

# Peace Pact in the Middle East

Sunday, September 27, 2020 --- from 9:00-9:45am

## Hybrid Class

**In Person:** First Floor Social Hall (Mask & Social Distancing)

or

**Zoom:** Meeting ID: 860 8980 7220 Passcode: 195152

Dear Class Member,

Earlier this month, Israel signed diplomatic pacts with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, the first such agreements since Israel's peace accord with Egypt in 1978 and with Jordan in 1994. Neither of the new deals ends the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which many believe is the greatest obstacle to peace in the Middle East, but both appear to be steps in the right direction.

This news gives us an opportunity to think about what the Bible says regarding doing what is possible, even when larger goals elude us. So that will be the topic of our next class.

During this time of social distancing to control the spread of the virus, *The Wired Word* is including in the TWW student version the full lesson, with all the biblical commentary and additional discussion suggestions normally available only in the teacher's version.

### How To Participate:

We are offering The Wired Word as a hybrid class. You can participate in person or via Zoom. The Wired Word will be from 9:00am-9:45am on Sunday mornings. For those meeting in person, we will be in the old social hall of the church building (located on the first floor). If participating in person, please come with a mask and follow the COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for Sunday School: <http://www.sprucc.org/news-a-events/news.html#COVID19Precautions>

You can also participate in the Wired Word virtually by Zoom on your computer or smart device at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86089807220?pwd=eStWa0ZZK0hOTVdwU0pjZlMrdk5ydz09>

or by telephone by calling: 1-301-715-8592 US (Germantown, PA)

Meeting ID: 860 8980 7220

Passcode: 195152

To subscribe or unsubscribe to the weekly mailing of The Wired Word student handout, please contact the church office at [Office@sprucc.org](mailto:Office@sprucc.org).



## Israel Signs Pacts With Two Arab Countries

*The Wired Word* for the Week of September 27, 2020

**In the News**

September 15 saw a ceremony at the White House at which diplomatic pacts called the Abraham Accords were signed between Israel and two Gulf Arab states: the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain. President Donald Trump, who hosted the event and whose advisers helped to negotiate the deals, called the signings "the dawn of a new Middle East." His opponent in the upcoming election, Joe Biden, also praised the accords.

While some observers question how a "new" Middle East can happen without a settlement of the long-running conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, which the Abraham Accords do not address, others note that the pacts cast aside traditional thinking that no regional breakthrough was possible until the Israel-Palestine strife had been solved.

The accords were named for Abraham, the patriarch of the world's three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

*The Washington Post* noted that the agreements are in line with the opposition to Iran, which is common in all three signing countries, as well as in the United States.

Frederick Kempe, president of the Atlantic Council, a think tank on global affairs, who worked at *The Wall Street Journal* for more than 25 years as a foreign correspondent, said that hurdles remain. "Even now, it would be naïve to ignore the impediments: historic distrust, religious intolerance and intractable conflicts of the sort unfolding in Libya." But Kempe added, "I've also sensed something more promising in the air in recent trips to the Middle East, particularly among the young: a frustration with the status quo, a hunger for a better future and an impatience for change."

The agreement between Israel, which has promised to suspend annexation of the West Bank, and the UAE is officially titled as Abraham Accords Peace Agreement: Treaty of Peace, Diplomatic Relations and Full Normalization Between the United Arab Emirates and the State of Israel. It includes bilateral arrangements on 15 areas of mutual agreement, including finance, trade, aviation, energy, telecommunication, health, agriculture and water.

Israel's agreement with Bahrain is titled Abraham Accords: Declaration of Peace, Cooperation and Constructive Diplomatic and Friendly Relations. That agreement is not as detailed as the one with the UAE, but it does pledge to promote diplomacy, mutual cooperation and regional peace.

Until now, the only peace deals Israel has had with Arab countries are with Egypt and Jordan.

Palestinian leaders, who have long called for the elimination of Israel and its replacement by an Arab state which they lead, consider the accords a stab in the back from fellow Arabs and a betrayal of their cause for a Palestinian state.

The pending agreement between Israel and the UAE was the first of the accords to be announced, and at that time, the Palestinians appealed to the Arab League to condemn the deal since Israel has not agreed to their demands. The League, however, declined to do so.

"Once again, Arab leaders are signaling to the Palestinians that they have grown tired of what they see as Palestinian rejectionism and obduracy," said Jeffrey Goldberg, editor in chief of *The Atlantic*, adding that those leaders "would very much like to be partners with Israel in high-tech development and in the fight against Iran."

In his remarks following the signings, UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who signed the accord for his country, thanked Israel's leader Benjamin Netanyahu for "halting the annexation of the West Bank" -- land claimed by the Palestinians. And Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif al-Zayani, said his country would stand by the Palestinians.

While it is too early to know what positive development the accords might trigger in the Middle East, Israel and the United States hope that other Arab nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, would also normalize relations with Israel.

There have long been rumors that Saudi Arabia is already cooperating in the area of military intelligence concerning their common enemy, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

At this time, other countries believed to be close to recognizing Israel include Oman, Sudan and Morocco.

Perhaps there will be a new Middle East.

More on this story can be found at these links:

Israel Signs Pacts With 2 Arab States: A 'New' Mideast? *The Washington Post*

([https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-to-preside-over-historic-arab-israel-recognition-deals/2020/09/15/51617b6c-f70e-11ea-85f7-5941188a98cd\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-to-preside-over-historic-arab-israel-recognition-deals/2020/09/15/51617b6c-f70e-11ea-85f7-5941188a98cd_story.html))

READ: Full Text of the Abraham Accords and Agreements Between Israel and the United Arab Emirates/Bahrain. *CNN* (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/15/politics/israel-uae-abraham-accords-documents/index.html>)

Op-Ed: UAE-Bahrain Deals With Israel Offer Chance at a 'Warm Peace,' Economic Growth and a Moderate Mideast Alliance. *CNBC*

(<https://www.cnbcm.com/2020/09/20/op-ed-uae-bahrain-israel-deals-offer-chance-at-peace-.html>)The Abraham Accords: Who Benefits? *Defense One* (<https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2020/09/abraham-accords-who-benefits/168509/>)

Palestinians Worry About the Impact of the Abraham Accords. They Say It's Time to Elect New Leaders. *The World* (<https://www.pri.org/stories/2020-09-16/palestinians-worry-about-impact-abraham-accords-they-say-its-time-elect-new>)

## **Applying the News Story**

We know of no Bible verse that commands, "Do what is possible." In fact, when the Bible uses the word possible, it is sometimes to contrast what God can do versus what human beings *cannot* do, such as in Luke 18:27, where Jesus said, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

Nonetheless, there is an undercurrent theme in scripture advocating and praising effort, diligence, perseverance and "bearing fruit," which points us toward doing what is possible in the realm of good works, healing, peacemaking and other virtuous undertakings.

And then there is this advice from St. Francis of Assisi (A.D. 1181-1226): "Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

Most observers of the Middle East would likely agree that the biggest step toward peace in the region would be to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, but many skillful, well-intentioned diplomats and others have tried, and so far, those efforts have not achieved the goal. The Abraham Accords, however,

ignored that area, and instead focused on how an accord could benefit those nations involved, both in security and in the economy. With the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and of the annexation of the Golan Heights, those issues were no longer on the table, and focus shifted to other possible steps.

There is nothing inherently unchristian about doing what is possible even when a bigger goal is beyond reach. So this lesson gives us an opportunity to think about when doing the necessary and then the possible may be God's way of opening the doors marked "Impossible."

### **The Big Questions**

1. When, in the face of the impossibility of accomplishing what you'd liked to have done, have you put your energy instead into doing what seemed possible toward that goal? What was the outcome?
2. When is "I'll do what I can" the right response? When is it a self-limiting excuse?
3. How does doing what is possible fit into your philosophy of life? into your faith?
4. What is waiting for a start in your life? Is there anything about which you even wonder if it could be God giving you a nudge?
5. What is waiting for you to finish? How might your decision about that be driven by what is possible for you now? How might God be in that decision?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **Ezra 3:8**

*In the second year after their arrival at the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their people ... (For context, read 3:8-13.)*

The book of Ezra covers the time when the people of Judah, after having spent decades in captivity in Babylon, are being allowed to return to their homeland. And so, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, a grandson of Judah's last king, and a priest named Jeshua, some of the people go back. What they find when they get to Judah, however, is disheartening. The city of Jerusalem lies in ruins, the once glorious temple built by Solomon is destroyed, and other peoples have taken over a lot of the land and the towns that had belonged to the ancestors of these returnees. What the present generation sees is nothing like the glory of the place their grandparents and parents had told them about.

Nonetheless, Zerubbabel and Jeshua set up an altar on the site of the previous one, and began the worship of God through sacrifices. A year goes by during which the people begin to get established. But eventually, Zerubbabel and Jeshua decide the time has come to get the construction started on the temple. The Bible has this significant line: "Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak made a beginning ..."

"Made a beginning." In those three words is the secret to most of what gets accomplished in life, in the church, in our faith. We need to make a start, take the first step, turn the first shovelful, sketch a quick plan ... something. In the case of Zerubbabel and the people under his leadership, it was laying the foundations of the temple.

**Questions:** When have you made a beginning which eventually led to an improved situation for those concerned? From where did the vision come that prompted you to start? Did you sense that God was involved in your decision to begin?

### **Galatians 6:9**

*So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.* (For context, read 6:6-10.)

This verse might be thought of as calling for the next ingredient after making a beginning, and that ingredient is perseverance.

**Question:** Where in your endeavors do you need to apply this verse afresh?

### **Mark 14:8**

*She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial.* (For context, read 14:3-9.)

This is part of what Jesus said in defense of the woman who intruded into the house of Simon the Leper, where Jesus was a guest, and anointed his head with costly ointment. She was soundly criticized by some of the others at the table for the extravagant "waste" of the ointment. But in her defense, Jesus, knowing he was soon to die, said, "She has done what she could ...," suggesting that she had accomplished what was possible.

Being a woman in a patriarchal culture, she didn't have many options -- she wasn't even invited into the room -- but something drove her to want to see Jesus and express the value he represented for her. And so she did what she could, what was possible. And Jesus said she had performed a "good service" or as another Bible version has it, "a beautiful thing" for him (v. 6).

**Questions:** How does this woman's action toward Jesus strike you: thoughtful but misguided, tasteful but extravagant, dramatic but embarrassing, something else (specify)? What, if any, beautiful thing within the realm of possibility would you like to do for Jesus?

### **Ephesians 2:10**

*For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.* (For context, read 2:1-10.)

**Questions:** Have you ever thought of your way of life being "for good works"? Why or why not? Do good works have to be expressed in the realm of the possible to be effective?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. With the St. Francis quote in mind ("Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible"), discuss this description from a recovering alcoholic (<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/12/21/start-doing-what-s-necessary-then-do-what-s-possible>): "As we begin the journey of recovery we are capable of doing only the necessary. We don't drink and we go to meetings and we live our lives in hourly increments. Slowly, as hours turn into days and days into

months, the fog lifts and we begin to recall our forsaken dreams and goals. One day we realize it might be possible for us to achieve what we abandoned. As our dreams are reclaimed we become the people we were intended to be and suddenly we realize we are doing the impossible. That is the story of my recovery ... "

2. What does this Bible verse suggest to you about the limits on what's possible: "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18)?

3. Respond to this, from TWW consultant James Gruetzner: "I think there is a tendency among U.S. political academics to overrate the Hamas/Fatah/Israel conflict. The shift in the focus of U.S. efforts for the past three years to countering expansionist Iran (the Abraham Accords are only one branch of this) has placed Sunni Arabs and Israel *on the same side*. This really is 'huge.'"

### **Responding to the News**

This is a good time to make a beginning toward reaching a goal that seems far away or toward solving a problem that looms large.

### **Prayer**

O Lord, let my work for you and for others not be too quickly limited by terms like "impossible" or "unattainable," but when the ultimate good is beyond reach, give me vision to see what can be done and the energy and perseverance to do it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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