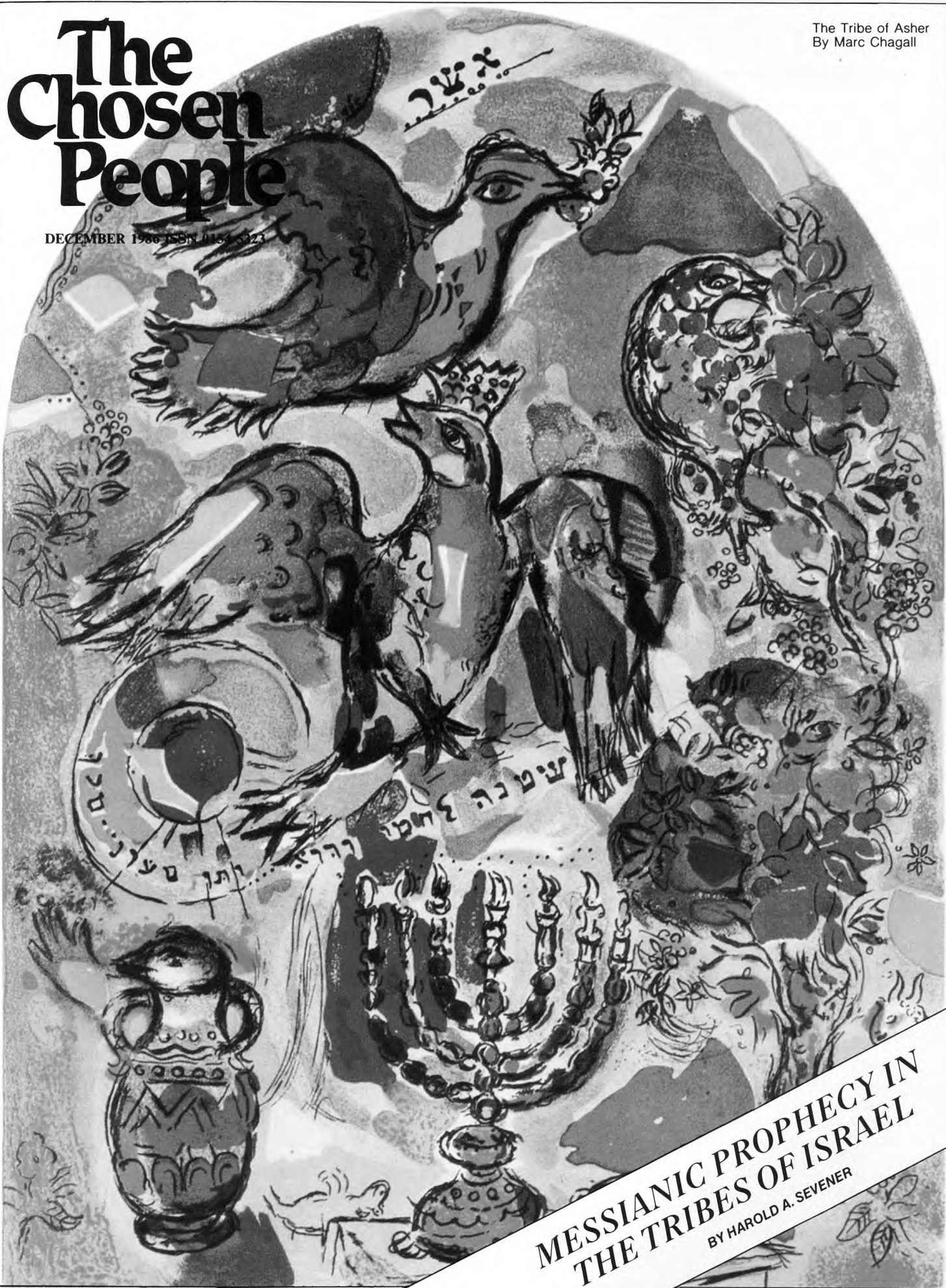


The Chosen People

The Tribe of Asher
By Marc Chagall

DECEMBER 1966 ISSN 0154-2023



**MESSIANIC PROPHECY IN
THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL**
BY HAROLD A. SEVENER

From the President



A star appeared suddenly in the eastern sky. Astrologers, philosophers, teachers, politicians, all wondered about the strange star. What did it mean? What did it signify? They had many questions, but no answers—so they did nothing.

The common people, the masses, saw the same star. They waited for an appropriate response from their leaders, but—in the end—they too did nothing.

Three other men also saw that same star. They had the same questions. But with one major difference. They had heard about the prophecies that foretold the birth of a Messiah—the Son of God.

When they saw the wondrous star, they followed it, traveling hundreds of miles. They were wise men—they acted upon the knowledge they had about God.

Sometimes I wonder why there were only three men who came. Where were all the others? Did only three men out of all the hundreds of thousands of people living in the East understand the “signs of the times”? Did only three understand the prophetic Word?

I am positive that the influence of the Daniels, the Jeremiahs, and the other prophets of the Exile, had a greater impact upon the Gentile world of their day than we could ever imagine. I believe these three men who came seeking Jesus were the product of the influence of godly Jewish men living in the Exile. They became wise to the things of God because someone had shared with them the facts of Scripture.

Perhaps these three men represented a greater body of believers—men and women who could not themselves make such a journey. Perhaps the precious gifts they bore represented the collective gifts of many who also were *wise*—because they too believed God’s Word.

Yes, wise men seek Him still. But, in order to be wise in the things of God, one must hear the Gospel. One must hear God’s Word.

Your missionaries, who you support with your prayers and gifts, are the Daniels, the Jeremiahs, the prophets of this generation. They are telling Jew and Gentile alike that our Messiah, the Lord Jesus, was born; that He died; that He was buried; that He rose from the dead on the third day; and that He is coming again.

Sometimes it seems that only a few respond. But we have found that the few represent the many more who are seeking, waiting and watching to see the results.

Thank you for helping us send wise men to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.

Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

In our Messiah,

HAROLD A. SEVENER

Our cover this month: The themes and prophecies within the Tribes of Israel fascinated the Jewish painter Marc Chagall. This month’s cover and pages 9-12 feature paintings preliminary to Chagall’s famous Jerusalem Windows in the Hadassah Medical Center Synagogue; all inspired by Jacob’s blessings.

The Chosen People

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When Tuning in, Turning On and Dropping Out Isn't Enough

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL GOLDSTONE

*Early 1973, Michael and Ron (left to right).
All smiles, at the lowest point in their lives.*



*Marijuana, music,
the beauty of nature—none of it was
enough. Michael
grew introspective,
wondering why he
hadn't found God yet.*

It was the age of natural foods, Joan Baez, war protests (Vietnam), Bob Dylan, and "getting back to the land." We (everyone under thirty) were positive that they (our parents' generation) had sold out to a plastic life. It was going to be different for us.

Like most students in the sixties, I spent a lot of time asking a lot of questions. It seemed that there was grave injustice in the world, and it seemed to me that I should be able to do something about it. But when I joined the protest marches, even though I was helping my fellowman, I sensed that we needed something more drastic than a new government. We needed all new people, people who were changed on the inside.

It also seemed to me that there had to be more to life than just being a nice Jewish boy from Queens who would go to college, get married, have children, and get a good job.

With these thoughts on my mind, a friend and I left New York in the summer of 1971 to go "exploring." We traveled throughout Canada and the United States, picking up hitchhikers, talking with fellow seekers, and trying to see if we could find a purpose to life.

That trip was very instrumental in my life. Until then all I had known were concrete walls, the constant noise of city life, and crowded streets. I thought the whole world played stickball in schoolyards surrounded by chain link fences.

Fellow Sojourners

Instead, I found a world outside of New York, a land full of color and fresh, clean scents. There were, especially in California, streets full of fellow sojourners who were seeking simple truths. They were beautiful people living off the land. I listened to them all, read their books on Eastern mysticism, and adapted their inward-bound philosophy.

By the time I returned to the University of Buffalo, I felt like a

continued on following page

stranger in a strange land. The pace at school was frantic. Most of my friends were into sports and the bar scene, and I couldn't relate to that anymore.

My life was heading in a new direction. The name of my favorite rock band summed up my destination: Procol Harum, which in Greek

means "beyond these things." I wanted to lay under the stars, get high, have a garden, listen to good music, and try to find God.

Hungry To Meet Him

The God I was looking for was not the God I had read about while studying for my Bar Mitzvah. He was not the God of any organized religion. I pictured the God I would find as one who loved and accepted all people and philosophies. Though I wasn't sure what or who He was, I was hungry to meet Him personally.

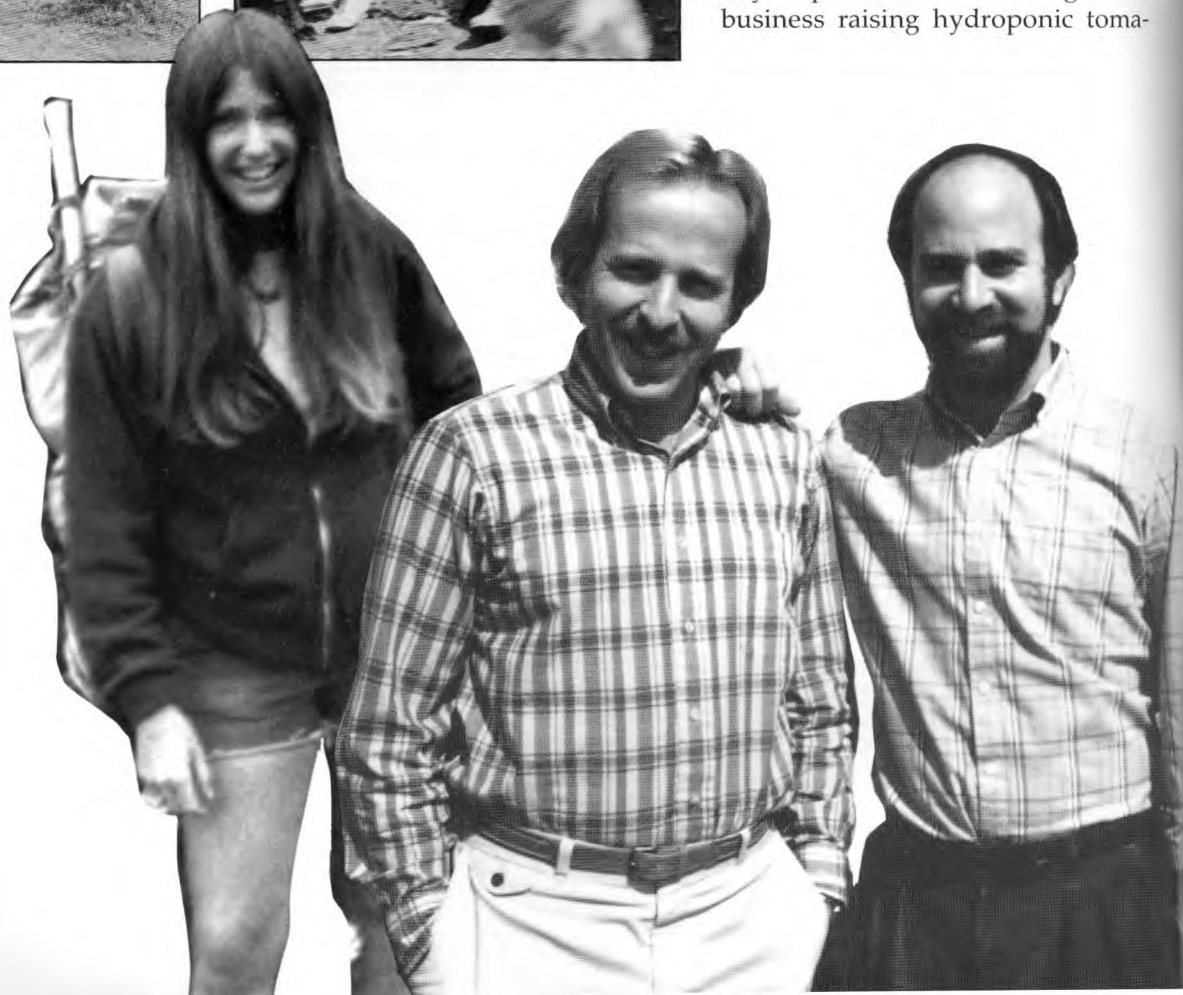
School that year was especially dissatisfying. The courses I selected didn't take much concentration. I wasn't sure what I was doing at college anyway, and life was aimless. My dream was to do something that would help me get in touch with myself.

By the summer of 1972 I knew it was time to do more than dream. My good friend Ron and I decided to buy a patch of land and go into business raising hydroponic toma-

The ranch (left) and left to right, Ron, Debra, and Michael.



Debra, like me she was a Jewish New Yorker who came West on a personal odyssey. After three days I knew I was in love.



toes. It may sound a little crazy now, but actually this was a growing and profitable industry.

We investigated other growers' methods, got some seed money from our folks, gathered our two dogs, and pointed our VW bug toward Florida. By North Carolina we agreed that the West Coast was more attractive, so we turned right on the Interstate and didn't stop until we got to northern California.

Our search for land started in Ukiah and led us straight up 101 North. At the Oregon border, we kept on going along Highway 199. Finally, in Grants Pass, Oregon, we wandered into the office of a neatly dressed, grey-haired, smiling female real estate agent, who, for some strange reason, took a liking to us.

Two Pony-Tailed Hippies

Ron and I—two pony-tailed, long haired, scruffy-bearded East Coast hippies—and our dogs all piled into her pickup truck (she drove most of her clients around in a Cadillac). She showed us every piece of land in the area.

There it was. It was so beautiful. Twenty acres of the kind of land people call God's country. Fifteen acres of woods. A gurgling brook. A log house built in 1919. A deep well. Beautiful views.

We chopped our own wood every day and built our own fires. We were 3,000 miles away from that other life. This was happiness, for at least three months anyway.

Then the dream disappeared. Marijuana, music, the beauty of nature—none of it was enough. I grew introspective, wondering why I hadn't found God and why I wasn't feeling content even though I seemingly had everything I wanted.

Ron and I rented out the log cabin to four hippies, and we moved into a shed on the property. That way we could make our land payments without working at all. I grew even more melancholy. Eventually we decided to go to Mexico in search of some magic mushrooms (organic LSD). They were supposed to give a very spiritual high which I thought would help me find real truth.

Wrapped up in myself the way I was, I became lonelier and emptier. I longed for someone who would listen to me and understand what I was feeling.

Hitchhiking down the Coast we met a lot of people. A number of Christians crossed our path. Ron later told me that these Christians had a strong effect on him. But to me, they were more people just trying to push their own views.

Hitchhiking down the Coast we met a lot of people. A number of Christians crossed our path, and we even stayed in a Christian commune called the Lighthouse Ranch. Ron later told me that these Christians had a strong effect on him. But to me, they were more people just trying to push their own views.

I'd let them talk about Jesus for about two minutes, then I'd tune them out. It seemed obvious that they had nothing to say, and their narrow mindedness really irked me.

All I could see was that my life was empty; my dream was void; I was dead on the inside; and I had tried everything I could. No one wanted

to listen to this ache inside of me. Instead people were just interested in themselves.

Mexico was horrible. After hitchhiking for days and then taking an old school bus 1,700 miles into the interior, I got dysentery. This plus rumors of massive arrests of American long-hairs forced us to turn back. Yet another disappointment.

Something Wonderful

Then, with things at an all-time low, something wonderful happened on our way back to Oregon. In San Francisco I met a girl named Debra. Like me she was a Jewish New Yorker who came West on a personal odyssey. We talked and talked. I had finally found someone who would listen to me and who seemed to understand my heart. After three days I knew I was in love and I asked her to marry me.

"Of course I won't," she answered.

But I knew better.

It was spring when I got back to Oregon. My spirits were high from the time with Deb, and I felt strangely alive. I started taking long walks in the woods, falling in love with the beauty of my ranch all over again and trying to express my gratefulness to God for introducing me to this wonderful woman.

I had never been so happy. Finding Deb, seeing nature's beauty fresh and clean, hearing a new song in my heart, all this burst inside of me. Each day I walked a little farther into the woods, and each day I found myself having longer and more intimate talks with God.

The more I talked to God, the more I realized I had found another Friend, a Friend who listened very deeply. I wanted to learn to listen to Him also.

I pulled out the Bible I had had for some time. I never really understood it or liked it before. But now the

continued on following page

September, 1986, left to right Ron and Michael, business partners.

words came alive and I couldn't stop reading. All the books on Eastern mysticism were like cotton candy. They had no substance compared to this piercing truth.

I went from Genesis through the Psalms, the Proverbs, and the prophets before I faced the inevitable: It was natural to continue into the New Testament. For the first time in my life I read about Jesus.

No words had ever been so real and powerful. Jesus was remarkable. Loving. Wise. His love and truth were so obvious that I couldn't stop reading.

New questions came to mind. How could He say He was the *only* way to the Father? How could I believe He was God when I had always believed there was only one God?

Star-Laden Darkness

Alone with these questions one night, I walked under a canopy of trees through the star-laden darkness. God seemed to walk with me, and I was both less and more alone than ever.

"I don't know," I told God. "How I can think about leaving everything I've ever known? Show me what to do." A cold, clutching fear grabbed me, but I had to go on. "If Jesus is real, show me. Help me. If You are the truth, Jesus, come into my life."

The magnitude of my prayer frightened and relieved me at the same time. But I knew I had met God in Jesus.

The next Sunday I was invited to Redwood Country Church by someone with whom I had shared my experience. Fifteen minutes into the service I felt very out of place. The hymn about the blood that washes us white as snow made me feel uncomfortable and strange.

Fortunately, part way through the sermon I recognized the same Jesus I had met that day in the woods.

The next day a car pulled up to my door and two men introduced themselves as members of the church. They looked about as different from me as anyone could, with their three-piece suits and crew cuts. But I had never met people who loved God like they did. The older man, William Lewis, must have been in his seventies, but he was so full of the Spirit he absolutely glowed.

New questions came to mind. How could He say He was the *only* way to the Father? How could I believe He was God when I had always believed there was only one God?

My questions poured out, especially about how impossible it seemed to be Jewish and believe in Jesus. He asked me to help him out with something and then he opened his Bible.

He read, "Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He took our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds

we are healed."

Then he asked, "Where do you think you could find that in the Bible?"

I shrugged. "Probably in Luke, or no, I know, it's in John."

He shook his head.

"Romans?"

"No."

"OK, Matthew."

He handed me the Bible. I couldn't believe it was in the Old Testament! In chapter 53 of Isaiah! Soon we were flipping through Scripture and seeing the full picture of Messiah, and I realized that believing in Jesus was a totally Jewish thing to do.

A Neverending Story

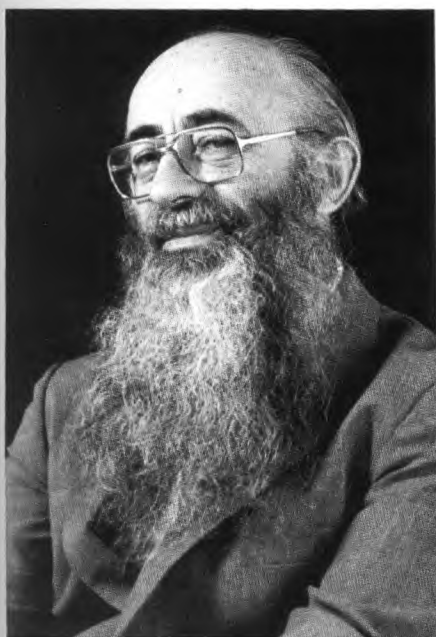
Well, the good part about this story is that it never ended. My friend Ron received the Lord; Debra soon came to faith as well. She and I got married. Shortly after that, my mother got saved. Another year later, my dad and brother made the same commitment.

We have two children — Shawna, age 11, and Brian, age 6. Ron and I are still best friends, and for the past three years we've been in business together.

It's as wonderful today as it was that spring in 1973. He's changed our lives from the inside out and has given us so much. Praise God! The deep peace He has given me makes me love and praise Him, the Giver of Life, the true God of Israel. □



A NEW HEART FOR HELEN



By ELIEZER URBACH
Missionary, Denver

To please her Christian mother-in-law, Helen was baptized and married in a church. But there was no commitment to the Lord on the part of this Jewish woman.

Several people had explained the Gospel to her. One fine Christian

I felt an instant kinship with this woman—she had a European accent, physical features resembling my own family, and an indelible number tattooed on her left arm. When I explained that I too had been through the Holocaust, she began to tell me her story.

woman, Mary, had taken her a Bible and the two of them were reading it together. I had been praying for Helen and Mary every day when Mary asked me to come speak with Helen.

I felt an instant kinship with this woman — she had a European accent, physical features resembling my own family, and an indelible number tattooed on her left arm. When I explained that I too had been through the Holocaust, she began to tell me her story.

“Barely 22 years old and just

married, I was taken to Auschwitz, along with my new husband, my widowed mother, and all my brothers and sisters. They were all sent to the crematoriums.”

Her tale of pain and unhappiness spanned forty years and continued for more than two hours as she shared her anger at those who had killed her family and the joyless life she now lived.

“Dear lady,” I told her gently, “the answer is Jesus.” I shared with her several verses and asked, “Do you want to turn all your woes over to Him?”

“No, I’m not ready for that,” she said.

I left her with my phone number and my prayers, but it was three months before I heard from them again. Mary sent me a postcard saying Helen would like to talk to me again. We arranged a lunch meeting which was a special treat, for Helen did some old-world European cooking for us.

After lunch, I asked Helen point blank, “Are you ready now to receive Jesus into your heart?”

“Yes, I think so. Read to me those verses again.”

This time as we discussed God’s salvation, she saw her own need for a Savior. Together we prayed, and she asked for forgiveness of sins, inviting Jesus to come into her heart.

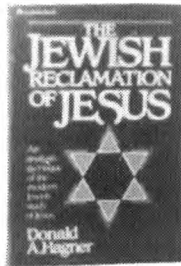
Please pray for this dear sister. Only by His Spirit whom He has given Helen can He heal the rage and bitterness which have lived in her heart for so long. □

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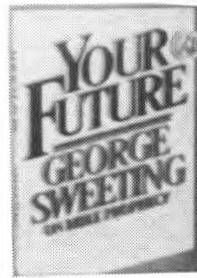
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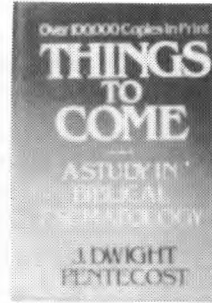
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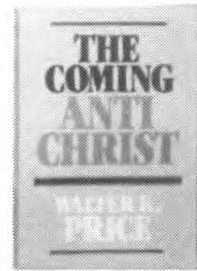
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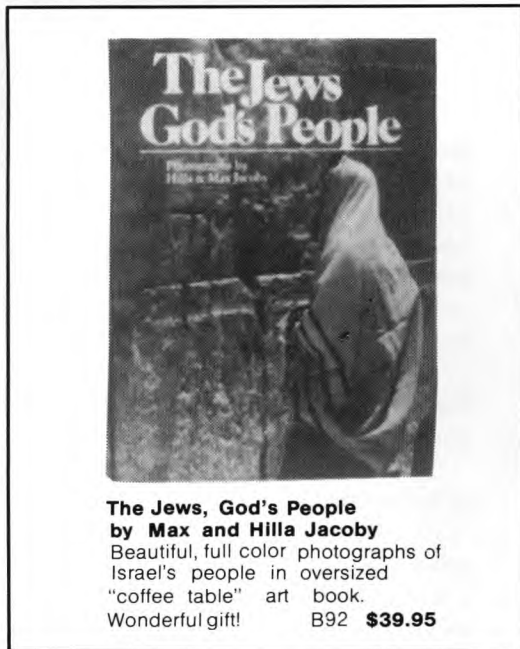
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Messianic Prophecies Within the Tribes of Israel

Biblical names are frequently used as pictures of something God wants to portray.

By HAROLD SEVENER

Biblical names are frequently used as pictures of something God wants to portray. For the last two months we have studied the names given each of the sons of Jacob (later to become the twelve tribes of Israel) and how each name is a miniature picture of the Messiah.

NAPHTALI

Continuing our study of the sons of Israel, we come next to Naphtali, who, like Dan, was a substitute son born to Bilhah, Rachel's handmaiden. The name *Naphtali* means "to wrestle with God," giving us a play on words in the Hebrew. Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings (or "With the wrestlings of God") have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed" (Gen. 30:8, 9). So she named her son Naphtali.

It is interesting to note that sometime after the birth of Naphtali, Jacob himself wrestled with God, and God gave Jacob a new name—Israel. Israel, meaning a "prince with God," was given to him because, in wrestling with the Lord, he prevailed (see Gen. 32:24).

In the name Naphtali is a picture those of us who are his spiritual descendants can really appreciate. As believers, we are told that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against

spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

We are also called upon to wrestle with the truth of God's Word and to take a stand against wickedness and unrighteousness. We are to be Naphtalis, wrestlers for the truth.

GAD

From Rachel we now turn back to Leah, who then gave her hand-



NAPHTALI

maiden Zilpah to Jacob. Gad was the first son from this union. (See Gen. 30:9-11.) The name *Gad*, meaning "with fortune" or "fortune has come," reminds us that in Scripture, *fortune* is not a term meaning "accidental prosperity" or "happens-stance wealth."

By naming this son Gad, Leah also testified to the hand of God upon her life, despite the fact that she remained unloved by her husband. She remembered that God is faithful to all who trust Him.

Inherent in the idea of good fortune is the direct involvement of God. It is God who prospers the righteous (Ps. 1:1-3). It is the Messiah Himself who shall see His seed, those born of faith, prosper (Isa. 52:13; 53:10, 11). It is those who love Israel and who pray for the peace of Jerusalem, who shall prosper (Ps. 122:6, 7).

Prosperity does not necessarily mean material blessing, it can mean spiritual blessing. In Gad we who are believers should see that God is faithful in supplying our every need and that we who are believers in Messiah will prosper in our faith.

ASHER

After Gad's birth, Zilpah has a second son, whom Leah named Asher (see Gen. 30:13), meaning "happy." Often in our English translation the Hebrew word *Asher* has been translated as "blessed." While the blessing of God implies happiness, there is another Hebrew word meaning blessed — *baruch*. In Asher, we have a picture of happiness from and in God.

In the Scriptures Israel is told to be happy (Dt. 33:29). The righteous man is said to be happy (Ps. 1:1). The man whose sins have been forgiven is said to be happy (Ps. 32:1, 2). The

continued on following page

one whom God corrects is said to be happy (Job 5:17). Those who wait upon the Lord are happy (Isa. 30:18). Those who put their trust in the Lord are happy (Ps. 2:12).

When the Lord Jesus, our Messiah, was here on earth, He taught His disciples the Beatitudes, all of which began with the word *happy* (see Mt. 5:3-11). Happy are the poor in spirit. Happy are those who mourn. Happy are the meek. Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Happy are the merciful. Happy are the pure in heart.

ZEBULUN

God always honors faith, and thus He blessed Leah again with a sixth son, whom she herself bore to Jacob.

This son she called Zebulun (Gen. 30:20). The name *Zebulun* comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to honor" or "exalt." A cognate word refers to elevation, having to do with mountain heights that are lofty, such as the abode of God's holiness on Mount Zion and Mount Moriah.

Once again there is a play on words in the Hebrew, this time between the meaning of "exalting"

dwelling with her.

So, too, is the promise of God that He would dwell in the sanctuary of His holy Temple (Ex. 25:8; 29:45, 46; Num. 35:34; 1 Kn. 6:13). He would dwell on Mount Zion (Isa. 8:18; Joel 3:17, 21).

He promised that when Messiah would come He would be called Immanuel, God with us. He would dwell among us (Jn. 1:14), and He would dwell in our hearts by faith (Eph. 3:17). As believers we are Zebulun. We are honored by the



GAD

Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

Leah called her son "Happy am I," because she had experienced God's grace. So, likewise, we as believers in Messiah experience God's happiness.

ISSACHAR

Honoring Leah's faith, God gave her a fifth son, Issachar, whose name, as we've seen in our previous study, means "recompense" or "reward for faithful service."



ASHER

and "honoring through dwelling." Leah said, "Now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons" (Gen. 30:20).

Throughout her married life, Leah, in faith, trusted God that Jacob would one day love her as he loved Rachel, that one day he would dwell with her as he dwelled with Rachel, and that one day he would honor her with his presence as he honored Rachel. The root word *zebul* is translated "dwelling," and inherent in the naming of *Zebulun* is Leah's hope that Jacob will honor her by



ISSACHAR

indwelling presence of God in our lives.

JOSEPH

Now God remembered Rachel, and she conceived and bore her first son. She named him Joseph, saying, "May the Lord give me another son" (Gen. 30:24). The name *Joseph* comes from the root word in Hebrew meaning "to add to one."

Rachel, trusting God and believing that He had removed her reproach, hoped she would continue to bear children; thus she

named her son Joseph. There is another prophetic significance in Joseph's name, for Joseph would add two more names to the fathers of the Messianic nation: Ephraim, meaning "fruitful," and Manasseh, meaning "forgetting."

Joseph, the one who "adds to," represents a very significant addition to our understanding of Messiah. Although in Scripture there is no reference that he is a type of the Lord Jesus, the parallel between the two lives is remarkable:



ZEBULUN

Joseph was the son loved by his father. Jesus was the Son loved by His Father.

Joseph was hated and despised by his brethren. Jesus, likewise, was hated and despised.

Joseph was sold for twenty pieces of silver. Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver. Joseph was sold to the nations (Gentiles). Jesus was sold and turned over to the nations.

Joseph was exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh. Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God,

His Father.

Joseph met his brethren and made himself known to them. Jesus, when He returns, will make Himself known to the Jewish people.

Joseph is also a type of the nation of Israel. He was sold into slavery, rejected, persecuted, and was exalted to rule over Egypt. So Israel as a nation has been sold into slavery, rejected, and persecuted, and it will one day be exalted to rule over the nations of the world.



JOSEPH

There is still another significant point to the name of Joseph. We, as believers, are to seek "first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto [us]" (Mt. 6:33).

BENONI (BENJAMIN)

Rachel named her second and last son Benoni as she died in childbirth (Gen. 35:18). The name *Benoni* literally means "son of affliction," "son of sorrows." Yet Scripture points out that his father called him Benjamin, which means "the son of

the right hand."

Rachel, realizing that she was dying, perhaps thinking back over her life, uttered prophetically the name Benoni. Jacob, however, inspired by the Holy Spirit, looked at the son in a different perspective and called him Benjamin.

In the names Benoni and Benjamin, we have a twofold portrait of the Messiah—the suffering Messiah, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, who is also the Son of exultation, the Son seated at



BENJAMIN

the right hand of God the Father.

The very place of Benjamin's birth—on the road to Bethlehem (Gen. 35:19)—speaks of the advent of Messiah. Jacob was on his way from Bethel (meaning "the house of God") to Bethlehem (meaning "the house of bread"). Likewise, our Messiah left the house of God (heaven) and came as our Savior to Bethlehem. He left the "house of bread" to become the "Bread of life." Having died for the sins of mankind, He has been exalted to the

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Throughout the Bible, God reveals his prophetic purposes, His redemptive program. The names and characters of the scriptures are given to us as examples. God faithfully keeps His promises to the nation of Israel and to all those who trust in Him.

right hand of God (Acts 2:33; 5:31).

Let us now put the names of the sons of Jacob together in the order of their birth and notice the redemptive program of God as spelled out in the sons of Israel, through whom the Messiah would come:

Reuben, behold the son; Simeon, hear him; Levi, join him;

Placed together, these names may read:

Behold, the Son; hear ye Him; join Him in faith; praise Him; for God is our Judge; we wrestle with God; He gives good fortune; happy are we; for He rewards us; with great honor dwelling in His presence; He adds to His family;



REUBEN

Judah, praise him; Dan, God is my Judge; Naphtali, wrestling with God; Gad, with good fortune; Asher, happy am I; Issachar, there is reward for faithful service; Zebulun, honor in dwelling in God's presence; Joseph, add to one; Benoni, son of affliction; Benjamin, son of the right hand.



LEVI

because of the Son of affliction, who is the Son of His right hand.

Throughout the Bible, God reveals His prophetic purposes, His redemptive program. The names and characters of the Scriptures are given to us as examples. God faithfully keeps His promises to the nation of Israel and to all those who trust in Him. □

HANUKKAH THE FEAST OF LIGHTS

On December 26 your Jewish friends will celebrate Hanukkah.

Because the holiday falls around Christmas and presents are exchanged, Hanukkah has become known as the "Jewish Christmas." But in fact, Hanukkah does not commemorate a religious event, but a military one: the Jewish revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes.

Antiochus, a Syrian ruler who occupied Israel between the Testaments, commanded the Israelites to worship his idols. His contempt for the God of Israel was so great that he slaughtered pigs on the altar of the Holy Temple.

One brave priest, Mattathias, led his family and a faithful band of Israelites in a revolt. Fighting valiantly in the name of the God of Israel, this group of unlikely heroes became known as Maccabees (hammerers) because they hammered against Antiochus and eventually defeated him.

With the fighting over, the Maccabees went to the Temple and cleared it of idols. When the Temple was ready to be rededicated, they had only one jar of oil for the menorah (Temple lights).

Then, as the legend goes, God did a great miracle. The single day's supply of oil lasted eight days, until a new supply could be consecrated. It is for this miracle that Hanukkah is also called the Feast of Lights.

The Bible mentions Hanukkah only once, in John 10:23-23, when Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate Hanukkah (referred to as the Feast of Dedication or the Feast of Lights).

The fact that our Lord celebrated Hanukkah is a reminder to us that He is the Light of the World; He is the way to cleanse the temple of our body from the occupying enemy of sin. □

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From the Exile to the Christ

The Rise of Greece

By DR. DANIEL FUCHS

Old Testament history closes with the Jews under Persian rule. A remnant of the Jews had returned to Jerusalem, and after many trials they rebuilt the Temple. The great majority of the Jews were still dispersed all over the Persian Empire.

Not much is known about the history of the Jews in this period. The Scriptures, particularly Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, and Zechariah do give us some important details concerning the history of Judah, but authoritative data are sparse about the history of the Jews who remained in the Persian Empire.

An indication of their condition is found in the Book of Esther. This book vividly describes life in Persia during its decline. The story opens with an account of a luxurious feast staged by the king. He is Ahasuerus in Ezra 4:6 (KJV) and in the Book of Esther.

"The name Ahasuerus is an appellation, which means the chief king, or king of all kings. Xerxes, the son of Darius Hystaspes, bore this title, king of kings. This title is also given to him in the cuneiform inscriptions. One of these reads as follows: 'I, the mighty king, king of kings, king of populous countries, king of this great and mighty earth, far and near.'"

A.C. Gaebel, *Concise Commentary*, p. 403.

The Bible describes him as "the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush" (Est. 1:1). The familiar story opens with the account of a sumptuous "banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present" (Est. 1:3).

Xerxes had three capital cities, but his proudest possession was his winter capital, "the citadel of Susa" (Est. 1:5).

The Bible gives us a glimpse of the opulence of his winter palace. "The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There

were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. Wine was served in goblets of gold." (Est. 1:6, 7).

Xerxes Wasn't "King of Kings"

The Book of Esther was written to demonstrate that Xerxes was not "king of kings." It was written to the Jewish people who were scattered all over the Persian world and who were facing a seemingly certain extinction. Xerxes "ruled over 127 provinces from India to Cush," but one night he couldn't sleep (Est. 6:1). God was to show the enemies of the Jews who the King of Kings really is!

The reign of Xerxes ushered in a new era in redemption history. Old Testament history is the story of two civilizations, each of which thrived around the deltas of great rivers. In the East the Mesopotamian civilization grew in the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which flow into what is now known as the Persian Gulf.

The Fertile Crescent

Fifteen hundred miles to the west another great civilization rose on the delta of the Nile River, which empties into the Mediterranean Sea. The only feasible corridor through which these cultures could communicate either through trade or war was the Fertile Crescent, which is the fertile green area that extends northwest from the Persian Gulf along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and then dips southward into Canaan.

Abram was born in Ur of the Chaldees, near the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. When he was 75 years old, he followed the Fertile Crescent to Haran and from there, he and his family migrated to Canaan (see Gen. 2:4, 5 and map, "World of the Patriarchs").

From Canaan Abram migrated to Egypt and later

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returned to Canaan. The road traveled by Abram was the same route taken by the nations in the Old Testament world. When the Assyrians or the Babylonians attacked Egypt, and when Egypt attacked the Assyrians, the only feasible route was through Canaan, which is now the nation of Israel.

With the ascendancy of Persia, a different area of potential conquest arose. When Cyrus the Great began his campaign for world dominion, before he attacked Babylon, he defeated Croesus in Lydia. This kingdom was in western Asia Minor (now western Turkey). In Lydia there were a number of Greek settlements.

Fierce Rivalry

These Greeks maintained very close ties with their kinsmen in Europe just across the Aegean Sea. The Greeks in Europe lived in independent city-states. There was fierce rivalry among them, and Cyrus realized that if Persia was to rule the world he would not only have to subdue all of Lydia, he would eventually have to conquer the Greek city-states as well. Sooner or later Persia would have to fight the European Greeks.

Both Cyrus and Darius the Great made abortive attempts to crush the city-states of Greece. All that they did was to unite the quarreling cities for a time. When the Ionians revolted, Darius determined to bring the city-states of mainland Greece into his empire. He sent an expedition to Athens. This ended in failure at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.

Xerxes was 35 years old when he succeeded Darius. He had two problems at this ascendance — the Greek cities were continually revolting, and the land of

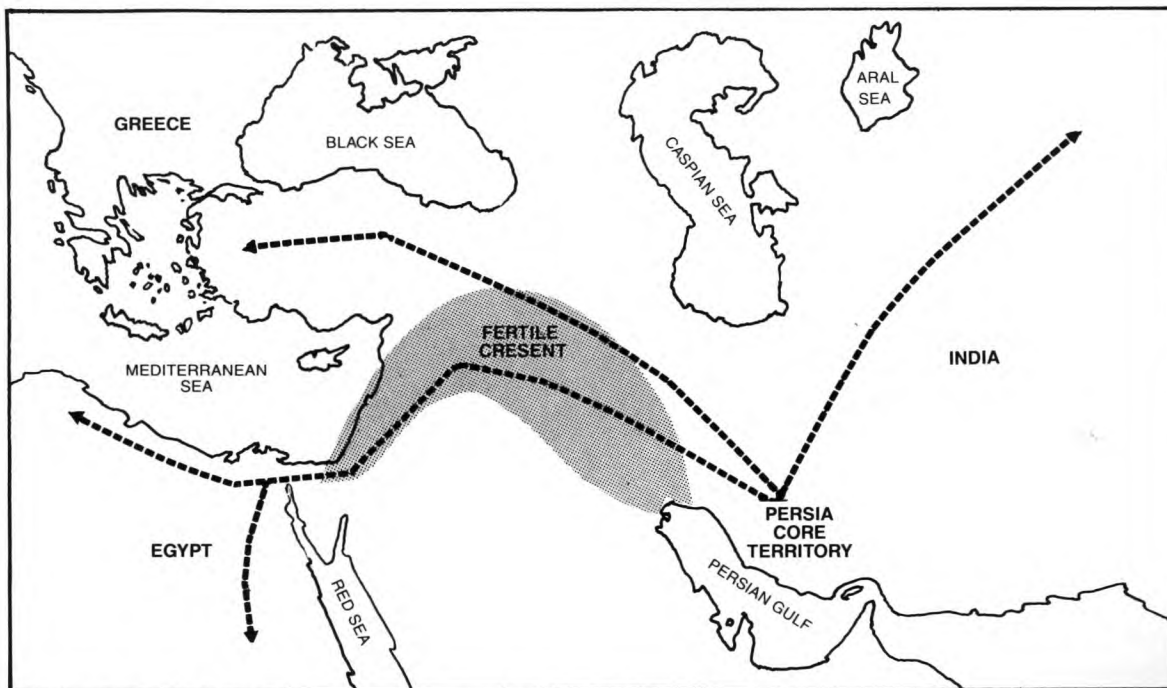
Egypt thought that this was a good time for revolt. Xerxes decided to handle his problems one at a time. He subdued Egypt. Then Babylon also revolted and Xerxes cruelly demolished their temple. Ever since, the Persian kings used "King of Babylon" as part of their royal title. Xerxes called himself "King of Persia and Media."

Xerxes felt it was now time to attack Greece. He carefully planned his attack both by land and sea.

"Xerxes prepared leisurely but thoroughly for the second Persian attack upon Greece. For four years he collected troops and materials from all the provinces of his realm; and when, in 481, he at last set forth, his army was probably the largest ever assembled in history before our own century. Herodotus reckoned it, without moderation, at 2,641,000 fighting men, and an equal number of engineers, slaves, merchants, provisioners, and prostitutes; he tells us, with perhaps a twinkle in his eye, that when Xerxes' army drank water whole rivers ran dry. It was, naturally and

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The growth of the Persian Empire

WARS OF XERXES (AHASUERUS)

fatally, a highly heterogeneous force. There were Persians, Medes, Babylonians, Afghans, Indians, Bactrians, Sogdians, Sacae, Assyrians, Armenians, Colchians, Scyths, Paeonians, Mysians, Paphlagonians, Phrygians, Thracians, Thessalians, Locrians, Boeotians, Aeolians, Ionians, Lydians, Carians, Cilicians, Cypriotes, Phoenicians, Syrians, Arabians, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Libyans, and many more. They were footmen, cavalymen, chariots, elephants, and a fleet of transports and fighting triremes numbering, according to Herodotus, 1207 ships in all. When Greek spies were caught in the camp, and a general ordered their execution, Xerxes countermanded the order, spared the men, had them conducted through his forces, and then set them free, trusting that when they had reported to Athens and Sparta the extent of his preparations, the remainder of Greece would hasten to surrender."

Will Durant, *The Life of Greece*, p. 238.

Engineering Feat of All Time

In the spring of 480 B.C. the Persian hordes reached Hellespont (now called the Dardenelles), the narrow strait which separates Asia Minor from Europe. The Egyptian and Phoenician engineers in Xerxes' army built a bridge of ships across the Hellespont that was one of the outstanding engineering feats of all time. According to Herodotus, the bridge was constructed of 674 ships, each moored with a heavy anchor. They made cables of flax and papyrus, bound the cable to the ships, and made the cables taut by using capstans. Trees were cut and planks were laid across the cables. The planks were covered with earth, and the bridge became a road. In one week the entire host crossed from Asia into Europe.

The Jews were generally well treated during the two centuries of Persian rule. Throughout the Empire they built synagogues. There is evidence that after the events in Esther they became intensely missionary-minded. They devoted their lives to the preservation, copying, and teaching of the holy writings. From this time on, the intellectual life of the children of Israel was devoted to the study of the Law and the Prophets.

Imagine the terror of the Greeks as this horde advanced. For once Sparta and Athens and the other Greek city-states united, but at first it seemed that defense was futile. Athens was occupied, but the Greek refugees fled with the Greek navy to Salamis,

where the Greeks trapped the Persians and destroyed an entire corps, as well as the Persian navy. Xerxes' army retreated and was defeated at Plataea in 479 B.C.

If the Greeks had not defeated Persia, the development of Europe under Xerxes would have been very different!

A Greater King

All students of history realize the importance of Greek-Persian wars. A believer in the Scriptures realizes much more. Xerxes was a great king, as kings go, but his father, Darius, knew of a greater King.

For he is the living God
and he endures forever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed,
his dominion will never end.
He rescues and he saves;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth.
He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions.

(Dan. 6:26, 27)

The Jews were generally well treated during the two centuries of Persian rule. Throughout the Empire they built synagogues. There is evidence that after the events in Esther they became intensely missionary-minded. The Persians gave the Jews an autonomous government in Jerusalem. They had their own governors, who were mainly priests of the house of Aaron. During these centuries, the order of the scribes arose. They devoted their lives to the preservation, copying, and teaching of the holy writings. From this time on, the intellectual life of the children of Israel was devoted to the study of the Law and the Prophets. The scribes and the synagogue welded the Jews into one people. The center of worship at Jerusalem brought foreign Jews to Palestine, thereby increasing both the wealth and population of the Holy Land.

Daniel's Vision

Persia was the second world empire prophesied by Daniel. The third, Greece, was on the threshold of world dominion. Two centuries before Alexander the Great defeated Persia, Daniel had a vision: "In my vision I saw myself in the citadel of Susa" (Dan. 8:2). This is where Esther became the queen. It was a vision of a ram with two horns and a goat "... from the west, crossing the whole earth without touching the ground" (Dan. 8:5).

Gabriel interpreted Daniel's vision: "The two-horned ram that you saw represents the kings of Media and Persia. The shaggy goat is the king of Greece, and the large horn between his eyes is the first king" (Dan. 8:20-21).

One of the truths of the Book of Daniel is that there is a greater King than Alexander the Great! □



They Saw His Star.

By **MICHAEL RYDELNIK**
Missionary, Long Island

The Grinch scorns it; Macy's counts profits; Tiny Tim blesses everyone. Christmas evokes a variety of responses, but each of these only demonstrates attitudes toward Christmas. Of greater significance is how we respond to Jesus, the Messiah whose birth is celebrated at Christmas.

The visit of the Magi (Mt. 2:1-15) is probably recounted in every church Christmas play. Yet, this familiar story is not for Christmas only, but for every day. It demonstrates three possible reactions to the Lord Jesus, which persist even now.

Three Gentile wise men directed by a supernatural star came to Jerusalem. Their worship demonstrates the proper response to the Messiah in four ways.

The King's Hostility

First, there was Herod's reaction of hostility. This Roman puppet king of the Jews feared the One who was rightly born King of the Jews (2:2, 3). He was afraid that this little Baby was going to interfere with his life, his place, and his power. So Herod plotted to murder the promised Messiah and to thwart the plan of

God (2:13). But God's plans are never hindered. God sovereignly protected His Son by sending Him to Egypt until Herod's death (2:13-15).

There are still those in the world who would destroy the Lord Jesus. It may be a government that persecutes or even murders His followers or a business executive who hinders the advancement of a believer for his or her honesty. Such persecutions, which on the surface are directed against God's children, truly demonstrate hostility toward God's Son. Our comfort remains the same: God is in full control. His purposes cannot be thwarted.

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The Religious Leaders' Indifference

Second, the chief priest and scribes responded with complete indifference to the Messiah's birth. Their apathy was even more culpable because it was knowledgeable. Herod, the political leader, asked these religious leaders where the Messiah was to be born (2:4). They immediately knew the answer was Bethlehem. They turned to the correct prophetic Scripture; they interpreted it accurately; they even knew the reason for Messiah's birth: to shepherd His people (2:5, 6).

The religious leaders lacked only one thing: They did not act on their knowledge. They did not go to Bethlehem to seek Him. The Promised of ages, the Shepherd of Israel, the King-Messiah, the One for whom all Israel waited had been born. Yet Israel's religious leaders refused to travel the five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to welcome or worship Him. They were so engrossed in Temple worship and biblical discourse that they were indifferent to the One to whom the Temple and the Bible pointed. All their information was useless. They responded with intellectual, informed indifference.

Overcoming Indifference

There are still those who are so interested in their own affairs that the Lord Jesus means nothing to them. Even believers can get so caught up in Bible study groups, church projects, and social issues that they begin to care little for the Lord Himself. We can know much doctrine and Bible but still be indifferent to God. The way to overcome indifference is found in the response of the Magi.

The Magi's Worship

The Magi reacted with worship. These Gentile wise men from the East, directed by a supernatural star, came to Jerusalem, seeking the King



The tyranny of the urgent and the cares of daily life often separate us, like a barren desert from our King. Worshipping Him must be a priority.

of the Jews. Their worship demonstrates the proper response to the Messiah in four ways.

First of all they gave worship number-one priority. They told Herod, "We saw his star... and have come to worship him" (2:2). Because of this goal, they crossed a trackless desert, paid for provisions and guides, braved the elements, endured the threat of robbers, even obtained an audience with King Herod, so that they could worship the Jewish Messiah.

The tyranny of the urgent and the cares of daily life often separate us, like a barren desert, from our King. Worshipping Him must be a priority. As J.B. Phillips said, "If the Christian is to maintain the spiritual life within him, he must by desperate resolution elbow a space in his

activities when he can obey the command to "Be still and know that I am God."

Second, the Magi worshipped joyfully. After they left Herod, the guiding star reappeared, prompting them to rejoice at the prospect of seeing the Child (2:10). The irksomeness often felt when approaching the Lord is inconsistent with worship. Remember, worship of the Lord of life is a joy, not a burden.

Submissive Worship

Third, the Magi's worship was submissive. They brought the noblest gifts that they could to express their reverence and submission (2:11). Likewise, we must bring all that we have, our time, our goals, our egos, and our talents and lay them at the Savior's feet.

Finally, the Magi's worship produced obedience. After adoring the Child, God warned them not to return to Herod but to go home another way. Risking the wrath of Herod, they obeyed God's Word out of love for His Son (2:12). In the same way, believers must obey the Bible no matter what the cost. Haddon Robinson once said, "Selected obedience is not obedience, it is merely convenience."

If we are to be wise men this Christmas and every day, we must respond to the Savior even as the Magi did. We must worship the Lord Jesus, the King of the Jews. □

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Questions and Answers

QUESTION: Is the traditional date of Messiah's birth during the month of December trustworthy? It would appear unlikely that shepherds would have been pasturing their flocks during the winter months.

ANSWER: Many who have objected to the traditional date of Messiah's birth on the grounds that the rains or rare snowfalls of December would prevent the flocks from being kept out all night "in the field" are mistaken. The Mishnah sheds a great deal of light on this question. It states; "If cattle be found, between Jerusalem and Migdal Eder (The watch tower of the flock) — and to an equal distance (from Jerusalem) in every direction — males are to be considered as burnt-offerings and females as

peace-offerings. Rabbi Judah says, if valid for Passover-offerings they must be considered as Passover-offerings if (such cattle are found) within thirty days of the Festival (of Passover.)" (Shekalim 7.4).

The shepherds to whom the angelic message came (Lk. 2:8-20) were those watching the flock near Bethlehem destined for sacrifice in the Temple. The Migdal Eder, referred to in the Mishnah, was a well-known "watch tower of the flock" located between Bethlehem and Hebron (see Gen. 35:21; Mic. 4:8). In fact, it was so well known that if flocks or cattle were found as far from Jerusalem as the Migdal Eder, and within that circuit in all directions, the males were offered as burnt-offerings and the females as peace-offerings.

Thus the shepherds mentioned in Luke were on their way to Jerusalem with their flock to offer as sacrifices at the Temple. These flocks were not regularly pasturing in the open during this season. Rather, they were just passing through.

Rabbi Judah's statement is also noteworthy for it indicates that if such cattle or flocks were found within thirty days of the Passover festival and were valid for Passover-offerings, they must be considered as Passover-offerings. Thus the Mishnah considers the possibility of cattle or flocks in the open pasture thirty days before Passover, or during the month of February when the rainfall in Israel is the heaviest in the year.

For more information about introducing your Jewish friends to the Messiah, please contact a regional director near you

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