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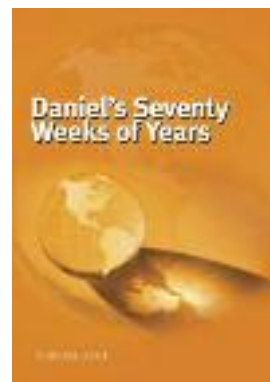
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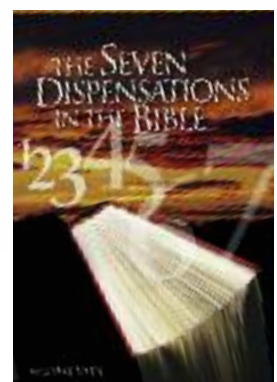
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The Greatest Gift



By Thomas Lieth

Pastor and Author, Midnight Call International

Dear Friends,

One might not believe it, but the year is already drawing to a close. Now it is again time to think about what to put in the children's stocking and what to give Aunt Erna for Christmas.

Even though my preceding words don't sound like it, I feel that this tradition is very beautiful. What is wrong with surprising the children and delighting one's loved ones with presents? Little to nothing. Consequently, I am an ardent lover of the Christmas season with all its many traditions, of which gifts certainly are an important part.

Yet, when we are talking about presents, the greatest gift of all is definitely love. Thus, I am more joyful about receiving my wife's love than a pair of socks. Even children care more about their parents' love than they do about any toy. Of course, one does not exclude the other. But gifts without love are like a river without water. Paul writes: "So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13).

Perhaps this year's pre-Christmas time should make us more sensitive to treating our fellow human beings in general, and our brothers and sisters in the faith in particular, with much more love. Isn't there way too much strife, division, envy, pride

and arrogance in our congregations, as well as between Christian brothers and sisters? All these things lead to unkindness.

Dear readers, we are certainly not all of the same opinion. We also do not find everyone equally likable. We do not have the same talents, nor do we have the same knowledge. We attend different congregations and sing different hymns. You read one article from *Midnight Call* with delight and feel refreshed; then you read another one, shake your head and feel upset. But, have we forgotten that God loves one brother no less than the other? Have we forgotten that the Bible warns us of envy and strife, but at the same time calls us to unconditional love? How did Paul say it? "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:4-7).

Where is there still room for strife and anger, for arrogance and our lack of loving-kindness? This love—especially among Christian brothers and sisters, regardless of their church membership—is not a pious wish or recommendation, but an unequivocal

ocal command. Thus says the Apostle John: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:7-11).

It would be a most extraordinary gift if from now on, you would meet your Christian brothers and sisters across all borders and differences with cordial love. Love can be practiced and applied in practical ways by always regarding others higher than oneself. And so, I pray that someone will give you this gift of love, and that you will surprise and delight others with such a gift. Knowing that God has given us the amazing and precious gift of becoming human in His Son, Jesus Christ, I greet you in heartfelt fellowship.

With love, your sometimes unloving brother in Christ. (MC)

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OUR TASK

Midnight Call Ministries is a nonprofit missionary organization, dedicated to proclaiming the entire Bible as the unfailing and eternal written Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the unerring guide for the Christian faith.

The object of Midnight Call is to call people everywhere to Christ, to proclaim the return of Christ, to prepare Christians for His coming, and to uphold the faith and warn of false doctrines. *Midnight Call* magazine is available in twelve languages. All work done through radio, literature and missionaries is supported entirely by the gifts and free will offerings of God's people.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

WE BELIEVE in the divine inspiration of the whole Bible and therein the infallibility of the Holy Scripture, which is God's Word, and in the eternal Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

WE BELIEVE Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, and shed His blood to save mankind. He died and arose bodily the third day and later ascended into heaven.

WE BELIEVE that the Lord Jesus Christ died in the place of each individual sinner and that all who believe in Him as their personal Savior are justified through His shed blood and have become children of God.

WE BELIEVE that Israel is God's chosen people, and that the restoration of the Jews to their own land is the fulfillment of the Word of God.

WE BELIEVE in the pre-tribulation appearance of Jesus Christ for the Rapture of His Church (all born again believers).

WE BELIEVE in the immortality of our souls and the resurrection of our bodies, and in the resurrection of the just and the unjust, the everlasting blessedness of the saved and the everlasting punishment of the lost.

From Nazareth to Nazareth



Thomas Lieth

Matthew and Luke give two different sequences of events for the Christmas story. Do they contradict each other? Not in the least! A chronological account.

The Lord Jesus' birth is described twice in the Bible: in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. If the two reports are compared, they don't agree on every point. This makes sense, since otherwise, a single account would have sufficed. But Matthew writes about things in his Gospel that Luke doesn't mention, and vice-versa.

My goal is to combine the accounts from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and to present one possible timeline for the Christmas story. We'll begin with the annunciation of the Lord Jesus' birth in the Gospel of Luke: "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary" (Luke 1:26-27).

The theme is "From Nazareth to Nazareth," and Luke confirms that Mary lived in Nazareth and that the angel appeared to her there. **This is the first step:** the Lord Jesus' birth is announced to Mary in Nazareth before she even becomes pregnant, "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS" (Luke 1:31).

Mary wasn't yet pregnant when the angel appeared. But then the Holy Spirit came over Mary and she became pregnant, as a result of her trust in God and her words, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (v. 38).

An angel then appeared to Joseph when Mary was already pregnant. We read this in the Gospel of Matthew, since Luke doesn't mention Joseph (who was taken completely by surprise). "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her

a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matt 1:18-20).

When it says that Joseph "was minded to put her away privily," it means that somehow at some point, he'd noticed his fiancée's pregnancy. Only then did an angel appear to him as well. This suggests that Mary's visit to Elizabeth (which only Luke reports) took place when Joseph wasn't yet aware of the pregnancy.

So, it could have happened as follows: The birth is announced to Mary: "Thou shalt conceive in thy womb." After her words, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word," she becomes pregnant. This is followed by a visit to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39ff.). And finally, in verse 56 it says, "And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house." This means that Mary returns to Nazareth three months pregnant, and doesn't know how her loyal fiancé will react to these circumstances...up to and including the risk of being stoned as a harlot and adulteress, or at least being cast out. While the visibly shocked Joseph wants to separate from Mary, the angel appears to him with the words, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matt 1:20). **This is the second step:** An angel in Nazareth also announced the Lord Jesus' imminent birth to Joseph.

This brings us to the Lord's birth. And where was He born? "In Nazareth, of course; that's obvious!" But no, anyone who believes that has clearly never attended a Christmas service (and may also believe

From Nazareth to Nazareth

Mary and Joseph leave Nazareth—under duress—and travel to Bethlehem. That’s a distance of roughly 130 kilometers (80 miles) through partly mountainous terrain.



that Pontius was Pilate’s brother)! The Lord Jesus’ birth took place in Bethlehem, just as God willed and the prophets foretold.

So, we leave Nazareth temporarily, and come to Bethlehem. **This is the third step:** the birth of the Lord Jesus in Bethlehem. Luke explains to us how it happened: “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the City of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because

there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:1-7).

Mary and Joseph leave Nazareth—under duress—and travel to Bethlehem. That’s a distance of roughly 130 kilometers (80 miles) through partly mountainous terrain. Luke didn’t write that they “went up from Galilee” for nothing: it was no flat stretch of land. And in all this, we mustn’t forget that Mary was heavily pregnant when she and Joseph undertook this long trek. They would have been en route for about a week. Due to the accompanying circumstances and stresses of travel, it wouldn’t have been unusual for Mary to have given birth along the way. Then the Savior of the world wouldn’t have been born in Nazareth or Bethlehem, but somewhere in between. But God arranged it in such a way that the birth occurred only after Mary and Joseph had reached Bethlehem and finally found a place to sleep, according to the prediction of Micah 5:2: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands

of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel...”

On the very evening of the Lord Jesus’ birth, an angel appeared to the shepherds in the field: “And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord...And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger” (Luke 2:8-11, 16). **This is the fourth step:** the shepherds at the manger.

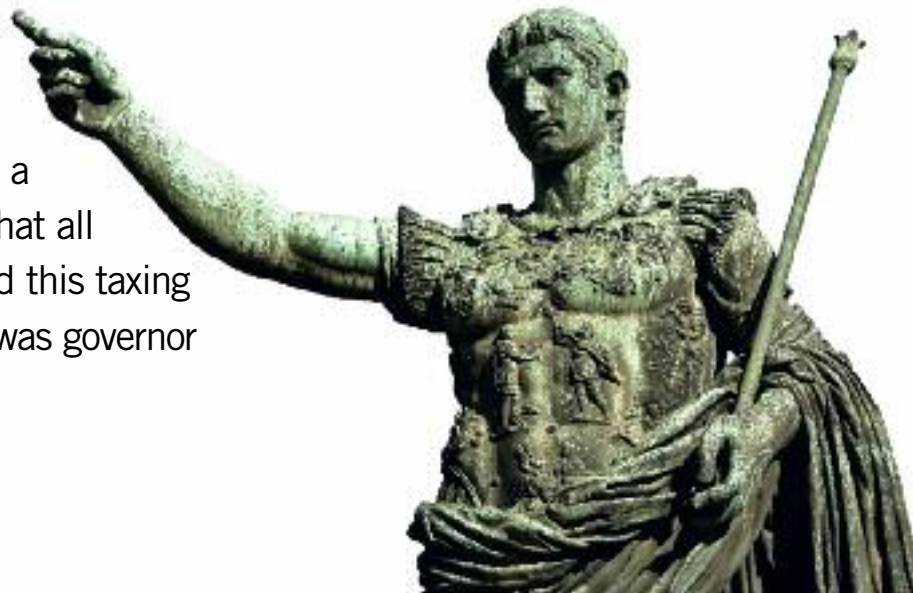
Up to this point, everything seems easy to trace, as Luke in particular gives us a nice chronological overview. However, as we’ve already established, Luke doesn’t give a complete report. Instead, he leaves Matthew to supplement what he doesn’t cover. For example, the events with the so-called Magi from the East. Let’s return to the Gospel of Matthew: “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to

worship him” (Matt 2:1-2). **That is the fifth step:** the wise men see a star and go on a journey to Jerusalem.

What we don’t find out, however, is when the wise men really set out. Did they set off immediately after the initial heavenly appearance—possibly on the following day—or did they make inquiries about this extraordinary star? In any case, they must have needed some time to prepare to undertake this long journey. I don’t know, because the text doesn’t state it explicitly. Let’s note, however, that in this fifth point, a star lights up for the wise men to guide them to the birth of the Lord Jesus, a good 1,000 km (620 mi.) away. This is in direct connection with the shepherds’ visit to the manger. And then they make the long journey to Jerusalem, because they were expecting the newborn King of the Jews.

Let’s return to Luke: “And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Luke 2:21). Mary and Joseph are still in Bethlehem, but probably no longer in a stable with a nativity scene. They most likely found normal accommodations in the meantime. And eight days after the birth and the shepherds’ visit, the child is circumcised, as the law requires. **This is the sixth step:** the Lord Jesus’ circumcision in Bethlehem, while the

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)”



From Nazareth to Nazareth

What we don't find out, however, is when the Magi really set out. Did they set off immediately after the initial heavenly appearance—possibly on the following day—or did they make inquiries about this extraordinary star?

wise men from the East have set out to pay their respects to the newborn King of the Jews.

Next, we read: “And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the LORD, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord)” (Luke 2:22-23). **This is step seven:** the offering of the Lord Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem, to fulfill the command in Leviticus 12:1-4. After about forty days, Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem, which is only about 10 km (6 mi.) from Bethlehem. This means that Mary and Joseph stayed in Bethlehem for at least 40 days. This also means that all of their relatives (grandmas, grandpas, godparents, and everyone else), 130 km (80 mi.) away in Nazareth, hadn't even seen the baby Jesus yet. But now, after about 40 days, the family is in Jerusalem, and the wise men from the East are somewhere along the Euphrates.

As we read further in Luke's Gospel, we see that Mary and Joseph return to Nazareth from Jerusalem with their child: “And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth” (Luke 2:39). Home at last. Finally home, back in their city. And finally, the waiting relatives could embrace the young family and shower them with gifts...yes, if not for Matthew.

Something's still missing. What about the Magi from the East? Did they not accomplish their goal? And wasn't there still the infanticide in Bethlehem, and an escape to Egypt? Actually, yes—but when, and how? As I said, we could assume from Luke's ac-

count that the family returned to Nazareth from Jerusalem. According to Matthew, however, it appears that the family didn't return until much later. Let's shed some light on this supposed contradiction.

Again, if we only had Luke's Gospel, we'd have to assume that the family returned to Nazareth after Jesus' circumcision and presentation. This is basically the first scenario, and it isn't that different from the other possibility that we're about to see. But if that was really the case, then Jesus' family must have returned to Bethlehem at some point, because the Magi worshiped the Lord. And that hasn't occurred yet.

Before we go down this path, let's briefly look at a second scenario: one where the family went back to Bethlehem instead of Nazareth. Then Luke would have omitted relevant events from his report. These events reported by Matthew would have taken place between the statements in Luke 2:39: “And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord...”; then comes the big gap (the events that Luke skips), and it continues with, “...they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.”

That means that Mary and Joseph would have returned to Bethlehem from Jerusalem with their six-week-old child, perhaps even intending to settle in Bethlehem. In this case, the wise men would have appeared a while later, the cruel infanticide and the escape to Egypt would have taken place...and only then would Mary and Joseph have returned to Nazareth.

But let's return to the first idea: namely, that the family made their way from Jerusalem to Nazareth, the city where Mary

There were three pilgrimage festivals for which devout Jews went to Jerusalem: the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Weeks, and Passover.

and Joseph had originally lived, and where their parents and relatives were longing for their return. During this time, the wise men from the East were still on the long trek toward Jerusalem. Jesus' family is living in Nazareth again, and it's been almost two months since the Lord was born.

And now we learn, almost incidentally, an important detail from Luke 2:41: "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover."

Mary and Joseph were very pious people, so they made their way to Jerusalem at least once a year. There were three pilgrimage festivals for which devout Jews went to Jerusalem: the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Weeks, and Passover, the one mentioned here. The Lord Jesus was already twelve years old at the Passover festival spoken of in Luke 2:41, but it's very likely that the family had moved to Jerusalem in the intervening years. And that would mean that a few months after their arrival in Nazareth, the family went back to Jerusalem, either for the Passover festival, or for one of the other pilgrimage festivals. In addition, it's well over 100 km (60 mi.) from Nazareth to Jerusalem—requiring more than just a day trip. Since Jerusalem must have been quite overcrowded during these festivals, it's more than likely that Mary and Joseph made their home in Bethlehem (especially since Joseph was originally from Bethlehem, and would have been able to arrange lodgings with relatives).

In this scenario, Jesus' family would have arrived back in Bethlehem in connection with their visit to the Passover festival. **These are steps eight and nine:** the return to Nazareth, and the new departure for



Bethlehem and Jerusalem. And so, we return to Matthew's Gospel for what Luke doesn't talk about: "Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was" (Matt 2:7-9).

As mentioned before, we don't know when the Magi set out, nor when they arrived in Jerusalem or Bethlehem. But we can assume they came from the region of Babylon and Persia, which means that it took them at least a year and a half to reach Jerusalem. And that lines up: both with the first possibility (according to which Jesus' family already lived in Bethlehem because Joseph had settled there), as well as the second (in which the Lord Jesus was 6-18 months old when the Magi finally arrived in Bethlehem, depending on which pilgrimage festival the family was visiting).

In either case, what happened next is clear: the Lord Jesus was no longer in a manger, but He also couldn't have been more than two years old when the Magi visited him: "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother..." (Matt 2:11). **This is the tenth step.** There is no stable, no cave, no nativity scene, and no shepherds here. The wise men were never at the manger, and never met the shepherds. Jesus' family was

From Nazareth to Nazareth

God used a vain and fearsome tyrant named Herod, to see to it that the Word is fulfilled: "...[I] called my son out of Egypt."



living in a house at that time. We also learn from verse 16 that Herod wanted all boys aged two years and younger to be killed. As a result of Herod's fit of rage, the flight into Egypt took place.

This is step eleven: the flight into Egypt. "And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child with his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matt 2:13-15).

The stay in Egypt was an integral part of God's plan for salvation, just as it was pre-

dicted that the birth of the Lord Jesus would be through a virgin; just as it was prophesied that the promised Redeemer would come from the tribe of Judah and from David's family; and just as the birth in Bethlehem was prophesied. As it says in Hosea 11:1, "...[I] called my son out of Egypt." We see that God leaves nothing to chance. His actions are always goal-oriented. Isn't that an encouragement for us today as well? We can be certain that we're not left to chance or fate, or even the arbitrariness of any would-be power, but are surrounded by the goodness and love of God. Any person who can count himself among the children of God can consider himself blessed! How did Paul say it in Philippians 3:8? "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." In other words, "Without Jesus, I have nothing!" And

stated in reverse, the word from 2 Corinthians 6:10 still applies: "...having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

Back to Egypt. How long Joseph and his family remained isn't stated, but historiography tells us that Herod died only a short time later. With his death, the return to Israel took place, so their stay in Egypt wouldn't have lasted too long. Only now does the Gospel of Matthew report that Mary and Joseph settled in Nazareth again. **This is step twelve:** the return to Nazareth. This is either the first since the Lord Jesus' birth (maybe after as much as two years), or another return after having attended the Passover festival in the meantime.

"But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene" (Matt 2:19-23).

The wording of verse 22 strongly suggests that Joseph and his family didn't want to go to Nazareth, but to Bethlehem. As it states, he was afraid to go to Judea (Bethlehem was in Judea) because Archelaus ruled there. It was only because of a dream that Joseph moved back to Nazareth. As mentioned earlier, it is very likely that Joseph wanted to settle in Bethlehem, or had already done so. But God—who once made sure that Mary and Joseph had to leave Nazareth and go to Bethlehem—now made sure that Mary

and Joseph didn't return there, but instead returned to Nazareth. That too was an integral part of God's plan of salvation, as it is written: "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."

And with that, we're back in Nazareth. From Nazareth, to Nazareth. We can see that the Word doesn't contradict itself, but is a unique revelation from God to us humans. The Lord's entire plan of salvation runs through the Bible like a guiding thread. It is we humans who are deaf to God's words. It is we humans who constantly contradict each other. And it is we humans who proceed from false assumptions. But God doesn't contradict Himself. His words are clear, true, precise, unique, sovereign, omnipotent, and unshakable.

It is fascinating how God achieves His objective with His Word and His plan of salvation. He causes a Roman emperor to order a census at precisely the right moment, which ultimately leads to the Lord Jesus being born in the right place at the right time. He uses a vain and fearsome tyrant named Herod, to see to it that the Word is fulfilled: "...[I] called my son out of Egypt." God uses a man of power named Archelaus, no less cruel than his father, to ensure that Jesus doesn't grow up in Bethlehem but in Nazareth, so that He will be called a Nazarene.

Nothing happens by chance, because heaven and earth will pass away, but God's Word remains forever (Matt 24:35). And so, with firm trust in His Word, we can conclude with 1 Thessalonians 2:13: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." (MR1219/1105)

The Advent Season as a Mirror of Redemptive History

Norbert Lieth



Each year, the four Sundays of Advent preface the Christmas season. They are intended to help Christians get into the right mood for Christmas. We know that these days don't have a biblical origin, but they can still serve as a parable describing the arrival of Jesus.

The first Sunday of Advent is a metaphor for Jesus' first arrival, almost 2,000 years ago: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal 4:4). At that point in time, very specific prerequisites for this event were being fulfilled in world history. The Roman Empire was at the zenith of its political power. The network of Roman roads stretched to a length of more than 80,000 kilometers (50,000 miles) through all the Empire's territories. There were hardly any borders, so anyone could travel unhindered between them. A common language made it easier for people to understand each other. There was relative peace, and the common culture brought the world closer together. A highly developed school system existed. Synagogues were springing up all over the Roman Empire, and due to deep disappointment with the Greek human-like gods and their cult, people were opening up to the message of the God of the Bible. World events had been directed so that everything was ready for Jesus' coming and the spread of His gospel. And that's precisely what happened: in the first hundred years, the good news spread at lightning speed to the ends of the (then-known) earth.

We find a metaphor for Pentecost in the second Sunday of Advent. It was then that the Lord Jesus entered the church through His Holy Spirit. Ever since, it has been indisputable that every person who calls on the name of the Lord is saved and added to the church of Jesus, because He comes into their life as Savior.

The third Sunday of Advent is a metaphor for the Rapture of the church. Jesus is coming in the clouds, to bring those who believe in Him and belong to His

church, into the Father's house. "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20).

The fourth Sunday of Advent points to Jesus' visible return in glory: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen" (Rev 1:7).

We're again experiencing how the signs of the times are being fulfilled today. A world government is being sought; people are looking for peace. We're striving for global unity, and it's all about a New World Order. In Europe, everything is revolving around political, cultural, and economic unity. The world is drawing closer together; global events are being directed in such a way, that they must be serving the fulfillment of the divine plan, with a view to Jesus' Second Coming.

John MacArthur writes in his sermon "Christmas Future":

"The first time He came, a star marked His arrival. The next time He comes, all the stars of heaven will fall, and the whole of heaven will collapse. The first time He came, wise men and shepherds brought Him gifts. The next time He comes, He will bring the gifts: the rewards for His people. The first time He came, there was no room for Him in a small inn. The next time He comes, His glory will fill the entire earth. The first time He came, just a few attended His arrival. The next time He comes, every eye will see Him. The first time He came as a helpless baby. The second time, He comes as the sovereign king and judge over all."

(MR1219/1106)



The Message of Jonah – Part 1

Dr. Ron J. Bigalke

“The Tortoise and the Hare” is one of Aesop’s Fables. The story concerns a Hare who mocks a slow-moving Tortoise. Exasperated by the Hare’s arrogance, the Tortoise challenges the animal to a race. On the racing day, the Hare instantly raced ahead of the Tortoise, prior to the turtle barely crossing the start line.

Confident of victory, the Hare stopped midway through the race for a nap. The Hare woke to realize that the Tortoise was slowly and steadily continuing the race and was nearing the finish line. Though he raced as fast as he could, the Hare was unable to beat the slow and steady Tortoise across the finish line.

Aesop’s fable is so well known that it can be difficult for one’s mind not to wander when hearing it repeated. Some biblical narratives can have the same response. Certain biblical accounts, like Aesop’s fable, have been heard so frequently that people automatically presuppose there is not any need to give them careful attention. Would you be able to

answer why the Bible should include a narrative concerning a man being swallowed by a great fish? Some accounts in the Old Testament have become so familiar they have almost lost their meaning.

The account of Jonah and the great fish was included in the Bible to seize the reader’s attention. Unfortunately, it is easy to remember the story of Jonah and forget the message. Truly, the emphasis of Jonah is the application of the grace of God. The book of Jonah reveals God as the champion of the story, not the prophet, which is evident in that the Lord is mentioned 38 times (in comparison to the fish being mentioned 4 times, the city of Nineveh 9 times, and Jonah 18 times).

The Message of Jonah – Part 1

How often do we manifest hatred toward sinners (especially in the political realm), who desperately need God’s message of grace, life, and truth?



Prior to considering the book of Jonah, some historical background is necessary. Jonah was a prophet of God in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II (793-53 BC; 2 Kgs 14:23-25); therefore, his message is dated 780 BC. Second Kings 14:25 refers to how God “restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.” Jonah prophesied that Israel would expand her boundaries. When it occurred, there was great excitement that God would make her the most prominent nation in the known world, and she would receive her promised inheritance. Israel was also benefiting from economic prosperity unknown since the time of King Solomon. Jonah was a national hero, and God was using him to give Israel everything she desired.

The only problem was another nation across the desert—Assyria. Once a major world power under Tiglath-pileser III (Pul: 745-27 BC), Assyria during that time would have been as stalwart and wealthy as Israel had become. Though the nation was in decline, Assyria could be regarded as Israel’s rivalry. If the nation regained its former sovereignty, the likely outcome would be war (which eventually did occur under Shalmaneser III: 860-25 BC). During the time of

Jonah, Nineveh (where God sent the prophet) was a very significant city of the resurging Assyrian Empire.

GOD INSTRUCTS

(Jon 1:1-3) The book of Jonah begins with the commission of God’s prophet and him rebelling against the Lord’s will (vv. 1-3). The expression, “The word of the LORD came to...” occurs more than 100 times in the Old Testament. The means by which Jonah received the Lord’s message is not given, yet it is evident that God’s actions are the most important aspect.

God was not impressed by the military prowess or the cultural achievements of Nineveh. Jonah was commissioned to “cry against” Nineveh, which meant to inform its inhabitants that God was aware of “their wickedness” (v. 2). Perhaps the prophet initially recalled God’s response to great sin in the past (cf. Gen 6:5-7; 18:20-21; 19:24-25; Exod 23:23-24; 1 Sam 15:18). Jonah may have believed the capital city of the Assyrian Empire—whose national history was a grisly record of death and torture—would finally receive God’s judgment. Cities have always been concentrations of sin. Not because urbanization is necessarily evil; rather, they tend to have a greater density of population, which allows for many sinful opportunities. As evident in His mercy toward Nineveh, the Lord is still actively concerned for the cities of the present time.

God is holy, which means He must respond to wickedness. Thinking of the city’s misfortune may explain why Jonah fled “from the presence of the LORD.” He likely did not think Nineveh deserved to be warned of imminent judgment, and that God should proceed to destroy the Ninevites. Whatever he was thinking, God’s prophet heard the word of the Lord plainly and fled (Jon 1:3). Fleeing from God was Jonah’s means of proving that he did not want to obey.

GOD PURSUES

(Jon 1:4-9) Jonah was called by God to go east, so he decided to venture west, to some remote destination in

the opposite direction of Nineveh. The prophet of God was blatantly defying God. Amazingly, in the process, others discovered they too could benefit from God's grace (vv. 5-9). Jonah defiantly repudiated the Lord's calling, which resulted in God hurling "a great wind on the sea" (v. 4). History reveals that many servants of the Lord have imagined they could shun the Lord and escape the consequences of their actions by a change of location. Scripture refutes that possibility (cf. Ps 139:7-10).

Jonah's attitude toward his circumstances was incorrect; he thought they were in his favor, when they were actually opposed to him. He fled to Joppa and "found a ship." He even had enough money to pay the fare, and was able to go "below into the hold of the ship," lie down and fall asleep (Jon 1:3, 5). Perhaps he concluded his circumstances were an indication of God's blessing. One cannot simply regard good experiences as God's will, and the converse as contrary to the Lord's desires. Circumstances may appear to be in a person's favor, and he or she can have a false sense of security in their rebellion against God. Yet be advised that the Lord is not mocked, and a great plummet in fortunes will most certainly arise (cf. Gal 6:7).

What is worse is Jonah's attitude toward people who did not know God as Lord and Savior. Instead of wanting to help them know the true and living God, Jonah was content to abandon them to darkness and spiritual death. Not only did Jonah hate the sins of the Assyrians, but also he loathed the sinners who committed their sins. He thought it better for Nineveh to be destroyed, than imagine their survival and the possibility they could eventually attack Israel. How often do we manifest hatred toward sinners (especially in the political realm), who desperately need God's message of grace, life, and truth?

GOD DISCIPLINES

(Jon 1:10-17) Subsequent to Jonah's confession that he was trying to evade "the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land" (v. 9), the sailors wanted to know how to calm the sea (v. 10). Jonah should have been God's means of salvation, rather than bringing destruction as a result of his disobedience to the Lord. One of the problems with rebellion is that innocent people are affected.

The sailors entrusted themselves to the sovereignty of God, by heeding Jonah's advice for calming the sea (vv. 11-15). They offered sacrifices, revealing their wonder at what God did, and "made vows," perhaps as an indication of genuine faith in the Lord (v. 16). Divine intervention was Jonah's only hope, and God demonstrated His sovereignty by appointing "a great fish to swallow Jonah" (v. 17).

God made it possible for Jonah to live "three days and three nights" inside a fish. He did not die in the belly of the fish! Liberal theologians have denied that Jonah could survive "in the stomach of the fish," and therefore regard the book's historical constitution as an elaborate allegory. The name Jonah (meaning "dove") and the story of the gourd (4:6) are thought to exemplify the symbolism. Jonah's sojourn in the fish is regarded as symbolic of his "three days' walk" in Nineveh (cf. 3:3). God's command that the fish vomit Jonah "onto the dry land," symbolizes leaving the repentant city because he did not belong there.

The problem with such thinking is that whenever an allegory or parable appears in the Bible, it is either said to be symbolic or else made evident as such by the context. Yet the book of Jonah is written as a historical book. Jonah is mentioned as a historical character in 2 Kings 14:25. None of the ancient Jews or early Christians doubted the historical accuracy of the book of Jonah. More importantly, the Lord Jesus Himself confirmed the historicity of the book. He said that the people of Nineveh repented of their sins "at the preaching of Jonah" (Matt 12:41). Moreover, Jesus said that His death and resurrection would be similar to Jonah's deliverance (v. 40).

Jonah "was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights," by either natural or miraculous means. There are many types of fish that can swallow a human being (e.g. the sperm whale and the whale shark), and there is always some air in the stomach of a large fish like the one that swallowed Jonah. Nevertheless, it is more likely that the event was a miracle, as the biblical account certainly implies (cf. Jon 1:17; 2:10).

The Bible reveals God's power to work as He desires. Scripture invites believers to have faith in the Lord's sovereignty to accomplish His purposes. How should you trust the sovereign God to use the unexpected to achieve His desire in your life? (1108)



THE RAPTURE CHRONICLES – PART 4: A SURE DOCTRINE OF THE BIBLE



Our study of the Rapture Chronicle Series yielded a very important proof. The Rapture can only occur at the start of—or just before—the Tribulation begins. We have decisively proven that the Rapture cannot occur at the mid, the pre-wrath point, or post/the end of the Tribulation. To repeat: As we have shown, Scripture only supports the pre-Trib position. This view also perfectly lines up with the character and nature of God. We can rejoice about that: Our LORD is faithful. “The LORD is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does” (Psalm 145:17).

By Wilfred Hahn

Another clear conclusion is that there are two streams of Christians in the last days. There are those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior before the Rapture takes place, and those who do so thereafter. Their paths are very different. This is a very important distinction to keep straight.

If one mixes up these two streams, the narrative of the books of Daniel and Revelation (as well as a few other verses outside these two books) risks not making much sense. The whole detailed record will not fall precisely into place. Raptured Christians meet the Lord “in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17), their bodies will be made glorious (Philippians 3:21), and they will reign with the Lord forever. Wherever Christ is, there we will be also. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

As for those who become Christians after the Tribulation period begins, they will face much persecution on earth. In our Rapture Chronicles to date, we concluded that ALL Tribulation Christians will perish, and that this extermination will occur no later than the mid-point of the 7-year Tribulation.

This “persecution by slaughter” is connected with the False Prophet’s attempts to make all bow before the First Beast; to take his “mark,” at the threat of being cut off from the world’s financial system should one not comply (see Revelation 13 for the full account). This is most pivotal—the capstone of Satan’s cosmological scheming, and his last.

While we may have reached our conclusions about the Rapture by studying the Bible, others will continue to reject this doctrine. One of the reasons some people have rejected the Rapture doctrine is that they may have confused the two separate categories of Christians (as we have explained). Or, people

Apparently, to believe that a Rapture will occur reveals that one is “low brow,” “gullible,” and an “escapist.” But, even as a spirit of derisiveness and smugness is becoming more prevalent among the Rapture naysayers, the reality is that their arguments have generally been invalidated as perhaps never before.

may simply choose what they believe no matter the facts. The latter is often the case with other Biblical truths.

Most sadly, this denial may be attributable to the fact that “[...] the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3). And, being “[...] tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14).

Some choose to ridicule Rapture believers, employing personal attacks and blustery debate tactics. Often, when we mention that we have adopted a pre-millennial, pre-tribulational view and believe that there will be a Rapture—absurdity of all absurdities—we receive responses of surprise.

Apparently, to believe that a Rapture will occur reveals that one is “low brow,” “gullible,” and an “escapist.” But, even as a spirit of derisiveness and smugness is becoming more prevalent among the Rapture naysayers, the reality is that their arguments have generally been invalidated as perhaps never before.

These “nay” respondents will usually agree that any differences in perspectives are nothing over which to lose fellowship (as long as both parties are pre-millennial), and that it is not a salvation issue. Yet, “nay Rapture” proponents seem to adamantly want to convert Rapture believers ... even to “deliver” them to a post- or mid-tribulational perspective.

We wonder why there is such an opposition to the Rapture view. Just what spirit—or

irritant—is behind these attacks? Naysayer counter-arguments and viewpoints range from the thoughtful to pure vitriol.

Conversely, those who hold the Rapture view do not feel it an imperative to expunge the world of Rapture naysayers. As readers will know, this doctrine is not a salvation issue. The Rapture believer knows that the non-Rapture-believing Christian is given salvation through grace as anyone else. The nay-Rapturists, on the other hand, generally do not see it that way.

So, why “proselytize” naysayers to the Rapture view? This writer is not suggesting that this is a priority. Nevertheless, while not every variant of doctrine threatens one’s salvation, every deviation from Biblical truth does have its price, we believe. Good doctrine is therefore important. We are charged to “[...] teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

However, as already mentioned, “[...] the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.” That time is certainly today!

Not surprisingly, therefore, some Christians do succumb to the notions of the naysayers.

To illustrate, some time ago, a friend (with an evangelical background, who was raised with the Rapture expectation) rather suddenly changed his mind, announcing that he no longer believed in the Rapture.

This writer was curious about what was behind this “conversion.” Apparently, my friend had swallowed the argument that the Rapture was a “new” doctrine, supposedly popularized by a delusional young



The Rapture doctrine finds its source in Scripture—nowhere else.



woman named Margaret MacDonald in the 1800s.

This couldn't be further from the truth in many respects. To fall for such shallow arguments is to ignore Scripture and the full history of the Christian church. There has been much research done in recent years that sheds additional light on the unfounded allegations of the naysayers. Pro-Rapture scholars have roundly invalidated the claims of those that claim the Rapture is a new teaching.

Dear reader, what is your view on the Rapture, and can you support it in the face of mockery and derision? We suspect that many Christians are “closet Rapture believers,” who will only admit their views in safe company.

We present here a short “checklist” of five points that will be helpful in countering doctrinal error in the matter of the Rapture.

1. Back to the Source. First, we must begin with the document that is claimed to be all-sufficient for teaching, rebuking and admonishing (2 Timothy 3:16). Its truth towers far above that of all other documents in the world. The Rapture doctrine finds its source in Scripture—nowhere else. Not only is it spoken of specifically, but also it is foreshadowed and deductive based on the character and actions of God Himself.

The doctrine of the Rapture must stand on the Bible “full stop.” The view of any later church father, pope, or entranced young girl cannot add any credence nor pedigree to what Scripture has said. As it is, a so-called church father can be found and quoted to support almost any theological view. We may have our favorites, but quoting them adds nothing proof-worthy to this main point: The Rapture is a Scriptural doctrine.

2. Since When New? Rapture doubters often claim that a teaching cannot be true if it is “new” ... i.e., a view that was popularized in recent centuries or times. This argument is not valid for a number of reasons. For one, just because a Scriptural doctrine has been re-discovered recently says nothing of its veracity or history. If it is Scriptural, it is therefore correct ... whether it is a recent understanding or not.

Rapture doubters like to say that the “church has historically not taught the Rapture.” We ask, What church, and during what era? Was it the founding church that was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the New Testament? Or a later church that preached a different Bible and a different gospel?

3. Context: The History of the Church. Rapture naysayers like to sweep away the record of Christian history, and while doing so, ignore the warnings of the New Testament from its outset. Early on—nearly 2,000 years ago—Christians were already warned about the infiltration of false doctrines, and that deceivers would creep in unawares. Sadly, this was clearly an issue already during the time of the apostles themselves (See 2 Timothy 3:8; 4:3; 2 Peter 2:1-3).

Once the apostles had passed on, the dilution of the gospel happened quickly. Over the course of a few centuries, many false doctrines

“[...] I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

(surely, driven by many “antichrists”: see 1 John 2:18; 1 John 4:3) became embedded in various teachings. However, crucially, these were not “new” teachings. Rather, they were largely restored teachings that were originally based on Scripture.

4. Solid Scholarship and Proofs. Today, we have the benefit of much scholarship on the origins of Christian doctrines. Within this record are the teachings of various preachers and theologians of the 16th to 19th centuries (outside the Roman Catholic Church), which have been found and uncovered. Plain to see in these records is the dominance of pre-millennial interpretations of the Bible.

Moreover, there is much proof of the Rapture being taught once the systematic oppression of Christians (or those with merely opposing Scriptural views) began to be lifted. The Rapture view was held by some clergy centuries before the alleged “trance revelations” of Margaret MacDonald. John Nelson Darby is shown to be influenced by these teachings of more than 200 years before his time (and not deliriums).

Today, we can say with confidence that the trance allegations of the “anti-Rapture” crowd, have been thoroughly debunked and invalidated, based on scholarship and hard evidence.

5. Logic and Apologetics. There are many excellent books available on the doctrine of the Rapture. Hence, as already mentioned, we can hardly do credit to this body of work ... especially so in such a short article. Students of the entire Bible (Old and New Testaments) can sense in their spirit God’s divine plan behind the Rapture.

God always called out and preserved the believing remnant before unleashing His

wrath. Consider the preservation of the families of Noah and Lot. Why then, would the Church (what Jesus calls His Bride) be allowed to be utterly slaughtered under the justice of His wrath? As pointed out in this Rapture Chronicles series, it is ALL Christians who were *not* part of the church who will perish in the Tribulation period. Not His Bride.

None who refuse to take the mark and worship the beast (Revelation 20:4) will survive. Contrary to the Bible, if one presumes that Christians will not be “[...] caught up together [...] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:17), then what “blessed hope” is there (Titus 2:13)?

To the contrary, says Jesus Christ to the Philadelphian church, “[...] I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth” (Revelation 3:10).

But do we not all deserve wrath? Yes. As such, the Partial Rapture Theory (that only some Christians will be raptured and not all) can appear logical. Why? To the human, it simply doesn’t seem just that Jesus Christ would rapture all Christians; though hardly any of them are as worthy as perhaps Elijah and Enoch of the Old Testament, who were also raptured.

But, if the Lord saves us “while we were yet sinners” (Romans 5:8) through grace, then the Rapture is equally undeserved for last-day Christians.

In conclusion, today, the attacks against the Rapture (except on the basis of Scriptural evidence) can be ignored. Our short, five-point checklist shows that the main arguments against the Rapture are fallacious ... and sometimes nothing more than mean-spirited “hatchet jobs.”

ALL present-day Christians are both saved and raptured by grace! (MC)

The Evangelist, the Businesswoman, and the Lost Cell Phone

Elia Morise

God's love appeared on earth through Christ. Without Him, there's no reason to celebrate. A personal report.

Once I flew back to Germany after an engagement in Australia. I was sitting next to a Chinese woman. I was trying with all my might to make a connection with her; we were going to be on this plane for about thirteen hours, and an evangelist who goes without speaking for thirteen hours goes crazy. I tried until the food came, and then wished her “bon appétit.” She said something in Chinese that probably meant “thank you.”

She was glued to her cell phone the entire time. She typed and typed, and eventually fell asleep. I was reading my Bible and taking notes when, she suddenly jumped up and began to frantically search for her cell phone. But, she didn't find it. She looked high and low, turned everything upside down, and switched on the light. Then she gave me a knowing look. I lost all of my confidence. Maybe I'd taken the cell phone? She seemed to think so. She called the stewardess and told her she'd lost her cell phone, and that without it, her work would be meaningless.

She got a flashlight. It turned out that the phone was stuck between her seat and the wall. I took a deep breath, thanked God, and said in my heart, “Lord Jesus, use this situation so that I can pass on the Good News.”

She looked at me and said, “Sir, I'm sorry.”

Her eyes were red, and I replied in English, “No harm done.”

“Please, I apologize.”

Then I said, “You said that phone was your office.”

“Yes.”

“What do you do for work?”

“I work for a company in China. We make artificial Christmas trees.”

However, she called the Christmas tree “Christ tree.” So, I asked what a “Christ tree” meant. She declared, “Europeans and the Christian world celebrate every year for someone who was born on that day.”

Then I said, “One person is born and the whole world is glad about it?”—“Yes.”

Next, I wanted to know how many people work at the company. She answered that there are 13,000 employees.

“13,000 people make their living because one child was born?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Do you know who this child is?”

“No, I haven't heard much about this person.”

Finally, I asked, “Do you want to hear more about this person, who is apparently your company's source of life?”

She did. I confessed to being a Christian, and summed up the Good News of Jesus Christ for her. Before the plane landed in Frankfurt, I was able to pray with the woman. We took a picture together, and promised to pray for one another. Since then, I pray for her every time I think of her.

People live because of the love that came to Bethlehem, but often don't know that Jesus Christ is the source of love.

(MR1219/1104)




WORLD FOCUS

 SWEDEN

Strict New Rules Amid Rising Coronavirus Cases

After opting against lockdown measures throughout the coronavirus pandemic, Sweden is said to be shifting strategies toward the kinds of restrictive measures adopted by most of its neighbors.

 Unlike its Nordic neighbors and most other countries, Sweden did not deploy wholesale lockdown measures in response to the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic earlier this year.

Instead, the government led by Prime Minister Stefan Lofven allowed shops, bars, and restaurants to remain mostly open and students to attend school.

Sweden has recorded a much higher per capita death rate than its neighbors since adopting this strategy. It had recorded 5,918 deaths, compared with 278 in Norway and 346 in Finland.

Johan Nojd, who heads Uppsala's infectious-diseases department, suggested that he would



(Jonathan NACKSTRAND / AFP)
(Photo by JONATHAN NACKSTRAND/
AFP via Getty Images)

be prepared to introduce harsher restrictions for the city like new rules for hospitality if the number of cases in the city continued to grow.

Unlike in other countries, however, there are not expected to be fines or legal consequences for people who decide not to follow any new advice. Bitte Brastad, the chief legal officer at Sweden's public-health agency, said the rules were "something in between regulations and recommendations."

-www.businessinsider.com, 18 October 2020

Commentary: Swedish authorities did not take the coronavirus seriously enough. This was

also the case in Brazil and the USA. Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center reports deaths by Covid-19 per 100,000 in population: Sweden 58.27, USA 69.89, Brazil 75.89. When comparing these figures to countries with strictly enforced shutdowns, mask usage, and prohibitions on mass gatherings, etc., the result is crystal clear: Germany 12.43, Austria 11.94, Norway 5.29. Countries which took extreme measures fared even better: South Korea 0.90, New Zealand 0.51, and Taiwan 0.03.

Jehoshaphat prayed to God when judgment was approaching: "If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and

cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help" (2 Chronicles 20:9). Our prayer is for His church to practice peace.

7368


(See *Prayer and Revival*, Item #1002, \$10.99.)



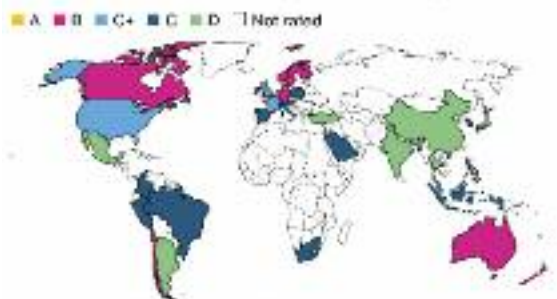
WORLD

Best and Worst Pension Systems

The Netherlands and Denmark have cemented their positions as having the best pension systems in the world, even as other countries falter during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to an annual global survey.

 The scores of over half the countries (20) slipped this year as the world battles to limit the economic fallout from the Covid-19 crisis. The global recession has led to reduced pension contributions, lower in-

World's Best (And Worst) Pension Systems
Netherlands, Denmark lead with A grade retirement systems



Source: Mercer CFA Institute Global Pension Index

vestment returns and higher government debt in most countries.

"Inevitably, this will impact future pensions, meaning some people will have to work

longer while others will have to settle for a lower standard of living in retirement," said David Knox, the report's author and senior partner at Mercer. Stretched public finances mean public benefits in particular are under pressure, he said.

The rankings, based on more than 50 metrics, assess whether a system leads to improved financial outcomes for retirees, whether it is sustainable and whether it has the trust and confidence of the community.

The United States came in 18th with a C+ grade, a system that has good features "but

(continued next page)

Pension Systems (continued from page 23)

also has major risks and/or shortcomings that should be addressed,” the report said, suggesting raising the minimum pension for low-income pensioners and increasing social security funding.

In top placed Netherlands, at present most workers enjoy defined benefit plans based on lifetime average earnings and a universal state pension. That means a worker gets about 80% of their pre-retirement earnings after stopping work, according to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development data.

-www.bloomberg.com, 19 October 2020

Commentary: The article by Bloomberg.com is quite revealing. Israel is placed number 3. Quite remarkably, as always, is that Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are usually in the top 10 of any global quality-of-life survey. Interestingly, they are the nations where equality is not only talked about, but also practiced. When it comes to trade, among the top 10 (of which 5 are EU countries), monetarily exports are higher than imports, except Israel, Canada, and New Zealand which, quite noticeably, have slightly higher imports than Israel.

While a pension system does not necessarily show the productivity of a country, it does reveal that taking care of the pensioners and the workforce is a major characteristic which earns them their place in the top 10. There seems to be a distinct difference in outcome between the countries that pay fair wages and those that don't.

Way back in olden times, some 3,500 years ago, we read in Leviticus 19:13: “Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.” Some rich countries apparently ignore that clear instruction. 7366
(See *A Simple Christianity*, Item #2324, \$14.99.)

SOUTH KOREA

Exceptional Success on Coronavirus

In South Korea, churches resumed in-person services and stadiums welcomed sports fans as the country once again manages to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.



The government eased social distancing restrictions after the country apparently dodged a surge in cases that was feared to follow the Chuseok national holiday in early October.

President Moon Jae-in noted South Korea's “exceptional” success in overcoming “what could have been the biggest threat yet,” in contrast to other countries struggling with a continuing upsurge.

To ensure its pandemic response is effective and sustainable, Health Minister Park Neung-hoo said South Korea will “minimize extreme measures,” such as shutting down businesses, and will reinforce “precision prevention” tailored to individual risks.

South Korea lifted its assembly ban on large groups, reopened buffet restaurants, nightclubs and karaokes—venues categorized as high risk—and expanded in-person attendance at schools while upgrading detailed disease prevention guidelines for each facility.

The South Korean government can now enforce mask-wearing in public transportation, hospitals and rallies, and more quickly punish business owners and citizens who flout the rules, thanks to the revised disease control laws that took effect.

-www.npr.org, 19 October 2020

Commentary: South Korea indeed can claim exceptional success among the rich and industrialized nations. With about 52 million in population, the religious makeup is 20% Protestant Christian, 15.5% Buddhist, 7.9%

Catholic, and a lopsided 56.9% claim no religious affiliation. Life expectancy stands at 82.6 years, with a per capita GDP of \$40,000, resulting in \$577.3 billion in exports, and \$457.7 billion in imports (2017 estimate).

Coronavirus related deaths stand at 0.90 per 100,000 in population (USA: 69.89). Quite apparently, strict adherence to prevailing government orders (based on the latest medical science) has saved South Korea from the consequences other countries exhibit when it comes to Covid-19 deaths and the related effects.

Here 1 Peter 2:13 is applicable: “Submit

yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme.”

7370

(See *The Sure Foundation of the Church*, Item #1066, \$18.50.)



SAUDI ARABIA

Fails in Bid to Join Human Rights Council

Human rights groups hailed the snub to Riyadh, which deals a blow to the kingdom's attempts to improve its image in the international community.



Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

© Bandar AL-JALUD



“The #HRC elections today delivered a stunning rebuke to #SaudiArabia under Mohammed bin Salman,” tweeted Bruno

(continued next page)

VATICAN

Pope Calls for Civil Unions for Same-Sex Couples

In a documentary that premiered in Rome, Pope Francis called for the passage of civil union laws for same-sex couples, departing from the position of the Vatican's doctrinal office and the pope's predecessors on the issue.



"Homosexuals have a right to be a part of the family. They're children of God and have a right to a family. Nobody should be thrown out, or be made miserable because of it," Pope Francis said in the film, of his approach to pastoral care.

"What we have to create is a civil union law. That way they are legally covered," the pope said. "I stood up for that."

The film addresses the pastoral outreach of Pope Francis to those who identify as LGBT, including a story of the pontiff encouraging two Italian men in a same-sex relationship to raise their children in their parish church, which, one of the men said, was greatly beneficial to his children.

The pope's remarks on civil unions come amid that part of the documentary. Filmmaker Evgeny



Pope Francis speaks at the Basilica of Santa Maria in Aracoeli during an interreligious ceremony for peace in Rome's Capitoline Hill.

Vatican Media / AFP - Getty Images

Afinevsky told CNA that the pope made his call for civil unions during an interview the documentarian conducted with the pope.

The pope's direct call for civil union laws represents a shift from the perspective of his predecessors, and from his own more circumspect positions on civil unions in the past.

The Vatican's press office did not respond to questions from CNA on the pope's remarks in the film.

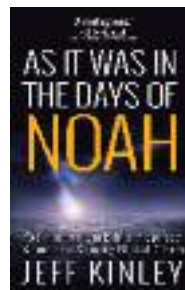
-www.catholicnewsagency.com, 21 October 2020

Commentary: There are religious politicians and political religious leaders. In the case of the Vatican's leader, both definitions apply.

Christians, however, have only one guideline: the written Word. The Bible is identical with God Himself, who was manifested in the flesh through the Lord Jesus Christ. It's rather significant that in the letter to the Romans, Paul writes: "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is

blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet"

(Romans 1:24-27).
7376
(See *As It Was in the Days of Noah*, Item #2286, \$11.99.)



Human Rights (continued from page 24)

Stagno, a deputy executive director at Human Rights Watch, referring to the country's crown prince.

"Only country not elected, shunned by a majority of the UN. The kingdom reaped what it deserves for its serious violations of human rights and war crimes abroad," he added.

Fifteen positions were up for grabs on the 47-seat body that has been criticized by rights organizations and the United States for electing countries accused of human rights violations.

China received 139 votes in the secret ballot, a dramatic fall from the 180 votes that it received when they were last elected in 2016.

Saudi Arabia was the only country up for election that failed to be elected, mustering only 90 votes.

"Unless Saudi Arabia undertakes dramatic reforms to release political prisoners, end its disastrous war in Yemen and allow its citizens meaningful political participation, it will remain a global pariah," said Sarah Leah Whitson, executive director of Democracy for the Arab World Now, which hailed the result.

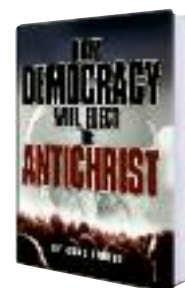
-www.msn.com, 14 October 2020

Commentary: While the United Nations Human Rights Council has little to no power to enforce its resolutions, Saudi Arabia clearly stands embarrassed. Nevertheless, the process toward change is in the works, albeit slowly. Rumors have emerged about their closer relationship to

Israel, with some speculating that an agreement may be reached in the not-too-distant future.

The criteria by which human rights are measured is diverse—sometimes outright contradictory. But, unity will and must be achieved for Bible prophecy to be fulfilled. All nations of the world will worship the god of this world and his two

supermen: Antichrist and the false prophet, visibly manifested in the image of the beast.
7371
(See *How Democracy Will Elect the Antichrist*, Item




#1064, **CLEARANCE \$7.**)

 **UK**

World's First Covid Passport

Coronavirus passport trials are taking place at Heathrow to test technology to let people travel the globe without risk of being quarantined.

 Passengers on United Airlines and Cathay Pacific are trying out an app called the CommonPass.

The phone software is a digital health pass which can hold a certified COVID-19 test status or show someone has been vaccinated in [the] future in a way designed to satisfy various governments' different regulations.

Dr Bradley Perkins, chief medical officer of The Commons Project, said: 'Without the ability to trust COVID-19 tests—and eventually vaccine records—across international borders, many countries will feel compelled to retain full travel bans and mandatory quarantines for as long as the pandemic persists.'

'With trusted individual health data, countries can implement more nuanced health screening requirements for entry.'

The pass works by passengers taking a test at a certified lab before uploading it to their phone. It generates a QR code that can be scanned by airline staff and border officials.

David Evans, Joint CEO of traveler pass company Collinson, said the app could be a gamechanger.

He added: 'As we come to grips with living with COVID-19, testing is the safest scientific method to reopen countries and borders.'

'However, as each country looks to find the right solution to protect their citizens, we know that the ability to demonstrate the validity of testing done upon arrival or before departure is key to reopening borders.'

'The Collinson and Swissport dedicated COVID-19 testing facility at Heathrow will support the CommonPass trial by testing



The new app lets you upload your Covid test securely to show different countries



Passengers will be able to show the digital passport to authorities to give them assurance



The aviation industry had hoped trials of new systems designed to cut travel quarantine times could begin. But Grant Shapps said he would launch a 'task-force,' delaying hopes of action.

United Airlines and Cathay Pacific Airways volunteers.'

Industry leaders are pushing for travelers to be tested at the airport and then re-tested a few days later in order to cut the current 14-day quarantine time which is crippling the sector and wrecking families' travel plans.

-*www.dailymail.co.uk*, 7 October 2020

Commentary: We are being inundated with daily news regarding vaccines, testing, and other issues related to the novel coronavirus.

Those who object to masks, for example, argue that only a tiny percentage of the population faces real danger from catching the virus. That may indeed be true. Yet, when taking international tourism into consideration, the figures are mind-boggling. The first five

places belong to these countries: France—90 million; Spain—83 million; United States—80 million; China—63 million; Italy—62 million. To check each person is virtually out of the question with the technology readily available today. Thus, an assembly line-like system will have to be implemented. A prescreened tourist with a Covid passport is definitely a welcome beginning for global travel to go back to normal.

In order to obtain such a Covid passport, much personal information will need to be revealed. And, that is the road the world is racing down: total control of the population, with little to no possibly of detouring this coming global security system.

7365

(See *End-Times Super Trends*, Item #2342, \$15.99.)



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 **IRAN**

Olympics Slammed for Ignoring Murder of Iranian Wrestler

Global Athlete, a sports advocacy organization that seeks to advance the rights of athletes, said the IOC has neglected its “duty to care for athletes by failing to take action against Iran.”

 “The IOC claims to use sport for peace but has failed to act when athletes’ lives have been taken or are at risk. Athletes, sporting leaders, government, sponsors and human rights experts cannot sit idle. We must collectively stand together to demand that human rights are imbedded into the Olympic charter,” the statement continued.

“Abuse in sport is rampant and it must come to an end. Only when the IOC adopts a zero tolerance approach to athlete abuse and embeds human rights into the Olympic charter will they have met their most basic responsibility to care for their athletes.”

According to the Global Athlete’s website, it “is an international athlete-led movement that will inspire and lead positive change in world sport, and collectively address the balance of power between athletes and administrators. We aim to help athletes gain a more represented voice in world sport, recognizing that the neglect and suppression of the athlete voice has gone on for too long.”

Thomas Bach, the German president of the IOC, has refused to impose sanctions on Iran’s regime for the execution of Afkari for the wrestler’s participation in nationwide protests against regime corruption in 2018.

Human rights and sports organizations across the globe have urged Bach to ban the Islamic Republic of Iran from the Tokyo 2021 Olympics. Critics say that Iranian athletes can participate in the Olympics but not under the flag of the Islamic Republic.

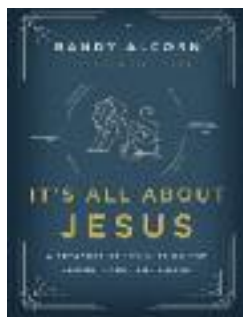
-www.jpost.com, 8 October 2020

Commentary: The Olympic Games, held every four years in different countries around the globe, symbolize global unity. The five interlocking rings represent Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Australia (the five internationally recognized continents).

The Olympic Games initially took place in the 8th century BC in Olympia, Greece. The modern one was resurrected in 1896 in Greece. While the Games were cancelled in 1916, 1940 and 1944 due to the First and Second World War, only five countries were present at every modern era summer Olympic Games: Greece, Great Britain, France, Switzerland, and Australia.

Politicizing the Games is nothing new. For most countries, it is an honor to send their top athletes to compete with the nations of the world. In 1920, five countries were banned from the Olympics: Austria, Bulgaria, Turkey, Hungary, and Germany. In 1964, South Africa was banned by the IOC due to apartheid policies. In each following Games, South Africa was banned, and in the year 2000, Afghanistan was also banned because of their discrimination against women.

The apostle Paul used the Games to show the believer’s need to fix his goal exclusively on the target: “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (1



Corinthians 9:24-25). 7364
(See *It's All About Jesus*, Item #2369, \$18.99.)

 **ISRAEL**


Ultra-Orthodox: Hotspot for Covid-19

Some 52% of COVID-19 patients over the age of 65 in Israel are ultra-Orthodox, new figures released by the Health Ministry show, and a large number were infected during prayer services over the High Holy Days.



Haredim burn garbage and protest enforcement of coronavirus restrictions in Mea She’arim.

(photo credit: MARC ISRAEL SELLEM/ THE JERUSALEM POST)

 Ultra-Orthodox citizens over the age of 65 are just 3% of the population, however, meaning that the rate of coronavirus infection among the elderly in the ultra-Orthodox sector is far higher than their proportion of the population.

The percentage of positive tests in the ultra-Orthodox city of Bnei Brak is also extremely high, standing at 25%, compared to 7.7% nationally.

In Bnei Brak, which has an older population than other ultra-Orthodox cities, such as Modi’in Illit and Beitar Illit, the mortality rate among those aged 70-74 is 4.9 deaths per 1,000 population, six times the national average, and 12.9 deaths per 1,000 population for over 75 in the city, nearly four times the national average.

“Do not forsake me in old age,” the Health Ministry ad implores with a picture of an elderly man holding a cane.

“They are the ones who sacrificed for us all their lives, they were there for us day and

(continued next page)

Ultra-Orthodox (continued from page 27)

night, taught, educated and took care of us. They are our mothers and fathers,” it continues and urges people to obey the COVID health regulations.

-www.jpost.com, 13 October 2020

Commentary: Interestingly, those who occupy themselves most with the Bible seem to be the least attentive to civil authorities. Similar findings were reported in other countries as well. About contagious disease, Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 24:8: “Take heed in the plague of leprosy, that thou observe diligently, and do according to all that the priests the Levites shall teach you: as I commanded them, so ye shall observe to do.” That was the time when healthcare was the responsibility of the religious authority. Today, it’s a government institution (in combination with private entities). But, a “plague” or contagious disease is still the same; those who follow the rules strictly, build themselves a higher level to escape the dreaded virus than those who simply ignore it.


7372

(See *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus*, Item #2363, \$12.99.)

THAILAND

Monarchy in Trouble

The scion of one of the world’s most privileged families, he wrapped himself in the trappings of royalty, wealth and a comfortable hideaway thousands of miles from his subjects.

 In Berlin, the German government faced questions in Parliament over the king’s legal status in Bavaria, where he resides. Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said that if the king were making decisions affecting Thailand from German soil, “We would quite clearly not stand for that.”

Then, visiting Thailand to mark the fourth anniversary of his father’s death, the king’s



family came face to face with pro-democracy protesters agitating for limits on his power. At one point, demonstrators confronted the queen’s motorcade and hurled insults at her cream-colored Rolls-Royce.

“The bubble that protected them from reality is bursting, without a doubt, and in a very graphic way,” said Pravit Rojanaphruk, senior staff writer with the Khaosod English news site.

Michael Montesano, coordinator of the Thailand studies program at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, said protesters and the military were heading down a dangerous path of escalation. Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha told reporters that he would not resign and issued a warning—“Do not challenge the Grim Reaper”—that some activists interpreted as a threat.

“This has become a genuine crisis,” Montesano said. “And the mechanisms for resolving the crisis, whether in terms of compromise or dialogue, don’t seem to exist.”

-news.yahoo.com, 16 October 2020

Commentary: Thailand is a country of about 69 million people, of which 94.6% are Buddhist, with 4.3% Muslim and 1% Christian. Life expectancy stands at 75.6 years, and per capita GDP is \$17,900; rather low considering that Thailand’s exports are at \$235 billion, with only \$203 billion in imports. Apparently, the royals are taking in a large share, while the people are suffering to a certain degree.

First Kings 12:4 states: “Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou

the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.” Later, in verses 15-16 we read: “Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying, which the Lord spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat. So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.”


7367

(See *World Religions & Cults Box Set*, Item #2326, \$46.99.)

GERMANY

Law Says You Must Walk Your Dog Twice a Day

Germany’s dog owners will soon to be ordered by law to walk their pets twice a day.

 The country’s agriculture minister, Julia Klöckner, has said she is introducing the new law based on evidence that many of the nation’s 9.4 million dogs are not getting the exercise or stimuli they need.

Under the new regulations in the *Hundeverordnung*, or Dogs Act, owners will not get away with a quick jog round the block, but will be required to take their dogs out for at least one hour in total.

Dogs may not be left alone at home all day, and a person will be required to take care of their dog “several times a day.”

News of the law, which is due to be introduced next year and was made widely known for the first time, has prompted a lively debate in Germany.

The main question is how it will be possible to check up on the 19% of German households that own dogs, which as pets are second in popularity only to cats.

-www.theguardian.com, 19 August 2020

(continued next page)

Walk Your Dog (continued from page 28)



Commentary: The last question, “How it will be possible to check up on the 19% of German households that own dogs?” could easily be answered with the placement of a chip, which records the time and distance walked. Failure to do so would draw a fine, and that directly from the person’s bank account.

Money is not a question, since German dog owners pay taxes of between 24 to 100 euros (\$28-\$119) per year, depending on what type of dog they own.

The welfare of a dog is apparently very important to Julia Klöckner, the agriculture minister.

We ask, is human life less important? And the answer is definitely yes. More than 100,000 abortions are registered each year. There is no agency, no human minister in government, which protests against the cold-hearted killing of the unborn.

To Jeremiah the prophet, God said: “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).

Paul writes in Galatians 1:15: “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace.”

7345

(See *The Non-Prophet’s Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, Item #2368, \$17.99.)



AUSTRALIA

World’s First Human Bionic Eye

A team of researchers at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, has built a bionic device that they say can restore vision to the blind through a brain implant.

It’s essentially the guts of a smart-phone combined with brain-implanted micro electrodes, as *TechCrunch* reports. The “Gennaris bionic vision system,” a project that’s more than ten years in the making, bypasses damaged optic nerves to allow signals to be transmitted from the retina to the vision center of the brain.

“If successful, the MVG [Monash Vision Group] team will look to create a new commercial enterprise focused on providing vision to people with untreatable blindness and movement to the arms of people paralyzed by quadriplegia, transforming their health care,” [Lowery] said.

“With extra investment, we’ll be able to manufacture these cortical implants here in Australia at the scale needed to progress to human trials,” Marcello Rosa, professor of physiology at Monash and MVG member, said in the statement.

-*futurism.com*, 15 September 2020

Commentary: This marvelous invention gives hope to millions who cannot see.

Time will tell how successful the Monash University team will be. But in the end, there is little doubt that modern technology will be able to give sight to the blind.

Why are we confident that this will happen? Because the great imitator, the deceiver, is revealed in 2 Thessalonians 2:9: “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.” Antichrist, during his rulership, will mimic that which Jesus accomplished: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped” (Isaiah 35:5).

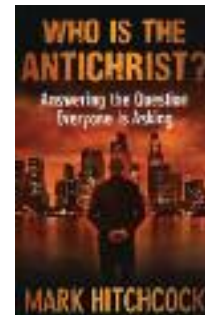
While we greatly admire scientific achievements, we must not forget that all inventions like planes, motor vehicles, cell phones, televisions, and computers will, in the end, be utilized to further the works of Antichrist. Although these things are not bad in themselves or evil, they lead toward continual independence from God the

Creator. The image of the beast will be the masterpiece of mankind, under the auspices of the evil one.

7343

(See *Who Is the Antichrist?*

Item #2254, \$13.99.)



Global Unity Leads to Global Rebellion

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“I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18).

BY ARNO FROESE

For Israel, Moses is the ultimate authority. In the book of Deuteronomy, he repeatedly presents to Israel the option to follow God or not. But that’s not all; as we have read in the above prophecy, there is another prophet to come in the future. How is Israel to recognize Him? By the word of a prophet. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he proclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36b). We must note here that Jesus had not yet performed any miracles or fulfilled any signs to legitimize Him as the prophet to come. See also verse 40: “One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.” He simply believed; Andrew acted upon his belief, passing on the important message that the Messiah, the Christ, had come. “He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (verse 41).

The next disciple is Philip; he too was a believer in the words Moses had spoken. Thus, we read: “Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the

prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). The religious authorities, the scribes, priests, Levites, Pharisees, Sadducees, etc., believed the Scripture too, but apparently only with the intellect, not with the heart. Thus, in their minds, Jesus could not have been the Messiah, the Son of God. But our Lord made a prophetic statement about the coming of Antichrist: “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive” (John 5:43), and then added, “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me” (verse 46).

A recent article from the *Jerusalem Post* exposes evangelical publishers for anti-Israel bias:

The two publishing houses, InterVarsity Press in the US and the similarly named InterVarsity Press in the UK, were sent an open letter by the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA).

“IVP publishing houses have been retailing anti-Israel propaganda for some time,” CAMERA’s Shillman Research Fellow Dexter Van Zile said in a statement.

The two publishers have a history of promoting texts filled with factual, historical and cultural errors about Israel. This, the statement said, was evident by the 2016 campaign to pressure the publishers to drop Rev. Dr. Stephen Sizer from its catalogues following numerous controversies over his appearance at anti-Israel conferences.


Sizer had propagated numerous conspiracy theories in the past, such as Israeli involvement in the September 11 terrorist attacks.

"Writers such as Rev. Garth Hewitt, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon and Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac all promote false and hostile narratives—such as, that there is something inherently wrong with Jewish sovereignty, that Christian support for Israel is a betrayal of the Christian faith, and that the conflict in the Holy Land is Israel's fault," said Van Zile.

It is books like these, Van Zile explained, that lay the groundwork for anti-Israel activism growing in more mainline Protestant churches.

"You can't promote dishonest propaganda about Israel and then be taken seriously when professing the truths of the Christian faith."

-www.jpost.com, 1 October 2020

These are well-respected authorities within the evangelical camp; but quite obviously, they do not believe what they have learned. We simply ask, why would anyone, just impartially reading the Old and New Testaments, conclude that "there is something inherently wrong with Jewish sovereignty"? They know many facts, they have studied diligently, but somewhere they deviated from the path of truth to the path of lies. Have they not read what Romans 11 says? "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (verses 25b-26). Verse 28 adds: "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes." By rejecting Israel, these learned theologians are not only destroying the truth regarding their own faith, but also leading many others astray. Such "evangelicals" are the ambassadors of the one who is to come in his own name: "if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive." 

Action for Israel



MIDNIGHT CALL

"I will bless them that
bless thee..."
(Genesis 12:3).

Mail to: Midnight Call Ministries, PO Box 84309, Lexington, SC 29073

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 **BRAZIL**



Missionary Work in the Age of Coronavirus Continued

The coronavirus pandemic is more protracted and pervasive than many had initially assumed. Its effects on the various Midnight Call outposts is very different. An overview.

BY MARKUS AND ELLEN STEIGER, PORTO ALEGRE

A lot has changed in our country since the end of March. The world declared coronavirus a pandemic, and everything was turned upside down. Our president announced that the virus was just a flu epidemic. The Supreme Court ruled that every governor and every mayor has the autonomy to determine whether, how, when, and for how long they want to impose sanctions in the face of Covid-19. For us that meant: total lockdown at the beginning, which then turned into a partial lockdown,

then again into a total lockdown, then into a partial lockdown... Since pharmacies are also dependent on printers, we were freed from a total stop, and only had to close the print shop for one week. Four employees are working from home offices. Those who rely on public transportation weren't allowed to go to the mission site for two months. The print shop kept going, with two employees who came in their car.

During this time, we tackled various projects that had been on our minds for a long time, but we'd



“We were surprised by the large number of orders for study Bibles that we offer on secular websites such as Amazon or other online bookstores.”

never actually implemented: for example, offering the magazine digitally on the internet. Since the post office wasn't working properly, we had no choice but to take this step. We were pleasantly surprised by the response. Next, we took on the task of putting the Bible courses online, which we had previously been offering in our relatively new classroom. Everything has been switched to online courses; the good news is, more students have registered because the lessons are no longer tied to a specific site. Some books were already online as e-books; we are now promoting the format and offering more. Of course, we're making use of the time to offer more articles and messages on the website. We have intensified contact with our readers and friends in Brazil through a weekly email newsletter. We also received positive feedback from the podcasts that were heard before the pandemic. We were surprised by the large number of orders for study Bibles that we offer on secular websites such as Amazon or other online bookstores.

It makes us sad that we had to cancel the 22nd Conference on the Prophetic Word this year, and postpone it until next year. In its place, we plan to offer an online conference with five lectures. And the trip to Israel should have originally taken place in April of this year. We postponed it first to September, and then November, and now the date is April 2021. Despite everything, we have a lot of reasons to be thankful, because the Lord has made our service possible even in the pandemic, and interest in the prophetic Word is increasing. God is faithful.

BRAZIL

BY ERNST AND ELVIRA KRAFT,
SÃO PAULO

We can only thank God for how He has carried us through to this point, and is still carrying us through. Our two bookstores were closed for three months. There were only a few orders for tracts, which was predictable since people

had to stay at home. But we were still able to pay our three employees, and also pay the rent for the stores. We had one employee quit, because she is battling depression as a result of the pandemic. Due to the situation in Brazil, we are going to give up one of our bookstores and pass it on to a pastor and his wife. Pray with us for wisdom and clarity as to how the work may continue according to God's will.

BOLIVIA

BY EBERHARD AND ROSMARIE
HANISCH, RIBERALTA

Due to the government's early measures, the school and boarding school have been closed since mid-March. In the meantime, we've lived through all the stages together with the population, from understanding to desperate. But we know that it is Jesus who carries us through, and we are completely dependent on Him.

Many of our employees have suffered all the symptoms of the infection. Mid-June to mid-July were the saddest days so far. Sometimes we would write up to three condolence notes in a day. There were many funerals on the streets. A special cemetery for Covid-19 deaths has been created in Riberalta. The Evangelical Alliance posted a video with 70 deceased pastors from all denominations. A retired employee of ours lost his wife and son within a week. Several brothers and sisters from the area around the church have died, pastors have been infected, and many of the teachers in our school have experienced illness. Some were desperate for oxygen, and the pharmacies ran out of aspirin. Parts of Riberalta were completely isolated for protection. It's a miracle that Obed and Rebecca Hanisch (and recently, the last volunteer who worked for us) were able to leave the country. In the meantime, illnesses have receded somewhat, but Riberalta is one of the highest-risk areas. With its 10 million inhabitants, Bolivia can be



Fellow Laborers



MIDNIGHT CALL

compared with Switzerland by population. But it has twice as many people who have tested positive for the infection, and a third more who have died. However, hardly any tests are being carried out anymore. We're now experiencing greater flexibility with all measures, since people have to work to live. The supply situation has largely been restored, and it has been possible to work in stores until 5 pm. Gatherings are prohibited; however, the police hardly check anymore.

In July, our teachers put a lot of effort into creating a plan for virtual learning, and established contact with students and parents. Nevertheless, one-third of families can't maintain the internet due to its cost. Protests arose across the country due to the inequality, and there is a risk of destabilization. Because the protesters rejected many options for running the school, the government officially ended the school year on August 1(!). After so much work, this is a huge disappointment for our teachers. Nothing is certain in Bolivia, and we're wondering what's ahead.

The church's leadership has decided to continue preaching on Sunday mornings, but only using virtual media. Because of the risk of infection, we meet in the open on the mission site for morning devotions, and experience numerous blessings. Our

small team works in site maintenance; we have created garden beds and sanded down and repainted the school furniture in four classrooms. In the boarding school's new building, sanitation work was carried out in the bathrooms, the doors were completed, and windows were installed, all with a reduced workforce. The bookstore is open twice a week for half the day. There is great demand for Bibles and teaching materials for children. In a new WhatsApp group, we're making *Midnight Call* magazine more accessible.

The people's openness is encouraging; some are asking about eternity. At government agencies, individuals speak to you and ask about the signs of the end times. Those who can't sleep at night show their gratitude for the radio shows, and people are asking how they can donate toward them. A mechanic also repaired our tractor for free as a contribution to our work. (Years ago, his colleague received a package of literature from Midnight Call in Iraq, where he was working!) People have met Rosmarie doing errands on the street, and expressed their joy at seeing her. It gives the impression that they're glad there are some foreigners getting through the situation with them as locals. We are grateful for all intercessions and gifts!

(MR0920)



"To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever" (Jude 25).

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**“But Jesus said to him, ‘No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God’”
(Luke 9:62).**



By David Phillips *Project Manager*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

There is only one justified reason to look back, and that is to prayerfully give thanks to our Heavenly Father. We at the Ebenezer Home would like to thank HIM for your involvement, for our dedicated team, and for our lovely residents and their families! We are grateful to Yeshua for all the work accomplished this past year, much of it through and with your help. Because of the Lord and your generous donations, we have received 100 percent of the funds needed! We have now ordered the van for the Home, and hope to start its service very soon. “Toda La’EL” (Thank the Lord)! Thank you for being involved (since we have not yet received the van, pictures will be coming in the future). We also want to let you know that with the van project behind us, we continue on with raising funds for the building/renovation project.

The above verse is so true and teaches us a very practical lesson for all of life. When we

look back, we lose eye contact not only with our Lord, but also with our goal and intention. Thus, the rows which we intended to plow in straight furrows, become a curved mess. To plow and create straight furrows and maximize the use of the soil (which we sow with much expectation for a great harvest), we must look forward.

Labor, knowledge, judgment, hope, love, passion, expectation, and FAITH come together in this “simple” act of plowing—so why destroy it with a single act Yeshua warns us against?

As each year ends, we all tend to “look back” over the previous year to see what we have done and achieved, but this is not the correct approach. We all make mistakes, which HE has forgiven; we disappoint people around us; we often waste time—so really, there is nothing to be proud of for what “we” have accomplished. Without our Heavenly Father, nothing is possible, and it is only



through Him that we are able to do our work. BUT, what we can say all *together* is, “THANK YOU LORD, THANK YOU FATHER, for *You* have carried us through this very difficult year. Through *Your* love for us, *You* take care of all our needs—regardless of your son or daughter’s location and position. THANK YOU!”

I realize that some of you may have been ill or have experienced loneliness, but remember: HE is there at your side. May HE strengthen you. Look forward!! “I’m coming soon! Blessed is the one who follows the words of the prophecy in this book” (Rev 22:7).

The residents and the team at the Ebenezer Home, would like to thank ALL of you for your prayers, letters of encouragement, and gifts that carried us through. We know that some of you gave the “widow’s mite” from the little that you had. Others gave generously as they were able—each has an eternal value as a gift of love to HIS people in Israel! May the Holy One of Israel bless you as never before—and HE will, for HE has promised this to Abraham in Genesis 12:3: “I will bless those who bless you...”

We pray for you and lift you up before HIS throne.

For me personally, a special blessing this past year has been that I have been able to write and speak with some of you. Indeed, our “family” in Yeshua has been blessed with an extension of new friends this year. Thank you!

Wishing you a blessed 2021! May the Father help us keep both hands on the plow and keep going, looking forward to the coming and soon return of Messiah Yeshua. Praying for you to be a blessing to your family, children, friends, fellow coworkers; or perhaps you serve in the army, police or government services. And, not to forget those who are retired. We all need each other’s prayers.

As we look forward: In January, God willing, we pray to report on something very special. (Are you curious yet?) In February, we intend to reveal more about our future plans (which the Covid-19 period forced us to postpone), as well as much more for 2021. Stay tuned!

Plowing and looking forward with expectation for HIS coming,

Your Brother in Israel,
David



Note: Donations for the project by check/money order should be made out to Midnight Call, and specify Ebenezer Home in the memo line.

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Note: All letters will be answered by the Executive Editor, Arno Froese.

DATE OF CHRIST'S BIRTH... TEN KINGS... IDENTIFYING THE MESSIAH

Date of Christ's Birth

Dear Editor,

Modern Christian astronomers, with the help of contemporary technology (computers), in accordance with Jewish festivals, have determined that Jesus was born on September 29, 2 BC, during Rosh Hashanah. On New Year's Day, a new man was born: Emmanuel!

-R. Cleveland, CO

Answer: I appreciate the information, but have doubts about the accuracy, since the name, place, and date of the findings of these "modern Christian astronomers" is missing.

Incidentally, several years ago at the prophecy conference in Brazil, Meno Kalisher said he had studied the priestly order in the Bible and came to the conclusion that Jesus was born on Easter (Pascha).

Does the Bible give an answer in this regard? None whatsoever. Of course, the good news is that He was born. He fulfilled—in detail—all the prophecies proclaimed in the Old Testament. He died on Calvary's cross, pouring out His life in His blood for our sins. That is the message we must continue to proclaim.

Ten Kings

Dear Editor,

I am writing in regard to Wilfred Hahn's "10: The Magic Number of Endtime Post-Globalism" (from Dec. 2009; available in the "Ends & Trends" archive on eternalvalue.com). He is a well-informed and remarkable writer that I follow in every issue. In this particular article, I only differ with his reference to the 10-nation coalition relating to the Ten Kings of Daniel and Revelation.

Kings and nations just naturally and historically pair themselves together like birds of a feather. In the study of eschatology, in reference to the Ten Kings there has been throughout the years a dogmatic relationship: one king, one nation. While we can acknowledge a one-world ruler over many nations, the history of one king over many nations fades away from the time of the Pharaohs to the Caesars of Rome.

The Ten Czars (Kings) will rule over all natural resources, developed resources, and the production and distribution of all goods. This will not necessarily come into effect by international



law and trade agreements, but by the power of the economic elite, guided by these emerging Czars.

The False Prophet will reinforce their computer chip enticement, which will become the Mark of the Beast. The Antichrist will then bring about international laws with little similarity to trade agreements. Daniel 7:25, "...shall intend to change times and law." The Revived Roman Empire is alive, and the worldwide Babylon economic system is in place.

-D. Marx, CA

Answer: My understanding of the Ten Kings is different, in that they are ten demonic, non-earthly, physical entities. The reason is that they prepare to fight against the Lamb. No earthly identity can do so. Of course, that is my understanding and is subject to error. I have dealt with this issue in my book, *Revelation 13: Satan's Last Victory*.

Identifying the Messiah

Dear Mr. Froese,

Did the Jews believe that one was only truly dead after three days? Thus, only Lazarus and Jesus were resurrected, and the rest technically "resuscitated"?

Did the Jews have a procedure for identifying the Messiah, or to evaluate a person who made that claim or was thought could qualify? I have heard that only the Messiah could perform certain miracles.

-C. Ingram, MT

Answer: Jews in general bury their dead within 24 hours. Incidentally, Jesus too was buried the same day He died. John 19:31 explains: "...because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day..."

The "procedure" for identifying the Messiah was and is faith. Jesus said, "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me" (John 5:46). Moses prophesied, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken" (Deuteronomy

18:15). Furthermore, Jesus testifies: "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him" (John 10:37-38). Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), rejected by the Jews (Isaiah 53:3) and crucified (Psalm 22:16-18), He also demonstrated more than 35 supernatural miracles (John 9:32-33).

Abraham's Seed

Dear Midnight Call,

I've gotten your magazines for several years.

After I moved to an assisted living facility, I became friends with a lady who told me she is Jewish. So, I've been sharing your magazines with her. I have always respected the Jews.

I met Jesus when I was five, and have enjoyed fellowship with Him all my life. I taught at a Christian school for 35 years, and married the missions director at church. With him, I traveled almost all around the world. Now I am quite up in years, but still a tool in God's toolbox.

My reason for writing is that so many say this pandemic has created a terrible thing in the world. Well, that may be true, but not as bad as the flood in Noah's day!

Another thought: God told Abraham that "through you I will bless the whole world." He has! First, we think of Jesus, but there have been many Jewish people who have created devices that bless the world as well.

-A. Konkel, CO

Answer: I enjoyed reading the details of your life story, and about your affinity for the Jews.

Indeed, we are Abraham's seed, according to the promise in Genesis 26:4: "And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Galatians 3:29 confirms: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (MC)

Thoughts on Advent

Norbert Lieth

An elderly woman accidentally flushed her wedding ring down the toilet. She had received the precious item from her husband at their wedding 39 years ago. He had died in the meantime, but she had continued to wear it. Now it had slipped off her finger—gone just like that!

She wrote a desperate letter to the city asking for help. Under ordinary circumstances, the authorities would hardly step in for something like this; but in this case, they made an exception.

It was a filthy job. They ran a camera into the sewers, but didn't spot anything. Later, they ran the wastewater through a fine silica filter, but still didn't find anything. They didn't give up, and finally rinsed the stinking mass away from the solid objects—by hand—with a garden hose. And? They found the ring!

They brought the precious piece to the woman, and it's said that she was so overjoyed that she suddenly seemed decades younger.

This story makes me think of God's love. Jesus came out of heaven into the darkness of this world, into the filth that surrounds our souls. God came in Christ to save something that is infinitely precious to Him: human souls, lost and defiled in the sewer of sin;

lost in the darkness of great need, in the currents of despair, the mud of hopelessness and loneliness. Jesus was born in Bethlehem and was swaddled—being as needy as any other baby—even though He is the Creator, and the worlds were made through Him. But it wasn't beneath the Son of God.

The Bible says in Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." In Matthew 1:21 it says, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." And Luke 1:35 reports, "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Jesus came from heaven to earth to bring us into heaven. This means that through His birth, through

Thoughts on Advent

God came in Christ to save something that is infinitely precious to Him: human souls.



His death, through His resurrection, and through His return to glory, He has created eternal access for all people. The door is wide open. Nobody needs to feel left out. Everyone is invited and may go to heaven.

It was no special person that was born, but God as a person.

He remained what He is (God) and became what He hadn't been before (human). Only a great God can become so small.

He came gently and compassionately. He came to save, not to judge. His incarnation wouldn't have been necessary for judgment.

Sin conquered man and brought death; the man Jesus conquered sin and brought life.

God became a child, so that we could become children of God. To this end, He chose a woman named Mary, whom He Himself had created as Creator.

Maybe you've reached the end of your capabilities. Your soul is empty and calling for redemption. Famous pastor C. H. Spurgeon put it this way:

"From the outside everything looks fine, but inwardly you're searching for God. Has your hope waned? Has your health declined? Have your friends left you? Have your dreams fallen through? Has your faith dried up, your love burned out, your peace left you? Has your sorrow grown? Has your anguish reached its peak? Have your tears overcome you?

Then look to Jesus! Call Him; ask Him to help you. There is sufficient redemption for you. Look to Him and live; yes, live!"

In Romans 10:13, the Apostle Paul says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

An elderly man expressed his thoughts at Christmastime:

"Advent not only means *coming*, but also *future*. It comes to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus is coming again! Not hidden and unrecognized, but visible to everyone. He isn't coming as a child, but as Lord. Then no Christmas hype or media event will

distract from Him. Then all eyes will be solely on this Lord, who hasn't been honored here. Then all of the mirages will fade. Then only one light will be shining: Jesus Christ" (source unknown).

Jesus said of Himself in Matthew 24:30, "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

In Titus 2:13 we read, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Dr. J. I. Packer, Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, emphasized: "But the truth is that the riches that Jesus gives are beyond comparison. Life with Christ is tremendously worth living, tremendously full of joy, tremendously fulfilling. No life can surpass the quality of a Christian's life."

Paul writes in Philippians 3:8, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

Christmas means much more than you think. Christmas is the realization of God's thought to save you. Think about it, and talk to Him about it.

(MR1219/1109)

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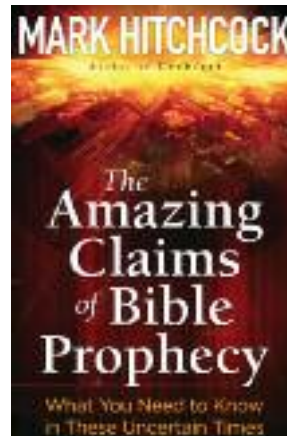
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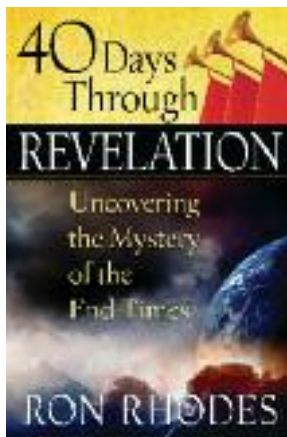
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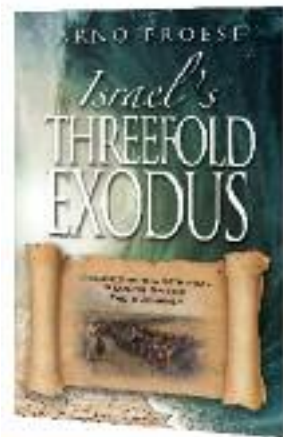
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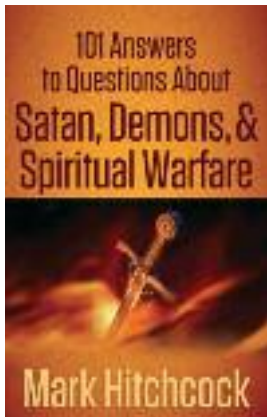
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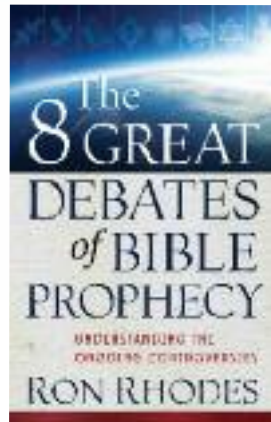
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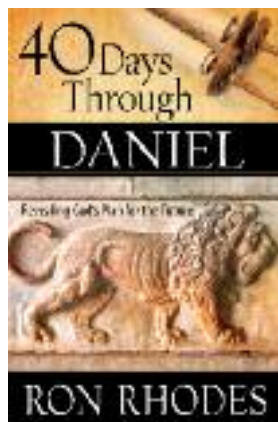
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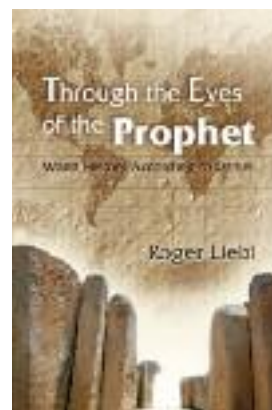
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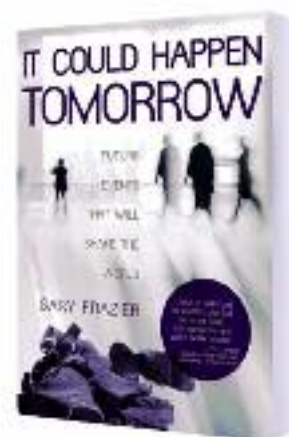
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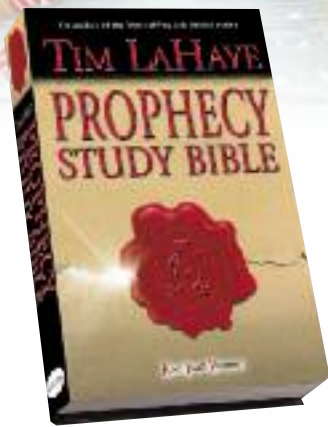
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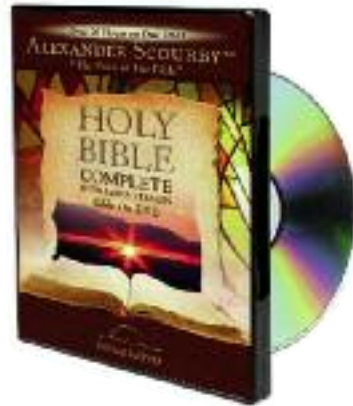
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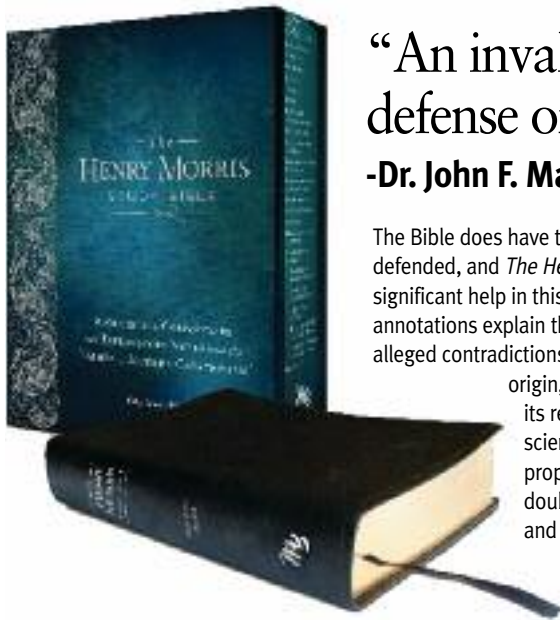
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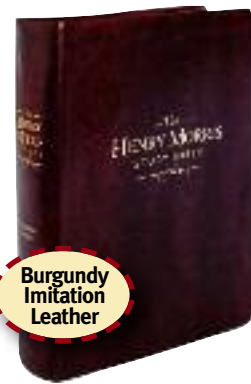
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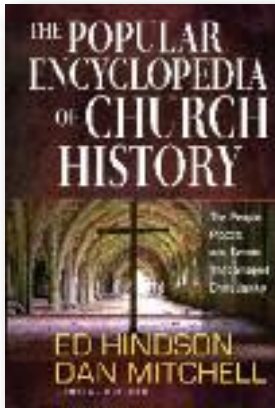
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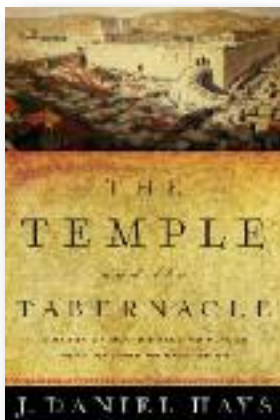
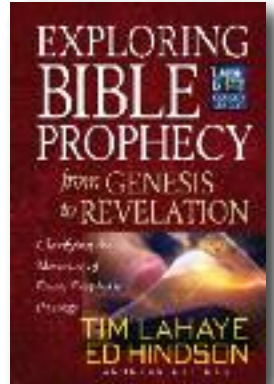
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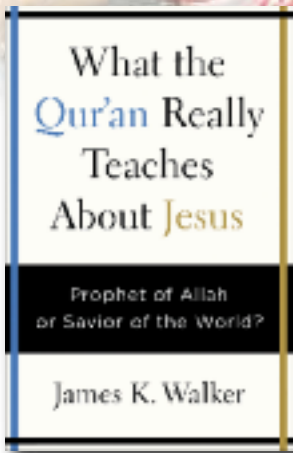


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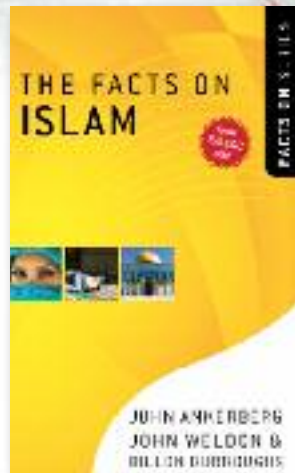
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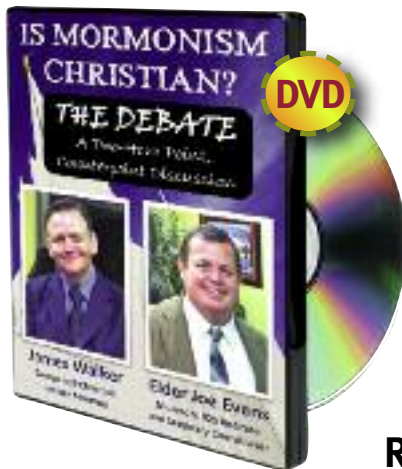


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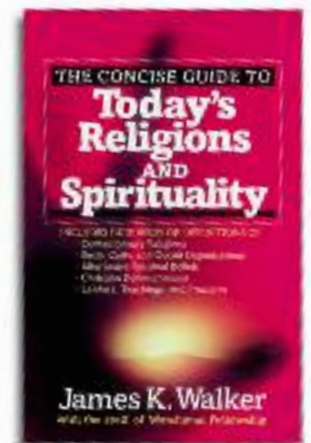
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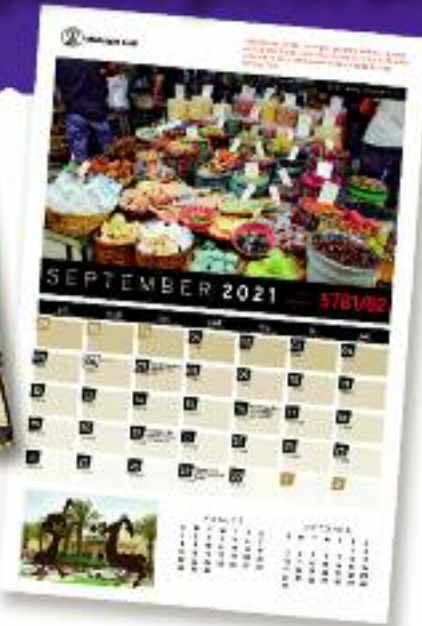
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