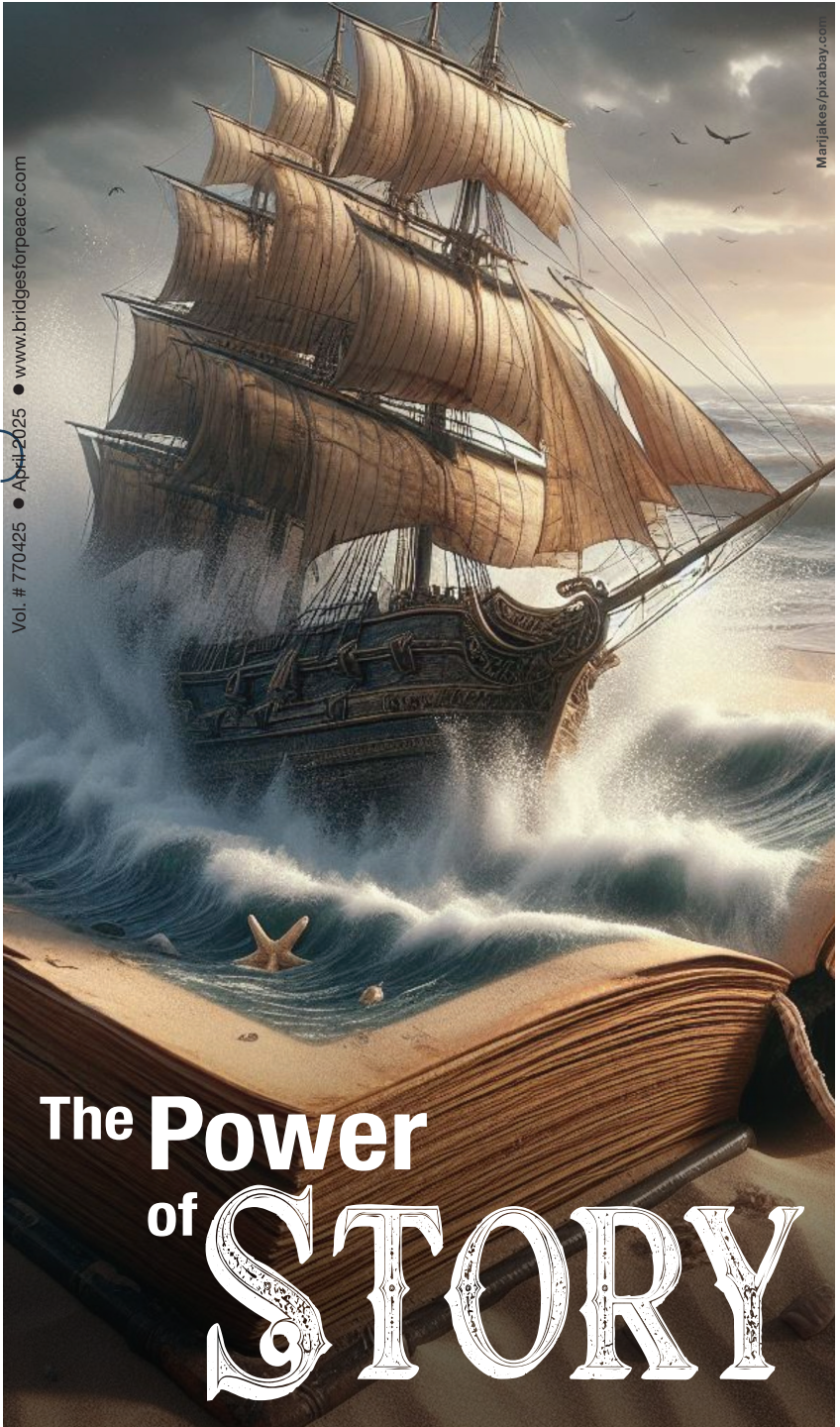


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The Power of STORY

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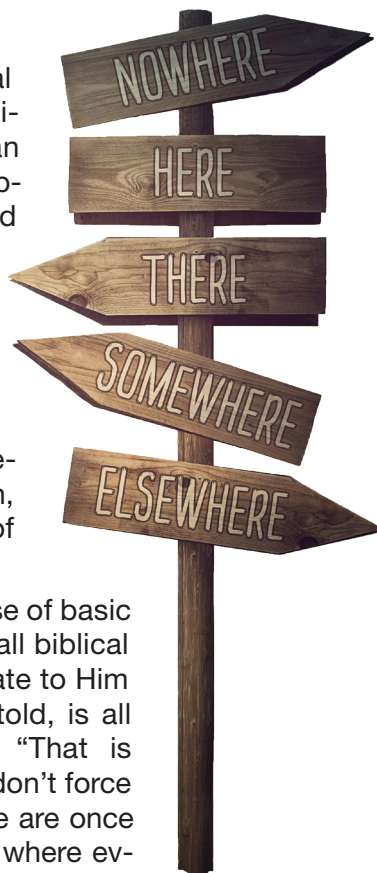
HOW HAS YOUR PERSONAL STORY shaped who you are and what you believe? It may be a more significant factor than you realize. When you are aware of the story and it is positive, we often take for granted the strength that our narrative provides for our lives. This is true for individuals as well as societies.

THE STORY ABANDONED

Have you ever felt lost...not in a physical way, but in regard to your life purpose and direction? If so, you are not alone. We live in an age where the core values and beliefs that upheld societies for generations are being stripped away, often at frightening speed. This leads to a sense of anomie or normlessness. Wikipedia describes normlessness as “a social condition defined by an uprooting or breakdown of any moral values, standards or guidance for individuals to follow,” while the online *Merriam-Webster* dictionary defines anomie as “personal unrest, alienation, and uncertainty that comes from a lack of purpose or ideals.”

By and large, societies have lost any sense of basic human decency or what Christians would call biblical values ordained by the Creator. How we relate to Him and the way that we treat others, we are told, is all relative or subjective. “That is right for you, fine, but don’t force it on me,” we hear. We are once again living in an age where everyone seems to be doing what is right in his or her own eyes (Judg. 17:6 and 21:5). It didn’t work out well for the Israelites in the time of the judges, and it will not bode well in our generation.

The prophet Isaiah gave a strong warning against the excesses taking place in his day when he said, “Woe to those



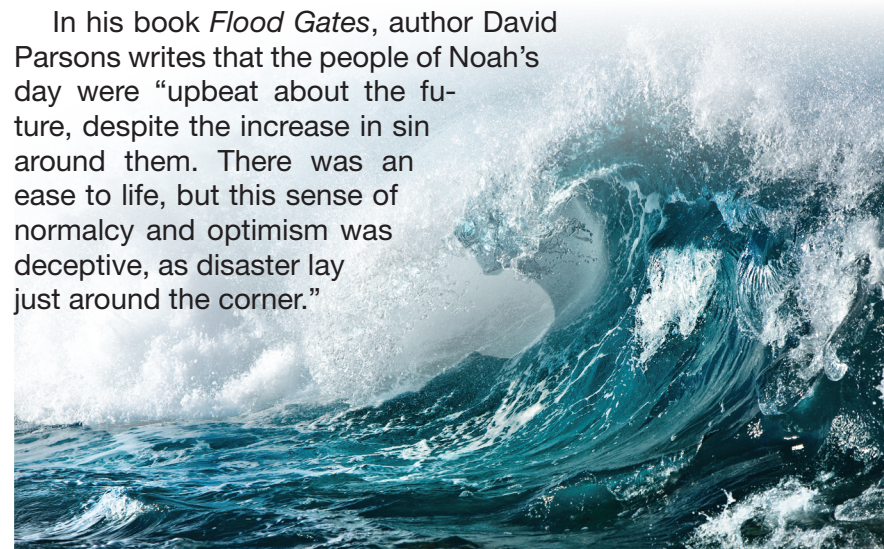
who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (Isa. 5:20–21).

God, the Sovereign Creator of the universe, gave mankind principles for how to live a good life and build strong, just societies. When an individual or society spurns these universal principles, God’s heart is grieved and He must bring punishment as a means of correction.

THE FLOOD

Our world today mirrors Noah’s time in the days before the flood. Jesus (Yeshua) referred to that time when describing what it will be like at the end of the age. *“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be”* (Matt. 24:37–39). Genesis 6:5–7 gives us a glimpse of God’s heart, *“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.”*

In his book *Flood Gates*, author David Parsons writes that the people of Noah’s day were “upbeat about the future, despite the increase in sin around them. There was an ease to life, but this sense of normalcy and optimism was deceptive, as disaster lay just around the corner.”



The author continues with this reflection on our day. “Many Christians today sense that we are living in similar times; the world is far too upbeat about the future in light of the serious global threats we face and our steady moral decay. Thanks to militant secularism, multi-culturalism, and other factors, many people no longer believe that there are moral absolutes.”

Indeed, many are calling good evil and evil good.

EMBRACING THE STORY

But all is not doom and gloom! As people of faith, we have a firm foundation and godly heritage. The prophet Jeremiah admonished the people of his day, *“This is what the LORD says: ‘Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find a resting place for your souls.’ But they said, ‘We will not walk in it’”* (Jer. 6:16 NASB).

We are blessed to have a biblical heritage that has proven over the centuries to be a godly foundation for individuals, families and societies. We choose not to “walk in it” at our own peril. Sadly, many today—even those who grew up in the Church—have lost a strong connection to God’s ancient paths. Biblical literacy is rapidly declining and the influence of the world is pervasive. How can we ensure that there will be a firm foundation for our individual lives, our families and our faith communities? The answer is simple: develop a family narrative.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks cites the conclusion of Bruce Feiler’s book, *The Secrets of Happy Families*, to expound on this idea. “The single most important thing you can do for your family may be the simplest of all: develop a strong family narrative.”

Rabbi Sacks quotes a study which found that “the more children know about their family’s story,

the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem, the more successful they believe their family functions.”

Sacks continues, “A family narrative connects children to something larger than themselves. It helps them make sense of how they fit into the world that existed before they were born. It gives them the starting point of an identity. That in turn becomes the basis of confidence. It enables children to say: ‘This is who I am. This is the story of which I am a part. These are the people who came before me and whose descendant I am. These are the roots of which I am the stem reaching upward toward the sun.’”

The Jewish people have proven this fact about the power of family narrative to be true time and time again. Over the centuries, they were dispersed among many other cultures that spurned God’s values. But they found numerous ways to ground themselves and their children in the powerful, biblical narrative that God gave their family as His Chosen People.

THE EXODUS

Take the Exodus from Egyptian slavery as an example. It is the foundation of the Jewish people’s narrative, the time when they became a nation if you will. This defining event is reinforced seemingly at every turn in Jewish culture. For instance, observant Jewish people read the “Song of Moses at the Seashore” every morning in their prayers. And each year at Passover during the seder meal, children are a key focus. Indeed, one of the main purposes of the Passover holiday is to teach the children. They are mentioned three times in the Exodus narrative.

“And when your children say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ ‘then you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD because He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians, but spared our homes.’” And the people bowed low and worshiped” (Exod. 12:26–27).



“And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt’” (Exod. 13:8).

“And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ then you shall say to him, ‘With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery’” (Exod. 13:14).

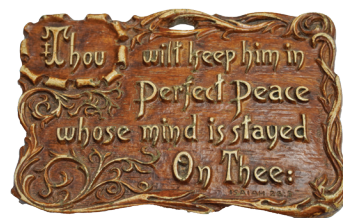
During the *seder* meal, children traditionally ask four questions about why specific foods are eaten and certain customs are observed. Near the end of the meal, all the children go on a frantic search for the *afikomen*, the piece of *matzah* or unleavened bread that was broken and hidden away earlier during the meal. The child who finds the *afikomen* receives a special prize. Many families also recite the tradition of four types of sons: the Wise Son, the Wicked Son, the Simple One and the One Who Doesn’t Know How to Ask. Families find fun and creative ways to engage the children and make the Passover *seder* meal a memorable learning experience.

WHAT IS YOUR STORY?

Deuteronomy 6:4–8, known as the *Shema*, is the foundational text of the Jewish people. *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.”*

As Christians, we know verse 5 as the Great Commandment according to Jesus (Matt. 22:37). But for Jewish people, the *Shema*, *“Hear, O Israel...”* always includes the rest of the passage about teaching one’s children. In order to keep awareness of the Bible constant, observant Jewish people place *mezuzot* (plural for Scripture boxes affixed to a doorway) on the doorframes, both external

and internal, of their homes. These small receptacles contain both the *Shema* and its corresponding text from Deuteronomy 11:13–21. When moving between individual rooms or entering the house itself, Jewish people reverently touch the *mezuzah*.



Terry's grandmother's plaque

In many Christian homes, we find ways to remember the centrality of God’s Word. I remember a plaque in my grandmother’s bedroom that contained the text of Isaiah 26:3, *“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.”* This verse has always stayed with me.

Some families stencil a favorite Scripture on a wall of their home so that it will always be before their eyes. We have used Proverbs 3:5–6 in our home, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”*

My brother’s family chose the Fruit of the Spirit to display around the top of their kitchen and dining area: *“...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”* (Gal. 5:22–23 NASB).

What are some ways that you could more intentionally reinforce your connection to God and our biblical heritage? How could you creatively bring the Word of God into your daily routine?

As Christians, we believe that by faith we are spiritual children of Abraham (Gal. 3:7–8). *“And if you belong to Christ [Messiah], then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise”* (Gal. 3:29 NASB).

We are grafted into the Olive Tree of Israel by grace, through faith; wild olive shoots, as it were, who are joined to the narrative of God’s Chosen People (Rom. 9–11). We do not become Jewish, neither do we replace the Jewish people in God’s plan. But the apostle Paul teaches that by grace, as we believe in Jesus, we become part of the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2). Citizens of a commonwealth retain their own identity and citizenship in various countries, but they see themselves as part of a greater narrative. Many retain a connection to the culture, learning and values of the alliance of nations to which they belong.



STRENGTH TO PRESS ON: REDISCOVER YOUR BIBLICAL HERITAGE

Are you well versed in your personal family story? Do you perhaps need to refresh your knowledge of the biblical heritage from which your faith narrative springs? Celebrate your family and faith stories, and let them strengthen you as you press on. Your light can help to bring a focus back to the foundational biblical truths that this world desperately needs in these darkening days.



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TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God's chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah*, *Nevi'im* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)

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