

ISRAEL MY GLORY



HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR JESUS?

A LOOK AT WHAT JESUS SAID WHILE ON EARTH

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'I WILL RETURN'

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UNTIL HE COMES





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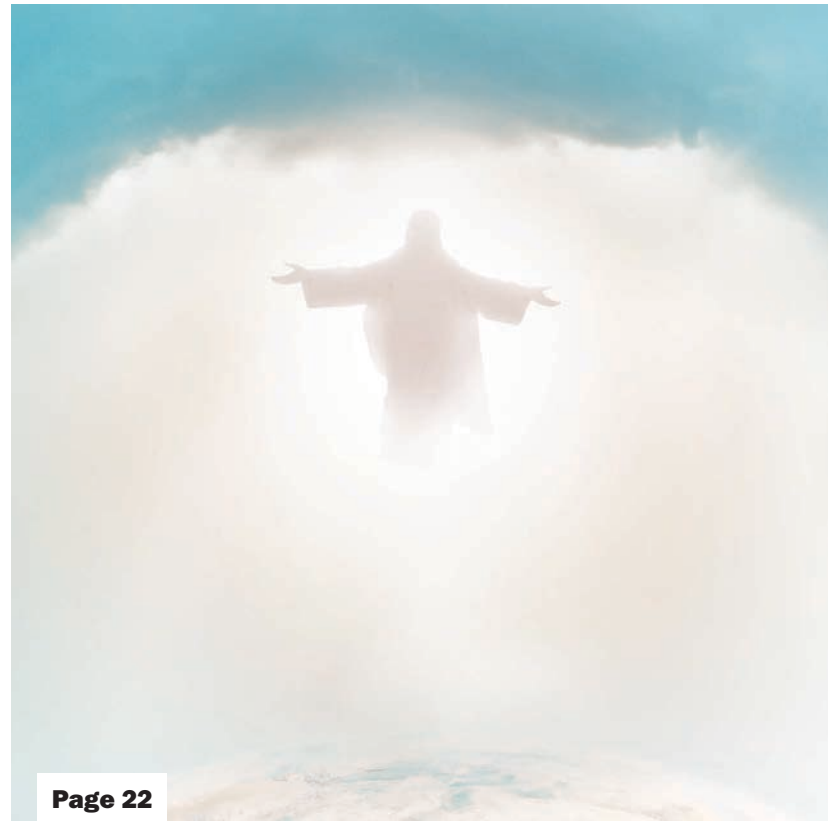
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FROM THE EDITOR

Christmas is around the corner. 'Tis the season for almost every made-for-television movie to overload us with house-decorating, tree-lighting, cookie-baking, and ice-skating scenes punctuated by

endless repetitions of the feel-good mantra, "Christmas is a time for miracles."

Yet all that holiday hype ignores the real miracle that occurred more than 2,000 years ago when God became man, born in a humble stable in Bethlehem of Judea to a young Jewish couple descended directly from King David of Israel. It seems Christmas is becoming less and less about Jesus and more and more about almost anything else.

To make matters worse, people are trying to make Jesus over in their own image. The truly uninformed think He was a Roman Catholic. The Palestinians ludicrously claim He was a "Palestinian freedom fighter." Wikipedia calls Him "a first-century Jewish preacher and religious leader" whom Christians say was God incarnate.

But what did Jesus say? What did He say about Himself, about life and death and salvation and the end-times? Sadly, most people don't know. Even sadder, some Christians don't know.

In August 2021, relevantmagazine.com discussed the results of a study that found, "Of the born-again Christians between the ages of 18–39 surveyed, 60 percent agreed with the statement 'Buddha, Muhammad and Jesus are all valid paths to God.'" Yet Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14:6).

This Christmas season, we thought it would be good for *Israel My Glory* to ask the question, "How well do you know your Jesus?" Do you know Jesus said, "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore"?

Do you know He acknowledged being God and the Messiah? Do you know He said, "Salvation is of the Jews" and "You must be born again"? Do you know He promised to return to Earth in a stunning, visible display of splendor and majesty that every eye will see? "For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be."

We hope this issue will help you know Jesus better. And if you know *about* Him but don't *know* Him, we urge you to ask Him to forgive your sins and come into your life today. Then you'll experience a true Christmas miracle that one day will carry you all the way to heaven! Merry Christmas!

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



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Many believers today see no value in studying prophecy, particularly end-times prophecy. They say it serves no purpose and is difficult to understand and a waste of time. To them I ask, “How well do you know your Jesus?”

Soon after Jesus arose from the grave, He joined two disciples on their seven-mile walk to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13–35). “But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him” (v. 16).

As they walked, Jesus heard them struggle to make sense of the events of the previous three days. So, He questioned them. Their response revealed they had the widespread knowledge of His arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection; yet the Lord still called them foolish.

They had pinned their hopes on Jesus to redeem Israel and bring in the long-awaited Messianic Kingdom. But three days earlier, Jesus died; and that morning, they were astonished when women in their group found His tomb empty and said they saw two angels who claimed He was alive.

“O foolish ones,” Jesus said, “and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” (v. 25). They should have known the Messiah had to suffer before He could enter into His glory.

These two had followed Jesus, heard His teaching, seen His miracles, and knew the prophecies about Him. They should have understood the events. Not only had Jesus warned His disciples three times that He would go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and arise after three days, but there also was ample disclosure in the prophets that the Messiah would suffer and die.

Jesus pointed out that they did not know Him nearly as well as they should have known Him. So where did He take them to teach them? “Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (v. 27).

Here is the simple truth: To know Jesus well, we must know all that the prophets said about Him. It’s not that the disciples were unfamiliar with prophecy. They concluded He was the one who would deliver them from bondage to Rome because they recognized He possessed the qualities of the Messiah,

spoke God’s words, and performed miracles.

Where they fell short was in not embracing the difficult things in prophecy. They readily accepted the conquering-son-of-King-David aspect, but they ignored the suffering-son-of-Joseph aspect.

This failing is, after all, human nature. We tend to embrace the agreeable and eschew the disagreeable. But Jesus taught His disciples that to know Him well requires studying and embracing everything, not just the pleasant parts.

A few hours later, the Lord appeared to the 11 apostles. They, too, struggled to believe what they were seeing and to accept that Jesus was physically raised from the dead. So He reminded them why everything had to occur that was written in the Law of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets concerning His suffering, death, and resurrection.

Many of Jesus’ disciples today struggle with the same affliction. They embrace the pleasant but ignore the unpleasant. They refuse to read Revelation because it is dark and difficult to comprehend. They look forward to the glorious day when Jesus returns and takes them home, but they don’t want to think of God’s impending wrath before He returns.

The danger, however, is that ignoring the difficult prevents us from knowing Jesus well and understanding God’s full plan for the ages. We end up not understanding important events, such as the judgment of the nations and the return of Christ to Earth to rescue Israel, defeat Satan, and restore the Millennial Kingdom.

Were Jesus to join you today on your journey, would you know prophetic Scripture well enough to recognize Him and understand not only what He already has accomplished but what He will yet do? I hope so, because otherwise, you don’t know your Jesus as well as you should.



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

PC(USA): AT ODDS WITH GOD'S WORD

My responsibilities at The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry (FOI) have changed over the years, but one of the tasks I enjoy most is that of Philadelphia tour guide. When FOI staff visit our international headquarters, I often take them to historical sites like Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed; the Liberty Bell, with its famous crack; and, of course, John's Roast Pork for the best roast pork and cheesesteaks in the cradle of liberty!

My tours always conclude with a visit to the historic Witherspoon Building on Walnut Street in Center City. This is one of my favorite sites because it provides a glimpse into the rich history of The Friends of Israel. The Witherspoon Building housed FOI's first official offices.

The 19th-century, 11-story edifice that looks more like a church than a commercial building was named after John Witherspoon (1723–1794), one of America's Founding Fathers, who was a Presbyterian minister and president and head professor of the small Presbyterian College of New Jersey, later known as Princeton University.

The Witherspoon Building's location was a natural fit for The Friends of Israel because many of the pastors and Christian businessmen who founded FOI in 1938 were Presbyterians—among them, Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Theological Seminary. Our first executive director, Dr. Victor Buksbazen, was also a Presbyterian.

FOI exists because brave Christian men and women chose to stand with the Jewish people and help them as they fled Nazi tyranny. Their biblical convictions compelled them to help. They knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Jewish people held a special place in God's heart and that His eternal plan for the ages involved the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So these believers used what little resources they had and invited other Christians to give financially and join them in bringing comfort to God's Chosen People during the Holocaust of World War II.

Fast-forward 84 years. Today, the same denomination that helped establish the FOI ministry is decrying

Israel as an apartheid state. At its General Assembly meeting over the summer, the Presbyterian Church (USA) (PC[USA]) passed a resolution declaring the Israeli government's treatment of the Palestinians “fulfills the international legal definition of apartheid.”

The resolution compared Israel's security policies in the West Bank to those of segregated South Africa during its apartheid era of institutionalized, racial oppression (1948 to the early 1990s). This blatant lie is used around the world to demonize and delegitimize the Jewish state.

If the PC(USA) General Assembly wanted the facts, it should have invited South African Parliament Member Kenneth Meshoe to its meeting. Meshoe has said, “Those who know what real apartheid is, as I know, know that there is nothing in Israel that looks like apartheid.” Calling Israel an apartheid state “is an empty political statement that does not hold truth,” he added.

To be clear, The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry has no association or relationship with the PC(USA). Yet it saddens and troubles us to see how a denomination that once produced men and women with keen spiritual discernment could lose its scriptural footing concerning Israel and the Jewish people. The PC(USA) General Assembly fails to take God's Word at face value and has abandoned the art of reading the Bible in its literal, grammatical, and historical context.

When God made His eternal promise to Abraham, He said, “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you” (Gen. 12:3). Based on the PC(USA)'s recent anti-Israel resolution, the denomination is at odds with God's Word—not a good place to be.

The Witherspoon Building today still has its ornate façade, but the inside is hollowed-out. The structure that once housed FOI and other Bible-based ministries is just another apartment complex in Philadelphia. If the PC(USA), now steadily losing members, continues to demonize Israel, it could end up just another hollowed-out façade. And that would be a shame.

by Chris Katulka

RADICAL PIJ IS MOVING IN

Recent clashes between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) have underscored Iran's growing influence in the Gaza Strip. PIJ, a Sunni Muslim jihadist movement that seeks to annihilate Israel and replace it with a Palestinian Islamic state, receives funding, weapons, and training from Iran.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz said Iran funnels "tens of millions of dollars per year" to PIJ. "Their leadership visits Iran and meets Iranian leaders frequently," he said. Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid called PIJ "an Iranian proxy that wants to destroy the state of Israel."

Acting on intelligence reports that PIJ was planning attacks on Israeli civilians, the IDF commenced Operation Breaking Dawn and assassinated several senior PIJ leaders in Gaza. Israel also arrested 19 PIJ members in the West Bank (biblical Judea and Samaria). Analysts say Israel's success is temporary, and worse clashes are certain.

PIJ is smaller than Hamas, which governs Gaza, but it is better organized. "It is not about the size; it is about power, efficiency, and the ability to engage militarily in a confrontation with Israel," said Ibrahim Fraihat, a professor at the Qatar-based Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. "And for that reason, Israel is trying to arrest its leaders in the West Bank and to contain any action that Islamic Jihad might escalate."

Like Hamas, PIJ is a terrorist organization. Though based in Gaza, it also has a presence in Lebanon and Syria. PIJ leader Ziad al-Nakhalah recently met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran while PIJ militants fired more than 1,000 missiles into Israel. Iranian Supreme

Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei later told al-Nakhalah that PIJ proved the Palestinians could "crush the enemy."

Some analysts say Iran is using PIJ, with its 8,000 or so fighters, to coerce U.S. President Biden's administration into reviving the 2015 nuclear deal. They say the Iranian mullahs are sending a

message that Iran and its proxies will continue to attack Israel and kill Jews unless Biden gives them what they want.

Others warn that PIJ, filling the vacuum created by the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, is expanding its presence in the West Bank. Middle East analyst Daniel Ben-Ami warned that its ascendancy shows Islamism has replaced Palestinian nationalism as the driving force in Palestinian politics. Consequently, Israel is determined to weaken the PIJ leadership.

"Until about 2006," wrote Ben-Ami, "when Hamas won elections in Gaza, Palestinian nationalism was widely seen as the main political force among the Palestinians. Since then, there has been a deep schism, with Hamas taking over Gaza and the old nationalists still controlling the West Bank. Now the tide seems to be turning towards Islamism in the West Bank, too." He concluded, "This will have profound effects on the conflict to come."

Others are more optimistic. Middle East



* Masked fighters of the military wing of Islamic Jihad

expert Hadeel Oueis noted that young Arabs increasingly reject the actions of PIJ and Hamas against Israel. "After the Abraham Accords agreements and other steps taken by the Arab countries, like the recent formal opening of Saudi skies to Israel, more young Arabs are condemning the Islamic Jihad and Hamas usage of Gaza to start a new war with Israel."

She concluded, "The fact that the countries controlled by Iran have daily suffering regarding their basic needs while the Arab countries that signed the Abraham Accords enjoy a better quality of life is an eye-opener for the Arab youth. People in the region are questioning the old assumptions about the so-called resistance against Israel more than ever."



by **Soeren Kern**, a senior fellow at the Gatestone Institute, a nonpartisan foreign-policy think tank based in New York City

CHRISTIAN KILLED AFTER OPEN-AIR EVENT IN UGANDA

A 28-year-old Christian in eastern Uganda has died from head injuries sustained in an attack by Muslim extremists in July, reported morningstarnews.org.

Robert Bwenje had accompanied Assistant Pastor Ambrose Mugisha of Elim Pentecostal Church to an open-air debate about Christianity and Islam, after which eight Muslims put their faith in Christ. “This angered the Muslims, but they could not attack us because we had tight security from the police,” said Pastor Mugisha.

When the two men left, Muslims from Sirimula village ambushed them as they crossed a swamp. “We saw men dressed in Islamic attire coming from the bush in different directions and shouting ‘Allah akbar, Allah akbar [Allah is greater],’” Pastor Mugisha said. The assailants forced them to hand over Bibles and other books they were carrying.

“They removed the Koran and then burned the rest of the books, including the Bibles, and then beat us with sticks,” he said. “I jumped into the water and managed to swim and cross to the other side.”

Passersby found him bleeding and rescued him. The assailants continued assaulting Bwenje and then fled, and the passersby took both wounded Christians to a nearby clinic for first aid and then later to a hospital, Pastor Mugisha said.

Pastor Godfrey Ssemujju of Elim Pentecostal Church said he visited Pastor Mugisha and Bwenje in the hospital soon after the attack, and Bwenje died later that night. Police arrested the assailant and charged him with attempted murder.

UGANDAN CHURCH BUILDING DEMOLISHED

Muslim extremists from Kindeke village in Uganda attacked Pastor Baingana James on June 26, demolished his church building in Rwomuriro village, and threatened

to kill him if he continued leading Muslims to Christ, the 48-year-old pastor said.

Pastor James said he received a phone call the morning of June 23 from a Muslim who identified himself as Sheikh Mwesigye Ja’afari of Kindeke, telling him to leave and return to Islam seven Muslims who had converted to Christianity. “We therefore want to warn you to leave the place within two days; if not, we are coming to destroy your home and church,” Ja’afari told him.

Pastor James did not take the threat seriously, but on June 26 he found a letter on his door ordering him to stop Sunday



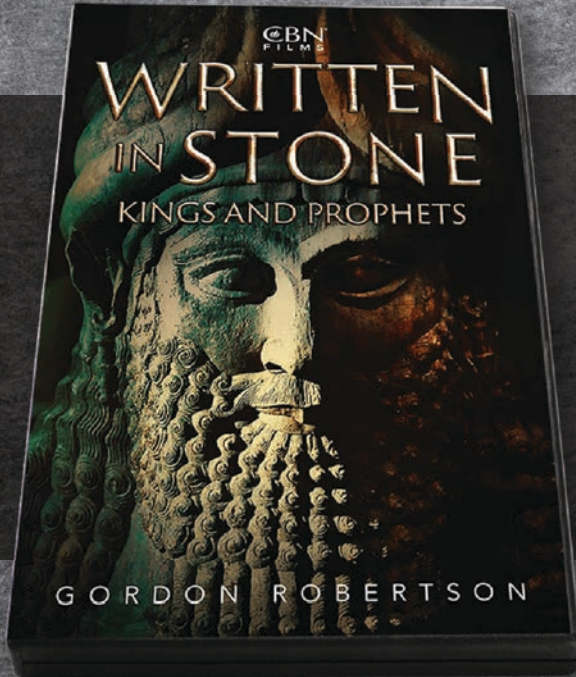
services and close the church. “I refused,” he said, “because preaching Jesus Christ is my calling, and planting churches is my vision in this area.”

While he and his congregation were worshiping the Lord in their Sunday service, a group of Muslim youths led by Ja’afari ambushed them from different directions with clubs and sticks. “They started beating us . . . and ordering us to stop the service and leave immediately,” Pastor James told morningstarnews.org. “As we were struggling to go out in serious panic and tension while others were with serious injuries, they started breaking and pulling down the building.”

In March, Muslims from Rwentuha village demolished the same church’s building under construction, and complaints to local leaders fell on deaf ears. “My prayer is that God help us and make a way to convert these people to Christ, and we need serious help for the victims who were cut during the attack,” Pastor James said.

To read these reports and many more in full, go to morningstarnews.org.

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FOI and the ZOA

Last spring, the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) telephoned Tim Munger, a Church Ministries representative with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry (FOI) in Michigan, and asked if he knew any Christians who would be interested in joining the Jewish organization's one-of-a-kind Leadership Mission trip to Israel.



*
The Christian participants in the ZOA Leadership Mission, left to right: Front row—Pastor Alex Perednia, FOI Canadian Director Robert Gottselig, FOI Representative Tim Munger, Barbara Gottselig. Back row—Pastors Robert Snell, Aidan Wengel, and Stephen Luff; FOI Representative Tom Simcox.

Tim jumped at the opportunity to connect the two communities, and in a matter of weeks he arranged a delegation of four believers from FOI and four pastors from the United States and Canada to join the 35 people going with the ZOA.

They went to places most tours don't go and met with Knesset members and dignitaries. They not only visited sites in and around Jerusalem, but they also went to Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), Hebron, and Gush Etzion.

They also spent time in Sderot along the Gaza border, where everyone saw firsthand the Israeli children suffering from PTSD after years of Hamas rockets battering their town. They interacted with the brave soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces and saw the military and security forces' resolve and determination to keep Israel strong, safe, and free for everyone—Jew and Arab alike.

We're extremely grateful that FOI was able to fully fund all expenses for the four pastors through our Ministry Launch fund. It's our desire to disciple and train Christian leaders in what the Scriptures teach concerning the Jewish people, and there is no better way to do that than to take them to Israel.

On the Sabbath, Tim led his team of Christians to the Jerusalem Assembly where they joined Pastor Meno Kalisher (Zvi Kalisher's son) for worship and fellowship. Afterward, they toured Jerusalem and took communion at the Garden Tomb.

The highlight for Tim was toward the end of the tour when the ZOA asked the Christian leaders to share their experiences in Israel with the entire group. All the believers had an opportunity to express their love for the Jewish people, why they believe Israel matters to God, and how they see God's hand moving in Israel today. Many people came up to them afterward to chat and ask questions about their faith.

Their messages compelled one of the Jewish participants to publicly express her personal faith in Jesus to all her ZOA friends. Praise the Lord!

The trip was unique in every way and reminded us yet again that "He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4). Despite all of the threats facing Israel, God is her Defender and loves her.

If you would like to support Ministry Launch and programs like it in North American Ministries, please visit foi.org/NAMoutreach. You can also call our toll-free ministry-support line at 800-257-7843. Thank you for your prayers and financial support.

Help for Ukraine

The humanitarian crisis in Ukraine has been unlike anything the world has seen for decades. Yet our Ukrainian and Polish teams have boldly responded to the call for help with little regard for their own safety. Just as God calls us to share the gospel, He also calls us to care for the broken and hurting with the love of Jesus. And that's exactly what our workers have been doing consistently and selflessly since February.

The stories of refugees, Jewish and Gentile, who come through our European facilities or are touched by The Friends of Israel's (FOI's) relief efforts are countless. Hundreds of Ukrainians have stayed with us and received medical supplies, clothes, transportation, or simply had someone listen to their stories.

We've helped dozens of Jewish people make *aliyah* (immigrate) to Israel. One of our workers alone had more than 100 meetings to help people who want to go to Israel.

We've also taken food and medicine into some of the most devastated areas of the country, including the western city of Chernivtsi, which is inundated with displaced people who have doubled the city's population.

Ukraine's infrastructure and government services cannot keep up. FOI, along with churches in Poland, has been shipping pallets of food and supplies into the city

*
Two of our workers:
Anna (left) and Tetiana



to help in the crisis. We recently received a note from a rabbi in Chernivtsi who has been a friend of ours for years because of our ministry in his synagogue community.

"We are left without any help now," he



*
Andrew with food shipment

wrote. "And only you and The Friends of Israel have not left us, but faithfully continue to help our people. Thank you!"

We've ministered to people who saw rockets destroy their homes. We know people who walked for miles to the border under the cover of night. We've sat for days in vehicles with families who needed help and comfort. We wept and prayed with women who don't know if they'll ever see their husbands again. And we've been blessed to open the Bible with Jewish refugees who attended our children's camps in Poland 30 years ago.

The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry was established before World War II to share the gospel and help Jewish people escape the Nazis; and in 2022, God has taken us back to our roots. We are so grateful to all of you who are a vital part of this work and have joined us in loving God's Chosen People.

As we continue to help Ukrainians pick up the pieces of their lives, we invite you to join our Eastern European teams and other ministries like this around the world. Please visit foi.org/INT outreach, or call our toll-free ministry-support line at 800-257-7843. Thank you for serving through your prayers and financial support.

THE FALLACY OF FICTIONALISM

WHY WOULD AN ATHEIST PRETEND GOD EXISTS—AND EVEN PRAY?

BY STEVE HERZIG

Scott Hershovitz is a philosophy professor and director of law and ethics at the University of Michigan. He grew up in a practicing Jewish home, feels attached to his Judaism, prays in the synagogue, fasts on Yom Kippur, has a son studying for his Bar Mitzvah, and doesn't believe in God. Neither does his son.

"I am a fictionalist about God," he wrote in a *New York Times* guest essay titled "How to Pray to a God You Don't Believe In." "I pretend," he said. "And I don't plan to stop."

Fiction can take different forms. It can transport us to Narnia (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*), Mordor (*The Lord of the Rings*), and the USS Enterprise (*Star Trek*). It can make us laugh, cry, and certainly relax with the Bennets (*Pride and Prejudice*) and the Dashwoods (*Sense and Sensibility*). For some of us, certain fiction was mandatory, as we spent time with Romeo and Juliet (Shakespeare).

But fictionalist? I had never heard the term. So I went to encyclopedia.com to do a little research. A fictionalist is "one who aims to secure the benefits of talking as if certain

kinds of things exist—numbers, moral properties, possible worlds, composite objects, or whatever—while avoiding commitment to believing in their existence."

In other words, Hershovitz is an atheist who pretends God exists because it makes him feel better. He doesn't know God. He doesn't know how to know God. He may not even want to know God. Why? Because, like most compassionate people, he struggles with evil in the world, as does his son.

"The world is awful at the moment," he wrote. "Millions have died of Covid-19 [sic]. Authoritarianism is on the rise, abroad and at home. And now there's war, with all the death, destruction and dislocation that [it] entails." His son feels that, if God existed, He would stop the suffering, or at least mitigate it. So, Scott Hershovitz seeks "refuge in religious rituals."

Believers in Jesus Christ are by no means immune to suffering. But we have something Scott doesn't have: a personal relationship with the living God that comes from reading His Word, which is "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). Taking God at His word is what we call faith. Reading the Bible and believing it leads to saving faith. God promises, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

The Scriptures teach us who God is and how much He loves us. Through them, He tells us what separates us from Him (sin, Isa. 59:2), how to get close to Him (Jn. 3:3), the importance of repentance (Lk. 13:5), how we're forgiven

(Eph. 1:7), and what the future holds (1 Cor. 15:51–54).

Even those of us who have come to God through Christ often struggle with the existence of evil, pain, and adversity. But He tells us we'll never understand everything:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8–9).

Once you have a real relationship with God, you don't have to pretend and seek refuge in rituals. You can do as King David did and seek refuge in God Himself (Ps. 62:7).

Church-Going Pretenders

Sadly, fictionalism isn't confined to Hershovitz. There are church-going fictionalists as well. Philip Goff, a British philosopher and consciousness researcher at Durham University, UK, says, “The contentious claims of religion, such as ‘God exists’ or ‘Jesus rose from the dead’ are all, strictly speaking, false.”

Though he doesn't believe in the doctrines of Christianity, he believes the practice of faith is more important than believ-

ing in supernatural claims. For Goff, “God is a useful fiction.”¹

Goff and Hershovitz believe religious pretending makes the world better. But pretending to worship a God you deny is dangerous business. The writer of Hebrews warned, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

This is the time of year our Jewish friends celebrate Hanukkah (December 18) and Christians celebrate Christmas. Lighting the *hanukkiyah* (nine-branched Hanukkah menorah) reminds us that a promise-keeping God has vowed to preserve the Jewish people forever (Jer. 31:35–36). “And it shall come to pass, that as I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to throw down, to destroy, and to afflict, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD” (v. 28). “I will assuredly plant them in this land [Israel], with all My heart and with all My soul” (32:41).

God's faithfulness to keep His promises is the only reason the Jewish people exist today. They've been among the most persecuted people on the face of the Earth and are so few in

number that it's truly by divine intervention they have not been destroyed.

Over the millennia, many have tried to destroy them. The Seleucids' attempt and the Jewish people's miraculous victory produced Hanukkah—which Hershovitz no doubt plans to celebrate. With that victory, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob preserved (yet again) His Chosen People, through whom the Messiah and Savior of the world would come.

This year Christmas falls on Sunday, the day Christians meet to worship. We will remember our Savior's birth, along with the fact that God used the Jewish prophet Isaiah to reveal the event more than 700 years before it took place. Contrary to what fictionalists say, Jesus is capable of fixing the world—and will do so when He returns.

Currently, Jesus is redeeming individuals—not through empty, fictitious, religious activity, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. Those of us who come to faith in Christ have a relationship with the living God that brings us joy, peace, hope, and the assurance of life everlasting. Who needs to pretend?

We have the real thing; and I can't help but feel the real thing is what Mr. Hershovitz longs for as well. He just doesn't know where to find it.

Genuine faith in the living God comes by God's grace: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not

of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2:8–9).

Being a fictionalist may sound interesting and intellectual. But it cannot heal the human heart. Only the Lord can do so when we come to Him in faith. Fictionalism is just another sad commentary on the human condition. Pretending is no substitute for the real thing—a genuine relationship with the true and living God. ★

“**HERSHOVITZ IS AN ATHEIST WHO PRETENDS GOD EXISTS BECAUSE IT MAKES HIM FEEL BETTER.**”

ENDNOTE

- 1 Andrew Silow-Carroll/JTA, “Religion for non-believers: It's a Jewish thing—opinion,” *The Jerusalem Post*, June 20, 2022 <jpost.com/opinion/article-709866>.



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THE REST



OF THE STORY

Yes, Jesus came to Earth to die for our sins. But He also had another reason for coming that is often overlooked.

Robert Gottselig

Christians around the world eagerly await the Christmas season, and my wife and I are no exception. One of our favorite activities this time of year is to take a Twinkle Tour of all the wonderful light displays in our city. Last year my wife placed notes in mailboxes to thank people who took the time to put up Nativity scenes, as they are a beautiful testimony of the reason for Christmas.

Christmastime is also when pastors prepare messages about Jesus' birth and how He came to Earth to redeem us by becoming the final, once-for-all sacrifice for sin. While most of these messages are excellent, few tell the rest of the story.

Yes, the Messiah came to redeem mankind; but He also came to offer Israel the long-awaited Messianic Kingdom.

JESUS' PEDIGREE

Jesus is the rightful heir to the Davidic throne (2 Sam. 7:13; Lk. 1:32) and the one who fulfills the prophecy Isaiah gave 700 years before Christ's birth:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6–7).

Consequently, Jesus is the only one qualified to usher in the Kingdom. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke trace His lineage—albeit differently—showing His legitimate, iron-clad claim to David's throne. Matthew records Jesus' genealogy through His earthly father, Joseph (1:1–16), establishing His legal, royal right; while Luke traces it through His mother, Mary, confirming His kingly bloodline (Lk. 3:23–28).

Jesus' Jewish brethren never questioned His lineage. That is why they called Him, "Son of David" (Mt. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15).

THE OFFER

When Jesus sent out His 12 disciples, He told them specifically to whom they should preach:

These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Mt. 10:5–7).



Even though God knew Israel would reject His Kingdom, it did not make Jesus' offer of it any less genuine.

THE POSTPONEMENT

After Israel rejected the gospel (Mt. 12), Jesus' message changed (chap. 13). In eight parables, He began to describe what the intervening church period would be like and spoke of hidden treasure and a pearl of great price:

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it **he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field**. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and **sold all that he had and bought it** (vv. 44–46, emphasis added).*

Israel and the Jewish people are God's "special treasure" (Dt. 14:2; Ps. 135:4), for whom Jesus came at His First Coming, only to have to leave them in

Even though God knew Israel would reject His Kingdom, it did not make Jesus' offer of it any less genuine.

He offered the Kingdom to Israel, saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:15). This was not a message of the cross but, rather, of the Messianic Kingdom, which is why Jesus told His disciples to go to Israel only, as "salvation is of the Jews" (Jn. 4:22).

Sadly, Israel refused the gospel of the Kingdom. Later, the apostle Paul taught that because of Israel's fall, "salvation has come to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:11).

the field (the world) because they rejected Him. The pearl of great price represents the church. In both cases, He sells everything (His life) to purchase them.

The Messiah sacrificially gave all He had, His very life (Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26), to become the final atonement for sin—both for Jewish people and Gentiles. God created this plan from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), and Jesus explained it in the Gospel of John:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 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 (3:14–16).

To be lifted up meant to die. Jesus referred to the bronze serpent in Numbers 21 to explain how He would intercede for us. When the Israelites wandered in the desert, they “spoke against God and against Moses” (v. 5). So God sent fiery serpents that bit and killed them. When the people repented, God told Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live” (v. 8).

Just as looking at the bronze serpent brought physical life, looking to Jesus in faith brings eternal life. This was Jesus’ mission in coming to Earth: “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk 19:10). He also said,

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (Jn. 3:17–18).

PAID IN FULL

Jesus indeed paid it all when He declared from the cross, “It is finished!” (19:30). He knew every sin each one of us would ever commit—past, present, and future—and freely took the punishment for all of them because He loves us: “Greater love,” He said, “has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (15:13).

Three days later, Jesus arose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:3–4), proving who He was and what He came to do: “I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (Jn. 10:17–18). Centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah spoke of the Messiah’s resurrection



The rest of the story is that Jesus will return and establish the Messianic Kingdom He promised to Israel.

and substitutionary atonement: “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:11).

The rest of the story is that Jesus will return and establish the Messianic Kingdom He promised to Israel. Because the Jewish people “did not know the time of [their] visitation” (Lk. 19:44), the Kingdom is postponed. But “if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!” the apostle Paul said (Rom. 11:12).

When Jesus returns, we will see a dramatic shift from Gentile to Jewish preeminence (Isa. 49:22–23; Zech. 14:16). God will restore Earth to Edenic conditions, and Messiah Jesus will reign on the throne of His father David (Isa. 2:2–4:6).

As you celebrate the Christmas season with your family and friends this year, remember to share the whole story of why Jesus came and why He will definitely come again. Maranatha! ★



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AS BELIEVERS, WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE RAP

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RAPTURE. BUT DO WE KNOW WHY WE'LL BE RAPTURED?



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BY JESSE KING

He's coming!

How exciting was it when you knew your dad was on his way home when you were growing up? Maybe as a kid you felt like everything would be fixed when he came through the door. Or maybe you felt that way about your mom. You might have found her to be the do-it-all superhero who could answer every question and meet every need.

Whatever the problem, sometimes all we need is that one person who can make everything better. Our worries fade when we know that special someone is coming to make things right.

How much more do we feel this way about Jesus' return! He has promised to come back for His church; and we know He'll honor His promise, as He always does. But to fully enjoy the significance of the event, we need to understand not only how He'll come and what He will do here, but also why He has to come.

A Meeting in the Sky

Jesus came to Earth as a baby, lived a perfect life because He was God incarnate, died to pay the ransom for our sins, was resurrected, and ascended back to heaven. Ultimately, He will return to Earth a second time, set foot on the Mount of Olives, and allow us—His redeemed—to reign with Him for 1,000 years (Zech. 14:4; Rev. 21:4). But His Word teaches us to anticipate His return in the Rapture first.

Rapture is the term we give to the event prophesied for the church in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, passages that give us a good look at what Jesus will do when true believers see Him coming down from heaven. He will descend “with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (1 Th. 4:16).

All true Church Age believers, living and dead, will meet Christ in the air: “The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we

who are alive and remain shall be caught up [Greek, *harpazo*, “to snatch away or seize”] together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (vv. 16–17). The Latin translation of the Greek is *rapturo*, where we get the term *Rapture*. Once raptured, we will never be separated from Christ again: “And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (v. 17).

Why Rapture the Church?

To fully appreciate our future reward, we should know why Jesus must come—and what He will set straight.

1. To save us from His wrath. After we are ushered into heaven at the Rapture, unprecedented darkness will fill the earth. This era goes by many names: the Day of the Vengeance of God (Isa. 34:8; 63:1–6), the Time of Jacob's Trouble (Jer. 30:7), the Abomination of Desolation (Dan. 9:27), the 70th week of Daniel (vv. 24–27), the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:31), and the End of the Age (Mt. 13:40, 49)—among others. We most often call this period the Tribulation.

The prophet Daniel summarized God's purposes for it: “To make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy” (Dan. 9:24). To achieve these ends, God must deal with iniquity. He will issue seven seal, seven trumpet, and seven bowl judgments to punish sin throughout the earth and restore Israel through its repentance (Rev. 6–9, 16).

Jesus wants us to understand this coming danger from which He has delivered us. God's wrath will devastate the earth. War, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, fire, torture, darkness, and death will be everywhere.

But the church will be safe, “for God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Th. 5:9). How sweet it is to know God promises to protect us from this awful time of judgment.

2. To give us our resurrected bodies. When we meet the Lord in the air, “we shall all be changed . . . in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Cor. 15:51–52).

All true believers, living and dead, will join Christ: He will prepare us for glory, transforming us and replacing our mortal, corruptible bodies with immortal, incorruptible ones (vv. 52–53). We will be ready to see our hearts' ultimate desire fulfilled: perfect fellowship with our Savior. “Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (v. 54).

3. To complete His program for Israel. As God keeps His promises to the church, He also will be faithful to His Chosen People, Israel. He forged a covenant with them through the Law of Moses, but they were unfaithful and broke it. However, rather than casting them off forever, God promised them a new covenant:

I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. . . . For they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jer. 31:33–34).

The prophet Zechariah described the Lord's end-times ministry to Israel as the "pouring out" of His Spirit (Zech. 12:10). Though two-thirds of Israel will perish as billions on Earth die, He has promised to deliver the rest (13:8–9). The apostle Paul expanded on this prophecy, saying God has vowed, "All Israel [the one-third] will be saved, as it is written: 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins'" (Rom. 11:26–27). Jesus' return is necessary to kickstart the Lord's salvation of His Chosen People.

more: "Each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:8). Jesus' return will bring heavenly rewards in addition to the greatest treasure of all—unity forever with the One for whom our souls yearn.

Are You Ready?

At Christmastime we celebrate Jesus' First Advent. Because of His incarnation and sacrifice, He made a way for us to be reconciled to the Father, forgiven of our sins, and cleansed to live eternally with Him.

When He returns to take us with Him to heaven, we'll wonder what we ever saw in this life on Earth. In His presence is where we who love the Lord are meant to be, by His grace. Once we enter heaven, we'll fully understand that our time on Earth was simply a brief stop on our way home—a prelude to the perfection of eternity.

Jesus' return will bring heavenly rewards in addition to the greatest treasure of all—unity forever with the One for whom our souls yearn.

4. To keep His promise to return. Speaking of the Rapture, Jesus told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (Jn. 14:2–3).

If Jesus were never to return, He would be a liar. But our trustworthy God will do exactly as He promised: receive believers to Himself when He comes again, so we can dwell with Him forever.

5. To reward believers. Before closing the canon of Scripture, Jesus left us with words of great hope: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Rev. 22:12). We are in for a treat when Christ returns!

Jesus will reward believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10), which will occur after the Rapture but before the Second Coming. Meeting Him is reward enough, yet He plans to give us even

Against the backdrop of this world, with its endless supply of problems, Jesus' return for His church doesn't feel too close. Yet He left us with a reminder we can't miss: Three times in the final chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, Jesus said, "I am coming quickly!" We share the apostle John's response in verse 20: "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

In the meantime, let's follow God's Word, sharing the Good News of salvation and Jesus' imminent return. After all, there's no greater reward than the one we'll have when we meet Him face to face. ★



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A LOOK AT WHY JESUS MUST—AND WILL—COME TO EARTH AGAIN

‘I WILL RETU

JRN'

BY BRUCE SCOTT

Following a 2020 Democratic presidential debate, U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) approached Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), who reached out his hand to shake hers. She did not reciprocate. Instead, she made an accusation that accidentally was caught on a hot mic: “I think you called me a liar on national TV.”

Sanders replied, “What?”

Warren repeated her claim. Sanders tried to brush it off but then added, “You called *me* a liar.”

Most people would agree that politicians from all parties lie. One politician accusing another of not telling the truth seems the height of irony.

However, no one can call Jesus a liar. Jesus always told the truth (Jn. 8:45). He came into this world to bear witness to the truth (18:37) and was, in fact, truth incarnate (14:6). So, when He told His disciples, “I go away” (16:5) but also said, “I will come again” (14:3), He was stating fact.

Although 2,000 years have passed since Jesus ascended to heaven, He is coming back. And He’s coming back soon (Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). We refer to this event as the Second Coming or Second Advent.


Why did Jesus say He will return? And what did He say He will do when He arrives? He will rule the world, and He will judge it.

HE MUST RETURN TO RULE

When Adam sinned, he forfeited mankind’s stewardship over this world. That authority passed to God’s adversary, Satan, whom Jesus called “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 14:30). But Jesus also said, “The ruler of this world is judged” (16:11) and “will be cast out” (12:31).

When Christ returns, Satan will be imprisoned for 1,000 years in what the Bible calls “the bottomless pit” (Rev. 20:1-3). Jesus—the righteous, rightful Ruler—will take His place on His throne. Since His ascension, He has been sitting at the right hand of His Father’s throne in heaven, waiting to occupy His own throne on Earth (Heb. 8:1; Rev. 3:21). Then He will exercise supreme power, as He said in Matthew 28:18: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”

In Matthew 19:28, Jesus also promised to delegate authority



to His 12 apostles (excluding Judas and probably including Paul) and clarified that this event will take place “in the regeneration.” The word *regeneration* in this context means “the renewing of the world in the time of the Messiah.” The apostle Peter described this future renewal as “times of refreshing” ushered in by Christ, “whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things” (Acts 3:19, 21).

This time of regeneration, refreshing, and restoration will include the reestablishment of God’s Kingdom on Earth, the redemption of believers’ bodies, and the rejuvenation of all creation (Zech. 14:9; Rom. 8:18–25).

Even though Earth today languishes under the rule of a usurper, someday “the Son of Man [will sit] on the throne of His glory” (Mt. 19:28; cf. 25:31) in “Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King” (5:35). That Son of Man, the true King, is the Lord Jesus.

HE MUST RETURN TO JUDGE

In Genesis, when God prepared to destroy everyone in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (18:25). When Jesus returns, He will be that righteous Judge of all the earth. He declared the Father “has committed all judgment to the Son” (Jn. 5:22).

Jesus will not make the same mistake His generation made when it judged Him. He told the people, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (7:24). All of Jesus’ judgments will be completely righteous, well deserved, and in accord with the Father: “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (5:30).

Jesus also asserted that the Father has “given Him authority to execute judgment” (v. 27), which He will do when He returns: “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Mt. 16:27; cf. Rev. 22:12).

Who will Jesus judge? He will judge Israel, as well as all the Gentile nations. The prophet Ezekiel foresaw Israel’s judgment when God told the Israelites, “I will rule over you. I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face” (Ezek. 20:33, 35).

Jesus said, “Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels” (Mk. 8:38).

He also will judge the Gentiles: “All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats” (Mt. 25:32). He will judge them according to how they treated Israel, specifically during the seven-year Tribulation when Jewish people will be severely persecuted.

Jesus said, “Inasmuch as you did it [gave help] to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (v. 40). The nations’ treatment of Israel will indicate whether they are in a right or wrong relationship with the Savior.

Part of Jesus’ role as Judge will be to decide who gains entrance into His future, earthly Kingdom. That decision will hinge on whether or not an individual trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life: “Do not marvel at this,” Jesus said, “for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear [My] voice and come forth—those who have done good [believers, as evidenced by their good deeds] to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil [unbelievers, as evidenced by their evil deeds] to the resurrection of condemnation” (Jn. 5:28–29). Jesus’

parables of the separation of the tares from the wheat and the bad fish from the good fish also illustrate this truth (Mt. 13:24–30, 36–43, 47–50; cf. 24:37–41).

Those admitted to the Kingdom will be rewarded: “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (19:29). Those excluded from the Millennial Kingdom will ultimately be judged at the Great White Throne, along with all unbelievers through the ages (Rev. 20:11–15).

The world has seen its share of corrupt judges throughout history. But Jesus will return to judge every person righteously.

HE IS NO POLITICIAN

Jesus’ Second Coming is one of the most important doctrines in all of Scripture. It has always been considered a fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. If Jesus were not to return, hundreds of verses that speak of God’s future plans for us and for this earth would be lies.

But Jesus will never lie. He is no politician. Indeed, “All the

promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Cor. 1:20). In fact, Jesus vowed, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Mt. 24:35). The simplest reason why Jesus must return is to validate His eternal promises.

God is always faithful and true to His Word. Jesus will come back to Earth at the exact moment God the Father wants Him to come (Ps. 110:1). As we wait, let us not be like the Lord’s detractors, whom He once asked, “If I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?” (Jn. 8:46).

Instead, let us be like the apostle Paul and confess with great assurance, “I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told” (Acts 27:25, NASB). ★



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KEEPING HIS PROMISES

Jesus’ Second Coming will bring to completion scores of prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as many predictions and promises Jesus made Himself while here on Earth.

Regarding Israel, Jesus predicted that because the nation rejected Him and His Kingdom, Israel will suffer a judicial blindness that will not be removed until His Kingdom is established: “For I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” (Mt. 23:39).

He confirmed the postponement of this literal, earthly, Messianic Kingdom when He told His disciples at His last Passover meal, “I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (26:29).

In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus also told a future generation of Israel—the one that will endure the horror known as the Tribulation—how to prepare for His Second Coming. He wanted the Jewish people who will be alive then to be aware of how He will come (24:1–31) and be alert and ready when He arrives (24:32–25:46).

To the religious leaders of His day who wanted to destroy Him, Jesus foretold, “Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the

clouds of heaven” (26:64), indicating that when He returns, He will fulfill Daniel’s prophecy regarding the promised Messiah (Dan. 7:13–14).

He also promised that when He returns, He will “send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect [referring in context to Israel] from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mt. 24:31).

One of the most precious promises Jesus made involves the church. It will be fulfilled at the Rapture, when He meets all Church Age believers (dead and living) in the air to bring them to heaven: “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (Jn. 14:2–3).

When Jesus fulfills this promise, it will culminate His prayer to His Father: “I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me” (17:24).

All of these predictions and promises depend on Christ’s return. And return He will.

by Bruce Scott



JESUS IS COMING SOON. SO WHAT SHOULD HIS
CHURCH BE DOING IN THE MEANTIME?

UNTIL HE COMES

BY PAUL PIERCE

“I want your room cleaned up before I get home!” Sound familiar?

Parents often leave directives like these for their children before leaving the house. The kids might get the job done—but usually it’s right before their parents return.

Too often we also put things off until the last minute. Because Jesus’ return for His church is imminent (He could come at any moment), we should live as if He will come today; and as we wait, we should obey His two key directives: to make disciples and to remember.

MAKE DISCIPLES

Before the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, He spoke of “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Naturally, the apostles had a pressing question: “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (v. 6). Jesus’ answer was both assuring and direct:

It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (vv. 7–8).

Like the apostles, we, too, would love to know when

Jesus will return—first to rapture His church to heaven and then to establish His promised Kingdom. Yet Jesus told the apostles not to concern themselves with *when* He will return but, rather, with what they should do *until* He returns. He wanted them to know they would receive the promised Holy Spirit and become His witnesses.

As born-again believers in the Lord Jesus, we are to live in anticipation of His coming—abiding in Him, bearing fruit for Him, and glorifying Him. “So you will be My disciples,” He said (Jn. 15:8).

Unfortunately, our world revels in sin and is a faithless place with little love for God. But we are to be His witnesses, living for Christ, teaching the truth, making disciples, and expecting grief in return. Jesus said,

If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. . . . If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. Whoever kills you will think that he offers God service (vv. 18–20; 16:2).

Yet God has given us the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of truth” (v. 13), to help us. Jesus said, “He will guide you into all truth; . . . He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (vv. 13–14). In turn, we are to declare

His truth to everyone—Jewish and Gentile—making disciples as we live in obedience to Him. Immediately before His ascension, Jesus gave this directive:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Mt. 28:19–20).

We are to work diligently for the King of kings until He takes us home (cf. Lk. 19:13).

REMEMBER

In the upper room where the Lord shared His final Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus added to that holy day's significance by introducing what we know as communion: He took the unleavened bread, broke it, and gave the following directive: "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me" (Lk. 22:19).

We must never forget the unparalleled sacrifice the Lord Jesus made for us. He left His glory in heaven to eventually become the final, once-for-all sacrifice for our sin under the Mosaic Law. All the Levitical sacrifices over the centuries merely covered sin temporarily until the one, perfect sacrifice could remove it entirely (Heb. 9:23–28). Jesus gave His life so that we might have eternal life through faith in Him.

He arose from the dead because He is God, as evidenced by His prayer: "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (Jn. 17:5).

The apostle Paul emphasized our obligation to remember Jesus' great sacrifice: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). We should always remember these six key truths:

- **We were condemned sinners and enemies of God.** "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:20). "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). We are unworthy and deserve death—eternal separation from God.
- **Christ was our substitute and paid the penalty for sin.** "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). The Messiah endured our punishment, as Isaiah prophesied more than 700 years prior to Jesus' birth.
- **All who are born again belong to Him and are kept by His great power.** God, "according to His abundant

mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance . . . reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith" (1 Pet 1:3–5). We cannot save ourselves, nor can we keep ourselves saved. God does both for us.

- **Someday, we will see Him face to face.** "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn. 3:2). Today we walk by faith. Someday, we will walk by sight.
- **Jesus is coming for His church:** "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself" (Jn. 14:2–3). The apostle Paul called this event "the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Ti. 2:13).
- **He is with us always and gives us peace.** "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). The peace God can give us through Christ transcends everything, including war, persecution, illness, and heartbreak.

LOVE

Until He returns, we should be known by our love for one another as we gather in our churches, bear one another's burdens, and forgive one another as Christ forgave us (Col. 3:12–17). Paul's words to Titus, a young pastor, should encourage us:

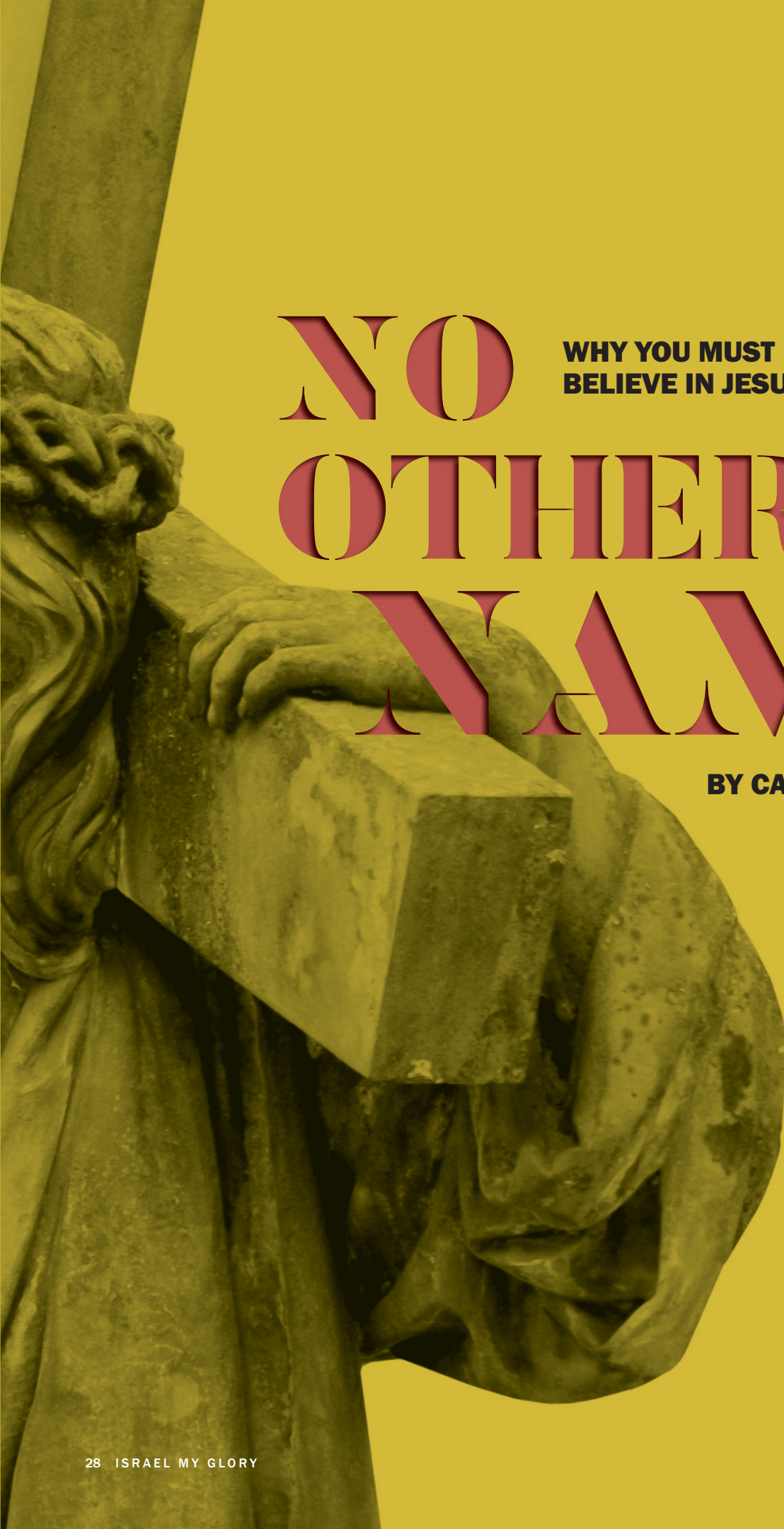
For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (Ti. 2:11–14).

May we be found faithful as we make disciples and remember what Jesus did for us, echoing the words of the apostle John: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). ★



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NO

**WHY YOU MUST
BELIEVE IN JESUS**

OTHER

WANTIE

BY CAMERON JOYNER

How can people hate someone who died for them? After all, the whole world celebrates heroes, people who selflessly “pay the ultimate price” for a noble cause. Countries dedicate entire days to honoring their fallen. So, what makes Jesus of Nazareth an exception?

Christians often ask me why so much tension exists between Christianity and other faiths, particularly Judaism, which rejects the Jew whose very name in Hebrew, *Yeshua*, means “salvation.”

Sadly, history overflows with accounts of Christians (some true believers, others not) who have persecuted or murdered Jewish people in the name of Christ—even though those actions defy Jesus’ teaching. Not only did Jesus never advocate violence, but He commanded the opposite: “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Mt. 5:44).

Unfortunately, many who profess to follow the Savior ignore His commands. It’s no wonder Jewish people, along with many Gentiles, ask, “Who is this Jesus, and why must anyone believe in Him?”

One reason we must believe comes from the book of Acts: “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (4:12). The other reason comes from Moses.

JESUS AND MOSES

God gave Moses an astonishing prophecy:

I will raise up for them [Israel] a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him (Dt. 18:18–19).

In other words, God will hold accountable anyone who does not listen to the Israelite Prophet who is like Moses.

Israel was actively looking for that Prophet when Jesus arrived on the scene (Jn. 1:21; 6:14; 7:40; Acts 3:22; 7:37). In fact, when Jesus turned five loaves of bread and two fish into enough food to feed 5,000 men, plus women and children (Mt. 14:17–21), people began to say, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world” (Jn. 6:14). They probably thought of the miraculous manna their ancestors ate as Moses led the Israelites through the wilderness.

Historically, the Dead Sea scrolls (1QS IX) also acknowledge the Jewish expectation of the Prophet.¹

While there are many parallels between Moses and Jesus, the people of Jesus’ day easily would have recognized at least two: (1) the many physical miracles both performed that verified they were sent by God and (2) their unique relationship with the Almighty. In Moses’ case, “The LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex. 33:11). In Jesus’ case, “He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mt. 7:29), declaring, “I and My Father are one” (Jn. 10:30).

Today, it's easy to see many more parallels. Both:

- Arose during Israel's oppression by foreign empires (Egypt in Moses' day, Rome in Jesus' day).
- Were spared from death when evil rulers ordered the slaughter of Jewish infant boys (Ex. 1:22; Mt. 2:16–18).
- Were called to deliver Israel: Moses, from slavery in Egypt; Jesus, from slavery to sin and death (Isa. 61:1–2; Lk. 4:18; Rom. 8:2).
- Mediated a covenant between God and Israel. Moses instituted the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai (Ex. 34:27); Jesus instituted the New Covenant foretold by Jeremiah the prophet (Jer. 31:31–34; Lk. 22:20; Heb. 8:6–9:15).
- Knew their nation's tendency to rebel against God (Num. 11–17; cf. 14:10–12).
- Experienced the rejection of their own people (Ex. 2:14; Isa. 53:3; Jn. 1:11; Acts 7:35).

JESUS' PROPHECIES

Let's not forget another obvious parallel: Moses and Jesus both accurately predicted Israel's future and the global Jewish dispersion (Diaspora).

Through Moses, God told the Israelites 3,400 years ago what would happen to them and their land if they forsook Him:

I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation. . . . I will bring the land to desolation. . . . I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste. . . . You shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up (Lev. 26:31–33, 38).

The LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other . . . and among those nations you shall find no rest . . . but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul. Your life shall hang in doubt before you; you shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, "Oh, that it were evening!" And at evening you shall say, "Oh, that it were morning!" because of the fear which terrifies your heart, and because of the sight which your eyes see (Dt. 28:64–67).

In 1st-century Israel, many thought the Diaspora was ending. They had high expectations the Messiah was coming as a military deliverer to conquer Rome. The return from captivity in Babylon, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the restoration of Jerusalem were seen as signs that Moses' prediction was being completed. Even the ancient Roman historian Tacitus confirmed that Israel believed its global kingdom was coming soon.²

Israel's leaders also had a newfound concern for keeping the Mosaic Law, bolstering the belief in the Messiah's arrival

to end the dispersion by regathering the Jewish people. For Jesus to come along and contradict them with the following unpopular prophecy was unthinkable:

There will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Lk. 21:23–24).

Jesus said a coming Diaspora would be the "days of vengeance" (v. 22) that Moses referenced in Leviticus 26:25: "I [God] will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant . . . and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy." Clearly, Jesus knew the future; and He mourned over it (Mt. 23:37–39; Lk. 19:41–44).

All who taught the Diaspora was ending were false prophets. God declared in His Law that Israel's loss of its land would always be a punishment for Israel's disobedience (Lev. 26:27–33).

God also held Israel's leaders accountable because they were false shepherds (Ezek. 34:1–6). In the days of the prophets, God condemned them for causing the people to sin. Later, Jesus excoriated the Pharisees (Hebrew, *P'rushim*) for doing exactly the same thing. Had Israel's ancient sages taught truth, Jewish history would be far different today.

WHAT DID JESUS SAY?

God said of the Prophet like Moses, "Whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him" (Dt. 18:19). So, what were some of Jesus' words for which God will hold everyone accountable?

- "I am," when asked by the high priest, "Are You the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the Blessed?" (Mk. 14:61–62).
- "I am the bread which came down from heaven" (Jn. 6:41).
- "Before Abraham was, I AM" (8:58).
- "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (10:11).
- "I and My Father are one" (v. 30).
- "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (11:25).
- "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (14:6).
- "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (v. 9).
- "I am in the Father and the Father in Me" (v. 11).
- "He who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me" (Lk. 10:16).

Clearly, Jesus claimed to be both God and the Messiah of Israel prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures. He said Isaiah spoke of His death when the prophet wrote, "He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken" (Isa. 53:8) and of His resurrection when he

wrote, “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. . . . My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities” (v. 11).

How can people hate someone who died for them? Probably because sin blinds people to the truth. But God still holds us accountable for heeding the Prophet like Moses. It’s not surprising Jesus told the Jewish leaders, “If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (Jn. 5:46–47).

As Jesus said in John 3:18, “He who believes in [Me] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

There is no other name under heaven that can save us.

As followers of Jesus, we plead with everyone everywhere: Repent and believe. ✨

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THE MOSES TEST

Remember Y2K, the colossal, highly anticipated computer catastrophe that was supposed to paralyze the universe the moment we entered the 21st century?

We were told computers weren’t built to navigate into 2000 and probably would reset themselves to 1900, creating mass chaos by crashing and corrupting data everywhere. Power plants wouldn’t function, vault doors wouldn’t open, appliances would explode, communication networks would implode, the financial system would collapse, and life as we know it all would end.

But what happened when January 1, 2000, rolled around? Absolutely nothing!

Had that prediction been made by someone who claimed to be speaking for the Lord, the Law of Moses says he should have been put to death: “The prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak . . . shall die” (Dt. 18:20).

A prophet could not be wrong—not even once. Every single prophecy had to come to pass or the individual wasn’t a prophet of the Lord. God always knows the end from the beginning. That is why fulfilled prophecy confirms that the message and the messenger are from God: “I am the LORD, that is My name; . . . New things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of

them” (Isa. 42:8–9).

When wicked King Ahab of Israel persuaded godly King Jehoshaphat of Judah to help him fight at Ramoth Gilead, Jehoshaphat first wanted a word from the Lord. So Ahab gathered 400 of his idolatrous, false prophets who all predicted great victory. “Is there not still a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of Him?” Jehoshaphat asked (2 Chr. 18:6).

So they found Micaiah, who said the other 400 men had lying spirits. Angry, Ahab declared, “Put this fellow in prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and water of affliction, until I return in peace,” to which Micaiah replied, “If you ever return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me” (vv. 26–27).

When they went to battle, Ahab disguised himself. But a random arrow “struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor,” and he died that day at sunset, propped up in his chariot (vv. 33–34).

Everything God says will happen will, indeed, happen. Everything Jesus said would occur before He died transpired, and what He said will transpire in the latter days is beginning to take shape today. When the time is right, it, too, will come to pass.

Jesus passes the Moses test with flying colors. So when He speaks to us through His Word, we would be wise to listen.



THE HOPE FOR ALL TIME

BY TOM SIMCOX

On December 25, much of the world will pause to celebrate Christmas. And though it is a well-documented fact that Jesus was not born on that date, those of us who name the name of Christ as our Lord and Savior see the holiday as a reminder of God's faithfulness and goodness in sending us a Redeemer to buy back the universe Adam lost when he fell into sin.

Christmas reminds us of the greatest gift this fallen world will ever receive: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (Jn. 3:16).

I can't help but wonder, however, how many people realize that, if God had not first delivered the Jewish people from the hands of the evil Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV (Epiphanes), Jesus could never have come.

Had Antiochus succeeded in assimilating the Jewish people, Jesus could not have fulfilled the Scriptural requirements to be our Redeemer. The Messiah-Savior had to be a verifiable, direct descendant of King David from the tribe of Judah. There would have been no tribe of Judah because it and all the other tribes would have ceased to exist.

THE BATTLE FORETOLD

People who think history proceeds along an uncharted course probably don't read God's Word. More than 300 years before Antiochus came on the scene, God told the prophet Daniel about him.

When Israel was captive in Babylon because the nation forsook the Lord, God strategically placed Daniel in the

service of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Later, Daniel served Nebuchadnezzar's grandson Belshazzar.

In Belshazzar's third year (551 BC), God sent Daniel a vision that involved animals representing countries and horns representing rulers:

I lifted my eyes and saw . . . standing beside the river . . . a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other. . . I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him. . . And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. Then he came to the ram that had two horns . . . and ran at him with furious power. . . He [the goat] was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns (Dan. 8:3-7).

The goat was an incredibly swift animal that basically flew across the earth. Enraged by the ram, he charged into battle with alarming speed, breaking the ram's horns, its symbols of power. The ram represents the Medo-Persian Empire; the goat is Greece; and the notable horn represents Greece's powerful ruler, Alexander the Great.

In June 323 BC, at merely 32 years of age, Alexander died exactly as Daniel prophesied: "The male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken" (v. 8). Alexander's vast empire was divided among his four generals: the "four notable [horns that] came up



Q

WHAT IS THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST?

toward the four winds of heaven” (v. 8). Two of these generals are historically famous: Ptolemy, who ruled Egypt and part of North Africa, and Seleucus, who ruled a vast empire that stretched from Asia Minor to modern India.

Then a little horn appears. This is Antiochus IV, also known as Antiochus Epiphanes: “A little horn . . . grew exceedingly great toward the south [Egypt/Ptolemaic Kingdom] . . . and toward the Glorious Land [Israel]” (v. 9).

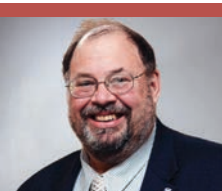
Antiochus savagely attacked the Jewish people and desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem by sacrificing a female pig on the altar and erecting an image of himself in the holy of holies. He also sent squads of soldiers throughout the length and breadth of Israel, trying to force God’s people to embrace his Hellenistic mandates in order to assimilate the Jews and destroy the practice of Judaism. Antiochus was so cruel and ruthless that he is considered a type of the Antichrist.

His onslaught met resistance at the town of Modi’in, where Judah Maccabee and his family led a rebellion against the forces of paganism. They recaptured the Temple in 164 BC; and Temple worship was reinstated on the 25th of Kislev, which became the Feast of Dedication (Jn. 10:22). Today it is celebrated for eight days as Hanukkah.

Triumph over the Seleucids was a tremendous victory. The God of Israel provided deliverance over Antiochus and thus preserved the Jewish people, the Jewish religion, and the Messianic line through which our Savior had to come.

The victory back then against all odds also assures us that God ultimately will vanquish Satan and sin completely, just as the Scriptures promise.

This year, the 25th of Kislev begins at sundown on December 18, when Jewish people will light the first Hanukkah candle. Six days later, on Christmas Eve, Christians will begin celebrating the greater significance of that wonderful Jewish victory: God became man to redeem us from sin. And for all eternity, the Jewish Messiah of Israel shall be humanity’s only hope for all time. ★



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In biblical times, a judgment seat (called the *bema*) was a raised platform erected at an athletic event where the judge presented an award to the winner. Likewise, the apostle Paul used the word *bema* as the place in heaven where Christ will sit and reward Christians for their service.

All Christians will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give an account of their works on Earth (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). They will not be judged for sin because their sins were forgiven at the time of their salvation (Rom. 8:1). Christians are secure in Christ and have eternal life (Jn. 10:28-30), so this judgment is not to determine whether someone goes to heaven or hell.

Rather, Christians will be judged completely (1 Cor. 4:5), impartially (Rom. 2:11), objectively, and separately (14:10, 12) in every area of their lives. The Lord will evaluate each person’s motives, character, conduct, words, works, and use of his or her gift(s) and talent(s) and reward each believer accordingly. Christ keeps an ongoing record of all things in each Christian’s life during our time on Earth (Jer. 17:10; Mt. 12:36-37; Heb. 4:13).

At this judgment, every Christian’s works will be examined to determine what type of reward he or she will receive or lose (1 Cor. 3:12-15). The rewards are described as crowns, and five types will be given for faithful service:

1. *Victor’s Crown* (1 Cor. 9:24-27). For those who lived a life of self-discipline and self-control in serving Christ.
2. *Crown of Righteousness* (2 Tim. 4:8). For those who looked fervently for the Lord’s coming at the Rapture and lived a life of practical righteousness and faithful service that glorified God.
3. *Crown of Life* (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10). For martyrs and those who suffered persecution and triumphed over trials.
4. *Crown of Rejoicing* (1 Th. 2:19-20). For those who led souls to Christ and will rejoice over them in Christ’s presence.
5. *Crown of Glory* (1 Pet. 5:1-4). For elders who are faithful pastors, teachers, and Christian leaders.

Besides crowns, other rewards of position and authority will be granted to Christians who will serve in the Millennial Kingdom.

This judgment must take place after the church is raptured (1 Th. 4:13-17) but before Christ’s Second Coming because the church accompanies Christ when He returns, clothed in fine linen, clean and bright, which is the “righteous acts of the saints” (Rev. 19:8). Thus, Christians will already have received their rewards.

by David M. Levy

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ARCHAEOLOGY AND JERICHO (PART 2)

*
Jericho ruins

➔ One of the best-known accounts from Scripture is the miracle of the walls that came tumbling down when “Joshua fit the battle of Jericho,” as the old song goes. Therefore, the archaeological excavations conducted at Jericho should provide evidence of such a biblically significant event.

However, the latest excavations conducted since 1950 concluded that Jericho was destroyed 150 years before Scripture places the Israelites at the site.¹ Archaeologists claim the biblical authors made up the story and attributed Jericho’s fall to Israel.

In our last issue we refuted the belief that Israel could not have invaded and conquered Canaan. In this column we will address the claim that the biblical account of the fall of Jericho is a myth—which it is not.

The Timing. Every excavation at Jericho has produced archaeological evidence of the city walls’ destruction and the city being burned, just as the Bible described (Josh. 6:5, 24). The issue is not *if* this happened but *when* it happened and *who* did it.

Earlier archaeologists concluded that the timing of what happened could be determined by literal biblical chronology (Jud. 11:26; 1 Ki. 6:1), which gave a date of 1406 BC (Late Bronze Age). Later archaeologists believed the archaeological evidence alone should determine the date.

Since the walls could be dated to an earlier time (Middle Bronze Age) and no pottery (used to date a site) from the Late Bronze Age was found, archaeologists determined that Jericho was destroyed in the Middle Bronze period and was uninhabited at the time of Joshua. However, there was no Late Bronze wall because the Middle Bronze III wall was still strong and serving its purpose in the Late Bronze period.

Although most of the Late Bronze remains were eroded or removed by human activity, there was evidence of Late Bronze habitation.² Scarabs and seals containing the names of Egyptian royalty were buried with people in Jericho’s cemetery, clearly indicating the city was active in Joshua’s day.³ One excavator discovered a Late Bronze clay tablet with an administrative text, evidence that the city at that time had a functioning government and an archive to house such official correspondence.⁴

In addition, earlier excavations discovered a “red ware,” a local imitation of more expensive imported pottery from Cyprus. This type of pottery, which came into use only in the Late Bronze age, was ignored by an excavator who, misidentifying some of her pottery finds, had examples of the very pottery she had used as evidence against the biblical dating.

Furthermore, several more findings of the excavations help confirm the biblical account of Israel’s conquest.⁵ The discovery of large quantities of storage jars filled with grain indicate the destruction occurred during the harvest season (Josh.

2:6; 3:15). Storage jars still filled with grain were found, confirming a short siege (6:15, 20). And the most recent excavations exposed the mudbrick walls that sat atop the stone revetment (retaining) walls, verifying they were leveled completely (v. 20).

This evidence, along with the documentary evidence in Scripture, assures us God’s Word is true and Joshua did indeed fit the battle of Jericho.

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INTRODUCTION TO PHILIPPIANS

ACTS 16:6–40;
PHILIPPIANS 1:1–2

Christian leaders often create ministry strategies, only to discover God's will is different. The apostle Paul and Silas wanted to revisit churches in Galatia and deliver the decrees established by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6–29), but God had other plans for them.

In a vision, Paul saw a man plead with him to come to Macedonia. Paul and his coworkers, Silas and Timothy, believed God had called them to preach the gospel in Macedonia. So they sailed from Troas to Samothrace then to Neapolis and made their way 10 miles inland to Philippi, a colony in Macedonia where they stayed many days (16:9–12).

Because Paul heeded the Macedonian call, the gospel reached Europe, resulting in the evangelization of the Western World.

SETTING OF PHILIPPI

A mountainous stronghold, Philippi was rich in gold, silver, timber, and minerals. It also housed a medical academy where Luke, a physician and the author of Acts, might have studied.

For centuries the area was ruled by petty kings; but in 360 BC, colonists asked Philip II of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great) to take control of the city. Philip garrisoned the area with his troops and named it Philippi. In time it became the capital of the Greek Empire.

In 168 BC, Philippi was passed to Rome's control and designated a Roman colony in 31 BC. Given the power to govern itself, Philippi was exempt from poll and property taxes. Although Latin was the city's official language, most Philippians spoke Greek. Philippi's nationalities included Thracians, Greeks, Romans, Asians, and a small number of Jews.

SALVATION IN PHILIPPI

Upon entering a city, Paul always went to the synagogue first,

hoping to present the gospel to the Jewish people. But Philippi had so few Jews it could not muster the 10 men required to hold a synagogue service. Paul eventually found a small service of Jewish people worshiping God by the riverside.

In the service was Lydia from Thyatira. She was a Gentile convert to Judaism and a seller of expensive purple dye or fabric, whose work kept her in Philippi. The Holy Spirit opened her heart to receive Jesus as her Savior; and she and her household were baptized, becoming the first Christians in Europe. Lydia persuaded Paul and the missionary team to stay in her home, which she opened as a house church (vv. 12–15).

While Paul and Silas ministered in Philippi, a demon-possessed slave girl, who brought her masters much financial profit by fortune-telling, followed them for days. She continually screamed, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation" (v. 17). Greatly annoyed, Paul cast out the demon in the name of Jesus Christ; and she was delivered (v. 18).

Angered because their profits disappeared, the girl's owners seized Paul and Silas and dragged them to the magistrates, who disparaged their Jewish heritage and claimed they taught unlawful practices. Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten, put in stocks, and imprisoned (vv. 19–24).

Despite their brutal treatment, they prayed and sang hymns. Suddenly, an earthquake shook the prison's foundation. Doors sprung open, and the prisoners' chains were loosed. The jailer, awaking from sleep and fearing the prisoners had escaped, prepared to commit suicide. But Paul shouted, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here" (v. 28).

The jailer fell at Paul's feet and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" (v. 30).

They replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (v. 31). The jailer and his household obeyed. He took Paul and Silas home, fed them, washed their wounds, and was baptized with his family.

When the magistrates sent officers to release Paul and Silas, Paul refused because they were Roman citizens who had been beaten openly without a trial and thrown in prison. If Rome learned of these actions, the magistrates could be removed from office and Philippi stripped of its privileges as a Roman colony. The magistrates promptly released Paul and Silas, who went to Lydia's house, encouraged the new church, and then left the city. Luke remained behind to guide the church (vv. 35–40).

SPECIFICS ON PHILIPPIANS

The following details provide important insight into the letter:

Authorship. Based on biblical and extrabiblical evidence, most commentators agree Paul penned Philippians during his first Roman imprisonment, when he led several Romans

to the Lord, including some in Caesar’s household (Phil. 4:22).

Place and Date. Most commentators believe Paul wrote the epistle in either Caesarea, Ephesus, or Rome near the end of his first imprisonment in AD 61 or 62 (Acts 28:30–31). Some think he wrote it in AD 63, shortly before he was released from prison.

Purpose. Paul wrote to the Philippian church to (1) express his love and joy over learning of their Christian growth (Phil. 1:3–11); (2) update them on his imprisonment, opportunities to proclaim the gospel, and hope to join them upon his release (vv. 12–26); (3) challenge them to uphold their Christian testimony and witness boldly to the unbelieving world (1:27–2:18); (4) tell them he would send Timothy and Epaphroditus with

as a servant to God during His earthly ministry (cf. 2:5–8).

He addressed “all the saints . . . in Philippi” (1:1). The word *saint* means “set-apart one.” Scripture teaches that every believer in Christ is a saint.

The church officers are called “bishops [overseers] and deacons” (v. 1). The word *bishop* is used interchangeably with *elder* [Greek, *presbuteros*] and speaks of the same position. Bishops were responsible for overseeing work in the local church (1 Pet. 5:1–4).

Deacon [Greek, *diakonos*] means “servant,” and the position originated in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1–6). Deacons helped the bishops care for people in the church. Paul provided qualifications for bishops and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1–13.

ALTHOUGH SEVERELY PERSECUTED FOR HIS FAITH, PAUL CONTINUALLY REJOICED IN WHAT HE POSSESSED IN CHRIST HIS SAVIOR.

an update on his situation (2:19–30); (5) warn them about Judaizers and Antinomianism and exhort them to live the Christian life (3:1–21); (6) encourage them to be united in joy, prayer, and peace (4:1–9); (7) praise and thank them for their generosity toward him (vv. 1–20); and (8) offer a concluding greeting and blessing (vv. 21–23).

Pattern. The letter’s major theme is to call the Philippians and all Christians to rejoice in Christ. Although severely persecuted for his faith, Paul continually rejoiced in what he possessed in Christ his Savior (1:4; 2:2, 17–18, 28; 3:1; 4:4, 10). Thus, *joy* and *rejoice* are the key words in this epistle. Christians should rejoice because of what they possess in Jesus Christ their Savior.

SALUTATION IN THE LETTER

The letter begins, “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1–2).

This was a standard salutation in Paul’s day. Paul included Timothy in his greeting because the Philippian church knew him well. Although he did not mention Silas and Luke, they were with Paul when he founded the church.

Paul called Timothy and himself “bondservants [slaves] of Jesus Christ” (v. 1). Christ was Paul’s Master, both of body and soul. Paul followed Christ’s example, who humbled Himself

As was his custom, Paul began his epistle with a greeting: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:2). He used the word *grace* rather than *greetings* and included *peace*. Notice, *grace* always precedes *peace*, for without God’s grace one cannot possess His peace. God’s grace cannot be earned or bought. Here the word *grace* does not refer to saving grace because the addressees are already saved. Rather, it refers to the favor and blessings the Lord bestows daily on believers.

Peace refers to the inner peace people possess as believers in Christ, trusting Him daily for all their needs. The source of all grace and peace is “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 2). The original Greek text shows Jesus is equal to God the Father in essence and being (cf. Jn. 10:30; Ti. 1:4). Thus, both God the Father and Jesus Christ bestow grace and peace to the redeemed.

As we explore this epistle, I pray your heart will be encouraged as you face life’s difficulties, and that Philippians will bring you joy and cause you to rejoice greatly in what you possess in Christ.



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

JUST A CLOSER WALK WITH THEE

PART 6: THE DISCIPLINE OF DISCIPLESHIP

BY DAN PRICE

Did you know people can be disciples of just about anything? Sports teams, fitness programs, and celebrities all have “disciples.” In ancient Judaism, discipleship was a method of teaching—a pursuit that matters for Christians today as we learn how to be disciples of Jesus.

Throughout this series we’ve discussed spiritual habits, or disciplines, that can help us enjoy the intimacy of seeking God and being in His presence as He reshapes our thoughts and affections. Spiritual disciplines help us deepen our walks with God, grow in our love for Him, and focus our lives on Him.

We conclude this series now with a final discipline: discipleship, which is a method of shaping a person into a committed, mature, growing apprentice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Jesus’ day, most rabbis had disciples (Hebrew, *Talmidim*). The relationship was more akin to master and apprentice or mentor, rather than to teacher and student. A disciple did more than sit under a rabbi’s teaching; he traveled with him, ate with him, and learned his way of life—as Elisha did with the prophet Elijah.

The disciple had an intense commitment and passion to imitate everything about the rabbi, so he could carry on in the rabbi’s tradition—becoming an extension of him and his way of engaging God, the text, and the world.

When Rabbi Jesus asks us to become His disciples, He wants us to do more than simply believe in Him for salvation. He wants us to pursue passionately and determinedly the goal of becoming more and more like Him through the power of the Holy Spirit. That goal certainly takes discipline. Discipleship

is a disciplined tenacity for growing spiritually to be more like Jesus.

God expects such spiritual growth from us: “By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 Jn. 2:5–6). Learning to live as Jesus lived by keeping His

commandments and imitating Him is essential to what it means to be a Christian. Similarly, the apostle Paul saw himself as a disciple of Jesus and expected others to imitate Jesus by imitating him (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1). Notably, Jesus claimed that a student is not to be better than his teacher, but well-trained students must be *like* their teacher (Lk. 6:40).

Do we have that disciplined commitment to become like Jesus? Yes, our theology should line up with Jesus’ teaching. But have we become apprentices, imitators of Jesus in His school of how to live as He did?

IMITATING RABBI JESUS

Some might question if living like Jesus is even possible. It certainly isn’t if we’re talking about Jesus’ divine attributes. Jesus was God incarnate; we are mere mortals.

However, in many areas of life, Jesus expected His disciples to imitate Him. Interestingly, He advocated many of the spiritual disciplines we’ve examined in this six-part study: biblical meditation, prayer, fasting, rest, community, and worship. Being Jesus’ disciples means disciplining ourselves to imitate His way of life in other areas as well:

Pray Like Jesus. Jesus taught His disciples to pray as He did in Luke 11; and He modeled a prayer life for them that

included concentrated, daily times of communing with the Father (Mk. 1:35; Lk 5:16). He prayed for Himself (Jn. 17:1), His loved ones (v. 9), and His spiritual children (Mt. 19:13). He prayed for His enemies (5:44; Lk. 23:34) and for the seemingly impossible (Mt. 26:39).

Repeatedly, He asked His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane to follow His lead and pray intensely (v. 41). It was their final exam of sorts in His school of prayer. But despite their best attempts to imitate His prayer life, they failed. And so will we. But He still expects us to try to imitate Him in prayer.

Memorize Scripture. Jesus' teachings are filled with Scripture references, biblical allusions, and textual arguments. He repeatedly quoted Deuteronomy to fight off temptation (Mt. 4), Exodus to teach about our hearts in relation to the Law (chap. 5), Psalms in reference to His true identity (27:46; Mk. 12:36), and many others.

us?" Surely, we can't die for the sins of the world. Neither can we accept the unbiblical ways people interpret Jesus' love today. So how are we to understand and obey Jesus' command to love as He loves us?

The context of Jesus' statement in John 13:34 involves His sacrifice and the submission of His will to that of the Father. Jesus calls us to love unconditionally and selflessly, submitting to God and others. He asks us to obey what He called "the first and great commandment" (Mt. 22:38).

Judaism refers to it as the *Shema*: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (v. 37; cf. Dt. 6:5). Then Jesus added, "'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 22:39-40).

We are to love God passionately and completely and to set aside our own self-protective instincts and love selflessly,

Discipleship is a disciplined tenacity for growing spiritually to be more like Jesus.

One can argue that every time Jesus taught, He exegeted a correlating Hebrew Scripture. It's important to know the Bible—Old and New Testaments—in order to understand what Jesus was saying. For example, Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) takes on a new poignance when we know the passages about ritual cleanliness for priests and Levites (Lev. 21). The Lord's statement that He came to "seek and save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10) becomes a declaration of His divinity if we know these are roles God claims exclusively for Himself (Ezek. 34).

Jesus adroitly taught Scripture in a way that helped His disciples understand the benefits of memorizing as much Scripture as they possibly could. As disciples, we are called to imitate Jesus' intimate relationship with the text, memorizing it and living it—to walk as He walked.

Love Like Jesus. In John 13:34, Jesus told His disciples, "As I have loved you . . . love one another." This type of love marks us as His disciples and resonates with the discipline of discipleship: If you want to be known as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, you'll seek to imitate His love.

Of course, the question is, "How do we love like Jesus loved

especially when it comes to other Christians. This is the love we seek to imitate, and Jesus' disciples will make this calling their highest priority in life.

THE PRICE OF DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship is not for the faint of heart, but it is for the failures at heart. Jesus knew exactly whom He was calling to imitate Him: the weak and weary, the brokenhearted and spiritually sick.

It takes discipline to bathe in the grace the Savior offers us through endless second chances. It takes discipline to follow in His footsteps and consistently practice biblical meditation, prayer, fasting, rest, community, and worship. But there is no greater privilege than being able to walk closely with the Lord—and nothing brings greater joy.



Dan Price

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BEN & JERRY'S MISGUIDED WAR ON ISRAEL

BY JESSE KING

Ben & Jerry's, the Vermont-based ice cream company that started in an old gas station in 1978 and grew into a behemoth doing \$450 million a year in business, appears to have lost its war against Israel.

After fighting for more than a year and a half to keep its ice cream from being sold in Judea and Samaria, which it calls "occupied Palestinian territory," Ben & Jerry's lost in court recently when a U.S. federal judge said the company failed to show that continued sales would cause irreparable harm.

Last summer, Ben & Jerry's, a wholly owned subsidiary of Unilever, defied its British parent company to end the sale of its products in Judea and Samaria, also called the West Bank. So Unilever sold its Ben & Jerry's interests to longtime Israeli ice cream licensee Avi Zinger. When Zinger made the ice cream available in Israel, including Judea and Samaria, Ben & Jerry's sued Unilever, its single, full shareholder, to block the sale to Zinger.

Ben & Jerry's felt it must condemn Israel to remain consistent with its social-activist causes. However, its position displays its ignorance concerning the area's history and tramples on Israel's right to exist and defend itself in its own land, to which it holds both divine and legal claim.

Despite the dispersions, Jewish people have lived in the land since the days of Joshua. The 1920s Mandate for Palestine gave them sovereign claim to their ancient homeland, including Judea and Samaria. In 1947, the newly formed United Nations violated the original mandate by giving Judea and Samaria to the Arabs for an Arab state.

Wanting all the Jewish land, the Arabs rejected the offer; and Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq attacked Israel hours after Israel legally declared its independence in 1948. During the war, Jordan grabbed the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem and kept them until Israel liberated the areas in the 1967 Six-Day War, regaining its own land.



BEN & JERRY'S SEEMS MORE PREOCCUPIED WITH ITS AGENDA TO SMEAR ISRAEL THAN WITH STUDYING HISTORY TO UNDERSTAND THE NATION'S HISTORIC, LEGAL RIGHT TO JUDEA AND SAMARIA.

Seeking peace, Israel, through the Oslo Accords, ceded portions of Judea and Samaria to the Arabs, who had just begun to call themselves Palestinians. But Palestinian leaders refused to recognize or negotiate with Israel because their goal has always been to destroy Israel entirely.

Ben & Jerry's has drawn a line in the sand. Many people who had been waiting for an opportunity to vilify the Jewish state banded together to stand against Israel. We who love Israel should be willing to sacrifice our comfort to support and defend the Jewish people and their nation when they face attacks like these.

Ben & Jerry's seems more preoccupied with its agenda to smear Israel than with studying history to understand the nation's historic, legal right to Judea and Samaria. In its attempt to be on the "right side of history," the ice cream giant took the side that tries to rewrite it.

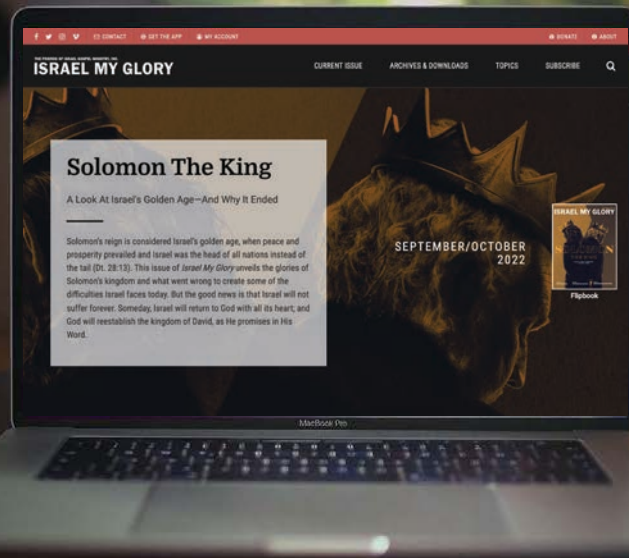
By catering to those who think justice means opposing Israel's existence in its homeland, Ben & Jerry's probably alienated a large number of people who know the truth and may never buy Ben & Jerry's ice cream again.



Jesse King

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

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PHOTO: THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL ARCHIVE

“Not many people have had as much trouble as I have had; and I put my trust in the Lord, our Savior, who said, ‘I will never . . . forsake you.’

by Zvi Kalisher

Through God’s miracles, the Jewish people have survived; and now we live in the Promised Land. At this time of year, we enjoy celebrating Hanukkah. It is a joyful, special time for children. Their parents come not with candles of joy and victory but of memorial.

Many people here are far from God. They have lost their hope and are in trouble. No one can encourage them. They live in deep disappointment, and the whole world seems dark to them. There are many such people in our neighborhood, and they know me and like to speak with me. Recently, some of them came to me in deep despair.

“You should never lose hope,” I told them. “Put your trust in God, for only He will encourage us.”

“What will you say to those whose sons were taken into the army?” one of them asked.

I have heard this question many times. I asked him, “How many of your sons are in the army?”

“Is one son not enough?” he replied.

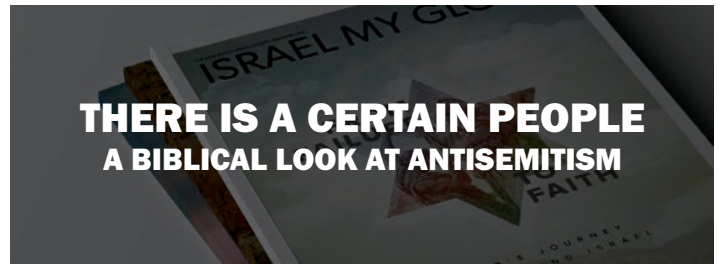
“You are so far from faith in the Lord,”

I told him. “I have three sons in the military: one in the paratroopers, one in the Air Force, and one is an officer on a torpedo boat. Our daughter is also in army communications.”

“How can you be at peace with this?” one asked.

“Psalm 50:15 says, ‘Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.’ But this is written only to those who believe in the Lord,” I said.

I was about to read for them what God tells the wicked in the next verse, but first I asked, “If I read only from the book of Psalms, why do you call me a traitor? Who are the traitors? Those who read God’s Holy Word or you people? Job 5:7 says, ‘Man is born to trouble.’ But without God, every day will bring more trouble. Only God can take all this suffering from



us. Therefore, the Lord said, ‘Call to Me’” (Jer. 33:3).

I told them, “Not many people have had as much trouble as I have had; and I put my trust in the Lord, our Savior, who said, ‘I will never . . . forsake you.’”

“How can you speak about faith and not even cover your head?” one of the new immigrants asked.

“I am not like the ultra-Orthodox, who come in black clothing like camouflage. This seems good to people like you, but not to God. I come before God with an honest heart. The ultra-Orthodox come to you with fables and rabbinical traditions. They bring many books written by men. But what do I have? Only the Holy Bible, which was given to the people of Israel. It is written in Leviticus 26, ‘If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season’ [vv. 3–4]. Can we live without water? And are you obeying His commands?” I asked them.

“Do you obey?” one asked me.

“I am not an angel, but I do my best to obey His commands,” I replied.

People are very suspicious here. As we say in Israel, “Respect him and suspect him.” That is why one asked me, “To which sect do you belong?”

I showed them the Bible and asked, “Who wrote the Bible? Those who belong to a sect or those who have true faith in the Lord?”

They had received brochures from ultra-Orthodox organizations. “These brochures,” I said, “only tell you how to fight against those who do not believe like the ultra-Orthodox. There is no love, no consideration for anyone who is not with them. But the Lord said, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ in Leviticus 19:18.”

They started to listen with great attention, not as before. We spoke more deeply this time. I read John 3:16 and showed them God loves them and can change them.

At the end of our time together, I read Ezekiel 33:11, “Turn, turn from your evil ways!” It was a long and interesting talk. Please pray they read God’s Holy Word for themselves and come to know Him personally.

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.

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