

Spiritual Insight 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 man named Mark, who happened to be an evangelical Christian. Mark shared his excitement about visiting the “Holyland” for the very first time.

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

However, this zealous Christian persisted in sharing his faith for more than an hour. At this point, I decided it was time to defend my faith. I asked Mark if he accepted the authority of the Jewish Bible, which he called the “Old Testament.” He responded that he did, and he told me he considered it to be the infallible “inspired word of God.” After hearing this, I posed the following question to him. “What would you say if the more recent Book of Mormon contradicted the original inspired word of God?” Without missing a beat, he insisted that this would prove that the Book of Mormon was not true.

I explained I could not accept the New Testament for the very same reason because it contradicted the “Old” Testament many times. In disbelief, he responded, “Show me one contradiction, and I will leave you alone.”

Using Mark’s bible, I pointed out several contradictions. However, one specific contradiction shocked him because the New Testament contradicted something stated not once but three times in the Jewish Bible.

Show me one contradiction, and I will leave you alone.

In a turning point in Jewish history, this week’s Torah portion, *Shemot* (Exodus 1:1- 6:1), records that Jacob’s twelve sons were forged into a fledgling nation. In Hebrew, the word “*shemot*” means “names.” After listing the names of the twelve sons of Jacob, the Torah proclaims that the total number of people who “*emerged from Jacob were seventy*” (Exodus 1:5).

The number “seventy” is significant and is repeated three times in the Torah. The first time is in Genesis 46:27, which states, “*All the people from Jacobs’s household who came to Egypt were seventy.*” As noted, the number seventy is mentioned a second time in this week’s Torah portion.

Most Jews are more familiar with the third reference to the number seventy because we recite it aloud every Passover. During the traditional reading of the Haggadah, we retell the story of Exodus from Egypt. We are reminded, “*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).

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Population experts calculate that the exponential growth of seventy people during 210 years of Egyptian exile could surpass two million people. Remarkably, this number of people corresponds closely to the number mentioned in Exodus 12:37.

After establishing that the “Old Testament” consistently says “seventy people” came to Egypt, I asked Mark to look up a passage in the New Testament.

Mark’s mouth dropped when he read aloud that the number of people who came to Egypt was “*seventy-five people*” (Acts 7:14). Then, after 30 seconds of silence, Mark offered several rationalizations to explain the discrepancy. He even tried to attribute the number seventy-five to the Greek translation of the Bible known as the Septuagint.

Mark’s Septuagint argument fell apart when I pointed out that we trust the Hebrew original rather than a Greek translation produced by Hellenized [assimilated] Jews. One reason the New Testament is full of contradictions is that its authors relied on this inaccurate and inconsistent translation. For example, the Hellenized Septuagint mentions seventy-five people in Genesis and Exodus but records seventy in Deuteronomy.

Other inconsistencies prove that this Hellenized translation is not the same as the original Greek Septuagint mentioned in the Talmud Megillah 9a, which consisted exclusively of the Five Books of Moses.

Knowledge of the Torah is the best way to survive missionary challenges.

Not willing to give up, Mark vehemently declared that the numbers seventy or seventy-five did not matter, since there is no way to calculate the actual historical number. I responded, “You consider it unverifiable, unlike the historical and archeological fact that Jacob was buried in the city of Hebron, as mentioned in Genesis 49:29-30.”

“Exactly!” he exclaimed.

At this point, I asked Mark to read Acts 7:16, which mistakenly claims Jacob was buried in the city of Shechem, 50 miles north of Hebron. He was dumbstruck and did not say another word to me for the duration of the flight.

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

Shabbat Shalom,

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