

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Eye-Opening Debate in Jerusalem



Not long ago, I befriended Mark, a young Jewish college student who was influenced by his roommate to convert to Christianity. Together they attended Christian rock concerts and Bible studies.

Without a strong foundation in Judaism, Mark was swayed by the biblical “proof-texts” that a Christian youth pastor pointed out to him.

Mark’s sister contacted me about her brother, and eventually, the three of us were sitting at a table in a kosher restaurant, engaged in a dialogue. Mark was adamant that Jesus had fulfilled dozens of bible passages. However, he was unwilling to consider any viewpoint other than his own.

At this point, I showed Mark the words of King Solomon, who said, *“The first to bring an argument sounds right until someone comes and challenges him”* (Proverbs 18:17). When Mark abruptly got up to leave, I told him, “My door is always open if you want to talk.”

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A few months later, Mark reached out to me. It took some time, but Solomon’s advice convinced Mark to listen to an alternative explanation. Together we examined the context and original Hebrew of the passages he thought referred to Jesus. Eventually, he realized that he had made an uninformed decision. Furthermore, the experience had ignited a desire in Mark to reconnect to his Jewish heritage, learn Torah, and seek a meaningful relationship with God.

Mark left California and traveled to Jerusalem to study in yeshivah, a Jewish school for young people like himself. A few months later, I received a frantic call from Mark. Mark described how he started each day with a fresh coffee at a small Jerusalem cafe owned by a fifth-generation Israeli. He discovered that the owner had accepted Christianity and considered himself a “messianic Jew.” Many cups of coffee later, Mark was confused by the Israeli’s passionate arguments and fluency in Hebrew.

Mark wanted to hear my response and asked me to debate the cafe owner. Because of the urgency of the situation, I immediately booked a flight to Israel. A few days later, we met at the coffee house. Mark listened attentively as the Israeli presented his arguments, and I patiently provided a response. The discussion lasted for many hours. However, no matter what I said, the Israeli provided a rationalization for his point of view.

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I decided to take a different approach when I realized that the Israeli was not interested in facts because his mind was made up. I said I would like to visit the resting places of some of the great biblical figures who are buried in Israel. In particular, I want to go to the city of Shechem to visit the grave of our forefather Jacob. Immediately the Israeli corrected me and pointed out that not only was Shechem a dangerous place to visit but that Jacobs's resting place was actually in the city of Hebron, almost 50 miles south of Shechem.

I already knew this, but as you will soon see, I was making a point.

In this week's Torah portion, *Vayishlach* (Genesis 32:4-36:43), we learn that Jacob "*purchased a field in Shechem from the sons of Chamor*" (Genesis 33:19).

However, after Jacob died, he was buried in Hebron, "*in the cave in the field of Machpelah [that is in Hebron] ... which Abraham bought ... as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite.*" (Genesis 49:30; Genesis 23:17-19).

Actually, it was Jacob's son Joseph who was "*buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Chamor*" (Joshua 24:32).

As we reviewed these biblical and archaeological facts, the Israeli was thrilled that he had apparently caught me in a mistake. The bible clearly says Jacob was buried in Hebron and not in Shechem, as I had claimed.

Then I made my point. I asked him if the bible was so clear that **Jacob** was buried in **Hebron** on land **Abraham** bought from **Ephron**, why did the New Testament incorrectly say that "*Jacob and our fathers died ... and they [Jacob and the fathers] were buried in Shechem in a tomb Abraham purchased from the son of Chamor*" (Acts 7:15-16).

The Israeli's mouth dropped in disbelief.

Upon seeing the glaring contradiction in his Hebrew New Testament, the Israeli's mouth dropped in disbelief. At the same time, Mark glanced at me and smiled because he realized that I had made my point.

The wisdom of Solomon rang true for Mark in that Jerusalem cafe. Once again, he realized that the first to bring an argument might sound right until someone provided another point of view.

Satisfied and relieved, Mark returned to his study of the Torah and committed his life to Judaism.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

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P.O. Box 351235, Los Angeles, CA 90035 • 310-556-3344
info@JewsforJudaism.org • www.jewsforjudaism.org/donate • www.SMARTalks.com