

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Defending My Faith at 35,000 Feet

On a flight to Israel, I was seated next to a stranger who was an evangelical Christian. He enthusiastically shared his excitement about visiting the “Holyland” for the very first time.

Our conversation was cordial. However, at 35,000 feet, he challenged me to accept Jesus and the New Testament. I preferred not to debate the issue while on a plane, so I asked him to stop and respect my personal space.

However, this Christian zealously persisted in sharing his faith for more than an hour. So, I decided it was time to defend mine.

I asked him if he accepted the authority of the Jewish Bible, which he called the “Old Testament.” He said he did and considered it to be the literal “inspired word of God.” I then questioned him, “what if the Book of Mormon contradicted the original inspired word of God?” He was adamant that this would prove that the new book was not true.

In the same way, I said, I cannot accept the New Testament because it contradicts the “Old” Testament many times. He responded, “show me one contradiction, and I will leave you alone.”

I pointed out several contradictions. However, one, in particular, shocked him because the New Testament contradicts something stated, not once but three times in the Jewish Bible.

In this week’s Torah portion Shemot (Exodus 1:1- 6:1), in a turning point in Jewish history, Yaacov’s twelve sons were forged into a unified nation.

In Hebrew, “Shemot” means “names.” After listing the names of the twelve sons of Yaacov, the Torah proclaims that the total number of people who “*emerged from Yaacov were **seventy***” (Exodus 1:2).

continued on reverse

The number “seventy” is mentioned three times in the Torah. First in Genesis 46:27 where it says, “*all the people from Yaacov’s household who came to Egypt were seventy,*” the second time is in this week’s portion, and the third time in Deuteronomy.

This last verse is very familiar to Jews. Every Passover, we read it in the traditional Haggadah proclaiming, “*your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven*” (Deuteronomy 10:22).

It is noteworthy that population experts calculate that the exponential growth of seventy people during 210 years of Egyptian exile could surpass 2 million people and this corresponds to the number mentioned in Exodus 12:37.

I continued to make my point and you could have heard a pin drop when I showed him that Acts 7:14 in the New Testament says “75 people” came to Egypt.

He offered numerous rationalizations to explain the discrepancy. Then he vehemently declared that it does not matter since there is no way to calculate the actual historical number. I responded, “you mean it’s not provable like the historical and archeological fact that Yaacov is buried in the city of Hebron, as mentioned in Genesis 49:29-30. “Exactly,” he exclaimed.

I then showed him another New Testament contradiction, where Acts 7:16 mistakenly claims Yaacov was buried in the city of Shechem, 50 miles north of Hebron. He was dumbstruck and did not say another word to me the entire flight.

Even at 35,000 feet, we see that knowledge of the Torah is the best way to survive missionary challenges, which are based on misquotes, mistranslations, and even fabrications. As King Solomon put it, “*the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of those who have it*” (Ecclesiastes 7:12).

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

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