

Editorial: You are a witness, like it or not

March 20, 2025

You are a witness. What is your testimony?

I am a witness. What is *my* testimony?

...

Does the question give you cold sweats?

Depending on the day, the time, the situation, it at least gives me pause.

Maybe it's that we're unsure of what our witness should be or is or will be. Or we don't want to hear how others perceive our witness. Actually, that's what I'm really worried about—but only for one reason. See, my hope is people see Jesus in me and that the Jesus they see is true to who Jesus is and draws people to him.

I know how far off the mark I am, and that's why the question gives me pause.

This has been imprinted on my mind since my visit yesterday to a memorial museum just off the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

As I descended the stairs to the lower level of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I couldn't help but see a seemingly simple statement on the expansive wall in front of me.

Just four words.

"You are my witnesses."

And the reference—Isaiah 43:10.

To witness is to remember

Given the context, it is clear these words are intended to describe those who survived the Holocaust. But stated as such, these four words also make a claim on all who see them ... in that place. And, indeed, the word “Remember” is repeated everywhere.

The hope is, all who see—witness—the museum will in turn give witness to the reality of the Holocaust.

So it doesn't happen again. To anybody.

I support that hope.

I wanted to read the broader context of those four words. So, when I had the opportunity, I looked up Isaiah 43 on a Bible app. While I know you can look it up, too, I include it here, because it's just that important.

Take the time to read—really read—the following words from Isaiah 43.

The witness of Isaiah 43:1-13

But now, this is what the LORD says—

he who created you, Jacob,

he who formed you, Israel:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

When you pass through the waters,

I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers,

they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.”

Remember where I was when I saw those four words and their reference—a Holocaust memorial museum. Let the reader hold that in stillness and reverence.

“For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; ...
Do not be afraid, for I am with you;
I will bring your children from the east
and gather you from the west.
I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’
and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’
Bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the ends of the earth—
everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.”
Lead out those who have eyes but are blind,
who have ears but are deaf.
All the nations gather together
and the peoples assemble.
Which of their gods foretold this
and proclaimed to us the former things?
Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right,
so that others may hear and say, “It is true.”

“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord,
“and my servant whom I have chosen,
so that you may know and believe me
and understand that I am he.

Before me no god was formed,
nor will there be one after me.
I, even I, am the LORD,
and apart from me there is no savior.
I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—
I, and not some foreign god among you.
You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “that I am God.
Yes, and from ancient of days I am he.
No one can deliver out of my hand.
When I act, who can reverse it?”

...

Sit with these words for a moment.

Remember where I saw four of them, standing out starkly on a museum wall—a Holocaust museum wall.

Reading ‘witness’ in context

I’m not an Old Testament scholar and certainly not an expert on Isaiah. There’s much I don’t know and much I can’t say about Isaiah 43. For that reason and others, I left out a portion of verse 3 and all of verse 4, because they introduce a problem I’m not equipped or have the space to deal with here.

But I am a student of, a reader of Scripture. I believe portions of Scripture should be read in their original context, that the original—and full—context of Scripture deeply informs the meaning of short portions.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” is a powerful question because of the context in which we most often encounter it. What we may not know is Jesus was quoting Psalm 22 and most assuredly knew he was. If

you haven't put Jesus' question in the context of the full psalm, you should do that ... after you read the rest of this editorial.

Returning to the four-word quote from Isaiah 43:10: "You are my witnesses" is a powerful statement in the context of a Holocaust museum, but read in the broader context of Isaiah 43:1-13, it challenges even further.

Why we are witnesses

The broader context of those four words from Isaiah 43:10 tell us we are not merely witnesses. Nor are we merely witnesses of horror and tragedy. Nor are we witnesses only so such things never happen again.

Isaiah, quoting the LORD our God, tells us we are witnesses of God. We are witnesses that there is no other god before, beside or behind God. We are witnesses that God delivers and nothing and no one else does.

We are witnesses of who God is and what God has done.

The power of our witness

"You are my witnesses" is a powerful statement in a museum that gives praise to the human armies that liberated the Nazi concentration and extermination camps. Certainly, we should cheer that liberation and give thanks for the liberators, but we mustn't do so to the neglect or the diminishment of God as our ultimate deliverer.

"You are my witnesses" also is a powerful statement in a city where men and women promise they are our salvation. I assure you, they are not.

"You are my witnesses" is simultaneously a powerful statement of fact and a powerful call to action.

As a statement of fact: Like it or not, you and I are witnesses. Our lives speak. They speak of who we take God to be. What are our lives speaking about God?

As a call to action: If you and I claim the name of Christ, we are and will be his witnesses, in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth (Acts 1:8)—like it or not. We will witness in word and deed. What witness about Christ will our words and deeds give?

Yes, we are God's witnesses in our politics, in our economics, in our business dealings, in our spending, in our giving, in our love life, in our friendships, in our family, in our driving, in our recreating, in our watching, in our listening. In all we do, we are communicating something about God.

In all we do, does our witness tell the world there is no god but God, nor has there ever been, nor will there ever be? That's a bold testimony at the present time.

In all we do, does our witness tell the world God is the only Savior, the only Deliverer? That's a bold testimony at the present time.

I admit this is more sermon than editorial.

I was a pastor. So, sometimes I preach.

Now, I'm an editor. So, sometimes I write.

I am a Christian. So, I'm always a witness.

Fellow Christian, so are you.

What God are we proclaiming?

Eric Black is the executive director, publisher and editor of the Baptist

Standard. He can be reached at eric.black@baptiststandard.com. The views expressed in this opinion article are those of the author.

Commentary: Clarifying complementarity biblically

March 20, 2025

Lauren Roberts Lukefahr and Christine Crawford examine a biblical definition of a term in the center of much recent controversy.

Letters: Working together, evangelism, Zelensky

March 20, 2025

Working together for a better world

The United States was the only country to [vote](#) March 4 against a United Nations resolution declaring an International Day of Hope. The resolution was approved 161 to 1.

The U.S. delegate said the text “contains references to diversity, equity and

inclusion that conflict with U.S. policies that seek to eliminate all forms of discrimination and create equal opportunities for all.”

Moreover, the United States was one of just three nations, along with Israel and Argentina, to vote against a resolution calling for an International Day of Peaceful Coexistence.

The U.S. representative expressed concern the resolution “advances a program of soft global governance that is inconsistent with U.S. sovereignty.”

If our worst fears regarding war do come to pass, our epitaph will read, “[Ideology](#) destroys Earth.”

[John Paul Lederach](#), professor of international peacebuilding at the University of Notre Dame, [wrote](#) an essay in 2002 titled, “Breaking the cycle of violence.”

In the article, Lederach contends the most important question the United States and the West can ask other nations is, “How can we help you meet the fundamental needs of your people?”

It is a foundational principle in many religions that we are created in God’s image, and that every human life has intrinsic value and is worthy of respect.

Can we not just work together as human beings to build a better world?

*Terry Hansen
Milwaukee, Wisc.*

RE: Voices: The slow, tragic demise of evangelism

Your two-part series on the demise of evangelism in our time struck a nerve with me.

While a ministerial student at Wayland Baptist College during the summer of 1959, I hitch-hiked from New York City to Plainview, Texas, and then from Texas to North Bend, Ore. On both ends of that journey, I rode with Wayland student friends. I shared the good news of Jesus inside the vehicles of others over countless miles.

For a period of time, I pastored small churches in Texas, New Mexico and California while teaching full time in the field of education. For many years, members of my family engaged in Christian drama.

My wife Shannah and I have been involved in jail ministry in a variety of ways. Today, we still share the good news, but we and our Christlike relatives and friends, who are better examples than us, find it hard to witness in the age of Christian nationalism.

Many people now view evangelicals as hypocrites due to the mean-spirited actions of today's religious zealots who are hungry for political power. Evangelicals now are viewed as members of a political bloc, instead of "the bearers of good news about Jesus Christ." My wife and I no longer call ourselves "evangelicals." We simply identify as "Christian."

Satan is surely rejoicing about the bad news of Christian nationalism. Many of our friends and relatives support the movement because of their views about abortion and homosexuality.

Leon Blevins

Flower Mound, Texas

RE: Voices: What would you do if you were Esther?

I think this article you chose to publish might have been more than I can handle.

I think we need to be careful when trying to make comparisons of current politicians and events against those portrayed in the inspired word, especially when there is a political tint to the observations.

I sort of find the parallels drawn ludicrous and easily could make arguments that the author had it backwards. The author indicated we should find our own credible Ukrainian sources, rather than supply us with certifiable evidence.

This article never should have been published, in my opinion.

I've been a fan of the *Baptist Standard* since it was a small, paper magazine we picked up at church. This might well be the end of my interest in your publication. My intention is to unsubscribe. We'll see.

Andy Pardue
Mesquite, Texas

Voices: A man one dark night

March 20, 2025

“I was running late for church. I tried to justify not helping, but this did me no good. God gave me ... a visible need, and I drove by.”

Voices: Unintended consequences and rural life

March 20, 2025

Changes to rural Texas have been drastic and rapid. Many of these changes are unintended consequences. Stacy Conner describes a few.

Commentary: Empathy isn't a sin. It's a risk.

March 20, 2025

Michael C. Rea seeks to correct Joe Rigney's take on empathy, arguing the danger of empathy is not weakness or sin, but risk.

Voices: A slap in the face to sex abuse survivors

March 20, 2025

Encouraged by the DOJ dropping its investigation of the SBC, Joshua Sharp is shocked by how some SBC leaders have responded to the news.

Editorial: In a divided time, we must model civil disagreement

March 20, 2025

Editor Eric Black calls to account how Christians communicate their opinions and convictions to and about those with whom they disagree.

Letters: Explainer, BGCT &

NAMB, Esther & Ukraine

March 20, 2025

Explainer

Some readers have noticed how few letters to the editor we publish. There was a time when each issue of the *Baptist Standard* contained a full section of letters. Now, we can go months without a single letter.

Throughout my tenure, I have been asked if I publish every letter to the editor I receive. I publish letters to the editor for which the writer provides his or her name and location—including those letters that criticize me and the *Baptist Standard*.

The simple fact is, social media and the desire for anonymity have resulted in the very low number of letters to the editor we publish. Social media allows anyone to say whatever they want to say, and immediately and sometimes anonymously. Many times, those who send me emails that read like letters to the editor do not want them published or do not want to be identified, which precludes their publication.

And then, there are topics like the relationship between the Baptist General Convention of Texas and the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the relationship between Ukraine, Russia and the United States that generate a lot of conversation and, by extension, more letters to the editor.

So, for the first time in a long time, I present you, the reader, with a full Letters to the Editor.

*Eric Black, executive director/publisher/editor
Baptist Standard*

RE: Voices: Correcting misunderstanding about BGCT/NAMB agreement

I appreciate Dustin Slaton's answer March 5 to [my earlier opinion piece](#) in the *Baptist Standard*. My only response is:

The Baptist General Convention of Texas in November 2024 voted convincingly not to affirm the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

The Texas Baptist Executive Board in February 2025 approved a plan to accept \$300,000 annually from the North American Mission Board to help finance new churches that will approve the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message.

Anyone else see any inconsistency in those actions?

Toby Druin

Waxahachie, Texas

Love of money evil's root cause

Elon Musk and Donald Trump are two of the greediest persons on earth. Their love of money is the root cause of the evil they are inflicting on our nation's people and the rest of the world. Both are using their powerful positions in government to enhance their own personal wealth. Doing so is wrong and totally unacceptable.

Spineless U.S. House and Senate Republicans, along with a dominant

conservative U.S. Supreme Court enable Musk and Trump to do their thing by failing to hold them accountable.

Mid-term elections in 2026 cannot come soon enough.

Paul L. Whiteley Sr.

Louisville, Ky.

RE: [Voices: What would you do if you were Esther?](#)

Thank you for publishing Dr. Semikov's article. I've served for 28 years as a U.S.-based missionary, having made 60 visits to Ukraine—four since Feb. 24, 2022.

The parallels between the account of Esther and her advocacy for the Jewish people and President Zelensky's advocacy on behalf of the Ukrainian nation are numerous. Dr. Semikov's analysis is compelling.

I know many Christians voted for President Trump, but the betrayal of Ukraine by the current administration cannot be defended on biblical, moral or democratic principles.

It is imperative Christians across the United States stand up for what is right and rise up on behalf of a nation fighting for the same values Christians in the United States hold dear: faith, family, freedom to worship, the right for self-determination, and an emphasis on value and dignity of each human life.

Ukraine has one of the largest evangelical populations in all of Europe. They have been a bastion of evangelical Christianity since their

independence from the Soviet Union in 1992, with more than 2,200 Baptist congregations—though hundreds of church buildings have been destroyed by Russia. In the middle of the war, these churches have opened their doors to their communities, providing sanctuary, humanitarian and medical aid, in addition to meeting spiritual needs.

Missionaries from Baptist churches in Ukraine currently serve in more than 22 countries around the world in places as far away as Africa, Australia and South America.

Abandoning Ukraine now in favor of Russia isn't only a shift from religious freedom to support of a dictator, it is an abandonment by the American church of our brothers and sisters in Ukraine.

I urge American Christians to [contact their senators and representatives](#) and speak up in support of Ukraine. Our voices matter.

Stephen Benham
Lawrence, Penn.

Thank you for publishing Dr. Semikov's article, "[What would you do if you were Esther?](#)" I found the parallels between the biblical story and current international events thought-provoking.

As an early scholar of the Bible, I appreciated learning more about Esther's story—an example of a leader facing a difficult choice between personal risk and standing firm for her people. History repeats itself, and today, we see leaders navigating similar dilemmas, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The recent confrontation between our national leaders has sparked intense emotions and debate. Some find it troubling to compare Ukraine's fight for

survival with biblical struggles, as morality, political views and understanding of the war shape perspectives. Yet, for those who grasp the history of this conflict, the right side to support is clear. It is unsettling when prominent leaders hesitate to stand against evident evil.

The question of compromise is complex: Do you surrender and risk annihilation or keep fighting despite great costs? Is true courage about defying enemies, or does it also mean challenging allies? While national interests matter, moral responsibility cannot be ignored.

Dr. Semikov's article raises important questions about leadership, morality and international responsibility. Thank you for publishing this thought-provoking piece. I look forward to future discussions on this topic.

Sergiy Nesterenko, M.D.

Lubbock, Texas

Voices: Why my church gave up on Annie's offering

March 20, 2025

Matt Richard, pastor of FBC Llano, explains why his church voted to cease giving to the SBC's Annie Armstrong Easter Offering.

Commentary: Religious persecution is part of Russia's battle plan

March 20, 2025

Knox Thames, U.S. State Dept. special envoy during the Obama and first Trump administrations, examines Russia's religious liberty record.

Voices: Baptists, baptism and open membership

March 20, 2025

David Wilhite presents the view Baptist churches should welcome believers in Jesus, whether baptized by pouring, sprinkling or immersion.