

# Israel's History Written in Advance

According to an old story, the powerful Prussian King Frederick the Great had a chaplain who was a Bible-believer, though Frederick himself was a rationalist. One day, Frederick challenged his chaplain, "In a word, give me a good argument for the God of the Bible." His chaplain, a knowledgeable man, responded, "The Jew, your majesty!" To unpack the chaplain's concise remark is the purpose of this essay.

## Neglected Evidence for the God of the Bible

The history of the Jews is a demonstration of God at work, sometimes miraculously, sometimes providentially, in the affairs of men and nations. The particular significance of the Jews—in contrast to other nations—is that God called Israel His special people and made covenants with them through Abraham, Moses, and David. In addition, the Old Testament predicts what God planned to do with His people. We'll look at three rather wide-ranging prophecies about the nation Israel and see how they have come to pass. These involve first, the covenant curses; second, an acted parable of the marital relations between God and Israel; and finally, a prediction of Israel's return to her own land.

The first area of prophecy involves what God promised to do to the nation of Israel if they did not keep the laws Moses had given them from Mt. Sinai.

When the Israelites were rescued from slavery in Egypt about 1,400 B.C., God made a contract or covenant with Moses to define Israel's relationship to Him as His own special people. This covenant reminded them of what God had already done for them and what He promised to do in the future. God had saved

them from slavery, brought them safely through the desert, was about to bring them into possession of the land of Canaan, and would protect them from all disasters if they would be faithful to Him. To test their faithfulness, God gave them an elaborate set of laws—some moral, some civil, some ceremonial—which also set them apart from the nations around them. God showed His reality through the lifestyle that He had designed for Israel. In Deuteronomy 4:5-8 Moses explained it:

*See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'*

Moses goes on to say only Israel has a God who is near when they pray, and only His people have such righteous laws to guide them.

In the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy and the 26th chapter of Leviticus, the provisions of the covenant are set out in the form of blessings and curses—blessings if Israel would obey God's commands and curses if they disobeyed. Through these sanctions, Israel would be reminded of how they were doing in obeying God, and their neighbors would see an objective demonstration of God's judgment in history.

## **Israel as a History Lesson**

Israel's history demonstrates that when they broke the laws God gave them, they experienced exactly the results God predicted would happen if they were unfaithful. No other nation has prophesied its own downfall with such accuracy. Thus history demonstrates how accurately God predicted what would happen to Israel if they disobeyed His laws. And what did God predict? To summarize nearly a hundred verses,

Israel's disobedience brought wasted effort in labors; natural disasters such as drought, blight, and locusts to their crops; and disease and death to their animals and themselves.

Their enemies would defeat them in battle and besiege their cities, resulting in plague, famine, cannibalism, and starvation. They would be scattered to foreign countries. There some would die; others would live in constant fear of both real and imagined disasters, or turn to other gods. They would be sold as slaves. Their numbers would decline greatly, as they suffered from fearful plagues, prolonged disasters, and lingering illnesses. What an amazing list of disasters!

Not only are these curses severe, but the Bible predicts them in some detail. In Deuteronomy, fourteen verses describe the blessings and fifty-four the curses. In Leviticus, eleven verses are blessings and thirty-two are curses. Altogether, over 75 percent of the verses concern curses for disobedience. God-predicted disasters will be a major part of Israel's future.

This proportion is very unusual. Other religious people might concede that their own history had been three-fourths disaster, but who would admit it had been three-fourths disobedient? And this proportion is borne out not only by the history of Israel recorded in the Bible, where one might claim the biblical history writers either molded the narrative to match the prophecy or adjusted the prophecy to match the history. It is also demonstrated in the long history of disaster experienced by the Jews after the Bible was written.

No other national group has experienced such disaster as the Jews. Most nations have not survived long enough to experience so much disaster! Yet Israel has experienced disaster at every point sketched in the long lists of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They have, unfortunately, been persecuted again and again for over two thousand years. For most of that time they were without a national homeland, having been driven out of

Palestine. They have faced decimation and sometimes genocide from nearly every group they have lived among: Greeks, Romans, Christians, Muslims, Nazis, and Communists. Even now the recently re-established nation of Israel faces continual harassment and threats of annihilation from hostile forces all around her.

In the midst of these curses, however, comes a promise that Israel will not be totally destroyed.

*Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the LORD their God (Lev. 26:44).*

But as predicted, the Jews still exist as a people today. “Of course!” you say. “If Israel had been destroyed, we would never have heard of them.” Not true – unless they had been destroyed before the coming of Jesus. With the rise of Christianity, the Old Testament was preserved by non-Jews and would have survived whether the Jews survived or not. In fact, many of the threats the Jews have faced came in the past two thousand years. Yet Israel, unlike most oppressed nations of antiquity, has survived as a distinct people.

Thus the evidence from Israel’s predicted covenant curses points to God’s activity in history, keeping His words of both judgment and promise.

## **Israel’s Harlotry**

It’s easy to miss the book of Hosea in the Old Testament. But it describes an amazing parable that would picture Israel’s situation for some two thousand years. The prophet Hosea was divinely directed to live out a powerful parable depicting God’s relationship with Israel.

In chapter 1, Hosea is instructed to marry a harlot, Gomer,

and have children. He obeys, thereby picturing God's choice of the nation Israel for a personal relationship with Him, even though Abraham was an idolater when God called him and the Israelites were idolaters when they were called out of slavery in Egypt.

In chapter 2, Gomer runs off with her lovers. In the same way, Israel abandoned God for the more sexually exciting worship of the Canaanites, even though God had brought the people safely into the promised land. Finally Gomer winds up in slavery, as Israel would later be taken captive to Assyria and Babylon.

In chapter 3, Hosea is directed to go and buy her back. But she is to have no relations with Hosea or with her lovers. This last event in Hosea's living parable is a prediction of the status of Israel for a long time to come:

*For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king . . . in the last days (Hos. 3:4-5).*

Hosea predicted that Israel for "many days" will lack a king, even though God had promised that Israel would never lack a descendant to sit on the throne if the nation was obedient to God.

In fact, the prediction states that Israel will lack even a prince. Since in Hebrew, "prince" means a government official, not the son of the king, Israel would lack both government and king.

Hosea also predicts that sacrifice, pillar, ephod, household idols will be lacking. Two are associated with the sacrificial system and two with idolatry. Sacrifice was an integral part of Israel's covenant and worship. The ephod, a sort of vest, was one of the most important of the ceremonial garments worn

by Israel's high priest. Although some pillars had orthodox uses, the most common reference is to those used in Canaanite worship. Israel was to lose both true worship and the false religion which had been such a problem since it entered Canaan.

This has happened exactly! Since A.D. 44 (the death of Herod Agrippa I), Israel has had no native king to this day. For 1,878 years, from the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 to the formation of the modern nation in 1948, Israel had no government of its own either. Thus the predictions regarding Israel's governmental status were fulfilled in detail.

With the loss of the Temple and the priestly garments came the end of the sacrificial system. Israel has not had a high priest to this day. So Hosea's prophecy about the loss of sacrificial worship has also proved true.

From A.D. 70 to 1948, the "sons of Israel" lacked all six items predicted in Hosea 3:4. Now they have a government, but five are still lacking. Hosea 3:4 has been literally fulfilled.

## **A Regathering of Israel?**

In our own generation we may also be seeing the fulfillment of Hosea 3:5. Many Jews have physically returned to Palestine in this century. If their seeking of "God and David their king" is understood as a turning to Jesus as the true Messiah, we can point to the growing Messianic Jewish movement which has flourished in the past two decades. But we are still too close to these events to be sure.

Whether or not Hosea 3:5 refers to Israel's return to the promised land, a number of other Old Testament passages do. Let's look at one such passage, Isaiah 11:11-16. Verse 11 reads:

*Then it will happen on that day that the LORD will again*

*recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.*

Sometime after Isaiah wrote these words, Israel was to be regathered to its homeland. The reference to a “second time” as well as the places from which they would return suggests that this is not the return from the Babylonian exile.

According to the whole passage, several significant features will characterize this return. First, verse 13 suggests that Israel will no longer be two nations as it was after Solomon’s time, but a single unified country . Second, Israel will fight the surrounding nations (the Philistines, the Edomites, The Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Egyptians) as a part of this return (vv. 14-15). Third, something spectacular will happen to dry up the “tongue of the sea of Egypt” and the “River,” presumably the Euphrates (v.15). Fourth, the places from which the return will take place are explicitly named, except for the general phrase “islands [or ‘coastlands’] of the sea” (v.11).

Of these four items, three have already occurred in the return of Jews to Israel in our own generation; only the third has not yet taken place.

The return of Jews to Palestine and the formation of a state of their own is amazing in itself, given that just a century ago the territory was controlled by the Muslim Turks who hated the Jews. Yet a world Zionist movement was formed; the land came under the control of Britain at the end of World War I; Britain allowed the Jews to have a homeland; the Nazi holocaust drove Jews to Palestine who otherwise would have stayed in Europe; the United Nations agreed to partition Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state; and the Jews were able to defeat a coalition of Arab states bent on their destruction.

The Jewish state formed in 1948 in Palestine included persons descended from both the northern and southern tribes. The enmity of the divided kingdoms that existed at Isaiah's time has, in fact, been healed.

Israel has already fought with all the surrounding nations, in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. Though the Philistines, Edomites, and such are no longer identifiable as separate peoples, the Arab nations occupying their lands (and most likely including some of their descendants) are Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, and Syria. These were the nations Israel fought and dispossessed to regain its territory.

Once again, the prophecies of the Bible about the Jews show the God of the Bible to be true.

In this essay we have examined three significant passages in the Bible that predict the history of Israel. We have shown that numerous prophecies from the Old Testament regarding Israel have been fulfilled. We have made the following observations:

1. The Jews would have fierce and repeated persecution and disaster. This has been characteristic of the nation for two thousand years.
2. In spite of such disasters, the Jews would continue to exist as a recognizable people group, in spite of treatment which has destroyed other such people groups.
3. Israel would be without a king for a long period of time. Israel has been without a king for nearly two thousand years, though a Davidic royal dynasty was an important part of the Old Testament revelation.
4. Israel would lack government officials for a long time. Now, after almost 1,850 years, the Jews have them again.
5. Israel would lack sacrifice and ephod, both associated with



God's commands at Mt. Sinai. This has been true for nearly two thousand years and is quite surprising in view of how important sacrifice and the priesthood were in the Old Testament.

6. Israel would lack pillar and idols. This seems obvious today, because the Jews so adamantly worship one God, but the situation was rather different when Hosea made the prediction about 800 B.C.

7. Israel would return to its land as a single united nation. A century ago, such an event would have seemed almost impossible. Palestine was controlled by a Muslim government which had no interest in providing a homeland, much less an independent state, for the Jews. Yet it has come to pass!

8. The countries explicitly named in Isaiah 11 have been nearly emptied of Jews in this return to Palestine.

9. The Jews have fought successfully with the surrounding nations in establishing and maintaining the new state of Israel.

Sadly, some elements of the Christian church have ignored or participated in the persecution of God's special covenantal people, the Jews. Yet Romans 9-11 exhorts Christians never to rejoice in the misfortunes of the Jews. To do so brings shame to the church and to our Lord.

As we look at God's hand in the history of Israel it may seem fierce to us, for at least two reasons: first, we regularly ignore the biblical teaching that there is a life beyond this one, and that in the last judgment with its rewards and punishments everything will be made right, and no one will get less than he or she deserves; and second we regularly minimize our own sin, blaming our actions on circumstances and environment. Whatever may be the faults of our parents, teachers, or society, God will apportion to them (and us!) exactly what we deserve—unless we accept the offer of God's

forgiveness through believing on Christ as our personal Savior.

Are all the predictions we have listed trivial? Did they just happen by chance? Or is the God of the Bible indeed the One who controls history and who announces the end from the beginning? The decision is yours.

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## **An Easter Quiz**

Written by Dale Taliaferro

**1. What emotional state were the disciples in when they left the upper room to go to the garden?**

Anxious, fearful, troubled (John 14:1, 27).

**2. What is John 13-17 called?**

The Upper Room Discourse.

**3. Why were the disciples so troubled?**

a. They had probably been excommunicated by this time for professing Jesus as Christ (John 9:22).

b. The religious leaders had determined to kill Jesus and His followers (John 11:16).

c. One of the inner core was going to betray Him (John 13:20-30).

d. Peter was going to deny Him three times (John 13:38).

e. Jesus was going to leave them in the lurch (John 13:33).

**4. For what did Jesus pray before they arrived at the garden?**

Eternal security and temporal protection of the disciples (John 17:1-26).

**5. What is the name of the garden?**

Gethsemane.

**6. Where is it located?**

At the base of the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 22:39).

**7. What was the subject matter of Jesus' great discourse upon this mountain?**

Prophecy (Matt. 24-25).

**8. What ravine did they have to cross to get to the garden?**

The Kidron Valley (John 18:1).

**9. What did they do just before going out to the Mount of Olives?**

Sang a hymn (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26).

**10. Who accompanied Jesus the furthest into the garden?**

Peter, James, and John (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33).

**11. What command did Jesus give His disciples at this time?**

"Remain here and keep watch with me" (Matt. 26:38).

**12. How far did Jesus remove Himself to pray?**

A stone's throw (Luke 22:41).

**13. What posture was Jesus in when He prayed?**

On His knees, face down on the ground (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:35).

**14. What was Jesus' emotional state at this time?**

Deeply grieved to the point of death (Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:34).

**15. How did Jesus address His prayer?**

To the Father (Matt. 26:39).

**16. What petition did Jesus make?**

"Let this cup pass from Me" (Matt. 26:39).

**17. With what concession did Jesus close His prayer?**

"Yet not as I but as Thou will" (Matt. 26:39).

**18. How long did Jesus pray this time?**

One hour (Matt. 26:40).

**19. Upon finding the disciples sleeping, what warning did He give them?**

Once again, "Watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41).

**20. What rationale does Jesus use to strengthen His warning?**

"For the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

**21. What did Jesus pray the second time?**

The same words (Mark 14:39).

**22. When Jesus found the disciples asleep the second time, what excuse did they offer?**

None (Mark 14:40).

**23. What did Jesus pray the third time?**

The same thing (Matt. 26:44).

**24. How many people did Judas bring with him to arrest Jesus?**

A multitude (Mark 14:33).

**25. From whom was the crowd sent?**

From the religious leaders (Matt. 26:47).

**26. What happened to this multitude when Jesus identified Himself?**

They fell backward upon the ground (John 18:4-6).

**27. What did this signify?**

As He had prophesied, none would take His life; He would give it up voluntarily (John 10:16-18).

**28. What sign did Judas use to designate whom the crowd should arrest?**

A kiss (Matt. 26:48).

**29. How did Jesus convict Judas of his sin?**

Confronted him *before* the kiss, stating, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48).

**30. Which disciple drew his sword to protect Jesus?**

Simon Peter (John 18:10).

**31. What part of the body did Peter slice off when he attacked the servant of the high priest?**

The ear (John 18:10).

**32. What was the servant's name?**

Malchus (John 18:10).

**33. What did Jesus say to Peter in rebuke?**

- a. "Live by the sword, die by the sword."
- b. "My Father could send 12 legions of angels."

**34. How did Jesus heal the servant's ear?**

By touching it (Luke 22:51).

**35. Name two evidences that Jesus was in control during His arrest and that His arrest was moving along as it had been divinely appointed.**

- a. It was prophesied (Matt. 26:54; Mark 14:49; John 18:8-9).
- b. Jesus' comment, "The cup the Father gave me, I must fulfill," reflects His earlier prayer to the Father.

**36. What three things did Jesus say to rebuke the multitudes, including chief priests, captains of the temple, and elders?**

- a. "Have you come out to arrest Me as you would a robber with swords and sticks?"
- b. "You did not try to arrest Me when I *daily* sat teaching in the temple."
- c. "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

**37. Who was the young man who fled Gethsemane naked?**

Tradition identifies him as John Mark (Mark 14:51-52).

**38. To whom was Jesus presented first?**

Annas the high priest (John 18:24).

**39. To whom did Annas send Jesus?**

Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57).

**40. Which two disciples followed?**

Peter and John (Matt. 26:58; John 18:15).

**41. Where did Jesus meet with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin?**

Caiaphas's house (Luke 22:54).

**42. How did they attempt to convict Jesus?**

By bringing in false witnesses (Matt. 26:59-60; Mark 14:55-56).

**43. Of what did two false witnesses accuse Jesus?**

The claim to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days (Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:57-59).

**44. How did Jesus respond to all of the charges?**

He remained silent (Matt. 26:63; Mark 14:61).

**45. What question did Caiaphas then ask Jesus?**

Was He the Christ, the Son of God? (Matt. 26:63; Mark 14:61).

**46. How did Jesus answer the question?**

He said "*Egoeimi*," "I am" (Mark 14:62).

**47. What did those who heard Him take His response to mean?**

That He was the Messiah and also the Son of God, making Himself equal in person with God the Father (Matt. 26:65-66; Mark 14:63-64; John 5:18).

**48. Had Jesus ever clearly claimed His deity before?**

Yes (Mark 2:1-12; John 5:18; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9).

**49. How did those with the priest respond to Jesus after Caiaphas sentenced Him to death?**

a. They spit in His face.

- b. They blindfolded Him and beat Him.
- c. They asked Him to prophesy who hit Him.
- d. Many other things that Scripture does not specify (Matt. 26:67-68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63-65).

**50. What dilemma do Peter's denials present to the reader?**

The need to harmonize them. One can apparently list ten different denials by Peter.

**51. How many denials did Jesus clearly prophesy that Peter would give?**

Three.

**52. What was the purpose of the regathering of the Sanhedrin at dawn?**

Jesus was formally condemned by the Sanhedrin at that time. This action by the council was an effort to make the proceedings and the passing of judgment upon Jesus legal. But, as Greek expert A. T. Robertson writes, "No ratification of a wrong can make it right" (*A Harmony of the Gospels*, 215).

**53. What did Judas feel when he realized he had helped condemn Jesus to death?**

Remorse (Matt. 27:3).

**54. How much did the chief priests and elders give Judas to betray Jesus?**

Thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 27:3; 26:15).

**55. How much would that be worth today?**

The exact amount is unknown; it was the redemption price for a slave (Exod. 21:32).

**56. What did Judas do with the money after he realized what he had done?**

He tried to give it back. When they wouldn't accept it, he threw it into the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies (Matt. 27:3-5).

**57. What did Judas do next?**

Hanged himself (Matt. 27:6).

**58. What did the religious leaders do with the returned money?**

Bought a field in which to bury foreigners— Potters Field or Field of Blood (Matt. 27:6-7; Acts 1:18-19).

**59. What is significant about this action?**

It fulfilled prophecy of both the price and the consequence (Matt. 27:7-10).

**60. To whom did the council now take Jesus?**

To Pilate (Matt. 27:2; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1; John 18:28-29).

**61. What principle can we learn from the Jews' legalism or "works" mentality at this point?**

Legalism—actually any system of works—blinds one to his own sinfulness (John 18:28). They didn't want to defile themselves by going into the palace, but they were willing to kill an innocent man.

**62. What accusations did the religious leaders bring against Jesus?**

- a. He perverted the nation (Luke 23:2).
- b. He prohibited the giving of tribute to Caesar (Luke 23:2).
- c. He said He is Christ, a king (Luke 23:2).
- d. He stirred up the people (Luke 23:5).

**63. What conclusion did Pilate come to after questioning Jesus?**

- a. "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4).
- b. "I find no crime in Him" (John 18:38).

**64. To whom did Pilate send Jesus?**

Herod Antipas the Tetrarch (Luke 23:7).

**65. What was the stated reason Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas?**

Jesus was a Galilean and under Herod's jurisdiction (Luke



23:6-7).

**66. How did Herod Antipas receive Jesus?**

Gladly (Luke 23:8).

**67. Why did he receive Jesus this way?**

He wanted to see a miracle (Luke 23:8).

**68. How did Jesus respond to Herod's interrogation?**

With silence (Luke 23:9).

**69. How did Herod respond to this silent treatment?**

He mocked Jesus (Luke 23:11).

**70. What custom did Pilate attempt to use to keep from condemning Jesus?**

The custom of freeing a prisoner during the feast (Matt. 27:15, 17; Luke 15:6, 9; John 18:39).

**71. After Jesus' interrogation by both Herod and Pilate, what was the governor's verdict?**

Neither he nor Herod had found Jesus worthy of death (Luke 23:15). In fact, Luke 23:14b says, "[I] have found no basis for your charges against Him."

**72. What was the name of the other man Pilate offered to release?**

Barabbas (Matt. 27:16; Mark 15:7; Luke 23:18; John 18:40).

**73. What motive did Pilate detect which propelled the chief priests to demand Jesus death?**

Envy (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10).

**74. Why was Barabbas imprisoned?**

Insurrection and murder (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19).

**75. From whom did Pilate receive a warning to have nothing to do with Jesus?**

His wife (Matt. 27:19).

**76. What motivated her to warn Pilate?**

She had suffered many things that day in a dream because of Jesus (Matt. 27:19).

**77. How did Pilate respond to Jesus before he again told the crowd he could “find no crime in Him?”**

a. Pilate scourged Him (John 19:1).

b. He allowed the soldiers to (1) plait a crown of thorns and place it on His head; (2) array Him in a purple garment; (3) while mockingly hailing Him as the King of the Jews, beat Him with their fists (John 19:2-3).

**78. How many times did Pilate confess he could find no cause for putting Jesus to death?**

Three (Luke 23:22).

**79. At this point, what accusations do the Jews make to claims that Jesus is worthy of death?**

“He made Himself [out to be] the Son of God” (John 19:7).

**80. After Pilate again tried to release Jesus, what threat did the Jews use to obtain Jesus’ condemnation?**

“If you release Him, you are no friend of Caesar’s. Everyone who makes a king speaks against Caesar” (John 19:12).

**81. What symbolic gesture did Pilate make to declare himself innocent of condemning a righteous man?**

He washed his hands before the multitude and said, “I am innocent of the blood of the righteous man (Matt. 27:24).

**82. When, exactly, did this happen?**

This is the subject of a huge debate, but it was probably just before dawn on Friday.

**83. What did Pilate do to Jesus before he handed Him over to be crucified?**

a. He had Jesus scourged a second time! (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15).

b. He delivered Jesus over to his guards, who first mocked and

beat Him, then crucified Him (Matt. 27:27-30; Mark 15:16-19).

**84. Who was enlisted to carry Jesus' cross for Him?**

Simon of Cyrene (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26).

**85. What is the name of the way that Jesus walked to His crucifixion?**

The Via Dolorosa, "Way of Suffering."

**86. Who accompanied Jesus along the path?**

The two thieves (Luke 23:32).

**87. What is the name of the place where Jesus was crucified?**

In Hebrew, Golgotha (Matt. 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17).

**88. What is this place called in Greek?**

The cranium, the skull (Luke 23:33).

**89. What is this place called in Latin?**

Calvary.

**90. Of what significance were the inscriptions on the crosses at crucifixions?**

They identified the crime for which the person was being executed.

**91. What were Jesus's first words from the cross?**

"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

**92. What is the first fulfillment of prophecy by those who crucified Jesus after He was nailed to the cross?**

They cast lots over Jesus' garments (John 19:24).

**93. What inscription did Pilate place on Jesus' cross?**

"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (John 19:19).

**94. In what languages was it written?**

Aramaic, Latin, and Greek (John 19:20).

**95. Who are the three women named in scripture who stood by**

**the cross (John 19:25)?**

- a. Mary, mother of Jesus
- b. Mary's sister—the wife of Cleopas
- c. Mary Magdalene

**96. What was the second thing Jesus said from the cross and to whom was it addressed (John 19:27)?**

To Mary: "Woman, behold, your son"; to John, "Behold your mother!"

**97. At what hour was Jesus actually crucified?**

The third hour—nine a.m. (Mark 15:25).

**98. At what hour did darkness enshroud the earth?**

The sixth hour (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44).

**99. How long did the darkness last?**

Three hours (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44).

**100. Around the ninth hour, what did Jesus cry out?**

"My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken me?" (Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani).

**101. What was Jesus' next-to-last utterance from the cross and to what did it refer?**

"It is finished." It referred to the penalty He paid on the cross (John 19:30).

**102. At the death of Jesus, what physical phenomena occurred?**

- a. The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 21:45).
- b. There was an earthquake (Matt. 27:51).
- c. Rocks were split apart (Matt. 27:51).
- d. Tombs were opened (Matt. 27:52).
- e. There were many resuscitations of the dead. They entered into the city, appeared to many, and stayed alive until after Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 27:52-53).

**103. The fear occasioned by these awesome phenomena moved the**

**centurion at the foot of the cross to make what profession?**

That Jesus was a righteous man and truly the Son of God (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47).

**104. How did the multitudes respond to these awesome displays?**

They returned to the city beating their breasts (Luke 23:48).

**105. What reason did the Jews give to have Pilate break the legs of those crucified?**

So as not to defile the sabbath-day Passover (John 19:31).

**106. Instead of breaking Jesus' legs, they did something else to Him, since He was already dead. What?**

They pierced His side (John 19:33-34).

**107. What resulted from the piercing, signifying that death had occurred?**

Blood and water flowed out (John 19:34).

**108. What two prophecies relate to Jesus' legs not being broken?**

a. No bone shall be broken (Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12; Ps. 34:20).

b. They will look on me, the one they have pierced (Zach. 12:10).

**109. Who asked Pilate for the body of Jesus for burial?**

Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50; John 19:38).

**110. How did Pilate confirm that Jesus had in fact died?**

He called in the centurion in charge of the crucifixion (Mark 15:44-45).

**111. Who helped Joseph prepare the body for burial?**

Nicodemus (John 19:39).

**112. What two spices were used in the burial preparation?**

Myrrh and aloes (John 19:39).

**113. How much was used?**

One hundred pounds (John 19:39).

**114. Who were the two women who watched where Joseph and Nicodemus buried Jesus?**

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47).

**115. What reason did the chief priests and Pharisees give for sealing and guarding the sepulchre?**

They secured the tomb for three days because they feared Jesus' disciples would steal the body and tell the people He had risen (Matt. 27:62-66).

**116. What supernatural event accompanied the great earthquake early on Sunday morning?**

An angel of the Lord rolled back the tombstone and sat on it (Matt. 28:2-4).

**117. What is curious about the angel and this appearance?**

The angel came and went. Some saw the angel and some didn't (John 28:2-10).

**118. Who was the first person at the tomb early on Sunday morning?**

Mary Magdalene (John 20:1).

**119. Basically, what message did the angel give the women at the tomb?**

"He is not here; He has risen just as He had said He would" (Matt. 28:5-7; Mark 16:26-7; Luke 24:5-7).

**120. Who were the first two apostles to go to the empty tomb?**

John and Peter (John 20:2).

**121. What was curious about the burial wrappings?**

They were in the tomb, neatly folded (John 20:5-7).

**122. What excuse did the soldiers (who were paid by the chief priests and the elders) give for the disappearance of Jesus'**

**body?**

“His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept” (Matt. 28:11-13).

**123. What is so ludicrous about this excuse?**

The guards who fell asleep, plus all of those in the unit, would have been executed.

**124. Name some of the people to whom Jesus appeared after He arose.**

Mary Magdalene, Cleopas and a friend, the eleven disciples, Thomas (Mark 16:9, 14; Luke 24:17; John 20:26).

**125. How long did He appear to the disciples before He finally ascended?**

Forty days (Acts 1:1-2).

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# **The Theology of Christmas Carols – A Godly View of This Sacred Holiday**

*Dr. Robert Pyne looks at the theological message found in five different popular Christmas carols. For the most part, these carols, when listened to for their content, help us remember a biblical worldview perspective of this popular holiday.*

## **Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus**

Most radio stations play some type of Christmas music during

the holiday season, but many of the songs have become so familiar to us that we no longer consider their content. In between the secular songs like “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” and “Up on a Housetop,” you may hear the strains of an old hymn by Charles Wesley called “Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus.” It was written in 1744, and it reads,

**Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us; let us find our rest in  
Thee.**

**Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth  
Thou art;**

**dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.**

**Born Thy people to deliver, born a child, and yet a King,  
born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.**

**By Thine own eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone;  
by Thine own sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious  
throne.**

“Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus” is a little heavier than most of the music we are used to hearing today, and if we are not careful we will miss much of the meaning. The first verse focuses on the fact that the coming of Jesus Christ fulfilled Israel’s longing for the Messiah. As the one whose coming was prophesied in the Old Testament, He is the “long-expected Jesus.”

A few of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled are Isaiah 7:14, which spoke of a virgin giving birth to a child whose name would mean “God with us;” Isaiah 9:6, which told of a child whose name would be called “Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, eternal Father, the Prince of Peace;” and Micah 5:2, which said that from Bethlehem would come a ruler whose “goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”

These and many similar prophecies looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, and many devout Jews prayed earnestly for the day when He would arrive. Luke 2 tells of Simeon, a man of



faith who was “looking for the consolation of Israel” (v. 25). When he saw Jesus as an infant, Simeon knew that this Child was the fulfillment of his messianic hope. Charles Wesley was borrowing from this passage when he described Jesus in this song as “Israel’s strength and consolation.”

Although He fulfilled Israel’s prophecies, Jesus came to bring salvation to the entire world, which is what Wesley was referring to when he described Christ as the “hope of all the earth” and the “dear desire of every nation.” More than that, He is the “joy of every longing heart.” He alone is the one who can satisfy every soul.

The second verse tells us why Jesus can meet our expectations: He was “born a child and yet a King.” As the One who is both God and man, Jesus was able to satisfy God’s wrath completely by dying on the cross for our sins. When Wesley wrote about Jesus’ “all sufficient merit,” he was referring to Christ’s ability to bring us to salvation.

“Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus” is a great song for Christmas, focusing on the “long-expected Jesus” who was born to set us free from sin and to bring us salvation by His death.

## **Hark! the Herald Angels Sing**

Charles Wesley’s best-known song is probably “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing.” It has been altered slightly by editors, but most of it remains just as Wesley intended when he wrote it over 250 years ago.

As we generally hear it today, the song begins with a triumphant proclamation of Jesus’ birth, describes the fact that He is both God and man, and then praises Him for the salvation He was born to provide.

The first verse reads, in part,

**Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled."**

Talking about peace on earth is popular at Christmas time, and appropriately so, for Jesus did come to bring peace. Primarily, however, He came to bring us peace with God, which is what Wesley meant when he wrote, "God and sinners reconciled." We have all sinned against God; we have broken His commandments and thus made ourselves His enemies. When people become enemies, they cannot go back to being friends until their differences are set aside. Sometimes reconciliation involves the payment of reparations, and which is essentially what Jesus did when He died on the cross. He paid the price necessary to reconcile us to God. The price was really ours to pay, not God's, but Jesus was able to pay it because, though He was God, He became also a man, being born as a baby on that first Christmas day.

Charles Wesley described Jesus' birth in the second verse of this song. He wrote,

**Late in time behold Him come, offspring of the Virgin's  
womb.**

**Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.**

Though He was the everlasting Lord, the second person of the Trinity (which is described in the song as "the Godhead"), fully equal in nature with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus became the "offspring of the Virgin's womb." He was "veiled in flesh," the "incarnate Deity." He was God, having become also a man. The name Emmanuel means "God with us," which is what Wesley was referring to when he wrote that Jesus was "pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel." He became a man, but in the process did not lose His deity. He was "God with us."

The idea that Jesus would lay aside His divine privileges for

any reason is nothing short of incredible, but He did so in order to provide us with salvation. Wesley focused on this amazing occurrence in the third verse, where he wrote,

**Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second  
birth.**

Jesus laid aside His own rights, coming to this earth and dying for our sins, that those who trust in Him might have eternal life. He was born that we might be born again, and that is good reason to sing “glory to the newborn King.”

## **0 Little Town of Bethlehem**

“0 Little Town of Bethlehem” was written in 1867 by Phillips Brooks, an Episcopal pastor from Philadelphia. He had been in Israel two years earlier and had celebrated Christmas in Bethlehem. This song describes the city not so much as it was when Brooks observed it, but as he thought it might have appeared on the night of Jesus’ birth.

The first verse reads,

**0 little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee  
tonight.**

The streets of our own cities are quiet on Christmas day; stores are closed and most people are at home. It is possible that Bethlehem was quiet on the night that Jesus was born, but we know that the place was full of people from out of town, and chances are that there were even more people on the streets than usual. But this song does not say as much about the level of activity in Bethlehem as it does about the fact that very few people even noticed the Baby who was born. One

line from the second verse reads, "While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love"—a situation that is true even today. The world goes on about its business, working, eating, sleeping, and playing, utterly oblivious to the spiritual realities around it. As Brooks wrote in the third verse of the song,

**How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven.  
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ  
enters in.**

When Christ came into this world, He came quietly. The angelic announcement to the shepherds was the only publicity that accompanied Him. He was born in a stable and laid in a feeding trough; He did not arrive with the pomp that one would expect of a King. For the most part, He still does not. When people today place their faith in Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that He comes to live inside them through the indwelling Holy Spirit (John 14:16-23; Rom. 8:9-11). There is not a lot of flash associated with an entrance like that, and some of your friends might not even notice the difference at first, but when you trust in Jesus Christ an incredibly significant event takes place. Your sins are forgiven and you are made a new person (John 5:24; 2 Cor. 5:17).

Jesus' coming means that Christmas does not have to be the lonely time that it is for so many people. We can experience His salvation and enjoy His presence as individuals, even though the world around us does not understand what is really going on. As the last verse of the song reads,

**O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us we pray,  
Cast out our sin, and enter in; be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel.**

# 0 Holy Night

The carol “0 Holy Night” by John Dwight begins by describing the night Jesus was born. It reads,

**0 holy night! The stars are brightly shining.  
It is the night of the dear Savior’s birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.**

The coming of Jesus Christ should make us feel valuable, and it should make us feel loved. John 3:16 tells us that Jesus came because “God so loved the world.” First Peter 1 reminds us that God has actually purchased us out of our slavery to sin, not with something perishable and comparatively worthless like silver and gold, “but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (vv. 18,19). The fact that Jesus gave Himself for us should cause our souls to feel their worth to God.

The second verse of “0 Holy Night” calls us to consider the incredible fact that the King of kings was born as a human infant and placed in a manger. Most of us cannot relate to that kind of birth—our children are usually born in hospitals and nurtured in the most sterile of environments. Jesus was not. He was born in a stable. More than that, He lived a life of poverty, experienced severe temptation and persecution, and died a brutal death, abandoned by His friends and wrongly condemned by His enemies. Thus, although we cannot always relate to His experiences, He can relate to ours. This empathy is what Dwight was describing when he wrote,

**The King of kings lay thus in lowly manger,  
In all our trials born to be our Friend.  
He knows our need, to our weakness is no stranger.  
Behold your King, before Him lowly bend.**

It must have seemed ironic for grown men to bow down before a

baby, but no act of worship was ever more appropriate.

Considering our Lord's birth should cause us to worship Him, and it should cause us to respond to one another with humility. The third verse of "O Holy Night" reads,

**Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is love and His gospel is peace.  
Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother,  
And in His name all oppression shall cease.**

We no longer have slavery in this country, but we have many other forms of oppression, and Dwight was correct in writing that the oppression of human beings is inconsistent with the worship of Christ.

The Bible tells us that we are to model the humility that Jesus demonstrated when He voluntarily laid aside His rights as God and became also a man in order to suffer for our salvation. Based on Christ's example, Paul writes,

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others (Phil. 2:3-4).

Paul tells us that we are wrong when we put our own interests ahead of someone else's, whether through the slavery that John Dwight spoke against or simply through insensitivity toward others. Because He loved us, Jesus chose not to exercise all of His rights. May we follow that pattern of humility as we love one another, even after Christmas.

## **Joy to the World**

"Joy to the World" was written by Isaac Watts and published for the first time in 1719. The song is a paraphrase of the

98th Psalm, and it has become one of the most popular Christmas carols of all time. The popularity of "Joy to the World" has resulted in a number of revisions designed to fit the theology of those singing it. For example, in 1838 the song was revised by a group of religious skeptics, who apparently liked the song but did not want to sing about the coming of the Lord. They changed the words from

**"Joy to the world! The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King.**

**Let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing,"**

to

"Joy to the world! The light has come [a reference to reason], the only lawful King. Let every heart prepare it room, and moral nature sing."

Several years ago the song was used by a marching choir in a major televised parade. But the choir only sang the first four words, "Joy to the world," and then just hummed the rest of the song!

People who do not believe in Jesus often do not mind singing about a baby born in a manger, but it is a little more awkward for them to sing about Him being the Lord of heaven and earth. And this song makes it very clear that Jesus did not just come to be an inspiring infant or a gentle teacher. He came as the Lord, the King of kings, fully deserving our praise.

"Joy to the World" continues with the words,

**No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground.**

**He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found.**

This verse alludes to Genesis 3, where God told the first man

that the ground itself would be cursed as a consequence of his sin. Instead of abundant crops, the ground would now produce thorns and thistles—weeds that would cause humankind to labor intensively in order to survive. With this verse of the song, Watts anticipates the day when the blessings of salvation in Christ will overturn sin's consequences "as far as the curse is found."

That day has not come yet, but someday Christ will return to reign in His glory and judge the nations. As the last verse of "Joy to the World" reads,

**He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the  
nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love.**

When Jesus came to this earth, He did not remain in the manger, where He might have been easily controlled. He did not even remain on the cross, where He might have been honored as a martyr. He rose from the dead, that He might reign over all creation. Whether people enjoy singing the words or not, Isaac Watts was right. "Joy to the world! The Lord is come."

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