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



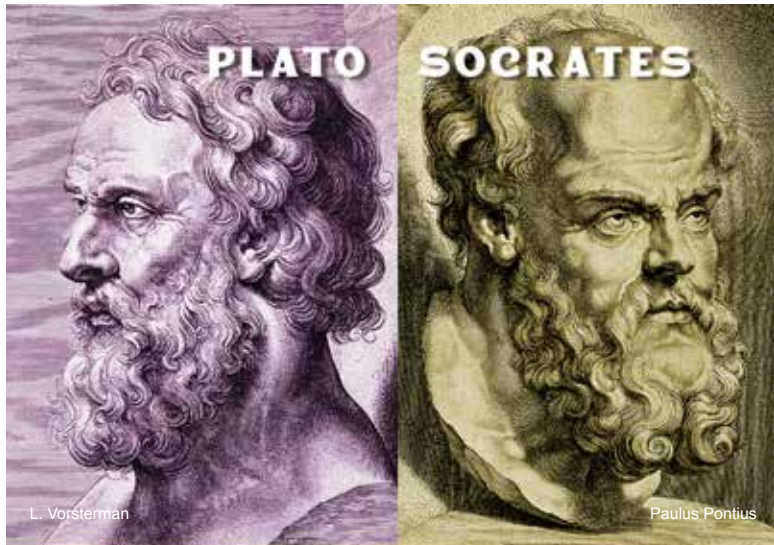
Plato & The End Times

BY GARY HEDRICK

Someone has well observed, “The story of the future is written in the past.” How true! History offers important clues—if we are listening—about what the future holds.

One set of such clues is found in the writings of Plato (428–347 BC),¹ quite possibly the most influential of the ancient Greek philosophers. He studied the histories of ancient Greek city-states, both real and imagined, and published his observations in *The Republic*.

One of Plato’s conclusions was that once the citizenry loses its “virtue,” democracy quickly descends into anarchy.² Then, in the aftermath of this collapse, a “tyrant” rises up out of the chaos and becomes a dictator.



Origen of Alexandria and a page from sermons on the Psalms in Greek

¹ Plato was a student of Socrates and later became teacher and mentor of Aristotle. He lived nearly four centuries before the birth of Christ and founded what has been called the first university in the western world—his Academy. His works *The Republic* and *Apology* have had a profound impact on modern civilization.

² Plato wrote a great deal about his concept of “virtue.” To him, virtue consists of four essential traits: temperance, prudence, courage, and justice—all of which enable people to achieve their “highest good.” We will define those four traits later in this article. In *The Republic*, Plato warned that once the people in a Democracy lose their virtue, the State quickly disintegrates into chaos—and, finally, into Tyranny.

The irony in Plato’s scenario is obvious. We often think of democracy as the highest and most noble form of government. But if the philosopher from Athens was right, democracy is often the doorway to dictatorship!

Should Christians Listen to Plato?

Understandably, Bible-believers tend to view Plato with a healthy measure of skepticism. They see him as the premiere champion of pagan philosophy and a promoter of ungodly notions—something the NT warns us about: *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ* (Col. 2:8).

The widely respected creationist theologian Henry Morris, in his comments about Origen of Alexandria (AD 185–253), linked Plato with the religious errors of Origen:

With all his immense learning and zeal, however, it is sad that Origen’s views of theology and biblical interpretation were heretical with respect to numerous key doctrines. . . . He felt constrained to harmonize Christianity with pagan philosophy, especially that of Plato and the Stoics.³

Dr. Morris is correct. What happened was that Plato influenced Origen who, in turn, laid the groundwork in the early, formative phase of Christendom for the allegorical view of Scripture. Centuries later, in the time of Augustine (AD 354–430), this gave rise to a view that we know today as Amillennialism, a non-literalist approach to the Bible. For obvious reasons, this is problematic for conservative premillennialists (like us) who take an inerrantist, literal-historical view of Scripture.⁴

Nonetheless, the fact remains that some early Christian theologians found parallels between Plato’s ideas and Scripture.⁵ Some of Plato’s reflections on politics and cycles of history do indeed seem to sync up well with aspects of the Bible’s teachings about the end times.

Was Plato a Prophet?

No, Plato wasn’t a prophet in any formal sense. He was a pagan philosopher; however, truth is still truth, no matter who says it. Plato made observations about the rise and fall of civilizations (i.e., Greek city-states) that can inspire and instruct us even now, in the twenty-first century.

³ Henry M. Morris, *The Henry Morris KJV Study Bible* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2012), 2150.

⁴ Literalism doesn’t mean we don’t recognize legitimate symbols and metaphors in Scripture. According to David L. Cooper’s “Golden Rule of Interpretation,” being a literalist means that “when the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, [we] seek no other sense.” Cooper went on to explain that we should “take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise” (David L. Cooper, *When Gog’s Armies Meet the Almighty in the Land of Israel* [Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1958], 104).

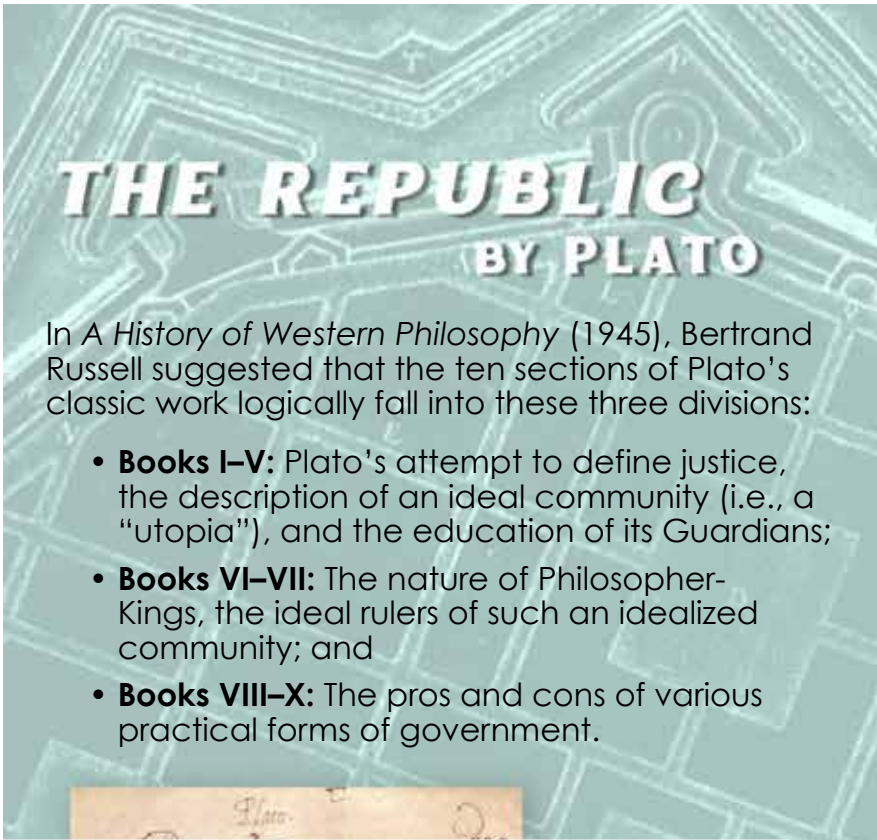
⁵ The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* labels Augustine a “neoplatonist,” in part because the ancient church father appreciated Plato’s regard for eternal truth, his affirmation of the immortal soul, and his recognition of a greater, spiritual reality beyond this physical world (“forms”). Augustine concluded that Plato’s “forms” originated with God (Nick Robinson, “Platonic Influence on St. Augustine’s Philosophy” in *Seattle Pi* (education.seattlepi.com)).

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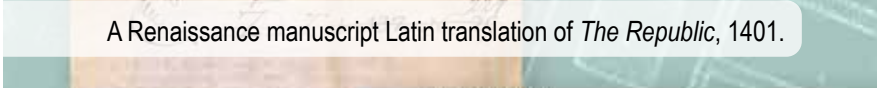


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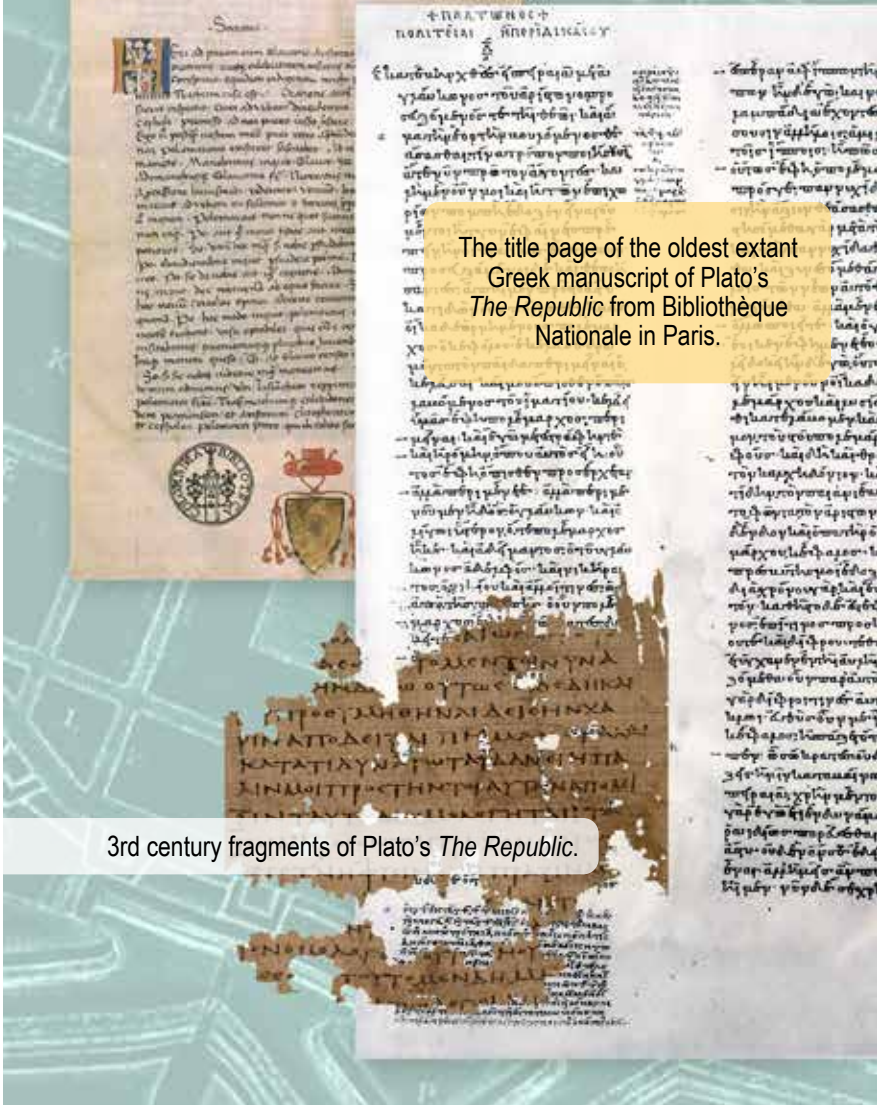


In *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945), Bertrand Russell suggested that the ten sections of Plato's classic work logically fall into these three divisions:

- **Books I–V:** Plato's attempt to define justice, the description of an ideal community (i.e., a “utopia”), and the education of its Guardians;
- **Books VI–VII:** The nature of Philosopher-Kings, the ideal rulers of such an idealized community; and
- **Books VIII–X:** The pros and cons of various practical forms of government.



A Renaissance manuscript Latin translation of *The Republic*, 1401.



The title page of the oldest extant Greek manuscript of Plato's *The Republic* from Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

3rd century fragments of Plato's *The Republic*.

Like most superior intellects, Plato had an insatiable curiosity. Growing up in ancient Greece, the birthplace of democracy, he was particularly interested in politics and human governance. In fact, the original Greek title of *The Republic* was *Politeia* (πολιτεία), the Greek word for “commonwealth” or “citizenship.” In this fascinating book, the philosopher wrote about political theory, the inner workings of city-states, and his concept of justice.

What is justice, anyway? Is a just person happier than someone who is unjust? And what does justice look like in real-life city-states where there are inevitable conflicts between the elite, refined “haves,” and the more numerous masses of “have nots”? How much power and influence should the super-rich elites be allowed to exert over everyone else? These are some of the issues Plato tackles in *The Republic*. His arguments take the form of a series of question-and-answer dialogues with his famous mentor, Socrates (470-399 BC).⁶ Christians won't agree with everything Plato writes because, after all, we possess a great deal more “light” today than he had 2,500 years ago. Nonetheless, we may find that his words ring with truth more than most of us might have expected.

Plato's Vision of the Ideal City

According to a widely used academic study aid, Plato's intent in *The Republic* was “to establish philosophically the ideal state, a state that would stand as a model for all emerging or existing societies currently functioning during Plato's time and extending into our own times.”⁷

In *The Republic*, Socrates (in his ongoing conversation with Plato) wonders what caused the decline and collapse of city-states in his day. Many readers are surprised to learn that Plato sees Greek-style direct democracy not as a positive development, but rather as a precursor to a crude type of mob rule, just one downward step away from totalitarianism.

Plato identifies the shortcomings that lead city-states down that primrose pathway to dictatorship and ultimate destruction. But he doesn't leave it there. He finishes *The Republic* with a flourish that includes his vision of a city-state he names Kallipolis (Καλλίπολις), a hypothetical, utopian paradise ruled by a great, benevolent philosopher-king.⁸ He wants his readers to see that there is a better way than what he observed in ancient, Greek city-states. In Kallipolis, which only exists in his imagination, all segments of society live in harmony. There is no poverty or unemployment. There is universal peace, prosperity, and justice. The weak are no longer victimized and exploited by the powerful. Discrimination and injustice are things of the past. Everyone has a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Everything is as it should be. This is the ideal city that Plato envisioned.

⁶ Interestingly, Socrates himself left no written materials—or at least, none that survived. Most of what we know about him today has come down to us in the writings of his students, like Plato and Xenophon. Did Plato put words in Socrates' mouth in *The Republic*? Or did Socrates actually say these things? No one knows for sure.

⁷ “Republic (Plato),” *Cliff's Notes* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2022), np.

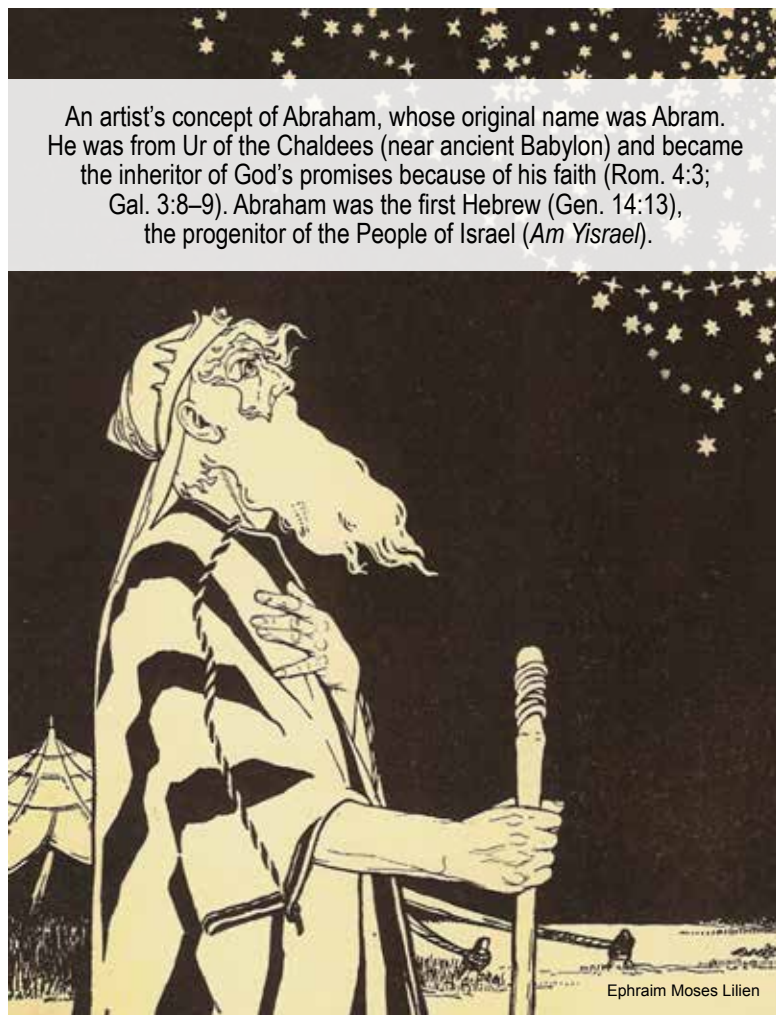
⁸ In Greek, *kallipolis* means “beautiful city.”

Father Abraham and the New Jerusalem

The philosopher's vision of Kallipolis is certainly awe-inspiring. As it turns out, though, Plato was a latecomer in his vision of the idyllic city. Fifteen hundred years earlier, Abraham (c. 2000 BC) had longed for a future city where all people could flourish and all wrongs would finally be made right.

The writer of the NT Book of Hebrews has this abbreviated version of Abraham's story:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (11:8–10).



Abraham lived in the 20th century BC, long before Plato. He was a native Mesopotamian whose roots were near ancient Babylon; however, God called him to leave his home and take his family with him. He had seen the greatest metropolis of his day—Babylon with its amazing, sprawling architecture and hanging gardens—but according to Hebrews, he was looking for an even greater city, one designed and built by God himself.

In the NT, this city is called the New Jerusalem, which is another name for Heaven, God's dwelling place. It's currently located somewhere in the heavenlies, or possibly in another dimension, but someday it will blaze its way into the upper atmosphere, descend, and assume its place in the Middle East on a renewed earth (Rev. 21:1–2).

Yeshua and God's Heavenly House

On one occasion, Yeshua and His disciples were together in Jerusalem during the run-up to Passover week.⁹ Everyone's attention was on the sprawling campus of the magnificent Herodian Temple, which would be the center of the upcoming celebration.

The Temple, known in Hebrew as *Beit HaMikdash* ("the Holy House") was imposing and impressive. Structurally, its foundation stones weighed up to five hundred seventy tons apiece. Think of that—more than a million pounds each! Even today, engineers aren't sure how those magnificent stones were laid.



The massive Herodian Temple was destroyed by the Roman General Titus in AD 70. This model is on display outside the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

© 2009 templar1307.com

The palatial Temple and its huge, surrounding plaza (an area equivalent to six football fields), along with the shopping areas down below, could accommodate up to one million worshipers on the high holy days. It was in this setting that the Lord took the opportunity to explain to His disciples that the Temple, with all its immensity and grandeur, was only a small, imperfect reflection of God's heavenly House, the New Jerusalem. Not only that, He said, but every one of God's people will have his/her own "mansion" inside God's House—so there's plenty of room! He told them, "*In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you*" (John 14:2).

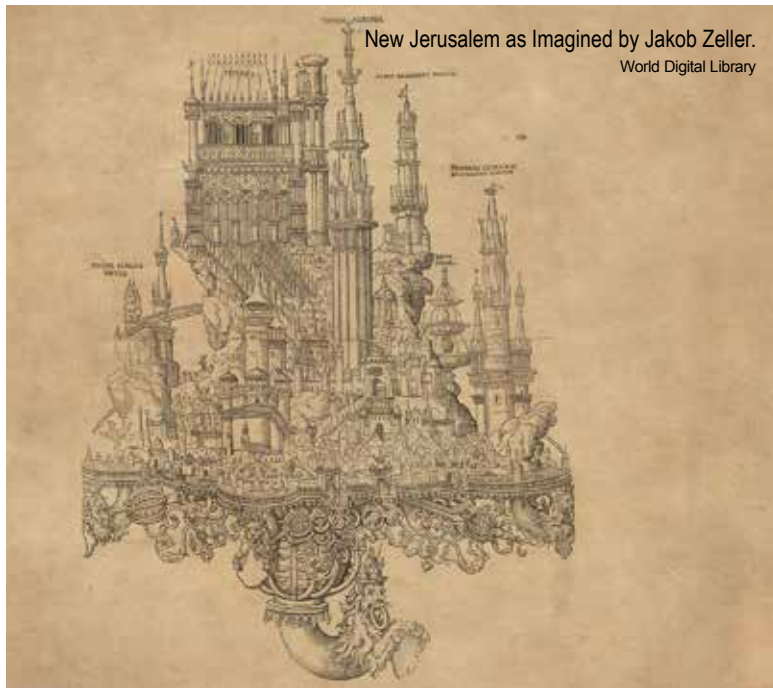
⁹ This would have been during the month of Nisan on the Jewish calendar, probably in the year AD 30.

A Mansion or a Room?

Most modern Bible translations use either “rooms” or “dwelling places” in John 14:2 rather than “mansions.” The Greek word is *moné* (μονή), which literally means “to remain.” It conveys the imagery of a personal space where we can spread out and stay—a place that’s set aside just for us and where we can make ourselves right at home.¹⁰

Later in the verse, a corresponding term is “place”—“I go to prepare a *place* for you.” Here, the Greek word is *topos* (τόπος). It’s where we get our English word “topography,” which refers to the surface features of a city, town, or region.¹¹ While the English translations “rooms” or “dwelling places” aren’t necessarily wrong, we consider them unnecessarily restrictive in the context of John 14:2. The word *topos* itself could refer to an entire city! So yes, we like the translation “mansions.” Checking into the New Jerusalem isn’t going to be like checking into Motel 6!

Even as the disciples huddled in the frightening shadow of Yeshua’s approaching Crucifixion, they could take comfort in the assurance that, no matter what was about to happen, they would be together with Him someday in the heavenly City.



We don’t know how much information Abraham had about this future, glorious City of God. He lived centuries before the books of the Tanakh (i.e., the Old Testament) were composed, so whatever knowledge he possessed about these matters must have been imparted to him by God directly, via special revelation. This isn’t surprising, though, since Abraham, according to Moses, heard directly from God on a regular basis (e.g., Gen. 12:1–8; 13:3–18; 15:1–21; 17:1–22; 18:17–33; 21:12–13; 22:1–18). He and the Lord were “friends” (James 2:23)! We can only guess what Abraham’s Friend told him about the New Jerusalem. Whatever He told him, it was enough to convince Abraham to make that City the focus of his hope for the future: *For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (Heb. 11:10).

¹⁰One of the nuances of meaning for the Greek *moné* is to “mark off” and reserve a space for some purpose.

¹¹*Strong’s Concordance* says *topos* can refer to “an inhabited place, as a city, village, [or] district.”

Plato and Abraham: A Shared Vision

These two men, then, shared a vision of an idealized, perfect city. The difference was that for Abraham, it was a future reality; but for Plato it was merely a theoretical construct. Poor Plato didn’t know if Kallipolis—his glorious, utopian city—would or could ever truly exist. Abraham, on the other hand, kept his eyes on the horizon, waiting for God’s City!

That’s an important distinction, by the way. The writer of Hebrews says Abraham “waited” for the City. God had told him about it, and he believed it was real. Note that the text doesn’t say that Abraham “hoped” there would be a future city, or that he “believed” that someday such a city would appear, or that he “thought” it was a possibility. He had progressed beyond the point of merely hoping, believing, or thinking. He was *waiting* for God’s City.

Think of it like this. If you see someone at JFK airport and they’re waiting at Gate B for a flight to Amsterdam, you wouldn’t walk up and ask them if they believe a KLM aircraft is going to taxi up to the terminal, take them on board, and whisk them off on their journey. The fact that they’re sitting there patiently, boarding pass in hand, tells you exactly what they believe. *They are waiting for the plane.* Likewise, the fact that Abraham was *waiting* for this city tells us what he believed. For him, it was a future certainty! It was only a matter of time.



Plato’s Cycles of History

In his research, Plato believed that he had identified five stages in the natural evolution of a city-state. He believed this process could apply to any community or society.

1. Aristocracy

First, Plato observed that communities generally started off on the right foot. Settlers gathered in a locality and a wise and capable leader (often a local, wealthy landowner) emerged over time as someone the people loved, trusted, and respected. Plato saw this person as a sort of benevolent king or ruler (he used the terms “aristocracy” and “monarchy” interchangeably). He often said the ideal ruler would be a benevolent Philosopher-King who was virtuous and controlled the resources (more about this later).

In this respect, one can't help thinking about the founding fathers of the United States. Certainly, they constituted an American aristocracy. Yes, they were imperfect—like we all are. However, they were, on the whole, principled men of means. Almost without exception, they were educated, prosperous businessmen and plantation owners. At the conclusion of the Declaration of Independence, they said, “We pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.” And most of them fulfilled that pledge. By the end of the War of Independence, several of them were left penniless or bankrupt. Another had lost two sons in battle. Dr. Joseph Warren, a respected physician from Boston and a leader of the patriot movement, was killed in the Battle of Bunker Hill in June of 1775.

Most of the fifty-four brave and courageous signers of the Declaration paid a heavy price in one way or another. Unlike many modern politicians, they were not shallow opportunists who jumped on the bandwagon for personal gain. George Washington could have assumed the title of “king,” but he didn't want it. He was convinced that kingship—even if it was only a title—was inconsistent with the concept of a constitutional republic.¹² Plato most likely would have said that our country had a good start!

The Aristocracy, then, is the first type of city-state Plato scrutinizes in *The Republic*. He calls it “the government of the best.”¹³ It's ruled by a benevolent king who controls resources and metes out justice. This ideal, however, is short-lived in Plato's scheme of things. It is followed by a series of what he calls hypothetical “declining states.”¹⁴

Why the decline? According to *The Republic*, the ideal of the benevolent Aristocracy gives way to Timocracy. He writes, “Corruption has crept into philosophy, and simplicity of character, which was once her note, is now looked for only in the military class. Arts of war begin to prevail over arts of peace; the ruler is no longer a philosopher.”¹⁵

In other words, the leaders are no longer thinkers. They're not well read. They're incapable of serious contemplation. All they think about is themselves and their being recognized.

2. Timocracy

Plato describes this as governance by soldiers and lovers of recognition. Plato calls this the “intermediate between aristocracy and oligarchy”—and it has some characteristics of both. The term “timocracy” later came to describe countries where only well-to-do landowners were allowed to hold government office. But for Plato, it denotes governance by individuals—especially those from a military background—who relish the accolades and recognition that come with the office. Plato writes, “The accumulation of gold in the treasury of private individuals is the ruin of timocracy; they invent illegal modes of expenditure; for what do they or their wives care about the law?”¹⁶

Plato, then, warns about the danger of allowing too much wealth to be concentrated in the hands of a relatively few individuals. He didn't like the idea of the super-wealthy living in comfort and opulence while ordinary working people struggle from day to day just to pay their bills and provide for their families.

¹² See Kathleen Bartoloni-Tuazon, *For Fear of an Elective King: George Washington and the Presidential Title Controversy of 1789* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014).

¹³ Plato, *The Republic* (Kindle Edition, location 8461).

¹⁴ Ibid., location 2127.

¹⁵ Ibid., location 1981.

¹⁶ Ibid., locations 1983–1984.

3. Oligarchy

Timocracy gives way to Oligarchy. This is rule by an elite clique of the super-rich who use their position and influence to take advantage of the poorer, working class. This results in what Plato calls a “State full of evils.” Under Oligarchy, it's like “two nations are struggling together in one—the rich and the poor.”¹⁷

In our day, Oligarchy has manifested itself in countries like Russia, Indonesia, and Singapore, which are ruled by a relatively small clique of billionaire oligarchs.

4. Democracy

The fourth step in this downward spiral, according to Plato, is Democracy. The term itself means “people rule.” For Plato, this is the phase where the poor, uneducated masses finally rise up and overthrow the rich, ruling elites. To him, Democracy represented a decline from the “best” form of government, Aristocracy, in which the ideal ruler was a benevolent Philosopher-King who ruled the State for the benefit of his subjects.

Plato was not particularly fond of Democracy, even though he was Greek, and his own people had championed the concept. He saw it as a seriously flawed system because people are naïve by nature and can be easily deceived by flattering, lying demagogues. Democracy assumes that the majority is usually right—when in fact, the majority is very often wrong.¹⁸ Plato's concept of Democracy (capitalized when referring specifically to his version of it) inevitably, over time, deteriorates into mob rule and finally leads to something he called “Tyranny.”



In Abraham Lincoln's famous defense of democracy, he said, “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time.” However, the problem with direct democracy is that a tyrant doesn't have to fool “all of the people.” He only needs to fool fifty-one percent of them at any given time—and that puts him in the driver's seat.

¹⁷ Ibid., locations 2004–2005.

¹⁸ Remember that in medieval times, there was a popular consensus that the earth was flat. And as recently as the eighteenth century, medical science thought sick people could be healed by draining the “bad blood” out of their bodies. (That's how George Washington died, by the way.) The majority isn't always right!

5. Tyranny

According to historian William Federer, George Washington shared Plato's concern about Democracy leading to Tyranny. Washington feared that the fledgling American nation—a modern experiment in representative democracy—could too easily decline into despotic rule. Federer writes, “[Washington] warned in his Farewell Address, 1796: ‘Disorders and miseries . . . incline the minds of men to seek security . . . in the absolute power of an Individual . . . [who] turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of public liberty . . . and thus to create . . . a real despotism.’”¹⁹

As Democracy descends into chaos, the populace becomes fearful and desperate. They fall into line when a charismatic, fast-talking despot steps forward and offers to protect them and restore the State to its former greatness. Of course, he demands absolute loyalty and obedience. Debate and discourse are not tolerated. At this point, the State (or, in the end-time prophetic context, the whole world) is now under a dictatorship.



Plato called Tyranny the “most wretched form of government, and the rule of a [good] king the happiest.”²⁰ The rule of a good king is roughly equivalent to what political theorists call a “benevolent dictatorship,” where a single, virtuous leader exercises control over the State.

The End of the World

Plato, then, taught that the final phase of any democratic city-state's inevitable political evolution would be the rise of a tyrannical figure who would use any means at his disposal—including lies, demagoguery, and manipulation—to seize power over the fearful and gullible masses. Let's see if we can apply Plato's vision on a global scale (rather than just to a single city-state) and discern some parallels with biblical eschatology.

¹⁹William J. Federer, *Rise of the Tyrant: The 6,000-Year Quest for Global Power* (Virginia Beach: Amerisearch, 2016), 66.

²⁰Plato, *Ibid.*, location 9157.

First, Apocalypticism is a perspective that warns, with a sense of immediacy, that the world is coming to an end. The Bible is clearly an apocalyptic book, but similar, end-of-the-world themes are found in other ancient literature, including the Dead Sea Scrolls and even the Mayan calendar.²¹ In the Jewish tradition, there is an entire genre of ancient apocalyptic literature—including Daniel, Enoch, Baruch, Esdras, and Jubilees, among numerous others. However, only Daniel was canonized and carries the same authority as Scripture.

Some people push back against end-of-the-world scenarios because they think they're too far-fetched. Nonetheless, there's no getting around the fact that the Bible is an apocalyptic book. It clearly teaches that world history had a beginning (in Genesis)—and it could quickly come to an end at virtually any time (as we see in Revelation). So, what's in view biblically is the end of an entire world order rather than just a city-state or civilization.

As we near the end of the Book of Revelation, it's clear that what John is talking about is “out with the old, in with the new”! The social, political, and economic landscape of this old, war-torn world will be completely transformed.

Evangelists for Democracy

We hear a great deal these days about the need to spread democracy around the world. The United States, it has been suggested, should be positioned at the forefront of this effort to globalize democracy.

No doubt, such sentiments are well-intentioned. Americans want to see poor and oppressed people in other countries have the same rights and freedoms that we enjoy (and often take for granted) here in the United States. What better way to accomplish this than to spread democracy worldwide?²²

Certainly, reforming the world looks good on paper; however, if Plato was right, Democracy (or populism) isn't the way to do it. The problem is that democracy assumes a downward trajectory once the people lose their “virtue.”²³



²¹End-of-the-world terminology doesn't necessarily mean that Planet Earth will cease to exist. It can also point to an abrupt and paradigm-shifting transition from one age or epoch to another. The Greek word *kosmos* can refer either to the planet or to “the orderly arrangement” of things (*Thayer's Lexicon*).

²²Some modern philosophers—especially those with a libertarian bent—have pushed back strongly against Plato's ideas about the shortcomings of democracy and the merits of a benevolent dictatorship as the ideal form of government. Karl Popper, for instance, accused Plato of advocating totalitarianism (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 1: *The Spell of Plato* [New York: Routledge, 1950], 162).

²³We noted earlier that Plato's idea of “virtue” consisted of four traits: temperance (i.e., self-discipline), prudence (doing the right thing at the right time), courage (standing for what's right), and justice (doing right by everyone, regardless of their economic class or social standing).

Democracy and the Beast

There are hints here and there in the Scriptures that democracy will indeed spread around the world as we approach the end of this age. For instance, John says the “dragon” [i.e., Satan] will give the Antichrist “his power, his throne, and great authority” (13:2). These terms (particularly “throne”) suggest the possibility of a centralized, global seat of government. It’s difficult to imagine this happening without most of the populace—particularly those in the western, developed world—being on board with it.

So, it will evidently be a democratic process—with the “beast” (Antichrist) governing by acclamation. In fact, John goes on to say, “And *all the world* marveled and followed the beast” (v. 3, emphasis added). It sounds like an overwhelming consensus! The people of the world even begin worshiping him, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” (v. 4). Clearly, the Antichrist will be seen as a “man of the people”—and they will love him!



His name won’t be “Antichrist,” of course. He won’t have a nameplate on his office door with the word ANTICHRIST proudly displayed on it. His business cards won’t have ANTICHRIST on them, along with his email address and mobile phone number. We don’t know his personal name, although it has been the subject of much speculation throughout the ages.

The Bible, however, calls him by numerous descriptive names or titles. In the Book of Daniel, for instance, he’s a blasphemer who will deify himself (11:36–39). He’s also the diabolical one who will set up “the abomination of desolation” in the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem (12:11). In the NT, the Apostle Paul describes him as “the man of sin . . . the son of perdition” (2 Thess. 2:3). Paul says he “opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped” (v. 4). He also calls the Antichrist “the lawless one [who] will be revealed” after the Rapture (v. 8).²⁴ In Revelation, he is “the Beast” who rises up out of the “sea” of humanity (13:1).

²⁴Note: In Greek, the term “Lawless One” (or “Wicked” in the old KJV) is *ho anomos* (ὁ ἀνομος), or literally, “one without law.” He will promote rebellion against the principles of God’s law—and against God himself.

As we approach the time of the Tribulation, then, we can expect to see authoritarian regimes crumbling and giving way to populist movements—that is, “rule of the people”—all over the world. When it happens, gleeful pundits on news channels will no doubt voice their approval. Plato, however, pointed out that in ancient Greece, the spread of populism invariably provided fertile soil for the emergence of Tyranny. To modern-day Bible-believers, this sounds very much like the rise of the biblical Antichrist, the global dictator of the end times.

THE ANTI-MESSIAH

There have been many antichrists (with a small “a”) over the past two thousand years (1 John 2:18). However, the Bible also alludes to the emergence of a final, singular Antichrist, an end-time political figure who, in league with a religious leader known in the NT as the “false prophet” (Rev. 16:13; 19:20), will seize global power during the coming, seven-year Tribulation Period. The Greek term *antichristos* (ἀντίχριστος) can signify either someone who opposes the Messiah or someone who seeks to replace Him (or both). This dark figure is known in Scripture by several names, descriptions, or titles, including the following:

- Abomination of Desolation—Matt. 24:15
- Anti-Messiah (Antichrist)—1 John 2:22
- Beast from the Sea—Rev. 11:7, 13; 13:1–10; 19:19–20
- Branch of the Terrible Ones—Isa. 25:5 (contrast with the Lord’s “branch” in 4:2 and 60:21)
- King of Fierce Countenance—Dan. 8:18–26 (Antiochus IV prefigures the future Antichrist)
- Lawless One—2 Thess. 2:8
- Little Horn—Dan. 7:7–8
- Man of Sin—2 Thess. 2:3
- Prince That Shall Come—Dan. 9:26
- Son of Perdition (2 Thess. 2:3)
- Wicked One—Isa. 11:4 (cp. 2 Thess. 2:8); Jer. 30:23–24



The Final World Tyrant

Some skeptics look askance on this premillennial end-time scenario. After all, these doubters wonder, how would the world's masses ever acquiesce to the rule of a tyrant—especially in this enlightened day and age?

Maybe a lesson from twentieth-century history is in order here. After World War One (1914–1918), a defeated Germany was left in shambles. She was forced to pay reparations that bankrupted her over the next decade. Then, in 1929, adding insult to injury, the Great Depression hit Europe. The proud German people were humiliated. Their world was turned upside-down, and now they couldn't provide for even the minimal needs of their families. This is when an unknown, former painter named Adolf Hitler captured their attention with his promises to bring back “the good old days” and restore Germany to her former greatness. The people were held spellbound by his fiery rhetoric and confident tone.



The result was that fourteen million Germans voted for Hitler in the 1932 federal elections, making the National Socialists (Nazis) the largest party in the Reichstag. Hitler began conducting his massive Nazi Party rallies in 1923; and by 1933, the rallies had become an annual event. The gullible masses flocked to these extravagant productions. They didn't care about the Fuehrer's flawed personality, his personal attacks, or his racism; all they cared about was the policies he promised to implement for the benefit of Germany. Their downtrodden country would be great again! So, then, one of the little-known ironies of modern history is that the rise of genocidal, Nazi fascism in Germany began with a free and democratic election—just like Plato warned about 2,500 years earlier!

It's not that difficult to imagine the same thing happening now, in the twenty-first century. Human nature hasn't changed. People are still gullible. Too often, they are easily snookered by slick talkers who tell them what they want to hear—and that's what John's end-time tyrant will do.

The End Becomes a New Beginning

The opening chapters of Genesis tell us how the “first man,” Adam, lost his Edenic kingdom through his disobedience—and the closing chapters of Revelation show us how the “Last Adam,” Yeshua, wins it back through His obedience (19:11–16; cp. Rom. 5:19; 1 Cor. 15:45).

In Revelation, we have the perfect city that Plato could only dream about. He called it Kallipolis; but now, with the benefit of NT revelation, we know that the true “beautiful city” is the New Jerusalem. This massive metropolis will someday descend from the heavenlies into the Middle East.²⁵ Note that it won't be a democracy, but a monarchy. The New Jerusalem will be the seat of government for Yeshua the Messiah, the ultimate Philosopher-King that Plato envisioned.²⁶ King David of ancient Israel foretold the extent of the King's future, earthly reign: *He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth* (Psalm 72:8).

In Revelation 19, Yeshua of Nazareth is the coming King of kings and Lord of lords who will conquer His enemies (including the Antichrist) at the end of the Tribulation, ushering in the earthly Kingdom of God (vv. 11–16).²⁷

This is what makes the Book of Revelation, despite its apocalyptic tone, one of the most optimistic books in the Bible. It's not all about gloom and doom. The end it describes is really a new beginning:

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea (21:1).

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful” (v. 5).

The Prophet Isaiah tells us that God's new beginning will have no ending:

*Of the increase of His [i.e., Messiah's] government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (9:7).*

²⁵For more details about the prophetic New Jerusalem, see “The New Jerusalem in Bible Prophecy: An Interview with Janet Willis” in *Messianic Perspectives* (Sept.-Oct.-Nov. 2016 issue), available in our online archive at cjfm.org.

²⁶The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) is where the Messianic Philosopher-King expounds on the principles of His Kingdom.

²⁷Premillennialists refer to the first thousand years of the eternal Kingdom (Rev. 20:1–10) as the “Millennium.” In the Latin Vulgate, it's *annos mille*—*annos* meaning “year” and *mille* meaning “thousand.” In Greek, it's simply “thousand years” (*chilia etei*; χίλια ἔτη). Some critics are fond of pointing out that the Millennium isn't mentioned in the Bible. Oh, it's mentioned, alright—if you know where (and how) to look.



*Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.*

We are indebted to our friend Dick Hess, who planted the seed on Facebook that gave rise to this article.

Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

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

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

QUESTION: *I believe in Jesus, but I'm having trouble getting my head around the notion of a future Rapture-event, where millions of believers will be suddenly "caught up" to meet the Lord in the air. I've also read two of the Left Behind books, thinking it might help—but to me, it was more like reading fantasy or sci-fi, rather than reading something even remotely fact-based. I'm afraid to voice my concerns at church because I might be branded an infidel!*

ANSWER: Dear friend, you can take consolation from the fact that you're not alone in this. And no, your concerns don't make you an infidel. We all have difficulty trying to imagine how the end-time events described in the Bible will play out in the real world. We believe the coming Tribulation Period will begin when a multilateral peace accord is signed in the Middle East, an inference based on Daniel 9:27. It's important to remember that the seven-year period that follows the peace agreement will usher in supernatural events and unprecedented, hard-to-imagine characters/entities on the earth—especially during that period's final three-and-a-half years.

Let's think about this together, shall we? In biblical history, miracles were relatively rare. Supernatural events took place in clusters during the ministries of leaders like Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and the Apostles. Over the two-thousand years from Abraham to the time of the Apostles, then, miracles occurred during maybe a hundred years, or slightly more, of those two-thousand years. That means miracles were prominent in only five percent or so of biblical history. Ninety-five percent of the time, they weren't. The reason for this is that God didn't create a "magic" world where supernatural events occur routinely. Instead, He created a world that is governed by natural laws that He himself ordained. He doesn't encourage His creatures to ignore those laws, and we do so at our own peril. So, it is not surprising that the events of the Tribulation, which represent the final grouping of miracles in world history, present a challenge to even the most vivid imagination.

The Book of Revelation, of course, is a prime example of ancient apocalyptic literature. It was written by the Apostle John during his exile on the Isle of Patmos around AD 95 or so. In keeping with the apocalyptic genre, it's teeming with strange-looking symbols and metaphors. Some critics dismiss the entire Book, saying that due to its symbolic content, it's no longer relevant two thousand years after its writing. What these critics are missing, however, is that even symbols and metaphors can (and often do) represent underlying realities. The fact that the realities are veiled in apocalyptic language does not render them meaningless or irrelevant.

So, yes, most of us have difficulty imagining what a supernatural world—a world where strange and dangerous creatures patrol the skies, "stars" fall from their places in the heavens, and frightening monsters roam the earth—would look like in real history. You're not alone! Events like the Rapture do, indeed, seem far-fetched. They violate natural laws that have been immutable for all our lifetimes. We have never observed any exceptions—like the many supernatural

events that will be evident during the coming Tribulation Period, especially during those final three-and-a-half years. But we know these things will happen because God informs us that they will.

Regarding the *Left Behind* series of books by the late Tim LaHaye and his co-author Jerry Jenkins, their intent from the very beginning was to present the stories as literary fiction—not non-fiction. Dr. LaHaye's vision was to begin with the biblical data—and then suggest how the actual events *might* unfold once the end-time countdown begins. *He was using his imagination to present possibilities, not necessarily realities.*

Think of it like this. In the 1960s, when space travel was in its infancy, a Hollywood screenwriter (and retired airline pilot) named Gene Roddenberry had a vision for the future that he turned into scripts for a new television series named *Star Trek*. In it, Roddenberry started with a core of scientific facts generated from the space programs of the USA and the USSR—and his imagination took it from there. This is like what LaHaye and Jenkins did with the *Left Behind* series. They started with the basic framework of premillennial eschatology and then used their imaginations to go from there. The books represent LaHaye's and Jenkins' best guess about how the end-time scenario will play out. *Left Behind* was never meant to be anything more than that—an educated guess.

Guesswork is involved because there are just too many aspects of the Rapture that remain a mystery to us. For instance, will we just instantly disappear into thin air and reappear somewhere in the upper atmosphere with the Lord? Or will we fly, Superman-style, up-up-and-away, into the air and on upward into the earth's atmosphere? And when we depart, do our clothes go with us? Or do we leave them behind in a crumpled pile on the ground or floor? (One of our grandchildren asked about this many years ago. She didn't like the idea of arriving in Heaven with no clothes on.) And what about those who are dead when all of this happens? When they're resurrected, will their caskets and graves be ripped open, leaving big holes in the ground in cemeteries all over the world, like what happened in Matthew 27:52–53? Or will their new, glorified bodies simply pass through the caskets and concrete vaults, leaving the burial sites relatively undisturbed?

There are many, many such questions. The Bible gives us the answers God knows we need. He is aware of our curiosity, but He's also aware that if He answered every one of our questions in His Word, the resulting volume(s) would easily fill an entire library—way too much information for us to process. So, He asks us to trust Him to take care of those unanswered questions.

Moses wisely admonished the children of Israel to leave the "secret (i.e., hidden or concealed) things" in the Lord's hands. He said, "*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law*" (Deut. 29:29).



Fruit from the Harvest



by Violette Berger



A Phone Connection

Diann Parkas, CJFM Northeast representative (New Jersey), writes about a phone call she almost missed. She still has a landline telephone which she doesn't answer much due to all the "robo" calls. Somehow, though, she felt the urge to pick up a call one evening. On the other end of the line was an Orthodox Jewish man who had found her number on the CJFM website. He told her that he had been reading the New Testament and listening to various ministers online and that he was absolutely convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. Diann then asked him, "Do you personally accept Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for your sin?" He immediately backed down, expressing a fear of losing his family and ended their conversation. However, exactly 24 hours later, he called Diann back after thinking about what she had said and wanted to pray, asking her if she would help him. With a resounding, "Of course!" Diann prayed with him. She says, "It was an honor and a privilege to lead him in prayer as he opened his heart to Jesus!" She asks that we please pray for him to grow in his new faith and get connected with other believers.

Divine Appointments

CJFM representative, Eric Chabot (Columbus, OH), praises God for His faithfulness in answering their prayers for divine appointments as he and his team minister on the Ohio State University and Columbus State Community College campuses. Just before winter break at Ohio State University, he says, "God gave us one more warm day to set up outside and engage students for the Gospel." The question they posed on their white board was, "Does God care about you?" The question proved to be a great conversation starter and resulted in three students praying with them to commit their lives to the Lord. Eric asks, "Please pray that these students really grow and become fully committed disciples of Jesus."

More Salvations

Richard Hill, CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation (Las Vegas), is blessed by his partnership with his wife, Oanh, as they minister together on the campus of the University of Las Vegas (UNLV). Oanh was recently engaged in a long conversation with two students who were asking and discussing many questions about Jesus. Apparently satisfied with her answers and God's perfect timing, they prayed with Oanh to receive the Lord. Rich then joined in to encourage them. Also, Rich and Oanh went to California for vacation to get some reprieve from the heat in Las Vegas. While heading to the beach one day, they heard someone exclaiming, "I love Israel, too!" as a response to the multi-colored "I love Israel" T-shirt Rich was wearing. A woman approached them and started talking about Israel. In the course of their conversation, she talked about not having a lot of hope in her life because of all the bad personal events that had happened to her recently. Although she attended church, she had never prayed to receive Jesus and thus was not born again. After Rich and Oanh shared the Gospel with her, she prayed the sinner's prayer with them right there in the parking lot and realized that she has hope at last. Please pray for "S" and her sanctification process.

Fruit and More Fruit . . .

Larry Dubin, CJFM Southeast representative (Florida), reflects and writes, "[2020] has been nothing less than the craziest and wildest ride that he has experienced in his almost 57 trips around the sun." He was diagnosed with Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL), cancer of the blood, in Feb 2022; infected with the COVID-19 virus (July 2022); and pneumonia in both lungs (Aug-Sept 2022).

When confronted with his first challenge, Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia, being a Jewish believer in Yeshua (Jesus), Larry prayed for the "right" team, professionally and spiritually, to guide and counsel him through this battle. Presented with optional plans, he chose the cutting-edge treatment plan, which was the most expensive, most effective, and only required a 12-month protocol. He praises the Lord that the insurance company approved it and covered the costs. After God had provided a fantastic medical team, the grace shown him by his own mission organization (CJFM) and several wise and discerning brothers, the treatment process began. Five months later, his doctor informed Larry that he was in remission. Larry adds, "My heart was full of joy, hope and peace amid this challenge (Isaiah 43:1-3). **FRUIT!**"

Larry's second challenge was the COVID-19 infection. During that time, he and his wife, Debby, were in isolation for two weeks, living in two separate apartments in the same building, the first time (with a few exceptions) during their 22 years of marriage. Although the long-term consequences of COVID-19 presented some new daily medical challenges or biblical "trials" for Larry, he writes: "It was a great time to delve deeper into the Word of God, for my walk with Jesus and for our marriage. It was another great reminder to stay focused and be anchored in the Messiah of Israel, Jesus (Hebrews 6:19; 12:2). **FRUIT!**"

The third challenge Larry encountered was double-lung pneumonia that lasted for approximately seven weeks. "During the scariest days of this challenge, I was under the impression that this illness was the final earthly event before I would be ushered into the presence of God forever. Walking, talking, and breathing were extremely difficult. Yet the God of Israel used an incredible medical team and powerful antibiotics to destroy the bacterial infections. It was a sweet day when I departed the hospital, 10 pounds lighter and using a walker. The fruit of this experience was life changing. I believe that God was testing my faith by this trial, and He was pruning me for His glory. I never experienced a crisis of faith; rather, the only name that I consistently called upon at that time was 'Jesus' (James 2-4; John 15:2, John 11:4). **FRUIT!**"

As the year 2022 draws to a close, Larry reflects: "The suffering created by CLL, COVID-19 and pneumonia were three great gifts that I experienced. The Lord drew me closer to Him and to the people that I love and appreciate during this season. He illuminated many of the passages of Scripture that I have been thinking about for three decades. My faith in the Holy One of Israel, Jesus, is greater than it was when this journey started in February, 2022. My heart is full of thanksgiving, gratefulness, and praise. **FRUIT!**"



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NEW PUBLISHING SCHEDULE FOR *MESSIANIC PERSPECTIVES*

Due to difficulties associated with the COVID pandemic, as well as other prior, mitigating factors, we've had difficulty keeping up with our bimonthly publishing schedule for *Messianic Perspectives*.

To help, we are skipping 2022 and switching to a quarterly schedule.

Thank you kindly for your patience—and feel free to write or call if you have any questions about this change.

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