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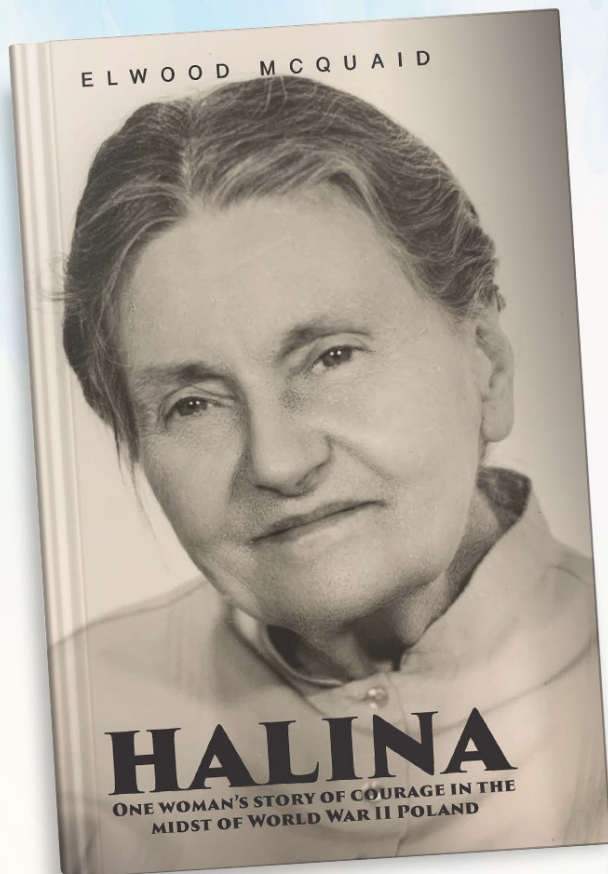
ISRAEL MY GLORY



*For Such
a Time as This*

CHARACTER STUDIES FROM THE BOOK OF ESTHER

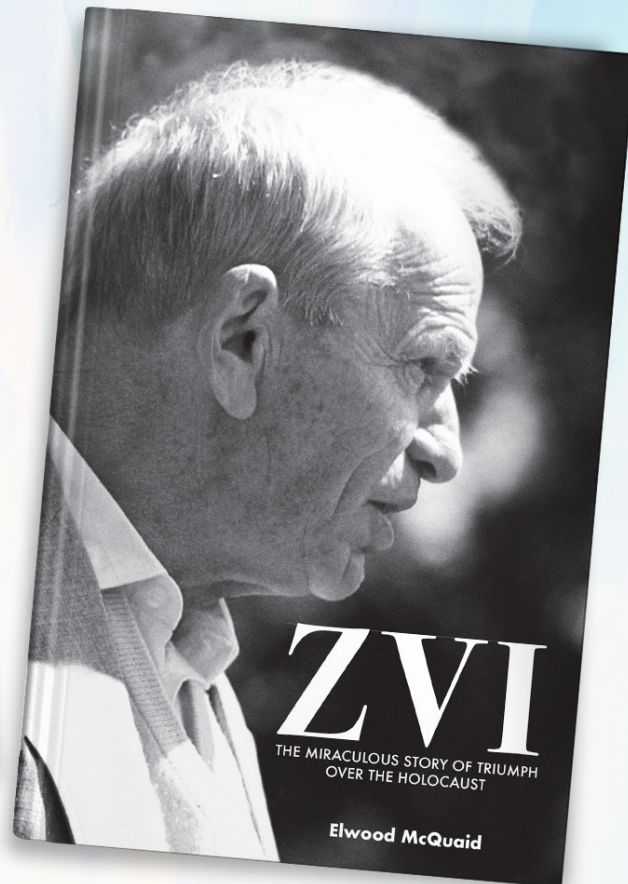
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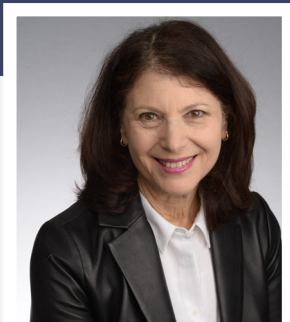


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FROM THE EDITOR



Publishing is an interesting industry. We must do everything very far in advance to meet our deadlines. I'm writing this column on December 2, 2022, but you're reading it three months later—after

I will have retired as editor-in-chief of this magazine.

I've been with *Israel My Glory* for 23 years, the best years of my life. I have loved every minute of the hard work it takes to produce what I truly believe is one of the finest Christian magazines in the world. But now I feel the Lord is moving me on—not away from ministry to the Jewish people but from the all-consuming responsibilities of running this publication.

Starting with the next issue, Jesse King will take over as managing editor and will fill this space with his wonderful writing. If you read our online blog, you're already acquainted with him. I've agreed to remain on part-time for another year as consulting editor. And from time to time, I hope to post on my husband's Facebook page. So be sure to look for Tom Simcox on Facebook.

Also look for Elwood McQuaid's new book, *Almost There*, which the two of us finally finished and placed in the hands of the publisher. In it, Elwood, a former executive director of The Friends of Israel (FOI), treats you to a nostalgic, heartwarming look at his formative years in the pastorate in Goodview, Virginia. It's an enjoyable, inspirational read as only he can deliver, with an Earl Hamner Jr. (*The Waltons*) flavor and a crystal-clear gospel. I think you'll like it.

I also think you'll like this issue of *Israel My Glory*. It's filled with interesting character studies of all the major players in the book of Esther, and Steve Herzig has written a special article telling us what it was like celebrating the holiday of Purim when he was a boy. Be sure to read Ty Perry's new, ongoing column on antisemitism, designed to keep you informed about what's happening in this vitally important arena that the secular press loves to ignore.

Although I'm sad this is my final column, I'm happy to tell you I'm hoping to be available for limited speaking engagements. Feel free to email me at LornaSimcoxAuthor@gmail.com; or contact me through my husband, an FOI Bible teacher with North American Ministries, at TSimcox@foi.org.

So, I'm saying goodbye for now, wishing you all the very best our holy, almighty God has to offer, as well as the happiest of Easters celebrating our Lord's glorious resurrection and His guaranteed, future return. God bless you all.

Waiting for His Appearing,
Lorna Simcox
Editor-in-Chief



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* Jim Showers (left) on Up to Jerusalem tour bus

A

At our farewell dinner for our *Up to Jerusalem* tour to Israel in October, I was touched by the comments of our Israeli guide. We honored him for skillfully leading and sharing with us his vast knowledge of things biblical and historical and his great insights into the significance of the places we visited. We gave him a standing ovation in appreciation for what he had done for us.

As we settled back into our seats, he took the microphone and shared his heart. “I grew up believing that no one cared for us,” he said. “The world is filled with hatred of the Jewish people. Yes, some may come saying they are friends and reach out a hand while reaching their other hand behind our backs to do harm.”

Wow! His words captured the attention of everyone in the room. It’s difficult for us to understand what Jewish people experience: not only to be hated for who you are, but to be persecuted and betrayed by those who profess friendship, and to believe the whole world is against you.

He continued, “When I began guiding The Friends of Israel tour groups many years ago, for the first time I met people who genuinely loved me. Instead of reaching out one hand to greet me, they reached out both hands. For the first time, I came to understand that there are people in this world who love and appreciate the Jewish people!”

This is the gift of love I see given by those who come on our tours. They express their unconditional love and appreciation for the Jewish people in Israel that emanates from knowing the Jewish people have blessed them. Over the 10 days of the tour, so many Israelis expressed their appreciation to me for what we do.

Our guide concluded, “You don’t know how much it means to me and other Israelis to know that someone cares for us. It’s huge!”

This is the reality of the world in which we live. Antisemitism—hatred for God’s Chosen People—has existed since God made His unconditional covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12. That covenant, in which God promises to

bless all the people of the world through Israel, gives us insight into this hatred.

When God raised up a nation through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He used that nation to:

- Teach us there exists only one Most High God.
- Record and preserve His Holy Word.
- Give us our Savior.
- Become the exclusive nation through whom our future blessing will flow.

Consequently, that nation became the enemy of everyone who hates the God of the Bible. Antisemitism flows out of Satan’s conflict with God and his continuous efforts to thwart the Almighty by eliminating the one people through whom God has chosen to complete His redemptive plan. Antisemites are doing the will of the Evil One.

Today, antisemitism is surging around the world. Jewish people face persecution and violence in increasing numbers. Synagogues, Jewish schools and day care centers, university campuses, subways, marketplaces, and even Jewish homes are all targets of this vile hatred.

Our guide’s words are a lesson to all of us. You possess the antidote to antisemitism that can relieve Jewish people from feeling that nobody cares for them. It is called love, and you don’t have to go on one of our tours to Israel to use it—although I would love to have you join us.

You can love and bless Jewish people right where God planted you. It can begin with merely teaching others to love and appreciate them. Explain why you love them. Then others may follow you and express their love in words and deeds. The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry has been doing this for 85 years, and we thank God every day for the Jewish people and the blessing they are to the world.



by Jim Showers,
executive director and president of
The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry

GROWING A GLOBAL LOVE FOR ISRAEL

BY CHRIS KATULKA

Last December the Israeli Government Press Office (GPO) invited me to the sixth annual Christian Media Summit, a three-day event in Jerusalem for Christian journalists to learn firsthand about the events happening in the Holy Land. The itinerary was packed from morning to evening with meetings; travel; and discussions with leading Israeli journalists, politicians, and army officials.

During one session, Jeremy Weber, global director of Christianity Today, described the condition of evangelicalism and support for Israel worldwide. I found his statistics both exciting and ominous.

Over the past century, the global spread of evangelicalism has undergone a drastic shift—and that’s a good thing. The numbers show that as the gospel continues to be shared around the world, more and more people are giving their lives to Jesus Christ.

But the locations of the growth of evangelicalism have changed dramatically. In 1900, North America and Europe housed 92 percent of evangelicals globally; but today, 72 percent live in South America, Africa, and Asia, while those from North America and Europe only make up 23 percent.

Support for Israel among American evangelicals ages 18–29 is steadily declining, with some polls showing only 33.6 percent support the Jewish state. However, all is not lost—nearly half of the evangelical young adults polled are unsure of what they believe about Israel and whose side they should take in the Middle East conflict.

That percentage represents a large number of undecided Christians who need to hear God’s biblical plan for Israel and the Jewish people. To be sure, we need a concerted effort to reach these young American and European Christians; but how can we reach the other 77 percent of evangelicals around the world?

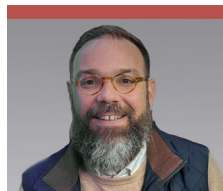
Many of our international brothers and sisters in Christ are already on the right track. Guatemala, for example, is one of the few countries that moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Sara Angelina Solis, Guatemala’s ambassador to Israel, credited the

embassy move to her country’s evangelical support for Israel, saying, “People in Guatemala pray for the peace in this region, pray for Jerusalem, and they are excited. I feel this is a gift from God. I know that a lot of blessings will come after this decision. This is a promise in the Bible, in Genesis, and I don’t [only] think, I’m sure many blessings will come for Guatemala.”

As biblical supporters of Israel, we need a more global outlook on teaching Christians about God’s love for Israel and the Jewish people. This task is formidable; but I found hope at the Christian Media Summit while surrounded by 150 like-minded journalists from 30 countries spanning the continents of Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America.

According to the Israeli GPO, Christian media reaches nearly 1 billion Christians around the world from various backgrounds, ethnicities, and denominations—from Ethiopia to Estonia, from Canada to China, from Germany to Guatemala, from India to Indonesia, from South Korea to Sweden, from Ukraine to the United States. Evangelical organizations produce and publish biblical truth about Israel every day via television, radio, podcasts, printed materials, online resources, social media, and more.

But it’s vital that we do more to expand our efforts to reach those areas of the world where evangelicalism is growing and individuals are coming to faith in Christ. They need to know what the Bible teaches about Israel. They need to learn how they can love the Jewish people better. They need to understand how their faith in Christ fits into God’s divine plan that reaches back to the promise made to Abraham. And when they do, God will bless them for blessing His Chosen People (Gen. 12:3).



Chris Katulka

is the director of North American Ministries for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry and the host of *The Friends of Israel Today* radio program.

IRANIAN DRONES IN UKRAINE: WARM-UP FOR ISRAEL?

Russia's use of Iranian-made, unmanned drones in its war against Ukraine is forcing Israel to step up its own defenses against such weapons, as analysts warn that Ukraine is a testing ground for a future Iranian war against Israel.

Since the first Iranian combat drones arrived in Russia in August 2022, Russian forces have launched hundreds of them from long distances, targeting vital Ukrainian infrastructure, including electricity and water facilities. Although Ukrainians have shot down up to 80 percent of the drones, enough of them hit their targets, leaving hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians without power.

The drones include the Shahed-136, with a range of up to 2,500 kilometers (1,500 miles). It can carry up to 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of explosives and can be launched in rapid-fire succession to create kamikaze "drone swarms" that can overwhelm Ukraine's—and possibly Israel's—air defenses.

Drone warfare is cost effective: Each Iranian drone costs around \$20,000. By comparison, each F-35 Lightning II, the most advanced fighter jet in the world, costs approximately \$100 million—which would buy more than 4,700 drones. Russia is believed to have ordered approximately 2,000 drones from Iran, including larger, more lethal models.

In October 2022, Israeli President Isaac Herzog shared intelligence with the United States about these drones. "This is only the tip of the iceberg of a lot of intelligence information," Herzog said. "The

fact that Iran, following its activities in killing its own citizens, in working towards nuclear weapons endlessly, endangering the entire world and the region—and now killing innocent civilians in Ukraine, clearly that gives you a picture of what Iran is all about and that was the main point of my meeting with President Biden."

Middle East analysts Michael Knights and Alex Almeida warned that Iran is using its supply of drones to Russia to improve its own offensive drone warfare capabilities against Israel. "Ukraine is an environment in which Russia is subsidizing Iran's military experimentation, making the process not only free for Iran but potentially profitable," they wrote. "In an environment where not dozens but hundreds of drones are being used each month, Iran will learn important lessons about the saturation of defenses and the exhaustion of more expensive and slower-to-build air defense systems. These lessons will be extremely useful for Lebanese Hezbollah as it plans methods to swarm Israel's defensive systems."

Israel is vulnerable to drone warfare. Ukraine's landmass is 27 times larger than Israel's, and Ukraine's population is spread throughout the country. By contrast, nearly 50 percent of Israel's population is concentrated in a single area, the Tel Aviv-Jaffa metropolitan region.



*
Shahed-136 drone

In a future war, Iran can be expected to attack this densely populated area with thousands of rockets, missiles, and drones and cause massive destruction of life, property, and infrastructure.

"We must remember that the Iranians helping the Russians in their fight against Ukraine can lead the Russians to allow the Iranians to act against Israel through the Golan Heights," Yitzhak Barik, a reserve Israel Defense Forces general, recently warned. "We also need to understand that Iranian drones of the type that Russia purchased from Iran have long been in the hands of Hezbollah and the pro-Iranian Shi'ite militias in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Israel needs to do more than pay attention; it needs to think about how to win a war against such a threat."



by **Soeren Kern**,
a geopolitical analyst
based in Europe

A Heroine Goes Home to Jesus

Halina Ostik, who fought in the Polish Resistance during World War II, smuggled Bibles into the country under the noses of the communists, and singlehandedly started The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry's (FOI's) flourishing work in Poland, has gone home to be with her Savior at the age of 103.

Halina was born in Warsaw in 1919 and was only 20 when Adolf Hitler's army invaded her country in 1939. She risked her life by providing first aid to those who fought against Germany, smuggling food into the Warsaw Ghetto, and rescuing Jewish children from the Nazis. Eventually, she was captured and sent to various prison camps, where she almost died. Yet, the prisoners always knew Halina was a true believer in Jesus and came to her for prayer and Bible study. She was liberated by the Allied forces.

After the war, the communists took over Poland and killed anyone who had fought in the Resistance. So, Halina and her husband, Samuel, with whom she was reunited after the war, fled to Argentina. Samuel died of cancer in 1954, leaving her a 35-year-old widow with two young daughters. For many years she ministered to the Indians in Argentina.

By then, her lifelong friend, Polish-born Dr. Victor Buksbazen, was leading FOI's worldwide ministry from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He had never lost touch with the 7-year-old girl he befriended in Poland so many years before. He wrote to her faithfully, sometimes sending her money; and he sent her copies of *Israel My Glory* magazine. Knowing her burden for the Jewish people, he invited her to join The Friends of Israel in 1961.

Halina ministered to Jewish people in Argentina for



*
Halina in 1990

two years before bravely returning home to communist Poland to help her ailing mother and answer God's call to begin a ministry to Jewish people for FOI in Poland. Her parents had taught her well from childhood to love God's Word and His Chosen People.

Over six decades, the Lord miraculously opened doors for Halina and enabled her to accomplish great things in His name. Halina established our ministry in Eastern Europe at a time when she easily could have been killed for doing so. For almost 50 years we hid her identity, calling her Sister Alice, to protect her. "She was Poland in those days. She ran ev-



everything,” said Tom Simcox, who joined FOI in 1979 and remembers Halina well. “I remember when we bought the farm in Poland. We prayed for that. We prayed for her constantly. We prayed for the people she ministered to because she was doing it right under the nose of the communist regime. She was very brave. We weren’t allowed to show pictures of the work in Poland without blocking out the faces. It was a dangerous, volatile field. She was quite the hero.”

David Levy, former FOI director of International Ministries, added, “I worked with Halina for 32 years. She was unbelievable, used mightily by God among the Jewish people with a burden that began when she was 5 years old. To my knowledge, nobody served the Jewish people like Halina.”

Today, The Friends of Israel has six full-time workers serving in Poland and Ukraine in ministries almost too numerous to mention. Halina began our summer camps for Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian Jewish children, which are held on our property there. She helped Jewish people make *aliyah* (immigrate) to Israel; provided relief aid to Jewish Sunday schools in Russia and Ukraine; and established Bible studies, pastors conferences, and annual “Holiday with the Bible” retreats for Jewish people from Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, the Czech Republic, and Poland.

She led many young people in studying God’s Word



**To my knowledge,
nobody served the Jewish
people like Halina.**

and sharing the gospel on the streets and led many souls, Jewish and Gentile, to a saving knowledge of Jesus the Messiah.

FOI’s former executive director, Elwood McQuaid, brilliantly captured God’s remarkable work through Halina’s life in her biography,

*
Young Halina with
her grandmother



*
Halina with a Holocaust survivor

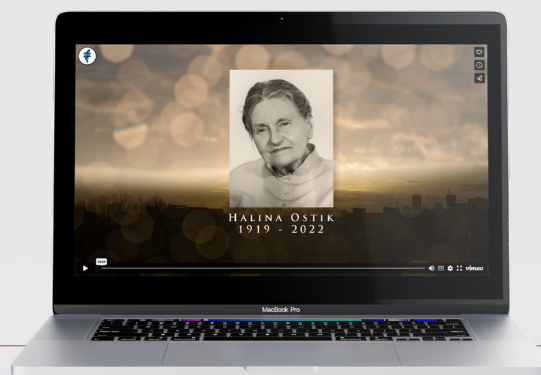
Halina. (See the inside front cover of this magazine.) If you haven’t read this inspirational story, you can buy a copy by filling out the enclosed envelope, visiting foi.org/halina online, or calling us at 800-345-8461.

Halina’s life blessed thousands of people, particularly Jewish people. And we know for a fact that today she is enjoying life everlasting in the presence of our great Savior. We have no doubt her sentiments echo those of the apostle Paul: “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8).

The truth of the Christian faith is that, when we truly give our lives to Christ, we are His forever despite what horrors come our way. He never leaves us or forsakes us (Heb. 13:5). We not only belong to Him, but He belongs to us for eternity.

Halina is with Christ in glory. And though we miss her, we look with great hope to the day when we will see her again in the presence of God.

**WATCH HALINA’S TRIBUTE
VIDEO AT FOI.ORG/HALINA**



Anti-Zionism: The Modern Antisemitism

“There’s going to be an anti-Israel protest downtown,” my friend said. “I think we need to do something.”

The next day, we met in front of the courthouse in Las Vegas. Sure enough, there was a group of protesters calling for an end to Israel’s “occupation of Palestine.”

After watching the protest for a few minutes, we walked to our cars. One protester recognized my friend, an Ethiopian Israeli, and confronted us. He followed us for several city blocks, hurling vile slurs at us, accusing us of supporting racism and genocide.

That day I experienced what many of my Jewish friends have: the never-ending scourge of antisemitism.

From spray-painted swastikas on Jewish frat houses to toppled tombstones in Jewish cemeteries, traditional antisemitism is easy to identify. More difficult to pin down is the modern, politically motivated version my friend and I experienced.

As Natan Sharansky, a victim of Soviet-era antisemitism, writes,

Whereas classical anti-Semitism is aimed at the Jewish people or the Jewish religion, “new anti-Semitism” is aimed at the Jewish state. . . . This hatred is advanced in the name of values most of us would consider unimpeachable, such as human rights.¹

This modern, slickly rebranded incarnation is called anti-Zionism. Zionism is the liberation movement of the Jewish people, which originally called for a return to their homeland after centuries of global dispersion and persecution. Its goal realized in the 1948 establishment of the Jewish state, Zionism continues today, calling for the Jewish people’s continued right to live in their land sovereignly and securely.

But anti-Zionists believe Zionism is a form of Western colonization that dispossessed the Arabs living in the region (identified as Palestinians after the Six-Day War) and robbed them of their land. In their view, since the *Nakba*—the term they use to describe Israel’s rebirth, meaning “disaster”—the Jewish state has engaged in the brutal oppression and systematic disenfranchisement of these “Palestinian refugees.” Not only, they claim, is Israel an illegitimate nation, but it participates in apartheid, à la pre-1994 South Africa. This twisted interpretation of events motivates anti-Zionism’s calls for the destruction of Israel and the establishment of a Palestinian state in its place.

It might seem that anti-Zionism is merely impassioned criticism of a nation that happens to be Jewish, not an antisemitic credo. In theory, this dichotomy works. One can criticize Israeli policy without hating Jewish people. Just ask Israelis,

who are known for being their own biggest critics. But there is a vast disparity between anti-Zionism in theory and practice.

To determine when this line is crossed, Sharansky developed the “3D Test”: If anti-Israel rhetoric demonizes Israel, holds Israel to double standards, or delegitimizes the existence of the Jewish state, it is not legitimate criticism but, rather, antisemitism.

With few exceptions, anti-Zionists check all of these boxes. They demonize Israel by comparing its security barrier to the wall around the Warsaw Ghetto or by carrying Israeli flags with swastikas in place of the Star of David.

They accuse the Jewish state of human rights violations while ignoring true human rights abusers. Where is their concern for the victims of violent regimes in South Sudan, North Korea, and Syria? Where are the campus protests against security barriers in India, Saudi Arabia, and Slovenia? Where are the boycotts against products made in communist China?

By definition, anti-Zionism delegitimizes Israel. Just consider that the movement’s proposed solution to their complaints is not the end of Israeli policies they dislike but the destruction of Israel itself. For proof, look no further than their well-worn protest chant, “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free!” Free from whom? Free from the Jews.

Traditional antisemitism rightly draws the ire and condemnation of many. But don’t be fooled: Anti-Zionism is simply the latest iteration of that ancient hatred, and it deserves the denunciation of the whole world.



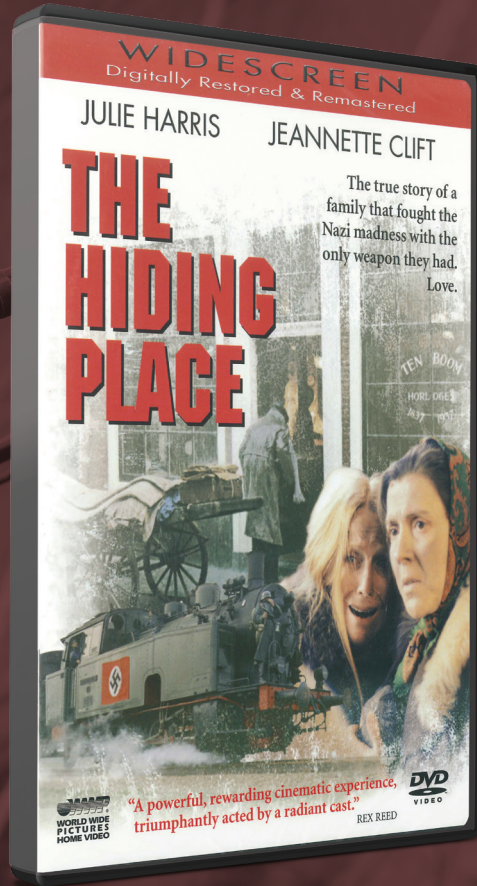
ENDNOTE

- 1 Natan Sharansky, “3D Test of Anti-Semitism: Demonization, Double Standards, Delegitimization,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 16, (Fall 2004): 1, <jcpa.org/phas/phas-sharansky-f04.htm>.



Ty Perry

is the Field Ministries manager and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry in Michigan.



THE HIDING PLACE DVD

\$19.95 US; \$24 Outside US

Discover the amazing, true story of the Ten Boom family! Based on Corrie ten Boom's best-selling book *The Hiding Place*, this film captures the family's heroic quest to save Jewish people from the Nazis in World War II Holland. Even in the face of imprisonment and death, the Ten Booms modeled true faith in their Savior. Their selflessness and courage to risk their lives to save God's Chosen People from destruction will inspire your walk with the Lord today.

See enclosed envelope for ordering details.

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To learn more about wills, request our free, no-obligation brochure *Making a Will That Works*. Simply check the appropriate box on the envelope in this magazine, call Tom Geoghan at our office at 800-257-7843, or email us at advancement@foi.org.

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GOD & MONEY

EXPLORING THE INTERESTING WORLD OF GIVING
BY STEVE HERZIG

The popular musical *Hello Dolly!* had many memorable lines; but my favorite is this one: “Money,” said Dolly Levi, “pardon the expression, is like manure. It’s not worth a thing unless it’s spread around, encouraging young things to grow.”

I’ve heard more than one preacher say he could tell a lot about individuals based on how they spent their money. Christians, of all people, should be generous out of gratitude for what Jesus did for us. If we truly trust God to provide for our needs, we should not be afraid to give liberally to causes that honor Him.

John Cortines and Gregory Baumer, two Christians in their 20s earning more than half a million dollars a year between them, recently wrote a book titled *God and Money: How We Discovered True Riches at Harvard Business School*. “The Bible,” they found, “contains roughly 500 verses on prayer and faith, but well over 2,000 verses on money.”¹ Obviously, God has much to say about wealth and giving.

So, I decided to explore the world of giving, beginning with the Jewish people, who often are characterized as being cheap when, in fact, they are among the most generous. For example,

Ruth and Raymond Perelman donated \$225 million in 2011 to the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine (Penn Med).² Penn Med’s Perelman Center for Advanced Medicine houses the Abramson Cancer Center, a world leader in cancer research and patient care, made possible by a gift of more than \$140 million from Madlyn and Leonard Abramson.³

Jewish people generally give liberally, although their reasons for giving differ from those of evangelical Christians.

Tzedakah and Tikkun Olam

A study by Giving USA shows the average annual Jewish household donates \$2,526 to charity yearly, compared to \$1,749 from Protestants and \$1,142 from Catholics.⁴ And, while Jews give about the same percentage to their local congregations as other faiths, they give a greater percentage to other causes.

Jewish giving is fueled by two concepts: *tzedakah* and *tikkun olam*. Both observant and nonobservant Jews embrace these ideas, producing the most philanthropic of all faiths.

Tzedakah is a Hebrew word composed of two words, *tzedek* (righteousness) and *chesed* (lovingkindness) and means “philanthropy” or “charity.” Jewish people consider giving to be a righteous act that pleases God and a *mitzvah*, or commandment (also translated “good deed”), because God commands His people to give. For example, Leviticus 27:28–33 deals with the command to tithe (give 10 percent of) one’s land, produce, and livestock. God calls the tithe “holy to the LORD” (v. 30).

Unfortunately, Orthodox rabbis teach that this mandatory, righteous giving is so important it has the power to take away sin.⁵ Herein lies a major difference between Jewish and evangelical giving. Evangelical Christians believe no amount of tithing or giving to the Lord can remove sin. Leviticus also says, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul” (17:11). Only blood can remove sin.

In addition, the prophet Isaiah said, “All our righteousnesses [Hebrew, *tzedkotanu*, from the word *tzedakah*] are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

Rabbinic Judaism, of course, isn’t alone in believing good deeds remove sin. All religions, including within Christendom, share that misconception. Bible-believing Christians, however, take Leviticus 17:11 literally, as well as 1 John 1:7: “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

The point of Jesus’ ministry on Earth was to bear our sin and be punished in our stead. As Isaiah wrote, “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” (Isa. 53:6). Jesus (Hebrew, *Yeshua*, meaning “salvation”) became our blood sacrifice; and because He is God, He arose from the dead. He sacrificed Himself to save us from eternal punishment. Is there any better reason to love Him or any better motivation to give than that one?

Tikkun olam, Hebrew for “repairing the world,” is the second term associated with Jewish giving. Originally, Orthodox Jews saw *tikkun olam* as partnering with God to repair our broken world. Today, the term is associated with Jews who support social-justice causes thought to make the world a more equitable, peaceful, and tolerant place.

They believe giving generously to such causes benefits everyone and follows the spirit of Torah. For them, political action, along with acts of charity and kindness, retranslates the words *tikkun olam* from repairing the world through *mitzvot* (commands, good deeds) to repairing it through social justice.

‘We Shall All Be Changed’

A recent study, “The Generosity Factor: Evangelicals and Giving,” revealed that, over a 12-month period, the average American evangelical gave \$1,923 annually to church and \$622 to charity, for a total of \$2,545 (a mere \$19 more than the average Jewish donor).⁶

Sadly, it also showed 19 percent of evangelicals during that period gave no money at all.⁷ Surprised by that statistic, I asked Tom Geoghan, The Friends of Israel’s vice president for Ministry Advancement, why Christians should give. Tom has studied evangelical giving for more than 30 years. Here was his reply:

We give because of 1 Corinthians 15, which, in my opinion, is the greatest chapter in the Bible. The apostle Paul testified to Jesus’ resurrection and how we will be resurrected. He said,

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. . . . This mortal must put on immortality” [vv. 51, 53]. Therefore, and as a result of all that, the practical value is to be “steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” [v. 58].

After such dynamic preaching on Jesus’ resurrection and the assurance of our resurrection, Paul immediately said, “Now concerning the collection” [16:1]. It’s like, wow, okay, you learned all this stuff, and now he throws the collection at them. It seems mundane, almost comical. How can I be thinking about the collection when you’ve just taken me to the heights of resurrection power? But he does because it is so important. Christians should give “hilariously” because Christ gave us abundant, overflowing life by His death, burial, and resurrection. There is no way we can pay Him back for our salvation, but we can express our gratitude.

We should give regularly, prayerfully, and consistently. We were never commanded to give a certain amount. Our giving is supposed to be something that spontaneously emerges from a thankful heart. Paul said a believer should give “as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” [2 Cor. 9:7]. To whatever level you feel that the Lord is leading you, do it!

Giving should be done joyfully. The word cheerful could rightfully be translated “hilarious.” It’s all a question of the heart.

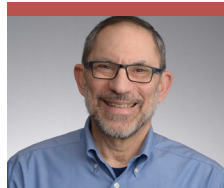
I believe Dolly Levi had the right idea. What good is money if we don’t spread it around to encourage growth and provide for people’s needs? As believers, our treasures are to be stored up in heaven, not on Earth. As Jesus said,

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Mt. 6:19–21).

I want my heart to be with the Lord. How about you? ★

ENDNOTES

- 1 <godandmoney.net/buy>.
- 2 “Raymond and Ruth Perelman Donate \$225 Million to the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Medicine,” *PennToday*, May 11, 2011 <tinyurl.com/Penn-Perl>.
- 3 “Madlyn Abramson: Penn Alumna, Trustee, Benefactor” <penntoday.com/cancer/about/remembering-madlyn-abramson>.
- 4 Hanna Shaul Bar Nissim, “American Jews and charitable giving: an enduring tradition,” *theconversation.com*, December 10, 2017 <tinyurl.com/TheConvJ>.
- 5 “Tzedakah: Charity,” *Judaism 101* <jewfaq.org/tzedakah.htm>.
- 6 Infinity Concepts and Grey Matter Research, “The Generosity Factor: Evangelicals and Giving” <infinityconcepts.com>, 8.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 4.



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BY DAVID M. LEVY

Reading the book of Esther is like reading a novel filled with suspense. Chock-full of intrigue, heroism, pathos, and deception, it holds your attention from beginning to end.

The story revolves around four major characters: King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) of Persia; Esther, a Jewish girl; Mordecai, Esther's cousin who raised her; and Haman, the villain and chief advisor to the king.

Told by Mordecai to keep her Jewish identity a secret, Esther becomes queen of Persia, replacing Queen Vashti. Haman hates Mordecai and plots to kill him and annihilate all the Jewish people in the Persian Empire, which, at the time, meant all the Jewish people in the world.

BACKGROUND AND SETTING

The Persian Empire emerged under Cyrus the Great who conquered the Median and Babylonian Empires and extended his rule from Egypt through Mesopotamia and all of India. A clay cylinder (the Cyrus Cylinder) found in Babylon in 1879 tells how Cyrus overthrew Babylon in 539 BC.

Cyrus differed from other emperors in that he showed mercy, respect, and grace to the kings and nations he conquered. He often allowed the conquered kings to guide their own people, albeit under his rule, and let them practice their religion.

Persia (today, Iran) dominated the world from 539 to 331 BC, during which the events recorded in the book of Esther took place (cf. Dan. 5:30–31; 8:1–27). Chronologically, these events fall between the Jewish people's first and second returns to Jerusalem from captivity—between Ezra 6 and 7. The first return was under Zerubbabel, a godly prince of Judah, though the grandson of wicked King Jeconiah (1 Chr. 3:17, 19); and the second was under Ezra the priest. Slightly fewer than 50,000 Jews returned with Zerubbabel, the greater number choosing to remain in Persia.

The book of Esther spans a decade, from the third year (483 BC) of Ahasuerus's rule (Est. 1:3) to the 12th year (3:7). Esther contains only 167 verses

and makes no mention of God's name, prayer, Israel's faith, worship of Israel's God, trusting God for help, the Temple of Israel, or belief in a coming Messiah to deliver Israel.

Consequently, many scholars have questioned whether the book belongs in the Old Testament canon and whether it was inspired by God. Some believe Esther was not recognized as canonical before the rabbis included it in the canon during the Council of Jamnia in the 1st century AD.

It is believed the Jewish canon was confirmed at that time. However, Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (AD 37–100) recognized Esther's importance and paraphrased it in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. The oldest available list of Jewish canonical books (2nd century AD) also includes Esther.

PURPOSE

Although God's name is absent, His providence is clearly seen everywhere. As the chapters unfold, it is obvious His unseen hand sovereignly, silently, and secretly orchestrates the events of Israel's deliverance.

The primary doctrinal lesson is the providential protection and deliverance of the Jewish people from annihilation.

AUTHOR

The author's identity is unclear and not stated in the text. He evidently knew Persian customs

“
*Yet who knows whether you
 have come to the kingdom
 for such a time as this?*
 ”

Outline of the Book of Esther

BY DAVID M. LEVY

and culture well, citing details of the Persian palace in Shushan and letters written by Mordecai (9:20). And he sympathized with the plight of the Jewish exiles living in the Persian Empire.

For these reasons, Mordecai, Ezra, and Nehemiah all have been suggested as possible authors. But Ezra and Nehemiah seem unlikely because their vocabularies and styles differ markedly from those used in Esther. Mordecai also seems unlikely because he already was off the scene when the book was written (10:2-3).

Therefore, many scholars believe the author was a Persian Jew who was familiar with Jewish and Persian culture and lived during that time. Unfortunately, not enough evidence exists to identify him.

DATE OF AUTHORSHIP

Most commentators are certain Esther was written between 450 and 400 BC, after Ahasuerus died in 465 BC. The text indicates his reign already had ended (v. 2).

THEME

Esther is about God's providence and protection of the Jewish people from annihilation.

KEY VERSES

Esther 2:15; 4:14-16; 6:13; 7:3-4; 8:17. The best known verse here is 4:14, where Mordecai tells Queen Esther,

For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? ★



David M. Levy

is the media resource specialist and a Bible teacher for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

I. CONTENTION IN THE KINGDOM (1:1-22)

- A. Regalia of King Ahasuerus (vv. 1-9)
- B. Requirement of King Ahasuerus (vv. 10-11)
- C. Refusal of Queen Vashti (v. 12)
- D. Removal of Queen Vashti (vv. 13-22)

II. CORONATION OF ESTHER (2:1-23)

- A. Search for a queen (vv. 1-4)
- B. Steps to acquire a queen (vv. 5-14)
- C. Selection of Esther to be queen (vv. 15-18)
- D. Scheme to kill Ahasuerus foiled by Esther (vv. 19-23)

III. CONSPIRACY AGAINST THE JEWS (3:1-5:14)

- A. Promotion of Haman (3:1-4)
- B. Plan of Haman against the Jews (vv. 5-12)
- C. Proclamation of the king's decree (vv. 13-15)
- D. Peril of Esther (4:1-17)
- E. Petition of Esther (5:1-8)
- F. Plot of Haman (vv. 9-14)

IV. CONDEMNATION OF HAMAN (6:1-7:10)

- A. Rewarding Mordecai (6:1-11)
- B. Regret of Haman (vv. 12-14)
- C. Request from Esther (7:1-6)
- D. Retribution on Haman (vv. 7-10)

V. COUNTER-EDICT OF AHASUERUS (8:1-9:16)

- A. Discloser of Jewish persecution (8:1-6)
- B. Decree of Ahasuerus (vv. 7-14)
- C. Delight of the Jews (vv. 15-17)
- D. Defeat of the enemy (9:1-11)
- E. Death for Haman's sons (vv. 12-14)
- F. Demise of Jewish enemies (vv. 15-16)

VI. CELEBRATION OF PURIM (9:17-32)

- A. Purim established by Mordecai (vv. 17-21)
- B. Purpose of Purim (vv. 22-32)

VII. COMMENDING MORDECAI (10:1-3)

- A. Mordecai promoted (vv. 1-3)
- B. Mordecai's popularity (v. 3)
- C. Mordecai speaks peace (v. 3)



Ahasuerus

He was emotional, impulsive, and wicked—
and he was the man Esther was forced to marry.

by David M. Levy



King Solomon wrote, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He [God] turns it wherever He wishes” (Prov. 21:1). Just as God controls nature in His sovereignty and providence, He also directs rulers, as seen in the book of Esther.

In Esther’s day, the king of the vast Persian Empire was Ahasuerus. He is called Xerxes in Greek and Khshayarsha in Persian. Some scholars believe *Ahasuerus* is a title meaning “chief of rulers,” while others believe it was the king’s name.

The King’s Background

Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) was the firstborn son of Darius I and the grandson of Cyrus the Great through his mother Atossa, Cyrus’s daughter. This line is also called the Achaemenid dynasty. The Persian Empire lasted more than 200 years, ending in 330 BC when it fell to Alexander the Great.

Cyrus began to rule in 550 BC. After conquering Babylon in 539 BC, he decreed that the Jews taken into exile could return to Jerusalem and rebuild their Temple.

Upon the death of his father, Ahasuerus became king and ruled over a vast kingdom of 127 provinces that stretched from India to Ethiopia. His throne was in Shushan (Hebrew for the Greek word *Susa*), the winter residence of Persian kings (Est. 1:1–2).

Immediately after Ahasuerus assumed the throne, he had to deal with a revolt in Egypt. One year later, he marched his army to Egypt and put down the rebellion.

The Babylonians were willing to accept Ahasuerus as their ruler because he had already ruled for 12 years on behalf of his father. But they soon rebelled against him because of his policies. As a result, Ahasuerus attacked Babylon; tore down its temples and the golden statue of the Babylonian god Marduk; and murdered the priests who tried to impede the destruction.

His thirst for power and control manifested itself when he unsuccessfully tried to subjugate Greece several times, despite his uncle’s advice to the contrary.

The King’s Character

It was said that Ahasuerus was extremely handsome, tall, and vigorous and looked every inch a king when seated

on his white marble throne.

Like many heathen monarchs of his day, he was extremely wicked. Apart from being filled with pride and vanity, Ahasuerus had a volatile temper that exploded without warning, unleashing a torrent of brutality on unsuspecting people within his kingdom.

His huge harem served at his bidding. He made emotional promises without thinking and manipulated people to satisfy his personal whims without considering the consequences.

He also loved to hold elaborate, opulent banquets. His first, held in the third year of his reign, hosted all the officials in the Median-Persian Empire. It lasted “one hundred and eighty days in all [six months]” (vv. 3–4). As if that weren’t enough, at the conclusion, he held a weeklong party to display the glory and wealth of his kingdom to all his guests (vv. 5–6).

On the final day of the banquet, with everyone completely intoxicated and pursuing the lusts of the flesh, he summoned the eunuchs to bring his wife, Vashti, into the banquet hall “to show her beauty to the people and the officials” (v. 11). Although Scripture does not reveal what this command entailed, it no doubt meant the worst type of humiliation possible for Vashti. She refused, knowing that to defy the king might mean her death; and she was removed as queen, never to be heard of again (vv. 12–21).

When Ahasuerus’s fury subsided, he found himself in need of a beautiful woman to replace Vashti. So he sent officers out to comb his kingdom and seize beautiful young virgins. Among those taken was a Jewish girl named Esther, who was reared by her cousin Mordecai.

Esther was crowned queen; and Mordecai lingered inside the king’s gate, monitoring Esther’s welfare. While there, he overheard a plot to kill Ahasuerus and told Esther, who told the king, who had the traitors hung (2:1–23).

The Plot Unfolds

Ahasuerus then promoted Haman to a top position in the kingdom and ordered everyone to bow before Haman. When Mordecai refused, Haman hatched a plot to kill all the Jews, making them enemies of the state. Never once asking who these “certain people” were (3:8) whom Haman wanted killed, Ahasuerus impulsively granted Haman’s request.

Mordecai asked Esther to intervene. Knowing Ahasuerus loved parties, Esther invited him to a banquet to honor him and Haman. She refrained from revealing Haman’s plot at this feast, but instead requested that Ahasuerus and Haman come to a second feast the following day.

Overjoyed, Haman went home to tell his wife; and at her suggestion and that of his friends, he built 75-foot-high

gallows from which to hang Mordecai.

But that night, Ahasuerus couldn't sleep and had the Persian annals read to him. Taking notice of the earlier plot to kill him, he asked if Mordecai was rewarded for saving his life. Learning that he was not, Ahasuerus decided to remedy the omission.

Enter Haman. Ahasuerus asked him for suggestions on how to honor a man the king wants to reward. Thinking the king meant him, Haman said to dress the man in a royal robe and parade him through the city on a royal horse, proclaiming, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!" (6:9).

The king immediately told Haman, "Hurry . . . and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate!" (v. 10). Haman did as he was told before skulking back to his house in humiliation just in time for the king's eunuchs to collect him for Esther's second banquet.

At the second banquet, Esther begged for her life and that of her people. Outraged that someone would want to kill the queen and the Jews, Ahasuerus demanded, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?" (7:5).

Esther replied, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" (v. 6). Stunned, Ahasuerus left the room enraged. Haman, evidently well acquainted with the king's fierce temper, threw himself on Esther's couch, begging for his life. When the king returned and saw Haman on Esther's couch, he misinterpreted Haman's motives; had Haman hauled away and hung on the gallows he had prepared for

Mordecai; and gave Haman's property to Esther.

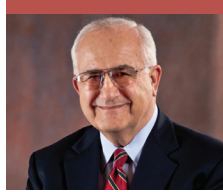
However, the edict to kill the Jews could not be broken, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians. So the king gave Mordecai carte blanche to counter the decree in Ahasuerus's name by granting the Jewish people permission to defend themselves. Thus, Esther rescued Mordecai and world Jewry.

The Latter Years

Ahasuerus spent his latter years overseeing building projects and indulging in pleasure. In time, he deteriorated and became a pawn in the hands of women and those who served him daily.

Eventually, a conspiracy developed to rid the empire of his rule. In 465 BC, Ahasuerus was murdered in his bedroom; and tradition says that Artabanus, believed to be his bodyguard, committed the act.

He was buried in a sepulcher next to the grave of his father, Darius I. Leaders within the Persian Empire crowned his son Artaxerxes I to be king of the empire. Artaxerxes reigned from 465 to 425 BC and, also in the providence of God, was the king whose cupbearer was Nehemiah. ★



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KINGS OF THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

by *David M. Levy*

Cyrus the Great: 550—530 BC

Cambyses II: 530—522 BC

Darius I: 522—486 BC

Ahasuerus (Xerxes I): 486—465 BC

Artaxerxes: 465—424 BC

Xerxes II: 424 BC

Darius II: 423—404 BC

Artaxerxes II: 404—359 BC

Artaxerxes III: 359—338 BC

Arses: 338—336 BC

Darius III: 336—330 BC



WHAT HAPPENED WHEN

586 BC

Babylon destroys the Temple in Jerusalem and takes Judah captive.

539 BC

Cyrus conquers Babylon and solidifies the Persian Empire.

538 BC

Cyrus issues an edict to let the Jews return to their land.

536 BC

Zerubbabel leads the first return.

535 BC

Construction begins on the Second Temple, but it stops.

515 BC

The Second Temple is completed.

486 BC

Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) ascends to the Persian throne.

479 BC

Esther becomes queen of Persia.

474 BC

Haman decrees the murder of all Jews; Mordecai establishes Purim.

465 BC

Artaxerxes I ascends to the Persian throne.

458 BC

Ezra leads the second return to Jerusalem and reestablishes worship.

445 BC

Nehemiah leads the third return and rebuilds Jerusalem's walls.

Editor's Note: As with all ancient dates, some variation exists between sources. For the most part, this table was compiled using dates found in *The Ryrie Study Bible*, ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



WHAT IS GOD'S PROVIDENCE?

Providence is God's active care, control, and governance over everything in His created universe by His sovereign will (Eph. 1:11) in wisdom and love.

Providence was planned by God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son and is executed by the Holy Spirit. Thus, providence means God preserves, sustains, and directs the universe through natural law and sometimes by overriding natural law and individuals to fulfill His eternal purposes (cf. Ps. 104).

God's providence governs celestial heavens (Job 9:7–9); weather (37:9–13); natural disasters (Rev. 6–18); fruitful plant and animal life (Ps. 104:10–30); nations, especially Israel (Isa. 63:9); rulers (Rom. 13:1); world affairs (Dan. 4:17); birth (Ps. 139:1–17); and death (Heb. 9:27). Therefore, the idea that the universe functions by fate, chance, or luck is utterly erroneous.

God hates sin. He did not create sin, nor does He tempt man to sin; and, eventually, He will judge the sin of all people (Jas. 1:13–15). God allows sin to exist to perform a purpose in His providence. Scripture provides examples of how the sins of evil men brought about God's providence for good.

For example, Joseph's brothers sold him to Ishmaelites, who sold him to Potiphar in Egypt. Potiphar imprisoned Joseph on the false charge of adultery. In prison, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream about a coming seven-year famine; and Pharaoh rewarded Joseph by making him the second highest authority in the land under himself.

Many years later, Joseph's brothers went to Egypt to buy grain during a famine and discovered Joseph oversaw the grain distribution, causing them to fear for their lives. Joseph said, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order . . . to save many people alive" (Gen. 50:20).

Judas Iscariot deceived, stole, and betrayed Christ. He sold Jesus to His enemies, who crucified the Lord. In His providence, God allowed Judas's wicked betrayal so that the greater good through Christ's death would make salvation available to all mankind. Those who receive Christ will enjoy eternal life with Him.

Neither God's name nor His Law are mentioned in Esther. Also absent is any mention of worship, prayer, sacrifice for sin, or Israel's Temple. Yet God's sovereign, silent, unseen hand worked behind the scenes through evil men like Haman to orchestrate the events that brought about Israel's rescue from certain annihilation. God used Esther, Mordecai, and King Ahasuerus to deliver Israel through their own free wills, guided by God's providence.

God's providence clearly shines in believers' lives: "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).

by David M. Levy

CALLING CHRISTIAN KIDS!

ART CONTEST

If you like to draw or paint, you have an opportunity to celebrate Israel's upcoming 75th anniversary in a very special way. The Genesis 123 Foundation is holding an international art contest for Christians ages 10 through 17 and will award prizes for the best pictorial representations of "What Israel Means to Me."

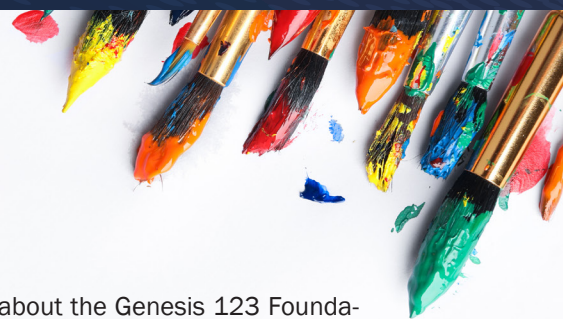
Your drawings or paintings may relate to such topics as the significance of modern

Israel, biblical Israel, biblical figures in Israel, scenery or landmarks in Israel, and so forth. The goal is to provide a visual depiction of what Israel means to you. Entries must be submitted by April 24.

All the information you need to enter the contest, including instructions on how to transmit your artwork, can be found on whatisraelmeanstome.com. You also can log on to genesis123.co to learn more

about the Genesis 123 Foundation, which is a U.S.-based non-profit designed, as the site says, "to build bridges between Jews and Christians with Israel in ways that are new, unique, and meaningful."

The Genesis 123 Foundation is an independent organization and is not affiliated with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.





Mordecai

He was a hero in the book of Esther. But, like most of us, he had another side as well.

by Dan Price

Occasionally, my second son and I dabble in the hobby of polishing rocks. With lots of time and patience, rough-hewn stones placed into a rock tumbler come out colorful, smooth, and gleaming. It's incredible to see how a stone that is ugly and jagged can be sanded down to look beautiful.

Unfortunately, we sometimes “polish” people in the Bible, seeing only their good qualities. While Scripture highlights Mordecai’s admirable traits, it shows us some rough edges too. And it’s those rough edges that communicate some vital aspects of the account in the book of Esther.

Mordecai’s Background

The upheaval of the Mesopotamian nations in the years of Israel’s exile saw the rise and fall of several empires that spanned the known world. The book of Esther is set after the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire to the Neo-Babylonian Empire in 612 BC and the fall of the Neo-Babylonian Empire to the Persian (Achaemenid) Empire in 539 BC, during the

reign of Persian King Xerxes, called Ahasuerus.

Mordecai was an official in Ahasuerus’s court in the capital city of Shushan. It’s unclear how important his position was; but he clearly held influence because he sat in “the king’s gate,” where judges and other officials typically worked in ancient cities (2:19; 6:10, 12); and he had access to the portion of the palace that housed the king’s harem (2:11). A cuneiform tablet unearthed by archaeologists in the 1940s lists Mordecai as having a position in the city.¹

In the language of the Persian Empire, the name Mordecai was a tribute to the Babylonian god Marduk. But in Hebrew, it is a combination of the words *bitter* and *crushed*, or *oppressed*, a fitting name for a man whose family was exiled from their home in Jerusalem and forced to assimilate into Babylonian life and culture. Mordecai’s father, Kish, a Benjamite, was carried into exile when the Babylonians captured Judean King Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) in 597 BC (v. 6).

However, when the decree from Cyrus the Great in 539 BC enabled the exiles to return to Jerusalem, Mordecai’s family remained in Persia.

Mordecai’s Character

There is much that shines about Mordecai’s character. He showed great compassion and graciousness in choosing to raise his young cousin, Hadassah, as his own daughter (v. 7). He also showed his dutiful faithfulness by revealing his

coworkers' assassination plot against Ahasuerus (vv. 19–23). And he shared God's passion to protect His people, evidenced by his mourning in Esther 4 when he learned of Haman's edict to annihilate the Jews.

When the tables were turned on Haman's attempt to honor himself, and Mordecai was honored instead, the text shows Mordecai's great humility. He immediately returned to his work at the gate, whereas Haman went home and pouted (6:12).

Perhaps the finest of Mordecai's qualities was his complete trust in God's sovereign plans and his certainty that God would protect His people Israel. Mordecai famously told Queen Esther in 4:14,

If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Mordecai trusted completely that God would orchestrate events to protect His people; there are no coincidences. Esther was divinely put in the right place at the right time to be God's conduit to influence events on the world stage. And Mordecai rightly recognized the responsibility of God's people to act in partnership with God's plans.

Mordecai's Troubling Behavior

After reviewing Mordecai's good qualities, it seems appropriate to focus on some of his rough edges as well. Mordecai evidenced some troubling behavior; and though we cannot know his motives, we must recognize that God tells us these things for a purpose.

Why, for example, was Mordecai in Shushan at all? Cyrus's decree that allowed the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem was issued 59 years earlier. Why did Mordecai not return to the land of his people? We're left to wonder about the extent of his assimilation and whether he was too comfortable among the Gentiles. Instead of returning to Jerusalem, he took a position in the court of a king who was a notoriously ruthless, drunken sexual predator.

Similarly, when Ahasuerus ordered his men to collect young virgins for him, why didn't Mordecai attempt to hide Hadassah or send her away? He knew exactly what type of abuse lay in her future, but Scripture records no resistance on his part. It appears he encouraged Hadassah's prospects, even telling her to use the Persian name Esther and hide her ethnicity. We can't help but ask, "Why would Mordecai choose this course of action?"

However, the most troubling of Mordecai's activities involved what he did after Haman's plan to kill the Jews was foiled and King Ahasuerus gave Esther and Mordecai the freedom to write a law to counteract Haman's evil edict. Mordecai didn't merely write a law allowing Jewish people to defend themselves against attack; he wrote one allowing the Jews to

counterattack "both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions" (8:11).

The text says 800 men in the capital were killed and 75,000 throughout the empire (9:12, 15–16). Such retaliation goes far beyond simply protecting the Jewish people. We don't know why he authorized such action; but it appears needlessly vindictive, opportunistic, and morally questionable. And the text indicates the extent of this new law lacked divine approval. Chapter 9 says three times the Jews did not plunder their enemies (vv. 10, 15–16).

In the midst of this ruthlessness, Mordecai was raised to the position of prime minister; and "the fear of Mordecai" (v. 3) fell on all the governors and royal officials, some even pretending to be Jewish because they were afraid (8:17).

Imperfect Partners

What are we to make of the unpolished, rough-hewn Mordecai? Ultimately, the judgment seems positive. He is described as a man who sought the welfare of Jewish people and spoke *shalom* (peace), rough edges and all (10:3).

Perhaps the best way to view his complicated character is through the lens of his statement in 4:14 that God will raise up partners to work His plans at the right time, whether or not the partners feel ready for their roles.

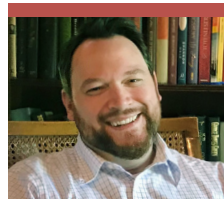
The overall message of the book of Esther is that God sovereignly works His plans through imperfect people. This is true of His preservation of the Jewish nation, and it is true on the world stage. Just as God used Mordecai to preserve His Chosen People, God used the wicked kings of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia to work His will, even exiling the Jewish people from their land.

The same holds true on the small stages of our lives. God uniquely places all of us in situations into which blows the breeze of His sovereign grace. We become the conduits through which He works, whether rough-hewn or highly polished.

What matters to God is our willingness and determination to submit to His will. Mordecai teaches us about God's grace in choosing imperfect partners, like you and me, to live and work for Him wherever He plants us. Whether we feel ready or not, He has sovereignly placed all of us in a foreign land to live for Him and speak His peace "for such a time as this." ★

ENDNOTE

- 1 Koot Van Wyk, "Finding Mordechai at Persepolis," [academia.edu <tinyurl.com/26228bwr>](http://academia.edu/26228bwr).



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Esther

She was young and beautiful, but
her courage was her crowning glory.

by **Linda Craft**

When I was a kid, watching the Miss America Pageant on TV was a big deal in our home. The competition symbolized everything we knew back then about beauty, glitz, glamor, and fame and was an experience most little girls dreamed about.

In those days, Americans watched with breathless anticipation to see which contestant would be the one to walk the runway with the crown on her head, the sash over one shoulder, and camera bulbs flashing as Bert Parks sang “There She Is, Miss America” by songwriter Bernie Wayne.

But that’s not the way things happened for Esther or any of the “contestants” in the “Miss Persia Pageant” of 479 BC. Queen Vashti had displeased her husband, King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), who banished her from the kingdom. Word then went out the king was looking for a replacement, and he sent his men to find one.

The girls were probably in their mid-to-late teens when they were snatched from their homes by the king’s commissioners whose orders were to bring back beautiful, young virgins. Although some of the girls may have thought it a privilege to be picked, most probably were terrified. After spending one night with the king, they were doomed to join his vast harem, with no hope of homes and families of their own.

Her Wise, Submissive Spirit

Esther’s Hebrew name was Hadassah. We know nothing about her father or mother except that they had not returned to Judah when the opportunity presented itself and, in fact, were probably dead (Est. 2:7).

Mordecai, Esther’s cousin, who was much older than Esther, reared her as his own daughter. He, too, remained in the land of captivity with no apparent plans to return to his own country.

Interestingly, there is no record of Esther’s or Mordecai’s godliness, although Mordecai appeared to be honest, wise, and solicitous about Esther; and he understood a providential hand worked behind the events unfolding. They both may have realized what it meant to be Jewish in a foreign land (a risky business throughout history) because Mordecai told Esther not to reveal her Jewishness, and she obeyed. So, a certain amount of anxiety and guardedness may have characterized their lives.

We know Esther was an exceptionally beautiful virgin, or the king’s officers would not have snatched her. But, apparently, she also had an inward beauty because she “obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her” (v. 15). She was well-liked by everyone, including Hegai, the king’s eunuch in charge of the harem.

When her time came to go to the king following a year of beauty treatments, “she requested nothing but what Hegai . . . , the custodian of the women, advised” (v. 15). She was smart enough to know Hegai knew his business, and she submitted to his wise counsel.

Clearly, Esther was not headstrong or wise in her own eyes and carefully considered the advice of a counselor. The phrase *favor in the sight of all who saw her* also implies the other girls in the harem, as well as the palace workers, found her warm and personable and wanted to be near her.

Scripture says when it was Esther’s turn to be with the king, he was more pleased with her than with any of the others; and he made her queen—queen of the vastest empire in the world at that time and the empire that ruled over all of world Jewry.

Esther’s new position did not change who she was or whom she loved. She remained loyal to Mordecai and showed great wisdom when her time of testing arrived.

Her Courage

Esther is best known for her bravery in approaching the king, risking her own life to save her people.

When Mordecai heard that all the Jews in the kingdom would be murdered on the 13th of Adar, he “tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes”; went to the king’s gate; and cried aloud (4:1–2). Esther’s servants told her what



was happening. “Deeply distressed,” she sent clothes to Mordecai, which he refused (v. 4).

Evidently, Esther was never allowed to leave the palace. She communicated with Mordecai through Hathach, who went back and forth between the two with messages. Consequently, Hathach must have learned Esther was Jewish; but he faithfully kept her confidence.

Mordecai wanted Esther to ask Ahasuerus to rescue her people. Her initial reaction was fear for her own life: “He has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days” (v. 11).

Mordecai’s response was blunt and challenging and is the most famous passage in the book of Esther:

Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (vv. 13–14).

When Esther sent back her reply to Mordecai, she was resolute and unflinching. She would do as Mordecai requested, boldly declaring, “If I perish, I perish!” (v. 16).

The Bible does not dwell on the moment Ahasuerus extended his scepter, but it had to have been one of staggering relief to the young queen. In fact, the king received her so favorably he offered to grant any request of hers up to half his kingdom, which was the largest, most powerful kingdom on Earth. But Esther seemed unaffected by the offer. She was focused on one thing only: rescuing her people.

In her wisdom, she had devised a plan. First, she told Mordecai to have all the Jews in Shushan fast for three days; and she and her maids would do the same. Then she invited the king and Haman, the antisemite who had engineered the Jews’ demise, to a feast.

At the feast, the king again asked for her request. But instead, Esther invited them both to another feast. She obviously knew the king well enough to know what he

would enjoy; and she showed patience, discretion, and wisdom in her timing.

Her banquets not only put the king in a good mood but also gave her opportunity to prepare herself mentally and emotionally for what she was about to ask of him. She was careful; deliberate; and, in the end, successful. Haman was executed; and the Jewish people were allowed to defend themselves and “to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them” (8:11).

Her Mystery

Esther does not appear to have been a spiritual giant, specifically devoted to God. Apart from the fast she called, there is no direct evidence she was religious. Fervent prayer being the purpose of fasting is never mentioned.

However, it could be the writer of Esther intentionally never mentioned prayer for the same reason he never mentioned God; but God’s providence clearly shines through. Or it’s possible Esther had no relationship with Yahweh. Some details about Esther remain a mystery.

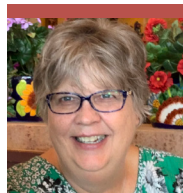
We also don’t know how long Esther lived or if she had children.

We do know she was queen for 14 years at the most because Ahasuerus was murdered in 465 BC by the commander of the royal bodyguard with the help of a eunuch.

No matter, Esther had qualities we all would do well to emulate. Even when weak and fearful, she was strong and brave. Her story is inspiring and motivating and shows how God is at the center of everything in the universe—with an especially protective eye on His Chosen People, Israel.

Esther was not your typical beauty queen, but there is beauty in her story—the beauty of a sovereign, covenant-keeping God whose promises are eternal and whose Word stands forever. ★

“
If I perish, I perish!
”



Linda Craft

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Haman

He was the archetypal antisemite—
and he came to a fitting end.

by Tom Simcox



Villains! Where would literature, movies, or old-time radio serials be without them? From Sherlock Holmes's Professor Moriarty to Peter Pan's Captain Hook to Luke Skywalker's Darth Vader, a good story requires a heavy—the antagonist who provides the drama.

Unfortunately, the Bible is filled with heavies, real-life villains who are pawns of Satan. But one in particular stands out. His name was Haman.

Haman's Prominence

Haman appears in the book of Esther. A proud, egotistical, self-absorbed bureaucrat, Haman was determined to annihilate the entire Jewish race because one member of it refused to bow down to him.

He rose to prominence in Esther 3, when Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) "promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and . . . set his seat above all the princes who were with him" (v. 1).

Because Scripture calls Haman an Agagite, Bible scholars have debated his lineage for years. What, if any, relationship was there between Haman and Agag, the king of the Amalekites whom Israel's King Saul was commanded by God (1 Sam. 15:3) to destroy? Saul spared Agag, whom the prophet Samuel then killed (v. 33).

While it is remotely possible that Haman descended from Agag, Bible commentator John A. Martin believes otherwise:

It seems unlikely that a high-ranking Persian official would be related to a west Semite who lived 600 years earlier. Archeologists have uncovered an inscription which indicates that Agag was also the name of a province in the Persian Empire. This probably explains why Haman was called an Agagite.¹

Once promoted, it became obvious that Haman loved the preeminence, prestige, power, and praise that accompanied his newly exalted position: "All the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him" (Est. 3:2).

Pride leads to arrogance, hatred, and prejudice; and Haman was well-infected with pride. When Mordecai refused to bow, "Haman was filled with wrath" (v. 5). Disdaining "to lay hands on Mordecai alone, . . . Haman sought

to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai" (v. 6). It wasn't enough for him to kill only Mordecai. His ego would be satisfied only after he killed the entire Jewish nation.

So Haman hatched a plot worthy of a true villain and persuaded his king to go along with it. He told Ahasuerus,

There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries (vv. 8–9).

Since Haman also planned to "plunder their possessions" (v. 13), he probably intended to seize the Jewish assets for the kingdom and possibly add to it from his own wealth.

Whatever the case, the money he planned to put "into the king's treasuries" was substantial. According to Greek scholar Frank Egleston Robbins, the Athenians in the late 4th century BC (100 years later) spent two talents to build an entire naval ship.² Ten thousand talents would have built 5,000 ships. No wonder Ahasuerus went along with Haman, never even asking the identity of this "certain people."

The Decree of Death

In Nisan, the first month of the Jewish ceremonial year (March/April), a decree was issued "and sealed with the king's signet ring" (v. 12).

Letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month . . . Adar [February/March], and to plunder their possessions (v. 13).

The decree gave the Jews a full year to mourn their tragic, unexpected fate. "In every province" (4:3), all 127 of them (1:1), Jews were mourning, "fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes" (4:3).

Upon learning what was happening from her cousin Mordecai, Queen Esther bravely entered the king's presence unbidden. When Ahasuerus received her warmly, she invited him and Haman to a banquet, where she then invited them to a second banquet the following day.

These two invitations further stoked Haman's ego, made him "joyful," and gave him "a glad heart" until the moment he saw the unyielding Mordecai in the king's gate (5:9).

Vexed to the core, Haman complained to his wife and friends, who suggested, “Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high [75 feet], and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet” (v. 14). What an inspired solution to his problem! That way he wouldn’t have to wait an entire year to rid himself of Mordecai. He could do it right away. “So he had the gallows made” (v. 14).

Haman Humbled

But God had other plans. That night, unable to sleep, Ahasuerus had the annals read to him and learned about an assassination plot Mordecai had uncovered, saving the king’s life (6:1–2).

Anxious to reward Mordecai, the king asked, “Who is in the court?” In God’s providence, “Haman had just entered the outer court of the king’s palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai” (v. 4). God’s timing is always perfect!

The king asked Haman, “What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?” (v. 6). Thinking, “Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?” (v. 6), Haman made a suggestion that asked nothing for his wife, his 10 sons, or his friends. It was wholly self-centered and reminiscent of Satan’s declaration in Isaiah 14: “I will be like the Most High” (v. 14). Haman wanted to be like the king. So he told Ahasuerus,

Let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that he may array the man. . . . Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!” (Est. 6:8–9).

Pleased, Ahasuerus replied, “Hurry, . . . and do so for Mordecai the Jew” (v. 10).

Oh, the humiliation Haman was forced to endure while a 75-foot-high gallows, the equivalent of a modern five- or six-story building, stood ready for Mordecai in Haman’s backyard.

That night, at the second banquet, Esther revealed the plot against her people. Enraged, Ahasuerus demanded, “Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in

his heart to do such a thing?” (7:5).

Esther replied, “The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!” (v. 6). That, of course, was the end of Haman. Had he known Esther was Jewish, he may not have been so quick to go after the Jewish people. But God, in His wisdom, made sure Haman did not know. Esther had kept her ethnicity a secret.

Immediately, servants covered Haman’s face. When Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said Haman had built gallows on which to hang Mordecai, Ahasuerus declared, “Hang him on it!” (v. 9).

Martin, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, said the gallows “probably was an impaling stake, a common method of execution in the ancient world.”³ And it probably was tall enough for everyone in the city to see because Harbonah apparently pointed to it from the palace, saying, “Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai” (v. 9).

Although the decree to kill the Jews could not be revoked, Ahasuerus gave Mordecai the authority to countermand it by allowing the Jews to fight back. When they did, they killed all 10 of Haman’s sons (9:10). Thus ends the story of the villain Haman.

Pride is probably humanity’s biggest problem. It prevents people from seeing their need of a Savior and from accepting the truths contained in the Bible.

God hates pride (Prov. 8:13) and resists the proud (Jas. 4:6), who are wise in their own eyes and deceive themselves into trusting in their own self-worth, making it extremely difficult for them to humble themselves before a holy God. So, sadly, they miss the free gift of eternal life that God has provided for sinners who trust in Him. ★

ENDNOTES

- 1 John A. Martin, “Esther,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 705.
- 2 Frank Egleston Robbins, “The Cost to Athens of Her Second Empire,” *Classical Philology* 13, no. 4 (Oct. 1918, University of Chicago Press), 366 <[jstor.org/stable/262943](http://www.jstor.org/stable/262943)>.
- 3 Martin, 708.




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LET'S NOSH SOME HAMANTASCHEN!

BY STEVE HERZIG



*Oh, once there was a wicked, wicked man, / And Haman was his name, sir,
He would have murdered all the Jews, / Though they were not to blame, sir.
Oh today, we'll merry, merry be. / Oh today, we'll merry, merry be.
Oh today, we'll merry, merry be / And nosh some hamantaschen.*

A humorous quip describes most of Jewish history: “They tried to kill us. They failed. Let’s eat.”

Jewish people have a way of making light of tragedy because our history overflows with it. But the quip isn’t far from the truth! In Egypt, Pharaoh enslaved us, God raised up Moses to deliver us, and we ate the Passover lamb. During the intertestamental period, Antiochus Epiphanes tried to convert or kill us; and today we celebrate Hanukkah and eat doughnuts and potato *latkes* (pancakes).

Then there is Purim, which is what the little song about Haman is all about. Haman, Persian King Ahasuerus’s Jew-hating prime minister, convinced the monarch to

sign a decree “to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day” (Est. 3:13).

Queen Esther stopped him by putting her life on the line. The Jewish people were delivered; and, to this day, we eat a pastry called *hamantaschen*, a three-cornered, fruit-filled cookie said to resemble Haman’s hat.

Purim epitomizes Jewish life: unrelenting persecution, followed by miraculous preservation wrapped in the truth of God’s choice as a special people. Like Tevye the milkman in the Broadway musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, I used to wonder when I was young, *Can’t you choose someone else?*

Yet, when I think of Purim, I remember the camaraderie

and community of my family and friends, along with the fun and festivities we enjoyed together. Purim always starts with the greeting, “Happy Purim!” (in Hebrew, *Chag Purim Sameach!*) and continues with a joyful celebration that, for me, was always with my family in our *shul* (synagogue). I enjoyed listening to the whole *Megillah* (scroll of Esther) read in Hebrew.

You might ask how I endured, let alone enjoyed, the seemingly endless reading of a Bible book in a language not my own. The answer is simple. Purim was the one day a year I could wear casual clothes to *shul* and was actually encouraged to be rowdy. We all were given *groggers* (wooden or metal noise makers) to use whenever Haman’s name was read. So when I heard the villain’s name, I rose up, stomped my feet, booed, and hissed. Haman wanted to blot out the Jews; but, instead, during Purim, we blot him out.

Part of the celebration also included a “beauty contest,” based on Esther 2:2–3:

Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women’s quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king’s eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given them.

At our *shul*, all the children took part; and everyone won a prize. Most girls dressed as Queen Esther, whose brave stand for her people helped save us from Haman’s evil scheme. Some boys used their mothers’ eyebrow pencils to draw dark sideburns and etch black goatees onto their chins to become the wicked Haman.

I always dressed as Mordecai, with a robe and white beard. (I was certain Mordecai sported one.) I made the beard out of cotton balls that I glued together and then glued onto my face. Mordecai was my favorite because he refused to bow down to Haman.

And, of course, I ate lots of *hamantaschen*. Today, these pastries are available all year. Whether filled with poppy seed (my favorite) or strawberry, cherry, prune, or apricot jam or preserves, *hamantaschen* are a tasty reminder of the fate of the antisemite Haman. God never wants us to forget the evil from which He delivered us.

Purim epitomizes Jewish life: unrelenting persecution, followed by miraculous preservation wrapped in the truth of God’s choice as a special people.

Happy and festive times indeed. But it was not until I became a believer in Jesus as my Messiah and Savior that I learned the most important truth about Purim: It reveals God’s providential care over His Chosen People. Haman told King Ahasuerus,

There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people’s, and they do not keep the king’s laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. . . . Let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work (3:8–9).

We deserve death—not at the hands of men but at the hand of God. In fact, all people deserve death because we all are sinners (Eccl. 7:20). But throughout the Jewish Scriptures, God demonstrates time and again by His mighty hand and outstretched arm that His love for us endures forever (cf. Ps. 136:12; Jer. 31:3).

Haman could not eradicate the Jewish people. No one can—not Haman, not Hitler, not even Satan—because God has promised that Israel will endure forever; and He is a promise-keeping God:

Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for a light by day, the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (the LORD of hosts is His name): “If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the LORD, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.” Thus says the LORD: “If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says the LORD” (Jer. 31:35–37).

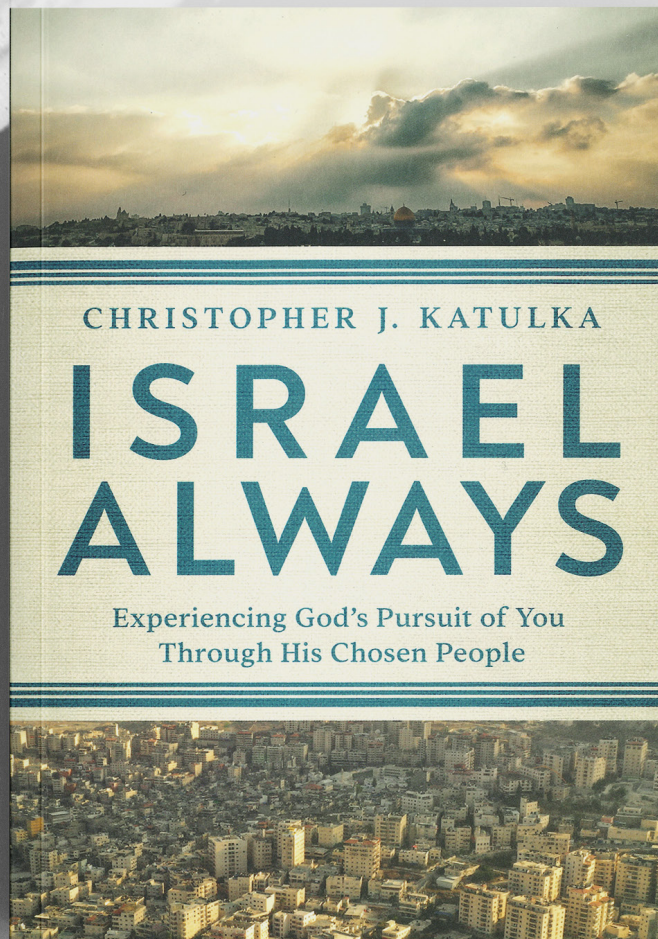
So, let’s celebrate God’s faithfulness and nosh some *hamantaschen*! ★



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ARCHAEOLOGY AND JERICO (CONCLUSION)

* Ruins of Ugarit at the Ras Shamra



➔ Previously, we looked at two of four issues (the ban and morality) that clarify God’s controversial actions in the wholesale destruction of Jericho’s inhabitants and animals. Here we discuss the final two issues that help us accept, if not fully understand, this ethical concern.

3. The Canaanites’ Wickedness. The Bible early describes the Canaanite abominations that took place in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:20; 19:4–13; Ezek. 16:49–50); and archaeology confirms the debased, pervasive state of Canaanite religion. The Ugaritic Ras Shamra Tablets reveal details of the worship of fertility deities, Asherah poles, and sacred stones.¹ At high places, the Canaanites practiced male and female shrine prostitution, child sacrifice, and serpent worship; and they used sorcery, divination, and witchcraft.

One form of child sacrifice mentioned in the Bible (Dt. 12:31; cf. 18:10; Lev. 18:21; 20:1–5) involved placing a living child into the burning arms of a statue of Molech.² The Canaanites were not innocent victims. They had been guilty of extensive, pervasive wickedness for hundreds of years (Gen. 15:16; Dt. 9:4–6); polluted the land with innocent blood (Num 35:33–34); and deserved divine punishment.

4. God’s Righteous Judgment. God is the Author of life and can take life whenever He chooses by whatever means in accordance with His greater purposes. He cannot murder because it is His right to take the life He has given. He is just because He is God (Gen. 18:25; Rom. 3:5); we are unjust because we are human (Ps. 14:1–3; Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:10–18). As such, our place is to bow humbly to His justice, not arrogantly question it (Rom. 9:14–22; 1 Pet. 4:19).³

Sometimes, as at Jericho, God’s righteous judgment involves the wholesale destruction of men, women, children, and animals. God judged this way on a global scale with the flood (Gen. 6:17; 7:21–23) and will do so again when Christ returns

to judge the nations (Rev. 19:11–15) and end this present earth (2 Pet. 3:6–7, 10–11).

Every creature will die eventually, and God has determined when human life will end (Ps. 90:10; 139:16). Military conquest was the chosen means to punish the Canaanites (Dt. 9:3; 20:17; 31:3), whose destruction God promised hundreds of years earlier (Gen. 15:16). The law of corporate solidarity means an unholy offense can doom a civilization. This was true for both the Canaanites and the Israelites (Dt. 6:13–15; 7:10).

The Canaanites deserved God’s judgment (9:4; 18:12). This was God’s righteous verdict against their sin, and it does not matter what unrighteous humans in sympathy with sin may contend. Archaeology confirms that their detestable abominations (12:31; 18:10; cf. Ps. 106:38), if left unchecked, would have compromised Israel (Lev. 18:24–29; 20:1–5).

Yet, even in judgment, God exercised mercy. He saved Rahab and her relatives. Israel’s spiritual preservation and God’s greater plan for the nation required Israel to control Canaan so it could bear witness to the nations (Gen. 12:3). Failure to remove pagan corruption potentially could have affected the fulfillment of the Messianic promise that offers salvation through Messiah to all nations.

Therefore, as in the death of the Messiah at the hands of godless men (Acts 2:23), a greater good came from what we perceive as evil; for in the Lord’s gracious plan, “All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Ras Shamra and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1962), 29–35; Mark S. Smith, trans., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry*, ed. Simon B. Parker (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), 3–4; Tilde Binger, *Asherah: Goddesses in Ugarit, Israel and the Old Testament* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).
- 2 Theresa Bane, *Encyclopedia of Demons in World Religions and Cultures* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012), 225–26. See also George C. Heider, “The Cult of Molech: A Reassessment,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 43 (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1985); John Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- 3 G. K. Beale, *The Morality of God in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 12–16.



Randall Price

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REJOICING IN CHRIST

PHILIPPIANS 1:12–20

If anyone had a reason to ask, “Why me?” it was the apostle Paul. No one who followed Christ suffered more for the gospel than he did (2 Cor. 11:22–31). Luke wrote extensively about Paul’s trials, defenses, and imprisonments in the book of Acts. Through it all, Paul continually rejoiced in Christ.

For many years, Paul had wanted to preach the gospel in Rome (Rom. 1:10, 13; 15:22–24). He was certain he would eventually do so long before he went. Some of Paul’s most effective ministry took place while imprisoned in Rome. God often fulfills our prayers much differently than we expect. Whatever Paul’s situation, he found joy knowing he was in the Lord’s will, for he rejoiced in the privilege of ministering, even as a prisoner.

PAUL’S CIRCUMSTANCES

Paul wrote, “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ” (Phil. 1:12–13).

Paul called the Philippian believers “brethren” because they were closely involved with his ministry in prayer and support. He wanted to update them on his condition since they knew he was taken to Rome as a prisoner. Even though he was chained to a Roman guard, he was following God’s will.

Paul’s ministry was in no way hindered while he was in prison. In fact, “the things which happened to [Paul had] actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel” (v. 12). Rather than dwelling on his suffering in prison, he pointed out that what seemed like a setback in his ministry turned out to be for the “furtherance,” or advancement, of the gospel. What seemed like a tragedy was God’s will for Paul, which opened the door for him to reach Gentiles and Jewish people

in Rome. Thus, the apostle wanted the Philippians to rejoice with him over the advancement of the gospel and not to mourn over his confinement.

Paul explained “that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ” (v. 13). As a prisoner in Rome, he preached the gospel not only to the palace guard but to many others also. Paul received all who came to him for two years in his own rented house, thus unhindered in his ministry (Acts 28:30–31). God gave Paul this opportunity to reach the palace guard and even Caesar’s court. Some of the soldiers who were assigned to guard Paul received Christ and most likely became missionaries later in life.

Paul’s prison ministry empowered other Christians. He wrote, “And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Phil. 1:14). Most who knew of Paul’s imprisonment were initially timid in revealing their commitment to Christ for fear of arrest, imprisonment, and even death. But Paul’s faithfulness and boldness to preach Christ while in custody prompted these fainthearted Christians to become bold witnesses to share the gospel and salvation through Christ in Rome and Philippi.

PREACHING WITH CONTENTION

Those who were emboldened to preach God’s Word fell into two groups. “Some indeed preach Christ even from [because of] envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel” (vv. 15–17).

The former group preached God’s Word with “envy and strife.” The word *envy* means they harbored ill will or jealousy against Paul because they did not possess his gifts and boldness. Their jealousy led to “strife,” or contention coupled with conflict or rivalry, seeking to harm Paul’s reputation and ministry. They did not preach “sincerely,” meaning purely or honestly.

Paul said their reason was “to add affliction to my chains” (v. 16). These preachers hoped to add misery and division to Paul’s ministry and turn Christians away from him so they could advance themselves at Paul’s expense. He did not mention what these men preached or how they acted.

Sadly, contention and rivalry often exist among ministers and ministries. Some even try to destroy the name and reputation of other leaders’ work or organizations to promote their own careers.

The latter group preached Christ out of “goodwill” (v. 15, cf. v. 17)—that is, out of appreciation for Paul, especially when he was in prison. They knew he was not in prison due to criminal behavior but for faithfully proclaiming and defending the gospel of Christ.

BUT PAUL'S FAITHFULNESS AND BOLDNESS TO PREACH CHRIST WHILE IN CUSTODY PROMPTED THESE FAINTHEARTED CHRISTIANS TO BECOME BOLD WITNESSES TO SHARE THE GOSPEL AND SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST IN ROME AND PHILIPPI.

Paul said this group preached not only out of goodwill but “out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel” (v. 17). These men were active because of their goodwill toward Paul and their deep love for him and his work.

Notice the motives of these two groups. The first group preached with contention, a divisive spirit of envy and strife, trying to destroy Paul's name and reputation. The second group preached out of love to win souls to Christ.

The word *appointed* (v. 17) describes a soldier acting as a sentry assigned to guard a person or area. Paul's analogy was appropriate since a guard was always appointed over him during his imprisonment.

The men knew God had appointed Paul “for the defense of the gospel” (v. 17). The word *defense* (Greek, *apologia*) is a judicial term from which we get the word *apologetics*. Paul was in the custody of Rome because he was predestined to defend himself and the gospel before Caesar (Acts 25:11).

Paul concluded, “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice” (Phil. 1:18).

What did Paul think of the two groups? The contentious group was not preaching false doctrine because he did not make mention of their error or reject their preaching. But he did not accept their motive for preaching, and neither would God. They were preaching with a “pretense” or “pretext,” meaning they preached hypocritically. Their preaching was not to glorify Christ or to win people to the Lord but to personally degrade Paul and his ministry and elevate their own. Although Paul rejected their motive and method of preaching, he did not show resentment, jealousy, or animosity.

The second group preached purely because they preached out of “truth” (v. 18). Their motive was to exalt and glorify Christ and see souls won to the Lord. Thus, he said, “Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice” (v. 18).

Paul's joy was not dependent on his freedom or the actions of others. He continually rejoiced because Christ was preached all over Rome, Philippi, and wherever Christians went.

PAUL'S CONFIDENCE

Although confined by Rome and awaiting trial, Paul was confident of his deliverance: “For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (v. 19).

Paul knew, or understood intuitively with conviction and confidence, that through his imprisonment the gospel of Christ was being more widely proclaimed. He also knew God would work out his suffering for his “deliverance.” The word *deliverance* (Greek, *soteria*) can be translated “salvation”—not from sin in this instance but from prison (vv. 24–25).

The Holy Spirit helped Paul remain joyful and committed in persecution. Paul wrote, “According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (v. 20).

Paul was confident that at his trial, whether he would be released from prison or condemned to die, he would look for that day with “earnest expectation and hope,” or great confidence in the Lord. Whatever the Lord's will was, Paul would not be “ashamed” (put to shame or disgraced). He would face his situation “with all boldness,” full of joy, freedom of speech, fearless confidence, and assurance in Christ.

Above all, Paul knew whether he lived or died, Christ would be exalted and glorified in his own body. He was prepared, filled with joy and expectation no matter what the Lord had planned for him. Whatever happened to Paul, his one concern was that Christ be magnified by his life. May this also be our joy as believers in Christ!



by David M. Levy,
media resource specialist and a Bible teacher
for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry

HOW DO YOU SPELL “LOVE”?

BY BECKY MEISSNER

The “Joy” ship—what a misnomer! I thought. I had reluctantly returned to my unfittingly named Norwegian cruise ship, wishing my three-hour Mexican beach excursion could have lasted a little longer, knowing what awaited me back on board. I had reached the halfway point in the weeklong cruise and managed to keep my elderly companion, Rosie, alive. Keeping her happy was another story.

A few weeks earlier, I had met with Rosie and her daughter to discuss my role as Rosie’s cabinmate during their family cruise to Mexico. Apparently, nobody wanted to room with Rosie. But because she had severely impaired vision and hearing, they wanted someone in her room all night in case she fell or needed help. I happily agreed to accompany my friend and began planning.

Since Rosie and I had attended Bible study together, I knew she was burdened for her family to know Jesus. She had come to accept Jesus as her Savior only a few years prior; and now she wanted her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren to know Him too. I knew this was a great opportunity to show them Christ’s life-transforming love, but I didn’t realize just how hard it would be.

I thought of Jesus’ focused, intentional parting words to His disciples in the upper room: “These things I command you, that you love one another” (Jn. 15:17). Simple, right? Just love. But that’s easier said than done. People don’t naturally give up their comfort, status, time, and resources to help others. But to be a true disciple of Christ, we are called to

take up our cross, die to self, and follow His example in love.

The week of the Joy cruise also happened to be Thanksgiving week, so I decided to settle in the book of Philippians for my personal devotional time. I found truths in this joy-themed prison epistle that anchored my love through stormy waters. To this day, I am still learning to spell love as T-I-M-E: thankfulness, intentionality, meekness, eternity. Here are the lessons I learned and lived out from Philippians that week on the cruise.

THANKFULNESS

Rosie really struggled on the trip. It started with an accidental overdose of medication and a stolen wheelchair—and we hadn’t even boarded the ship yet. The cruise went

from bad to worse as Rosie’s expectations of a happy, thankful family vacation in a clean, luxurious ship were dashed with an outbreak of norovirus and a host of family disputes and complaints.

I noticed Rosie’s family began to avoid her and exclude her from their plans. I tried to encourage her and take her to some of the special events on board. Her visual and hearing impairments made her feel even more disconnected. She began to snap and lose patience with herself and others.

Not knowing what else to do, I thanked God for Rosie. I thanked God for her life. I thanked God for saving her in her twilight years. I thanked God that Rosie trusted me to share His love with her family. The more I thanked God, the more He filled my heart with love.

INTENTIONALITY

Little things can magnify Christ in our lives, like acts of obedience to the Spirit and death to self each day. Like the apostle Paul, in order to live Christ wherever I may find myself, I must be intentional about living and sharing the gospel.

I kept reminding myself that Rosie's family did not have the power of the Holy Spirit to help them. They didn't have the hope of the gospel.

One evening, Rosie's son-in-law asked me what I believe. Totally caught off-guard, I gave a tired, short, cliché reply. Later that night, I lay awake and mentally kicked myself for missing such a golden opportunity to share how the gospel had changed my life personally. I prayed and asked God for another chance.

The next day, I ran into Rosie's son-in-law by the pool, and he asked me about my position as a representative with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry. More important than explaining *what* I do, I was ready and able to share *why* I do what I do. God had answered my prayer and given me another chance to share the hope of the gospel.

MEEKNESS

I got the feeling I was more excited to meet Amarillo than Amarillo was to meet me. I had been on the ship for three days, and I was ready to feel the firm ground beneath my feet once again. I picked a shore excursion that included a horseback ride on the beach.

I don't know much about horses, but it seems to me that there are "broken" (tame) horses and "really broken" horses. Amarillo seemed to be the latter. The tourists lined up on their horses, and the lead horse began walking toward the

God to give me the mind of Christ and a love that puts the interests of others above my own. The Holy Spirit enabled me to bite my tongue and follow my Master, the Suffering Servant.

ETERNITY

Though it seemed like the longest week of my life, that week was a blip on the screen of eternity. It was a brief window of opportunity to love Rosie and her family with the love only God supplies.

Two years later, I stood by Rosie's deathbed. I had not seen much of her or her family since the cruise. I took her hand and announced my presence in her good ear. She looked at me, though I knew her vision was almost completely gone. Everything took much effort for her as the strength was leaving her body. I prayed with her and spoke directly into her ear. After I finished praying, Rosie began fidgeting uncomfortably. With great effort, she forced out the words that shine in my heart to this day: "I love you."

Like a life raft, keeping the big picture in mind enables our love-inflated hearts to float above the waves of these temporary tempests. One day, every knee will bow; and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. One day, the process of sanctification will be complete in us; and we will finally be like Him. One day, there will be no more struggle against sin because sin will be no more. But for now, I am reminded that God is still working on me in the midst of the storm.

More important than explaining *what* I do, I was ready and able to share *why* I do what I do. God had answered my prayer and given me another chance to share the hope of the gospel.

beach. Each of the horses followed with his head down in habitual obedience to the leader. I'm not sure what Amarillo would have done if I had pulled the reins, given him a kick, and tried to ride him away from his owner and routine trail. Amarillo knew his master, and he knew what his master expected from him. His strength was submitted to the will of his master, and that made him useful.

Meekness is submissive strength. Humility. Self-control. I desperately needed these in order to rein in my fleshly responses to Rosie and her family that week and respond with the love of the Spirit. Between getting hit with a dinner roll by a frustrated Rosie and enduring hours of complaints and arguments, my flesh wavered between wanting to shout at Rosie and her family, "You're ruining my Thanksgiving!" and wanting to throw myself overboard.

Thankfully, the Holy Spirit reminded me of Christ's example. He humbled Himself in obedience to the Father's will. I asked

I still have a long way to go in this sanctification process; but God is showing me how He faithfully washes away our pride and selfishness so that we, as His people, may shine His love like a lighthouse on a dark and dangerous coastline. As the church, we are called to shine as lights in the world, "holding fast the word of life" (v. 16).

While I regret not loving Rosie and her family better on the Joy cruise, I did learn something invaluable that week. I learned how to spell love: T-I-M-E.



Becky Meissner

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DON'T GET TOO COMFORTABLE!

If we knew years ago what the world would look like today, we probably wouldn't have signed up for what we face now. We've endured many issues recently that have pushed us away from one another and increasingly secluded us.

Now, three years since the COVID-19 pandemic began, we have a better picture of how the virus has changed the world. As expected, we're less social than before; and though the virus forced us to develop creative solutions for operating remotely, it also took its toll on the bride of Christ: the church.

A study by Lifeway Research reveals a sharp rise in the belief that meeting together with believers is not terribly important. While 58 percent of Americans in March 2020 considered worshipping alone or with one's household a valid replacement for regularly attending church, more than 66 percent feel that way now. Only 36 percent of respondents said they believe Christians should join a local church.

A 2021 Gallup poll showed that church membership among U.S. adults, which has been declining steeply since 2000, has fallen below 50 percent for the first time since polling began in 1937. So, while decreased church attendance can largely be attributed to the two-decade trend of sinking church membership, the pandemic certainly didn't help.

Ironically, the very tools churches used to continue effective ministry during the height of COVID-19 have become the excuses people use to disengage from church activities. Though livestreaming services bridged the gap between weeks of lockdowns and the ability to worship together in person again, they accustomed churchgoers to the ease of at-home worship. If you can watch a church service from bed in your pajamas, why bother gathering with other believers?

Now, too many congregants are content to sit on the sidelines instead of jumping back into the action. But they fail to realize, or at least act upon the fact, that God-honoring worship services don't materialize on their own. They require a dedicated effort from many people within the body of Christ because "the body is not one member but many" (1 Cor. 12:14); and those many members need to cooperate, both to edify other members and to draw unbelievers to know the Lord so they can find eternal life in Him.

If our goal is merely to attend Sunday morning services, then staying home is fine. But that should not be our goal. We need not only to hear God's Word on Sundays but to engage with it and with others and to put the lessons we learn into



practice as we interact with the world around us and the community of believers in our local churches.

Hebrews 10:24–25, a familiar passage, teaches us how we should act:

Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Loving the Lord is not a passive pastime. It should lead to action that honors Him. And it should be our pleasure to fellowship with other believers, exhorting one another and worshipping the Lord together.

The world constantly changes. Society changes, and our responses to its challenges and trends change too. But God never changes, and neither does His Word. Though we live in this world, we are not of it; and our faithfulness to biblical teaching should not fluctuate the way our surroundings do.

We should be committed to worshipping together and living out God's Word both publicly and privately. When we do, we find greater joy in loving the church as God loves it than in watching church from the comfort of the couch.



Jesse King

is the senior editor of *Israel My Glory* magazine and a staff writer for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

“I came away from Encounter with a burning in my soul to minister to the Jewish people in my area.”

—JULIE



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*
Zvi Kalisher

PHOTO: THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL ARCHIVES

“When I showed them my Bible, they saw I was not reading made-up stories but that which was written by the Holy Spirit of God.

by Zvi Kalisher

It is written in Jeremiah 6:14, “Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace.” It is also written, “I will give you assured peace in this place” (14:13).

We hope here in Israel that we will have peace, but we found none from Yasser Arafat when he led the Palestinian National Authority. He was cruel like a wolf. After he died, Mahmoud Abbas took his place. People were confident that he would be kinder and more humane, but he was another wolf in sheep’s clothing.

This does not surprise me. Where there is no true faith in the Lord, there is hate. But many Arabs in my neighborhood come to me to show me they are friendly. Recently, several of them spoke with me; and one asked me, “What do you think? Will we have peace or not?”

“If we only trust in men who just want to show their strength, we will not find peace,” I said. “Peace can only be found when we put our trust in the Lord. It is written in Isaiah 48:22, “There is no peace,” says the LORD, “for the wicked.””

One of our Arab neighbors asked, “How can you say that?”

“I am 75 years old,” I said. “In those

75 years, how many times have your leaders signed their names for peace, only for nothing to happen? It is written in Deuteronomy 19:15, ‘By the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.’ But what have you done? When you look around, you cannot find peace. Why? Because you have trusted in men who are far from the truth that is found only in the Lord Himself.

“You are our neighbors. And what is written in Exodus 20:16? ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.’ I have lived with you in this neighborhood for 30 years and have never had a true friend among you. Why? Only

“Where there is no true faith in the Lord, there is hate.

because none of you have faith in the Lord.”

They asked me how I could be so confident. “There are one and a half billion of us, and there are

56 Muslim countries,” one said. “But it is hard to find Israel on a map, even with a telescope! How long do you think you will still be on the map?”

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

“Remember how God destroyed the Egyptians in Exodus 14,” I said. “The Jewish people are still here because the Lord has delivered us again in our own time. I am sure of this because I was a soldier fighting in wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. This is no story but the truth. The Lord’s Word is eternal, as it is written in Psalm 119:89.”

They became more and more interested as I spoke with them. When I showed them my Bible, they saw I was not reading made-up stories but that which was written by the Holy Spirit of God.

Later, they approached me when different situations arose to ask what my Bible had to say. I told them, “This Bible can also be yours because the Lord does not belong to just one nationality or one group of people.”

I read John 3:16 for them: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

“You see,” I said, “this does not say God is only for Arabs or Jews. God laid on His Son the iniquity of us all. Only through Him can we find peace. Will you receive Him as your Savior?”

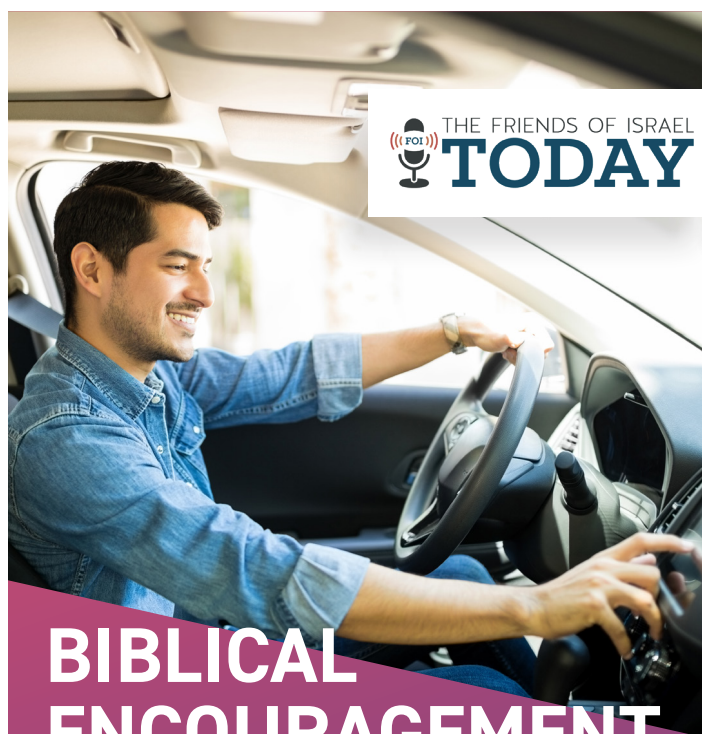
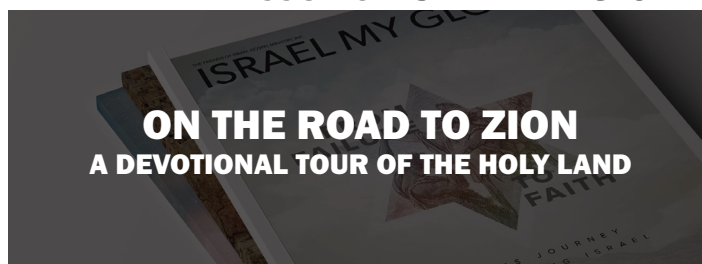
One of them asked me if he could have a copy of the Bible for himself. I gave him one gladly. It was my duty to bring His salvation to the ends of the earth. Here in Israel, we have people who have come from the ends of the earth! We pray the Lord will save them and fill them with His Holy Spirit.

From The Friends of Israel archives



Zvi Kalisher (1928–2014) was a Holocaust survivor who was known for his unswerving faithfulness to the Lord and his bold witness in Jerusalem. He was with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry for more than 55 years.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF **ISRAEL MY GLORY**



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