The Last of the Judges
A look at the life of Samuel
Find Hope and Inspiration From These Heroes of the Faith

50 People Every Christian Should Know
Does the pressure of the world seem overwhelming? During tough times, it’s often wise to reflect upon the examples set by spiritual giants of the faith that have come before us.

Remembering the great men and women of the past—including Charles Spurgeon, Dwight Moody, Amy Carmichael, and Fanny Crosby—will inspire you to renewed strength and purpose. Our spiritual struggles are not new, and the stories of those who have gone before can help lead the way to our own victories. US $17.99, Outside US $21.75

Not to the Strong
The period of the Judges was a time much like our own—full of spiritual disintegration and moral decay. This book isolates the four “heroes of the faith” found in Hebrews 11. Like us, they had tendencies toward fear, isolation, insecurity, and failure. Be inspired as you read how God corrected, tempered, and forged these men into instruments of His will. What God did for them, He can do for us as well! US $9.95, Outside US $12.00

Halina: Faith in the Fire
Misery and triumph. Heartache and hope. This is the inspirational story of a courageous young Christian who fought the Nazis in the Polish Home Army during World War II. It is a personal story of trust in Christ, victory over evil, and sensitivity to those who suffered under the Third Reich. Reads like a novel. Includes Halina’s own words, taken from her memoirs years later when she led the work of The Friends of Israel in Poland. A truly unforgettable book. US $9.95, Outside US $12.00

The Search
Once you start reading, you won’t be able to stop! A wonderful book for all who think their good deeds will get them to heaven. You will long remember Lorna’s true story and the heartwarming stops on a journey that brought this Jewish woman to undeniable truth about faith, God, and life after death. US $9.95, Outside US $12.00

See enclosed envelope for ordering details.
CONTENTS

10

Who Doesn’t Want a Blessing?
Many people throw around the word blessing without really understanding what it means. Nor do they know there’s one thing in particular they can do that God promises to bless.
Steve Herzig

12

From Bitterness to Joy
This is the story of how God used a godly woman’s difficult circumstances to effect change in Israel—and how He can use us, as well.
Cecelia Weer

16

The Gold-Box Idol
The Ark of the Covenant was extremely important to the people of Israel—but not always for the right reason.
Peter Colón

20

A Hearing Heart
Hophni and Phinehas are prime examples of disobedience. Samuel was different. He did something we all should do.
Bruce Scott

22

‘Bring Up Samuel for Me’
Here is a look at how fear drove a desperate king to do the unthinkable.
David M. Levy

MORE IN THIS ISSUE

4 From the Editor
5 Inside View
6 Editorial: Big Shoes to Fill
7 Eye on the Middle East: The Plan to Hitch Israel to Saudi Arabia by Rail
8 Christian Persecution
19 The Berean Box
26 Samuel’s Big Disappointment
28 Samuel & David
35 Unearthing Truth With Randall Price: Why Would God Harden a Heart?
36 Rightly Dividing: Introduction: The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians
38 Faith for Living: Trash to Treasure
40 Jewish World Update
42 Apples of Gold
Both of my children came to know the Lord at age four. I’ve heard some preachers say children can’t get saved that young, but I beg to differ. It depends on the child and, of course, on God.

Even 3-year-olds can tell the difference between right and wrong. And if they can understand Jesus paid for their sins by dying on the cross and that He is alive today, loves them, and stands ready to forgive them, they are capable of becoming saved.

In fact, it’s easier for youngsters to come to Christ than adults. A 2004 Barna Group study found “nearly half of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their savior do so before reaching the age of 13 (43%).”

More recently, Jorge Rodrigues, executive director of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in Australia, told ChristianToday.com, “A survey by the International Bible Society (Biblica) indicates that 83% of all US Christians make their commitment to Jesus between the ages of 4 and 14. There is no reason to believe that statistics in Australia are any different. This is a critical age of decision for our sons and daughters and it is imperative that we reach out to them in a way that is both relevant and effective.”

Didn’t Jesus tell His disciples in Matthew 18:10, “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven”? And in Matthew 19:14, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

The Bible doesn’t say when Samuel got saved, but he was young. Not as young as four, but still a lad. He heard God’s voice and went on to obey Him his entire life. He became a prophet, priest, and Israel’s last (and perhaps its greatest) judge.

In this issue of Israel My Glory, we explore the life of Samuel from the circumstances surrounding his extraordinary conception to his relationships with Kings Saul and David to the strange, sad incident involving Saul and the medium at En Dor.

May God use this issue to encourage us to pray for our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and beyond; to teach them about Jesus and salvation; and to encourage them to always listen to the “still small voice” of the Lord (1 Ki. 19:12). Enjoy!

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
I was sitting in a room with approximately 5,000 people last summer in Washington, DC, listening to then U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley. She delivered a remarkable speech that reflected on her year and a half at the UN and the challenges she was facing in opposing Israel’s unfair treatment by many of the UN member countries.

Too often the international community has argued that to have moral clarity, countries must remain neutral and not take sides between Israel and its opponents. Ambassador Haley exposed this false premise when she declared, “The United States has no moral duty to be neutral between right and wrong. On the contrary, we have a moral duty to take sides, even when that means standing alone.”

Her words reminded me of the founding of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry more than 80 years ago, when Jewish people in Europe faced extreme persecution. What Nazi Germany was doing to them was wrong; and even though the U.S. government chose to remain neutral at the time, there were men in the city of Philadelphia who could not.

The Friends of Israel was birthed shortly after the horrific pogrom of November 9 and 10, 1938, when the Nazis instigated and led barbaric riots in Jewish communities across Germany. Kristallnacht, meaning “Night of Broken Glass,” was the name given to the event. In the course of one evening, blood-thirsty mobs smashed the windows to Jewish stores, looted Jewish businesses, threw Jewish scrolls and holy books into heaps in the street and burned them, torched Jewish synagogues and burned them to the ground, and invaded and robbed Jewish homes.

As if that weren’t enough, they raped scores of Jewish women, beat multitudes of Jewish people, and murdered hundreds more. By the time the violence ended, the Nazis had arrested 30,000 Jewish men and deported them to concentration camps.

The United States responded feebly. Though the government expressed outrage and withdrew its ambassador to Germany, it did nothing to help the Jewish people there. It refused to relax U.S. immigration restrictions that prevented masses of persecuted German Jews from immigrating to the safety of the United States. In addition, America remained neutral in the growing European conflict until Japan attacked the American fleet at Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

Though the government did nothing to help, there were Christians in Philadelphia who did. The beginnings of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry are rooted in the same principle Ambassador Haley articulated. We have a moral duty when it comes to right and wrong, regardless of the consequences. In fact, it is more than a moral duty. It is a divine command that demands we do what is right and stand against what is wrong. The right thing to do was clear to those who founded this ministry.

On December 1, 1938, three weeks after Kristallnacht, a handful of Christian men met to consider their moral responsibility to help God’s uniquely chosen nation. The issue of right and wrong was clear to them, and they brought into existence The Friends of Israel Refugee Relief Committee.

Eighty years later, we carry on the work these faithful men began, communicating biblical truth about Israel and the Messiah while fostering solidarity with the Jewish people. Our Israel Relief Fund continues the benevolent aspect of the work started in 1938.

I appreciated what Ambassador Haley shared because it reminded me yet again why this ministry was founded, and I pray all of us at The Friends of Israel will continue to stand strong and serve the Lord as He tarries.

by Jim Showers, executive director of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
Nikki Haley’s departure as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations elated the political Left and saddened those who love Israel. In less than two years, Haley set a new American standard that leaves her successor with big shoes to fill.

Of all her accomplishments, and there were many, the one that stands out was her unwavering support for the Jewish state. Toward the beginning of her post at the UN, Haley made her voice clear: “The days of Israel-bashing are over,” she said. “For anyone who says you can’t get anything done at the UN, they need to know there is a new sheriff in town.”

Instead of entertaining unwarranted criticisms of Israel, Haley purposed to bring moral clarity to the UN, trying to unify countries to oppose true human injustices taking place in Syria, North Korea, Cuba, Iran, Venezuela, and the Sudan. Sadly, the UN Human Rights Council chose, as it always does, to condemn Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East.

Under President Trump’s leadership, Ambassador Haley withdrew the United States from the UN Human Rights Council, saying, “The Human Rights Council has long been the foe of those who truly care about human rights around the world. The United States has proven, yet again, its commitment to truth and justice and their unwillingness to allow the blind hatred of Israel in international institutions to stand unchallenged.”

Haley will be remembered for persuading Russia and China to impose the strictest sanctions on the totalitarian regime of North Korea. The landmark UN Security Council vote is believed to have been the impetus for the 2018 Donald Trump-Kim Jong Un summit in Singapore that hopefully will have a positive impact on the Korean Peninsula and abroad.

She boldly condemned Russia’s aggression in Crimea. Ukraine’s permanent representative remarked that Haley’s clarity on the issue was particularly important for his country.

The United States also did an about-face on Iran under Haley. The previous administration softened the language against Iran to advance the Iran nuclear deal, despite the fact Iran is the leading state sponsor of terrorism. Ambassador Haley changed the tone. “I’ll tell you right now,” she said, “we’re going to be really tough on Iran. We’re not giving them a pass.”

President Trump’s appointment of Nikki Haley was strategic. The two-term governor of South Carolina didn’t have a long résumé of international diplomatic experience. But what she lacked became, some thought, her greatest asset. Haley’s business-savvy approach to international politics and negotiations made her a perfect fit to do more than the average ambassador.

She approached the UN appointment with a desire to reform an organization that has become known by some as the “United Nothing.” A recent Gallup Poll found that two-thirds of Americans believe the UN is doing a poor job and that its ineffectiveness stems from its inability to distinguish right from wrong. Moral clarity has left the premises.

The prophet Isaiah said, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isa. 5:20).

The UN puts darkness for light, and light for darkness. Ambassador Haley’s desire to change that fact can be seen in her accomplishments, proving she shined the light of truth in the dark recesses of international politics.

Nikki Haley is going to be a hard act to follow. She called out hypocrisy, spoke up for those who aren’t heard, and was brave enough to stand up for truth. Let’s hope her successor does likewise.

by Chris Katulka
THE PLAN TO HITCH ISRAEL TO SAUDI ARABIA BY RAIL

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Transportation Minister Israel Katz have announced a historic plan to establish a rail link between Israel and Saudi Arabia—a land bridge that would be the cornerstone of a transcontinental transportation corridor eventually connecting Europe with the Persian Gulf through the Mediterranean Sea.

The Tracks for Regional Peace initiative would establish a transformative rail link between Israel’s Mediterranean ports of Haifa and Ashdod to Jordan’s existing rail network that would then connect to Iraq and Saudi Arabia’s Gulf port of Dammam, as well as other Gulf states that have been cut off from the Mediterranean Sea after the outbreak of war in Syria.

The Israeli plan also envisions a rail link to Jenin in the northern West Bank, which would give Palestinians the ability to export goods to other parts of the Arab world. “If the Palestinians connect to a railway system, the entire area will get a significant economic boost,” said Katz, who has expressed a desire to succeed Netanyahu eventually.

The initiative would offer shorter, cheaper, and safer trade routes by bypassing unstable maritime chokepoints, such as the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait at the southern end of the Red Sea. A train line from Israel through Jordan to the Persian Gulf would also allow countries to bypass Lebanon, which is controlled by the Iran-backed terror group Hezbollah.

By moving goods from Europe to Israel—strategically located at the apex of three continents—and then to other parts of the Middle East, cargo would also be able to skirt war-torn Syria. After Syria’s civil war began in 2011, Israel opened its Haifa port as a conduit so goods from Europe and Turkey could be trucked to Arab countries farther east. The new initiative would make permanent this temporary solution.

“There are two central components at the heart of this initiative,” said Katz. “Israel as a land bridge between Europe and the Mediterranean and Jordan; and Jordan as a regional transportation hub, which will be connected to a railroad system to Israel and the Mediterranean in the West; to Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states and Iraq in the East and southeast; and to the Red Sea, through Aqaba and Eilat, in the south.”

“Beyond its contribution to Israel’s economy, the Jordanian and the Palestinian economies, the initiative will connect Israel economically and politically to the region and will consolidate the pragmatic camp in the region,” he added.

“My vision to connect Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states and Jordan to the Haifa port and the Mediterranean Sea will transform Israel into a center for naval transport and strengthen the Israeli economy,” Katz said. “This is a realistic vision that I am advancing in partnership with the American government and other relevant international bodies.”

Katz said the German government already wants German companies to participate. “The United States is the patron of the [entire] process,” he said.

If realized, the initiative—a revival of the Hejaz Railway, an Ottoman-era railway that once ran from Damascus in Syria to Medina in Saudi Arabia, with a branch line to Haifa on the Mediterranean Sea—would reflect the new dynamics in the Middle East, in which Israel and so-called moderate Arab states of the Persian Gulf have found common cause to counter Iran’s growing presence and power in the region.

by Soeren Kern, a senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, a nonpartisan foreign-policy think tank based in New York City

PHOTO: KOBI GIDEON/GPO

PHOTO: BENJAMIN NETANYAHU (LEFT) AND ISRAEL KATZ

PHOTO: JERUSALEM IN THE MIDST OF THE NATIONS . . . ALL AROUND HER (EZEK. 5:5).
PAKISTAN—Authorities in Lahore, Pakistan, continue their refusal to arrest the Muslim hospital officials who killed an innocent Christian man, Sunil Saleem, more than eight months ago at Lahore’s Services Hospital.

“The police exonerated the main accused, Dr. Saira, in the initial investigation, even though she was the one who had instigated her colleagues and the security guards to attack us in the hospital ward,” Anil Saleem, brother of Sunil, told Morning Star News.

Fourteen doctors, 20 security guards, and 10 male nurses beat up Saleem, a father of four, more than eight months ago when he voiced his objection to a Muslim doctor’s refusal to tend to his pregnant sister because she was a Christian.

On March 26, 2018, Saleem took his sister, Kiran Kashif, to the emergency labor ward of the hospital because she was in severe pain. Dr. Saira, playing on her cell phone, told Kashif to wait outside until she finished sipping her tea.

Kashif waited for some time and then again went into the ward, requesting immediate attention. Dr. Saira cursed her for not waiting, threw her on the floor, and slapped her, saying “How dare a Chuhri [a derogatory term for Christian] question my order.”

Upon hearing the commotion, Kashif’s brothers and three other relatives entered the ward. Dr. Saira shouted to the doctors and security guards to lock the doors from the inside and “teach these Christians a lesson,” Anil Saleem said.

The medical staff and security guards beat them with iron rods, chairs, leather belts, and other items, he said. “Sunil, a police constable in the National Highway and Motorway Police, tried his best to placate the assailants, but they continued to beat him mercilessly, kicking and punching him in the groin and chest until he fell unconscious,” he said.

Anil Saleem and his relatives tried to defend themselves, but they were greatly outnumbered and were saved only when police arrived, he said. Sunil Saleem died shortly afterward from his wounds because the doctors refused to help him.

“Most of the doctors fled after the incident, while those who were present paid no attention to our cries to help our dying brother,” Anil said.

Sunil Saleem left behind his wife and four children, the oldest of whom was 10 and the youngest of whom was barely three months old.

Police declared Dr. Saira innocent based on video footage showing she was not involved in the attack. “How can they just absolve Dr. Saira, when it was she who had instigated the attack in the first place? The court has directed the police to re-investigate the case, but they are delaying presenting the report on one pretext or the other,” Anil said.

Police have been reluctant to arrest the medical personnel due to threats by the Young Doctors Association (YDA) of launching protests in hospitals across the province and leaving their duties as part of a boycott, Anil said. “We think that the police were told by the provincial government not to arrest the doctors to avoid confrontation with the YDA,” Anil said.

Despite police indifference, Anil continues to hope the court will give justice to the family. Pakistan ranks fifth on Open Doors’ World Watch List of the 50 countries where Christians experience the worst persecution.

by Morning Star News
To read the full report, go to Morningstarnews.org.
God revealed that the final destiny for every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is the New Heavens and Earth. Revelation 20—21 reveals the final realm of God's Kingdom where we will spend eternity with Him. It calls us to live righteously today in light of the new creation, city, citizens and life of the eternal state.

Please join us for this exciting study of God’s Word!

LOCATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redding, CA</td>
<td>February 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix, AZ</td>
<td>February 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Pines, FL</td>
<td>March 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugarcreek, OH</td>
<td>April 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado Springs, CO</td>
<td>April 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reno, NV</td>
<td>May 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boise, ID</td>
<td>October 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>November 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check our website for additional dates and locations.

SECTIONS

- The New Creation: The Recreated Heavens and Earth
- The New City: The New Jerusalem
- The New Citizens: Israel, The Church and The Nations
- The New Life: The Tree of Life
- Ask FOI: Q&A

For more information or to register, go to foi.org/prophecy or call 856-853-5590
Nostalgia. That’s the emotion fans of the iconic 1960s TV series Star Trek feel when they hear the words live long and prosper. The character of Mr. Spock, the half-Vulcan first officer on the USS Enterprise, made the phrase famous.

Jewish actor Leonard Nimoy, who played Spock, also used a hand gesture he made famous, along with the salutation. He raised his right hand, palm forward and thumb extended, and parted his fingers between the middle and ring finger, forming a V.

As a child, Nimoy went to synagogue and saw the rabbis use the gesture when they bestowed Birkat Kohanim (the Priestly Blessing), also called the Aaronic Blessing. When Star Trek’s creator, Gene Roddenberry, asked Nimoy to create a Vulcan greeting, the actor reached down into his Jewish roots and came up with the hand gesture. The Bible text for the blessing is Numbers 6:24–26:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

The ceremony Nimoy witnessed is also performed in some Jewish homes on Shabbat (Friday at sundown). Parents, usually fathers, raise their hands over their children and recite the prayer, asking God to bless their sons and daughters. Many Jewish people consider it a beautiful experience, significant and meaningful in their lives. And after all, who doesn’t want a blessing?

The answer to that question is probably no one. But what exactly is a blessing?

**A CLOSER LOOK**

The word blessing is familiar, but its meaning may not be. You can’t hold a blessing in your hand—until it’s your newly born child or grandchild, that is.
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This passage is part of the Abrahamic Covenant, a promise made unconditionally to Abraham, his son Isaac, grandson Jacob, his 12 great-grandsons, and all their future children right up to today. The verse continues, “I will curse him who curses you.” God promises that anyone who curses Abraham and his descendants will himself be cursed. It adds, “and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God promises that Abraham will bless all the earth through his descendants. In fact, five times in the book of Genesis (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14), God promises to bless the nations through the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

PROOF OF BLESSING
How then has Abraham’s seed blessed the nations?

Most Bible-believing Christians know at least two significant blessings Abraham and his Jewish progeny have brought to the world. The first is Jesus (Hebrew, Yeshua) the Messiah (Hebrew, Mashiach), the God/MAN and Savior. Many people, unfortunately, ignore Jesus’ Jewishness.

The second is God’s Word, the Bible. Of the 66 books in the Old and New Testaments, 63 were written by Jews. (Two Gentiles, Job and Luke, wrote the other three: Job, Luke, and Acts.)

In addition to these two important spiritual blessings, God has brought countless other tangible blessings to the world through the Jewish people. Some of these blessings make our lives easier, safer, and more enjoyable—such as cell phones, computer operating systems, voicemail, robotics, instant messaging, website development, and firewall security for computers.

Others make our lives healthier—such as synthetic vitamins, medical procedures, and cures for diseases. The website jinfo.org is devoted to specifically crediting individual Jewish people for their contributions to humanity. The site states, “Since the turn of the century, . . . Jews have been awarded 25% of all Nobel Prizes and 28% of those in the scientific research fields.”

Jewish people constitute less than one fifth of one percent of the world population—an infinitesimally small number. Yet their contributions are heavily disproportionate to their numbers; and their accomplishments, creativity, and innovations have blessed the entire world, making life better not only for themselves but for all nations.

God promises to bless those who bless the Jewish people. So how can we bless God’s Chosen People and receive a blessing ourselves?

WHAT WE CAN DO
Every year at our Friends of Israel (FOI) prophecy conferences, we have a session called “Blessing Israel.” Using video and PowerPoint, Tom Geoghan, our vice president for Advancement, explains the ways FOI regularly blesses Israel.

Since 2012, FOI has given (through donations from our constituents) more than $1.6 million to the FOI Israel Relief Fund. These dollars have blessed Israel in literal and tangible ways. We have provided funds for 20 bomb shelters that protect Israelis from rockets launched by Hamas from Gaza. We also have provided clothing, food, shelter, and education for 140 Ethiopian immigrant families; 1,400 meals for lone soldiers (soldiers with no family in Israel); and 11 academic scholarships for disadvantaged youth.

FOI funds have also enabled 60 cases to be legally advocated for Christian minorities in Israel, Holocaust survivors, and victims of prostitution and human trafficking. Seventeen babies have been saved from abortion and sponsored for the first year of life, and 10 Israeli paramedics have been equipped with critical lifesaving tools for a year.

Those of you who have contributed funds directed to Israel can attest to receiving a blessing from God—that is His promise. How He blesses is up to Him. But bless He does.

Giving money certainly is one way to bless Israel. But there is another extremely important way: Praying. Praying for the Jewish people is actually commanded in Scripture. Psalm 122:6 tells us, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” When we do so, we use an Old Testament way of saying, “Maranatha, Lord come,” for we know that Jerusalem will only know true peace when Jesus, the Sar Shalom, Prince of Peace, comes.

Who doesn’t want a blessing? We all would love to be blessed. I am so thankful “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). That is the greatest blessing of all.

Steve Herzig
is the director of North American Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
FROM BITTERNESS

How God used a godly woman’s difficult circumstances to effect change in Israel—and how He can use us, as well.

BY CECELIA WEER
God made us that way so He could instruct us in truth and illustrate it through the people whose lives are recorded in the Bible. Their stories show us, rather than tell us, how to live (Rom. 15:4). Their sinful natures are abundantly evident, and their circumstances are often cruel and agonizing. Yet God ordained these circumstances to advance His will, just as He ordains ours.

Each Bible account records a part of God’s grand and glorious design. Samuel’s account advances Scripture’s purpose to its fulfillment in Christ. His story begins with his mother, Hannah.

**HANNAH’S HEARTACHE**

Hannah was married to Elkanah, a Levite who lived in the hill country of Ephraim (1 Sam. 1:1). Each year Elkanah traveled with his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah, to worship in Shiloh. Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, served as priests at the Tabernacle there.

Without being told, we immediately see a conflict: two wives. Then we perceive more conflict: Peninnah had children, but Hannah was barren. In that culture, Hannah would have been considered inferior to other Jewish women and regarded as lacking the blessing of the Lord.

Elkanah gave Peninnah and each of her children a portion of the sacrifice, but to Hannah he gave a double portion “for he loved Hannah, although the LORD had closed her womb” (v. 5).

Delighted with her status as the childbearing wife, Peninnah humiliated Hannah. She provoked her and grievously irritated her, not merely occasionally, but year after year. So Hannah wept and refused to eat. Elkanah tried to comfort her: “Am I not better to you than ten sons?” (v. 8).

But Hannah wanted a son and unburdened herself to the Lord at Shiloh. Eli, the high priest, saw her. She was weeping and moving her lips, but he could not hear her saying anything. Having no idea she was praying, Eli assumed she was drunk. Little did he know this godly woman’s petition not only would one day affect him and his sons, but also the future of the entire nation of Israel.

Out of the bitterness of her soul, she prayed one of the finest vows in Scripture:

> **O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head** (v. 11).

When Eli accused Hannah of being drunk, she humbly and beautifully explained she was pouring out her heart before the Lord, but she did not tell Eli her prayer. Eli graciously responded, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition” (v. 17).

Hannah answered, “Let your maidservant find favor in your sight” (v. 18). Her sad countenance changed immediately.

**LENT TO THE LORD**

The next day, the family returned to Ramah. As time went by, Hannah conceived and bore a son. In gratitude to God, she named him Samuel (meaning “name of God” or “God has heard”) “because I have asked for him from the LORD” (v. 20). What a glorious answer to prayer!

We must never think God doesn’t hear us when we pray. He always hears us. In fact, He tells us to pray without ceasing (1 Th. 5:17). But God may not answer the way we want Him to because it is not His will. And His will is always best.

When it was again time for Elkanah and his family to go to Shiloh for the yearly sacrifice, Hannah declined to go. Instead, she chose to spend precious mother-son weaning time with her little Samuel before giving him to God. In those days, it was customary to nurse a child until he was three.

When Samuel was weaned, she took her toddler to Shiloh, where she presented him to Eli for lifelong service to the Lord. On seeing Eli, she told him, “O my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood by you here, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him. Therefore I also have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD” (1 Sam. 1:26–28).

Then Hannah broke into a beautiful prayer of praise and thanksgiving. So wonderful were her words that they seem to have provided the model for Mary’s Magnificat in Luke 1:46–55. Her prayer also has similarities to David’s song in 2 Samuel 22:2–51. God turned Hannah’s prayer of bitterness into a prayer of joy. She exalted in the Lord as the righteous Judge who knows and understands our hearts and actions.

Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1–10 reveals seven...
contrasts between:
1. mighty and feeble.
2. full and hungry.
3. barren and fertile.
4. dead and alive.
5. sick and well.
6. poor and rich.
7. humble and exalted.

She warned the proud of the Lord’s humbling and declared His care for the faithful—a perfect example of His relationships with Hannah and Peninnah.

Every year Hannah made a little coat to take to Samuel when the family went from Ramah to Shiloh for the sacrifice, and Eli blessed the couple: “The Lord give you descendants from this woman for the loan that was given to the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:20).

The Lord took care of His faithful Hannah by giving her three more sons plus two daughters. Hannah had vowed to give Samuel to the Lord and did what she promised, and the Lord blessed her. God says, “Those who honor Me I will honor” (v. 30). Samuel served the Lord all the days of his life.

**THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY**

As we look at the account of Samuel, the extraordinary circumstances surrounding his birth, and the godly mother who bore him, we see that the main character in this story is the Lord.

He was the agent behind Hannah’s infertility. He was the agent who used Peninnah’s provocations to drive Hannah to Himself. He was the agent in Eli’s promise and Hannah’s conception. He was the agent in Hannah’s vow and her beautiful words of praise; and He was the one who removed Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas from the priesthood and placed Samuel in godly leadership over Israel. He was the one who gave Hannah’s son the privilege of anointing David, whose dynasty will climax when his descendant, Jesus Christ, becomes King of kings and Lord of lords and reigns for eternity.

It was God who placed Hannah in miserable circumstances. Yet He used her trials for His honor and glory and her good, just as He does with us. He wants our trials to work patience in us, so we can become “perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (Jas. 1:4). He wants our suffering to restore, establish, strengthen, and settle us (1 Pet. 5:10). He wants to transform us and renew our minds, so we may prove “what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

Hannah’s story illustrates how the Bible gives us comfort and hope (15:4). Our lives are made up of circumstances, relationships, reactions, and decisions. Those decisions determine the ultimate success or failure in advancing God’s will in our lives. They also affect circumstances in the lives of our loved ones and have power to influence generations.

We know Hannah’s example was a bright light to her son because of the testimony of Samuel’s life. Hannah laid the foundation for the man Samuel would become, and her story should influence us to exhibit the same soaring faith.

> We must never think God doesn’t hear us when we pray. He always hears us. In fact, He tells us to pray without ceasing.

Cecelia Weer speaks at women’s retreats, teaches women’s Bible studies, and is involved in developing teen leaders. She is the wife of Tom Weer, pastor of Chelsea Baptist Church in Atlantic City, New Jersey.
THE GOLDEN BOX

IDOL
The Ark of the Covenant was extremely important to the people of Israel—
but not always for the right reason.

By Peter Colón

During the closing period of the judges, the Israelites embraced wicked beliefs in their worship and view of God. God had confirmed Samuel as His spokesman and true prophet, but the Israelites refused to obey. Instead, they trusted in the Ark of the Covenant, thinking that doing so was the same as having a heart relationship with God. They soon discovered they were wrong.

The Ark was a rectangular box of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It had a gold lid, or “mercy seat,” with two gold cherubim with outspread wings. Inside were stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments. Exodus 25:22 describes the special purpose it served: “And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.” The Ark served as the only place believing Israelites could go (through the high priest) to atone for their sins.

Israel’s Foolishness

In Samuel’s day, the Israelite armies mobilized to fight the Philistines, who had moved inland from the coast and established five cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron (Josh. 13:3).

The Philistines were a constant thorn in Israel’s side. They worshiped a disgusting idol called Dagon, whom they had designed as half-man and half-fish. It was as if they wanted to promote the belief that both men and fish had evolved together.

The Israelite-Philistine clash resulted in the death of 4,000 Israelite soldiers (1 Sam. 4:2). Israel’s elders wondered why the Lord had allowed such a catastrophe, but they never considered the fact that they were the problem.

In an attempt to defeat the Philistines, the elders presented a new proposal: “Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies” (v. 3). They foolishly decided to put their trust in the Ark, rather than in God. Proverbs 19:3 says, “The foolishness of a man twists his way, and his heart frets against the Lord.” The Israelites demonstrated extreme foolishness, and their way was twisted indeed.

The Israelites brought the Ark to the battle lines for a second assault against the Philistines. When it arrived near the Philistine encampment at Aphek, the Israelites shouted for joy; but the Philistines panicked (1 Sam. 4:5–7). The Philistines knew of Israel’s fear-
THESE CALAMITIES FORCED THE PHILISTINES TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE SOVEREIGNTY AND POWER OF ISRAEL’S GOD OVER THEIRS.

The Israelites were disillusioned. Surely, they thought, the Ark should have brought success. After all, didn’t it help them conquer Jericho? In the Jericho campaign, the Ark did play an important role in their victory (Josh. 6:2–20); but the difference was they had trusted in the Lord, not in the Ark. The Israelites should have remembered Joshua’s challenge before his death: “Now therefore, fear the L ORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the L ORD!” (24:14).

Losing the Ark signaled God’s displeasure with His people’s sin. When Eli, the elderly high priest, heard of the Ark’s fate, he fell backward off his chair, broke his neck, and died (1 Sam. 4:18). Some people say his heart broke first.

When Eli’s pregnant daughter-in-law heard the Ark had been captured and her husband and father-in-law were dead, she went into labor. Before she died, she named her newborn son Ichabod, saying, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured” (v. 22).

After their victory, the Philistines placed the Ark in the temple of Dagon. They soon learned Dagon was no match for Yahweh. The next morning they discovered the statue of Dagon had fallen on its face before the Ark. They set it back up, and the next morning they again found it on the ground, this time in pieces. Dagon’s head and hands were broken off. Only the torso remained (5:2–4).

Then God struck the city of Ashdod with what appears to have been the bubonic plague. Frightened, the Philistines decided to move the Ark to Gath. Then God struck Gath. So they moved it to Ekron. Then God struck Ekron (vv. 6–10).

These calamities forced the Philistines to acknowledge the sovereignty and power of Israel’s God. However, they still chose to resist and hold on to their pathetic idol.

Sadly, many people today are no different. They acknowledge the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, but they remain unmoved in accepting Him into their lives. Second Corinthians 4:4 says, “The god of this age [Satan] has blinded [the minds of those], who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”

Spiritual blindness afflicts people in all nations, cultures, and walks of life and makes them clutch their false gods and idols, rather than turn to Jesus.

RETURN OF THE ARK

After possessing the Ark for seven months, the Philistines decided they had better return it. They put it on a cart hitched to two milk cows that had never been yoked and sent it away, watching to see where it went. It went straight to the Levitical...
When Saul was anointed king of Israel, the prophet Samuel predicted the Spirit of God would come on Saul, giving him the needed skill and wisdom to rule the nation (1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6). But Saul later disobeyed God’s direction as given by Samuel, so the Lord rejected him and eventually removed him as king (13:1–14; 15:1–35).

God chose David to replace Saul. When Samuel anointed David, God’s Spirit departed from Saul and came on David from that day forward: “But the Spirit of the L ORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the L ORD troubled him” (v. 16). From Beth Shemesh the Ark was transported to Kirjath Jearim, where it remained for 20 years (1 Sam. 7:1–2).

After the Ark’s retrieval, Samuel told the people of Israel, “If you return to the L ORD with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the L ORD, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines” (v. 3). So the people fasted and repented of their idolatry. Samuel interceded for them before the Lord, and God delivered them from the Philistines (vv. 4–14).

The Israelites needed to understand that the Ark itself had no power. Power came only from the God who chose to dwell there, between the cherubim.

More than a thousand years later, God would dwell with Israel again in the person of Jesus Christ. As the Jewish apostle John wrote, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). Someday He will come again and dwell with us forever.

Meanwhile, we are to place our faith in the Son of God and worship Him in spirit and truth—and not trust in anyone or anything else (Ps. 2:12). *

**THE BEREAN BOX**

What does it mean a ‘distressing spirit’ from the Lord troubled Saul?

When Saul was anointed king of Israel, the prophet Samuel predicted the Spirit of God would come on Saul, giving him the needed skill and wisdom to rule the nation (1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6). But Saul later disobeyed God’s direction as given by Samuel, so the Lord rejected him and eventually removed him as king (13:1–14; 15:1–35).

God chose David to replace Saul. When Samuel anointed David, God’s Spirit departed from Saul and came on David from that day forward: “But the Spirit of the L ORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the L ORD troubled him” (16:14). It seems that, after David was anointed king, Saul’s mental instability and outrageous behavior worsened.

What does it mean, a “distressing [bad or evil] spirit from the L ORD” came upon Saul? First, we know God does not cause moral evil (Jas. 1:13–17). Second, we know all beings God created are under His sovereign control. Since God is morally perfect and unchangeable, He cannot cause or be involved in evil.

Although the text doesn’t elaborate, it seems God simply removed His Spirit (the Holy Spirit) from Saul and allowed an evil spirit from Satan to come upon him, causing Saul to think illogically about spiritual matters. Deep psychological problems plagued him the rest of his life.

Scripture says Saul at times suffered from deep, depressive mood swings, which made him mentally unstable and caused him to exhibit wild behavior of extreme wickedness throughout his rule. This behavior manifested itself in uncontrollable jealousy of David, compelling Saul to pursue David continually to injure or kill him. Given Saul’s uncontrollable fits of anger, it seems demonic forces motivated him at times.

From the symptoms expressed in Scripture, many Bible scholars have theorized on the theological and psychological particulars pertaining to Saul’s situation and the type of illnesses from which he might have suffered. Saul seemed to suffer from melancholia mania (extreme manic depression) and paroxysmal mania (violent emotional outbursts of rage), often described as paranoid schizophrenia.

The story of Saul is one of the sorriest and most ignominious in the Bible. It reveals what disobedience toward God and unchecked sin can do in an individual’s life. Saul entered his kingship with great potential and ended his reign 40 years later with the most grievous personal disasters recorded in biblical history.

**BY DAVID M. LEVY**
I have many fond memories of my mother from my childhood, but there is one memory that is far from fond. I still get a knot in the pit of my stomach when I think about it.

When I was around 11 years old, we were all gathered around the dining table when one of my sisters said something that lit my fuse. She knew I was angry, so she jumped up from the table and escaped to the other side. I also jumped up and started looking for something to throw at her.

Since the closest object was a metal spoon, I grabbed it and began swinging my arm around like a big-league pitcher. My parents, seated at either end of the table, saw I was serious. They calmly but firmly told me to put the spoon down. I didn’t listen. I hurled the spoon straight at my target.

But instead of hitting my sister, the spoon sailed left and struck my mother on the right temple. I watched in horror as blood began to trickle down her cheek. The wound wasn’t serious; but I experienced the terrible, awful realization I had just injured my own mother.
As my father treated the cut, I stood in front of my mother, crying and apologizing fervently. She then told me something I’ve never forgotten: “Son,” she said, “you’re bullheaded.” And she was right. I had chosen not to listen.

We live in a plugged-in generation with more media choices than at any other time in history. Every day we pick and choose which voices to allow into our heads. We make playlists for the ones we like and shut off those we don’t like.

Nothing is wrong with having choices, but too often we stop listening to the most important voice of all—God’s.

Such was the case with the nation of Israel during the period of the judges, when the Israelites decided to shut off God’s voice and seek autonomy from Him. The book of Judges recounts this dark, chaotic time in Israel’s history.

For the most part, Israel’s people did not know the Lord (Jud. 2:10). “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25). In addition, the Israelites refused to listen to the judges the Lord had set over them. They disobeyed their principal affirmation of faith, known as the Shema, which begins, “Hear, O Israel” (Dt. 6:4). Judges 2:17 tells us, “Yet they would not listen to their judges.” Consequently, they didn’t love the Lord and sought to rule themselves apart from Him.

Over approximately 450 years (Acts 13:20), God had called 16 judges to govern the people of Israel by giving them moral guidance, counsel, and deliverance from their enemies (Jud. 2:18). The final judges included Eli the priest (1 Sam. 4:18), Samuel the prophet (7:15), and Samuel’s two sons (8:1–2).

Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, provide two prime examples of disobedience. They were wicked priests who used their position of authority to abuse people (2:16). They treated the Lord’s offerings with contempt and committed sexual immorality with the women who served at the Tabernacle’s doorway (vv. 17, 22). The Bible describes them as “corrupt” (v. 12), says “they did not know the Lord” (v. 12), and calls their sin “very great before the Lord” (v. 17).

Though Eli, Israel’s judge, knew about his sons’ evil actions, he did not rebuke or restrain them sufficiently. He half-heartedly attempted to reprimand them once (vv. 23–25). “Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father” (v. 25). So God rebuked Eli: “For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them” (3:13). Hophni, Phinehas, and Eli all died on the same day (4:11, 18); and later God removed the priesthood from Eli’s line of descent.

**God Calls Samuel**

Samuel was different from Eli’s sons. Samuel listened to the Lord and became one of Israel’s greatest judges and prophets.

In speaking to the prophet Jeremiah, God ranked Samuel as one of Israel’s foremost intercessors, along with Moses (Jer. 15:1; cf. Ps. 99:6). Samuel brought revival to Israel (1 Sam. 7:3–6). Under his spiritual leadership, Israel defeated the nation’s Philistine oppressors (v. 13). Samuel appointed doorkeepers for the Tabernacle (1 Chr. 9:22) and went on an annual circuit to four towns to judge Israel (1 Sam. 7:15–17).

God confirmed Samuel was indeed His prophet (3:19–20). Unlike Eli’s sons, he was a man of integrity who did not cheat or oppress people (12:3–5).

What made the difference? It probably began with the influence of a godly mother and a willingness to hear God’s voice and obey it at a young age.

Although as a Levite Samuel did not have to serve at the Tabernacle until he was 25, he served much earlier as a ward of Eli (3:1; cf. Num. 8:24; 1 Chr. 6:33–38). As a youngster, Samuel assisted Eli by ensuring the Tabernacle menorah flame did not go out at night and opening the Tabernacle doors in the morning (1 Sam. 3:3, 15).

One evening, after fulfilling his duties, the lad lay down in his bed and heard a voice calling his name. Since Samuel did not know the Lord at that time (v. 7), he naturally thought the voice was Eli’s. Samuel ran to Eli, saying, “Here I am, for you called me” (v. 5).

Eli denied calling him and sent Samuel back to bed. This happened twice more. On the third occasion, Eli discerned that Yahweh was the One calling Samuel. So he told Samuel to respond the next time by saying, “Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears” (v. 9).

When Samuel returned to his bed, God called him for the fourth time. And Samuel—a young boy in the midst of a corrupt culture—decided to listen. Consequently, his life and the lives of the people of Israel were forever changed.

**Discerning God’s Voice**

The Bible admonishes us to listen as well: “Today, if you will hear His voice: Do not harden your hearts” (Ps. 95:7–8).

We may say, “But we have never heard God’s voice.” Oh, but we have. His voice is heard through His creation (19:1–4); the Bible (2 Tim. 3:14–17); and ultimately, through His Son, the Messiah (Heb. 1:1–2).

Unlike the days of Samuel when “the word of the Lord was rare” (1 Sam. 3:1), we have God’s Word in abundance. God is not silent, but we often refuse to listen to Him. We tend to shut Him off as if He were one of our playlists.

Today, if you hear His voice, don’t harden your heart. Don’t be “bullheaded” like I was at the dinner table that day.

Instead, respond like Samuel: “Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.” Who knows what wonderful things God may do in your life if only you listen—and obey.

Bruce Scott is the director of Program Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
‘Bring Up Samuel for Me’

Here is a look at how fear drove a desperate king to do the unthinkable.

by DAVID M. LEVY
to God can drastically change a person’s life. King Saul’s disobedience dramatically altered both his life and his kingship.

As a consequence for transgressing into the priestly office and then failing to carry out God’s judgment on the Amalekites, the prophet Samuel pronounced that Saul would be dethroned and his dynasty given to a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:13–14).

God instructed Samuel to anoint David as king of Israel. Upon David’s anointing, the Spirit of God left Saul and fell on David from that day forward, making Saul so angry he became obsessed with destroying David, chasing him throughout the Judean hills.

While Saul pursued David, the kings of Philistia were amassing a huge army on Israel’s borders, threatening the tribes of Issachar, Zebulun, and Asher. Saul saw the Philistines setting up camp at Shunem near the Sea of Galilee, so he gathered his soldiers at Mount Gilboa, terrified by the Philistines’ immense army (28:4–5).

THE DESPERATION OF THE KING

Saul needed spiritual guidance. In the past, Samuel guided Saul, but he had died (v. 3). Saul’s plea to God for counsel went unanswered (v. 6), and he could not seek help from the priests because he had ordered 85 priests to be killed (22:9–23). Alone and scared, Saul was left to his own devices.

Desperate for direction, the king did the unthinkable: He turned to a medium (28:7). Such counsel was an abomination God strongly condemned (Dt. 18:10–14; Isa. 8:19–20). God forbade and banned occult practices, and Saul knew this fact well. In fact, earlier in his reign, Saul had banished all mediums and spiritists from Israel.

Filled with despair and hopelessness, the king commanded his servants, “Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.” And his servants said to him, ‘In fact there is a woman who is a medium at En Dor’” (1 Sam. 28:7). En Dor was merely six or seven miles from Gilboa.

Disguising himself, Saul took two men and traveled at night to see the medium. He asked the woman to perform a séance for him and bring someone up from the dead. She sympathetically tried to comfort him, putting aside her own welfare and security. She had good reason to do so. She heard Samuel predict that Saul would die the next day; and should Saul have been found dead in her house, she would have been held accountable and put to death (v. 13).

Instantly the medium declared, “Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!” (v. 12). Again, Saul assured her no evil would befall her (v. 13).

Saul asked her, “What did you see?” (v. 13). Then he asked, “What is his form?” (v. 14). The woman replied, “An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle” (v. 14).

Perceiving the form was Samuel, Saul humbled himself and “stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down” (v. 14) out of respect for Samuel.

THE DIALOGUE

Samuel asked, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” (v. 15).

Saul answered, “I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do” (v. 15).

Samuel responded by asking Saul a rhetorical question: “So why do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy?” (v. 16).

Before Saul could answer, Samuel supplied the answer:

For the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines (vv. 17–19).

In other words, Saul and his sons would be killed, and Israel would be defeated and occupied by the Philistines.

Saul went into shock: “Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel” (v. 20). Lack of food all day and night also left him extremely weak. Ironically, the woman had compassion on Saul and tried to get him to eat. She had risked her life by agreeing to call up Samuel, and now Saul’s life was in jeopardy.

She sympathetically tried to comfort him, putting aside her own welfare and security. She had good reason to do so. She heard Samuel predict that Saul would die the next day; and should Saul have been found dead in her house, she would have been held accountable and put to death (vv. 21–22).

The woman tried to convince Saul to eat to renew his strength, but he adamantly refused. It wasn’t until his two companions persuaded him that he agreed. The medium quickly killed her fatted calf and baked unleavened bread.
for Saul and his servants. Ironically, Saul’s last supper was a meal fit for a king, but any hope of retaining his kingship was lost because he would die at the hands of his enemies (vv. 24–25).

THE SCHOLARLY DEBATE OVER SAMUEL

Bible scholars have thoroughly discussed Samuel’s appearance with differing conclusions. Some believe it was a psychological experience in which the woman convinced Saul and his servants that they saw and heard Samuel when, in truth, it was merely a hoax. After all, Saul’s mental state was so fragile he could have been convinced of almost anything.

However, this view is easily refuted. First, nowhere in 1 Samuel 28 does it say the woman spoke to Saul and conveyed what Samuel said. In fact, it was Samuel who spoke directly to Saul, and Saul to Samuel (vv. 15–19).

Second, the woman was in no position to tell Saul of his death or of Israel’s defeat by the Philistines. Nor would God have revealed such information through her.

Third, at Samuel’s appearance, the woman screamed, indicating genuine shock at what she saw. Such would not have been the case if she had contrived everything.

Fourth, Saul would recognize Samuel’s voice and not have been deceived by someone pretending to be him.

Fifth, Scripture states Saul spoke directly to Samuel (v. 15).

Other scholars believe the woman brought Samuel up from the dead through Satan’s power. They reason that demons can perform miracles through witches, mediums, and spiritists—and they give scriptural evidence.

Objections to this view are (1) Satan is totally under God’s authority and control (Job 1:10–12) and can only do what God allows; (2) God would hardly allow a witch or medium to actually raise a prophet like Samuel from the dead; (3) death is an appointment and is final (Heb. 9:27); and (4) only Jesus and several apostles raised a few people from the dead, and the miracles were done on God’s authority.

Still other scholars teach this was a satanic deception. They say the medium did not bring Samuel up from the dead but, rather, created an impersonation through demonic powers that convinced Saul that Samuel appeared and spoke with him. After all, Paul said, “For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14).

There are objections to this view, as well. Satan does not know the future, and it is highly unlikely God would reveal it to demons or allow demons to tell the future to Saul—especially the day of his death.

Most conservative scholars believe God Himself intervened by allowing Samuel to appear. The event had nothing to do with the woman or Saul, and here is why:

- God would not allow witches, soothsayers, sorcerers, mediums, spiritists, or interpreters of omens to bring anyone up from the dead (Dt. 18:10–14). These practices are abominations God condemns.
- Neither humans nor demons can raise people from the dead unless God allows it (Lk. 16:24–27; Heb. 9:27).
- The woman was shocked when she “saw Samuel” (1 Sam. 28:12).
- When asked, the woman said, “I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth” (v. 13).
- After the woman described how the spirit was dressed, Saul believed it to be Samuel (v. 14).
- For Saul to bow to the ground in homage indicates he believed Samuel appeared (v. 14).
- The text states Samuel actually spoke to Saul directly by saying, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” (v. 15).
- Samuel’s message was a revelation from God, predicting Saul’s death and Israel’s defeat (v. 19).

Prostrate on the ground lay a man who once stood strong, anointed and led by the Holy Spirit, who had prophesied with God’s prophets and led God’s people Israel. Yet he had disregarded God’s direction, disobeyed Samuel’s instructions on how to function as king and lead Israel, and rejected God’s Word. Now he was about to die.

Saul is one of the most pitiful examples of a chosen servant of God. Once facing a great future, he ended up wallowing prostrate on the ground in defeat, terrified at his future, with Samuel’s words possibly ringing in his ears: “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. . . . For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:22–23).

How awful and ironic that Saul had sought a medium for direction, dined at her table, and left knowing the date of his death. It is one thing to begin well and quite another to end well. ✪

God forbade and banned occult practices, and Saul knew this fact well. ✪

David M. Levy is the director of Education and Ministry Relations and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
The expectation of great potential can be exciting. It certainly is for athletes and professional sports teams, as each new season dawns. Many a manager has left training camp saying to himself, *This is a team that could win it all.* Several weeks later, however, the bubble of potentiality has burst, and everyone shrugs. *Maybe next year.*

Biblically, few people have appeared on the scene of Jewish history with more potential than Israel’s first king, Saul; and like many highly touted potential winners, he became a major frustration and abject failure.

No one seems to have been more disappointed by Saul than his mentor, Samuel. Samuel was the last in a long series of judges the Lord had raised up to lead and help defend the Jewish people from their enemies. However, as Samuel aged, he made his sons judges over Israel. While Samuel was well respected and loved, his sons were not. They did not follow his godly ethic and went “after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice” (1 Sam. 8:3).

The tribes of Israel told Samuel, “Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (v. 5). Samuel disliked their request. He understood the Israelites were God’s people, and God wanted them to be different from the heathen because they belonged to Him.

In truth, the Israelites weren’t much different than some Christians today. So often we find that people who belong to Christ want to be like the world. Like Israel, we look at what the world does, what it values, and what it loves; and we want to fit in, rather than stand out.

But the Jewish people were to stand out. God told them, “Be holy; for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44). Israel was to be different, and believers in Jesus today are to be different, as well. We are commanded, “Do not love the world or the things in the world” (1 Jn. 2:15). The apostle Paul
wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed” (Rom. 12:2).

The Israelites’ request annoyed Samuel, but the Lord told him, “Heed their voice” (1 Sam. 8:9). Ultimately, God chose Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, as Israel’s king.

Samuel probably worked closely with Saul. Today we might say he tried to mentor Saul. Mentoring involves advising, guiding, befriending, and often counseling. The Bible is replete with instruction regarding mentoring or training the next generation. Paul reminded Titus, “Older women [in Christ] . . . admonish the young women” (Ti. 2:3–4). To Timothy, his son in the faith, he wrote, “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

The Hebrew Scriptures encourage parents, “Train up a child” (Prov. 22:6), and Moses instructed Israel to teach God’s words and His commandments—laws, statutes, and judgments—“diligently to your children” (Dt. 6:7). Parents are to mentor their children.

Since Samuel was old and his sons grown, he may have been old enough to have been Saul’s father. He played a major role in implementing God’s selection of Saul and anointing him and was the prophet God used to direct, guide, and minister to Israel’s first king.

Saul began well, and the Lord used him to deliver the people of Jabesh Gilead from the Ammonites. But Saul only reigned two years when his great potential faded, much to Samuel’s chagrin.

**THEN THINGS WENT WRONG**

Two events in particular greatly angered and disappointed Samuel, who had been faithful to God from his youth, and led the Lord to reject Saul as king over Israel.

Israel was at war with the Philistines. So Saul and his son Jonathan gathered 3,000 men to do battle (1 Sam. 13:2). The Philistines, however, had 10 times that number: 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, “and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude” (v. 5).

As this massive enemy force gathered, the Israelites saw they were in danger and fled to hide themselves from the huge Philistine army. Saul, as their king and commander, was distressed and needed Samuel to arrive to make the customary sacrifice to the Lord before battle. Saul “waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him” (v. 8).

Samuel was a prophet, but he was also a Levitical priest, qualifying him to make the sacrifice. Saul was unqualified on two counts: (1) He was not a priest, and (2) he was the king. No king was allowed to act as priest. Saul greatly overstepped his authority and ordered that a burnt offering and peace offerings be prepared. Then he offered the sacrifice himself.

When Samuel arrived, he was incensed: “What have you done?” he demanded (v. 11). Saul tried to justify his actions, but Samuel knew there was no justification for direct disobedience to God. The king was supposed to rule on God’s behalf. Samuel told Saul,

> You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you (vv. 13–14).

As a boy, Samuel had seen how God had punished Eli the high priest and his sons who disobeyed God. He knew the importance of obedience and the consequences of disobedience.

The second event involved Amalek. Samuel gave Saul a direct order from the Lord: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have’” (15:2–3). God gave Saul the opportunity to fulfill the promise He had made to Moses: “I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven” (Ex. 17:14).

Saul partially did as he was told. However, he spared Agag, king of Amalek, along with the best of the flocks and oxen, ostensibly to sacrifice the animals to the Lord. Samuel was livid. He gave Saul the bottom line: “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22). Saul confessed to Samuel, “I feared the people and obeyed their voice” (v. 24).

Samuel responded, “You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king” (v. 26). Then Samuel “hacked Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal” (v. 33).

God wants our obedience today as much as He did in Samuel’s day. Sometimes we fail to obey because of fear, as with Saul. Sometimes we fail because of other issues. But genuine faith in Christ can give us the courage to rise above our human frailties, obey the Lord, and trust Him for the outcome.

God’s rejection of Saul was probably a bitter pill for Samuel to swallow because he “mourned for Saul” a long time (v. 35; 16:1). Samuel did not see Saul again until the king, in desperation, went to a medium at En Dor and asked her to bring Samuel up from the dead.

How sad and disappointed the old prophet must have been in the man he had anointed to lead Israel. Yet God gave Samuel the privilege of anointing another man, one after God’s own heart, who would someday ascend the throne: David, the sweet psalmist of Israel. And through Christ, his Kingdom will last forever. ✽

Tom Simcox is the Church Ministries training coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
SAMUEL

A LOOK AT HOW GOD USED SAMUEL, BY NOW AN OLD MAN, TO ANOINT THE MAN AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART
by DAVID M. LEVY

DAVID
Much is written about David in the Bible. At the mention of his name, some people immediately think of the courageous teenager who slew Goliath using a slingshot and a stone. Others remember a tender young shepherd who penned Psalm 23. And still others reflect on King David’s adulterous affair with Bathsheba and his uncharacteristically cold-blooded order to place her husband (Uriah) on the frontline in battle, assuring his death.

However, despite David’s sin (for which he repented), he was a deeply spiritual man with a thirst and passion for God, who called him “a man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22; cf. 1 Sam. 13:14).

Young David entered Israel’s history at a dire time. King Saul’s reign as the nation’s first king was a dismal failure. He had rejected God’s Word and recklessly disobeyed the Lord. For this reason, Samuel—Israel’s godly prophet, priest, and judge—told Saul God had rejected him from being king.

After Saul reigned 40 years, the Lord tore the kingdom from him. The prophet Hosea recorded God’s attitude concerning Saul and Israel when he wrote,

O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me. I will be your King; where is any other, that he may save you in all your cities? And your judges to whom you said, “Give me a king and princes?” I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath (Hos. 13:9–11).

Samuel, no doubt, contemplated Israel’s future because conditions were exceedingly bleak. And they would grow far worse before a new king was chosen. Samuel knew God controlled Israel’s destiny and that God alone could save the nation.

Samuel Anoints David

God knew Samuel was grieving over Saul, so He gave Samuel a message of hope: “Now the Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons’” (1 Sam. 16:1). God would establish a new king to deliver Israel from defeat, despair, and danger and provide a glorious destiny for His people.

Yet Samuel had reservations about God’s command, fearing Saul would kill him after hearing he had anointed a new king. So God instructed Samuel, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you” (vv. 2–3). Without
hesitation, Samuel obeyed and traveled to Bethlehem, though fearing for his life. When he arrived, great fear fell on the city elders because they didn’t know if the prophet had come in peace or to pronounce judgment on them; it was not the season for Samuel to visit (v. 4).

Samuel assured them he came in peace to sacrifice to the Lord and commanded them to sanctify (purify) themselves to prepare for the ceremony. Samuel then consecrated Jesse and his sons, giving them a personal invitation to the sacrifice (v. 5).

So Jesse and his sons appeared before Samuel at the sacrifice. The eldest son, Eliab, a tall and handsome man, impressed Samuel. “Surely,” Samuel thought, “the Lord’s anointed is before Him” (v. 6). Yet he had made an unwise assumption.

Since Eliab’s height and stature looked regal, Samuel assumed he was God’s choice (9:2). But looks can be deceiving. In fact, in God’s eyes they mean little. Apparently, Samuel had not learned that lesson yet from the choice of Saul, who possessed the same qualities as Eliab but proved to be a dismal disappointment. As
many people do in choosing a leader, Samuel used worldly principles, rather than divine ones.

God told Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (16:7; cf. 1 Cor. 1:26–30).

The word heart refers to a person’s spiritual qualities. Saul was taller and more handsome than the other Israelites, but he lacked the inner spiritual qualities and commitment needed to rule Israel according to God’s will (1 Sam. 9:1–2). The Lord wanted a man after His own heart (13:14) to command and lead His people. The heart principle refers to character, rather than countenance, and faith rather than face.

Jesse paraded seven of his sons before Samuel, but the Lord rejected all of them (16:8–10). If Samuel had been like others, he probably would have become discouraged, thinking he had missed the person of God’s choosing. But Samuel exercised wisdom: “And Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are all the young men here?’” (v. 11).

Jesse replied, “There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep” (v. 11). Jesse’s response kept hope alive, and Samuel insisted David be brought immediately to see if he was God’s choice.

So Jesse summoned David. “Now he was ruddy,” Scripture says, “with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the Lord said, ‘Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!’” (v. 12).

Samuel did as the Lord instructed and anointed David king of Israel. Then “the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah,” where he lived (v. 13). This anointing was one of three, but it was the only one Samuel performed. The second was when David was crowned king over Judah alone (2 Sam. 2:4), and the third was when he was made king over all Israel (5:3).

Throughout David’s life, the Holy Spirit empowered him in his reign as king and in his battles, writings, and ministry.

SCRIPTURE GIVES US FIVE FACTS ABOUT DAVID:

1. He possessed God’s approval to be king: “And the Lord said, ‘Arise, anoint him, for this is the one!’” (1 Sam. 16:12).

2. He was the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons, although his age is not recorded (vv. 10–11). Most scholars believe David was around 16 or 17 when Samuel anointed him.

3. He was industrious, obedient, trustworthy, and faithful in caring for the family sheep (v. 11).

4. He was handsome, although he was not chosen for that reason (v. 12). Yet his looks endeared him to people.

5. His abilities were provided and governed by the Lord: “The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward” (v. 13). His victory over Goliath and his skill in music, courage in war, leadership over men, wisdom in governing, faithfulness in worship, writing of God’s Word, and commitment to God were all controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Samuel Protects David

When David was anointed king, “the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him” (v. 14). Saul’s servants asked the king to let them find a skillful harpist to drive the evil spirit away. David was selected because of his demeanor, abilities, and skill on the harp (vv. 18–21).

Unbeknown to Saul or his staff, God had orchestrated David’s appointment. Although David was the king-elect, he had no training in court protocol or politics. David became a submissive, supportive servant to Saul, as faithful as he had been in shepherding the family sheep.

Saul immediately loved David and made him his armor-bearer (v. 21). When an evil spirit distressed the king, David would play his harp, the distressing spirit would leave, and Saul would experience relief (v. 23).

However, as David rose in favor with the Israelites because of his military exploits, Saul’s trust and affection for him turned to jealousy. Since Samuel no longer spoke to Saul, the king lacked wise counsel; and he soon became obsessed with killing David.

David took refuge by going to Samuel in Ramah, a short distance from Saul’s capital in Gibeah. It was in Ramah that David poured out his woes to the great prophet who had anointed him. Then David and Samuel went to Naioth to get away from Saul (19:18).

However, getting away was not easy. The king sent soldiers to Samuel’s place to arrest David. But
God’s Spirit came upon the soldiers, and they started to prophesy. Then they returned to Saul and explained why they could not arrest David. Saul sent a second group of soldiers, and the same thing happened. A third group returned with identical results. Wondering what had happened, Saul himself went to Naioth. When he arrived, he too began to prophesy with everyone else, giving David time to escape (vv. 20–23).

### Samuel and the Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers were leaders or heads of leading families within Israel who were specifically selected for their duties to guard access to certain gates. First Chronicles describes the duties of the 212 gatekeepers who protected the Lord’s house and managed its resources. Even Levites who did not reside in Jerusalem participated as gatekeepers.

Gatekeepers were appointed in the time of David while Samuel was still alive (1 Chr. 26:1–19). Since Samuel died long before David selected the gatekeepers, Samuel probably instructed David on whom to select and also appointed gatekeepers himself. Remember, Samuel was a gatekeeper in his youth (1 Sam. 3:15). He would have known the responsibilities and was well able to teach David. It cannot be overstated how great Samuel’s influence was in instructing Israel’s leadership during his days on Earth.

### Samuel’s Death

Today when a great man dies, word spreads around the world in seconds. We can only imagine how swiftly the news that Samuel the prophet was dead echoed throughout the hills of Israel in that day. It must have been a shocking blow to both Saul and David, but especially David.

Samuel’s death complicated young David’s life immensely. Hounded by Saul and his army, he would no longer have Samuel from whom to seek wisdom and prayer. The prophet’s death probably made David feel more alone than ever as he sought to stay a step ahead of Saul’s sword. But he did not lose hope and learned to rely more and more on God.

Samuel was the last of Israel’s judges. Though much more is written in the Bible about David than Samuel, Samuel was a revered spiritual leader who anointed the first two kings of Israel and who ranks as one of the greatest men in Israel’s history in both the nation’s religious and political life. ✡

---

David M. Levy

is the director of Education and Ministry Relations and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
A charitable gift annuity is a wonderful way to support The Friends of Israel and, at the same time, create a stream of income for yourself and your spouse.

Here's how it works. If you are 60 or older, you may purchase a charitable gift annuity of $5,000 or more. The Friends of Israel then provides you with quarterly, semiannual, or annual payments. The percentage of interest is determined by your date of birth. You may purchase a single gift annuity for yourself or a joint gift annuity that typically includes your spouse. You may even purchase one for a friend or relative who could benefit from the income. The annuity rate is determined by the birth dates of the annuitants.

As additional benefits, you may claim a charitable tax deduction in the year you purchase the annuity, and part of your income is tax-free. The Friends of Israel has been providing charitable gift annuities since 1942 without ever missing a payment to our annuitants.

If a charitable gift annuity sounds right for you, or you would like more information, please contact The Friends of Israel’s Ministry Advancement Department using the form below, or call us at 1-800-257-7843. We would be happy to give you all the details. Of course, there is no cost or obligation on your part to receive a quote on a charitable gift annuity.

The Gift That Gives Back

Please send me your free information on The Friends of Israel's gift-annuity program.

☐ Please contact me to discuss annuities further. The best time to call me is _________________.

☐ Please send me free literature about remembering The Friends of Israel in my estate plan.

☐ Please contact me about a personal visit. The best time to call me is _________________.

☐ I have provided for The Friends of Israel in my will or other estate-planning document.

☐ Please provide me with an annuity quotation.

Name __________________________________________ Date of Birth (month/day/year) _______________________

Address __________________________________________ City ___________ State ________ Zip ___________

Phone (_______) __________________________ Email ______________________________

Name of Joint Annuitant __________________________________ Date of Birth (month/day/year) _______________________

Possible Amount of Annuity $ __________________________

Please call regarding detail of deferred-payment gift annuity.

Mail this form to The Friends of Israel, PO Box 908, Bellmawr, NJ 08099
WHY WOULD GOD HARDEN A HEART?

Exodus 4:21 records a statement God made to Moses: “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.” Why would God harden Pharaoh’s heart even before Pharaoh heard Moses’ request to let the Israelites go?

While it is true Pharaoh “hardened his [own] heart” (8:15, 32), we must understand God’s purpose in hardening his heart from the outset. The Bible does not provide a direct answer, but the archaeological discovery of an ancient Egyptian funerary papyrus known as the Book of the Dead gives us an indirect answer in the account of the Ten Plagues (called “all those wonders” in Exodus 4:21).

The Book of the Dead reveals the theology of the ancient Egyptian death cult and helps explain how the God of Israel was demonstrating His power against the false gods of Egypt by hardening Pharaoh’s heart.

Egyptians considered Pharaoh the physical incarnation of the three most important gods of Egypt.1 They viewed his word as that of a god who controlled history and the natural elements; it could not be reversed or overruled.2

The Bible does not name the Pharaoh in the Exodus account, perhaps so that the God of Israel could match His power directly against the Egyptian gods via the plagues that upset the Egyptians’ theological dependence on their pantheon of deities.

The Egyptian Book of the Dead explains what the Egyptians believed happened to the souls of pharaohs and other high-ranked Egyptians after their deaths and subsequent embalming in pyramids. They believed that after death, the deceased’s soul faced a trial in the afterlife, called the “Weighing of the Heart,” in a hall of judgment.

There the god of the underworld, Osiris, determined the deceased’s guilt or innocence, resulting in either salvation or destruction; and Anubis, an Egyptian god of the afterlife, was in charge of the test. A great scale held the deceased’s heart on one side and a feather on the other side, the hieroglyphic symbol of Maat, the goddess of truth. Egyptians viewed the heart as the seat of one’s intellect and emotion and as central to rebirth in the afterlife. Therefore, the deceased’s heart, not the individual himself, was asked to prove his innocence through a number of negative confessions. If the heart revealed it was weighed down with guilt, it would tip the scales against the deceased.

Given this understanding, pharaohs tried to prevent their hearts from contradicting their negative confessions by arranging for heart scarabs to be placed within their chest cavities during embalment. These scarabs contained an incantation ordering the heart not to witness against the deceased’s testimony before Osiris.3

The Egyptians believed that the stony character of the scarab was transferred to the fleshy heart, making it “hard” and therefore unable to speak,4 resulting in the pharaoh’s salvation, since he was decreed sinless through silence. The Egyptians were so sure this hardening would work that a negative outcome of the trial is never depicted.

This context can help us understand how God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart reversed the Egyptians’ theological hope, since Pharaoh’s inability to stop the divinely ordered plagues resulted not only in his but also in Egypt’s destruction. Thus the discovery of ancient Egyptian beliefs as found in the Book of the Dead provides yet another example of how archaeology aids our interpretation of difficult theological texts.

ENDNOTES

1 This relationship was especially connected with pharaohs Thutmose III and his son Amenhotep II, whom many scholars believe were the Exodus pharaohs. Egyptian theology, enhanced by the pharaohs’ military accomplishments, gave them the status of “the sovereign gods of heaven and earth.”


4 For the various incantations, see J. Zandee, Death as an Enemy (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 259–62.

Randall Price

is a university professor, author and coauthor of 30 books, and world-renowned archaeologist. He is also the founder and president of World of the Bible Ministries (worldofthebible.com) and has taken more than 100 trips to Israel.
INTRODUCTION

The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians

2 THESALONIANS 1:1–2

One of the apostle Paul’s earliest ministries was in the city of Thessalonica. Because his heart was to “the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16), he preached the gospel first in the city’s synagogue, spending three Sabbaths presenting Jesus as Messiah. His work resulted in the establishment of a church (Acts 17:1–4). However, persecution arose immediately, forcing Paul and his coworker Silas to flee to Berea (v. 10).

Unable to return and disciple the infant believers, Paul sent Timothy in his place. He also sent a letter filled with teaching and encouragement. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul taught the new church about salvation, sanctification, service, suffering, election, God’s coming wrath on the unsaved, living a pure life, the Rapture, the Antichrist, apostasy, obedience to leadership, disciplining the unruly, supporting and encouraging the weak, the Day of the Lord, prayer, and Christ’s Second Coming.

Knowing it was necessary to follow up, Paul wrote a second letter to further inform the Thessalonians about the Day of the Lord, a subject about which many were perplexed.

SPECIFICS ON THE LETTER

Apprehension. What caused the confusion concerning the Day of the Lord? False teachers in Thessalonica had forged a letter in Paul’s name stating believers were living in the Tribulation. (If a forged letter was sent, it did not survive because no portions of it have ever been discovered.)

The news alarmed the church. If the Day of the Lord had arrived, these saints had missed the Rapture and would suffer God’s wrath. This teaching, however, contradicted what Paul had written in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, namely, that the church would be raptured before the Day of the Lord (1 Th. 1:10; 4:13–18; 5:9–10). Therefore, Paul’s second letter was intended to calm this young church’s fears, correct any contradictions concerning Paul’s earlier teachings, and clear up any misunderstanding on the subject.

Second Thessalonians teaches that two events must precede the Day of the Lord: the “falling away [apostasy],” followed by the revelation of the man of sin, the Antichrist (2 Th. 2:3). The church will not be on Earth when these events take place, so no Christian will be subject to God’s wrath.

Author. Twice Paul identified himself as the author: “Paul . . . to the church of the Thessalonians” (1:1) and “The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write” (3:17). The early church fathers all agreed Paul wrote the epistle. It was not until the 19th century that modern critics cast doubt on Paul’s authorship. However, they have not satisfactorily proven their claims.

Although the letter is undated, certain historical events indicate Paul wrote it a few months after writing 1 Thessalonians. After fleeing Thessalonica, Paul traveled to Berea (Acts 17:10–15) and Athens (vv. 16–34), finally arriving in Corinith where he ministered for 18 months (18:11). Paul wrote this epistle in Corinth when Gallio was proconsul there (v. 12). He probably arrived in AD 50 and composed 2 Thessalonians in AD 50 or early 51.

Aim. Paul had many reasons for penning this epistle. First, he wanted to praise the Thessalonians for their spiritual growth, resolute faith in Christ, and love for one another. Second, he hoped to encourage them for their steadfastness under persecution and assure them Christ would reward them when He returned.

Third, and most important, Paul needed to correct the error concerning the Day of the Lord. He wanted to outline and explain events that will take place during the Day of the Lord and tell the church how to discipline problem believers whose conduct dishonored the Lord.

SUMMARY OF THE LETTER

This letter is extremely important. It addresses major themes that greatly concerned the Thessalonians in that day and still concern the church worldwide today.

Chapter 1 presents God as the Father who cares for and protects believers. Paul praised the church for its patience and faith amid severe persecution and assured the Thessalonians God will judge all who persecuted them when He returns to Earth and will reward all who remained faithful.

Chapter 2 addresses the doctrinal error that had severely shaken these believers. Paul clearly stated the Day of the Lord will not come until “the falling away” (apostasy) occurs and the “man of sin [Antichrist] is revealed” (2 Th. 2:3). These events had not happened (nor have they yet) because the “restrainer” is suppressing evil on the earth (v. 7).
When He is removed, the Antichrist will be free to unleash wickedness on the earth as never seen in human history. During the Tribulation, he will utterly deceive the unsaved who have no love for the truth. They will receive a strong delusion, believe the Antichrist’s lie, and perish without hope. At Christ’s Second Coming, He will destroy the Antichrist with the spirit of His mouth and brightness of His coming.

The concluding paragraph breaks out in praise, thanking God for choosing, calling, and converting the Thessalonians through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. It then commands these believers to remain steadfastly committed to the faith and asks God the Father to comfort them.

Chapter 3 asks the Thessalonians to pray (1) for Paul as he preaches the Word, that the Word might spread swiftly and bring glory to God; and (2) that Paul and his coworkers be delivered from unreasonable, unsaved, wicked men.

In the middle of this request, Paul assured believers the Lord is faithful to establish them in persecution and to protect them from the evil one (Satan). He expressed confidence that they were doing as instructed and would continue to practice what he and Timothy had taught them as they served Christ.

His prayer was that they obey God out of love for Him, which would help them endure persecution. Their example was Christ, who persevered patiently through His trials and remained obedient in His commitment to God His Father.

The remaining verses of chapter 3 discuss how to deal with disorderly church members (vv. 6–15). Paul then closed the epistle as he had opened it, praying that God’s peace and grace would be upon them.

**SALUTATION OF THE LETTER**

Paul’s salutation resembles that of 1 Thessalonians: “Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Th. 1:1). But under the inspiration of God, the words grace and peace became invested with new meaning, expressing the truth of the gospel.

Grace (v. 2) can be defined as an attribute of God, a part of His character, which expresses His goodness to undeserving, sinful humanity. Peace (v. 2) enters our lives when we are born again and yield to the control of the Holy Spirit, who gives us a calmness of spirit and sense of well-being because we have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

In future articles, we’ll see that this book provides a treasure trove of prophetic insights yet to be fulfilled.

**IF THE DAY OF THE LORD HAD ARRIVED, THESE SAINTS HAD MISSED THE RAPTURE AND WOULD SUFFER GOD’S WRATH.**

Timothy there soon after (1 Th. 3:1–2, 6). Timothy was Paul’s son in the faith whom he personally discipled. Interestingly, Paul never referred to himself as an apostle in this epistle, as he did in others. He spoke to the Thessalonian Christians on a personal level because he was their spiritual father, and his character and conduct convinced them to heed his instruction and teachings.

Paul addressed the “church of the Thessalonians.” The word church (Greek, ekklesia) consists of two Greek words: ek (out of) and kaleo (to call). It was used in Greek culture to denote any group or assembly and carried no religious connotation. In Scripture, the word church refers to a Christian assembly of people who believe in Jesus Christ. It never refers to a building. Throughout this epistle, the word refers only to a local assembly, not to the universal church.

The phrase God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Th. 1:1) clarifies whom Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy worshiped and distinguishes the church from pagan religions and political groups of that day. Mentioning “the Lord Jesus Christ” identifies the church as Christian, rather than Jewish.

This church included many Gentiles who became believers and a number of Jewish people, such as Jason. (See Acts 17.) Salvation in Christ gave Gentiles and Jews equal social standing and a new relationship in life, love, and communion with one another—something no other religion could do.

Paul’s greeting, “Grace to you and peace,” was common (1 Th. 1:1). But under the inspiration of God, the words grace and peace became invested with new meaning, expressing the truth of the gospel.

by David M. Levy,
director of Education and Ministry Relations
and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel
Gospel Ministry
TRASH TO TREASURE

The roomful of men sat transfixed as they listened several years ago to the story of the elderly gentleman standing before them. The stark concrete room alternately filled with waves of laughter and hushed silence as John unraveled his journey. Leaning forward to hear every word, they sensed he cared; and they knew he understood.

Like many of them, John, too, had sat on simple wooden benches—cut off from the world by high, impenetrable walls. Incarcerated for life, he had been cast off as worthless by the society that lived beyond the steel bars and razor-edged fences. In His sojourn on Earth, Jesus was well acquainted with people considered worthless because of their choices—people like Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, Mary who was called Magdalene, and the woman with the alabaster flask of oil. Nor were they the only ones. Stories of people considered useless, worthless, or refuse abound throughout the Bible.

How dehumanizing to consider someone trash, to be tossed aside as if unfit to live. Throughout his ministry, the apostle Paul met such individuals. One man was considered so useless many thought it would be better if he were dead. His name was Onesimus.

A LETTER UNFOLDS
Details are sparse, but we know enough to discern that Onesimus was in a great deal of trouble. His story appears in Paul’s letter to his friend, Philemon, after whom the book of the Bible is named.

Onesimus was Philemon’s slave. How he became such we are not told, nor do we know how long he was in bondage. Since it appears he owed a debt to his master, he may have indentured himself to pay it off. The whole of the tale is complicated. At the time Paul wrote the letter, Onesimus had run away and most likely added larceny to his tainted résumé (Phile. 15–16, 18).

Onesimus’s flight from slavery took him on a formidable journey from Colossae, in what today is Turkey, across the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas to Rome. The trek probably forced him to be shrewd and deceitful to find passage and provisions for the arduous escape. The threat of being apprehended would have been a constant fear because, under Roman law, runaway slaves could be mutilated, tortured, or killed when captured. Slaves in the Roman Empire were considered as cattle, with no rights whatsoever.

Ironically, Onesimus’ name means “useful or profitable.” But from what we can discern in Paul’s letter to Philemon, Onesimus had a reputation of being unprofitable or useless to those who knew him. In a sense, he was considered to have had no reason to exist; he was assessed as worthless (v. 11).

However, in an eye-opening disclosure to Philemon, Paul revealed that Onesimus was with him in Rome. When and how the slave encountered the imprisoned apostle is unspecified. Why he eventually went to Paul, a close friend of Philemon, is also puzzling because Onesimus knew his whereabouts would be exposed.

The letter unfolds the amazing news that God was at work. Something dramatic and unexpected had happened in Onesimus’ life in Rome. This same man who was once deemed unprofitable was now extremely profitable and highly valuable to others.

To lay the groundwork for what he was about to divulge, Paul announced that Onesimus is “my son . . . whom I have begotten” (v. 10). This was his declaration that Onesimus had become his spiritual son through the gospel. Paul used a similar phrase in speaking to the Christians in Corinth, calling them his “beloved children.” As their spiritual father,
he reminded them, “I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Cor. 4:15).

Using well-chosen phrases to outline the timing and transformation that had taken place, Paul clearly expressed the metamorphosis in Onesimus’ life. Pivoting on the miniscule, contrastive conjunction but, Paul told how this man once was one type of person “but now” was completely different (Phile. 11):

- “Once” he was useless to Philemon. “But now” he was useful and profitable to both Philemon and Paul (v. 11).
- “Once” he was worthless. “But now” he was Paul’s beloved helper in ministry (vv. 12–13).
- “Once” he was Philemon’s slave. “But now” he was a dear brother in the Lord to both Philemon and Paul (v. 16).
- “Once” he was a fugitive from Philemon. “But now” he was to be welcomed as a partner (v. 17).

The runaway, pilfering slave had gone from trash to treasure.

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).

RECOGNIZING GOD’S GRACE

Paul was more than well-acquainted with the “once, but now” change that can take place in a person’s life. He once was a harsh and zealous Pharisee who arrogantly applied the Mosaic Law and murderously persecuted the church. But now, he said, he counted all things “as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him” (Phil. 3:8–9).

Even though Paul had turned to Christ on the road to Damascus, Christians in Jerusalem rejected him. They were afraid because of his reputation and didn’t believe he had truly become a follower of Jesus. In the midst of the mess, a man named Barnabas stepped forward, stood by Paul, and vouched for him before the early church leaders (Acts 9).

The apostle’s defense of the change in Onesimus’ life is inspiring. Paul was able to see the grace of God at work when others saw only uselessness. Even while imprisoned in Rome, Paul invested his life in this runaway slave despite his dreadful reputation.

The countless ways God works in a person’s life are often beyond our perception and understanding. But Paul understood that Onesimus’ arrival in Rome was no accident. He humbly suggested to Philemon that “perhaps” God had a greater, overriding purpose in all of this. He believed God was at work, but he did not presume to declare the Almighty’s veiled, eternal, and detailed purposes (Phile. 15).

Onesimus was not perfect, nor was Paul. The “once, but now” newness of life begins as a seed of grace that takes root and grows in the power of the Spirit along the road of life. The letter to Philemon was not meant to pronounce God’s work complete and declare that all was well in Colossae. There was much work to be done. Choices had to be made and details agreed on before this life saga could continue to move forward for the glory of God. Paul’s appeal to Philemon to see the useless as useful and the worthless as valuable becomes an appeal to every Christian.

Have you ever known someone whom others considered useless or worthless? Digging into Onesimus’ life brought numerous names and faces to the surface. Not all were prisoners or slaves, but their pasts made them seem worthless in the eyes of others, even by some who called themselves Christians. Each one of their trash-to-treasure encounters with Jesus brought about unique changes that were beyond imagination.

More than 1,900 years after the Holy Spirit had created a new man in Onesimus, He was at work in my friend John, who told his story to the prisoners sitting in a concrete room surrounded by guards. John, too, had come to believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross; and his life, too, was changed. With the help of a Christian ministry, he eventually was released from a life sentence that carried no chance of parole and then worked with the ministry for many years.

Once he was tossed away, but now he is a valuable example of what happens in someone’s life when he places his trust in Jesus.

As hymn writer John Newton wrote, “Amazing grace! how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.”

This same man who was once deemed unprofitable was now extremely profitable and highly valuable to others.

Barnabas could spot the grace of God at work in a person’s life. The ability to see such grace, even in the smallest of ways, stirred Barnabas to rejoice and help strengthen God’s work in the lives of others. He did so with Paul. He did so with Mark. And he did so with the new believers in Antioch.

The apostle’s defense of the change in Onesimus’ life is inspiring. Paul was able to see the grace of God at work when others saw only uselessness. Even while imprisoned in Rome,
HOSTILITY INCREASES TOWARD PRO-ISRAEL STUDENTS ON U.S. CAMPUSES

Pro-Israel students at Columbia University in New York City recently hosted a protest against the school’s “pervasively hostile environment” toward Zionist students and the administration’s refusal to address the problem.

“Our message was that we will not just allow the university’s dismissal of our claims to go by silently, and that we hold the [school] accountable for the repeated violations against us and the followed harassment our group goes through,” Dalia Zahger, president of Columbia’s chapter of Students Supporting Israel, told JNS.org.

Two of the many incidents included anti-Israel activists surrounding and harassing five Israeli students, and pro-Palestinian students defacing a poster of Albert Einstein that the pro-Israel club had posted. The poster read, “This is what a Zionist looks like.” Anti-Israel students replaced the word “Zionist” with “scientist,” rejecting Einstein’s support of a national homeland for the Jewish people, JNS.org reported.

“Because of the verbal aggression, which sometimes approaches physical violence, we have people who are afraid to be pro-Israel. They just know that the university won’t defend them,” Zahger said.

The University of Michigan has also come under fire for its hostility toward pro-Israel students. Professor John Cheney-Lippold and graduate instructor Lucy Peterson, citing their academic boycotts of Israel, recently denied requests to write letters of recommendation for students seeking to study abroad in Israel, WashingtonPost.com reported. The administration has issued stern warnings to both instructors and disciplined Cheney-Lippold by making him ineligible to take an accredited sabbatical until Fall 2020, JNS.org reported.

Last year, the school’s student government passed a resolution introduced by the local chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine calling for the University of Michigan to boycott all ties with Israel. But despite the student resolution, the university prohibits its departments from boycotting Israel, JNS.org reported.

For news reports

From news reports

‘ANTI-RACISM’ RALLY IN BERLIN TURNS ANTI-SEMITIC

Irony of ironies, a so-called anti-racism rally in Berlin, Germany, that drew 200,000 people had speakers who called for the annihilation of Israel and support of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement that wants to strangle Israel economically in an effort to obliterate the Jewish state.

In an article in The Jerusalem Post (jpost.org), Benjamin Weinthal wrote, “The Jerusalem Post reviewed a video showing two speakers who called for the ‘liberation of all of Palestine 48’ and ‘we must take a stand and boycott Israel. BDS.’ The slogan to ‘liberate all of Palestine’ reverts to the founding of the Jewish state in 1948 and is widely considered a euphemism to cleanse Israel of Jews.”

Weinthal said demonstrators hoisted symbols supporting the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which “murdered four rabbis in a synagogue in Jerusalem” in 2014.

Anti-Semitism is definitely on the rise in Germany. FOX News reported that a study released in 2018 “shows that anti-Semitism permeates mainstream German society.” In 2018, FOX said, “16 preschools and day care centers in Munich received letters with swastikas and threats against the [Jewish] children, calling them ‘biological waste.’”

German police reports reveal 1,453 anti-Semitic incidents took place in 2017, “amounting to four a day,” FOX said, adding that Richard Herzinger, a columnist for the newspaper Die Welt, said, “Young people don’t know, or care, about this [Holocaust] period [in history].”

For news reports

From news reports
ABBAS TO UN: JERUSALEM IS ‘NOT FOR SALE’

Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas recently spoke at the United Nations General Assembly, praising Arab terror prisoners as “hero martyrs” and criticizing U.S. President Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

“Jerusalem is not for sale, and the Palestinian people’s rights are not up for bargaining,” Abbas said. He also declared Palestinians “never use violence” yet praised those who have been imprisoned or killed for acts of terror against Jewish Israelis as “hero martyrs and prisoners of war.”

“[Abbas] knows only one word ‘no’—not ‘direct negotiations,’ not ‘Israel,’ not the ‘Americans.’ On one hand he brings imaginary initiatives to the UN, and with the other he pays millions of dollars to terrorists,” Israel’s ambassador to the UN Danny Danon said.

ARCHAEOLOGISTS DISCOVER EARLIEST STONE INSCRIPTION OF ‘JERUSALEM’

Israeli archaeologists have recently discovered a pillar from the second-Temple period bearing the earliest stone inscription of the full, modern Hebrew spelling of Jerusalem.

The archaeology team found the pillar during a salvage excavation of a large Hasmonean-period Jewish artisans’ village near the western entrance to Jerusalem, Israel Antiquities Authority archaeologist Danit Levi said. The inscription reads, “Hananiah son of Dodalos of Yerushalayim.” The column and inscription date back to 100 BC, Levi said. The column is on display at the Israel Museum in the second-Temple period exhibit.

ISRAEL HELPS INDONESIAN EARTHQUAKE, TSUNAMI VICTIMS

Israel has sent water purifiers and a delegation of aid workers to Indonesia despite the Muslim nation’s refusal to conduct diplomatic relations with Israel. Indonesia has been devastated by earthquakes and tsunamis. More than 1,400 people have died, and more than 200,000 victims need food and clean water.

Israel, a world leader in disaster relief, sent rescue and medical services to Guatemala last year; Nepal in 2015; the Philippines in 2013; Haiti in 2010; and Turkey in 1999, among others. Israel also offered to send teams to Iran and Iraq following the earthquakes in 2017, but the nations declined.

ISRAELI NGO TO REBUILD ISRAELI LAND DESTROYED BY HAMAS

The Keren Kayemet Leisrael-Jewish National Fund (KKL-JNF), Israel’s largest green NGO, donated almost $28 million to help redevelop the 10,000 acres of Israeli land damaged by Hamas’s incendiary kites and balloons near the Gaza border. Construction will include building houses, bicycle paths, and playgrounds and rehabilitating existing forests. “These days, in which residents of the towns surrounding Gaza face arson kites and additional threats on a daily basis, [we are] more committed than ever to support residents in the area,” KKL-JNF World Chairman Daniel Atar said.

ISRAELI NGO TO REBUILD ISRAELI LAND DESTROYED BY HAMAS

Israel’s capital.

JNS.org

PEPSICO BUYS ISRAELI SODASTREAM; DEFIES BDS

PepsiCo, Inc. recently bought Israel’s popular homemade seltzer company, SodaStream, for $3.2 billion. The deal seals a victory over the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, which pressured SodaStream’s factory in Ma’ale Adumim to close in October 2014, UnitedWithIsrael.org reported.

SodaStream’s factory in Rahat, Israel, currently employs 2,500 Israeli workers, including many Bedouin Arabs; and it plans to open another factory nearby that will employ another few hundred people, UnitedWithIsrael.org reported.

From news reports

ISRAELI NGO TO REBUILD ISRAELI LAND DESTROYED BY HAMAS

Israel's capital.

JNS.org
Two days ago, I was on my way to the bus and ran into two Arab sheikhs who began a friendly conversation with me. “Now we are on the way to peace. We just have to make this roadmap; then we will go from there,” one said. He was speaking of the current Arab-Israeli conflict.

“I wish that peace would come, too, so we could receive the blessing of the Lord,” I replied. “He is the Prince of Peace, and we must trust in Him.” I quoted Numbers 6:24–27:

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.” So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.

“Why do you speak about what is written in your Bible?” one asked.

“This is not only my Bible,” I answered. “It is the Bible of everyone who believes in Him.”

“Can you show us where it is written in your Bible that this land belongs to you, as you claim it does?” he asked. I have lived near these men for 30 years, so we know each other. But whenever it comes to the issue of the land, they try to fight with me about it.

“It does not matter what I say, but what the Lord says. He promised the land to Abraham and his descendants,” I responded.

Then some of their friends arrived, and the sheikhs seemed like they wanted to prove to their friends they could outsmart me with their arguments. But I was not looking for a competition. I just wanted to show them what the Bible says. So I read to them the following Scripture verses:

And the Lord said to Abram, . . . “Lift your eyes now and look from the place...
where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever” (Gen. 13:14–15).

On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates” (15:18).

They listened attentively as I read. Then one responded, “But that was written many years ago. All of that is in the past.”

“Do you believe what is written here? Or are we wasting our time?” I asked them.

“We do believe, but we have many questions. Abraham was a Jew, and he hated Muslims” one said.

“When did Islam begin?” I asked.

“Islam existed even before King David existed,” one answered.

“Islam began 600 years after Christ,” I said. They seemed very surprised. Their spiritual blindness was evident. But it is our duty as Christians to help those with blind eyes to see the truth.

As we continued to talk, more of their friends came. All spoke of their hatred of Israel. I was alone and outnumbered, but I trusted in the Lord.

“How do you think you can stand against such a big power? There are 56 Muslim countries and more than one and a half billion Muslims. Think about it,” one boasted.

So I read for them Deuteronomy 7:17–18: “If you should say in your heart, ‘These nations are greater than I; how can I dispossess them?’—you shall not be afraid of them, but you shall remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt.”

I told them, “In 1948, I was a soldier here on active duty. We were only a half-million Jewish people. You outnumbered us like the mighty locusts. But we all know the outcome of that war. Who do you think was fighting for us?”

They thought for a moment. Then one replied, “There is some truth to that statement, but we still do not believe what you are saying.”

As our conversation ended, I told them, “It does not matter what I say. What matters is what I read from the Holy Bible. I put my trust in the Lord. He has promised to help Israel, and His word is eternal.”

—The Friends of Israel Archives, July 2003
Friends of Israel
Gospel Ministry

THE PROPHECY CONFERENCE
Understanding the Olivet Discourse

Last year at our three national prophecy conferences, we opened the Scriptures and examined what Christ told His disciples in the Olivet Discourse regarding the future and the direction in which the world is moving.

Now, you can own all 15 messages from the conference on CD, MP3, and for the first time, on DVD.

Sessions include:

- Lament Over Jerusalem
- The Great Tribulation
- The World at Christ’s Second Coming
- Dedication to the Lord
- And more!

Don’t miss out on this valuable resource that will bring understanding to an often-misunderstood part of Scripture.