about the problem except blaming Israel, nor is Israel able to do anything: “Jews are not allowed in to the Temple Mount. . . . The Waqf has placed some scaffolding there to try to hold up the wall, but is doing no work there. Israel has stationed two
MEMORIAL GIFT to The Friends of Israel is a special and lasting way to honor the life and testimony of a loved one or friend who has passed on. It also serves as a vital investment in precious lives as God’s Word is proclaimed to Jewish and Gentile people alike through the worldwide ministries of The Friends of Israel.

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Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved (Ps. 55:22).
Where there is no faith, there is the tendency to hate. We see this every day as Arabs volunteer to become suicide bombers. And they wait eagerly to be called to do so. Those who send these people to die tell them they will go to heaven, where seventy-two virgins will receive them. They tell them they will become shahid (“holy”) if they kill us.

Where I live, there are many Arab villages. The Lord has blessed me with the ability to speak the Arab language. From time to time, I meet my neighbors, and we talk. I have lived near some of them for twenty-eight years. But they are not friendly, as they were before. They are being taught to hate us.

Recently I began speaking about what is happening here with some Arabs who know me well. They act as though they are now big heroes. I told them it is possible for us to be friends and live in peace, and the way to such friendship is not with weapons. “We must all put our trust in the Lord,” I told them. “You are putting your trust in your sheiks, and they are trying to make suicide bombers out of you. Ask these sheiks if they are asking their own sons to become such living bombs.”

Then they began to listen. They asked me, “How can we live in peace? Is this possible?”

I replied, “Yes, it is possible. But only if we worship the living God, the One about whom the Bible speaks, the One about whom it is written, ‘and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isa. 53:6). This does not speak of nationality. Everyone who has believed in Him can receive His forgiveness and great love.”

One of them asked, “Where is this written?”

“In the Bible,” I replied.

“This is only for the Jews!” he protested.

But I told them that half the world’s population follows the Bible, not only Jewish people. Christians follow the Bible. And I read John 3:16 to them:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Because they know people who work with Arab Christians, they recognized the verse. So one quickly replied, “This is what we often hear from the Christians. You are a Jew. How did you come to believe this?”

“I have believed in one mighty God,” I said. “Everyone can come to Him and be received as His child, ‘Not by might, nor by power,’ but by His Spirit” (Zech. 4:6).

Speaking with these people is even more difficult than speaking to ultra-Orthodox Jewish people. But it is our obligation to tell of God’s salvation. As I was talking to them, more Arabs began arriving and were listening. I showed them that we are not told, “Go, kill to become holy.” No! God tells us in Matthew 22:39, “Thou shalt love
thy neighbor as thyself.” I asked them, “Is this possible for you?”

“If we love our Jewish neighbors as ourselves,” one said, “tomorrow they will kill us.”

“Look at what you are saying,” I replied. “Your sheiks, whom you trust instead of God, they are killing you. They are making suicide bombers out of you. And you will die. But no one from their families is dying this way. And they also are teaching you how to pray, prayers of great hatred for others. But we know that in our Lord and Savior, there is no hate. The Lord tells us to love our enemies and bless them that hate you, which is not what I hear when I hear you chant, Etbah el Yehud! Ermium el bahar! (meaning, “Butcher the Jews! Cast them into the sea!”).

This time they asked me to show them in the Bible where it is written that the land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people. I quickly read them Genesis 13:14–17, where God told Abraham, “For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever.” I also read to them from Exodus 23 and showed them where the borders of the land are. Now they listened even more earnestly. So I read all the Lord told Abraham in Genesis, and I also read Deuteronomy 7:6–8. “It is not written here about Islam,” I said. I also showed them Psalm 124, where it says the Lord is on Israel’s side.

I could see they had become afraid to speak. So I said, “Today we have spoken as friends. Why? Because we spoke in the name of the Lord.”

To my surprise, they replied, “Thank you.”