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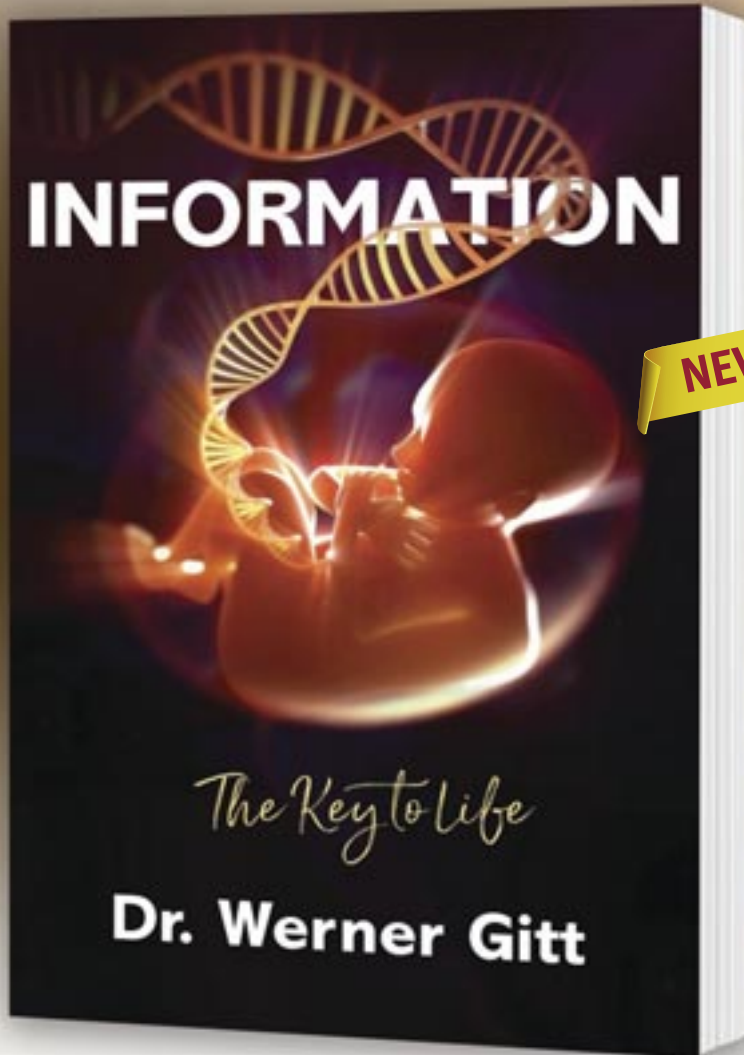
What Would Christmas Be without Mary and Joseph?

The background of the cover features a silhouette illustration of Mary and Joseph with a donkey, set against a bright, hazy sky. Mary is on the right, riding the donkey, while Joseph stands on the left, holding a long staff. The scene is set in a desert landscape with rolling hills.

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NEW

INFORMATION: THE KEY TO LIFE
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Author: Dr. Werner Gitt

This is another book where the cover design does not do justice to the content. It seems to target abortion; not so. The subject matter can be revealed with one word: information. That's what the over 440 pages is all about. This is the most challenging, scholarly, yet most fascinating volume regarding life and information this writer has ever read.

Dr. John Sanford—former Cornell University professor, genetic engineering pioneer, and inventor of the “gene gun”—testifies: “Dr. Gitt’s central thesis is profound—that information is a non-material entity foundational to all life and it can never arise spontaneously from strictly materialistic processes.”

To fully comprehend the scientific facts laid out in this book by Dr. Gitt, would require one to be the holder of a degree in higher mathematics, physics, biology, etc. But here is my simplified summary: Science has never proved that a piece of iron can dispense information to a rock, thereby producing life. True science has

proven that matter cannot self-organize into information. Or, as French scientist Louis Pasteur, who developed the germ theory in 1862, wrote, *Omne vivum ex ovo* (“All life comes from life”).

In contrast, Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), co-founder of Marxism, insisted: “The material world observable by our senses, to which we ourselves belong, is the only reality.” (*Information*, p. 173). But Nobel Prize-winning quantum physicist Erwin Schrödinger (1887-1961) wrote: “The unfolding of events in the life cycle of an organism exhibits an admirable regularity and orderliness, unrivalled by anything we meet within inanimate matter. . . . We must therefore not be discouraged by the difficulty of interpreting life by the ordinary laws of physics” (pp. 173-174). Simply stated, there is more to life than matter and energy, or as the Bible records: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).



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Without Mary and Joseph's determination, Jesus, the Son of God, would not have come to mankind. There would not have been a Savior. Without Mary and Joseph's determination, there would have been no Christmas.



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“Let It Be Christmas, Every Day Anew.”

By Norbert Lieth

Director of Missions, Midnight Call International

Motivational training, suitable exercises, quotations, and pep talk are the great topic of our time. Motivational events are well-attended, life coaches are flourishing, and their books are bestsellers. Whether in the economy, sports, or personal environment, a person is expected to live up to all of it. The last bit of strength is being asked of him, according to the motto: “You can do it; you are better than you think; you can be anything you want; simply retrieve it from your inner self, or awaken it within you; think positively.” Many let themselves be carried away and float on cloud nine for the moment, but the crash is not long in coming. They try to concentrate on the positive, but cannot find it. The truth is, they cannot live up to the demands; they are not as strong as they are being led to believe. They are human, with all the weaknesses and emotional fluctuations. Everyday life is too demanding; the constant stress becomes unbearable. The pressure from outside is too strong, and what they are telling themselves is a big lie. Instead of being built up, again and again a piece keeps crumbling off. They don't want to admit it, to confess it—until, one day, nothing works anymore.

What does that have to do with Christmas? Christmas means that God has created everything through His Son Jesus. Christmas means that all things come from Him, and nothing from us. Christmas means that the Lord expects nothing from us, but that He gives us everything. I don't have to exert myself to improve, to work and shine, to become the best I can be. I don't need to believe in myself, but I can believe that Jesus is everything to me—perfect grace and truth. He is sufficient for all things; He is the forgiveness of my sins; He is the renewal of my life; He is the constant power within me. I may accept these gifts and let myself be transformed by them. This is the greatest motivation in my life and for my everyday existence. And with this, we can press on through the coming year.

Paul says: “...I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

Many think they have to do something to be somebody. But spiritually, it is different: You have become something in Christ, and through Him you are allowed to do something. “Not

EDITOR'S NOTE

that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor 3:5). We cannot attribute anything to ourselves. We receive our strength, not from within but from above. It is not shouted at us; rather, it is a loving encouragement and a tender urging.

"But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor 15:10). It is grace that motivates us and does not allow us to be idle. It does not make us feel like we have to, but motivates us to a joyful willingness. Self-satisfaction is broken, and spiritual energy is released. "For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13).

Our motivation comes from the Lord. The driving force is God's Holy Spirit. The Lord creates in us the desire to be freely available to Him, and then gives us the strength to turn it into action.

Christmas is a gift of grace with many facets. We can accept it gratefully, unwrap it, and use it daily. Therefore, let it be Christmas, every day anew.

A Note from Arno Froese: Since the murderous attack by the terrorist organization Hamas, indiscriminately killing men, women, and children, there is great mourning in the land of Israel. Many families have lost loved ones, and will have to readjust to life when returning to their homes. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must not allow the seed of hate to grow in our soul and mind. May we always remember, "For God so loved the world..."

Our heart's sympathy, accompanied by a great degree of sadness, goes out to all the families who have lost both young and old. But here, we must also add our acknowledgement of the horrendous suffering, particularly by women and children, in Gaza. Above and beyond, we pray that our gracious Lord will comfort His Church in Gaza as well as in Israel, based on the Scripture, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). (MC)

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OUR TASK

Midnight Call Ministries is a nonprofit missionary organization, dedicated to proclaiming the entire Bible as the unfulfilling 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 therefore in 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, was seen by over 500, 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 imminent, pre-tribulational 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.



What Would Christmas Be without Mary and Joseph?

Fredy Peter

Luke's Gospel reveals Mary's extraordinary character, and Matthew's Gospel reveals Joseph's. Still, Galatians 4:4 and Micah 5:2 suggest that the "holy couple" wasn't without fault. Their example shows us that Christmas is about every person's need for a Savior. A biblical exploration.

Mary wasn't just a young woman (generally assumed to be around 15 years old), but also a virgin.

Christmas without Mary and Joseph would mean a completely silent night. There would be no mother and child in a Bethlehem stable. We'd know nothing of the wonderful woman and noble man to whom God would entrust His Son. The Christmas story is the most beautiful story in all of world literature, surpassed only by the fact that it's true in every detail.

Let's start with Mary.

Mary

People tend to go to extremes where Mary is concerned. Either she's revered to the extent that Jesus takes a back seat, or she is undeservedly ignored. Mary was an extraordinary woman! I'd even go so far as to say that there has never been a woman like her before or since. Interestingly, the physician Luke focuses on her specifically in his Gospel. He shows that:

Mary was pure.

"In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin..." (Luke 1:26-27). She wasn't just a young woman (generally assumed to be around 15 years old), but also a virgin. This means that she'd never had sexual relations. This truth is also clear from the context.

Mary was pure despite her engagement.

"...Betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David..." (Luke 1:27).

Engagement signified a great deal more at that time than it does now. The engagement period lasted for one year, and was just as binding as marriage. It could only be annulled through divorce. Therefore, the couple was already considered husband and wife, although they didn't move in together until after the wedding feast. A relationship outside of this arrangement was considered adultery.

Mary was humble.

"And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, O favored one...'" (Luke 1:28). Mary received grace, undeserved favor, because she was humble. Humility means not thinking more highly of yourself than you ought (Rom 12:3). God gives grace to the humble, according to James 4:6. And Mary was undoubtedly humble, because she received the very essence of God's grace in Jesus.

Mary was blessed.

"...The Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28, KJV). God bestowed a generous gift upon this young Jewish woman and granted her great delight. At the same time, she had to accomplish the most difficult task. There is only a single reason why God chose Mary: He simply wanted her.

Mary was ordinary.

"But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be" (Luke 1:29). Mary didn't encounter

What Would Christmas Be without Mary and Joseph?



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the angel as some placid saint on equal footing, but as a regular, upset young woman. Surprisingly, the encounter didn't prevent her from thinking steadily. That was also necessary to understand the extraordinary revelation about the magnitude, origin, and future of the baby she was to conceive (Luke 1:30-33).

Mary was deliberate.

"And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?'" (Luke 1:34). The Bible clearly speaks of purity during the engagement period. Mary wasn't surprised that the long-promised Messiah was to come, but marveled at how (as a virgin) she could become His mother.

Mary was resolute.

"And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1:38). Consider what this meant for the young woman: illegitimate pregnancy, shame, scorn, possibly being punished or shunned by others, and no wedding feast, congratulations, or gifts. "Let it be to me according to your word." She wasn't looking at the unforeseeable consequences, but at the exceedingly rich grace, causing her to become the boldest heroine of faith in the entire Bible.

The unbelief of one woman (Eve) brought the world to ruin through sin and death. The faith of the other (Mary) brought forth the world's Redeemer over sin and death.

Mary took action.

"In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth" (Luke 1:39-40). It's truly said that extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. What kinds of thoughts might have been going through her mind during the dangerous, lonely, days-long journey? Regardless, Mary immediately acted on the angel's practical remark about Elizabeth's pregnancy (Luke 1:36), so she could find refuge, a listening ear, and an understanding heart with Elizabeth. Elizabeth was the only one who would believe her, since her husband had experienced something similar with an angel...

Mary was thankful.

"And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is for those who fear him from gen-

Mary wasn't looking at the unforeseeable consequences, but at the exceedingly rich grace, causing her to become the boldest heroine of faith in the entire Bible.

eration to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever” (Luke 1:46-55). Mary's incredible knowledge of the Bible is revealed in this highly impressive Magnificat, as her song of praise and thanksgiving is known. According to Charles Ryrie, 15 Old Testament quotations can be recognized in just 10 verses! She reveals her spiritual insight and deep worship. She praises God's mercy in what He does for her (vv. 46-49), for us (vv. 50-53), and for Israel (vv. 54-55).

Mary was courageous.

“And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home” (Luke 1:56). She probably stayed until John the Baptist was born, and then made her way back. She left it all to God. This is one of the bravest walks of faith that the Bible records. What could she expect at home? What would her family say, and what would Joseph say?

And that leads us to her groom.

Joseph

A quiet, simple carpenter (Matt 13:55)—possibly a builder or stonemason. A Bethlehem native, he was also a descendant of David and a

migrant worker in Nazareth. This is where he found Mary. The evangelist Matthew, who focuses more on Joseph, shows us that:

Joseph was betrothed.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph...” (Matt 1:18). As mentioned earlier, an engagement had a completely different significance at that time. It consisted of three phases: First, the parents of the pair would reach an agreement and draw up a binding contract. After that, a portion of the bride price was paid. And finally, after a year of “probation” and preparation, the man brought his wife home.

Joseph was pure.

Despite being engaged, Joseph had neither lived with Mary nor slept with her. “...Before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” (Matt 1:18). Apparently, Mary kept her blessed knowledge to herself. Joseph only learned of his fiancée's condition when it became obvious, not when she told him herself. The moment Joseph's suspicions were confirmed must have been so startling to him: “My bride is pregnant ... she was having an affair!” A huge field of conflict opened up because:

Joseph was just.

“And her husband Joseph, being a just man...” (Matt 1:19). The expression “just” means that Joseph lived in a way that pleased God and

What Would Christmas Be without Mary and Joseph?

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was undoubtedly an extremely difficult one: 170 km/105 miles on rocky roads without any rest stops at service plazas. They were probably on a dusty, smelly donkey for days—maybe more than a week—on the road.



obeyed the Law of Moses. It would have required him to take action in such a case. Adultery was punishable by stoning. But Joseph's doctrine was consistent with his life:

Joseph was fair.

"...And unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly" (Matt 1:19). What a fair, merciful, and unbelievably noble character! He didn't at all wish to make a public example of Mary. How deeply he must have loved her! And just as Mary didn't tell him about her pregnancy, Joseph didn't tell her what his next step would be. However, he didn't allow himself to be guided by unrestrained vengeance.

Joseph was level-headed.

"...Resolved to divorce her quietly" (Matt 1:19). He reflected on ways out and found one. In such a case, the law also provided for the possibility of giving the woman a certificate of divorce, privately in the presence of two witnesses (cf. Deut 24:1-4). This would have kept everything discreet so she could marry the person she truly loved.

Joseph was ordinary.

How does an ordinary man react to his beloved's betrayal? Does he remain very still and contemplative? That is the image many have of good, pleasant Joseph: "But as he considered these things..." (Matt 1:20). This

wasn't unburdened reflection, but the brooding of an upset heart. The same Greek root of this word appears 18 times in the New Testament, and is often translated to express anger or even fury. Therefore, the quote from Matthew 1:20 could also mean that Joseph was upset or beside himself. That is a man's normal reaction when his wife has betrayed him. But God causes the upright to succeed, and always comes through at the right time. He sent an angel like He did for Mary: "...Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Matt 1:20-23). What an about-face! What relief and tremendous joy this must have been for Joseph. His Mary hadn't been unfaithful to him after all. She would even be the mother of the Messiah.

His understandable reaction came immediately:

Joseph was obedient.

"When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him..." (Matt 1:24). This unique revelation moved the righteous Joseph—as Mary's revelation had moved her three months earlier—to immediate obedience from faith. Not one objection. But that had consequences for him, and shows that:

Joseph was reliable.

"...He took his wife" (Matt 1:24). He took responsibility for Mary by immediately bringing her into his home. In doing so, he was violating the customary one-year engagement period. What he must have had to hear about it! From now on, he would protect her and the unborn child from every attack, hostility, and insult. To the people of Nazareth, it definitely appeared that he had slept with Mary prematurely, when in fact the complete opposite was true.

Joseph was self-controlled.

"But [he] knew her not until she had given birth to a son..." (Matt 1:25). Out of respect and reverence for God and the unborn child, he abstained from sexual relations. He had his physical desires under control. He was a self-possessed, exemplary man. Joseph later fathered four sons with Mary, and at least two daughters (Matt 12:46; 13:55-56).

Joseph was dependable.

"...And he called his name Jesus" (Matt 1:25). Joseph also carried out the angel's last instruction. By naming Him, he was recognizing the child as his son before the whole world, becoming His legal father.

Had it not been for Mary and Joseph's determination, the manger would have remained empty; there would have been no angels singing over the fields; the shepherds would never have hurried to Bethlehem; and the Magi would not have set out from the east. Without Mary and Joseph's determination, Jesus, the Son of God, would not have come to mankind.

What Would Christmas Be without Mary and Joseph?

If we know God's will in a matter, we need to be obedient today, and not postpone it until tomorrow.

There would not have been a Savior. Without Mary and Joseph's determination, there would have been no Christmas.

The holy couple

The trio of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are often referred to as the "holy family," which means that Mary and Joseph should be the "holy couple." But is that really the case? They both showed extraordinary obedience to the faith, although not in everything. They were neither perfect nor sinless. We can see this from two passages of Scripture. In the first, Galatians 4:4, we read, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law."

"But when the fullness of time had come"; that is, at a very special time (when religious, cultural, and political circumstances were just right), God sent His Son. At that time, the important trade routes from Africa to Asia and Europe, ran through Israel. As a result, travelers were naturally introduced to the Jews' belief in the one living God, and took that message with them. For example, the queen of Sheba (modern-day Yemen) learned of Solomon's wealth and wisdom. So, God had founded Israel in a highly strategic place. In 332 BC, Alexander the Great conquered the Middle East, and with it, the Jewish land and Jerusalem. What were the consequences? A single language prevailed from northern Africa to India: Greek. Between 280 and 130 BC, the Hebrew Old Testament (which was already complete) was translated into Greek in Egypt. The so-called Sep-

tuagint was born. Now the entire known world could read and understand the Old Testament. Additionally, the Gentiles learned that the Messiah was becoming more and more urgently anticipated by many Mediterranean Jewish communities. In 63 BC the Romans came, and Pompey conquered Jerusalem. What did the Romans bring to the table? A huge empire, political stability, and above all, good roads. The legions had to be able to be dispatched quickly to various flashpoints. And then around 2 BC, the time was fulfilled: The world was ready for God's incarnation and the rapid spread of the Gospel that would follow—perfectly prepared by God, down to the smallest detail. But shortly before this most significant event in redemptive history, the mother-to-be found herself with her husband totally in the wrong place!

Sweet holy couple? Mary and Joseph didn't know everything there was to know about their baby. But they knew their unborn Son was the promised Redeemer, the Messiah, the Son of God. And they knew with great certainty that the time of His birth was near. As a devout couple, they knew the Old Testament—Mary demonstrated this impressively in her song of praise and thanksgiving. And what is written in it about the Messiah's birthplace? This brings us to the second Bible passage:

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" (Mic 5:2).

This very specific statement could only apply to the Messiah. It wasn't just the priests and scribes (Matt 2:4-6), but the crowds in John 7:42 also knew exactly where the Messiah would come from: the city of David, Bethlehem, and the tribe of Judah. And since biblical prophecy is always clear and unambiguous, the prophet also disclosed the name of the place as Bethlehem Ephrathah. Why? Because there are two towns named Bethlehem in Israel. When the tribe of Zebulun occupied its allotted territory in the Promised Land (Josh 19:15-16), it was given twelve named cities and their villages. The twelfth town was called Bethlehem. So, there was a second Bethlehem in Galilee, and it was also very close to Nazareth (about 15 km/9 miles by foot)—the distance that a pregnant woman could walk in 5-6 hours.

The Bible doesn't reveal the reason that Mary and Joseph remained in Nazareth for so long. Perhaps the existence of a second Bethlehem caused them to mistakenly believe that their destination could be reached quickly. In any case, the Word of God was clear, and had to be fulfilled with absolute precision. However, the fact was that Mary and Joseph were 170 km/105 miles from their actual destination.

How did God arrange for His Word to come true? Did He have an angel messenger drop by with a friendly reminder? It would hardly have been a problem for God to use angels to transport the two to Bethlehem (as He did for Philip in Acts 8:39, for example). But God didn't do that, because His will had already been made known. When we know that we're able to do something for ourselves, we must.

God moved the whole known world so Mary and Joseph could be at the center of His will. But it played out in an utterly unspectacular way for the couple, and with unpleasant consequences. Caesar Augustus wanted to know how many people lived in his empire—probably so he could precisely tax them. He wanted cash so he held a census, plain and simple. Everyone had to register in their hometown, including Joseph. God didn't spare him and Mary the journey. They had to go themselves and do what they could (and should have done sometime earlier).

The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was undoubtedly an extremely difficult one: 170 km/105 miles on rocky roads, without any rest stops at service plazas. They were probably on a dusty, smelly donkey for days—maybe more than a week—on the road. Add to that the weather, the heat of the day, overnight stays, Mary being very pregnant and riding at the same time. Then there's the fear of going into labor on the way, when sudden movements or impacts could trigger contractions. And when they finally arrived, there was nowhere to stay! Instead, the disgrace of a stinking, dirty place with the animals. No hallowed, sacred atmosphere, but misery, hardship, and perhaps a few tears as well. This whole dreadful journey could have been much easier if Mary and Joseph had been heeding God's Word closely, had obeyed promptly, and set out early. But they eventually had to follow the path that God had laid out for them—either way, God's Word will be precisely fulfilled.

The same is true for us today. If we know God's will in a matter, we need to be obedient today, and not postpone it until tomorrow. God

What Would Christmas Be without Mary and Joseph?

Salvation is the major theme of Christmas. “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”



has plans for us, and he wants us to achieve these purposes. But we'd be wrong to think, “Oh, I'll wait for a while longer. This path looks too difficult for me.” Because we're going to have to follow it anyway, if we wait to begin, it will be much more difficult, and possibly also involve suffering, hardship, and tears. What does the Lord have to do and move in our lives to bring us into the center of His will, considering that He intervened powerfully in world politics for Mary and Joseph?

Mary and Joseph experienced hardships and needed the Savior's forgiveness, because they weren't a holy couple. Their example shows that all of us—from the humblest to the noblest—need a Savior.

The Savior

God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). When

Christmas came, He had only one purpose: for Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to be born for us in Bethlehem, and die for us on the Cross at Calvary. Because our sins separate us from God forever, we're lost without Him.

What would that Christmas infant be without the man crucified on Good Friday? The days of the Christmas season would be meaningless free time, with endless strings of lights, maxing out our credit cards, and sentimental—yet lonely and empty—hearts. It would be a complete waste of time, energy, and money.

Salvation is the major theme of Christmas. “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). Our biggest problem is our sins, which separate us from God and lead the unredeemed to eternal damnation. So, God sent a Savior to connect us back to God and bring us to heaven. Since man is unable to reach God through his own efforts, God came to us. This is what Christmas is all about.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

(MR1222/1311)



LEVITICAL ECONOMICS: MULTI-BILLIONAIRES VS. DEBT SLAVES



Cancellation of debts became a common royal practice in the old Babylonian period. Hammurabi, who was the Babylonian king early in the second millennium BC (around 1800 BC ... dating varies), is believed to have founded the basic principle of ruler-mandated debt cancellation in the renowned Code of Hammurabi.

By Wilfred Hahn

Debt cancellation was one of Hammurabi's first acts when he came to power. He is recorded to have ordered debt cancellations on at least two occasions (likely more) in his reign. However, significantly, there has been new research on this practice in recent years. Prominent Assyriologists (archaeologists who focus on the Middle East) now take the position that "clean slate" policies were the norm in early times ... very much counter to our modern practices, these being of Roman origin.

Announcing a "clean slate" was a wise practice. As in our time today, over-indebtedness was a major problem in Babylonian society. Citizens could easily become enslaved to the creditor class. Anyone falling upon hard times or who was unable to pay

taxes, would be forced to borrow. Interest rates were onerous ... commonly as high as 33% over the duration of the loan period (this sometimes being as short as a few weeks).

Once indebted, people were almost certainly doomed to even deeper debt or slavery. With such usurious interest rates, it would not take long for wealth imbalance and concentration of land ownership to become extreme, this potentially also threatening the power of the king.

It made sense to periodically decree an amnesty from all personal debts (this would not include commercial liabilities in the case of the Babylonian system). This wiping out of debts rejuvenated society and served to maintain a sustainable wealth and power balance.



Today, this tendency of “wealth begetting wealth” is viewed by economists as a “flaw” of capitalism.



Biblical Foundations for Debt Cancellation

Down through history, philosophers and religious thinkers came to similar conclusions on the issue of repressive debts and wealth distribution. For example, more than two and a half millennia after Hammurabi, Islamic scholars began to develop principles that sought to achieve relief for the poor and a sustainable wealth balance.

Their teaching of “al riba” served this end. It is the doctrine that money is not allowed to earn income through interest. According to Islam, gain and profit were only to be achieved through labor and trading. If money is allowed to earn income, though producing or risking nothing, even-

tually it would lead to an imbalance of wealth distribution (a large class of poor people).

Originally, Mohammed’s forbidding of debt interest was more likely rooted in the idea that a fixed rate of interest was an affront to Allah, as only he could determine and underwrite the certainty of future income, not mankind. Later, Islam further intellectualized its view on “al riba.”

But, much earlier than Islam (only some 500 years after the era of Abraham and Hammurabi), during the time of the 40-year wilderness journey of the Hebrews, God gave Moses the commands of the Sabbath.

Later, after entering Canaan, the Hebrews were commanded to observe the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee Year. (We will explain these policies.) Moses codified the rules of debt forgiveness and the restoration of wealth distribution ... these being much more advanced than the general haphazard concepts of debt forgiveness of the Akkadians, some 500 years earlier.

These Hebrew ordinances proved to be most wonderful for a number of reasons. Both the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee were an effective means of ensuring that a permanent poverty class would not emerge, where a soci-

The world groans for a Jubilee Year, when all debt would be settled. As Apostle Paul says, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22).

ety of a few ultra-rich could enslave everyone for perpetuity.

Creation and Multiplying Money

Today, this tendency of “wealth begetting wealth” is viewed by economists as a “flaw” of capitalism. They observe that over time, the competitive economic arena leads to winners who become very large or wealthy, and in turn have the ability to suppress new competitors. This is sometimes referred to as the “winner takes all” syndrome.

This could be problematic. As such, for example, the US government would intervene. It chose to break up companies that were thought to have become too large ...i.e., AT&T and General Motors).

The point we wish to emphasize here is that the natural laws of money, compound interest, and relative advantage (everything else being equal) contribute to the tendency that the wealthy get wealthier, and the poor, relatively poorer. Over time, these very trends lead to instability and eventual wealth destruction.

Just such a “late stage” situation exists in America and many other nations today. An extreme state of

imbalance between the rich and poor is a worldwide phenomenon. An ever-smaller minority is becoming wealthier. Recent actions in the US political sphere have signaled just how advanced and repressive this condition has become. Everywhere one looks in the world, a cry is heard for “debt cancellation.”

The world groans for a Jubilee Year, when all debt would be settled. As Apostle Paul says, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time” (Romans 8:22). Something else is needed to liberate the world, to free the economic captives.

Debt Forgiveness and the Prophetic Plan

Jesus Christ quoted Isaiah’s prophecy about Himself (Isaiah 61:1-2a) when He said: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19). Christ deliberately did not read the rest of Isaiah’s prophecy,



The Lord did not rescue the poor at His first coming, rather the “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3 from the Beatitudes). The rescuing of all poor (Luke 6:20, Sermon on the Plain) will be fulfilled in the Millennium.

which further states: “[...] and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:2b-3a).

Why? Because these were things that would be completed at His Second Coming, signifying the arrival of the “year of the Lord’s favor.” While our Lord proclaimed “the year of the Lord’s favor” during His first coming, it was not to occur until His second. The Lord did not rescue the poor at His first coming, rather the “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3 from the Beatitudes). The rescuing of all poor (Luke 6:20, Sermon on the Plain) will be fulfilled in the Millennium.

Prophetic Parallels to the Jubilee Year

Just what is meant by the Hebrew word for “jubilee”? It refers to the continuous blast of the silver trumpets as the Year of Jubilee was ushered in by the priests. “[...] Have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land” (Leviticus 25:9).

Ezekiel informs us that the “year of liberty” (year of freedom) will again be observed in the Millennium. He describes a procedure that will apply to a prince during that time: “But if he gives a gift out of his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall be his until the year of liberty [the Year of Jubilee]; after that it shall be returned to the prince; only his sons may keep a gift from his inheritance [permanently]” (Ezekiel 46:17, AMP).

While it is indeed prophetic that the Jubilee Year will again be reinstated, it is the prophetic parallels and symmetry of the 50th year of Jubilee to salvation and the Millennium that are the most inspiring.

To begin, the number 50 is the year that follows 7 weeks of 7. Therefore, the Jubilee year was the 8th Sabbath in a 50-year period. The number 8 in the Bible signifies a new beginning. The blasts of the Jubilee trumpets parallel or foreshadow the final trumpet of the Lord—both for the Church, this being the final calling in the “Sabbath Rest,” and the last judgments in the Tribulation period, these being followed by the Millennium reign of Christ.

The precious year of the Jubilee can also be seen as the prophetic parallel of the Millennial “Year of our Lord.” That year is the Jubilee Year of the Lord. All

We have been given this great promise: “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience” (Hebrew 4:9-11).

sins and debts will be forgiven, i.e., canceled.

We see that financial debt in the physical dimension is the parallel of spiritual indebtedness to our Creator. Both must be paid back; both can be forgiven. There is only one difference: While mankind may be able to pay back debts on earth, he cannot pay back his sin debt. Only Jesus Christ can make this payment.



Thoughts to Ponder

God has created the world for His purposes and glory. He made it so the world could not function righteously without the concept of “cancellation.” It is not a coincidence that we commonly refer to the cancellation of debts as a “forgiveness” of debt.

God has designed a plan for both heaven and earth. He sent His Son Jesus Christ to pay the debt mankind owed to God that he could not pay... a transaction that would be extended to all those who would believe upon Him. Just as in the Jubilee Year of ancient times, this opportunity to cancel all debt (sin) is open to all.

How wonderful then is “cancellation”! How many households today would dance for joy at the cancellation

of their mortgage? Consider that the word origin of “mortgage” literally means “death pledge” ... a state of affairs that those in foreclosure proceedings will readily understand. However, it is the cancellation of our sin and reconciliation with Jesus Christ that brings the greatest joy for eternity.

We have been given this great promise: “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience” (Hebrew 4:9-11).

The trumpets of Jubilee are ever nearer for the world! (MC)



Crossing the Jordan River: A Symbol of Inheritance and Rest

(Sites of the Bible Series)

DR. RON J. BIGALKE

According to Hebrews 4, Israel claiming her inheritance in the Promised Land is an illustration of the various ways in which New Testament believers experience what it is to be “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). Some do not know the promise of God, similar to those who originally journeyed into the wilderness, and then wandered forty years until they eventually died there because of their sin.

While the Jordan River is more than 223 miles in length, the actual distance between its principal source at the base of Mount Hermon (whose melting snow feeds it) and the Dead Sea is less than 124 miles. The stormy banks and swelling floods can result in the Jordan increasing a mile or two in width in certain areas.

Some did eat manna in the wilderness, yet because of their unbelief, died naturally (since manna would not always preserve their physical life). Those who were unbelievers also suffered eternal judgment (Numb 14:29; Heb 3:7-19; John 6:49-50). Others may be compared to the ten spies, who saw “the fruit of the land” of Canaan and yet, because of their “bad report,” failed to

enter it (Numb 13:25-33; 14:20-38). The sons of Reuben, the sons of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh fought alongside the other tribes in the land of Canaan, yet did not remain there. They settled in the Transjordan, because the land was optimal for raising livestock (32:1). They chose to settle on the border and be separated from their brethren on the land east of the Jordan River. God's desire was for His people to be like the new generation, who would trust His promise to fight for them (Josh 23:5, 10), and consequently would experience the Lord's intended blessing. The same is true in that God would have New Testament believers appropriate "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph 1:3), which is only possible if one is trusting God's promises and heeding His commands.

With the Lord God granting repeated victories, Israel would receive her inheritance in the Promised Land. They were able to take possession and establish homes and cities because God was faithful. God promised to aid His people in eradicating their enemies. He would continue to help Israel take possession of the land, because He had the desire and power to do so (Josh 23:3-5). The nations that Israel would dispossess were "great and strong" (v. 9), and the people lived in fortified and walled cities (2:15; 6:5, 20; 7:5; 8:29, etc.). Israel would conquer the land only if they consecrated themselves unto the Lord. They would continue to possess the land and enjoy it, only as they obeyed the commandments of the Lord and did not transgress His covenant (23:12-16).

Israel first entered the land of Canaan from the Jordan, and would need God to stop the flowing water from upstream for them to cross (3:14-17). Often mentioned in hymns, the imagery of the

Jordan River is that of an obstacle between life and death, earth and heaven, and either blessing or loss. For instance, Samuel Stennett (1727-95), who was a prominent minister among the Protestant dissenters of London, composed the song "On Jordan's Stormy Banks," with Canaan representing heaven. Succeeding his father, Stennett pastored the Baptist Church in Little Wild Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and it may have been his father's death that inspired him to write the hymn, some time prior to his own passing.

In 1787, English Baptist pastor John Ribbon published the influential and popular work, *A Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors*, in which he included 38 of Stennett's hymns. One of those hymns was entitled "The Promised Land," with "Heaven Anticipated" as the heading. A different form appeared in 19th century America with the refrain, "I am bound for the promised land." It has become the standard version for many hymnals since that time. Certainly, there is no problem singing, "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand, and cast a wishful eye to Canaan's fair and happy land," and later to have the refrain, "I am bound for the promised land." However, there is mixed imagery, for the believer's "possessions lie" not on the earthly side of Jordan but in heaven. "Sickness and sorrow, pain and death" will not be present in eternity (Rev 21:4), yet would be a reality in Canaan. Stennett unfortunately confused his imagery by equating Israel's crossing the Jordan with the believer marching forward to eternal life ("When shall I see my Father's face, and in his bosom rest?").

Stennett, of course, is not the only hymn writer to confuse Israel's crossing the Jordan with heaven. If "coming for to carry me home" is

Crossing the Jordan River: A Symbol of Inheritance and Rest

As mentioned throughout this article, the crossing of the Jordan does not represent a believer dying and going to heaven; rather, it depicts the believer's spiritual rest and victory that may be enjoyed presently through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.



understood to be heaven, then “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” has the same error when looking “over Jordan.” The same is true for “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah,” which equates the believer's death with treading the Jordan and landing safely in heaven (“When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside; death of death and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side”). Ultimately, such confusion produces interpretative problems in seeking to understand the book of Joshua.

One must guard against imaginative poetry that fails to represent biblical teaching. The books of Ephesians and Hebrews indicate how the New Testament believer can relate to Israel's experience in the time of Joshua. What is revealed in the book of Joshua concerns the life of God's people, not their entering into heaven. The book of Joshua records battles, death, sin and suffering, which certainly do not reflect the hope of heaven. Israel crossing the Jordan parallels the life of the righteous, in which one progresses toward spiritual maturity and has the ability to engage in spiritual warfare with divinely supplied weapons.

Israel's crossing the Jordan depicts the New Testament believer being engaged in the spiritual warfare described in Ephesians 6, which is to “put on the new self” and “lay aside the old self” (4:22-24) that is dependence upon the flesh and human effort, as opposed to living with faith and in obedience to God's Word. The book of Joshua would then depict how believers “[lay] aside the old self with its *evil* practices, and have put on the new self” (Col 3:9-10), thereby appropriating “the riches of the glory of [Christ's] inheritance” (Eph 1:18).

The book of Joshua illustrates in a practical manner the doctrinal truths revealed in the book of Ephesians. The “spiritual blessings in the heavenly *places* in Christ” are not restricted to heaven, but rather indicate the believer's oneness with the risen Lord in His present victory, and how Christians are able to receive the fullness of divine blessing. The true significance of the book of Joshua can only be understood by recognizing how Israel's experience illustrates that of the New Testament believer—which, of course is corroborated exclusively by the revealed Word.

For instance, the book of Hebrews explains how the land of Canaan depicts the spiritual rest and victory that may be enjoyed presently by every believer in Jesus Christ. The repeated emphasis of Hebrews 4 is “rest.” The initial verses of the chapter declare, “Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to

us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard” (vv. 1-2). The entire Canaan narrative emphasized in Hebrews indicates a present, temporary, spiritual rest through belief and dependence upon the Lord, which then culminates in a final rest.

The Israelites did not experience God’s rest when they simply entered the Promised Land, because David (who was “after so long a time” in comparison to when Joshua led God’s people into Canaan) warned his generation to hear God’s voice and not harden their hearts (Heb 4:7-8). If the generation of Joshua’s time had received rest, God “would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest [Gk. *sabbatismos*] for the people of God” (vv. 8-9). *Sabbatismos* has only one occurrence in the New Testament, and anticipates the age to come when true worshippers of God (John 4:23) persevere to the end in faith (cf. Heb 10:38-39). God’s Sabbath (4:4) and the Promised Land (3:17-19) foreshadowed the believer’s enjoyment of a day that will be all Sabbath (i.e. eternal rest). In the book of Hebrews, one must be careful to note which rest is being referred to, since there are various “rests” such as the one already mentioned (4:11). Other “rests” include: what Israel experienced after her conquest of Canaan (3:17-19); God’s Sabbath rest subsequent to His work of creation (4:4); and, the believer’s rest and victory through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which may be enjoyed presently (vv. 1, 3, 8-9).

Hebrews 4 contains a twofold parallel exhortation in verses 1 and 11, instructing believers to be careful not to “come short” of entering God’s rest, and to “be diligent to enter that rest.”

Whenever the term “rest” occurs in Hebrews 3:1—4:11, it refers to an experience of eternal salvation, which one enters by God’s grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The emphasis upon this salvation is evident in Hebrews 4:2, wherein the necessity of faith in the “good news preached” is prominent. Faith necessitates dependence upon God’s work in contrast to one’s own (4:10).

As mentioned throughout this article, the crossing of the Jordan does not represent a believer dying and going to heaven; rather, it depicts the believer’s spiritual rest and victory that may be enjoyed presently through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Similar to Israel in the time of Joshua, believers today have been promised God’s rest and should “fear . . . [coming] short of it” (v. 1). In the present age, God has promised abundant life to those delivered from the bondage of sin. The enjoyment of that pledge is based upon spiritual progress through faith. Believers today are encouraged toward spiritual maturity and not to “come short of it.” We trust Him for His completed work of redemption, and live in enjoyment of the spiritual blessings appropriated through faith.

How tragic when any of God’s people fail to appropriate such “rest,” and wander aimlessly like Israel did in the wilderness. Christians are challenged to spiritual maturity and not to regress “because of disobedience” (v. 6). Believers today are warned not to “come short” of all that God intends for them. The Christian life is never stagnant; one either makes spiritual progression through faith, or regresses in unbelief. “Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest” (v. 11a).

(1357)




WORLD FOCUS

 ITALY

AI Reads Ancient Scroll

At first glance, the Herculaneum scrolls look unremarkable, like pieces of coal. After surviving the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, the nearly 2,000-year-old documents would crumble if anyone attempted to unroll them, and surviving pieces with writing were considered to be nearly illegible to the human eye—until now.

 The word, “πορφυρας” or “porphyras,” which is the Greek word for purple, was found first by University of Nebraska computer science student Luke Farritor.

The technology was created by University of Kentucky computer science professor Brent Seales and has been in development for nearly 20 years now.

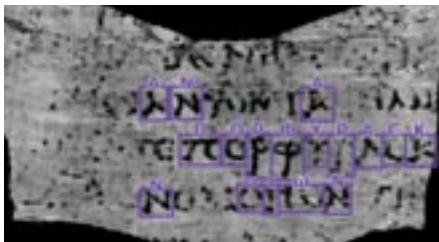
The 79 AD eruption of Vesuvius, a volcano located near Naples, Italy, covered the ancient Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in volcanic mud.

Approximately 1,100 carbonized scrolls, now referred to as the Herculaneum scrolls, were recovered from a building that was believed to be Julius Caesar’s father-in-law’s house, according to the University of Kentucky.

Farritor and Youssef Nader, a biorobotics graduate student at Freie University Berlin, worked independently of one another and found the same word.



By using computer tomography and advanced artificial intelligence, researchers have been able to read the first full word off of an unwrapped ancient Herculaneum scroll. Salvatore Laporta/AP



The letters found were “πορφυρας” which is the Greek word “porphyras” and translates to the English word “purple.” Brent Seales

Seales hopes that a partially read scroll, satisfactory with the contest conditions, will be seen by the end of this year, while a whole scroll might be deciphered by the end of 2024.

“And so even if we learn nothing, but the deep connection that we have to the ancients in terms of humanity, that’s still significant.”

-www.cnn.com, 18 October 2023

Commentary: It is of interest noticing how much time and energy is spent on the potential deciphering of this word “porphyras.” Professor Seales

believes that any revelation will “still [be] significant,” but that “even if we learn nothing,” there is some value to this pursuit.

There is another, much older document that is available in virtually all languages of the world—the Bible. According to several sources, the Old Testament was written between 1200 and 165 BC. Most scholars pinpoint the time of the writing of the New Testament between 50 to 100 AD. Others say it was written during the Roman Empire between 70 and 110 AD.

What we do know is that the Bible is not a mystery, but the recorded history of God’s plan of redemption ... the only book that precisely identifies what has occurred, what is occurring, and what will occur in the future.

The apostle Peter warns: “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11). He then opens a heavenly view for believers: “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (v. 13).


8115

(See Life-changing Bible Verses You Should Know, Item #2299, \$14.99.)

 **INDIA**

Court Rejects Same-Sex Marriage

India's top court refused to legalize same-sex marriages, passing the responsibility back to Parliament in a ruling that disappointed campaigners for LGBTQ+ rights in the world's most populous country.

 Chief Justice DY Chandrachud also urged the government to uphold the rights of the queer community and end discrimination against them.

Chandrachud said there were degrees of agreement and disagreement among the justices "on how far we have to go" on same-sex marriages, but the judges unanimously agreed that the court can't grant LGBTQ+ people the right to marry because that is a legislative function.

In 2018, the top court struck down a colonial-era law that had made gay sex punishable by up to 10 years in prison and expanded constitutional rights for the gay community.

The chief justice also rejected the government's assertion that being queer was an "urban" concept, saying it's not just "an English-speaking man" or a "white-collar man" who can claim to be queer, but equally, "a woman working in an agricultural job in a village."

In May, Taiwan became the first jurisdiction in Asia to recognize same-sex marriages. In July, Nepal's Supreme Court issued an interim order enabling the registration of same-sex marriages

for the first time. It's still not clear when the court would make its final decision on the case.

-www.npr.org, 17 October 2023

Commentary: When looking at a world map, one notices that the so-called Western ("Christian") world has legalized same-sex marriage. In Africa, it's only the country of South Africa, and in Asia only Taiwan is listed in this category. It's quite interesting to realize that the Muslims, the Hindus, the Buddhists, and the atheist countries do not accept this type of "equity."

What does the Bible say? "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves" (Romans 1:24).

When the apostle Peter speaks about "false prophets ... false teachers" and "damnable heresies," he writes in 2 Peter 2:7-8: "And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds)."

8114


(See *Signs of the Times*, Item #9103, \$3 per 100.)



 **NORTH KOREA**

Danger of 'Lazarus' Hacker Group

In a recent cyberattack, operatives of North Korea's Lazarus Group successfully infiltrated the network of a Spanish aerospace company.

 They reached out to the company's employees via LinkedIn's messaging service, disguising themselves as legitimate recruiters from Meta, and presented them with two deceptive "coding challenges" as part of a fake hiring process. The company employees fell for the ruse, leading to the inadvertent download of the LightlessCan malware onto their devices.

LightlessCan, categorized as a Remote Access Trojan (RAT), provides hackers with the ability to control the target computer discreetly.

This insidious malware granted Lazarus operatives unrestricted access to the employees' devices, enabling them to pilfer sensitive information.

ESET successfully identified the Lazarus Group as the culprits, with it being part of the Operation DreamJob cyber campaign, primarily focused on cyber espionage.

-www.jpost.com, 16 October 2023

(continued next page)

Hacker (continued from page 25)

Commentary: A century or two ago, safety was more or less located within the four walls of our house; the danger lay mostly outside. Today, that is no longer the case. With modern technology such as video, internet, etc., a totally different danger is revealed that we may not be aware of. Someone rightly said, “The enemies are in your house.” Considering the fact that much of the time spent at home is in front of the television or online, we realize that those instruments have become the ruling and dominating power in our homes.

When we stick to the Word of the Savior, we are safe: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15-17). 8112

(See *How to Study the Bible for Yourself*, Item #2308, \$15.99.)



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ISRAEL

Oldest Copy of the Bible Returns

The Codex Sassoon, the oldest complete copy of the Hebrew Bible dating back over 1,000 years, arrived home in Israel after a world tour following its auction at Sotheby’s in May.

 A codex, in the context of ancient texts, is a book or manuscript that is copied and bound with text appearing on both sides of the page the way a modern book is printed.

Before codices became the norm in publication, the Hebrew Bible was copied onto scrolls. The oldest of these, the Dead Sea Scrolls, is located in Jerusalem.

However, the Dead Sea Scrolls and texts like them do not divide the Bible into chapters and contain no punctuation or indication of how the words should be read aloud. The Masoretic notes, the marks found in modern copies of the Bible indicating how to pronounce and chant the text, did not begin appearing in copies of the Bible until the 10th century CE. The Codex Sassoon is the oldest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible that comes complete with the Masoretic notes.

Ambassador Alfred Moses, chair of ANU’s honorary board and the donor of Codex Sassoon to the museum stated upon its return to the State of Israel:

“The Hebrew Bible is the most influential book in history and constitutes the bedrock of Western civilization. I re-



The Codex Sassoon, the earliest and most complete Hebrew Bible ever discovered.
(photo credit: ARDON BAR-HAMA/ANU - THE MUSEUM OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE)

joice in knowing that it belongs to the Jewish People. It was my mission, realizing the historic significance of Codex Sassoon, to see that it resides in a place with global access to all people. In my heart and mind that place was the land of Israel, the cradle of Judaism, where the Hebrew Bible originated.”

-www.jpost.com, 6 October 2023

Commentary: Britannica.com explains the Hebrew Bible like this: “The Hebrew canon contains 24 books, one for each of the scrolls on which these works were written in ancient times. The Hebrew Bible is organized into three main sections: the Torah, or ‘Teaching,’ also called the Pentateuch or the ‘Five Books of Moses’; the Nevi’im, or Prophets; and the Ketuvim, or Writings.” In our Bibles, more books are counted because of the dividing of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles into “1st” and “2nd,” and Ezra/Nehemiah named as two separate books.

Regardless of these and other various details, the Bible has been pre-

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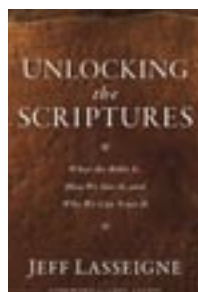
Bible Returns (continued from page 26)

served because God so promised it: “The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever” (Psalm 12:6-7). This “most influential book in history” is the only book that describes the beginning to our day and the future. We do well in this modern, highly sophisticated time

in which we live, to pay closer attention to the written Word of God.

8111

(See *Unlocking the Scriptures*, Item #2315, \$16.99.)



BRAZIL

Thousands Gather to Support Israel

More than 1,000 people gathered on Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana beach in order to march in solidarity for the state of Israel.



Demonstrators held signs saying “ Hamas is terrorism” and “Free the hostages,” attendees noted.

Multiple Brazilians were killed in the terror attack, including 24-year-olds Ranani Glazer and Bruna Valeani, as well as Karla Stelzer Mendes, 41. While some Brazilians survived by playing dead under other bodies, many Brazilians are still missing.

More than 3,000 gathered in a similar fashion in Sao Paulo. “Israel had its sovereignty invaded by terrorists from the Hamas. This demonstration aims to show the unity of the Jewish community and everyone who values Israel and who also values peace,” said Marcos Knobel, president of the Sao Paulo Jewish Federation.

Brazil is home to around 120,000 Jews, according to data provided. Sao Paulo is home to half of them, and Rio gathers another 30,000. The Brazilian diaspora in Israel holds a population of around 15,000 Brazilians, according to the Brazilian embassy in Tel Aviv.

-www.jpost.com, 17 October 2023

Commentary: Population-wise, Brazil is the 2nd largest nation on the American continent (North and South). The geographic size is slightly smaller than the USA. Present population is about 219 million. Wikipedia states that in 1970, 90% considered themselves Catholic; that changed in 2020 to about 50%. In the meantime, Evangelical Protestantism has reached 31%. Prognosis for the future shows Catholic membership dropping below 38% by 2030, while the various Protestant memberships will rise to nearly 40%.

As an overwhelmingly Catholic country until the Second World War, we note the Vatican's unsympathetic position toward Israel: “Until 1948 the Pope was motivated by the traditional Vatican opposition to Zionism. Vatican opposition to a Jewish homeland

stemmed largely from theological doctrines regarding Judaism.”

When did the Vatican recognize the State of Israel? “The relationship between Catholics and Jews is marred by centuries of troubles, including doctrinal polemics, Crusade-era massacres, and forced exiles of Jews. The Vatican moved to improve relations with Jews in 1965, although it did not formally recognize Israel until 1993.”

One of the unique characteristics of the Protestant movement is the encouragement to read the Scripture. The Bible is our ultimate authority, giving detailed instructions on our behavior within a geopolitical identity. For two millennia, the Jewish people were dispersed over all five continents, but remarkably kept their identity as Jews. Today, despite vehement opposition from terrorist groups like Hamas in the south and Hezbollah in the north (among many others), the country continues to prosper and, rather surprisingly, is establishing diplomatic relations with an ever-increasing number of Arab and Islamic nations.

The bottom line is Israel's future: “Then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there” (Ezekiel 39:28).

8113

(See *Israel Always*, Item #2403, \$18.99.)

CHINA

Birthrate Lowest on Record

The number of births in China tumbled 10% last year to hit their lowest level on record, a drop that comes despite a slew of government efforts to support parents and amid increasing alarm that the country has become demographically imbalanced.

Last year, the country's population also fell for the first time in six decades, dropping to 1.41 billion people.

Much of the demographic downturn is the result of China's one-child policy imposed between 1980 and 2015, though the abandonment of that policy is having some effect.

Nearly 40% of Chinese newborns last year were the second child of a married couple, while 15% were from families with three or more children, health authorities said.

To spur the country's flagging birth rate, Beijing has been rolling out a raft of measures, such as efforts to increase child care as well as financial incentives, and President Xi Jinping in May presided over a meeting to study the topic.

-*www.nbcnews.com*, 13 October 2023

Commentary: China's population explosion fear never materialized. Now fear is expressed in the opposite direction—losing population.

Welcome to the Western world! Materialism is king. For example, the population of Japan declined about 800,000 last year. Interestingly, *Statista.com* reveals the top five nations



Children at a kindergarten in Fuyang, China.
Costfoto / Sipa via Reuters file



FILE PHOTO-A parent pushes a stroller with a baby in a park in Shanghai, China.
REUTERS/Aly Song/File Photo Acquire Licensing Rights

with the lowest fertility rate for 2023: Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Macau.

Euronews.com reports that from 1961 to 2021, yearly live births per 1,000 people in the EU have drastically decreased from 6.8 to 4.1.

Thus, we see China's experience follows that pattern: more money, more merchandise, and less children. In the USA, the birthrate of 3.6 for 1960 has fallen to 1.6 in 2020.

This is prophetically significant, because Revelation 18 describes the great end-time deception. Verse 3 says: "For

all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies." Many of us do not fully realize that the world's commercial and economic system is literally supported by the promotion of numerous lies. What kind? That if you buy a certain product, you will feel better,


have less pain, grow older more slowly and gracefully, and have an abundance of luxury at your fingertips. Does this advertising work? Indeed it does; otherwise, firms that are in the medical field, consumer products, or legal services would not spend hundreds of millions to billions of dollars to promote their merchandise.

When the end comes, we carefully note that the people do not lament over their sins—which have led to the horrible death and destruction that are unleashed upon the world directly from God—but rather the loss of merchandise: "And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her;

for no man buyeth their merchandise any more" (Revelation 18:11). 8107 (See *Exposing Mystery Babylon Part 2*, Item #1080, \$4.50.)



for no man buyeth their merchandise any more" (Revelation 18:11). 8107 (See *Exposing Mystery Babylon Part 2*, Item #1080, \$4.50.)

An illustration of a hand pointing to a wristwatch. The watch has a white face with black hands and a brown leather strap. The hand is pointing towards the watch face.

Biblical Answers to Why Jesus Hasn't Yet Returned

– Part 3

Norbert Lieth

God wanted to give much more than Israel and redeemed Gentiles to His Son Jesus Christ; He wanted to give Him a Church as His body. This Church encompasses the period from the commission of the Apostle Paul and the message given to him and the other Apostles, all the way up to the Rapture of the Church. Then God will again resume redemptive history with Israel.

“And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6). Of all verses, this is the one cited at the start of Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13:47). The Apostles’ letters now speak to Israel’s time of deferment. In this phase—which has already lasted 2,000 years—countless redeemed people came into being, who form the body of Jesus.

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish,

but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9).

The promise hasn’t at all been distorted—even if it seems that way to us—because we don’t know the features of God’s road map. Everything will take place precisely according to God’s purpose and sublime thoughts. The reason behind it is salvation for the whole world. Where would I be if the Lord had returned before my own conversion?

In the meantime, Paul proclaims the Gospel of grace until midnight in redemptive history. Then it will be time for the Rapture and the Great Tribulation, after which the Lord will return as the bridegroom. Midnight in redemptive history

Biblical Answers to Why Jesus Hasn't Yet Returned – Part 3



The world is like a raft caught in the unstoppable current of a waterfall. Our society is spiritually sick; the order of Creation is being overturned; what is normal is being perverted into what is abnormal.

isn't just a point in time but a time span. To the best of our knowledge, the following events will occur within a few years:

1. First, the Rapture.
2. Next, the events of Revelation.
3. There is a call in those days: "...Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."
4. Then, at the time of the morning star, we see Him appearing as the bridegroom (Rev 19; 22:16).

Since all of Scripture is inspired by God the Holy Spirit, all of it conforms to God's plan of salvation. There are no coincidences in the Bible. This may be the reason that Paul's preaching can also be understood symbolically: "Paul preached unto them ... and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7b). Or in the ESV, "...he prolonged his speech until midnight."

Doesn't that symbolize the apostolic commission? The apostolic writings on the Gospel of perfect grace, cover the New Testament period up until midnight. Then, grace expires, and the dramatic events of Revelation take place. Grace will still be present, but in different proportions.

No More Delays

It's a true saying that the middle of the night is also the start of a new day.

A great deal has happened, and a lot of time has passed in 2,000 years. Just a few examples are the fall of the Roman Empire, the great per-

secution of Christianity, Islamization, the Crusades, the Dark Ages, two World Wars, and the rebirth of the State of Israel. Throughout these many centuries, Christians of all generations and walks of life have held fast to the promise that Jesus will return.

Israel once again has a platform on the world stage. And this platform has eschatological significance, since Jesus' return and the future of the Church are closely linked to Israel's history. The Church arose when there was a vibrant Jewish nation, and the Church will disappear when the end-time events unfold over the new Jewish State: "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; cf. Matt 24:30).

We can see that we're within reach of apocalyptic events. The Age of Grace seems to be drawing to a close. "Things will never be the same again," secular observers have said of our time. The world is like a raft caught in the unstoppable current of a waterfall. Our society is spiritually sick; the order of Creation is being overturned; what is normal is being perverted into what is abnormal.

More and more people are waking up to the gathering storm, realizing it is taking on increasingly sinister proportions. It's no longer rustling but crashing. Global political tensions are growing; the economy is becoming more unstable;

But there's good news: Jesus Christ will come again to take His Church with Him. Then He will appear as King and ascend to His throne in Jerusalem. His scepter of justice will reign. As we see the world becoming darker and more distorted, the promise of His return shines bigger and brighter.



moral relativism exists in all areas... The system's anchors are no longer holding... Terrible diseases threaten; there are natural disasters; fear of nuclear war is rising; rearmament is taking place; freedom-limiting measures are increasing... The Western world is moving away from its Christian roots, and biblical concepts of ethics, morality, and social norms are being rejected.

Aren't the words of Psalm 2 very timely today?

"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure" (Ps 2:2-5).

Any ties to God are abandoned... all spiritual principles are being cast aside, to usher in things

that are hostile to God. In His Discourse on the end times, Jesus announced, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt 24:12).

The Psalmist says, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Ps 11:3). And, "The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted" (Ps 12:8). This is precisely what is increasingly becoming reality today. Lawlessness abounds; the cornerstones of divine truth are being torn

down, and baseness is elevated. Where is this leading? Into the time of divine wrath—the apocalypse.

Al Mohler observed that truth is dead when "what was condemned is now celebrated, what was celebrated is now condemned, and those who refuse to celebrate are condemned."

But there's good news: Jesus Christ will come again to take His Church with Him. Then He will appear as King and ascend to His throne in Jerusalem. His scepter of justice will reign. As we see the world becoming darker and more distorted, the promise of His return shines bigger and brighter.

Arno C. Gaebelein writes: "We look at the approaching storm precipitating all into an abyss of hopelessness. We look again and see a marvelous sunrise. The Morningstar appears, the herald of the Day and the Sun in all His glory.

Biblical Answers to Why Jesus Hasn't Yet Returned – Part 3

Augustine is said to have remarked, “He who loves the coming of the Lord is not he who affirms it is far off, nor is it he who says it is near. It is he who, whether it be far or near, awaits it with sincere faith, stead-fast hope and fervent love.”

Even so Come, Thou Hope of the hopeless, Thou Hope of Israel, Thou Hope of the World, all Nations, and Creation. Even so, Come Lord Jesus.”

That's why we don't want to stop heeding the prophetic Word, praying for Jesus' return, and encouraging one another. I'd like to share eight encouraging thoughts from the following two Bible passages:

In Habakkuk 2:2-4, we read, “And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

We can find seven applications for us today in this Old Testament prophecy. First, Habakkuk had to write down his vision. Scriptural ministry has value. We spread the Bible's solid, prophetic Word, because that is our mission. Second, God has His appointed time; namely, that “which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:7), and “at the end it shall speak.” Third, Scripture does not lie, for God's Word is truth. Fourth, when we see delay of a promise's fulfillment, it challenges our faith. Yet we're called to wait no matter what. Fifth, the promise's reliability is not in doubt. “Because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” Sixth, there will be those whose “soul ... is lifted up”; who

walk “after their own lusts” like scoffers in the last days, “And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet 3:3-4); who are proud and puffed up, “his soul is not upright in him.” Seventh, “the just shall live by his faith.” The Gospel of our coming Lord is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16).

We read in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Eighth, those who love something focus fully on it, be it marriage, hobbies, work, children... Those who love Jesus' appearance are intent on fighting the fight, finishing the race, and keeping the faith. Such people will want to lead a life like Jesus.

Augustine is said to have remarked, “He who loves the coming of the Lord is not he who affirms it is far off, nor is it he who says it is near. It is he who, whether it be far or near, awaits it with sincere faith, stead-fast hope and fervent love.”

That is how we want to live: expect Him, and not forsake our hope. Maranatha—our Lord, come!

(MR1222/1356)

“O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord” (Micah 6:5).

BY ARNO FROESE

When reading the relatively short book of Micah, we realize that the largest part is related to the prophetic Word. He reminds Israel of the event recorded in Numbers, highlighting the King of Moab and the prophet Balaam.

In the previous verse, he goes back to Israel’s exodus from Egypt: “For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.” Here, all of Israel is meant: consisting of the twelve tribes, with no distinction between Judah and Israel, as they were later identified. We know that the division between Judah (which included Benjamin and Levi) and Israel took place in approximately 975 BC. However, from God’s perspective, it’s always one nation, His chosen one. God commanded Moses to face Pharaoh with

this message: “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn” (Exodus 4:22).

How distinctly different Israel is from God’s perspective compared to the rest of the world, becomes evident when reading the event that transpired between the King of Moab, Balak, and the heathen prophet Balaam.

Bible readers are familiar with Israel’s continued rebellion, despite repeated acts of God’s supernatural intervention. For example, dividing the Red Sea; the water from the rock in the desert; the visible manifestation of the pillar of fire at night, and the cloud during the day. There was absolutely no reason that Israel should not believe in the living God, the Creator of all things. He supplied innumerable physical proofs of His existence among His people, yet they believed not.

Balaam was requested to curse the people of Israel, but we read in Numbers 23:21: “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.” That is rather strange; the prophet sees no iniquity and no perverseness, and unequivocally states: “the Lord his God is with him.”

Here again, we learn of Israel’s absolute uniqueness: they are not to be compared with any other nation on planet Earth.

Another prophecy made by Balaam reaches into our times: “...the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Numbers 23:9b).

The descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel were later known as Jews. The first time we read the word “Jew” is Esther 2:5: “Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite.” From that point on, the terms Israel, Jew, and Hebrew are synonymous; they identify the twelve tribes of Israel.

It is the prophet Micah who pinpoints the geographic location, the

birthplace of the Messiah: “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; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2). This small village, located some 10 kilometers (6 miles) from Jerusalem, is the birthplace of Jesus Christ the Lord, the Son of God, at whose birth the angelic host proclaimed: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

Bethlehem Today

Since December of 1955, Bethlehem has ceased to be part of Israel. The town is under the jurisdiction and administration of the Palestinian Authority. According to Wikipedia: “Bethlehem is a Palestinian town south of Jerusalem in the West Bank. The biblical birthplace of Jesus, it’s a major Christian pilgrimage destination.”

For us Christians, it is quite discouraging to realize that Bethlehem is a Muslim city, which no longer carries a Jewish identity.

Bethlehem was also King David’s birthplace. In Psalm 132:5, he cries

Never must we allow it to enter our mind that nations, by whatever name, or leaders—be they prime ministers, presidents, chancellors, or dictators—can invalidate God’s irrevocable resolutions, which are guaranteed by the Creator Himself: the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

out to the Lord: “Until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.” He then identifies Bethlehem Ephratah: “Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood” (v. 6).

When we ask what the future of Bethlehem is, we must go back to the beginning—totally disregarding the geopolitical realities of our days, while totally dependent on the unconditional promise God made to Abraham: “In the same day

the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates” (Genesis 15:18).

Never must we allow it to enter our mind that nations, by whatever name, or leaders—be they prime ministers, presidents, chancellors, or dictators—can invalidate God’s irrevocable resolutions, which are guaranteed by the Creator Himself: the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. (MC)

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Letters to the Editor

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

DINOSAURS... BIBLE CONTRADICTIONS?... FAITHFULNESS

Dinosaurs

Dear Sir,

I am writing because of a comment in the May 2022 “Letters to the Editor” about dinosaurs.

At the time of Noah, they had iron, bronze, copper, and farm animals, but not dinosaurs living at the same time.

No bones of humans are found with dinosaurs.

God is infinite; man knows time only because he is finite.

After resting, does God continue to create?

God says to work 5-6 days, then rest. The state (devil) says don't work, we will still pay you.

-N. Bessinger, FL

Answer: Regarding dinosaurs, GotQuestions.org has this to say: “Those who believe in a younger age for the earth tend

to agree that the Bible does mention dinosaurs, though it never actually uses the word dinosaur. Instead, it uses the Hebrew word *tanniyn*, which is translated a few different ways in our English Bibles. Sometimes it's ‘sea monster,’ and sometimes it's ‘serpent.’ It is most commonly translated ‘dragon’ in the KJV. The *tanniyn* appears to have been some sort of giant reptile.”

God is the God of the living. Jesus said about His words, “they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63b). When the Gospel is preached, it “creates life.” The prophetic Word, spoken long ago, is alive too; some prophecies have been fulfilled, while others will be fulfilled in the future.

God speaks to the Hebrews, “Six days thou shalt labour ... But the seventh day is the sabbath” (Deuteronomy 5:13-14). Technology has brought us so far that in many countries, a four-day workweek has become a reality.



Your reference seems to be to those who are on welfare. Obviously, there is misuse, as in any other function of society. But the Bible makes it clear that we are to take care of the poor.

Bible Contradictions?

Dear Editor,

Recently, when taking time to look at articles and information on the computer, I read about the Gospel records of the birth of Jesus. My impression about what I read was that the author was trying to indicate that there are “contradictions” in the Bible. I quickly thought about an article I had read in the December 2020 issue of *Midnight Call*.

I re-read the article titled “From Nazareth to Nazareth” by Thomas Lieth. I appreciate the explanations and the information that he presents, about how Joseph and Mary were directed by God to fulfill the prophecies of the Messiah’s coming. It is an excellent article, and I thank you for such a thought-provoking, useful publication.

-B. Middlebrooks, AL

Answer: You are right; contradictions are usually found with the person finding them. Regarding the battle over God’s Word, to understand the Bible more clearly, we must

read it from Genesis to Revelation again and again.

Faithfulness

Midnight Call,

Our life destiny is in the heavens. Our gates of faithfulness are the best way forward to the heavens. While we walk the narrow way, we need to be patient and give thanks to God in all circumstances. That will be the way to receive heavenly rewards. We need to have steadfast faithfulness in every situation. Also, we need to prepare spiritually for the future.

The light of life comes from meditation on God’s Word. This light can overcome all darkness. We are all part of a spiritual family, and the Holy Spirit will always be with us. The Holy Spirit heals, recovers, and changes us into the perfect image of God. We need spiritual awakening at every moment, with spiritually clear discernment. I pray God’s blessings on your important ministry.

-K. Kim, CA

Answer: We appreciate your keen insight relating to a closer walk with the Lord and the development of a spiritual life. May the Lord, whom you believe and serve, bless you with His presence. (MC)



“PLEASE MAKE A U-TURN, IF POSSIBLE.”



By Peter Malgo

These words come from the car’s navigation system whenever one is going in the wrong direction, within a big city or anywhere else. Just a few decades ago, this would have been unimaginable. But today, the satellite-based device guides us effortlessly through totally unknown areas to the desired destination.

And then one is glad to hear the words, “You have arrived at your destination.” This GPS technology is immensely helpful.

An even better, heavenly navigation system is the Bible, through which the Lord God speaks to us. The Psalmist urges us to make constant use of it, and to entrust our life’s journey to the Father in heaven: “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5). If we do that, we will definitely reach the glorious end goal of life.

God speaks to us directly through His Word. But He may also do so through certain circumstances. And sometimes, He uses our conscience. It is of utmost importance for us to listen to His voice. For if we go down the wrong path, He also will tell us to “Make a U-turn!” We find a very interesting story in the Bible that deals directly with divine naviga-

tion: the Wise Men from the East, who saw the star and let themselves be guided to Bethlehem by this heavenly sign. In the past, many scientists have attempted to explain this phenomenon, but they have failed. The explanation that Jupiter and Saturn were seen in the same orbit did not stand up to close scrutiny, nor did the idea of it being a comet or meteorite. Matthew mentions the star four times. Thus, something must have shone very brightly in the firmament.

It was the divine “GPS,” a new bright star that was specifically intended for the itinerary of the Wise Men! “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37). It is very interesting that God used a different way of navigation for the return trip of the Wise Men, after they visited Jesus: “And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way” (Matt 2:12). At



God speaks to us directly through His Word. But He may also do so through certain circumstances. And sometimes, He uses our conscience.

the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ some 2,000 years ago, only a few people received a sign that the Son of God had come into this world, that it had become *Christmas*: “And this shall be a sign unto you...” (Luke 2:12a).

Today, all of humanity is seeing signs of imminent, end-time events. These are worrying signs: Fear arises, fear of the heat of the century, fear of flood waters, fear of earthquakes, fear of wildfires, fear of polar ice melting, fear of threatening diseases. And, last but not least, fear of a global financial crisis. Jesus counters these fears by explaining how these events ought to be interpreted: “And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). When we read the Bible with an

open heart, we realize: Jesus may return very soon. Two thousand years ago, only the Wise Men saw the shining star that led to Jesus. Today, all of us have the opportunity to see this brightly shining star.

Have you tuned into your heavenly GPS? Because God may possibly have to shout, “Make a U-turn!” to one or another of us when we are headed down a wrong way. Let us pay attention to the prophetic Word and look to the “Star.” Peter calls out to us: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until ... the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). Then, the heavenly navigation will lead us safely to our destination. (MC)



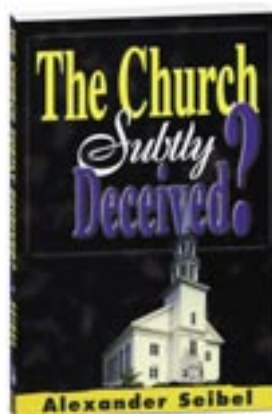
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A Surrendered Life: Faithfully Serving the Lord to the Very End -Part 2

In Memory of Annie, An Ebenezer Home Resident

By David Phillips (Ebenezer's CEO)

Why Israel?

When asked what made her retire in Israel, Annie said, “When God called me to Israel in 1973, He spoke to me through Psalm 121:8.” Annie quoted the familiar passage by heart, “The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.” “These words, like a compass, have guided my life in Israel, and I take them literally. Forevermore—this is a life commitment.” And it was. Annie passed away at the Ebenezer Home in July 2023.

Annie's Faithfulness

It was amazing to listen to so many who gave testimony of Annie's life. To hear of how she blessed and served others was truly humbling. Annie never wanted to speak much about what she did: It was simply between her and the Lord. But, one by one, people stood up at her funeral and shared about her life. I couldn't help but marvel at this godly woman and the lives she touched. She truly lived out her faith in both the smallest and biggest of ways. For her, it wasn't just about being a midwife (which she loved!) and delivering all those families' children ... it was about eternity. She cared most about where they would spend eternity.

But her compassion and love didn't stop where most people's does. If Annie knew someone needed something and she could provide it, she did just that, even if it meant she went without. She was always placing others' needs above her own.

At the Ebenezer Home, Annie continued to live a life of faithfulness. She was blind, but that didn't stop her. She almost never complained. Each day, she would gather with another resident and pray. Everyone knew that during certain hours, you just never bothered them. It was a sacred time.

As Minnie shared about the life lessons that Corrie ten Boom taught them, it was evident that Annie took these to heart. Like Corrie, Annie had compassion for those less fortunate than herself. During her younger years, she would often come home late. Some would wonder why, but then they soon found out. Annie wouldn't just go home after her shifts at work; she would go visit others who were less fortunate or sick. Annie believed everyone was important, and wanted them to know that Someone greater than all loved them, regardless of the situation or who they were.

Continuing to Serve at Ebenezer

Once at the Ebenezer Home, Annie's ministry of visiting people didn't stop. Each day, she would



make her way down to the first floor (Ebenezer’s medical floor) and sit with the residents. It didn’t matter to her if they knew who she was, or if they’d even remember that she came to visit them. She would simply come and sit with them, encourage them, pray with them, and sing to them ... day after day. It wasn’t until she herself had a heart attack (days before her death) and physically could no longer go, that she stopped. She missed those visits, and continued to pray where she was.

Taking These Lessons to Heart

We can learn a lot from the dedication of the Father’s servants in different places. I am sure that each one of you has your own little secrets of serving ... moments between just you and the Master, serving and being poured out before Him like an offering. Paul reminds us of this in Philippians 2:17, “Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.” In this way, we too are consumed in His service wherever He places us.

We continually see the prayer warriors bowing before God’s throne. Annie especially would stand

in the gap and pray together with others at the Home. Yes, she prayed for all those who were maybe unknown to her by name, but who stand in the gap for the Ebenezer Home—and this is you, my dear brothers and sisters. Thank you for standing in the gap for the Home! Sending you greetings from all residents and the team.

Ebenezer Update: War in Israel

Thank you all for your prayers and support for us during this war. We have been rushing to prepare all the last things. Yes, people are worried, but they are leaning on our Heavenly Father through this very difficult time. I also gather all the residents and team together each day, to spend time in Scripture, prayer, and updating everyone on the situation. Some of the Scriptures that have really encouraged us are Psalms 91 and 121, as well as Isaiah 41:10, which says: “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” What a promise!



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The Gaza War

By Arno Froese

“That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us” (Luke 1:71).

This prophecy was pronounced by Zacharias the high priest, the father of John the Baptist. Two thousand years have passed, and this prophecy has not been completely fulfilled for the people of Israel.

There are no other people on earth whose existence, deeds, and future are more intensely recorded than the Jewish people.

Verse 74 reads: “That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear.” The reason for the deliverance from all enemies is expressed with the five last words, “might serve him without fear.”

We know that the Jews have returned to the land of their fathers, and have established a well-functioning and progressive society. But the real deliverance and Israel’s collective salvation has

not yet taken place. Mary, the mother of Jesus, prayed: “And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:47). She revealed that the yet unborn child would be the Savior—God manifested in the flesh.

Now we turn our attention to the abhorrent event that took place in Israel, when the Hamas terrorist organization launched an unprecedented, multi-front attack on Israel on 7 October 2023. The result was devastating for Israel, as over 1,400 people were murdered in cold blood by members of the Hamas military faction.

Yet, “A Document of General Principles and Policies [of] The Islamic Resistance Movement ‘Hamas’” states: “Hamas believes that the message of Islam upholds the values of truth, justice, freedom and dignity and prohibits all forms of injustice and incriminates oppressors irrespective of

their religion, race, gender or nationality.” Killing civilians, “regardless of religion, race, or nationality,” violates Hamas’ own “Principles and Policies”!

This event is different from all others, because no high-tech weaponry was used in a significant manner; rather, a very unconventional method was implemented by Hamas. Besides sending over 3,000 rockets into Israel, hundreds of well-trained terrorists, heavily armed with modern weapons, broke through Israel’s security fence with one deliberate aim: kill Jews. It was not an issue of military operations, but the merciless, wanton murder of civilians young and old, men, women and children.

Most Western governments have outright condemned Hamas’ terrorist action, while many countries are in the process of reevaluating financial support for Gaza at this time.

We may ask: what went wrong with Israel’s intelligence community? Obviously, some slackness was evident. Hamas did not get involved in several previous military conflicts between Israel and the military faction of Gaza, Islamic Jihad. That, doubtless, was a contributing factor toward Israel’s lax attitude and not being fully prepared for the horrendous onslaught.

Nevertheless, even if Israel had prepared for immediate confrontation, there was virtually no way of knowing that Hamas had secretly trained hundreds of terrorists, who did not use heavy artillery or tanks, etc., but simply motorbikes that quickly raced to nearby Israeli towns and villages. We note, it was not to win a war, but simply to murder civilians and soldiers alike.

For us believers, it is a sobering warning: “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for

we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11). We are living in the end stages of the end times. Now, it is more important than ever to occupy ourselves with the eternal security available only through faith in the accomplished redemption of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The apostle Peter admonishes us: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We too often underestimate the cunning devices Satan uses to extinguish our testimony. John warns seriously: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15-16).

Back to Gaza. While we fully recognize the horrendous suffering of the people in Gaza—particularly women, children, and the elderly—we must focus our attention and prayer on the believers in Jesus Christ that are in Gaza. The Church in Gaza and in Israel is our main concern. We pray that our Lord in His grace will not only protect, but also endue the Christians with His courage, love and compassion. The Church will continue to be built, particularly where it all started: the land of Israel.

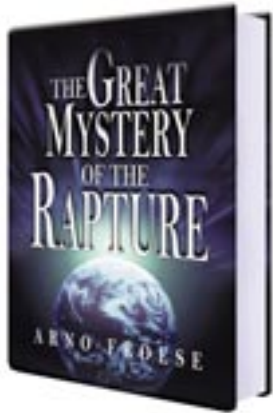
In the meantime, we remember the admonition the prophet Isaiah wrote some 2,700 years ago: “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (Isaiah 40:1-2). (MC)

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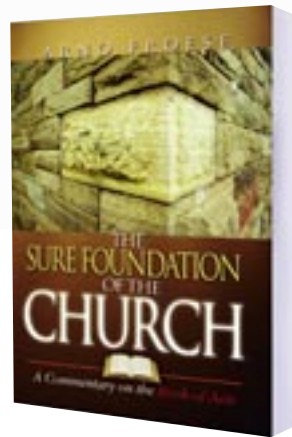
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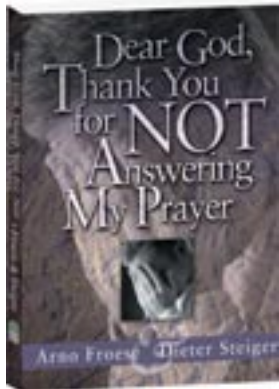
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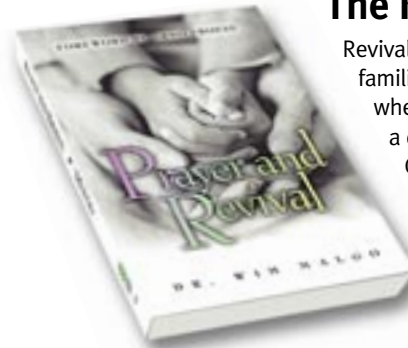
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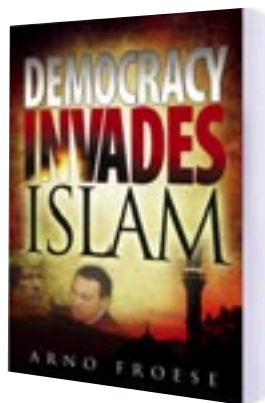
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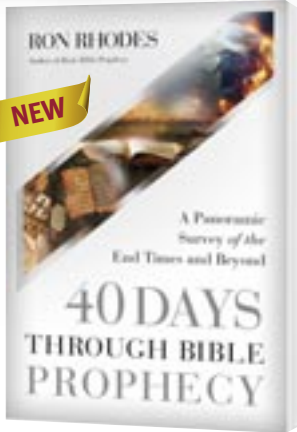
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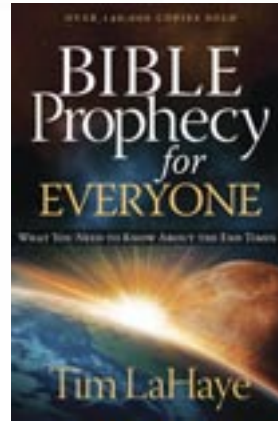
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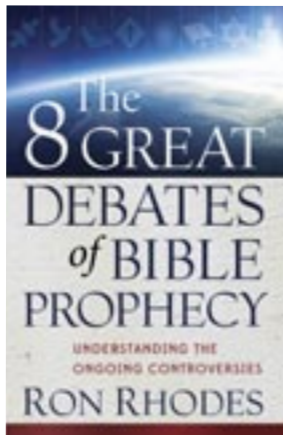
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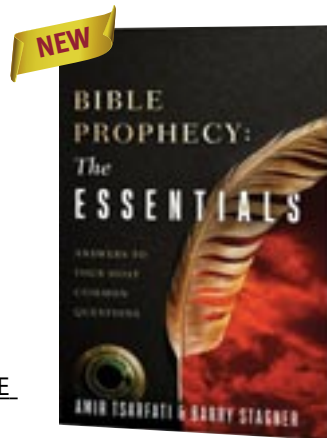
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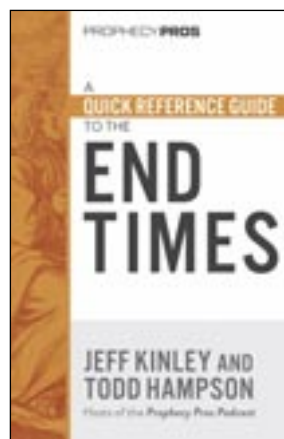
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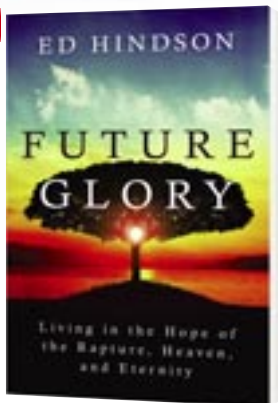
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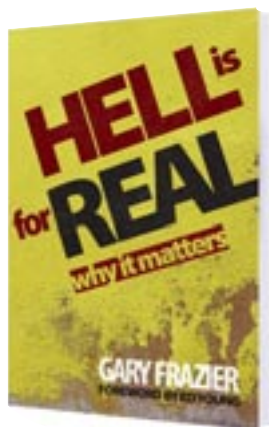
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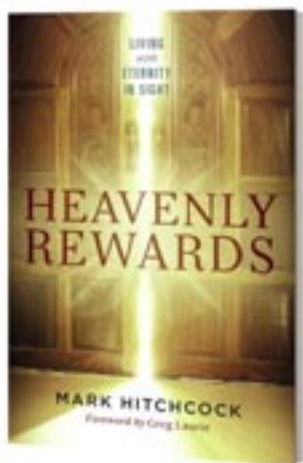
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