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# Messianic Perspectives®

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

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## THE EXTRAORDINARY CLAIMS OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

by Dr. Gary Hedrick

It's ironic that the New Covenant (or New Testament) documents the observance of an ancient Jewish holiday that's missing even from the Old Testament. But it's true.

That holiday is Chanukah, also known as the Feast of Dedication, which usually takes place around Christmastime. It's important in Judaism because it marks the rededication of the Temple in 165 BC after its desecration by Greco-Syrian forces.

Chanukah isn't mentioned in the Tanakh because it's about events that took place after the OT canon was closed; but in the NT, it became the backdrop for an important confrontation between Yeshua and the first-century Jewish leadership's scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees.

On this occasion, the dispute was over the question of whether Yeshua was the Messiah. Most of the rabbis said He wasn't. Other Jewish people, however, believed He was. Their names are familiar: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and James, among others.

John, the writer of the fourth NT Gospel, describes the encounter, which

took place in the winter of AD 29 (or thereabouts):

Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If you are the [Messiah], tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you" (John 10:22-26).

There's something about this Rabbi from Galilee that demands a verdict from each of us. Was He good or bad? Was He right or wrong? Was He the Messiah or not? There's not much in the way of middle ground. That's how it was in the first century; and it's still that way today.



Was He truly that exceptional? Couldn't He have been "just a man"? Not likely. Near the end of his life, while in exile, Napoleon answered Count Montholon's inquiry about Jesus's identity by saying:

Well, then, I will tell you. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I myself have founded great empires; but upon what did these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus Alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him. . . . I think I understand something of human nature; and I tell you, all these were men, and I am a man: none else is like Him; Jesus Christ was more than a man. . . .<sup>i</sup>

Yeshua said and did extraordinary things. The NT's messianic biographies document the extraordinary things that Yeshua said and did—some of which were downright shocking.

The statements and claims He made about Himself tell us a great deal about His nature and character—who He really was.

How we respond to those claims reveals a lot about who *we* are.

## 1. He claimed to fulfill the messianic prophecies.

At that Chanukah celebration in AD 29, the Judeans said they wanted to know if He was the Messiah. But did they really want to know? Were they prepared to follow Him if He was? Or, were they more interested in using Him to further their own agenda?

To find the answers to these questions, we follow the Lord back to Galilee, where He was in the habit of attending synagogue services in His hometown of Nazareth. On one Sabbath, He was asked to help with the public reading. Typically, He would have read from the Hebrew Bible with someone translating into Aramaic (the language most Jewish people spoke in those days)—which could account for the slight difference between Luke's quotation and what the passage in Isaiah actually says.

He read this passage from Isaiah: "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD . . .*" (61:1-2).

Luke 4:20-21 continues: "*Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to*

installing a Jewish government) without addressing its spiritual aspect would have been like putting a bandage over a festering cancer.

The problem, of course, was that this wasn't the approach that most Jewish people—especially the religious establishment—wanted. Their immediate concern was being delivered from Roman domination, not from sin. Ironically, however, the very reason they were under Roman domination was that they had sinned! The *Diaspora* (also called the Exile) was a divine



R. A. Higbee

*them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'*"

And it was! He had come to liberate us by offering up His life's blood as payment for our sins (Matt. 26:28). This was the only way to strike at the root of the world's problems. It's what His first coming was all about.

Dealing with the sin problem politically (by expelling the Romans and

judgment for their disregard of sabbatical laws, among other things (Lev. 26:32-45).

The congregation in Nazareth that day recognized the disconnect between Yeshua's spiritual mission and their political expectations. At first, they were nudging each other and commenting on His eloquence (Luke 4:22). But by the time the sermon was over, they were ready to run Him out of town (v. 29)!

## Messianic Perspectives™

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## 2. He claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath (from the Hebrew *shabbat*, or שבת, meaning “rest”) is considered the foundational observance of Judaism. In the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), Sabbath legislation forms the basis of the Mosaic Law (Ex. 31:12-17; 34:21; 35:2-3; Lev. 19:3, 30; 23:3) and underlies the other biblical observances.

According to the ancient sages, the Sabbath points to three significant events in the history of the People of Israel (*Am Yisrael*). The first two occurred in the past and the third one is in the future.

First, *the Sabbath commemorates the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt*. After centuries of hard labor, Israel could finally rest (Deut. 5:12-15).

Second, *it commemorates God’s creation of the universe* as recounted in Genesis 1 and 2, and from which He “rested” on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2; Ex. 20:8-11; 31:12-17). Long before the time of Moses, then, God himself was the first Sabbath-keeper.

And third, *it’s a foreshadowing of Olam Haba (“the world to come”) and the future Messianic Age*. In fact, the Messianic Age is known in rabbinic sources as *Yom Shekulo Shabbat*—“the day when all will be Sabbath.” It will be a time when the world—after millennia of conflict and turmoil—will finally be at rest. The *Talmud* sees the six days of creation as representing six 1,000-year periods of world history followed by 1,000 years of Sabbath-rest (i.e., the Messianic Age; *Sanhedrin* 97a and 97b).

The biblical passages describing the Sabbath are straightforward and relatively uncomplicated: Shabbat is a day of rest when no work is to be done (Ex. 20:9-10). The other biblical Sabbath regulations are essentially corollaries of this command.

Over the centuries, however, a vast array of detailed rules and regulations sprang up in Judaism around the Sabbath observance. It eventually occupied an entire tractate in the *Talmud*, where acts that violate the Sabbath are classified under 39 headings covering such activities as sowing, plowing, reaping, binding (and unbinding) sheaves, threshing, weaving, knotting (and unknotting) threads, sewing, kindling (or extinguishing) a fire, and much more (*Mishnah Shabbat* VII. 2).



Even though Chanukah is not among the seven feasts of Israel described by Moses in Leviticus 23, it is, nevertheless, a biblical feast. This historical event occurred in the interim between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. It is considered a biblical feast because the events that precipitated the Feast of Chanukah were prophesied in Daniel 8:9-14. Yeshua, Jesus, authenticated this particular feast by observing it in Jerusalem (John 10:22-23), in the same temple that had been cleansed and rededicated generations earlier under the Maccabees.

Chanukah is a Hebrew word that means “dedication.” It’s called the “Feast of Dedication” because it marks the occasion when the Jewish Temple was rededicated after it had been desecrated by the Syrians. The second common name is *Hag haOrim*, which means the “Feast of Lights,” as described in the writings of Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian. However, this second name is based upon the following legend: When the Jewish people rededicated the Temple and wished to rekindle the lamp stand and cleanse the Temple, there was no oil available. It alleges that a small vial of oil was found in one of the nooks and crannies of the Temple wall. That little bit of oil should have only lasted for one day, but instead, miraculously it lasted for eight days. Hence, it became known as *Hag haOrim*, the Feast of Lights. But the Apocrypha, also sometimes known as the “historical books,” speaks of the Maccabean revolt but never mentions any such miracle. It’s found only in later rabbinic tradition.

The true miracle that God wrought was not in the legendary oil, but rather in the fulfillment of prophecy in Daniel 8:9-14. This passage describes the events of the “little horn” (v. 9), which, in type and symbol, describes Antiochus Epiphanes—the Hellenized ruler of Syria who hated the God of Israel and despised the practice of Judaism. In fact, the very name that he chose to call himself means “the manifest god.” He and his huge army marched against Israel, slaughtering more than 100,000 Jewish men, women, and children.

Daniel prophesied that Antiochus Epiphanes would be guilty of committing the “abomination of desolation.” Daniel 11:31 says, “*And forces will be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation.*” Antiochus invaded the Holy Temple of God and carried away the golden treasures. He slaughtered and boiled a pig and poured its broth upon the Holy Scrolls of the Law. Antiochus then had a statue of his god Jupiter/Zeus Olympus—fashioned and modeled after a man—carried into the Temple. He demanded that the Jewish people bow down and worship the statue.

Antiochus’ plans, however, would not be realized—a band of godly Jewish men, led by Mattathias and his five sons, rebelled against the Syrians. Shortly after Mattathias died, his son “Judas the Maccabee” gathered a large number of courageous Jews and skillfully led them in the first guerrilla-style warfare from the mountains of Judea. They soundly defeated the Syrians and drove them from the land. Antiochus Epiphanes began his persecution of the Jewish people in 171 BC—and it was exactly 2,300 days on the 25th of Kislev (equivalent to the month of December) that the Temple was cleansed and rededicated, just as it was prophesied in Daniel 8:14. King Solomon’s dedication of the First Temple lasted for eight days, thus Solomon’s example was used for the rededication, and the Feast of Chanukah was also observed for eight days.

Chanukah is a great time of rejoicing; celebrated with candles, songs, dreidel games, special foods, and the exchange of gifts. The lamp stand used today is a special type of menorah, consisting of eight candle holders and a ninth one elevated above them. This particular candle, known as the “shammus” or the “servant” candle, from which the other candles are lit, is a beautiful symbol of our Messiah. Just as the shammus lights all the other candles, so too Jesus, who is the true “Light of the world” and the living Temple of God, gives light to all who will believe. “*Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’*” (John 8:12).

On one occasion, Yeshua was confronted by Pharisees who complained that His disciples were disregarding some of their Sabbath laws (Mark 2:23-28). In His response, He brushed aside their oral tradition (which later became the basis of the Talmud) by claiming that He was the originator and administrator of the Sabbath.

Note, however, that He did not repudiate the Sabbath itself. The Sabbath is still the seventh day of the week, and that has never changed (Ex. 31:16). What He objected to was the layers and layers of oral tradition that had been piled on top of the original commandment. The rabbis' Sabbath rules had become a burden to the people. The Sabbath was intended to be a blessing rather than a burden.



Only the Author of the Sabbath could go all the way back to its origins and explain, with authority, why it was established in the first place ("The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," Mark 2:27). So here is an implied identification of Yeshua of Nazareth as the God of Israel who gave His people the Sabbath through His servant Moses. As "Lord of the Sabbath," then, He could grant His disciples permission to eat grain from the fields when they were hungry—even on the seventh day of the week (v. 28).

As an aside, the Mosaic Law did allow a traveler to handpick grain from a stranger's field if he was hungry.

However, he couldn't use a sickle (which would enable him to harvest large amounts of grain); that would constitute theft (Deut. 23:25). Evidently, the judgment that was handed down by the Messiah in Mark 2 was that His disciples weren't really "working" because they were picking the grain by hand; therefore, they were not violating the Sabbath.

He also used an illustration from David's time to show that a legitimate physical need like hunger can trump a legalistic requirement (Mark 2:25-27).

Today, we need a balanced approach to the Sabbath. We should avoid the stifling legalism of Sabbatarian cults (who generally say it's a sin to worship on any day other than Saturday, and who want to impose Torah-like restrictions on Saturday activities) while also steering clear of Replacement Theology (which says the Sabbath has been replaced by Sunday).

### 3. He claimed preexistence.

Many ancient Jewish sources affirm the preexistence of the Messiah. The sages were a little hazy on whether He would be created or "born," but they mostly understood that He would predate the rest of humanity. One eminent Jewish scholar notes:

... The concept of the Messiah who was created in the six days of Creation, or even prior to them, or who was born at variously stated subsequent dates and was then hidden to await his time, became a standard feature of Jewish Messianic eschatology. In one version it is the name of the Messiah which was created in the Beginning; in another, his spirit or his soul; in a third, he himself was actually born and even his celestial throne was fashioned (Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979], p. 16).

Fortunately, the NT clears up the ambiguity. It explains that the Messiah is eternal (John 1:1). He *had* no beginning; He *was* the beginning. Bethlehem was where He stepped out of eternity and into our space-time universe; however, He didn't begin there. He existed even before time and space were created; in fact, He himself was the Creator (Col. 1:16)!

On one occasion, Yeshua stunned his Jewish listeners when He said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham

was, I AM" (John 8:58). What makes this particularly unusual is that He didn't say, "Before Abraham was, I *was*" (past tense), which still would have made the point that He existed before Abraham. Instead, He said, "Before Abraham was, I *AM*" (present tense). This choice of words has a calculated ring of timelessness to it.

The Hebrew translation of the NT renders the Greek *ego eimi* ("I am") in this verse with *ani hu* (אני הוּא). This is an instructive expression. It's basically two pronouns. We find it, for instance, in the writings of the Prophet Isaiah, where he quotes the LORD as saying, "*Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He* [Heb., *ani hu*], *I am the First, I am also the Last*" (48:12, emphasis added).

Not only was this Rabbi from Nazareth claiming to have been alive even before the time of Abraham (2,000 years earlier), but He was using a timeless (eternal) self-designation that was identical to the one God had used for Himself: I AM (*ani hu*).

Every occurrence of the phrase *ani hu* (and also its related forms *anochi hu* or *ata hu*) in the Bible refers to God (Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 13, 25; 46:4; 48:12; 51:12; 52:6).

The Septuagint (LXX), an ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, used *ego eimi* (Yeshua's reference to Himself in the Greek text of John 8:58) to render God's statement "I AM WHO I AM" (Heb., *ehyeh asher ehyeh*) in Exodus 3:14. It also renders the *ani hu* phrases (cited above) with the Greek *ego eimi*. So the Hebrew and Greek scriptures weave a complex web that connects Yeshua the Messiah with the LORD God of Israel. They are both identified as the great I AM, the Eternal One.<sup>ii</sup>

Some critical scholars dispute that Yeshua was claiming divinity in John 8:58. In that case, though, they have to try to figure out why the Jewish crowd who heard Him threatened to stone Him (v. 59). Stoning was the Mosaic punishment for blasphemy (Lev. 24:16).

Furthermore, just a couple of chapters later, it's like Yogi Berra said, "Déjà vu all over again." The crowd picked up stones to execute Him (John 10:31). On this occasion, they specifically accused Him of blasphemy: "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (v. 33). How could it be any clearer?



#### 4. He claimed that His words had the same force as Scripture.

The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem kept close track of Yeshua. Certain officers of the Sanhedrin were assigned to follow Him and monitor His movements, even when He was up north in Galilee. On one occasion, when they reported back about the Lord's activities, they remarked, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" (John 7:46).

This assessment evidently failed to impress the members of the Sanhedrin; however, it was a reasonable observation for anyone who had spent weeks, or even months, listening to Yeshua's teaching on a nearly full-time basis. After all, He was the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matt. 26:63-64). When He spoke, it was tantamount to God speaking.

That's why He spoke with authority: "*And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority*" (Luke 4:32). "*For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*" (Matt. 7:29).

He often amplified the words of Scripture—like those numerous occasions when He said, "You have heard such-and-such, but I tell you so-and-so" (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-34). With equal ease, He modified (or even reversed) common teachings of the day that strayed from Scripture—like when He addressed the notion of one Pharisaic school that said we should hate our enemies (5:43-44).

In the Bible, when people had a message from God, they would introduce it with a phrase like, "Thus says the LORD." Moses used this formula (Ex. 5:1); and so did the prophets (e.g., Isa. 42:5; Jer. 2:2, 5; Zech. 1:16). It appears dozens of times throughout the Tanakh. Even a NT prophet named Agabus employed a similar phrase (Acts 21:11).

Yeshua, however, never said, "Thus says the LORD." He didn't need to.

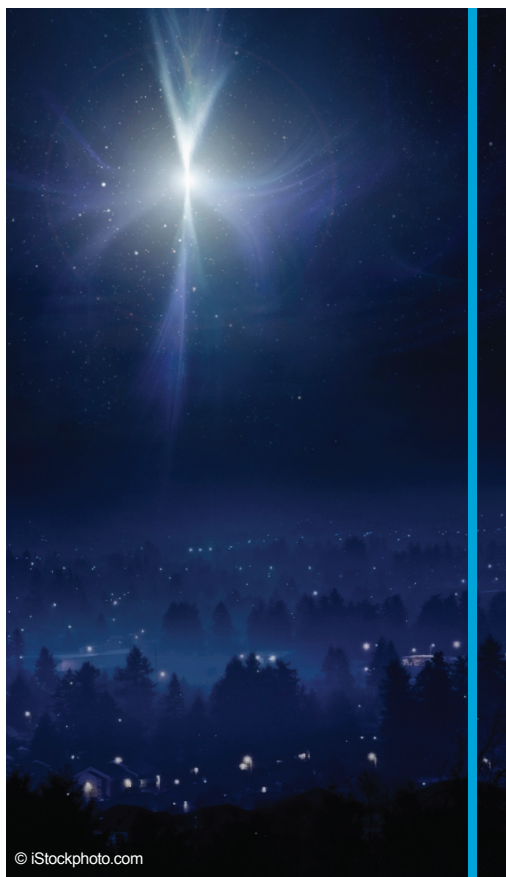
#### 5. He claimed to be the Almighty.

"*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty'*" (Rev. 1:8).

The speaker in this verse claims to be God Almighty (Heb., אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת, *Elohey Tzevaot*). John further identifies Him as "the Lord." Clearly, this is God talking.

But there's more to this divine Personage than what at first meets the eye. He shows up again in Revelation 22:13, where He says, "*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.*"

But what does all of this have to do with Yeshua of Nazareth? Simply this—three verses later, this One who calls Himself God Almighty tells us that He has yet another name: "*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star*" (v. 16, emphasis added).



So what we have here is an impressive array of names and titles for the Messiah! The Lord Jesus (*haAdon Yeshua*) is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, the One who was and Who is to come, the Almighty, the Root and Offspring of David, and the Bright and Morning Star!

The equation, then, looks like this: Yeshua (Jesus) = the LORD God Almighty.

(By the way, this is not the same as "oneness" [or unitarian] teaching that rejects the Triunity and makes no distinction between the Father and the Son. The Son is, and has always been, distinct from the Father in the Godhead.)

#### 6. He claimed to be omnipresent.

Omnipresence doesn't require God to be everywhere any more than omnipotence requires Him to do everything. All it means is that He has no spatial or temporal limitations and that He can be in more than one place at a time, as needed.

Yeshua the Messiah claimed this attribute for Himself. He said, "*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*" (Matt. 18:20).

He also said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

Wherever we are, His Spirit indwells us (1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 2:20) and empowers us (2 Cor. 12:9). With Him, there are no borders, boxes, or boundaries. He can be anywhere and everywhere He needs to be.

#### 7. He claimed to be omniscient.

Carnac the Magnificent was the all-knowing mystic played by Johnny Carson on his late-night TV show back in the 1970s and 80s. Ed McMahon, Johnny's sidekick, would hand him an envelope containing a question and Carnac would answer the question before he opened the envelope. The results were often hilarious. In light of recent political events, one of them seems almost prophetic:

Carnac's answer: *Until he gets caught.*

Question (pulled from the envelope): *How long does a US congressman serve?*

The human race has always been fascinated by the unknown. In the Garden of Eden, Satan convinced Eve that God was withholding something important from her. She took the bait; and as they say, the rest is history (Gen. 3:1-7).

Everyone wants to know something that no one else knows. This tendency, in fact, gave rise to an ancient philosophy that threatened the early Church—Gnosticism. The Gnostics believed that anything material was bad and that they could only escape materiality through the studied, disciplined acquisition of secret, mystical knowledge (Gk., *gnosis*).



# “Dead Sea Scroll” on Stone?

## Does Ancient Stone Predict a Risen Messiah?



Indiana Jones, move aside. An ancient Hebrew stone dated a few decades prior to Jesus' birth has suddenly become the hottest topic among archaeologists. On the three-foot tall stone are 87 lines of Hebrew words, some of which may refer to a messiah who would die and rise again three days later. The stone labeled “Gabriel's Revelation,” has been coined by one expert as a “Dead Sea Scroll on stone.”

Scholars have begun the tedious process of verifying the dating and authenticity of the stone. In the past, some scholars and conspiracy theorists have jumped to conclusions that finds such as the “James Ossuary” and the “Jesus Family Tomb” were authentic<sup>1</sup>, only to discover later that they were forgeries or of dubious historical value (see “The Jesus Family Tomb” [www.y-jesus.com/jesus\\_tomb.php](http://www.y-jesus.com/jesus_tomb.php)).

Thus far no scholar is arguing that the stone is a forgery. Yuval Goren, a professor of archaeology at Tel Aviv University, who has submitted his chemical investigation of the stone to a peer-review journal, presumes the stone is authentic. If proven to be authentic, the stone may actually shed light on the historical setting for Jesus' resurrection.

Was there during Jesus' time the belief among Jews that the Messiah would die and rise from the dead three days later? If so, how would this prophetic detail be different from the hundreds of other Hebrew prophecies regarding the Messiah? Christians point to Jesus' fulfillment of these ancient prophecies as evidence of his messiahship (see “Was Jesus the Messiah?” [www.y-jesus.com/path\\_1.php](http://www.y-jesus.com/path_1.php)).

But skeptics argue that Jewish expectations of a messiah who would die and rise again may have provided a motive for Jesus and his disciples to invent the story of his death and resurrection. In fact, some non-Christian scholars hope the stone will actually expose Jesus' resurrection as a hoax.

Israel Knohl, a professor of Bible studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, is leading the charge to prove that Jesus was a fraudulent messiah. Knohl interprets line 80 of the text as prophetic about a “suffering Messiah who would rise from the dead.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, according to Knohl, the concept of a risen Messiah would not be unique to Christian thinking.

“Daniel Boyarin, a professor of Talmudic culture at the University of California at Berkeley, said that ‘the stone was part of a growing body of evidence suggesting that Jesus could be best understood through a close reading of the Jewish history of his day.’”

“Some Christians will find it shocking—a challenge to the uniqueness of their theology<sup>3</sup>—while others will be comforted by the idea of it being a traditional part of Judaism,” he said.<sup>4</sup>

But before we evaluate whether or not the stone sheds any light on the Christian claim that Jesus rose from the dead, let's look at the facts regarding this ancient find.

### Checking the Facts

1. The stone was discovered ten years ago in Jordan.
2. An Israeli-Swiss collector who kept it in his Zurich home bought it from a Jordanian antiquities dealer.
3. It has two neat columns of Hebrew letters written in ink on 87 lines.
4. Experts date the stone first century BC, decades before Christ.
5. Two Israeli scholars published an analysis of the stone a year ago.
6. The stone is broken and some of the ink is faded, making it difficult to read.
7. The message has been dubbed, “Gabriel's Revelation,” and draws on the Old Testament writings of Hebrew prophets Daniel, Zechariah, and Haggai.
8. Line 80 begins with, “in three days,” but the next crucial word is hard to read.

### A Stony Problem

Although Knohl believes the message has significant historical value, what the message actually says is dubious. Knohl contends that the message on line 80 should be read, “In three days you shall live, I Gabriel, command you.” He believes the message may refer to a rebel-rouser named “Simon,” who was slain by Herodian forces. However, Hebrew language scholar, Moshe BarAsher, states:

“There is one problem: In crucial places of the text there is lack of text. I understand Knohl's tendency to find there keys to the pre-Christian period, but in two to three crucial lines of text there are a lot of missing words.”<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the interpretation of the Hebrew words is extremely difficult, and somewhat subjective. And subjectivity is the fodder of conspiracy theorists. Historian Paul Johnson writes:

“Unfortunately, historians are rarely as objective as they wish to appear. Biblical history, which for Christians, Jews and atheists alike involves beliefs or prejudices which go to the very root of our being, is an area where objectivity is peculiarly difficult, if not quite impossible to achieve.”<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, if the stone proves to be authentic, and Knohl's interpretation of the message is correct, it would be historically significant. But would the stone's message in any way validate his conjecture that the story of Jesus' resurrection was a fabrication?

That would certainly be a stretch. In fact, there are some major difficulties with that theory:

1. The details regarding Jesus' lineage, life, death, burial, and resurrection were contained in hundreds of Old Testament prophecies. How could they or their fulfillment have been conspired? (see “Was Jesus an Impostor?” [www.y-jesus.com/path\\_1.php](http://www.y-jesus.com/path_1.php))
2. How could Jesus have plotted his own death and resurrection in the face of his Roman and Jewish enemies? Regarding evidence against Jesus' resurrection they are strangely silent. Why? (see “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” [www.y-jesus.com/body\\_count1.php](http://www.y-jesus.com/body_count1.php))
3. Why didn't Jesus' enemies in the first century cite this message of a Messiah who would die and rise again as evidence against his resurrection?
4. If the first century Jews were expecting a Messiah who would die and rise again, why wouldn't Jewish historians such as Josephus have included this important historical fact in their writings?
5. Why would the disciples of Jesus willingly give their lives to perpetuate a hoax, if Jesus hadn't really risen from the dead? What did they have to gain by lying?

These and other questions will be the subject of numerous debates as the message on the stone is analyzed and deciphered by experts. It may take years for all the evidence to be weighed before the historical value of the “Gabriel's Revelation” is truly known.

UPDATE: After three years, the notion that ancient Jewish sources may have anticipated a resurrection of the coming Messiah after three days continues to generate controversy. For some recent developments, see the Wikipedia article on “Gabriel's Revelation” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel's\\_Revelation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriel's_Revelation)).

#### Endnotes

1. Ethan Bronner, *New York Times*, July 6, 2008
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (London: Harper & Row, 1988)

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The Bible, on the other hand, tells us that only God is all-knowing: “Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure’” (Isa. 46:9-10).

Our path to true enlightenment, then, is to become acquainted with Him: “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10).

The formula is simple: *God knows it all, so we need to get to know Him.* We do that through our study of the Bible. The Bible is known as “God’s Word” because it’s His way of speaking to us. We also get to know Him through prayer, which is our way of talking to Him. This conversation—in which He speaks to us and we talk to Him—should be ongoing for all of us.

Omniscience (all-knowingness) is one of God’s attributes. Nothing falls outside the scope of His knowledge and understanding. This was also one of the Messiah’s attributes. Peter said that the Lord Jesus knew “all things” (John 21:17—note that the Lord didn’t correct him on that occasion, so the point stood; see also 16:30).

Another time, Nathaniel was amazed when Yeshua rattled off numerous details about his life, as though He was one of his oldest and best friends (John 1:43-51). These were things He couldn’t possibly have known through any natural means. Nathaniel realized that this was no ordinary man. He exclaimed, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (v. 49).

The Lord similarly impressed the woman at the well (John 4:7-26). They had never met before, but He knew all about her—including the fact that she had been married five times (v. 18). She hurried back into town and brought a crowd out to meet Him (vv. 28-30).

## 8. He claimed to possess all authority.

The Jewish Bible introduces us to a heavenly Being known as “the Son of Man”:

I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

Yeshua’s favorite title for Himself was “Son of Man.” In Matthew alone, He calls Himself “Son of Man” 31 times.

When He stood before the high priest in judgment, He made a clear allusion to Himself as Daniel’s Son of Man. He told the members of the council that they would see Him again someday: “I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matt. 26:64).

We know that Caiaphas, the high priest, understood what Yeshua was saying because of his reaction—he tore his robes and declared that this was blasphemy (v. 65).

Just before He returned to Heaven, the Lord told His disciples, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (28:18). Note that it’s not just *some* authority; but *all* authority. And it extends not just over the physical realm (“earth”), but also into the spiritual realm (“Heaven”), as well.

One commentator (whose name I don’t recall) made note of the fact that Yeshua addressed Lazarus by name when He raised him from the dead (John 11:43). Everyone there knew

what He meant, so why was it necessary to use Lazarus’ name? This commentator raised the possibility that if the Messiah had simply said, “Come forth!” every grave in the world might have opened up.

The voice of the all-powerful One may well have echoed through the corridors of time, calling forth the dead from every age, tribe, nation, and continent.

I like that! Yes, it’s speculative; but it makes sense, nonetheless. Power and authority of this magnitude must be carefully wielded with near-surgical precision. The Lord knew this and that’s why He called his dead friend by name: “Lazarus, come forth!” (v. 43).

## 9. He claimed to forgive sins.

During a period in the Lord’s ministry when He was living in Capernaum, people came from all over Galilee to hear His teaching. One day, a small band of men brought a paralyzed friend to be healed; but there were so many people pressing in around the house, they couldn’t get the poor man anywhere near Yeshua.

However, they were persistent. They raised their friend up onto the flat roof. Then they removed part of the roof and lowered him down through the opening.

At this point in the story, the Bible says, “When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’” (Mark 2:5).

This man’s friends had brought him to get help for a *physical* need; but the Lord first addressed his *spiritual* need (forgiveness of sins). The religious leaders in the crowd were irritated because they knew that only God could forgive a person’s sins (v. 7). To them, His claim to be able to forgive sins was blasphemous.

Yeshua responded by asking, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house’” (vv. 9-11). And that’s what the man did.

You’ll search the OT in vain for an example of a human being forgiving sins. No priest or prophet ever claimed to do it. According to Moses, forgiving sins is within the purview of the LORD God, not man (Ex. 34:6-7).





# One Solitary Life: Yeshua of Nazareth

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was 30 and then for three years was an itinerant preacher. He never owned a home. He never wrote a book. He was never elected to office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He never put his foot inside a big city. He never traveled more than 200 miles from the place where He was born. He never did any of those things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself . . .

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial in which He was falsely accused. He was brutally beaten and then nailed on a cross between two thieves. While He was dying his executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth—a simple robe. When He was dead, He was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen long centuries have come and gone and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever were built, all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.

—Author Unknown



Nathan the prophet told David, “The LORD also has put away your sin” (2 Sam. 12:13). God, not Nathan, had forgiven David.

But here was a first-century, Galilean rabbi claiming to have the authority to forgive people’s sins. This was unprecedented.

## 10. He claimed to be sinless.

God, virtually by definition, is sinless (1 John 1:5). If He had any imperfection in Him, He would not be God. Therefore, if the Messiah is God in human form, He must also be sinless.

John the Baptizer (Heb., יוחנן המטביל *Yochanan haMatbil*) was the last prophet of the OT era (although he’s not mentioned by name in the OT). He was the long-awaited forerunner and announcer of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5-6; cf. Luke 1:5-17).

When John saw Yeshua coming, he cried, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

As the Lamb of God, Yeshua fulfilled the symbolism of the ancient Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). The sacrifice of the innocent lamb, the smearing of its blood on the doorposts, and even the unleavened bread (leaven represents sin)—it all points to Yeshua and His work of redemption.

Like the Passover lamb, which had to be unblemished (Ex. 12:5), Yeshua needed to be sinless (1 Peter 1:19). This was an absolute requirement because an imperfect person who had to answer for *his own sins* would not be qualified to pay for *the sins of others*.

In one of Yeshua’s confrontations with the religious leaders, they accused Him of being born out of wedlock (John 8:41). In English, it was the equivalent of calling Him a “bastard,” not to mention the implications for His mother, Miriam (Mary). His response was unruffled and measured: “Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?” (v. 46).

It’s as if He was asking for a show of hands and making it personal: “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” I can imagine a dramatic pause at that point while He gazed around at His accusers, making eye contact with each one.

This was their opportunity to present the evidence, if they had any. After all, the Sanhedrin had assigned officers

of the court to follow Him around and even participate in His meetings and teaching sessions (Mark 2:6; John 7:46). They scrutinized His every move and analyzed His every word. If there had ever been even the slightest hint of a flaw, they would have seized on it and used it against Him.

But no one stepped forward. They had nothing other than the usual lies, insults, and accusations with no facts to substantiate them.

Later, Pilate pretty well summed it up when he told the lynch mob, “I find no fault in Him” (John 19:6).

## 11. He claimed to be the One who will judge the world.

*“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats”* (Matt. 25:31-32).

*“And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead”* (Acts 10:42).

*“Because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead”* (Acts 17:31).

*“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom”* (2 Tim. 4:1).

## 12. He claimed to be the architect of a coming New World Order.

*“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’”* (Rev. 21:5).

*“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His 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”* (Isa. 9:6-7).





### 13. He claimed divine honor.

*“For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (John 5:21-23).*

### 14. He claimed equality with God.

*“I and My Father are one” (John 10:30).*

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).*

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:5-7).*

(See also point number three.)

### 15. He claimed to be worthy of worship.

Only God is worthy of worship: *“I am the LORD, that is My name; And My*

*glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images” (Isa. 42:8).*

Even angels will not accept worship (at least, not the good ones). In the Book of Revelation, John told about having received a message from an angel: *“And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he [i.e., the angel] said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (19:10; see also 22:9).*

However, the Lord Jesus did (and does) accept worship: *“Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God” (Matt. 14:33).*

*“And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, ‘Rejoice!’ So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him” (Matt. 28:9).*

*“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:28).*

### Conclusion

This summary of Messiah’s claims is not exhaustive; there are others. However, this list is detailed enough to make the point that His claims demand a response. What’s yours? What

will you do with this One who is called the Messiah?

C.S. Lewis presented the choice this way:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.<sup>iii</sup>

If your choice is to reject Him, then all you have to do is put this paper down and walk away. Try not to dwell too much on the fact that someday you’ll have to explain that decision to Him personally.

On the other hand, if your choice is to receive Him, we rejoice with you. You’re embarking on a wonderful and exciting journey—and we’re here to help! We would be delighted to hear from you at (800) 926-5397 or [info@cjfm.org](mailto:info@cjfm.org).

*Dr. Gary Hedrick  
is president of  
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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> Attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte in *The Divinity of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* by Henry Parry Liddon (New York: Scribner, Welford, & Armstrong, 1869), pp. 147-48.

<sup>ii</sup> For further details about the use of the Hebrew *Ani Hu* as a designation for God, see *I Am He: The Interpretation of Ani Hu in Jewish and Early Christian Literature* by Catrin H. Williams, Ph.D. (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr-Siebeck, 2000), *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*: Reihe 2:113.

<sup>iii</sup> *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980), p. 31.





by Violette Berger

# Fruit from the Harvest



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## An Honor and a Privilege

**Peter Parkas, CJFM missionary (New Jersey)**, relates an extraordinary opportunity that occurred thanks to Gentile believers who witness to and pray for unsaved Jewish people. A church in southern New Jersey recently held its annual fundraiser; the sole stipulation for the group receiving the funds was that they must attend a service. This year's recipient was a local synagogue, Temple Beth El, that had experienced financial hardships due to damage done by a flood.

Peter writes, "When asked if they would come to a service, the rabbi said that they would love to come. The pastor called and asked me if I would preach at the service—what an honor and a privilege! On the day of the service—with the rabbi, the Jewish congregation, and the church's congregation in attendance—I gave my testimony and explained that it is only through a blood sacrifice that atonement can be made (Lev. 17:11). Judaism is no longer able to make this sacrifice, and hence cannot atone for sins. I further explained that in the fullness of time, the Messiah, *Yeshua haMaschiach*, came and offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin, quoting Isaiah 53:10."

As a result, the Jewish people in attendance, likewise, had the opportunity to hear a clear Gospel message in a Jewish context. Peter adds, "It created a dialogue between the church people and the synagogue congregants, which ensued for about half an hour outside the church." Please pray that the seeds planted will come to fruition. "*For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim*" (Hosea 3:4).

## The Rest Is History

This story began 10 years ago when a young woman called and asked **Michelle Beadle, CJFM missionary (New Orleans)**, to visit her grandfather's brother who was in a nursing home and near death. He hadn't attended synagogue in years, and therefore did not have a rabbi the family could call to visit him.

Michelle writes, "I wish I could report to you that this man accepted Yeshua as Messiah, but he did not. However, I was asked to officiate at his funeral where I met his brother and his brother's wife. I stayed in touch after the funeral, but was

never able to meet with them to share the Messiah. They remained on my heart, and I continued to pray for them. Only a few weeks ago I took his granddaughter's name off my mailing list—believing nothing would ever come from this contact."

Later, after explaining "Messiah in the Passover" at a local church, Michelle was approached by a woman who had been praying about starting a Bible study in her home. She had a burden to reach her Jewish friends, and Michelle responded by telling her that *she* had been praying about starting a study on messianic prophecy. They promptly set a date to begin a Scripture study series at the woman's house. A woman who had a Jewish mother and a Catholic father began attending and enjoyed the study so much that she invited Michelle to a family reunion to meet the rest of her family.

Michelle continues, "At this reunion was the man whom I met 10 years earlier at his brother's funeral. I had no idea that he and this woman were first cousins! Following dinner, we had the opportunity to talk. I had the privilege of praying with him to receive Messiah, and we are now meeting for Bible study. God is so good and so faithful! I am truly amazed at how He worked all of this out."

## Brotherly Love

**CJFM missionary (Columbus, Ohio) Eric Chabot's** evangelism ministry at Ohio State University's campus is back in full swing since classes resumed. But he recaps what occurred during summer break. "We hit the streets of downtown Columbus with the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah, shared one-on-one with almost 200 people, and distributed approximately 1,000 pieces of literature. We were blessed to see eight people come to the saving knowledge of Jesus our Messiah."

A day that especially stood out for Eric was when he met "Tom." Eric conversed at length with the young man, explained the Gospel message, and answered his questions. Tom then prayed to receive the Messiah, and immediately sought out his brother, "Paul." He sent Paul to talk with Eric about the same spiritual matters. Eric adds, "When I presented the Gospel to Paul, he also prayed to receive the Messiah into his life. To make an eternal impact on two brothers in one day was an incredible blessing!"



# Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

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**QUESTION:** *Someone I love very much belongs to a denomination that claims to be raising people from the dead. Members of this congregation stand up in church and testify that they have witnessed modern-day resurrections of the dead. I recently saw an evangelist on TV who said the same thing. Help! I need Scripture.*

**ANSWER:** You are wise to seek an answer from Scripture. The Bible should always be our final authority, so I commend you for the way you're approaching this. Let's see what the Bible tells us about this phenomenon of raising people from the dead.

1. *We know from the biblical record that people have been raised from the dead by the power of God.*

This tells us that it's not inherently something God can't or won't do. OT instances include: the widow's son (raised by Elijah; 1 Kings 17:21-24), the Shunammite woman's son (raised by Elisha; 2 Kings 4:32-37), and the man thrown into Elisha's tomb (2 Kings 13:20-21). NT instances include the daughter of Jairus (raised by Yeshua; Mark 5:35-42), many OT saints in Jerusalem (after Yeshua's resurrection; Matt. 27:52), the widow's son at Nain (raised by Yeshua; Luke 7:11-15), Dorcas/Tabitha (raised by Peter; Acts

9:36-41), and Eutychus (raised by Paul; Acts 20:9-12).

2. *The biblical occurrences were not merely instances of resuscitation (reviving someone who's only been "dead" for a brief time); they were genuine miracles of reanimation.*

That is, people who were stone-cold dead were brought back to life. One of the best-known examples of this phenomenon is recorded in John 11 where Lazarus of Bethany—Mary and Martha's brother—died after a brief illness. Four days had passed and the body was already in a state of decomposition (v. 39); yet Yeshua (Jesus) raised him from the dead (v. 43).

(Note that we make a distinction between "reanimation" [a case where someone is raised from the dead but goes on to die later in life] and "resurrection" [describing a case like Yeshua's, in which He was raised from the dead never to die again; see Hebrews 7:15-16]. There's no such thing as a temporary resurrection, but there have been numerous cases of temporary reanimation.)

The people in Bethany, of course, were well aware of the Lord's reputation as a healer and miracle worker; so before Yeshua raised up Lazarus, the locals

were a bit critical. They were asking, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" (v. 37).

It was a legitimate question. Why didn't the Lord heal his friend Lazarus before he died? He could have spoken a word, even from a distance, and Lazarus would have been healed immediately (see Matthew 8:5-13 for an example). So why did Lazarus have to die? This leads to the third point.

3. *The purpose of the messianic miracles was to confirm that Yeshua was who He claimed to be—Israel's King-Messiah and Savior.*

In the case of Lazarus, Yeshua said (before bringing his friend back to life) that his illness was "not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). The Lord delayed coming to Bethany for several days (v. 6). That way, there would be no doubt that Lazarus was really dead. In ancient Judaism, there was a widespread expectation that the Messiah's arrival would be accompanied by the raising of the dead (e.g., 2 [Syriac] Baruch 30:1-5; Targum Songs 8:5; Sanhedrin 90b), so Yeshua was

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## FOUR CLUSTERS OF MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE PAST & FUTURE —Adapted from Part 5 of "Speaking in Tongues," on the CJF Ministries blog at [www.cjfm.org/blog](http://www.cjfm.org/blog).

PERSON(S)	PERIOD	PROOFS	PURPOSE
MOSES	Approx. 1446 to 1440 BC	The burning bush (Ex. 3:1-7); plagues on Egypt (Ex. 7-12); Red Sea crossing (Ex. 14); manna from heaven (Ex. 16:35); water from a rock (Num. 20:8-11).	To authenticate Moses' ministry to Pharaoh and to the children of Israel during the wilderness wanderings (Ex. 3:15-22); to protect Israel and preserve the messianic line (vv. 5-10).
ELIJAH & ELISHA	Approx. 875 to 797 BC	Controlling weather (1 Kings 18:45); parting of the Jordan River (2 Kings 2:8); raising the dead (1 Kings 17:22, 2 Kings 4:34); predicting future events (2 Kings 8:10-12); fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:37-39).	To help Israel survive a dangerous period of internal apostasy and external opposition (1 Kings 18:17-39); again, to preserve the physical line through which Messiah would be born.
YESHUA & THE APOSTLES	Approx. AD 27 to 95	People healed, raised from the dead (John 5, 9, 11:43); exercised authority over nature (Matt. 8:23-27); Yeshua's Resurrection (Acts 2:32, 4:10); spiritual gifts (prophecy, healing, tongues, others).	To identify Yeshua as the Messiah and the Son of God (Acts 2:22, Rom. 1:4); to validate the apostolic message (Acts 6:7-8); to confirm the authority of the Apostles in the early Church (Rom. 1:1-6); to provide divine guidance (Acts 11:27-30).
TRIBULATION WITNESSES	Sometime after AD 2010	Two prophets will be raised from the dead in Jerusalem (Rev. 11:3-12); the Antichrist will answer with his own counterfeit signs and wonders (2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:13).	To signal the approaching return of Israel's King-Messiah, Yeshua, who will judge God's enemies and set up His Kingdom on the earth (Rev. 11:15-18, 19:11-16, 20:4-6).



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carefully setting the stage for a miracle that would be an inexplicable sign to the Sanhedrin that He was the Messiah.

Sadly, however, the Sanhedrin later disregarded the sign (vv. 45-53). This was inexcusable because many eyewitnesses saw Lazarus walk out of that tomb. There was no question that a miracle had taken place. Yet the Sanhedrin brushed these events aside because they were that determined not to believe in the Lord.

Later, of course, the ultimate sign for the Sanhedrin was the Resurrection of Yeshua himself (Matt. 12:38-40). However, most if not all the members of the ruling council rejected that sign, as well. Even in Bible times, God wasn't interested in jumping through hoops for unbelievers who didn't want to believe anyway. He was more concerned about honest, sincere people who wanted to believe and were simply looking for evidence that what He said was true.

4. *In most instances, alleged modern-day "miracles" do not fit the biblical pattern.*

At times, they include out-and-out fakery and trickery. For example, a supposed

"faith healer" named Peter Popoff was exposed on national television in the 1980s. Investigators used a scanner to discover that Popoff's wife was feeding him information about people in the audience through a tiny radio receiver in his ear. His followers thought the information was coming from God. God's people need to be circumspect in these dangerous days and not fall for religious scams, trickery, and psychological manipulation (Eph. 4:13-14).

In some cases, supposed "miracles" have a natural (rather than supernatural) explanation. For instance, medical professionals are well aware of some people who were declared dead coming back to life spontaneously. Years ago, we knew a woman who was working in a morgue when a "dead" man sat up on the slab, threw off the sheet, and wanted to know where he was. She said she nearly had a heart attack! A spontaneous event like this would not be considered a miracle in the biblical sense of the word. Strange and unusual, yes; but not necessarily miraculous.

One intriguing case made the national news a few years ago when a well-known cardiologist named Chauncey Crandall prayed for a man who had died in a

Florida hospital—and he came back to life. This incident is well-documented (just Google the doctor's name and you'll find plenty of information).

Even so, we don't see miracles happening today (at least, not authentic ones) with the same frequency as they did in biblical times. Couple this with the fact that the religious landscape in the 21st century is overrun with pretenders and scam artists, and it means that we need to be careful and discerning in these last days (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

Quite frankly, some of us need to grow up. Our faith shouldn't be based on miracles and shallow sensationalism, but on the unchangeable and unshakable Word of God:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).