

When Heroes Abounded

By PAUL J. SCHARF

I have always loved Memorial Day. In fact, I celebrate it every Saturday night.

My ritual for the end of the week—normally as I am preparing to speak the next day on Sunday morning—involves watching *Combat!*, “TV’s longest-running World War II drama.”ⁱ When I am at home—or even in a hotel, if I can find it—I watch another adventure featuring the boys from the Company K, Second Platoon right before going to bed.

The soldiers represented by Sgt. Saunders and his men were heroes who rescued the world from tyranny in their generation. According to the National World War II Museum, more than 12 million Americans would be engaged in this conflict by 1945, serving in the Army, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard.ⁱⁱ In total, “More than 16 million American men and women served in the US Armed Forces during World War II, and another 3.5 million worked as federal civilian employees during the war.”ⁱⁱⁱ More than 400,000 of them sacrificed all that they had in this world—their very lives—for the cause of freedom; more than 670,000 additional men and women were wounded.^{iv} When you watch something even as realistic as *Combat!*, you realize the level of the sacrifice that they made, and you begin to marvel that so many could return to live out healthy and productive lives.

Those heroes of World War II who came home and built families, homes, careers and businesses by the hundreds of thousands are mostly gone now. But it is up to us to keep their memories alive by honoring them—especially on Memorial Day.

The concept behind Memorial Day is honorable and Biblical. There is great spiritual benefit in meditating on the past—not only to acknowledge and remember those who have gone before us, including those who have sacrificed for our benefit, but also to appreciate the legacy they have left behind, and to learn from their examples.

Several passages of Scripture come to mind that we might apply to this patriotic holiday.

The first is Moses’ final, extended message to the people of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy. As he recorded it by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he used the word “remember” 15 times, “heard” 12 times, “learn” seven times, “consider” three times, and “memory” once.

He exhorted the people to understand the value of treasuring their heritage in Deuteronomy 5:15 and 32:7, respectively, when he stated:

Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm.

Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of many generations.
Ask your father, and he will show you;
Your elders, and they will tell you.

Another text that can encourage us on Memorial Day is the great *Hall of Faith* chapter—Hebrews 11. It tells us about the heroes of the faith, who lived “by faith”—a phrase which is used 18 times. It also speaks of “faith” six additional times.

This is all premised on the author’s quotation of Habakkuk in Hebrews 10:38: “The just shall live by faith.” Here, in the third and final usage of this verse in the New Testament, the emphasis is on those final two words—“by faith.” This is how we are now admonished to live, as we are inspired by pondering “so great a cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1).

Finally, we will be edified on Memorial Day by considering the second epistle of Peter. Peter included forms of the word “remind” four times in his short epistle (1:12, 13, 15; 3:1).

I like to watch *Combat!* on Saturday evenings—not just because I enjoy a good war story, but also because I find that it puts me in the perfect frame of mind for the next morning. It reminds me that I am in a spiritual battle (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-20). But it also takes me back to the days when The Friends of Israel was founded, and it reminds me of the reasons for forming this historic ministry.

Its origins go back to December of 1938—three weeks after a demonic madman named Adolf Hitler launched the Holocaust through an event called *Kristallnacht*, on Nov. 9 and 10, 1938. Energized by the forces of hell, Hitler’s Schutzstaffel and other troops took 30,000 Jewish men captive into the Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen concentration camps in the devilish days that followed.

This was certainly not the opportune time to launch a worldwide gospel ministry—to say nothing of initiating one that was focused on blessing the Jewish people. But some very brave men and women set out to do exactly that, fueled by Biblical faith. They included Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer (the esteemed co-founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary) and Dr. Harry Ironside (the iconic pastor of The Moody Church in Chicago). These and many others helped to lay a foundation for a ministry first known as The Friends of Israel Refugee Relief Committee.^v Under long-time executive director, Dr. Victor Buksbazen, godly servants sacrificed to help the Jewish people by any conceivable means, in their hour of greatest need.^{vi}

I am grateful to God that I have had the privilege of living my life here in the United States. I can say with the Psalmist:

The lines have fallen to me in pleasant *places*;
Yes, I have a good inheritance. (Ps. 16:6)

I give thanks for every single soldier who gave his or her all that we might continue to live in freedom. As Jesus taught us,

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (John 15:13).

Finally, on this Memorial Day weekend, I am grateful for the opportunity to stand on the shoulders of courageous leaders who formed The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry and have caused it to flourish through eight decades—"in season *and* out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2).

At this point in the history of our beloved nation, powerful winds seem to be blowing against all who would stand for truth. But that simply means that the church—and, indeed, Israel and the Jewish people—needs the ministry of The Friends of Israel more than ever.

May God help us to serve Him at this amazing moment—remembering how many have sacrificed that we might enjoy freedom, and honoring their legacies in the physical realm by carrying out our "reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1) in the spiritual realm.

Let's make this Memorial Day a time, not only to remember the heroes of the past, but also to dedicate ourselves to finding our stations of service in the spiritual battle—just like those first *Friends of Israel* did ... in a season when heroes abounded.

Paul J. Scharf (M.A., M.Div., Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) is a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, based in Columbus, WI, and serving in the Midwest. For more information on his ministry, visit sermonaudio.com/pscharf or foi.org/scharf, or email pscharf@foi.org.

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ⁱ MeTV Staff; "11 action-packed facts about 'Combat!'" MeTV; <https://www.metv.com/lists/11-action-packed-facts-about-combat>; Internet; accessed 23 May 2021.

ⁱⁱ "Research Starters: US Military by the Numbers;" The National WWII Museum; <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-us-military-numbers>; Internet; accessed 23 May 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Research a Veteran: How to locate someone who fought in World War II;" The National WWII Museum; [https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/research-veteran#:~:text=More%20than%2016%20million%20American,civilian%20employees%20during%20the%20war.](https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/research-veteran#:~:text=More%20than%2016%20million%20American,civilian%20employees%20during%20the%20war.;); Internet; accessed 25 May 2021.

^{iv} "Research Starters: US Military by the Numbers;" The National WWII Museum; <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/research-starters-us-military-numbers>; Internet; accessed 23 May 2021.

^v For more details on FOI's history, see "Our History;" The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry; <https://www.foi.org/vision/history/>; Internet; accessed 25 May 2021.

^{vi} For more on Buksbaze's amazing life and ministry, see Elwood McQuaid; "The Friends of Israel Turns 70;" The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry; Jan. 6, 2012; https://www.foi.org/free_resource/friends-israel-turns-70/; Internet; accessed 23 May 2021.