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FROM THE EDITOR

Every now and then, the Lord brings someone into your life who changes everything for you. I met Rennie and Ellie Showers 33 years ago when I was a student at Word of Life Bible Institute in Schroon Lake, New York. I was a young widow with a 6-year-old daughter. After sitting under Rennie’s teaching, my outlook on life has never been the same. Rennie went home to be with the Lord on April 4, and we will all miss him greatly.

Thanks to Rennie, I view the world through a completely different lens, one that focuses on God’s plan for the ages. Rennie was at Word of Life teaching his incomparable book, What on Earth Is God Doing? If you haven’t read this unique and outstanding work, you should.

Rennie’s teaching was so compelling I hung on every word. When I began studying for the exam, I discovered I had been so invested in the material that I had retained everything.

I knew Dr. Showers was a world-renowned theologian and in great demand as a Bible teacher and conference speaker around the world. Never did I expect to become his editor, which happened when Elwood McQuaid, The Friends of Israel’s executive director at the time, hired me as senior editor in 1999.

Rennie became my theological compass, as he had been for The Friends of Israel since he began writing for Israel My Glory in the 1980s. When I became editor-in-chief, I consulted him often. Whenever I had theological questions about an article, I called Rennie. As busy as he was, he graciously gave me all the time I needed.

When my daughter graduated from college, she took a job 600 long miles from home at a megachurch that had 26 pastors and more than 100 full-time employees. A little lonely one day, she called me from work. During the call, I heard her ask someone, “Me?” She was told visitors were coming up the elevator to see her. She couldn’t imagine who they were. She didn’t know anyone. When the elevator door opened, there stood Rennie and Ellie Showers—two wonderful, welcome faces from home. She was so happy to see them she wanted to cry.

That was Rennie Showers. I will miss him dearly. Yet I know for certain I will see him again, and therein lies the matchless fact of the Christian life. Jesus told His followers, “Because I live, you will live also” (Jn. 14:19).

This issue of Israel My Glory focuses on Elijah the prophet, a righteous man whom God also raised up to do His work. In every generation, He has His faithful remnant. It’s all part of His marvelous plan for the ages.

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief
I awoke in Jerusalem on April 5 to learn my uncle, Dr. Renald E. Showers, was called home to glory. As I reflected on Rennie’s life and the family stories I heard growing up, the Lord impressed on me the words of Psalm 37:23: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.”

I thought about a teenager in Western Pennsylvania in the mid-1940s who spent Sunday evenings in his bedroom listening on the radio to the evening service of First Baptist Church in DuBois. He knew something was missing in his life, something he desperately wanted—peace with God.

That boy was my father, Louis Showers. When the church hosted evangelistic meetings, he responded to the gospel and gave his life to Christ. Immediately, he began praying his younger brother, Rennie, would come to faith—a prayer God soon answered.

As my Dad went off to Bible school to train for the ministry, he prayed God would call Rennie to full-time ministry too. Rennie wanted to be a medical doctor and graduated from high school with a full scholarship to Cornell University. But that summer, God gave Rennie no peace about Cornell. On the eve of packing his bags for school, Rennie surrendered to God’s call to ministry. Instead of treating people’s physical needs, he would invest his life ministering to their spiritual needs; and he enrolled in Philadelphia School of the Bible.

One of the greatest blessings in my life has been to know Rennie as my uncle. Growing up, I was always impressed with his deep love for God and strong desire to do God’s will. He had the humble spirit of a true servant, always extremely approachable. And he enjoyed humorous stories.

God used Rennie to help order my steps. His teaching and writing opened my understanding of theology; and his book What on Earth Is God Doing? enabled me to see God’s grand plan for the ages. It influenced me to go to seminary and then into full-time ministry.

Between my father and uncle, the Lord blessed me with two great teachers of His Word.

God used Rennie to connect me with The Friends of Israel. In 2001, Rennie submitted my name to then Executive Director Bill Sutter when Bill needed a chief financial officer. Were it not for Rennie, I would not be with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry today.

In every generation, God raises up a few individuals whom He endows with exceptional skill and understanding for His purpose. They are mighty warriors for God in the spiritual battle with Satan. Rennie was among that number in his generation.

He had an extraordinary command of Scripture and the God-given ability to break down difficult passages so everyone could understand them. As famous as he was, he always took whatever time was necessary to answer questions when people approached him; and he reflected genuine Christlikeness through his humble spirit. Rennie was truly filled with grace and truth.

I’ve received many notes from friends and colleagues since Rennie passed, each one sharing how God used my uncle to influence them. Through Renald Showers, God has ordered the steps of so many people. I can only imagine the large welcoming party that greeted him when he arrived in heaven.

Rennie’s presence will be dearly missed; but his ministry continues through the lives he touched and the many books, articles, and recorded messages he leaves behind. Well done, Uncle Rennie! Until we meet again.

by Jim Showers, executive director of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
ISRAEL’S ‘LEFT’ DEAD?

When Benjamin Netanyahu squeaked out his fifth victory in April, making him the longest-serving prime minister in Israel’s history, eclipsing even legendary leader David Ben-Gurion, the election results revealed more than the winner. It demonstrated that Israel’s left-leaning parties may be dead in the water.

I shouldn’t have been surprised. Last year I participated in an Israeli government-sponsored outreach to Christian media. For a few days I sat in the epicenter of Israeli politics in Jerusalem, along with members of the Christian media from around the world. We heard from Netanyahu; Israeli President Reuven Rivlin; U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman; former Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren; as well as other politicians, journalists, and influencers in Israel. The days were packed full, but one discussion stood out from the rest.

Five Israeli women, all Knesset (parliament) members at the time, who varied in political affiliation from religious conservative to socialist Left, got into a heated argument during a panel discussion. One of the women from a left-leaning party made a comment I won’t soon forget. Today, she said, most Israelis consider left a nasty word. The recent election cycle proved her correct.

Israel’s Labor Party received a paltry 5 percent of the vote. If it loses two more percentage points, it will forfeit its seat at the political table. Each party (there are more than 30) must garner a minimum of 3.25 percent of the vote to win seats in the 120-seat Knesset. Other left-leaning parties were barely able to pull together 3.3 percent of the vote.

Center-left parties weren’t always the minority in Israeli politics. The Labor Party dominated the political landscape for nearly 30 years. Prime Ministers Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and Ehud Barak all were leaders of the Labor Party. Yet after the failed attempt to achieve peace with the Palestinians in 2000 and Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the center-left movement became ineffective.

How does Netanyahu keep winning?

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton’s campaign may give us an answer. In an attempt to keep the campaign focused on what he felt would win Clinton the election, Clinton’s campaign strategist James Carville coined the phrase The economy, stupid. If the economy is doing well and people are working, they’re more likely to be satisfied.

Over the past 10 years, Israel has experienced uninterrupted economic growth, with record-low unemployment. Israel moved from being a socialist-structured economy to a highly competitive, capitalist one that encourages the lucrative, high-tech start-up environment. As a result, when Fortune 500 companies look to invest in new, advanced technology, they often turn to Israel.

Israel also has made new friends and deepened relationships with old ones. The Jewish state has established relations with India, China, the Gulf States, and even countries in Africa. Netanyahu made it a priority to deepen ties to the East in order to open new doors of economic opportunity and establish peace with countries once considered enemies. And let’s not forget about the strong bond between Israel and the United States.

But when all is said and done, what Israelis want most is security; and security remains a top priority with the Netanyahu government. When the Western leaders were kowtowing to Iran, Netanyahu diligently exposed the dangers of the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal, reminding the world that Iran poses an existential threat to Israel and the Middle East.

Netanyahu wasn’t alone in his thinking. Many Sunni Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia, agreed with him, which opened a dialogue that previously didn’t exist.

Netanyahu, of course, won’t be prime minister forever. He has his share of detractors and domestic problems, but he has been influential in promoting a conservative agenda to Israel’s citizens; and Israelis know you don’t fix what isn’t broken.

by Chris Katulka
I have set her [Jerusalem] in the midst of the nations… all around her (Ezek. 5:5).

The Trump administration’s recent designation of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a “foreign terrorist organization” is part of a multifaceted strategy to contain Tehran’s growing power in the Middle East. Established in 1979 to protect the Islamic regime from domestic threats, the IRGC has grown into an elite force that wields vast military, economic, and political influence in Iran and across the region.

Sworn to Israel’s destruction, it is Iran’s primary instrument for exporting the ideology of the Islamic Revolution worldwide. In 1989, the IRGC established the Quds Force, a special-forces unit that conducts covert missions outside Iran and provides training, funding, and weapons to terrorist groups in many countries, including Hezbollah in Lebanon; Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and West Bank; Houthi insurgents in Yemen; and Shia militias in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

Iran’s many foreign interventions have strengthened the so-called axis of resistance, an Iranian-led, anti-Israel alliance. In Lebanon, for instance, the IRGC has turned Hezbollah into the world’s most heavily armed non-state actor, with vast quantities of missiles and rockets arrayed against Israel. In Syria, the IRGC works to establish a permanent military presence aimed at “liberating” the Golan Heights from Israeli control.

“The ultimate goal is, in the case of another war, to make Syria a new front between Israel, Hezbollah, and Iran,” said Iran analyst Amir Toumaj. “They are making that not just a goal, but a reality.”

Iran and its allies are also working to establish a land corridor from Iran to the Mediterranean—through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon—to transport weapons to Hezbollah. Since 2017, Israel has launched more than 200 attacks against Iranian targets in Syria, according to Israeli Intelligence Minister Israel Katz. The IRGC’s covert nature, however, makes it difficult to determine how many and which type of weapons have slipped through.

In Yemen, Iran wants to establish a permanent presence on Saudi Arabia’s southern border and set up naval bases along the Red Sea. “If the IRGC-backed Shia rebels gain control of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Iran can attain a foothold in this sensitive region giving access to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, a cause of concern not only for its sworn rivals Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf states, but also for Israel and European countries along the Mediterranean,” said retired Israel Defense Forces Lt. Col. Michael Segall.

According to Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, Yemen is key to Iran’s strategy of ejecting Israel from so-called Palestinian territories. Iranian Gen. Kioumars Heydari recently said Iran’s plans go far beyond “freeing Palestine.” The IRGC “will flatten Tel Aviv,” he said, adding that at the entrance to every Iranian military base “we have a sign counting down the days to Israel’s demise.”

According to Nathan Sales, the U.S. State Department’s coordinator for counterterrorism, designating the IRGC as a terrorist group will “make it radioactive.” For many years IRGC entities were accused of supporting terrorism in a general sense, he said; but “now Iran stands accused of directly engaging in terrorism.” This fact, according to Sales, removes Iran’s “plausible deniability—it cannot hide behind Hezbollah or Palestinian Islamic Jihad anymore.”

The terrorist designation will enable criminal prosecution of “anyone knowingly providing support” to any entities linked to the IRGC, which controls nearly 40 percent of Iran’s economy. This crime carries prison sentences of up to 20 years. “The IRGC is the Iranian government’s primary means of directing and implementing its global terrorist campaign,” a White House statement said. “If you are doing business with the IRGC, you will be bankrolling terrorism.”

Graduation ceremony of the IRGC

by Soeren Kern,

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

PHOTO: ABACA PRESS/SALAMPIX/ABACA/SIPA USA/NEWSCOMM
HYDERABAD, India—Christian persecution has grown much more severe in India, and tribal villagers are being taught that Christianity is anti-Indian.

Upset about his daughter and son-in-law leaving the animistic Sarna religion to become Christians, 60-year-old Sanpitha Majhi recently attacked a 28-year-old Christian mother he believed had “forcefully converted” them. When her husband came to rescue her, he too was beaten, said her pastor, Girish Chander Marandi.

The same man had attacked nine people who had gathered for worship. He pounded their heads into the wall and ripped pages from a believer’s Bible.

Such violence comes against the backdrop of a draconian “anti-conversion law” that has given rise to spurious accusations of forcible or fraudulent conversion. Hindu extremists are turning animistic villagers against Christians.

Terrifying Tactics. In Pandanwa Tanda of Hazaribagh District, two families put their faith in Christ after years of losing family members to “healers” known as tantrics. Pastor Manoj Munda told Morning Star News, “The tantric would thrash them with a whip and exorcise on them, and they’d get even sicker and fall prey to death.”

Families who put their faith in Christ four years ago have broken the cycle of death from such treatment, though they have to travel miles to neighboring villages for worship due to hostilities from local Adivasis. This year, local villagers practicing Sarna mixed with Hinduism began collecting funds for puja (idol worship of gods and goddesses).

When Christians refused to contribute, villagers became enraged. They surrounded the wife of Christian Belu Ganjo as she went to draw well water at 9 p.m. “The entire village surrounded her and had decided to tie her with a rope and drown her in the well,” Pastor Munda said. Her husband came running to rescue her, and the women in the mob attacked her as the men attacked Ganjo, he said. They beat them with lathis, a bamboo stick bound with iron, and kicked them.

The mob also threw their 4-year-old daughter to the floor. “By God’s grace, the child suffered only minor injuries. Ganjo ran for his life with his child and wife to another Christian’s house, but the angry mob followed them, so they locked their houses, and in that night they fled away from the village,” Pastor Munda said.

Deprived of Food. In Ranchi, Hindu relatives filed complaints of forced conversions against newly wedded Christian couple Risha Toppo and Roshani Kachhap. After Toppo became a Christian in 2015, his family restricted him to his house. “But I continued praying and reading the Bible. My mother did not allow me into the kitchen for more than two years until I finally left the house in 2017.” They gave him only leftover food once a day, and sometimes they gave him nothing.

“Even through that phase when they were hating me, I questioned my parents, ‘Why are you worshiping the trees and plants? Why not worship the One who created them? The trees and plants do not hear or speak, but the living God sees us, He hears and speaks. Why are we not acknowledging the Creator?’” he said. “We married in court secretly because my family members were planning to attack me if they heard of me marrying a Christian.”

Toppo’s family banished him from the community. “I left everything behind and followed Christ,” he said. “Today we are surviving with the help of a basic salary I receive from working in a private clinic and my wife’s payments from tutoring some school students. We are working very hard but are happy that we are leading a Christian life.”

India ranks 10th on the Open Doors’ 2019 World Watch List of the countries that persecute believers. To read the full article, go to tinyurl.com/morningstarPERSECUTION.
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News of the passing of renowned theologian Dr. Renald (Rennie) Showers in April generated a massive outpouring of condolences from people in virtually all segments of the evangelical community. To anyone who knew Rennie, the response came as no surprise.

His theological expertise, gift for writing, and exceptional skill as a Bible teacher unquestionably motivated the immense number of people touched by his ministry to express their sorrow at his death. Such an outpouring of affection is seldom seen for someone who teaches theology and shapes minds in proper modes of Christian doctrine and conduct.

For me, after more than 30 years as colleagues, his passing marks the conclusion of a relationship I’m not likely to find in quite the same way again. Though tenacious when it came to theology, Rennie possessed a kindness of spirit that I experienced repeatedly in the quiet hours we spent together in conversation apart from the bustle of conferences and work-a-day matters. Whatever the subject, he was gracious, with a rather contagious appeal in how he answered questions and related to people’s personal concerns. I, too, feel heartfelt personal loss at Rennie’s departure.

I think I speak for everyone who listened as he taught in a clear, logical fashion, patiently answering questions. They came away feeling that in Rennie, they’d met a friend. His was the gift of instruction with empathy that touched so many lives and will not be lost in our memories. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord . . . that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:13, KJV).

Elwood McQuaid,
former executive director of The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
I first met Dr. Renald Showers while a student at Philadelphia College of Bible (PCB, now Cairn University). I knew of him because I was working in the shipping department at The Friends of Israel headquarters, where we mailed out materials all over the world. One of our newest titles back then was The Most High God, Dr. Showers’ now-famous commentary on the book of Daniel.

But it wasn’t until he became one of my professors in the fall of 1983 and I had the privilege of listening to him teach the Word of God that I began to grasp just how knowledgeable, humble, and gracious a man he really was.

Back then PCB assigned each student to a faculty member who would be available to pray with you, encourage you, and provide wisdom and advice. I was given a name, but I popped my head into Dr. Showers’ office one day and asked if I could speak with him instead. His response was a resounding yes, and I found myself visiting his office many times while at PCB.

We talked about everything—doctrine, The Friends of Israel, personal matters, even sports—while he sat at his desk eating a sandwich he had brought from home. He made it easy to be yourself. He knew how much I loved baseball, particularly my home team, the Philadelphia Phillies; so he brought me with him twice when he shared God’s Word in the locker room at Veterans Stadium with the Phillies players—including Mike Schmidt and Tug McGraw.

There’s a story Rennie loved to tell about the time I missed his class. He told it at his retirement dinner in 2016, and I think he’d want me to tell you now because he got such a kick out of it. I was struggling through Greek and had an exam coming up, so I decided to skip Rennie’s class for the first time ever and study. The next time class met, while Rennie was taking attendance, he looked at me with a big smile on his face and declared for all to hear, “You know who you would’ve sat next to had you not missed class? John Denny.” Talk about a missed opportunity for a young guy who loved baseball and adored John Denny!

John was a Cy Young Award-winning pitcher for the Phillies at the time. A believer, he later went to Rennie’s office where they talked about how to share Christ with fellow Phillies pitcher Steve Carlton.

Rennie was special to me. He knew so much and was able to communicate his knowledge effectively, while still being warm, personable, approachable, incredibly patient, and very understanding. I admired and respected him tremendously.

In 1989, my esteemed professor became a valued and much-loved colleague. We would often meet at the Word of Life Bible Institute in New York. Rennie would be the guest lecturer for the first-year class, and I would be lecturing to the second-year students. I look back on those times of fellowship as precious gifts from the Lord. I will miss you, Rennie.

Tom Simcox, a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
How God Turned the Foolish Into Fantastic

A cab ride in Tel Aviv could have ended in disaster.
But God stepped in.

by Steve Herzig

As a frequent traveler to Israel, I know enough to go to a specially designated area for taxis located outside the terminal at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. A ride from there ensures a safe trip at a fair price. Yet, on my recent visit to Israel, I did something foolish: I used a taxi from an undesignated area. To make matters worse, I wasn’t alone. I was with my wife, my sister-in-law, and her husband the day before we were to meet our Canadian Up to Jerusalem tour group. I can’t tell you why I did it. I’ve never done it before. The decision easily could have resulted in disaster. But by God’s grace, He took my mistake and turned it into something wonderful. Here’s the story.

THE FIASCO

Knowing I’m an experienced traveler, my wife and her family followed my lead as we set out for Israel. Our journey began well. Traffic was light, and we breezed through security and relaxed comfortably while waiting for our flight to Tel Aviv. We arrived ahead of schedule, retrieved our luggage, and went through Israeli security in record time. All that remained was getting a taxi to our hotel and enjoying our first Israeli dinner.

As we left the airport, we stopped to take a picture with Israel’s first prime minister—well, with the bust of David Ben-Gurion, for whom the airport is named. As we posed, a man approached me and offered to take the photo so we all could be in it together. Then he asked if we needed a taxi. Without hesitation, I responded, “Do you have room for four people and eight pieces of luggage?” He did! That’s when I was foolish and followed him.

The first red flag went up when he led us to the parking lot—in the opposite direction of the designated taxi area. As we schlepped our eight pieces of luggage, the next red flag appeared: He couldn’t find his taxi. Five minutes later, he waved to us, pointing to his car with the sign “Taxi” affixed to the roof. My relief was short-lived as I saw fear creep over the faces of my fellow travelers.

Red flag number three went up as he took off. He tried to
get out of the parking lot without paying. He tailgated the car in front of him, hoping he could slip through the lane before the bar came down. Each time he failed, he changed lanes and tried again. Finally, he shot through on the tailgate of another car. If my wife’s looks could kill, I would be dead.

As soon as Ossi, as he identified himself, pulled his pay-avoidance move, lights began to flash. Some of Israel’s finest were signaling us to pull over. Ossi turned to me and said, “Tell them you called me to be your driver.”

He pulled over and got out of the car. That’s when the shouting and hand gestures began. A policewoman came to our car and told us, “You are not in a taxi.” We didn’t understand. “No,” she said. “This is not a taxi. Wait here. We are calling a real taxi.” As we exited the fake taxi, it began to rain. There we stood, rain falling, eight pieces of luggage out on the road, and the four of us looking like lost immigrants in a strange country.

We followed the police to an area where a real taxi picked us up. The Israeli police could not have been nicer or more helpful, even helping us with our luggage. I apologized for my mistake. One replied, “No, we are sorry. It’s not your fault. Unfortunately, this happens all too often. It is deceitful and dangerous. Tourists are getting ripped off, which reflects poorly on our country. Worse yet, some people who refuse to pay an exorbitant fare are attacked, and their lives are put in danger.”

**GOD’S AMAZING GRACE**

Soon our new cab arrived. That was when God stepped in. The driver loaded our luggage into his legitimate taxi, and the police quoted me the exact price to go to the hotel. As we drove off, I introduced myself and began a conversation with the driver. His name was Jonathan, and he truly was God’s gift to us.

Jonathan emigrated from the Czech Republic in 2000 to build a better life in Israel. I asked him many questions, and he was more than willing to provide answers. He was the son of Holocaust survivors. His parents did not talk much about their experience, a common thing among survivors. Jonathan worked hard, usually 16 hours a day. He said the first eight hours were to pay for his taxi and the next eight were for his living expenses. He has three children, his youngest being 14 years old. In light of the geopolitical situation, he was wondering if his decision to move to Israel was right.

Israel was facing an election in April, and when I asked him for a prediction concerning the outcome, he said he was certain whoever won would not be successful. He believed Judaism and Islam were on a collision course with each other and that things had never been this way before. I quoted King Solomon, “There is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1:9), and the prophet Jeremiah: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9).

“You made a great decision in coming here,” I told him and explained my understanding of Israel’s situation: enemies all around, Hamas to the southwest in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria to the northeast and northwest, the Sinai border controlled by Egypt but dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood in the southwest.

“You must be Jewish,” he said. “You talk like a Jew.” I told him I was and that I was leading a tour of mostly Canadian Christians who, like me, love Israel and believe God gave the Jewish people this land. He responded, “No one seems to have the answer to this situation.”

“But there is someone who has the answer,” I told him. And then I took him on a cruise through the Jewish Scriptures. Beginning with the beginning, I talked about Adam and Eve’s sin (Gen. 3); Abraham’s faith (15:6); God’s promise of Messiah (Isa. 9:6); and a future time when God brings Gentiles and Jews to worship in Jerusalem together (Zech. 8:23).

By the time I finished, our 40-minute trip from the airport to our hotel was over. As I thanked Jonathan for a wonderful ride and gave him a hug, he whispered in my ear, “I purposely took the long way here because this was a great conversation.”

Though I tipped him well, I saw my brother-in-law give him an additional $20, no doubt grateful for a safe ride.

The apostle Paul said it well: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Only God could have orchestrated these events. I made a foolish mistake, but God turned it into a fantastic experience. ✮

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**Steve Herzig**

is the director of North American Ministries and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
What Heathenism Wrought
Elijah was an extraordinary prophet, but even more so because of the culture in which he lived.

BY DAVID M. LEVY
Without any announcement, the prophet Elijah appeared in Israel and boldly confronted his generation with a strong warning from God. His messages thundered with pronouncements of judgment against the inky blackness of Israel’s evil spiritual night.

Israel had turned its back on the living God; and, like all nations that forsake the Almighty, it degenerated into a corrupt and heathenistic society. To understand Elijah’s greatness, we must understand the political and religious arenas in which he ministered.

DECLINE OF THE KINGDOM
The Jewish kingdom’s decline began more than 100 years before Elijah came on the scene—in the days of King Solomon, who ruled from 970 to 931 BC.

Although blessed with more wisdom than any man on Earth, Solomon succumbed to the custom of his day and married many foreign women to cement political alliances. This practice, forbidden in the Mosaic Law (Dt. 17:17), hastened the nation’s spiritual decay.

Even more despicable, Solomon allowed his pagan wives to build altars to their gods (Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, and Molech) east of Jerusalem on the Mount of Olives, where the women practiced gross idolatry by burning incense and offering sacrifices.

Less than a century later, King Jehoram of Judah (r. 848–841 BC) sacrificed his firstborn son on the city wall to the heathen god Chemosh (2 Ki. 3:27). There are heartbreaking tales of children being sacrificed in the name of Molech, an abominable practice the Mosaic Law highly condemned (Lev. 20:2–5).

As time passed, Solomon’s wives turned his heart toward their idols, and Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord. He was not fully devoted to the God of Israel, as was David his father. Because of Solomon’s pride, arrogance, idolatry, unbridled passion, and neglect of God’s Law, God ripped the kingdom from Solomon’s son Rehoboam—dividing it in two.

After Solomon’s death, Rehoboam, whose mother was an Ammonite, reigned over Israel. He proved to be an arrogant, frivolous, unintelligent man who was totally nonreligious and untrained in God’s Law. The seeds of wickedness that Solomon had sown produced the fruit of rebellion against the reign of his son.

An uprising ensued when a man named Jeroboam, along with the congregation of Israel, asked Rehoboam to ease the grievous burden of compulsory service and oppressive taxation that Solomon had levied on the nation. Taking the advice of his peers over that of his elders, Rehoboam replied, “My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges” (1 Ki. 12:14).

Upon receiving this news, the 10 northernmost tribes seceded from the Davidic Kingdom. As prophesied, Jeroboam became the ruler of the northern kingdom, with Samaria as the capital. Rehoboam was left with Judah and Benjamin, the two southern tribes—plus Levi—with Jerusalem as the capital.

DEPRAVITY OF THE KINGS
The northern kingdom expanded its borders, took control of the trade routes surrounding it, and became extremely prosperous. An upper-class society emerged that built expensive homes, enjoyed a carnal lifestyle, and exploited the poor. Corrupt leaders oppressed the people and committed violence and robbery, while merchants chafed at closing their businesses for religious observances.

Jeroboam (r. 931–910 BC) was not religious, but he knew Israel needed a god to worship. Not wanting his people to return to Rehoboam when they went to the Temple in Jerusalem, he set up golden calves in Bethel and Dan and appointed degenerate men as priests (not of the Levitical priesthood) to offer sacrifices in direct disobedience to God’s law (vv. 27–33). He
established an abominable nation of apostasy built on human wisdom and designed to eliminate any need for pilgrimages to worship Jehovah, thus assuring undivided loyalty to his rule.

Soon Baal worship replaced true worship of God in Israel. Jeroboam laid the foundation for the despicable behavior that would later evoke God’s wrath and lead to Israel’s eventual demise. He ruled over the 10 tribes for 22 years (vv. 25–33; 14:19–20).

After Jeroboam, the northern kingdom survived through 18 more kings. Elijah passed off the scene with the death of King Ahaziah (852 BC; see “Israel’s Evil Kings,” page 19); and Elisha, his successor, began his ministry under King Jehoram.

All of the 19 kings who ruled in Israel were despicably wicked. Their behavior evoked God’s wrath, leading to Israel’s downfall. Assyria’s Tiglath-Pileser invaded the kingdom and laid siege to Samaria. His successor, Sargon II (r. 722–705 BC), continued the siege, capturing Samaria and the entire northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC.

All Israel’s kings were required to write for themselves a copy of the Mosaic Law so they would remember what God required of them (Dt. 17:18–20). They all failed to do so.

DEDICATION OF ELIJAH

Elijah appears suddenly, without preamble, in 1 Kings 17:1: “And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the L/O.sc/R.sc/D.sc God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.'”

Elijah’s name means “my God is Jehovah.” It is an apt name for the prophet who would minister to a generation of ungodly Israelites who were living like the heathen surrounding them. They had left Jehovah their God.

As with Melchizedek in Genesis 14, Scripture reveals nothing about Elijah’s ancestry, birth, father and mother, or his early life. When his ministry was completed, a whirlwind carried him to heaven as his protégé Elisha looked on (2 Ki. 2:1, 11).

Elijah is identified simply as “the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead” (1 Ki. 17:1). Many scholars believe he was from Tishbe in the area known as Gilead, but Tishbe’s location has never been determined with certainty. Gilead is a mountainous region 60 miles long and 20 miles wide, located east of the Jordan River and extending from the Sea of Galilee to the northern tip of the Dead Sea. It is bound on the north by Bashan and on the south by Moab and Ammon.

Elijah was a product of his time and place. Commentator Arthur Pink provided an apt picture:

The people of those hills reflected the nature of their environment: they were rough and rugged, solemn and stern, dwelling in rude villages and subsisting by keeping flocks of sheep. Hardened by an open-air life, dressed in a cloak of camel’s hair, accustomed to spending most of his time in solitude, possessed of sinewy strength which enabled him to endure great physical strain, Elijah would present a marked contrast with the town dwellers in the lowland valleys, and more especially would he be distinguished from the pampered courtiers of the palace.

Few prophets in Israel’s history were as bold and varied as Elijah. Unlike others whose prophecies bear their names, Elijah has no book in the Bible that bears his name.

His moral character was sterling and uncompromising, and his faith and zeal for God were unequalled among prophets. With courage and boldness, he confronted kings, called out false religious leaders, and condemned idolatrous practices within Israel. He was unafraid to challenge the sinful deeds and demonic customs of his day. He not only spoke simply, directly, and sternly against evil, but he also declared divine judgment against the sins of Israel and its leaders, who continually threatened his life.

Although stern, bold, and courageous, Elijah was still a human being with human frailties. He experienced timidity, weakness, cowardliness, fear, doubt, and even depression—especially after a great victory over the prophets of Baal. He actually had a pity party, telling God he was the only faithful prophet left in Israel. However, God informed him 7,000 other Israelites also had not bowed their knees to Baal (19:10, 14, 18).

Elijah also exhibited a tender side. He was touched by the poverty of those living in need and hardship, and he showed mercy and loving compassion. This was especially true of his behavior toward a Gentile widow in Zarephath to whom he provided food and whose son he raised from the dead (17:8–24).

The impact Elijah had on Israel is so memorable it bridges
both the Old and New Testaments. More is written about him in the New Testament than about any other prophet except Moses; Elijah is mentioned 30 times.

Furthermore, Elijah did not die. While he and Elisha walked together, a chariot of fire and horses appeared between them. A whirlwind swept up the prophet and, in one deathless step, carried Elijah from Earth into the everlasting glory of heaven (2 Ki. 2:11).

Although the Old Testament phase of Elijah’s work was completed, his ministry would not be over by any means. The Old Testament ends with the following declaration: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:5–6).

ENDNOTE


The question is often asked, “Do God’s people ever have the right to disobey government?” The answer is yes, but with stipulations. A believer may only disobey laws that are immoral and specifically stated as such in Scripture. For example, we are not to worship a heathen god, practice idolatry, blaspheme God, steal, abuse parents, commit murder or adultery, or bear false witness against another person.

Here are a few biblical examples of laws that were acceptable to disobey:

1. Pharaoh’s order that Jewish midwives murder all male infants (Ex. 1:17).
2. Nebuchadnezzar’s order to bow to a gold image. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused (Dan. 3:16–18).
3. Darius’s decree to pray to him alone or be cast into the lions’ den. Daniel disobeyed (Dan. 6:7–10).
4. Jewish leaders’ demands that Peter and John not teach in Jesus’ name (Acts 4:18–20). They refused to obey (5:29).

In all these situations, keeping God’s moral laws and commandments was a higher obligation than obeying the laws of human government. That said, Christians should faithfully abide by the laws of the country in which they reside, as Scripture demands.

BY DAVID M. LEVY
Israel’s Evil Kings
by David M. Levy

The northern kingdom was plagued with evil kings, beginning with Jeroboam (931–910 BC), who intentionally caused Israel to sin by erecting golden calves in Bethel and Dan and telling the Israelites, “Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!” (1 Ki. 12:28). Here is a rundown of the reigns of the seven kings who followed him:

**Nadab (910–909 BC)**
Jeroboam’s son. He practiced all the evils his father practiced. He ruled only two years because Baasha assassinated him and became king in his place (15:25–28).

**Baasha (909–886 BC)**
He immediately killed everyone in Jeroboam’s house. His despicable deeds caused God to pronounce the same judgment on him, and his household suffered the same fate as Nadab’s (15:28–16:11).

**Elah (886–885 BC)**
He assassinated Baasha and ruled two years. While in a drunken stupor, Elah was assassinated by Zimri (vv. 12–13).

**Zimri (885–885 BC)**
He ruled for one week. Hearing that Zimri had become king, the people of Israel made Omri king and attacked Zimri in Tirzah. Knowing he was defeated, Zimri committed suicide by going into the citadel of the king’s house and burning it down upon himself (vv. 15–20).

**Omri (885–874 BC)**
He proved to be eviler than all the kings before him. He ruled 12 years, died, and was buried in Samaria (vv. 21–28).

**Ahab (874–853 BC)**
Omri’s son. He followed the examples before him and became even more wicked. His idolatrous wife, Jezebel, was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. Her marriage to Ahab secured an alliance between Phoenicia and Israel and brought Baal worship to Israel. The driving force behind Baal worship, Jezebel led Ahab to serve Baal and erect a temple and altar to Baal in Samaria (vv. 31–33). When condemned and convicted of his sin by God, Ahab tore his clothes, donned sackcloth, and fasted and mourned in repentance and humility. God showed grace to Ahab, promising not to bring judgment or calamity on his house but vowing to pour them out on Ahab’s son’s house (21:27–29). Ahab died fighting the Syrians, and Ahaziah reigned in his place (22:37–40).

**Ahaziah (853–852 BC)**
He ruled for two years. He did evil in God’s sight and worshiped Baal, which angered the Almighty (vv. 51–53). Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room on the second floor of his dwelling and received a life-threatening injury. Extremely afraid he would die, he sent messengers three times to seek Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron (2 Ki. 1:1–2). In so doing, Ahaziah signed his own death warrant. Elijah intercepted the messengers each time. The third time the prophet informed Ahaziah personally that he would surely die. With Ahaziah’s death, Elijah passed off the scene.

Ahaziah had no son to replace him on the throne, so Jehoram (852–841 BC) became king in his stead (vv. 3–18). Ten more kings ruled Israel from 841 to 722 BC—all of them evil.
STATION on Carmel

A look at one of the most fascinating and decisive battles between good and evil

by Ty Perry
The scorching sun beat down on Obadiah as he walked the arid path, each step sending a swirl of dust upward. It had been years since rain had fallen on the once-lush Samaritan countryside—ever since Elijah the prophet had pronounced judgment on the land for King Ahab’s despicable acts. Now the entire northern kingdom of Israel was suffering.

As Obadiah continued his trek under the relentless Middle Eastern sun, he thought of the king’s order to search for well-watered areas for the livestock. Such foolishness!

Ahab had disobeyed God’s commands by marrying Jezebel, a Sidonian princess and evil-hearted woman who championed idolatry. The king worshiped at Baal’s feet and even built a temple for the worthless idol. The drought and famine were the fruits of national sin.

Like all man-made deities, Baal was only as powerful as his followers. Queen Jezebel, the nation’s chief worshiper of the chunk of stone, led the massacre of the faithful prophets who dared to speak out against Baal in the name of the Lord God of Israel. Their blood flowed like water in the streets, a poignant reminder of the price of discipleship.

Despite the withering heat, an icy chill ran down Obadiah’s spine. He thought of those men, many of them his friends. He thought of his own life, hanging precariously in the balance. It seemed that Ahab still trusted Obadiah; but how long would it be before the king, or worse yet, the queen, discovered he had secretly hidden 100 prophets of Yahweh in wilderness caves and had been feeding them and taking them water?

Suddenly, there appeared next to him a man roughly dressed. A hairy garment hung on his sinewy frame, a leather belt around his waist. The man’s hair and beard were long, scraggly, and dusty. His appearance was otherworldly. Trembling, Obadiah fell to the ground. “Is that you, my lord Elijah?” he asked (1 Ki. 18:7).

“It is I,” the prophet replied. “Go, tell your master, ‘Elijah is here!’” (v. 8).

“How have I sinned,” Obadiah asked, “that you are delivering your servant into the hand of Ahab, to kill me? As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to hunt for you; and when they said, ‘He is not here,’ he took an oath from the kingdom or nation that they could not find you. And now you say, ‘Go, tell your master, “Elijah is here”’!” (vv. 9–11).

Obadiah lamented that the Spirit of the Lord would carry Elijah away so Ahab could not find him, and the king would think Obadiah a liar and kill him. But Elijah insisted he would see Ahab.

The meeting between king and prophet was not cordial. Ahab called Elijah the “trroubler of Israel” (v. 17), to which Elijah replied,

I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals. Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table (vv. 18–19).

The contest of contests was about to begin.

‘That This People May Know’

Ahab did as Elijah ordered. The nation, including the prophets of Baal and Asherah, gathered on Mount Carmel; and Elijah threw down the gauntlet. Looking at the crowd, he shouted, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (v. 21).

No one said a word. Elijah challenged all 450 prophets of Baal to demonstrate their god’s power by sacrificing a bull on an altar and calling on Baal to consume the sacrifice by fire. “O Baal, hear us!” they cried (v. 26). They screamed and leaped about the altar that held their sacrifice of a dismembered bull; but nothing happened. Boldly, Elijah taunted

“Let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word.”
them: “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened” (v. 27).

Then the false prophets took knives and lances from their belts and slashed their bodies. Blood gushed from their veins in an attempt to elicit a response from their god. Nothing.

At the end of the day, Elijah gathered the people together. He repaired the dilapidated altar to the true and living God using 12 large stones, “according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob” (v. 31). Then he dug a trench around the altar’s base, laid wood on top of the stones, and prepared the bull for sacrifice.

Turning to a group of men standing nearby, Elijah demanded, “Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood” (v. 33). Then Elijah ordered them to do it twice more until altar, wood, and bull were sopping wet. Water dripped from the bull’s lifeless body into the pool that had formed in the trench below.

“LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,” Elijah shouted. “Let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word” (v. 36). The prophet’s voice reverberated throughout the Jezreel Valley below.

“Hear me, O LORD, hear me,” he shouted again, “that this people may know that You are the LORD God, and that You have turned their hearts back to You again” (v. 37).

At that moment, a terrifying roar came from the altar. A mass of white-hot fire consumed not only the bull, but also the wood, stones, and dust, as well as the water in the trench.

Tears may have streamed down the prophet’s face as he turned to see the Israelites prostrate on the rocky ground. “The LORD, He is God! The LORD, He is God!” they shouted in unison (v. 39).

The victory was God’s. Elijah commanded the people, “Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let one of them escape!” (v. 40). Then the prophet marched the followers of Baal to the Brook Kishon, where he executed them.

The Tiny Cloud

The prophet and his servant made the ascent back up Mount Carmel, where Elijah bowed to the ground. It hadn’t rained in Samaria for several years. Everything was dried up. Food was scarce, and the animals were dying. “Go up now, look toward the sea,” Elijah told his servant. The man went up but saw nothing. “Go again,” Elijah said (v. 43). Six times the servant went to the west side of the mountain, looked toward the Mediterranean, and returned with the same answer.

But the seventh time, he noticed something far off. Excitedly, he ran back to his master and shouted, “There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea!” (v. 44).

“Go up, say to Ahab, ‘Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you,’” said Elijah (v. 44).

As the servant ran to Ahab, Elijah looked to the sky. A deep rumble shook the mountain and valley alike, the sky blackened dark as pitch, the wind began to blow, “and there was a heavy rain” (v. 45).

Although most believers today do not find themselves surrounded by Baal worshipers, all of us live in cultures that worship objects other than the God of Israel. In the West especially, materialism is the god of this age; and it tempts Christians, as well as unbelievers.

Like Elijah, the church must be willing not only to stand against such 21st-century Baals, but also to remind those around us that a choice must be made: “If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (v. 21). Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone is the only way revival, personal or national, will occur; and when it does, we, too, will feel the effects of the refreshing rains of repentance.

Ty Perry
is a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
PASSING

by TOM SIMCOX
It’s so important to teach the younger generation. Elijah mentored Elisha for almost eight years. Then Elisha made an unusual request.

The Mantle

One of the most difficult aspects of growing older is being able to let go. It seems so easy to hold onto a job or position too long. Instead of holding on, we should diligently seek someone younger to mentor. So when the time comes for us to step down, the work won’t suffer loss.

The apostle Paul instructed his protégé Timothy, “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). This concept of the older teaching the younger runs throughout God’s Word.

In 1955, Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators, preached a sermon titled “Born to Reproduce,” where he declared, “Men, where is your man? Women, where is your woman? Where is the one whom you led to Christ and who is now going on with Him?”

He was teaching the truth of discipleship—the art of mentoring a new believer until he or she is mature in the Lord. That’s exactly what the prophet Elijah was commanded to do. God told him to anoint Hazael as king of Syria,
Jehu as king of Israel, “and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place” (1 Ki. 19:16).

The older prophet found Elisha plowing. “Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him,” apparently a sign that Elijah was calling Elisha into the ministry (vv. 19–21). Elijah would disciple, or teach, Elisha exactly what following the God of Israel was all about.

While Elijah’s ministry was fiery as he publicly called out sin and evil, Elisha seems to have had a quieter, more reserved manner, showing us God can use all types of personalities.

The men traveled and ministered together for almost eight years before it became known the Lord would “take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind” (2 Ki. 2:1). Elisha was probably distressed by the realization he soon would be separated from his mentor. He no doubt had grown close to Elijah, enjoyed sweet fellowship with him, and learned a great deal about serving the living God.

‘I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU’

On Elijah’s last day on Earth, the prophet told Elisha to remain in Gilgal while he went to Bethel. But Elisha refused: “As the L ORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!” (v. 2). Why Elijah made the suggestion is not known. Perhaps he was testing Elisha’s faithfulness. Elisha was as good as his word. He remained steadfast and never left the prophet’s side. At Bethel “the sons of the prophets” asked Elisha, “Do you know that the L ORD will take away your master from over you today?” Elisha curtly replied, “Yes, I know; keep silent!” (v. 3).

Scripture doesn’t say how they obtained that information, but God obviously had conveyed it to them. After all, He is the One who declares the end from the beginning and “from ancient times things that are not yet done” (Isa. 46:10). This is why we must study Bible prophecy; God is telling us ahead of time what He plans to do in the future. Had He not wanted us to know, He would not have told us.

Then Elijah said again, “Elisha, stay here, please, for the L ORD has sent me on to Jericho” (2 Ki. 2:4). Again, Elisha replied, “As the L ORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!” (v. 4). From Jericho, God dispatched Elijah to the Jordan; and for the third time, Elijah suggested Elisha remain behind. Again, Elisha declined (v. 6).

As they approached the Jordan River, with the prophets in training

Elisha was Elijah’s spiritual son; and as such, he was requesting the double blessing that would naturally fall to the firstborn male heir of a family.
watching, Elijah “took his mantle [cape], rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground” (v. 8).

Perhaps the water stood in a heap, as the Red Sea had when Moses held up his staff during the Exodus from Egypt (Ex. 14:13–22), or as the Jordan River had when the Ark of the Covenant entered the midst of the river, carried by the priests under Joshua’s leadership (Josh. 3:14–17). Whatever method God used, the prophets in training were there to witness it because the Lord had given them some type of advance notice—and they believed it.

On the other side of the Jordan, Elijah told his friend, “Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?” (2 Ki. 2:9). Elijah knew the time of his departure was near. Clearly, Elisha wanted something from his teacher because he had remained steadfastly at Elijah’s side.

Then Elisha made his request: “Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me” (v. 9).

**THE DOUBLE BLESSING**

On the surface, this may seem like an audacious request, but it actually was quite normal. As Elijah’s trainee, Elisha was, in a spiritual sense, his son. Timothy enjoyed a similar relationship with Paul, which is why Paul addressed him as “a true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2) and “a beloved son” (2 Tim. 1:2).

Elisha was Elijah’s spiritual son; and as such, he was requesting the double blessing that would naturally fall to the firstborn male heir of a family. Moses gave instruction regarding this blessing in Deuteronomy 21:17. Since Elisha had been discipled, trained, and tutored by his spiritual father, Elijah, he was requesting the double portion of the firstborn that would have identified him clearly as Elijah’s heir and separated him from all the other prophets in training.

Knowing such a request could only be fulfilled by God Himself, Elijah told his protégé he had no power or authority to bestow such a blessing. “Nevertheless,” he said, “if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be for you; but if not, it shall not be so” (2 Ki. 2:10).

Elisha had to stay with Elijah every minute or he could miss the moment of Elijah’s departure. He couldn’t leave to grab a burger and fries, so to speak. He had to be faithful to the bitter end. Isn’t that what God asks of all of us—to be faithful to the end? He doesn’t want us to become sidetracked. He wants us by His side until He calls us home.

Elisha remained faithful. “Suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (v. 11). He departed in a moment, miraculously carried into God’s presence by a chariot of fire.

Only one other person ever left this earth without dying: a righteous man named Enoch. The Bible simply states, “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Gen. 5:24). These two supernatural departures from Earth to heaven without experiencing physical death beautifully depict what the church is awaiting in the imminent return of Jesus at the Rapture. In the blink of an eye, the dead in Christ will rise; and the living will be caught up with them in the air (Jn. 14:1–3; 1 Th. 4:13–18).

Elisha saw his teacher depart this mortal sphere, and “he saw him no more. . . . He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him” (2 Ki. 2:12–13).

Was Elisha’s request granted? Scripture says the man took up his master’s mantle and “struck the water, [and] it was divided this way and that” (v. 14). The Lord divided the Jordan for Elisha exactly as He had for Elijah. With that miracle, a new prophet arose in Israel in Elijah’s place to continue the work of the Lord.

During the eight years these two men were together, the older poured himself into the younger, preparing Elisha for the day when it would become his responsibility to carry on the ministry of the Most High God.

As Dawson Trotman asked, “Men, where is your man? Women, where is your woman?” Today it seems more important than ever that we diligently teach the next generation what it means to be a true follower of the Most High God. ✶

ENDNOTE


Tom Simcox

is the Church Ministries training coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
‘I Will Send You Elijah’

A look at Malachi’s mysterious prophecy and the three phases of Elijah’s ministry

by

Richard D. Emmons
Elijah has always been a bit of a puzzle.

An iconic figure among the Old Testament prophets, he appears center stage, bigger than life—and then disappears. Everybody knows him. Nobody knows him. He faces down evil King Ahab and Ahab’s devilish queen, Jezebel. Then he retreats from society and rides a chariot of fire to heaven.

Four hundred years later, the prophet Malachi prophesied,

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse (Mal. 4:5–6).

Will Elijah return? What is his role? How is he part of Israel’s hope for the Messiah? How should we understand him?

Malachi’s Elijah prophecy is best understood in three phases, or appearances, each with a unique identity, time, and ministry. Phase one involves John the Baptist. Phase two is the appearance of Elijah himself on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Jesus, and phase three is a still-future ministry prior to and/or during the early days of the seven years of horrifying Tribulation promised to afflict the entire earth.

Messiah’s Forerunner

A decades-long prayer was answered when the angel Gabriel appeared to the Jewish priest Zacharias around AD 3 or 4, announcing that Zacharias and his aged wife, Elizabeth, would have a son. Directly referencing Malachi’s prophecy, Gabriel expanded on it, telling the priest to name the child John and that the child was to be a Nazirite from the womb, separated unto God:

He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, “to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,” and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Lk. 1:15–17).

John would fulfill (in part) Malachi’s prophecy about Elijah. Turning “the hearts of the fathers to the children” links the two revelations across 400 years of silence, when God provided no prophetic word to His Chosen People. Yet, though there had been a hiatus in God’s revelation, there was no lapse in His redemptive program (cf. Gal. 4:4–5). Gabriel’s message resumed God’s revelation to mankind exactly where Malachi left off.

John the Baptist would “go before” the Lord “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” accomplishing the spiritual ministry prophesied of Elijah (Lk. 1:17). He would
be the forerunner of the Messiah and “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (v. 17). Twice Jesus affirmed this truth about John:

But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.” Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come (Mt. 11:9–14, emphasis added).

Calling John a prophet and more, Jesus said John was fulfilling prophecy as the forerunner of the Messiah. Later, Jesus appeared in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah. The disciples who witnessed the event asked,

“Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things. But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist (17:10–13, emphasis added; cf. Mk. 9:12–13).

Jesus affirmed that Elijah had already come, and the disciples understood He was referring to John the Baptist (Mt. 17:13). But what about John’s denial when asked if he was Elijah?

Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ [Messiah].” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I

Malachi’s Elijah prophecy is best understood in three phases, or appearances, each with a unique identity, time, and ministry.

He was not Elijah. But he was the prophet who came in the spirit and power of Elijah to fulfill Elijah’s ministry before the Messiah’s First Coming. Not a resurrected Elijah, but a prophet “sent from God . . . to bear witness of the Light” (vv. 6–7). He was the Elijah figure who fulfilled the prophecy for Jesus’ First Coming.
Jesus affirmed that an “Elijah” will appear to conduct a John-the-Baptist-type ministry, but with far greater results.

recognized immediately—“appeared in glory,” they both apparently possessed their heavenly bodies, as promised in 2 Corinthians 5:1–3. The primary purpose of this event was to give the disciples a vision of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus had promised a few days earlier.

Scripture never says why Moses and Elijah were present. But in thinking about Jesus’ situation, we realize He had no one on Earth who understood Him or His mission. Not the disciples, not John, not even His godly mother. So Moses and Elijah were sent to talk with Him about His impending suffering and death. These men had carried heavy prophetic responsibilities, encountered discouragement and frustration, and now had heaven’s perspective on their own lives and struggles; and they knew what Jesus was on Earth to do.

Aren’t we encouraged when we encounter someone who truly understands our situation? Wouldn’t it be just like the Father to send such friends to speak with His Son? One wonders how often this scenario might have occurred when Jesus went to pray alone on a mountain. Elijah ministered to Jesus as the Lord approached the roughest part of His mission.

Messiah’s Restorer

The third phase of Elijah’s ministry is still to come.

Jesus was clear that an “Elijah” did come (John) and is still coming in the future (Mk. 9:11–13). Jesus’ mention of His own suffering and rejection seems to indicate “Elijah” encountered the same type of treatment: “But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands” (Mt. 17:12).

Jesus indicated two fulfills of Malachi’s prophecy: one at Christ’s First Coming, which met with humiliation, and one at His Second Coming to accomplish restoration. Jesus affirmed that an “Elijah” will appear to conduct a John-the-Baptist-type ministry, but with far greater results. God will use him to call men and women (most likely Jewish) back into a godly relationship with Him.

Will this person actually be Elijah, restored to human, physical existence on Earth? Some say yes and believe he will be one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 who will minister during the second half of the Tribulation, when the Antichrist wields unbridled, worldwide power and Jerusalem is devastated. Some reason Elijah (and Enoch; see Genesis 5:24 and Hebrews 11:5) must return because “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Neither Elijah nor Enoch died.

On the other hand, there is good reason to think this future Elijah will be like the first one associated with the Messiah’s appearance. It’s neither likely nor necessary that Elijah the prophet return. If John the Baptist was Elijah at Jesus’ First Coming, it seems likely the future Elijah will be a Jewish prophet whom God raises up in similar fashion. This Elijah will be someone who effects the righteous restoration of millions of Jewish people during the early days of the Tribulation, also called “the time of Jacob’s [Israel’s] trouble” (Jer. 30:7).

Like Elijah and John the Baptist, it’s our responsibility to be diligent to what God has called us to do. Today He wants us to share the truth about Messiah Jesus with people everywhere. May we be found faithful. *

Richard D. Emmons is senior pastor of GraceWay Bible Church in Hamilton Township, New Jersey. He is also professor emeritus in the School of Divinity at Cairn University in Langhorne, Pennsylvania.
The prophet Elijah is perhaps the most beloved prophet in the Bible. He is the forerunner of the Messiah and the promised Messianic Age (Mal. 4:5–6). He is so special he is featured in some of Israel’s beloved observances, such as the Havdalah.

The Hebrew word Havdalah means “separation” or “distinction.” It is the ritual and prayer that mark the end of the Sabbath, and it is designed to show the distinction between the holy day that is departing and the ordinary weekday that is coming.

Not only has the Sabbath been viewed as sacred, but it also has been seen as a brief relief from the daily trials and tribulations of living as Jews in a hostile world. It pictures the future Messianic Kingdom of God’s rest (cf. Isa. 66:22–23).

In some homes during the Sabbath, two songs are sung. The first is one the ancient Levites sang in the Temple: Psalm 92, the Sabbath song “for the time-to-come, for the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting” (Mishna Tamid 7:4).

Since the 11th century, the second has become customary at the end of the Havdalah service. It is titled “Eliyahu HaNavî,” meaning “Elijah the Prophet”; and it reflects a yearning faith that anticipates Elijah’s arrival to announce the coming of the Messiah and the end of all human suffering (cf. Mal. 4:5–6; Talmud Eruvin 43b).

Some believe observing the Sabbath and singing “Eliyahu HaNavî” is like “an overpowering taste of heaven on earth and the World to Come.” The words in English go like this:

Elijah the Prophet,
Elijah the Tishbite,
Elijah, Elijah,
Elijah the Gileadite.
Speedily and in our days,
Come to us,
With the messiah, son of David,
With the messiah, son of David.

The Messianic Kingdom to come has been called the “world of the eternal Shabbat,” a time of rest and eternal life (cf. Talmud Rosh Hashanah 31a). As believers in Messiah Jesus, we, too, await a future Messianic Kingdom—one that will cover the whole Earth and never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). We embrace the testimony of Scripture: Jesus is the spiritual Sabbath who gives us rest today and the matchless gift of eternal life through faith in Him (Heb. 4:1–11).

by Peter Colón, creative resource coordinator and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.
Elijah the Prophet,
Elijah the Tishbite,
Elijah, Elijah,
Elijah the Gileadite.
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Come to us,
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DID MOSES WRITE THE TORAH?

The Bible says explicitly Moses wrote the Torah. Exodus 24:4 states, “Moses wrote all the words of the Lord”; and Deuteronomy says, “Moses finished writing the words of this law [Torah] in a book until they were complete” (31:24, NASB). Why, then, would anyone question whether Moses wrote the Torah?

Yet the majority of mainline Bible scholars, including many evangelical ones, either deny Moses’ authorship or have difficulty accepting it. For decades, critical scholars have taught that Moses and his audience were illiterate and that no Hebrew language existed at his time. They claim Hebrew developed from Phoenician and only emerged as a distinct language in the 10th century BC, while Moses lived earlier, in the 13th century BC; and the laws of the Torah were composed much later, in the Persian period (5th century BC).1

Though we cannot address all these erroneous views, we can deal with whether Moses could write and if Hebrew existed in his day. This issue is critical because the Bible rests on the foundation of a Mosaic Torah (Josh. 22:5; 23:6; 1 Ki. 2:3; Neh. 8:1; Dan. 9:13; Mai. 4:4). Even the Lord Jesus said, “Did not Moses give you the law?” (Jn. 7:19). In fact, Jesus declared that belief in Him depended on believing Moses: “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me” (5:46).

The archaeological record and the Scriptures show Moses could write.

Egyptologist Filip Taterka said one of Egypt’s first rulers, Aha, mastered writing and was said to have written medical treaties. Furthermore, there is mention of a letter personally written by Pharaoh Isesi at the end of the third millennium BC. According to Taterka, when the pyramids were built, a special institution existed to teach royal children reading and writing; and from the time of Queen Hatshepsut (15th century BC), royal educators were well known. It is possible Hatshepsut was Moses’ Egyptian “mother”; and because Moses was raised in the royal court as a nobleman, he was taught to read and write. Acts 7:22 states, “Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.”

As an educated nobleman, Moses would have learned Egyptian; and as an Israelite, he also would have known whatever form of Hebrew existed at the time. The Torah we have was written in Hebrew; and though some of the Hebrew terms demonstrate the author’s familiarity with Egyptian, nothing indicates the text was translated from Egyptian. But what type of Hebrew existed this early?

Exploration in the Sinai desert at the turn of the last century uncovered an unknown graffiti in caves from the Middle Kingdom–New Kingdom periods (the times of Joseph and Moses). The writing borrowed characters from Egyptian hieroglyphics. But unlike Egyptian, it contained an alphabet of 22 letters that closely resembled the later Phoenician alphabet. Clearly Semitic, the language was used to record names and events important to people traveling through the Sinai or working in the nearby copper mines.

This language, well in use before the time of Moses, is readable as Hebrew2 and matches the Israelites’ history. It appears only in this area at the time the Israelites were in Egypt and then only in Canaan, after the Israelites had settled there. Though this evidence is not widely known and not yet accepted by mainline scholars, it makes the case that Moses had available to him an early form of Hebrew in which he could write the Torah.

Perhaps this language was a special gift from God to His covenant people to enable them to retain the knowledge of Him and His laws.4 Orthodox Judaism contends that every letter of the Torah was given directly by God (Ex. 31:18), thus separating it from other Old Testament divine revelation. Nevertheless, our Bibles begin with the Five Books of Moses; and thanks to archaeological discoveries, we can affirm its words of truth, especially as they point to our Messiah (Dt. 18:15–18).

ENDNOTES

1 These views are based on the JEDP theory that dissected the Torah into different compositions produced by different schools in different time periods, as well as the supposed lack of archaeological support for the Exodus.
2 “Did the pharaohs know hieroglyphic writing?—Polish Egyptologist explains,” Science in Poland (March 31, 2014) <tinyurl.com/pharaohWrite>.
4 This was the conclusion drawn by the recent film and book by Tim Mahoney, The Moses Controversy (Thinking Man Films, 2019).
THE RESTRAINER OF EVIL

2 THESALONIANS 2:6–8

While establishing the church in Thessalonica, the apostle Paul personally instructed believers concerning future prophecy. In fact, he went into great detail about the Rapture of the church and the Day of the Lord.

However, being severely persecuted for their faith, many Thessalonians wondered if they were already experiencing the Day of the Lord’s wrath. False teachers apparently had fabricated reports about the event, causing disruption and anxiety in the church and spreading great fear among these young believers who did not understand clearly what Paul had taught. Consequently, they became confused concerning the timing of certain prophecies. Paul assured the Thessalonians the Day of the Lord could not come until three events occurred:

1. The “falling away [apostasy]” (2 Th. 2:3)
2. The revelation of the Antichrist, “the man of sin [lawlessness]” (v. 3)
3. The removal of the one “who now restrains” (v. 7)

We examined the first two events in the previous article. Now we’ll look at the restrainer’s ministry.

THE RESTRAINER PRESENTED

The apostle appealed to the Thessalonians based on what they already knew about the restrainer: “And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way” (vv. 6–7).

The phrase and now draws attention to what the Thessalonians knew. The phrase you know speaks of their absolute knowledge concerning what Paul meant when he wrote of the restrainer.

The word restrain means “to withhold.” It is a neuter participle with a neuter article. Thus, the word does not refer to a person but, rather, to an abstract force or power that is holding back or holding down lawlessness in the world. However, verse 7 (“He who now restrains”) uses the masculine gender with a masculine article, referring to a person. Thus, in verse 6, Paul spoke of an impersonal principle or power of restraining, while in verse 7 he referred to a person who is restraining. Therefore, a person with extreme power is restraining both the man of lawlessness and evil in the world.

He is restraining so “he [the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist] may be revealed in his own time,” a time determined by God (v. 6). It should comfort us to know the evil in this world is completely under God’s sovereign control and is allowed for His purposes.

Even though the restrainer is working, “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work” in the world (v. 7). The word mystery does not refer to a mysterious or baffling event but, rather, to a prophecy in the Old or New Testament that has not been revealed to mankind. A mystery in the Bible is something that was hidden in past ages but will be divinely revealed at God’s choosing.

The word lawlessness does not mean a general outbreak of criminal activity. It refers to the specific lawlessness connected with “the lawless one” (v. 8)—the man of sin, the Antichrist, who will be energized and controlled by Satan.

This man has not been revealed yet; but Satan, the spirit controlling his career, already has operatives in the world (cf. 1 Jn. 2:18–22). The apostle John boldly declared that people who deviate from what he taught possess the spirit of Antichrist (4:3).

So horrible will the Antichrist’s acts be once he is revealed that it would be impossible for humanity ever to understand the depths of his wickedness without God’s revelation.

Paul indicated the restraining of lawlessness will end at a specific time: “He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way [midst]” (2 Th. 2:7), that is, until He is taken or disappears from the scene. When His work ends, the world will experience a Satanic onslaught of evil that will be unparalleled in world history.

THE RESTRAINER’S POSITION

Since the apostle never identified the restrainer, today’s church does not know for certain who he is. Over the centuries, commentators have offered many views as to his identity. Suggestions have included Nero and other Roman emperors, the Roman Empire, Israel, human government, law, Elijah, Michael the archangel, Satan, Jesus Christ, the gospel, the church, and the Holy Spirit.

The restrainer must be able to hold back the evil manifested by Satan, who is “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4). He must be more than a human force or human being because Satan is a spiritual being who functions in a supernatural realm that cannot be restrained by humans on Earth.

A popular position is that the church is the restrainer. True, the church is salt and light in the world. It does impact the world for good and restrains evil in many ways and in
many areas of life. The church also dispels darkness and brings light to the world. But the church is not the ultimate restrainer of evil, as required by 2 Thessalonians 2:7. The restrainer must be more powerful than Satan. The Holy Spirit is the only Person who possesses the principle and power required to restrain Satan’s wickedness until a time determined by God.

The Holy Spirit’s restraining power is revealed in Genesis: God said, “My Spirit [Holy Spirit] shall not strive with man forever” (Gen. 6:3). One of the Spirit’s ministries was to restrain Satan while Noah built the ark before the flood came. Another example was when God allowed Satan to take Job’s health, possessions, and children but restrained him from taking Job’s life (Job 1:6—2:6). Satan’s ability to generate evil is completely controlled by God the Father through the Holy Spirit.

Consequently, the Holy Spirit is the most qualified agent to restrain Satan’s villainy. As a member of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent and possesses the power to restrain the evil of Satan and the Antichrist.

The restrainer “will do so until He is taken out of the way [midst]” (2 Th. 2:7). At the Rapture of the church, the Holy Spirit’s restraining ministry will cease. Mark it well: This does not mean He will be removed from the world; it simply means His ministry of holding back evil will cease.

The Holy Spirit has always been omnipresent; He will never be removed from the world. He will be here to empower God’s servants for ministry during the seven years of Tribulation. A great multitude of people—who cannot be redeemed apart from the Holy Spirit’s ministry—will be saved during this time (Rev. 7:1–17).

**THE RESTRAINER’S POWER**

Paul provided a brief overview of both the Antichrist’s evil work and his demise at Jesus’ Second Coming: “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (2 Th. 2:8).

The phrase and then refers to what happens once the restrainer stops holding back evil. At that time, the “lawless one [Antichrist] will be revealed.” The reveal begins when “he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week” (Dan. 9:27). The “many” are Daniel’s people, the nation of Israel. The Antichrist will posture himself as a peacemaker, and many (not all) in Israel will accept him as such.

This landmark event broadcasts to the world that the “lawless one” has stepped onto the global stage. Wickedness will run rampant and unhindered around the world under the Antichrist’s brutal and demonic rule. He will claim to be God and demand to be worshiped, signifying that the time Paul was speaking about has arrived. The only escape is faith in Jesus Christ. However, many who turn to Christ will be martyred for their commitment to Him (Rev. 7:14).

At the Lord’s Second Coming, the Antichrist’s true identity as Satan’s demonic pawn will be divulged. He and his pernicious worldwide reign will be cut short by the Lord, who will swiftly “consume” or overthrow him “with the breath of His mouth” (2 Th. 2:8). He will not wage a prolonged war against the Antichrist. All of the Antichrist’s strength and authority combined with the supernatural power of Satan and his demons will be no match for Jesus Christ. The Lord will defeat him in an instant.

At His Second Coming, Christ will slay individuals and nations with His breath or spoken word (cf. Job 4:9; Rev. 19:15). This powerful picture describes the ease with which Christ will overthrow His archenemy and decisively end the Antichrist’s devilish rule.

Jesus Christ will destroy the man of sin “with the brightness [splendor] of His coming [appearance]” (2 Th. 2:8). *Consume*, or *destroy*, does not mean annihilate but, rather, make the “lawless one” immobile, inoperative, and powerless. The “brightness of His coming” speaks of Christ’s splendor, which will accompany His appearance. Christ’s radiant glory will shine in a worldwide manifestation unlike anything the universe has ever seen. Such glory will immediately destroy the Antichrist and his power.

The visible appearance of the glorious Lord Jesus Christ, who is the “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:16), will be so dazzling and overpowering that the lawless one’s “kingdom” will immediately cease to exist.

What an awesome sight to behold! As believers, we will return with Him at His Second Coming to witness this spectacular event. Glory to God in the highest!

by David M. Levy,
director of Education and Ministry Relations and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
Have you ever heard of International Pay It Forward Day? Every April 28, in an attempt to transform the world for the better, a global movement encourages people to perform acts of kindness. The hope is that such goodwill toward others might grow and spread throughout the year. The movement arose in 2007, inspired by an earlier book and movie by the same name.

The idea behind paying it forward is simple: When you receive an act of kindness or help from someone, instead of trying to pay it back, you pay it forward by doing something nice for someone else.

The concept supposedly goes back to ancient times. Instead of repaying the lender for a monetary loan or gift, the borrower would forward the payment to someone else by way of a service, monetary exchange, or even another loan with the same “pay it forward” requirement. Benjamin Franklin was known to lend money in this manner in the late 1700s.

Paying it forward can help spread some civility and kindness. But random acts of impersonal politeness can only go so far.

A DEEPER LEVEL
For the Christian community, Jesus and the apostles taught a more profound level of this concept: doing good from a grateful heart that recognizes the magnitude of blessings received.

Jesus told His followers to love one another as He loved them: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn. 13:34; cf. 15:12). When Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, He modeled humble service toward others and told them, “You should do as I have done to you” (13:15).

He also taught that doing good for others is not about keeping score or being repaid: “Love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return” (Lk. 6:35).

In his letters to the churches, the apostle Paul gave similar commands, urging believers in Ephesus and Colossae to forgive others as Christ forgave them ( Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). Husbands were told to love their wives as Christ loved the church ( Eph. 5:25).

Directly and indirectly throughout Scripture, God’s people are told to accept God’s blessings gratefully and, in a sense, pay them forward by treating others with the same grace and mercy the Lord has shown them. Rather than being a divine plan to build a kinder and gentler world, such godly behavior demonstrates what it means to be a true disciple of Christ: “By this all will know that you are My disciples” (Jn. 13:35).

A LIVING EXAMPLE
Paul embodied this attitude when dealing with his friend Philemon and Philemon’s runaway slave, Onesimus. After coming to know Christ under Paul’s ministry while Paul was imprisoned in Rome, Onesimus was sent home to Philemon in Colossae. In an attempt to reconcile slave and master, Paul sent a letter encouraging Philemon to receive Onesimus and treat him not as a worthless runaway but, rather, as a valuable new brother in Christ.

Paul’s petition on Onesimus’ behalf is preserved in its entirety in the 25 verses of the book of Philemon. Although brief, the letter discloses much about the lives and characters of both Philemon and Onesimus, as well as opening a window to the apostle’s heart and passions.

ACCEPTANCE
Now that Onesimus was a brother in the faith, Paul appealed to his friend, “Receive him as you would me” (Phile. 17). The word receive has the sense of receiving someone warmly and
is used of welcoming someone into your home with kindness. Since Philemon no doubt considered himself a close friend of Paul’s, Paul encouraged him to welcome Onesimus as if he were the apostle himself.

How could Paul expect Philemon to accept a slave who had wronged him in the same way he would receive the great teacher and evangelist? This act would go deeper than simply paying it forward.

In a letter Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he prodded them, “Receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God” (Rom. 15:7). They were also instructed to “receive one who is weak in the faith” willingly (14:1).

Paul lived in gratitude for the way Jesus loved, reached out, and accepted him, even though he was an enemy who had persecuted the church. In the same way, Paul reached out and welcomed those who came to know Christ, regardless of their backgrounds. He then encouraged those who were received by Christ to pay it forward to others.

Accordingly, Paul intentionally reminded Philemon that it was through the apostle’s ministry that Philemon himself had come to be accepted in the Savior (Phile. 19). Paul, Philemon, and now Onesimus had tasted the grace of God by which they were all “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6).

FORGIVENESS
Paul did not tell Philemon to ignore Onesimus’ wrongs or disregard the debt he had incurred. The phrase but if he has wronged you or owes anything assumes a positive response (Phile. 18). Paul was not being coy by saying, “if.” He probably knew the facts but not the full extent of the harm Onesimus had caused his friend. The Greek word for “wronged” conveys the idea of sinning against God or others.

Fully recognizing the slave’s sins against his master had created a debt the slave could not pay, Paul declared, “Put that on my account. . . . I will repay” (vv. 18–19). This was Paul’s personal promise to his friend and partner in the gospel. His guarantee was as good as his word, signed and sealed in his own handwriting. Paul was saying, “Charge it to me. I will pay it back. You have my word and signature on it.”

As a scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures, Paul knew what it meant for someone to pay a debt that never could be repaid. He was well acquainted with the Messianic blessing of Isaiah 53:5–6:

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

God could not simply overlook sin; the debt had to be paid. There was no doubt in Paul’s mind who paid the debt for his sins: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3).

Paul also declared, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). His overflowing thankfulness and gratitude for the payment Jesus made on his behalf can be seen throughout his biblical writings. Paul owed more to Jesus than he could ever begin to repay. Compared to what Jesus paid on his behalf, the simple act of assuming a brother’s debt was inconsequential. Paul also reminded Philemon how much he had received from and owed to others for their part in the forgiveness his friend had received from the Lord.

Paul not only encouraged others to forgive as they had been forgiven, he lived those words. As the Lord led, he challenged and directed the forgiven, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

In light of the indescribable gift we have in Christ, it may seem insignificant to pay it forward with the limited love, acceptance, and forgiveness we are able to offer to others from our sin-scarred hearts. But paying it forward from a heart filled with gratitude for the blessings we have received bears testimony to our faith in Jesus and glorifies our Father in heaven.

“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (5:1–2).

by Clarence Johnson, national ministries specialist and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
2,600-Year-Old Seal Discovered in City of David

A 2,600-year-old clay bulla (seal impression) bearing the name of a servant of King Josiah was uncovered inside a public building destroyed by the Babylonians during the destruction of the first Temple in 586 BC.

The seal reads, “Natan-Melech, Servant of the King.” He is mentioned in 2 Kings 23:11:

Then he [Josiah] removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the Lord, by the chamber of Nathan-Melech, the officer who was in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the bulla, along with other artifacts, “was uncovered during the archaeological excavation of the Givati parking lot in the City of David National Park in Jerusalem.” Archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) and Tel Aviv University conducted the dig.

According to breakingisraelnews.com, Dr. Anat Mendel-Geberovich of the IAA, who deciphered the seal, “notes that the fact that this official was mentioned by his first name alone indicates that he was known to all, and there was no need to add his family lineage. The title ‘Servant of the King’ (Eved HaMelech) appears often in the Bible and describes a high-ranking official close to Israel’s kings.”

“This is an extremely exciting find for billions of people worldwide,” said Doron Spielman, vice president of the City of David Foundation that operates the national park. He said, “The ongoing archeological excavations at the City of David continue to prove that ancient Jerusalem is no longer just a matter of faith, but also a matter of fact. It is truly fascinating to watch how archeologists have uncovered more than twelve layers of Jerusalem history in what used to be a parking lot until just a few years ago,” reported the news service.

CONGRESSMAN WANTS DUKE, UNC INVESTIGATED FOR ANTI-SEMITISM

U.S. Rep. George Holding (R-NC) has asked U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos to investigate a blatantly anti-Semitic, anti-Israel conference jointly hosted in March by Duke University and the University of North Carolina. Reportedly, $5,000 of taxpayer funds from the Education Department was used for the event, titled “Conflict Over Gaza: People, Politics and Possibilities,” JNS.org reported.

“According to first-hand accounts, the conference had a radical anti-Israeli bias,” wrote Holding in a letter to her. “Reportedly, speakers and panelists distorted facts and misrepresented the complex situation in Gaza. A video recently surfaced depicting the main musical performer, rapper Tamer Nafar, singing a brazenly anti-Semitic song.”

Holding, who serves on the Ways and Means Committee, wants to know what policies DeVos’s department has to ensure no taxpayer money goes toward anti-Israel groups, JNS.org said. “Honest academic debate . . . is critical in a democratic society and a central tenet of America’s educational system,” wrote Holding. “However, it is irresponsible, immoral and unproductive for taxpayer dollars to fund overtly biased advocacy under the guise of academic discourse.”

College campuses in America have turned into hotbeds of anti-Semitism. A big anti-Israel, anti-Semitic campus force is Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), which sometimes turns violent and is said to have connections to Hamas. SJP recently claimed it was receiving an award from New York University, prompting Judea Pearl, father of Jewish, terrorist-slain Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl, to renounce his distinguished NYU alumni status.

“In the past five years, SJP has resorted to intimidation tactics that have made me, my colleagues and my students unwelcome and unsafe on our own campus,” Pearl wrote in a letter to NYU President Andrew Hamilton. “The decision to confer an award on SJP, renders other NYU awards empty of content.”
The Trump administration has updated its official international maps to include, for the first time, the Golan Heights as part of Israel. A State Department spokesman told Voice of America the maps would be consistent with the proclamation recognizing the Golan Heights as part of the Jewish state, JNS.org reported. Israel liberated the strategically important area from Syria during the 1967 Six-Day War and annexed it in 1981.

IS ILHAN OMAR TIED TO MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD?

Evangelical Christian Laurie Cardoza-Moore, president of Proclaiming Justice to the Nations (PJTN), has asked the U.S. Justice Department “to launch a full and thorough investigation” into Minnesota Democratic Congresswoman Ilhan Omar’s “possible connections to the Muslim Brotherhood,” The Jerusalem Post reported. Host of the widely viewed Christian television program Focus on Israel, Cardoza-Moore said Omar has “established her credentials as a vehement anti-Semite” but may be “far worse.” She may be supporting “subversive factions aligned to destroy American and Western civilization itself.” Omar spoke recently at a fundraiser for the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), listed in 2009 as an “unindicted coconspirator” in the largest terrorist-fundraising operation in U.S. history. PJTN produced the Bible-based, pro-Israel DVD Israel Indivisible. Its website, pjtj.org, asks people to sign a petition demanding Omar’s resignation.

AIRBNB RETREATS

Vacation-rental giant Airbnb has reversed its decision not to list Jewish-owned homes in Judea and Samaria on its website, “thereby handing a defeat to the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in what had previously been thought a major BDS victory,” worldisraelnews.com reported. Airbnb had singled out Jewish homes but continued to list Christian- and Muslim-owned homes, said the news service. Israel, California, New York, and Delaware had filed suits against the company.

TEXAS DIVESTS $72 MILLION FROM COMPANY BOYCOTTING ISRAEL

Texas has divested $72 million from Norwegian financial services firm DNB ASA under the state’s 2017 law prohibiting agencies from investing in companies that boycott Israel. “The Employees Retirement System of Texas and Texas Permanent School Fund—two major state pensions—own $68 million and around $4 million, respectively” in DNB ASA stock, JNS.org reported. DNB ASA is Norway’s largest financial services company and has done business in Iran.

DELEK ACQUIRES INTEREST IN GULF OF MEXICO OIL FIELD

The Israeli Delek Group energy giant will acquire a 22.45 percent interest in the Caesar Tonga oil field, “one of the ten largest deep-water resources in the Gulf of Mexico,” which it will co-own with Anadarko Petroleum, Equinor, and Chevron, worldisraelnews.com reported. “Located 300 kilometers (185 miles) south of Louisiana at a depth of 1,500 meters (over 1,600 yards), the field contains eight wells connected by an undersea pipeline network to a production platform, [Delek] said in a statement,” the news service said, adding, “Delek will maintain exploration, development, and production rights for oil and gas at the Caesar Tonga field.”

SECOND ISRAELI SPACE LANDING IN THE WORKS

Although its first attempt to land a spacecraft on the moon ended in a crash on the lunar surface, Israeli nonprofit SpaceIL plans to try again with a new spacecraft named Beresheet 2 (Genesis 2). Worldisraelnews.com reported that South African-born Israeli billionaire Morris Kahn, the project’s primary funder, made the announcement during an interview on Israel’s Meet the Press program. The first Genesis was built by SpaceIL and Israel Aerospace Industries with private funding. The news service reported that Kahn said after the interview, “The flag of Israel and the slogan ’small country, big dreams’ is on the moon. The slogan ‘Am Yisrael Chai’ [‘the people of Israel lives’] is on the moon. I think we’ve done a lot. I’m happy.”

ISRAELI RESEARCHERS MAKE 3-D-PRINTED ARTIFICIAL HEART

Researchers at Tel Aviv University have created an artificial heart using a 3-D printer. “The researchers took fatty tissue from a patient, then separated the fatty tissue from extracellular material. They used genetic engineering techniques to turn the fat cells into stem cells. The stem cells were used to grow heart muscle and blood vessels. Afterwards, the extracellular material was used as ‘ink’ for the 3-D printer, which then printed the organ according to a computer program using MRI and CT imaging of a human heart as a guide,” reported The Algemeiner, citing the Hebrew news site Mako as its source. Prof. Tal Dvir, whose department supervised the project, said, “When a patient needs a transplant, you take tissue from his body and use it to print the organ according to the suitable size and characteristics, which will be planted in his body.”

U.S. WANTS TO LEASE LAND FOR PERMANENT EMBASSY

The United States has requested Israeli authorities to “begin preparing” the Allenby compound in Jerusalem for construction of its permanent embassy in the country, Israel’s Channel 12 reported, according to JNS.org. Citing anonymous sources, Channel 12 said President Donald Trump wants to relocate the embassy to a permanent location if he wins reelection in 2020. The current embassy was moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May 2018, occupying the former U.S. consulate on Agron Street, JNS.org reported.
My wife and I often take the bus to the market. The bus is a wonderful place to meet new people and reconnect with people you have not seen in a long time. Recently, while we were riding the bus, a man who looked like a rabbi approached me. He had a long beard and wore a big black hat. “Do you remember me?” he asked.

“No. I believe this is the first time we are meeting,” I told him. He was unhappy that I did not remember him. “I know that you also speak Russian,” he said.

“Yes, I speak even more languages than Russian and Hebrew,” I told him. “How do you not remember me?” he asked. “I visited your church many times and listened to the pastor, your son, preach. At the time I did not believe in God. Then I spoke with some rabbis and listened to what they had to say. Unlike your church, they do not believe in This Man [Jesus].”

“You are a special one,” I said. “You can use many diversionary tactics and wear camouflage, as you do now. But your beard and big cap will not open the door of heaven for you.”

Then he revealed he was one of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish men trying to silence us Jewish Christians. They call their effort “sanctification of the holy Name.”

As we continued talking, I began to remember him. He started to shout loudly at me and tell everyone on the bus I was a Christian. His high-pitched yelling made him sound like a crazy person.

“How do you know him?” someone asked me. “Is it true you know him from church?”

“Yes,” I said. “I go to the congregation to learn the Bible and to follow the Lord, unlike the rabbis who try to make people...
read their many commentaries. Do you think you will be a good person by dancing the Devil’s dance? Have a good look at this man with his long beard. What does he know about true faith? Please ask him.”

The man continued to shout like a crazy person, and many people were staring at him. When we got off the bus, some of the people on the bus came over to me to ask about what had happened. Their questions gave me great opportunity to share my testimony of how I came to know the Lord.

I told them that people like that man are far from the Lord. They go to people with their long beards, hats, and fictitious stories. But they never go with the Holy Bible, the Word of God.

“Do you know the Bible?” someone asked me.

“Yes. I do my best to study the Word of God, and I worship Him according to what is written in His Word, unlike those who call themselves great teachers,” I said. “Will you find a Holy Bible among their many commentaries? No.”

After we talked for a long time, someone asked me, “How did you come to believe in Christ?”

“I have believed in the Lord not according to the many stories you have heard, but according to the Holy Bible. Leviticus 26:3–4 says, ‘If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.’ It does not say ‘If you obey the many thousands of rabbinical traditions.’”

They listened intently and seemed hungry for knowledge and truth. “We have never heard this before. This has been a very interesting and important conversation,” one said. I pray the Lord will open their eyes to the truth of who He is.
Our multi-day National Prophecy Conferences feature sound biblical teaching, a Focus on Israel Night, a Shepherds’ Gathering for pastors, and plenty of fellowship opportunities with other believers!

THY KINGDOM COME

From the creation of the universe to the future eternal state, the Kingdom of God is foundational to God's plan for humanity. The Lord Jesus placed such a high priority on the Kingdom that He said our first and foremost prayer should be “Thy Kingdom come.”

Yet most of us don’t pray for God’s Kingdom to come or even fully comprehend what the Kingdom is. So we have many questions and few answers. Our lack of knowledge impedes our understanding of the Almighty's plan for the ages: past, present, and future. Join us as we open the Bible and study the exciting and incomparable Kingdom of God—the key to unlocking our understanding of human history.

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