

LIGHT



A CONVERSATION WITH
A MIDDLE EAST PASTOR

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1. Transgresses; 7. Acknowledges; 8. Through;
9. Redeemer; 12. Followed; 14. Handle;
16. Antichrist; 18. Became; 20. Judgment;
21. Forever; 22. Proclaim; 23. Confesses;
24. Omega; 25. Foundation

Down:

2. Abraham; 3. Destroy; 4. Express;
5. Godhead; 6. Reputation; 10. Created;
11. Worshiped; 12. Father; 13. Lawgiver;
15. Answered; 17. Beginning; 19. Shepherd

Practical Prerequisites—

**You May
Be Seeing
Things**

**But You Are
Probably Not
Going Crazy**

As many as one third of adults who have developed problems with eyesight later in life see things that are not there. If this has happened to you, it is very likely that you are *not* going crazy. What probably is happening is a condition known as Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS), named after a Swiss lawyer, who was also a dedicated naturalist and philosopher. Bonnet lived from 1720 to 1793.

Bonnet documented the condition in his 87-year-old grandfather, who was psychologically healthy, and who was nearly blind due to cataracts. The elderly man routinely experienced illusions of people, birds, carriages, buildings, scaffolding, and tapestries—always visually, with no other senses involved. He knew these images were not actually there. It took many years for CBS to be widely understood. The condition did not enter English-speaking psychiatric literature until 1982.

The following explanation appears in a publication from Lighthouse International: “The images are illusions, not delusions. The difference is that a person with delusions is convinced that what s/he sees is real. [People] with Charles Bonnet Syndrome may initially second-guess themselves but ultimately accept that their perceptions have no substance.”

Sometimes referred to as “phantom vision,” CBS can be compared to “phantom limb syndrome,” in which an amputee may seem

to have physical sensations in an arm or leg that has been lost. This is apparently due to a misfire in the brain.

As ophthalmologist Jonathan Trobe explained on National Public Radio, “When visual cells in the brain stop getting information . . . the cells compensate. If there’s no data coming in, they ‘make up’ images.”

Over the years, support groups of people experiencing CBS have sprung up, and have developed techniques for managing the phantom images, often making them recede or disappear. These include:

- Closing and then opening eyes.
- Rapidly moving eyes back and forth, or up and down.
- Standing up or moving around.
- Looking away from the images.
- Staring directly at the images.
- Turning on a light or opening curtains.
- Concentrating on something else.
- Approaching or physically striking out at the images.

It is often the case that, after 12 to 18 months, the hallucinations will begin to fade. In the meantime, those who experience them should not be alarmed. The phenomenon is harmless.

Sources: www.visionaware.org and wikipedia.org/Charles-Bonnet.



Unbelievable! . . .

The Knock on the Door

by John McLarty

It was a very dark day. The best man the world had ever known was dead. Not just dead, killed. And not killed by just some random lunatic. Executed. Put to death by the formal vote of the supreme court of the land, a judgment ratified by the chief executive.

How could people go so wrong? It had happened before. It would happen again. But this time seemed like the worst.

For three and a half years Jesus had toured Palestine, enthralling crowds with His preaching, healing every kind of malady—even raising the dead. These were among the most remarkable moments in human history.

But He rebuked the arrogance of the religious and moneyed elites. He echoed the words of the ancient prophets, insisting that those with privilege—the privileges of money, political power, religious and social status—were charged by God to use their advantages for the benefit of others.

DANGEROUS

Maybe the privileged could have ignored His rebukes if He had been less popular. They could have dismissed Jesus as a harmless, crazy dreamer. But the crowds—the thousands of people who instantly gathered every time Jesus stopped moving—the masses who adored Jesus, made Him dangerous. At least that was so in the minds of the rich and powerful. They were sure Jesus would use His power over

the masses to stir a revolution to benefit His friends. After all, that's how the elite had been using their power for centuries. They could not imagine Jesus was any different.

So they had Him killed. They accused Him of thinking like they did. They framed Him for ideas He did not have. They convicted Him of making the kinds of plots they would have made if they had possessed His power. They killed Him. And it was dark.

DEATH OF HOPE

For Jesus' friends—the people who had been enthralled by His preaching, the people who had begun to imagine there was another path besides the will to power—the death of Jesus was the death of hope. If Jesus couldn't change things, change wasn't possible. If Jesus couldn't advance the cause of righteousness, maybe righteousness itself was a mere fantasy.

It was a very dark day.

Ordinarily, when a man was crucified, his body was not buried. If he was evil enough to deserve crucifixion, he was too evil for the dignity of burial. His body was simply thrown onto a garbage heap outside of town.

But Jesus had friends and admirers even among the powerful people. A few devout, wealthy people had heard the glory in Jesus' preaching. They shared His vision of a world where the lowly were lifted, a world where

wealth circulated widely and generously, and righteousness was normal.

One of these righteous people was a man named Joseph. He went to the governor and asked for the body of Jesus. The governor was used to saying yes to wealthy, well-connected people, so he said yes to Joseph, and Joseph buried Jesus in a new tomb Joseph had just completed.

ENTOMBMENT

The tomb was a room carved into a limestone outcrop near Jerusalem. Joseph, with the help of servants or some of Jesus' disciples—the gospel doesn't tell us—wrapped Jesus' body in a burial shroud along with a huge amount of spices and herbs traditionally used for burials there. Then just at sundown, they closed the tomb by rolling a huge stone over the entrance.

Then they went home for the worst Sabbath of their lives.

Hope had died. They were left with numbness and pain. Blackness. Screaming silence.

Death collides with love. When we love someone, there is never enough time. No matter how long our time together, we are never ready to say, "That's enough." Thousands of people loved Jesus. His execution blighted their souls. His death created an aching, withering emptiness.

But it was even worse than that because Jesus was also their hope. How do we live without hope?

Maybe they didn't eat supper Friday night. Or if they ate, maybe it was merely nibbling, playing with food because it was in front of them, but they had no appetite. Sabbath morning, they had a hard time getting out of bed. Why bother? What was there to live for? The world was not going to get better. The best and brightest Hope for humanity had just been killed.

THE BLEAKEST EVER

The sun rose. But it didn't make things brighter. Maybe they didn't eat much for breakfast. Maybe not much for lunch. It was hard to breathe. Hard to be awake and impossible to sleep. That was Sabbath. The bleakest Sabbath ever.

Saturday night, the women talked. They were the women who had traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem with Jesus. The death had been so sudden, the reversal from the enthusiasm of the week so violent, that they had not been able to respond appropriately.

Joseph had buried Jesus with the traditional spices but the women had not had time to do anything. They had failed to do the necessary things for their own goodbye. So Saturday night they made their own plans to honor Jesus

with the proper attentions a dead loved one deserved.

Sunday at first light they were headed to the tomb.

SOMETHING WRONG

When they arrived, something was wrong. Were they at the right place? The grave was open. The stone was rolled back from the entrance.

They stooped and went inside.

Empty!

While they were wondering what on earth could have happened, a couple of men suddenly appeared. No, not men. Angels. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground.

One of the angels asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for Someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what He told you back in Galilee? That the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that He would rise again on the third day?"

Right! He had said this. He had said this very thing! Why didn't they think of it before? He's not in the tomb. He must be resurrected! They raced off to tell the men.

The men, the famous disciples whose names we know—Peter, James, John, Andrew, and Matthew—they didn't believe the women. What

do you mean the grave is empty? How could it possibly be empty?

The women told them again what they had seen and what the men in shining clothes had said. The women reminded the men of the words Jesus himself had spoken. But it was too much. The men wouldn't believe it.

NONSENSE

But neither could they deny it. Jesus *had* said something about dying and rising. It hadn't made sense. It still didn't make sense. But the words were there, floating at the edge of their memories. So Peter and John headed off to check it out. An hour and a half later they were back. They had seen no men in shining clothes. But they had seen the tomb. They had gone inside. It was empty. Jesus was gone.

The rest of the day passed in confusion. Jesus had died. They had seen it. Love had been crushed. Hope had been killed. The pictures were seared into their minds. And now the tomb was empty. The women had seen men in shining clothes and heard them announce that Jesus had risen.

They gradually remembered, together, words Jesus had spoken—words that had made no sense, and so had made no impression. He was going to be killed. He was going to rise. He had said those things, but they hadn't heard them

because they couldn't make sense of them. Not then.

But now—the tomb was empty.

WHAT NOW?

Well after sundown, there was pounding on the door. They looked at each other. Who? What now? Someone peaked through the crack.

"Who is it?"

It was friends. They opened the door and two friends from a hamlet outside Jerusalem practically jumped through the door—shouting.

"We have seen Him. We have seen Him."

The story tumbled out.

They had been walking home from Jerusalem that afternoon. A stranger joined them. He seemed friendly enough. They thought little of it. He asked about the latest news. He seemed clueless, like some redneck from Galilee ("Excuse me, Peter. No offense intended").

Judging by his questions, it appeared this man had heard nothing about Jesus, nothing about the triumphal ride last Sunday, nothing about Jesus chasing out the money changers and merchants, nothing about the crucifixion. Nothing.

"So we told him everything. And then he explained everything! He seemed like a brilliant scholar. He ran through dozens of prophecies, basically saying that the whole thing had been planned. It had all been prophesied.

"By the time we got to our place in Emmaus it was getting dark, so naturally we invited him to join us for supper and spend the night."

IT WAS HIM!

"We put some bread and wine on the table and sat down to eat. He picked up the bread and said the blessing. And *boom!* It was Him! How many times have we watched Him bless the bread? How could we have missed it? It was Him! It was His voice. It was His hands. It was Him! He is alive!"

"So where is He?" everyone shouted at once.

"We don't know. The instant we recognized Him and started from our chairs, He disappeared. Poof! Just like that! But we saw Him. We heard Him. We felt Him. He is alive!"

And for two thousand years this has been the song of the church. He is risen. He is alive.

Some of us have heard His voice, have felt His presence. Others, like the disciples in that upper room that evening, have only the testimony of our friends.

Still, we come together in worship and with one voice shout against the darkness of death: He is risen!

STILL WE SING

Some of us have had our children stolen from us. Still we sing, "He is risen. Death will one day die."

Some of us have seen our hopes crushed. We have felt the insuperable weight of despair. Still we come together and declare: Morning is coming! Righteousness, justice, God, and love will triumph. And we, too, will be victors. Because He is risen.

Recently, I had lunch with three college students. At one point, one of them asked me, "Do you think Christians make too much of heaven? Do you think Christians use talk about heaven as a substitute for actually doing something to make the world better?"

The question put a long pause in our conversation. What to say?

Finally, I said, "For people like you and me whose lives still include all kinds of opportunities to choose, to decide, to change things, to make things better, heaven can be a lazy-making idea. If we tell ourselves that God's going to fix things so I don't need to bother, heaven can be a bad idea. It can definitely make us lazy.

"But if heaven is the ideal that shapes our choices and our drives, we cannot give it too much attention.

"And some time, you will reach places in life where all of your strength and beauty and intelligence and luck and privilege will stand helpless in the face of unalterable grief and injustice. And *then* you will need the promise of heaven.

"And even if you don't personally reach that impasse, most people in the world live there every day. They are not sitting around in cafes wrestling with the questions: What career should I pursue? What city shall I live in? How will I spend my money? What fund should I invest my retirement funds in?

"For most people, the promise of justice—and even life itself—lives only in the reality of heaven. So let's be careful—we who live in privilege and comfort, we who have health and money, and youth—let's be careful not to make light of the truth that makes life worth living for millions who know nothing of our privilege."

If not for ourselves, then at least for our brothers and sisters who live in difficult places let's keep alive the glorious, shining faith: He is risen! He is alive! He will save us.

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A Conversation With A Middle East Pastor



Pastor Jony Hajaj shepherds a flock of some 250 Christian believers in Salwa, Kuwait. All of these church members are expatriates, working for non-governmental organizations, the United Nations, and as private citizens—doctors, nurses, accountants. Pastor Hajaj has recently started a new congregation in another city, Mangaf, with fifty to sixty people in attendance. Though Pastor Hajaj is a Seventh-day Adventist, the majority of those in attendance are members of other Christian denominations. The following conversation was conducted in January 2017 by means of a Skype computer connection. The conversation, as transcribed here, has been edited and condensed to fit the space available.



Editor: Pastor Hajaj, you do not have any members in your congregations who are Kuwaitis, correct?

Pastor Hajaj: No, all are expatriates. I have been here two years, and I am developing friendships with locals. I am reaching out to build relationships with them.

Ed: Are there Kuwaitis in the country who are Christians?

JH: Yes, there are Kuwaitis who are Christians, and there is a Christian pastor who is a Kuwaiti. He is a Presbyterian pastor. There are

not more than 250 Christians in the country who are Kuwaitis. But with expatriates of all nationalities, you have a lot of Christians in the country.

Ed: Does the government restrict how the expatriates can observe their religion?

JH: No, you have the right to practice your religion, but there are limits in doing public evangelism.

Ed: What is your personal experience with Islam?

JH: Let me give you a little bit of background. I am a Jordanian by nationality. My mother language is Arabic. I have been brought up in Jordan and, as you know, the majority in the Middle East are Muslims. In Jordan, we are only 3 percent Christian. 97 percent Muslim. So I have grown up with my peers, all around me, being Muslim. I know the tradition. I know the language. Even I have memorized a lot of Quranic verses. I know a lot of Hadiths—you know, the sayings of Muhammad.

Ed: Have you made this a formal study or, because you have lived there, you just became familiar with these things?

PRAYING TOGETHER

JH: Both. I have studied it, and I have practiced it. You know, when you have friends, you go with them, you learn, you see how they pray. Sometimes, you know, even you do it.

Ed: You have prayed with Muslim friends at

their calls to prayer?

JH: Yes.

Ed: I have sometimes discussed, with people here in the U.S., the question of whether Muslims worship the same God Christians worship. What do you think about that?

JH: We use the same word for God in our Arabic Bible, Allah. That is the Arabic word for the English word God. We worship the same God. With my friends I have discussed a lot of issues: Who is God? Why we worship God. These guys are so dedicated in worshipping God. Imagine this: They pray to God five times a day. They wake up at four in the morning.

Ed: So, to be clear, you have no question that, when one of your Muslim friends prays to God, and you pray to God, you are talking to the same person.

JH: Exactly! Yes. You know, there are things going around the world: Muslims worship the moon god, and on and on. I have lived with these people. I have seen how dedicated they are to God—worshipping Him, the one God, as the Creator, the Sustainer.

Ed: You mentioned the calls to prayer. I lived in Kenya for several years. We lived not far from Nairobi. There was a mosque some distance from our house. Sometimes, when the atmospheric conditions were right, the call to prayer from the mosque would awake me at four in the morning. There I was, comfortable, going back to sleep, and the Muslims were

going to the mosque to pray. Christians can seem lazy compared to Muslims, I think.

JH: You have put it the right way. If we compare ourselves, and their dedication to prayer, we can be lazy.

Ed: Of course many Christians are active with their devotion to God every day. It's not that Christians never are.

JH: There are a lot of Christians who are devoted to their worship of God.

ARE THEY FRIENDS?

Ed: Let me turn the conversation in a slightly different direction. I think this is already apparent in our conversation: You have no problem sharing friendship with Muslims.

JH: No. There is no problem at all. In fact, I love the time I spend discussing with these people my religion. How I can be a good Christian—how I can serve my God.

Ed: Are Muslims respectful of your commitment to Christ?

JH: Yes. They are.

Ed: Do they try to convert you?

JH: Yeah, they try. Oh sure.

Ed: Do you try to convert them?

JH: You know, it's not "trying." I like to live my life as what God has called me to be, to be an example. Because, let me tell you one thing that I have seen: Muslims have not seen what being a Christian can do in their lives. What they see from Hollywood, what they see on TV,

this is the religion that they see, you know?

Ed: But some of them know you. So, haven't they seen genuine Christianity in you?

JH: Look what they say. They say, "Jony, man, you are perfect. You are the Muslim that the Quran speaks about. But you miss one thing: saying that Muhammad is a prophet." So they look at my life as an example of how you should live. So I say, "Guys, Islam is about submission. You submit yourself to God. The other meaning of Islam is that you do not harm people with your hand or with your tongue. So I am a Muslim because I have committed myself to God, and I don't harm people with my hand or with my tongue. This is what God is asking me to do."

Ed: So, they are happy having these conversations.

JH: Yes, you know, there is deep friendship. There is love. We share everything openly.

SUNNI AND SHI'A

Ed: Let's talk more about Islam. It's divided between two major groups, Sunni and Shi'a, correct?

JH: Yeah, Sunni and Shi'a. That's right.

Ed: So what is the difference between the two?

JH: The Shi'a are followers of Ali. He was the cousin of prophet Muhammad. And Ali married the daughter of prophet Muhammad. So he is Muhammad's son-in-law and his cousin.

According to the Shi'a, the one who succeeded Muhammad is Ali, and his sons that come behind him.

Ed: OK.

JH: And then Abu Bakr came. He was a close associate of Muhammad.

Ed: And so the question is: Who should be the successor to Muhammad?

JH: Yes. And the other issue is that the Shi'a, they believe in Imams. The Shi'a are waiting for El Mahdi. The Sunnis don't believe in that.

Ed: So El Mahdi. This is like a messiah?

JH: Well, both the Sunni and the Shi'a believe that Jesus is coming back. But this guy El Mahdi, he's like the twelfth Imam. He disappeared when he was young. So they are waiting for him to come, and when he comes he will declare victory. The Sunni, they don't agree with all of this. So the Sunni say there is nothing to the idea of the imams, the descendants of Ali. This is the main issue between the sects.

Ed: Are both Sunni and Shi'a in Kuwait, where you are?

JH: Yes. The Sunni are dominant.

Ed: And worldwide, the Sunni are dominant?

JH: Worldwide, yes.

ARE THEY ENEMIES?

Ed: On a daily basis, do members of the two groups associate in a positive way, or are they

always enemies?

JH: No, they associate. You sometimes even find marriages between the two.

Ed: Would they worship in the same mosque?

JH: No. Because even in the call to prayer, the Shi'a have added Ali.

Ed: Well, it seems like wherever there are human beings there comes to be disagreement.

JH: Exactly. And I believe this is Satan. You know, he is trying to divide people wherever they are, so he will have the power. Because, you know, wherever there is division there is hatred.

LOVE OR HATE?

Ed: Now we hear, quite often, about radical Islam: ISIS. Are they Sunni or Shi'a, or something else entirely?

JH: These guys are Sunni. And they believe they are following the example of the prophet of Islam. You know, the Quran is filled with messages about love: Love your neighbors, love others, love God. There is a lot of that that you will find there, and you will find some places that you need to go and fight, and all of that.

Ed: And to be honest and fair, the Christian scriptures, in some places, could be interpreted as promoting violence also.

JH: Exactly. So you know, if you want to focus on love you will find it. But there were two scholars who came in the twelfth century, and

they were the beginning of Wahhabism, in Saudi Arabia. So these radical guys are building all their theology on these books.

Ed: So Wahhabism is the basis of most of this violence.

JH: Exactly.

NO SEPARATION

Ed: OK, let's change direction again. In the U.S. many people believe that there should be a separation between church and state—between sacred and secular. The state should not enforce religious beliefs and practices. A result of this, at least hopefully, is religious liberty. Everyone is free to worship—or not worship—as we choose. In Islam, there is not that separation. Is that correct?

JH: You are right. According to the Muslim, Islam is not a religion. It is a way of living. It is intertwined in everything.

Ed: Of course there are Christians who say that, too, and I believe that. I believe there is no part of my life that should be separated from my commitment to God, and yet there is a sense in which there needs to be a separation to avoid conflict.

JH. Yeah. I understand what you are saying. But here, in the Middle East, you cannot move without the package of who you are. Islam is the domain you live in. You cannot separate yourself from that. Even the ID—the

identification card that I carry—includes my religion.

Ed: You carry ID in your wallet that says you are a Christian.

JH: Yes.

Ed: Does that create a disadvantage for you.

JH: No. No. Everyone knows, from my name, Jony, that I am a Christian.

Ed: So everyone understands that you are named for one of Jesus' disciples.

JH: Yes! And I come from a tribe in Jordan. I am a descendent of the Moabites.

Ed: So you are a descendent of Abraham's cousin, Lot.

JH: That's right. So, I go back with my family history, where my tribe comes from. So I have never had a problem between Muslim and Christian. My friend's mother would say, "Jony, come to the kitchen and eat!" But in the last decade things started changing, because of what is going on in the whole world. People now are afraid of what will happen. News media, you know, are spreading hatred.

Ed: You know, media are causing those kinds of problems everywhere, I think. Here in the U.S. the political parties, Republicans and Democrats, are much angrier at each other than they used to be. And the media fan those flames.

JH: Yeah, it seems there is no good news anymore. And that's why it is important that we share the Good News!



Pastor Jony Hajaj's congregation in Salwa, Kuwait

DREAMS, VISIONS, VISITATIONS

Ed: Yes! Do you know Muslims who have converted to believe in Jesus as Messiah?

JH: Yeah, I know some. You know, this is important. These guys have become Christians in a way that you cannot believe. You know, if you do Bible studies, evangelistic campaigns—all of that—it does not work at all.

Ed: Increasingly in the United States it is the case that they don't work, either.

JH: So these guys, they had a dream or a vision or an angelic visitation.

Ed: Something supernatural.

JH: It is supernatural. You are right. Jesus came to them in a dream. Calling them. Or an angel came and visited them. These people will describe it for me: "The man in white."

When you talk to these guys, you know, that

encounter with God is deep in their heart. They are ready to die. They have no problem thinking that way.

Ed: So you're saying that the Muslims who have become Christian believers—it is the result of a supernatural visitation, almost always.

JH: Exactly. And so I believe it is important to pray that God will send dreams and visions and angelic visitations to this nation.

BELIEFS IN COMMON

Ed: Besides believing in the one true God, are there other commonalities between what Christians believe and what Muslims believe?

JH: Yes. We both believe in Christ. Now, Muslims have a different understanding of Messiah. You have Surrahs describing Jesus as "the word of God."

Ed: Now that's interesting because in the gospel of John, "the Word" applies to Jesus and it also says, "the Word was God." But a Muslim does not believe that Jesus is God, correct?

JH: You know, this what is called "shirk." This is the worst kind of sin. It is blasphemy for a Muslim. And blasphemy is a sin that will not be forgiven.

Ed: So, although you have good relationships with many Muslims—you eat together, you share life together—this part of what you believe is very bad in their minds.

THE WORD OF GOD

JH: Yes. So, when we speak about Jesus, I say that this is a spiritual relationship. I explain that Jesus has no earthly father. I say, today if we want to speak about Jesus and give him a birth certificate, I would write: mother's name—Mary. When he was born—we can fill out all of that. But the father—who is the root of Jesus? That is His Father. Usually I don't compare Jesus to Muhammad. I compare Jesus to the Quran. The Word of God is the Quran.

Ed: Yes. The gospel of John, again: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." So the way you explain it, Jesus is comparable to the Quran.

JH: Exactly. So, in Islam the word of God became a book, and in Christianity the Word of God became a person.

Ed: You know, I have a sense that the Christian belief is contradictory, in a way. The Christian view of the Trinity, and Jesus—God—becoming flesh, becoming a man—there is contradiction in that. You cannot make complete sense of it. And yet, as a Christian I'm willing to live with a sense that this is beyond my understanding. That the Trinity is One God—and yet three Persons. Jesus is God, and yet He's a man. These things are contradictory, in a way.

But they're also true. And as a Christian I believe them even though I see the possible contradiction. I understand that a Muslim could think: No. That's just crazy. It makes no sense.

ONLY BY THE SPIRIT

JH: Exactly. You know, only the Spirit can explain that. It is only the work of God that makes that difference. It is an intervention of the Holy Spirit. It's a miracle that can do that. This is very important. When I talk about God, you know, God has a personality, isn't that right?

Ed: Yes! And that understanding of God being a person is true with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam but many other religious people see God as something else—not a person.

JH: Exactly. So, when we talk about God as a person, one of the things we believe is that God talks, isn't that right? And how does God talk? Through His Word. And being a person, God is alive, and He lives through His Spirit. So, this is how I talk about it: The personality of God—we call Him the Father. The Word of God we call Jesus. And God is alive with His Spirit—the Holy Spirit. So this is what we believe. You know, in Arabic, we say that the first odd number is not one. It is three. Because one is the base of all the numbers, you know? There are many examples of three in the world. You look at water, you know. It comes in three ways: It can be vapor, and it is liquid, and it becomes hard—ice. It is the same way with God.

BEYOND UNDERSTANDING

Ed: So, do Muslims have a sense, as I do as a

Christian, that God is greater than our ability to understand?

JH: Yes.

Ed: So faithful Muslims do not believe that they understand all there is to know about God.

JH: That's right. Yes.

Ed: So we share that in common—that God is beyond our understanding.

JH: Yes. The Quran says there is nothing like God. So we have in common much about how we look at God. We believe that Jesus was born of a virgin.

Ed: Muslims believe that Jesus was born of a virgin? They believe in the virgin birth of Jesus?

JH: That's right. Exactly. And they believe that Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is a spirit from God. But there is a difference of understanding of who is that spirit. And then both of us—we are looking for the second coming of Jesus. Muslims believe that Jesus will come back again. Jesus is the sign of judgment day. You have a verse in the Quran that says that clearly: Jesus is the sign of the judgment day.

SHOCKING AGREEMENT

Ed: So in looking to the future, there is a lot in common between the Christian view and the Muslim view.

JH: Yes. Yes. Yes. And if you want to look also, we agree on the prophets. Many in the Old

Testament are mentioned in the Quran—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah. All these prophets are mentioned in the Quran.

Ed: So the Old Testament luminaries—the prophets—are a part of Islamic belief.

JH: That's right. They are. Even the Quran is encouraging Muslims to come and ask Christians if they do not understand something.

Ed: You know, most Christians, I think, would say that there is a lot in common between the Jewish faith and the Christian faith. But, as we talk, it seems to me that there may be more in common between Christianity and Islam.

We share a lot about our understanding of Christ, together, in a way that Judaism and Christianity do not.

JH: Yes. You are right. You know, Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet. He came. He had a message. Judaism does not accept that.

Ed: And I think, maybe, for the average American Christian, this idea would be shocking.

JH: Yes.

Ed: Hmm. Fascinating. OK, a little different direction now: Christians have a lot of doctrinal positions about things.

JH: Well, you know, people like to believe that Muslims believe in only the five pillars of Islam.

Ed: The five pillars, stated in English, include what?

JH: Yes. First, "only one God and Muhammad is His Prophet." Then second, you need to

pray five times a day. Third, you need to fast through the month of Ramadan. Fourth is The Hajj, that's pilgrimage to Mecca. And the fifth is a kind of tithing. So this is what are called the five pillars of Islam. But there is more than that, you know. There are other doctrines that go beyond the five pillars, for sure.

GRACE AND LOVE?

Ed: A foundational principle in Christian belief is God's grace. We're saved through our faith in Jesus by God's grace rather than by our own works.

JH: Yes, let me put it this way. In Islam, good deeds are very important. In the day of judgment, God will put your good deeds and bad deeds on a scale. But still, in Islam you are not saved by your deeds. If it is not for God's mercy, you will never be saved. You know, Muslims believe different things. Some scholars say that if your good deeds are few, God may burn you a little bit and then He will send you to heaven.

Ed: So this is like purgatory.

JH: That's right. They have that idea.

Ed: Do Muslims think of Allah as loving? I am not an expert but I have studied this. It seems that in Islam, Allah loves those who love Him but there is not the sense that He loves everyone, even those who do not love Him.

JH: Exactly. We have talked about the commonalities but there are certainly

differences also between Christianity and Islam—more than just our view about who Jesus is. The whole issue of a loving God, and the salvation plan—by grace: these are things we need to share with our Muslim brothers.

And their understanding of sin and our understanding of sin is totally different.

Ed: So Jesus' death on the cross to forgive our sins doesn't really make sense to a Muslim.

JH: Muslims don't think about it in this way. They think about it in terms of shame and honor. You know, Muslims will say that Abraham killed an animal for his son. They are practicing this every year. It's called Eid al-Adha.

Ed: So they have a sense of an animal sacrifice taking the place of a person.

JH: Yes, they have that whole story. It is in the Quran. And they say blood needs to be shed to cover the shame. So I tell a Muslim: God shed blood to cover our shame and bring back our honor. Jesus shed His blood so He can cover our shame.

IMPACT

Ed: Is this a way of thinking that has an impact on a Muslim?

JH: Yes. Yes, it has.

Ed: And that's a different way of speaking than I am accustomed to, but it's not wrong.

JH: It is very important for us to think of how we can build bridges. We are not here

to destroy bridges. We are here to build bridges. You know, Adam and Eve, they were ashamed—in the garden. What did God do to cover that shame? He sacrificed an animal, and he dressed them. He covered their shame through sacrificing an animal, through shedding blood. In the Quran it says that God gave them a righteous dress. That is a bridge that we can build on. To cover our shame God sent Jesus, and He shed His blood, so that we can be saved. In that way God gives us back our honor that we lost.

Ed: Very fascinating. Well, Pastor Jony, you have been a pastor to us today. You have ministered to us in a unique way. I think through explaining Islam so well, you have helped us to understand our own Christian belief more fully. Thank you for sharing your understanding with us—of both Islam, what our Muslim brothers believe, and also of your own and our Christian belief.

JH: Thank you. This has been a blessing to me, too.



Pastor Jony Hajaj and Christian Record President Diane Thurber recently attended a convention of Christian leaders in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. They arranged at that time for the Light magazine editor to interview Pastor Hajaj. As noted earlier, Pastor Hajaj works as a Christian pastor in Kuwait, on the

northern end of the Persian Gulf. The photos on the cover, and on pages 17, 36 and 37 were taken by Diane Thurber in the United Arab Emirates, on the southern end of the Persian Gulf.

Glimpses of United Arab Emirates



▲ Nighttime cityscape from the viewing deck of the world's tallest building, Burj Khalifa in Dubai.

◀ Abu Dhabi business district

▼ Abu Dhabi skyline





part two in a five-part series—

What the Bible Says About Grudges

by Ginger Ketting-Weller

In recent years I have been struck by how many people around me hold grudges, and by how much damage is done by that death-grip on a sense of offense. So I've been learning what I can about grudge-holding, and have become ever more intrigued by what I've discovered so far.

I often go to the Bible, which is a touchstone for me in understanding human beings and how they work. I was interested to find that the Bible mentions grudges five times, and in none of those places is a grudge a good thing. You may need to be biblically literate to follow my brief summary of these stories, but if you're not, I suggest you get acquainted with them. Bible stories are alluded to all the time in society, they provide the seed narratives for movies and books, and they have shaped Western culture, so it seems wise for people to be acquainted with them.

COLD-HEARTED CALCULATION

The first biblical mention of grudge-holding takes place in Genesis 27 just after Jacob steals his brother Esau's birthright blessing. The brothers' father, Isaac, is old, blind, and infirm, so although the twins are as different as night and day, Jacob is able to dupe his father into thinking he is the older twin, and gets his father to bestow his patriarchal blessing on the "wrong" son. Esau comes in to receive his

blessing and finds that the words have already been said over his brother. Culturally, the deed is done.

The Bible says, "So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (Genesis 27:41, NASB).

Clearly Esau's grudge not only led him to plot his brother's death, but it also revealed a cold-hearted calculation in estimating the time to his father's death so that he could exact revenge on his twin.

DIRTY TRICK

The second biblical mention of grudge-holding is in connection with the sons of Jacob, just one generation later. The brothers of Joseph, the next-to-youngest son of Jacob, pulled a dirty trick by selling Joseph into slavery. Problem was, he turned up again as the powerful second-in-command of Egypt, and first-in-command of the food they needed to buy from Egypt during a terrible drought. Joseph took the high road, forgiving his brothers and resettling his whole family nearby so that he could make sure they were provided for.

But memories are long, and shame runs deep. When his father died, the brothers were worried.

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" (Gen. 50:15).

But Joseph didn't.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Grudges show up again later, in the "sundry laws" (I love that term—a mishmash of guidance to pay attention to) that God gave Moses to guide the lives of the children of Israel. Here is the instruction from Leviticus 19:17-18: "You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor; but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD."

Seems pretty clear to me.

ROYAL INTRIGUE

Now we come to David, the second king of Israel. This man spent much of his youth hiding out in the mountains from the first king, Saul, who was out to kill him. Later he fled from his own son Absalom, who had designs on the throne and would have killed his own father to get it.

David was a lyricist, and we see much of what he was trying to work through

emotionally, in the songs that he wrote. In Psalm 55:1-3 we get a window into his fear of Saul:

Give ear to my prayer, O God,
And do not hide yourself from my
supplication.
Give heed to me and answer me;
I am restless in my complaint and
surely distracted
Because of the voice of the enemy,
Because of the pressure of the wicked;
For they bring down trouble upon me
And in anger they bear a grudge
against me.

It's no fun to be on the receiving end of a grudge, and David has not been the last to call on God for help in such a situation.

EVIL QUEEN

The final mention of a grudge in the Bible drives a famous story: the beheading of John the Baptist. This wild prophet from the wilderness had called out King Herod for stealing his brother's wife. Herod was interested in what this prophet had to say, but his wife Herodias was deeply offended.

"Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not do so; for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very

perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him" (Mark 6:19-20).

It did not end well for John. It often does not end well when someone in power holds a grudge against someone with less power.

In the next part of this series we will take a look at contemporary behavioral research about the effect grudges have on people.

Ginger Ketting-Weller is dean of the School of Education at La Sierra University, Riverside, California. Read Part 3 of the series on grudges in the May-June 2017 issue of Light.

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Jesus: God and Man

A crossword puzzle by Richard Clark Jr.
(Answers from the NKJV)

Across

1. Whoever ___ and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. 2 John 1:9
7. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who ___ the Son has the Father also. 1 John 2:23
8. All things were made ___ Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. John 1:3
9. Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his ___, the LORD of hosts: "I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God." Isaiah 44:6
12. They drank of that spiritual Rock that ___ them, and that Rock was Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4
14. Peace to you. ... Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. ___ Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have. Luke 24:36, 39
16. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is ___ who denies the Father and the Son. 1 John 2:22

18. And the Word ___ flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

20. The Father judges no one, but has committed all ___ to the Son. John 5:22

21. But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is ___ and ever." Hebrews 1:8

22. For I ___ the name of the LORD: ... He is the Rock. Deuteronomy 32:3-4

23. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that ___ that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God. 1 John 4:2

24. I am the Alpha and the ___, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.

Revelation 22:13

25. You, LORD, in the beginning laid the ___ of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Hebrews 1:10

Down

2. Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before ___ was, I AM." John 8:58

3. Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might ___ him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. Hebrews 2:14

4. God, ... has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, ... the brightness of His glory and the ___ image of His person. Hebrews 1:1-3

5. In Him dwells all the fullness of the ___ bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

Colossians 2:9-10

6. Christ Jesus, ... being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no ___, ... coming in the likeness of men. Philippians 2:5-7

10. For by Him all things were ___ that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible. Colossians 1:16

11. Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by the feet and ___ Him. Matthew 28:9

12. I and My ___ are one. John 10:30

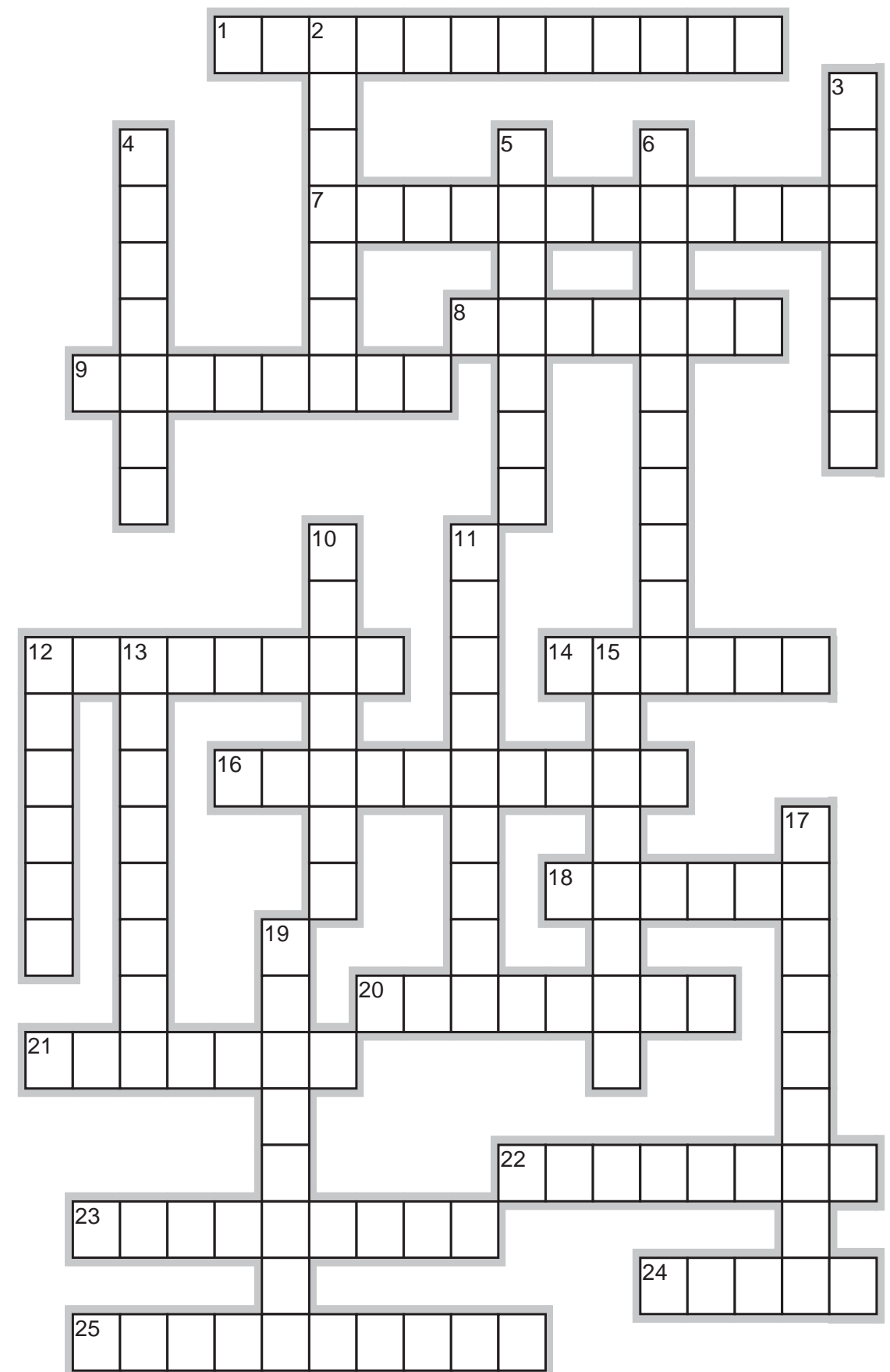
13. For the LORD is our Judge, the LORD is our ___.

15. Thomas ___ and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20:28

17. In the ___ was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the ___ with God.

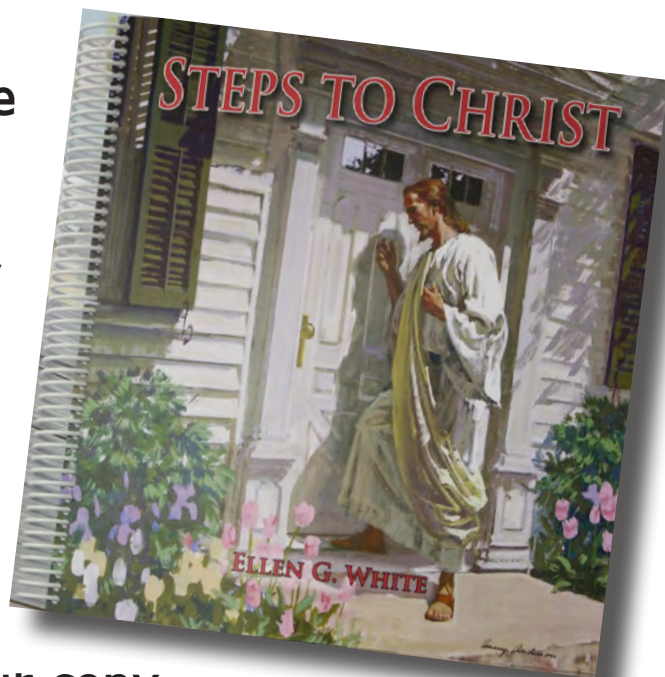
John 1:1-2

19. "The LORD is my ___." "I am the good ___." The good ___ gives His life for the sheep." Psalm 23:1; John 10:11



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