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Messianic Perspectives®

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.



ISAIAH 53:
FULFILLED BY JESUS?
PART TWO

BY CHARLES HALFF (1929-2000)
WITH GARY HEDRICK

In Part One, we surveyed ancient Jewish sources that regarded Isaiah 53 as Messianic. We also discussed five reasons the Suffering Servant in this amazing chapter cannot possibly be the nation Israel—even though that is the view of many in traditional, rabbinic Judaism. Then we considered a short list of false messiahs who have emerged at various times in Israel’s long history—and how Jesus differs from them in His claim to the Davidic throne. Part One concluded with an explanation of the purpose of the Messianic prophecies, and various

attempts the enemy has used—unsuccessfully, we might add—to discredit the prophecies that point to Jesus of Nazareth specifically. In this concluding article, we begin by discussing the impact of Isaiah 53 on the NT and the liberal critics’ attacks on the foundation of Messianic prophecy—the NT documents themselves. In both installments, we have modernized some of the language. Also, in instances where newer and better source material has become available, we have updated Dr. Halff’s more archaic sources.



To read Part 1, scan the QR code or visit cjfm.org/resources/messianic-perspectives-archive/april-may-june-2024-messianic-perspectives.



Messianic Perspectives®

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Isaiah 53 is alluded to in the New Testament (NT) more than any other single passage in the Older Testament (OT).

This remarkable passage, Isaiah’s Fourth Servant Song, was written by the Prophet seven centuries before the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The NT presents it as a vivid type and foreshadowing of His suffering and death as the final Atonement for our sins.

Some of those NT references are direct quotations. Note these passages in bold print:

- Matthew 8:17: *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:*

“He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses” (cp. Isa. 53:4a).¹

Matthew here relates Jesus’ healing ministry to Isaiah’s prophecy, stating that He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.

- Mark 15:27–28: *With Him they also crucified two robbers, one on His right and the other on His left. So the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And He was numbered with the transgressors”* (cp. Isa. 53:12).

Just as Isaiah had prophesied, the Servant would die with “transgressors.” Jesus, of course, died with two robbers who were crucified on either side of Him. One of them became a believer while hanging there on his cross—and joined the Lord later that day in Paradise (Luke 23:43).

- Luke 22:37: *“For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors.’ For the things concerning Me have an end”* (cp. Isa. 53:12).

The word “end” here translates the Greek *telos* (τέλος), which can also mean “goal” or “conclusion.” Jesus is saying here that the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53 found its fulfillment (or goal) in Him.

- John 12:37–38: *But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke:*

“Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” (cp. Isa. 53:1).

- Acts 8:32–33: *The place in the Scripture which [the Ethiopian eunuch] read was this:*

“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth.

“In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth” (cp. Isa. 53:7–8).

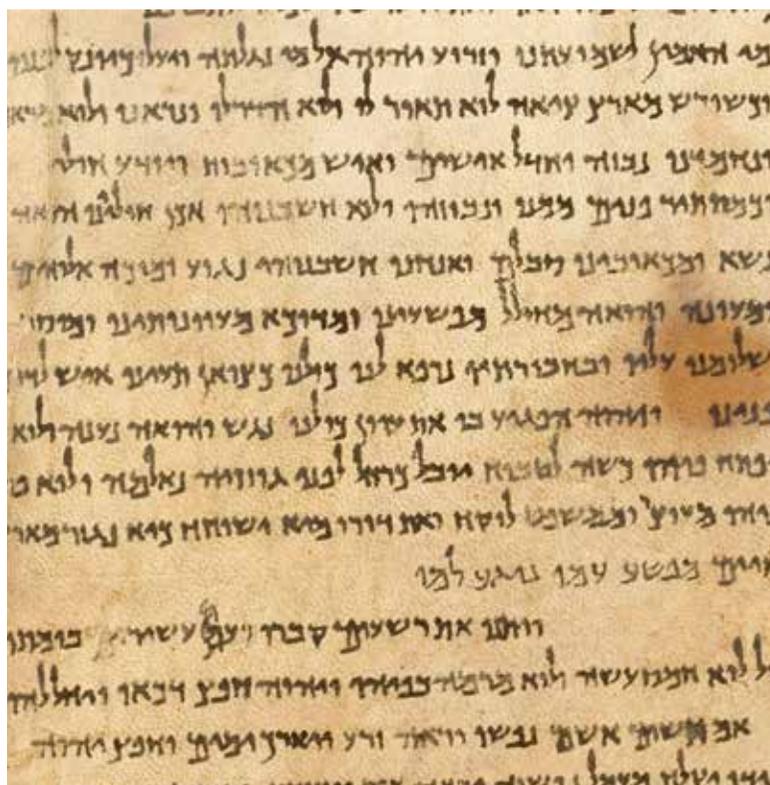
¹ Note that the English rendering of Matthew’s Greek words changes Isaiah’s wording slightly. Where the rabbinic Masoretic Text has, “Surely He has borne our **griefs** and carried our **sorrows**” (Isa. 53:4a), Matthew (depending on the English translation) has “infirmities” (or “weaknesses”) for “griefs” and “sicknesses” (or, “diseases”) for “sorrows.” This is because the NT (written in Greek) uses the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT—and the English rendering from the LXX frequently differs from the rabbi’s Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT). Interestingly, the LXX is several centuries older than the MT and may reflect an earlier, more accurate textual tradition. Either way, though, the meaning remains essentially the same.

- Romans 10:16: *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?”* (cp. Isa. 53:1).

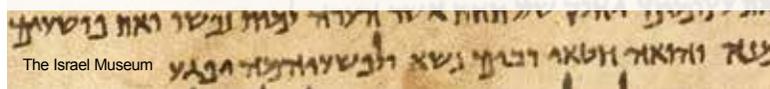
Here, the Apostle Paul links hearers who rejected his (later) Gospel message with the skepticism expressed in the opening verse of Isaiah 53. This is the question believers have been asking about Isaiah 53 for the past 2,000 years—“Who has believed our report?” This is the watershed issue of all time: Who will believe?

- Romans 15:21: *But as it is written: “To whom He was not announced, they shall see; And those who have not heard shall understand”* (cp. Isa. 52:15).

Paul, of course, knows that the Fourth Servant Song encompasses Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12. He appeals to 52:15, then, showing the Servant’s role in making the good news of the Gospel known to the nations.



Portion of a photographic reproduction of the Great Isaiah Scroll found at Qumran showing all of chapter 53.



- 1 Peter 2:22–24: **“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”**; *who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously* (cp. Isa. 53:9b).

In this verse, the Apostle Peter draws heavily on Isaiah 53, describing Jesus as the One who committed no sin and by whose wounds we are healed, clearly identifying Isaiah’s Suffering Servant as the One who died for our sins.

These passages, among others, draw upon the language and themes of Isaiah 53 to highlight this remarkable chapter as a prophetic foreshadowing of Jesus the Messiah.

Thematic Applications

As I continued my comparison of Isaiah 53 with the NT, I was impressed with how the concepts in this Servant Song aligned so well with various aspects of the life and work of Jesus. In this way, the OT and the NT are tightly bound up together—pointing to the same Person.

1. Suffering Servant

Concept in Isaiah 53: The figure depicted in Isaiah 53 is referred to as the “Suffering Servant” who bears the suffering of others and takes upon Himself their sins and iniquities.

New Testament Theme: The concept of Jesus as the “Suffering Servant” is foundational in the NT. Jesus’ suffering, Crucifixion, and sacrificial death are seen as fulfilling the role of Isaiah’s Servant.

This is especially evident in passages like Matthew 8:17, which cites Isaiah 53:4, and in Acts 8:32–35, where Philip explains to the Ethiopian eunuch that Isaiah’s Servant is none other than Jesus of Nazareth.



2. Substitutionary Atonement

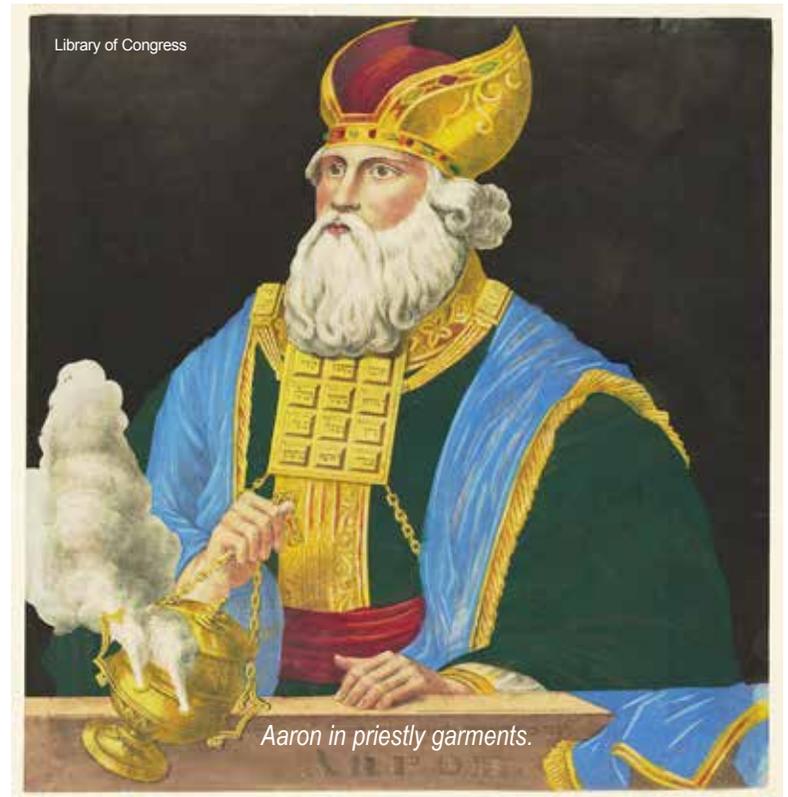
Concept in Isaiah 53: The Servant is depicted as bearing the sins and iniquities of others, suffering in their place, and making atonement for their sins.

New Testament Theme: The NT emphasizes Jesus’ role in substitutionary atonement. For example, 1 Peter 2:24 reflects this theme by stating that Jesus “bore our sins in His body on the tree,” echoing the idea that Jesus’ suffering and death were vicarious and that they atoned for the sins of humanity.

The rabbis have difficulty with the concept of a vicarious atonement. They insist that the Bible prohibits an innocent party from being held accountable for someone else’s sins.

In support of this position, they quote OT passages like Ezekiel 18:20: “*The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.*”

However, they overlook the fact that the same Hebrew Bible says there are exceptions to this rule (see Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Deut. 5:9). The greatest exception of all is the vicarious atonement of the Messiah. One might even say that it’s the exception that proves the rule.



It was the High Priest’s job to offer the sacrifice for Israel’s sin on Yom Kippur. The NT tells us that Jesus is now our Great High Priest (*Cohen Gadol*):

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

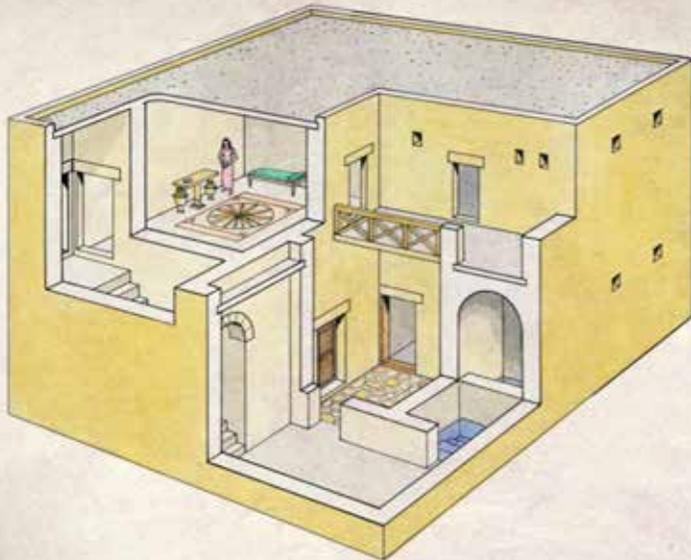
Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14–16).

One advantage to having Jesus serve as our High Priest is that He knows what it’s like to be us. When we’re struggling, we can’t say to Him, “Lord, you don’t know what it’s like.” Because He does!

For instance, there were times when He was physically weary and needed rest. On one occasion, He was exhausted and sleeping on the boat when a storm suddenly overtook them and frightened the disciples (Mark 4:38). There were other times when He took time to rest because He was tired (John 4:6). He also ate food when He knew His body needed nourishment (Matt. 4:1–4; Mark 2:15–17; Luke 5:29–32). His mission also took an emotional toll on Him (Matt. 26:36–44).

One reason the Burnt House excavation in Israel is such a popular tourist destination is that it pulls back the metaphorical curtain and allows us to see how lavishly the priests in Jesus’ day lived.

Note that the writer of Hebrews makes the point that “we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses” (v. 15). This was important because the Sadducees (the priestly class who controlled the Temple and its surroundings) were wealthy and privileged in Temple times. They lived in luxury and opulence that ordinary working people didn’t experience. They also had the advantage of automatic representation on the governing council, the Sanhedrin.



An artist's conception of what a priestly residence on the southern slope of the Temple Mount may have looked like before it was demolished by Titus in AD 70.

This “house” (or, rather, what’s left of it) is situated on the southern slope of the Temple Mount. It’s called the “Burnt House” because much of it was destroyed when the Romans burned the Temple in AD 70. As you walk through the excavation, there are places where you can scratch the surface of a floor or wall and get 2,000-year-old soot from the Roman fire under your fingernails.

It’s a sprawling mansion consisting of six large rooms on two levels—much larger and more luxurious than ordinary dwellings of the era. Some of the rooms had lavish tile mosaics on the floor. The archaeologists also found evidence of elaborate pottery, which most people of normal means wouldn’t have been able to afford. The Burnt House even had indoor plumbing with a sophisticated drainage system—remarkable engineering for 2,000 years ago.

Ironically, the Romans’ intention was to destroy these structures—but instead, they unknowingly preserved some of them for us. When Titus and his legions burned the Temple,² the fiery ruins tumbled down on top of the priestly residences (and other structures down below), covering them in layers of rubble—which preserved them so they could be uncovered and studied 2,000 years later.

The Burnt House shows us how the Sadducean priests lived in Jesus’ day—in the lap of luxury, with their every need met. The elite class in Jerusalem catered to the Sadducees because they controlled the Temple precincts. These priests had little if any understanding of the struggles ordinary people experienced in their day-to-day lives.

² For anyone who may be wondering—yes, though those huge, limestone blocks may appear to be indestructible, they’re not. They will indeed burn. When exposed to intense heat (anything over 1650°F, or roughly 900°C), a process called “calcining” begins on a molecular level. This is when the limestone’s calcium carbonate (CaCO₃) breaks down into calcium oxide (CaO) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) gas. This reaction is known as thermal decomposition. When ignited by the Roman torches, those huge, limestone building blocks of the Temple literally came apart, tumbling down into the valley below. By comparison, a simple housefire can reach 1500° F (815° C), and a flashover can reach 3000° F (1648 C°)—well within this range.

Armed with this information, we can put Hebrews 4:14–16 into its first-century context. The writer says we don’t have a High Priest who hasn’t lived a normal life and doesn’t understand the pressures and problems we deal with as ordinary people.

On the contrary, our High Priest is none other than Jesus, the Son of God, who was born into a typical Jewish family with Davidic descent. He Himself, as well as His brother James, were most likely trained to follow in Joseph’s footsteps as humble carpenters. Their friends James, John, and Peter were fishermen—ordinary, run-of-the-mill people who worked with their hands for a living.

So, then, what are your challenges, dear reader? What troubles you? How has your heart been broken? Whatever you’re experiencing, you can be confident that you have a High Priest who understands because *He has been there before you*.

That’s why we can come to Him “boldly” (not hesitatingly or tentatively) and find grace and help when we need it. And if things are going well for you, and you’re thinking, “Thanks, but I don’t need that”—don’t worry, your time will come.

The late Dr. David Stern, an Israeli scholar and a believer, has this insight from a Messianic perspective:

Yeshua had to be made exactly like those to be rescued from death so that He would fully know and empathize with our experience and thereby, as our *cohen gadol* (high priest), be able to be fully merciful and (as brought forth in 3:1–6 and also at Romans 3:22, 24) faithful, making a *kapparah* (“atonement”) for the sins of the people.

The Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53:12 predicted this seven hundred years in advance and also makes the best commentary: It is precisely because He “poured out His soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors” that He “bore the sin of many and will make intercession for the transgressors” (see 7:25&N).³

³ David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 392.

3. Healing and Restoration

Concept in Isaiah 53: The Suffering Servant's suffering is associated with the healing and restoration of those He suffers for. Isaiah 53:5 speaks of healing through His wounds.

New Testament Theme: This theme is evident in the Gospels where Jesus' healing miracles are seen as part of the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 53:5. For instance, Matthew 8:17 connects Jesus' healing ministry with the prophecy of Isaiah, highlighting that Jesus' healing acts are part of his mission to bring restoration and wholeness to the world.

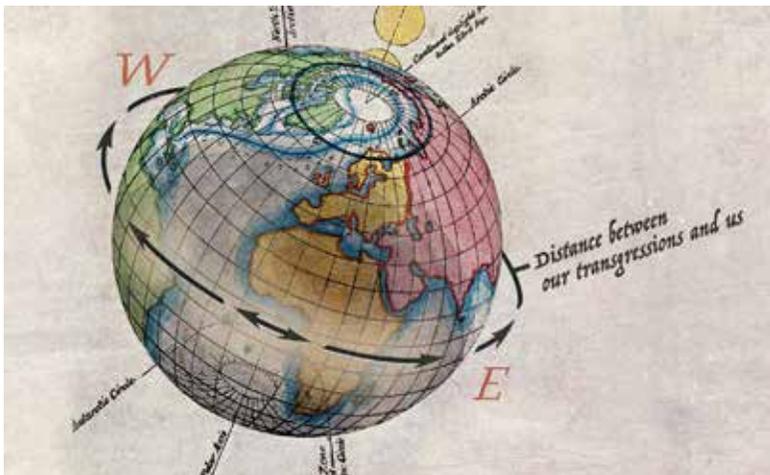
4. Redemption and Justification

Concept in Isaiah 53: The Servant's suffering leads to the justification of many, making it possible for them to be declared righteous.⁴

New Testament Theme: This concept is reflected in Romans 3:24–25, where Paul explains that believers are justified by grace through the redemption that came by Messiah Jesus.

The teaching of justification through the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus aligns with Isaiah's observation that the Servant's suffering leads to the justification of many (53:11).

Through this act of justification, we are declared righteous by God. As far as salvation is concerned, our sins are taken away from us: *As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us* (Psalm 103:12).



When you stop and think about it, the distance from east to west is infinite. Visualize a globe in your mind. Once you set out on an eastward trajectory, you can continue indefinitely—it never ends. You just keep heading east as you spin the globe.

However, setting out in a northerly direction on the globe is different because “north” is limited. Once you reach the North Pole, you start heading south. Then, when south ends, you start heading north again. The distance between north and south is limited.

The point here is that God has saved us from our sins—and the distance between us and those incriminating sins is infinite.⁵

⁴ The term “justification” means, literally, “to be declared righteous.” The Greek term is *dikaiosis* (δικαίωσις), derived from the Greek word for “righteous” (*dikaio*; δίκαιος).

⁵ With respect to *justification*, our status is sealed forever. We have been declared righteous. Note, however, that as far as *sanctification* and *status* (in the Kingdom) are concerned, we are still accountable to God, even as believers, for our sins: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad* (2 Cor. 5:10). For details, search our past teachings on the Bema in our archives (cjfm.org/resources/messianic-perspectives-archive).

5. The Innocent One Assumes Our Guilt

Concept in Isaiah 53: The servant is depicted as innocent and as unjustly taking the punishment for others' sins on Himself. The innocent party is punished for the guilty party.

New Testament Theme: The New Testament portrays Jesus as innocent and sinless (John 8:46, 2 Corinthians 5:21). Yet He suffers unjustly, without complaining, mirroring the description of Isaiah's Suffering Servant (53:7b). This innocent suffering corresponds with Jesus' redemptive work.

The story is told about a young man in London, many years ago, who committed a horrible murder in a fit of rage by stabbing his victim multiple times. He fled into the night with a constable in hot pursuit, blowing his whistle.

Not knowing where else to go, he ran to his brother's flat and confessed that he had just killed someone. His older brother saw his blood-soaked clothing. They could both hear the shrill sound of the constable's whistle closing in on their location.

The brother said, “Quickly, take off your clothes and give them to me. And give me that knife, too.”

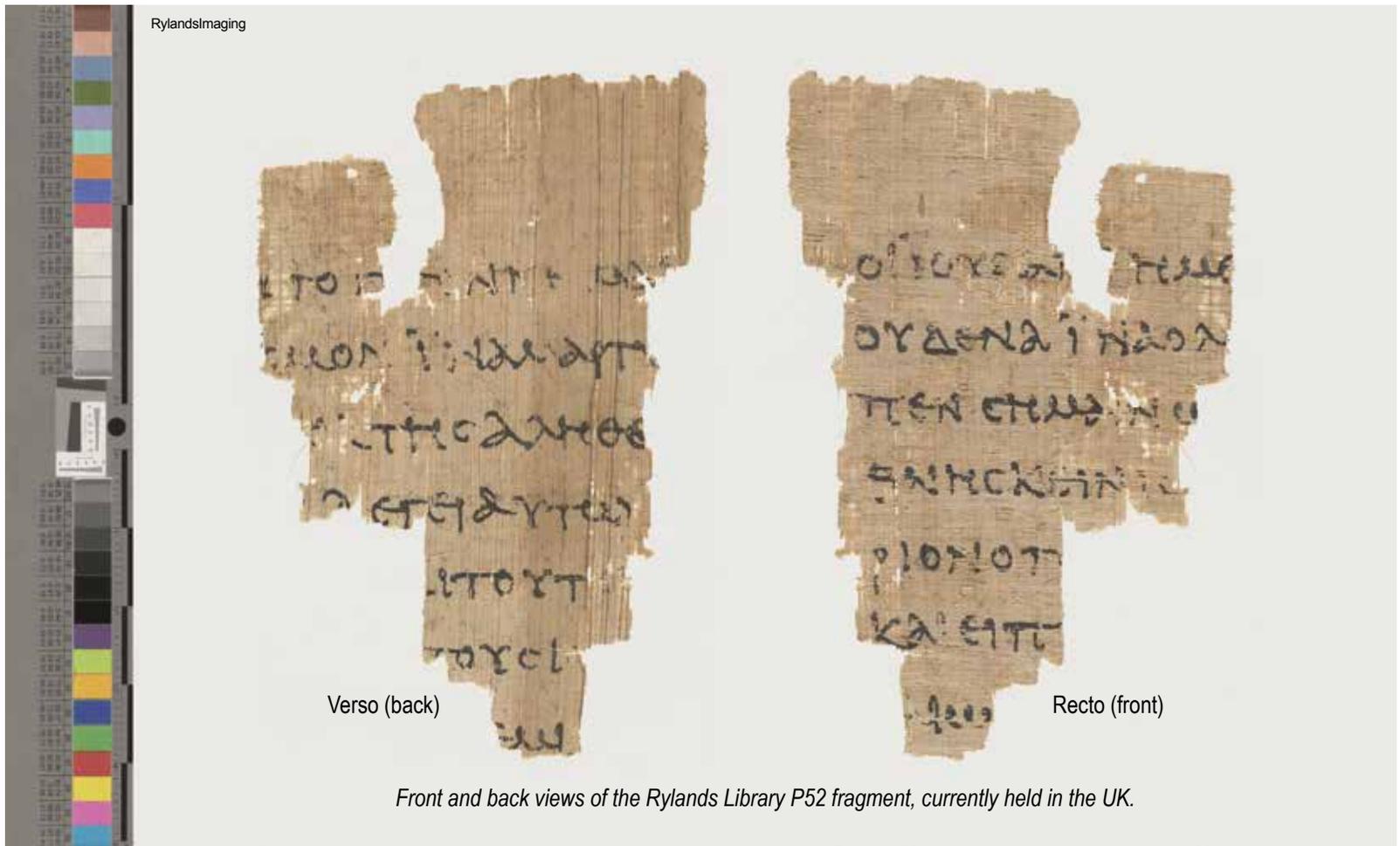
When the constable arrived, he found the innocent brother wearing the bloody clothes and holding the murder weapon in his hand. The innocent man was tried for the crime and found guilty. He was sentenced to death—and the sentence was eventually carried out by hanging.

For months, the guilty brother was riddled with guilt over what he had done. Not only had he killed someone, but he allowed his innocent brother to accept responsibility and be hanged for his terrible crime. The man was miserable. He couldn't eat or sleep. Finally, when he couldn't stand it any longer, he went down to the local police precinct and confessed everything he had done.

The guilty sibling was brought before the judge who had presided over his innocent brother's trial. He wanted to die. He begged the judge to order his immediate execution. It was the only way he could ever have any peace in his miserable, guilt-ridden heart.

However, the judge told him that couldn't be done. The reason? *Because the crime had already been paid for.* His brother, an innocent party, had already died in his place. Justice had been satisfied. The judge's only alternative was to set the guilty brother free.





Now I don't know if this would ever happen in the real world, or if the rules about "double jeopardy" would come to bear in such a case; but it nonetheless serves to illustrate the principle of justification. The point is that when God justifies us, He declares us "righteous" (not guilty). He makes that declaration on the basis that His Son already died and paid the penalty for our sin.

Are the Gospels Reliable?

Ultimately, our confidence in the Messianic prophecies—including Isaiah 53—is based on the authority of the New Testament itself. If the NT (and specifically, the gospels) can't be trusted, the whole Messianic structure crumbles like a house of cards.

The skeptics know how heavily we rely on the gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. That's why they spend so much time attacking these four ancient documents.

They have alleged, for example, that the gospel texts were doctored anonymously, centuries after the fact, to make it appear that prophecies like Isaiah 53 had been fulfilled.

Furthermore, they claim the gospels were not written by the men whose names they bear. Rather, they are clever forgeries that were penned centuries later, critical scholars say.⁶

⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). "Higher criticism deals with the genuineness of the text. Questions are asked such as: When was it really written? Who really wrote this text? Many . . . redaction critics and higher critics do not believe in the inspiration of Scripture and therefore use these questions to dispel the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the authors of Scripture. They believe that our Old Testament was simply a compilation of oral traditions [that] were not actually written [down] until after Israel was taken into captivity to Babylon in 586 BC" (gotquestions.org/redaction-higher-criticism.html).

One problem with this notion is that archaeology and paleography keep pushing the dates of the earliest manuscripts (actually fragments) farther back in time. We have, as one example, the Rylands Library Papyrus P52, also known as the "St. John's fragment." This is a small piece of a papyrus codex of the Gospel of John, with John 18:31–33 written on one side and verses 37–38 on the other.

Manuscript dating is a challenging and controversial endeavor, but P52 has been extensively analyzed—and it is most often dated by the experts to the first half of the 2nd century AD, sometime between the years 100 and 150.⁷

Such fragments are common. There are literally thousands of them, scattered in libraries and museums across the globe. They are copies of earlier versions, which would have been circulating well before that time.⁸ So, eyewitnesses to the gospel events (or their direct descendants) would have still been alive in the latter part of the first century, either to corroborate or to contradict the four-part mosaic of the gospel narrative.⁹ Yet there is no known record of any contemporary witness raising their voice to dispute the gospel's veracity.

⁷ P52 was discovered in Egypt and is currently held at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England.

⁸ John is believed to have been the last of the four gospels to be written (c. AD 90–110). Mark, Matthew, and Luke were written earlier—and possibly in that order. Matthew and Luke appear to have had access to Mark's material when they did their work. Other sources they accessed may have been unwritten. Oral transmission of stories and histories was common in ancient Jewish culture.

⁹ Many scholars say that the Apostle John wrote *The Revelation* around AD 95. He may have lived in exile on Patmos until AD 96 or so, when he returned to Ephesus, where he and Mary (the mother of Jesus) had previously made their home following the Crucifixion and Ascension (John 19:25–27). John lived out his remaining, brief time on this earth there in Ephesus.

Is the New Testament Really Necessary?

Sometimes traditional rabbis tell us they see no need for a “new” revelation to supplement their Tanakh (the Older Testament).

However, there are several important topics where the Tanakh leaves us hanging with very scant information. These topics include the following:

- Heaven and the Afterlife
- The Messiah as a Human Deliverer
- Satan and the Powers of Darkness
- The Incarnation (God Becoming Man)
- Details of the New Covenant (Jer. 31)
- The End-Time Prophetic Timeline

Most of what we know about these subjects comes from the NT, not the OT.

Traditional Judaism recognized this void of details in ancient times and responded with its own Oral Law (i.e., *Talmud*, *Midrashim*, *Halacha*, and other traditional, extra-biblical sources), where ancient sages sought to fill in the blanks, often with great imagination and creativity.

In biblical times, however, both the Samaritans (Shomronim) and the Messianics (Meshichiyim or Notzrim) stood apart from the rabbis/ Pharisees and rejected the authority of their Oral Law.

The Messianics, in particular, saw the NT as the fulfillment and completion of the OT—the only supplement they needed for Tanakh.

We are sometimes reminded that facts are stubborn things—and this is one of those times. The NT’s Messianic prophecies cannot be summarily dismissed with the wave of a hand, like the liberal critics are prone to do.

Taking the NT Seriously

Those prophecies must be reckoned with. If you happen to be one of our critics, go ahead and dismiss them as fantasy, if you must; however, please don’t insist that we join you in the illusion that yours is the only reasonable interpretation of the available facts.

Whatever lingering doubts I had as a young Jewish believer about the trustworthiness of the four gospels were finally laid to rest when I read F.F. Bruce’s scholarly work, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1960).

Bruce (1910–1990) is best remembered as John Rylands professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester in England from 1959 to 1978. His resounding answer to the question was that yes, the NT documents are most definitely reliable.

I was impressed with the professor’s objectivity and meticulous documentation in defending the reliability of the NT.

In Chapter Two (“The New Testament Documents: Their Date and Attestation”), Bruce points out that the NT is much richer in manuscript attestation than most other ancient documents:

For Caesar’s *Gallic War* (composed between 58 and 50 BC), there are several extant manuscripts, but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar’s day.

Of the 142 books of the *Roman History* of Livy (59 BC–AD 17), only thirty-five survive; these are known to us from not more than twenty manuscripts of any consequence, only one of which, that containing fragments of Books 3–6, is as old as the fourth century.

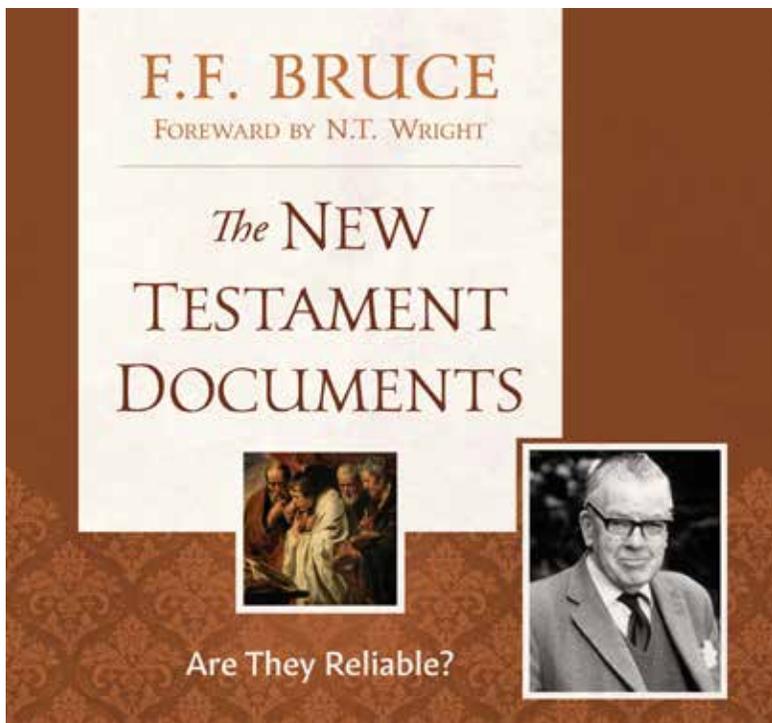
Of the fourteen books of the *Histories of Tacitus* (c. AD 100) only four and a half survive; of the sixteen books of his *Annals*, ten survive in full and two in part. The text of these extant portions of his two great historical works depends entirely on two manuscripts, one of the ninth century and one of the eleventh. The extant manuscripts of his minor works (*Dialogus de Oratoribus*, *Agricola*, *Germania*) all descend from a codex of the tenth century.

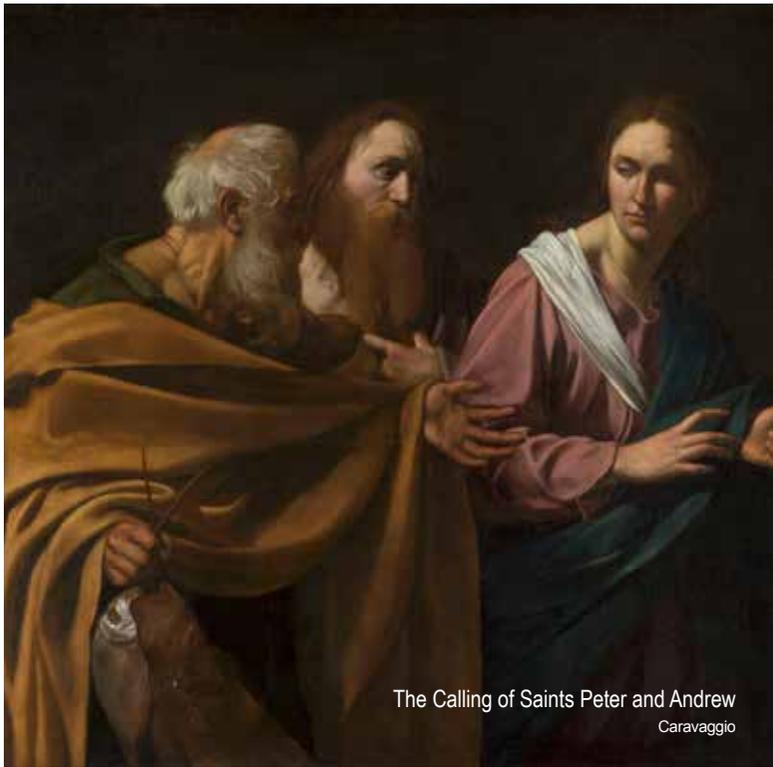
The *History of Thucydides* (c. 460–400 BC) is known to us from eight manuscripts, the earliest belonging to c. AD 900, and a few papyrus scraps, belonging to about the beginning of the Christian era.

The same is true of the *History of Herodotus* (c. 488–428 BC). **Yet no classical scholar would listen to an argument that the authenticity of Herodotus or Thucydides is in doubt because the earliest manuscripts of their works which are of any use to us are over 1,300 years later than the originals.**¹⁰

Great point! Why does liberal, progressive scholarship have two sets of standards—one for secular sources in antiquity and another for the NT? I suspect it’s because they don’t want the NT to pass the test!

¹⁰F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Nashville: Kingsley Books, 2018), 13 (Kindle Edition). Emphasis added in bold type.





The Calling of Saints Peter and Andrew
Caravaggio

They Found Him

In our day, we can't touch Jesus or see Him with our physical eyes—at least, not yet.

With help and enlightenment from the Holy Spirit, though, we trust the testimony of John and the others who were “eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

So, you see, trusting the testimony *about* the Person can be tantamount to trusting the Person Himself.

Andrew ran to his brother, Peter, and told him, “We have found the Messiah!” (John 1:41).

These eyewitnesses found Him, and through their testimony, we can find Him, too!

The Apostle Peter, who first heard about Jesus from his brother, commends those of us who have believed in the Lord without yet having seen Him:

“**[Jesus] whom having not seen** you love. Though **now you do not see Him**, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8, emphasis added).



It's telling, I think, that Dr. Bruce routinely rubbed shoulders with skeptical and liberal colleagues in the academic community, and he earned the trust and respect even of those who disagreed with him.

Faith In What?

As important as it is to defend the credibility of the NT documents, and to understand that they form the historical underpinnings of the Gospel, we should nonetheless understand that our faith, ultimately, is in a Person.

Having confidence in the historical authenticity of the NT writings is not the same as having faith in the One of whom they speak. After all, the devil himself knows that the NT documents are historically reliable; he was there when the events it describes took place. But despite his having this privileged information, the Evil One is nonetheless in a state of active rebellion against God.

So, yes—our faith is in a Person—and at the same time, it is solidly grounded in history. The Gospel is not a fanciful fairy tale that someone made up. The characters were real people who, by God's grace, contributed to a true and reliable narrative—“the Greatest Story Ever Told.”

Jesus is the *incarnate* Word; the Bible (OT and NT) is His *written* Word. In many ways, the two are inseparable. However, we worship Jesus, not the Bible. The Bible is our divinely inspired Guidebook; Jesus is our Savior, revealed and exalted in His Word.

John emphasized the objective truth of the Gospel when he wrote, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life* (1 John 1:1).

For John, the evidence was tangible. He could see it; he could study it; he could hold it in his hands. He was saying, “Don't try to convince me that the Gospel isn't true. Any such effort would be futile because it's all about Jesus—and I've seen Him with my own eyes, heard Him with my own ears, and touched Him with these very hands.”

We Have Found the Great Messiah

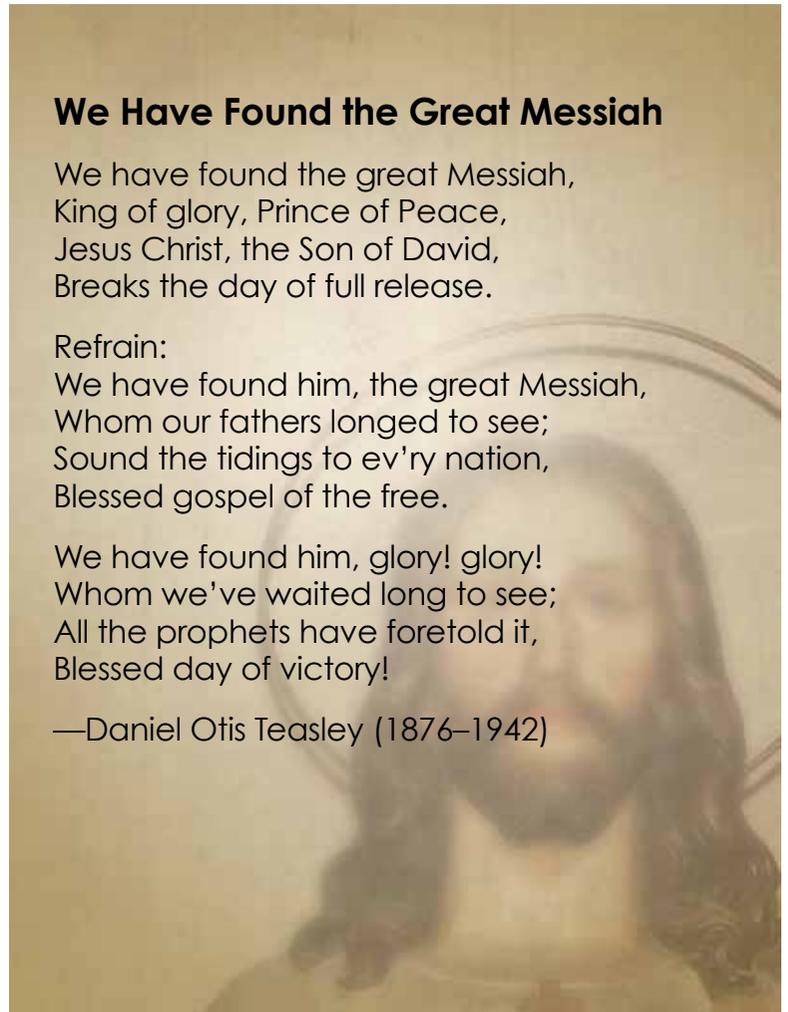
We have found the great Messiah,
King of glory, Prince of Peace,
Jesus Christ, the Son of David,
Breaks the day of full release.

Refrain:

We have found him, the great Messiah,
Whom our fathers longed to see;
Sound the tidings to ev'ry nation,
Blessed gospel of the free.

We have found him, glory! glory!
Whom we've waited long to see;
All the prophets have foretold it,
Blessed day of victory!

—Daniel Otis Teasley (1876–1942)



Dr. Gary Hedrick is president and CEO of CJF Ministries in San Antonio, TX.

Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: *I enjoy your paper very much. I read each issue from cover to cover! However, I'm wondering about your suggestion that the Crucifixion may have taken place on "Good Friday." How do you reconcile "Good Friday" with Matthew 12:40? It clearly says, For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Since the Bible has so indicated, I do not understand how Jesus could have been crucified on Friday. Wouldn't "three days and three nights" indicate a Wednesday or possibly Thursday Crucifixion?*

ANSWER: No. Let's look at this together. It's in cases like this where a Messianic (Hebraic) perspective helps us understand Scripture.

"Three days and three nights" or "three days and nights" were Hebrew idioms for any portion of a three-day period. Remember that in Jewish reckoning, a day (Heb., *yom*) consists of "evening and morning" (e.g., Gen. 1:5). That is, a day begins at sundown and continues for 24 hours until the next day at sundown. For our purposes here, we can think of "three days and nights" like this:

Day One (Friday)—The Lord is crucified at 9 a.m. and hangs on the Cross for six hours before He expires at around 3 p.m. Joseph of Arimathea obtains permission to take the body for burial in his own freshly-hewn tomb (Matt. 27:57–60). The Lord's body had to be taken down from the Cross before the Sabbath began.

Day Two (Shabbat)—His body was in the tomb for the entire day (that is, 24 hours from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday).

Day Three (Sunday)—He was resurrected "on the third day" (any time after sundown on Saturday) and the women arrived at the tomb early on Sunday morning.

For instance, we find the Hebrew equivalent of three days and nights in the story of Queen Esther, where she sent word to Mordecai to have their people fast "for three days, night or day" (Esther 4:16). This period ended not after 72 full hours, but "on the third day" (5:1).

Also, note that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus told the resurrected Lord that "today is the third day since these things happened" (Luke 24:21). The Lord couldn't have been in the tomb for a full 72 hours if He was already walking with these disciples on their way to Emmaus on the third day!

It's important to recognize idioms when they occur in the Bible. We have many idioms in English that can be very misleading if taken literally. Like if it's late at night, I might yawn and say, "I'm tired. I think I'll hit the sack." Someone who's unfamiliar with the idiom would think that's pretty weird!

It's true that the Lord condemned oppressive, misleading, man-made tradition (e.g., Matt. 15:6; Col. 2:8). However, not all traditions fall into that category. Paul himself presented certain traditions and said believers should obey them: *But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us* (emphasis added).

So, let's not assume that every traditional teaching or idea is automatically wrong. Good Friday may indeed be rooted in historical reality. 



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Fruit from the Harvest



by Violette Berger



Campus Ministries

Eric Chabot, CJFM representative (Columbus, OH), praises God for the amazing things He is doing on Ohio State and Columbus State University campuses. Eric writes: “Not only are people open to the Good News, but professing Christians are also very excited and passionate about their faith.” Since the beginning of the new semester at the end of August, Eric and his team have spoken with more than 200 students, of which 20 have committed their lives to Jesus Christ. Please pray for them to grow in their new faith and for more opportunities to share the Gospel with both Jewish and Gentile students. Eric is the director of the Ratio Campus Apologetic Alliance and is pleased that his meetings are well attended by individuals who want to be discipled as well as learn how to engage with others. In his campus outreach, Eric sets up a whiteboard asking either worldview or biblical questions, such as, “Are You Born Again?” with three responses available: Yes, No, and IDK (I Don’t Know). Passersby check off a column, but many students will approach and ask: “What does ‘born again’ mean?” Eric says, “This question leads directly to our Messiah’s discussion with Nicodemus in John 3.” He related the account to a Nicaraguan student who was so curious about the question that she stayed and engaged in a long discussion. Then she asked, “What must I do to be born again?” She immediately made a commitment to the Lord.

Eric also writes about the huge revival that broke out at Ohio State University and went viral. The event, organized by campus ministries and churches, was led by believers on the school’s football team who gave their testimonies and preached the Gospel before 800–1,000 students. Throughout the evening, the crowd grew larger and larger. By the end of the night, an estimated 60 students chose to make a confession of faith and were baptized in four tubs of water near the stage. Despite the protests on college campuses, there is evidence that college students are showing a deep hunger for God in these challenging times. A new born-again believer commented: “I didn’t recognize my condition. I was spiritually dead. I could smile and laugh on the outside, but on the inside I was broken.”

Haredi Ministry Update

Diann Parkas, CJFM representative (New Jersey), writes: “The ministry focused on the Haredi community has gotten more exciting lately as God has been connecting our team with a number of Haredi individuals who have come to faith in Jesus! Some are living as secret believers within the community, and some have left. Please pray for these believers to grow strong in their faith. Pray especially for ‘P,’ who is very new to the faith, is attending our online Bible studies, and is eager to be baptized.”

Creation and the Kingdom to Come

CJFM representative Michael Campo, Jr (Chicago), rejoices that sharing his faith is the goal and joy of his ministry—and that we never know when or where that opportunity will arise. Going about his day, Michael stopped at a car wash to vacuum his car. A worker appeared to clean up the garbage on the floor and began talking to Michael about his frustration with what was happening in the world and in our country. Michael agreed with him in his displeasure and then began to describe the Kingdom to come and how wonderful it will be. The gentleman said, “It sounds great, but we will never have that.” Michael replied, “I will,” and then asked him if he would like to know how he can, too. For the next hour, they talked about the Bible, Creation, Jesus, Faith, and the Kingdom to come. The man thanked Michael and said he would definitely remember their conversation.

Terror Attacks on Jewish Community

Carlos and Deborah Morales, CJFM representatives (Argentina), praise God that the recent planned terror attacks on the Jewish community in Mendoza, where they live and minister, were thwarted. Argentina’s Federal Police dismantled what it said was a terrorist cell, describing the group as an “Islamist terrorist organization.” Seven members of the group, with Syrian and Lebanese citizenship, were arrested. Eight raids were carried out at the homes of the members, resulting in the seizure of firearms, knives, and electronic devices. Libertarian President Javier Milei, a staunch proponent of both the Jewish community and Israel, promised to beef up the national intelligence system to prevent future attacks. Carlos writes: “We are grateful to our God for His grace and faithfulness and also to CJFM for their continued support and prayers for our ministry in Argentina. Please pray for protection from increasing terror threats from terrorist groups operating on the border between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay.”

A few years ago, Carlos began teaching a group of students, who were finishing their ministerial training, about how to witness to the Jewish people. Last year, Adrian, a young man with a heart for Israel and missions, was grateful when God opened a door for him to minister in Türkiye. Please pray that God will use him as His instrument in promoting love for Israel in a hostile environment. Adrian is thankful as Carlos encourages him via his daily audio devotional, *Seeds of Peace and Love*, which is also shared on YouTube and WhatsApp. Deborah also continues to teach a series of short Women’s Bible studies on those platforms, including Facebook. Carlos and Deborah are blessed to have their radio program on the air and online once a week and to have his devotionals broadcast after the news. More followers, from both their province and other regions in Argentina, have asked to receive their congregation’s streaming of sermons. Please pray that the Word of God will be shared to reach many souls for Yeshua. 

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