

DISCOVERING THE BIBLE & OUR BIBLICAL HERITAGES

Providing factual information about the Bibles, beliefs, movements, institutions, events and people of historical Christianity & Judaism.

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Ticket to Heaven or a Way of Life?

By Jim Myers



My Ticket

matter what I do! Our church had a doctrine called *“once saved always saved,”* which meant that our tickets to Heaven can never be cancelled. **Once you were “saved” and received “the” ticket, that was it** ó *you were set for eternity. Who wouldn’t go for a deal like that?*

For many years, my religion provided me with a *“ticket to Heaven.”* It looked like this **Ticket**. It admits *“believerø only”* into Heaven, where they will live a life of bliss without any pain or problems for eternity. How did I get my ticket? I received it when I was *“saved.”* Not only did I obtain my **Ticket to Heaven**, all of my sins were forgiven ó *past present and future*. And, not only did I receive the ticket ó ***I will never lose it no***

How was a person “saved” in my church? Most were saved during a ritual called *“the altar call.”* At the end of a church service, the *“invitation”* was given by the minister. He urged any who had not been *“saved”* to come forward as the congregation sang hymns. This was a very emotional experience for the *“lost person”* and the congregation as the minister reviewed the eternal rewards and punishments that lay ahead for the *“saved”* and the *“lost.”* Those who *“made a decision to be saved”* came forward and were asked a few questions by the minister. They were then led in praying the *“Sinnerø Prayer,”*¹ and after the prayer, the minister announced that the person had been *“saved.”*

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In my church, I have no doubt that our members all believed that the way we were saved came directly from Jesus. But, when I decided to examine the history of my church and its beliefs ó



Charles Finney ²

I discovered that we had been wrong. The first thing I investigated was our ritual of salvation ó *altar call, invitation, Sinner's Prayer and immediate salvation*. It didn't take long to discover that the person credited with making the altar call and instant salvation part of Christianity was **Charles Finney** (08/29/1792 ó 08/16/1875), an American Presbyterian minister. He has been called *The Father of Modern Revivalism* and is best known for his new innovations -- *including the altar call and immediate church membership for converts*.³ He also introduced -- *public praying of women in mixed-sex audiences, daily services over a series of days, use of the common everyday language by the preacher, the anxious bench, and praying for people by name*.

So, a major part of our salvation ritual was introduced by Charles Finney in America around the time of the Civil War ó *not by Jesus in Israel during the 1st century CE*.

We will have to continue our journey back in time to a period before Finney **to discover how emotionalism became part of our salvation ritual**. In 1679, a cycle of revivals began in Massachusetts. Revivals would flare up, die out and flare up again.⁴ At the meetings evangelists would stress the horrors of Hell and the rewards of Heaven (just like my preacher). They graphically describing the pain and sorrows the lost will experience as they are tortured by the flames of the fires of Hell forever. *As they burn, they will reminded of every opportunity they had to "surrender themselves to Jesus as he knocked on the door of their hearts" ó including the opportunity at that revival meeting. Emotions became so high that people barked, shouted, and ran to the front begging to be converted -- some literally passed out because of the guilt, fear, and stress.*⁵

George Whitefield (12/27/1714 ó 09/30/1770) arrived in America in 1740 and began a new wave of revivals that drew massive crowds. He raised the question of whether people who were church members had ever been saved and charged local ministers with leading their flocks into Hell by not teaching the true salvation message. Obviously, his message didn't go over very well with local ministers, who preached that Whitefield was a messenger of Satan. *Whitefield changed Christianity when he declared that God requires a personal publicly displayed emotional experience as evidence and proof of salvation*.⁶ Now I knew where the role of emotionalism in our salvation rituals originated ó *it came from George Whitefield in the 18th century*.



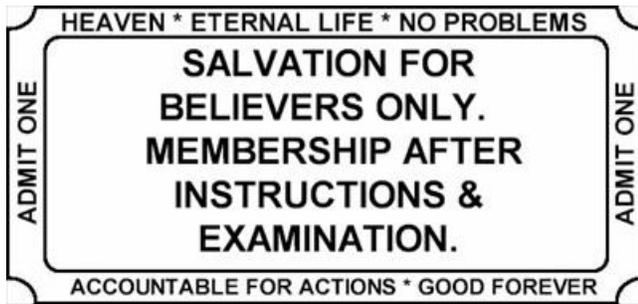
George Whitefield ⁷



Samuel Davies ⁸

During this period, churches divided into two distinct categories. Those following the evangelists became known as the "New Lights," while those who opposed them were the "Old Lights." The preacher who brought the **New Lights** to the forefront -- and played a major role in making their message acceptable in colonial churches -- was **Samuel Davies**. He arrived in Virginia as a New Light pastor in 1748.⁹ Davies was a master communicator who had the ability to appear to be speaking directly and personally to each member of the audience. Davies did not preach abstract moral principles about an abstract universe or an abstract God. *He spoke about "your life and your relationship to a God who seeks you out of a condemned world" to save you*. The "you" in Davies's sermons became "me" in the mind of his audience. They understood his words "to be to me

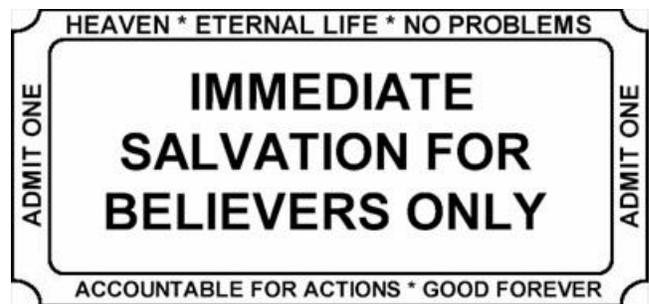
about Christ's love for me, the awfulness of my sin and guilt, and my salvation through Christ's sacrifice."¹⁰ *The lure of this new "personal (individual) salvation message" was very appealing.*



The **Old Lights** were unencumbered by the *emotionalism* preached by the evangelists. They moved in the direction of a greater rationalism in theology, **Unitarianism** came from this group.¹¹ **Old Lights** did not allow people to immediately become members of their church. They required a period in which a candidate for membership received instructions about the requirements for

one to become and live as a Christian. During that period, the candidate's lifestyle was observed to see if his or her actions reflected the church's teachings. The last step, before the candidate was accepted for membership, required the candidate to be brought before the entire congregation for questioning.

New Lights allowed new converts to immediately become members after demonstrating a "personal emotional conversion experience." But, they continued to keep an eye on them after they became a member. New converts were taught "to come out of the world -- *true Christians did not gamble, wear pretentious or conspicuous clothing, dance, or engage in activities attributed to the wealthy.* Behavior that had denoted respectability and prestige prior to conversion became improper and sinful afterwards. *This resulted in a radical cleavage between people who had known each other for years, including family members and old friends and created clear social distinctions between the members of the two groups.*"¹²



As we shall see below, **predestination** or **predetermination** "God determined who would be saved and who would be lost at the beginning" -- played a major role in the teaching of **John Calvin** and **Martin Luther**. The belief that only the Elect will be saved was very common until **Jacobus Arminius** (10/10/1560 " 10/19/1609) declared -- *grace sufficient for salvation is conferred on the Elect, and on the Non-elect.* His theology did not become fully developed during his lifetime, but John Wesley (1703"1791), founder of the Methodist movement, embraced Arminianism and helped it become one of the dominant theological systems in the United States.¹³



Jacobus Arminius¹⁴

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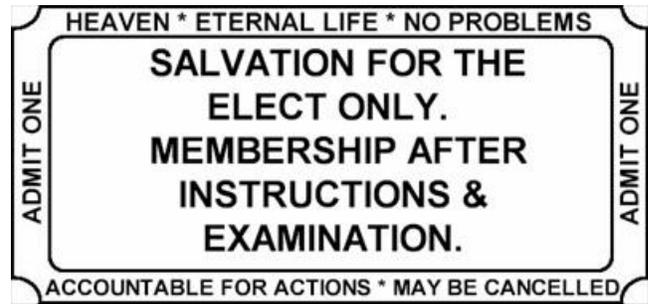
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John Calvin¹⁵

John Calvin (07/10/1509 ó 05/27/1564) taught that one is united to Christ by faith, and all of the benefits of Christ come from being united to him. Calvin saw salvation as a permanent feature of being connected

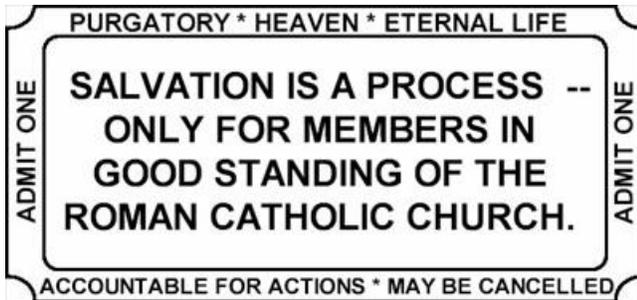


to Christ. His teachings were in substantial agreement with Luther, but he expanded Luther's position by emphasizing that -- *it is impossible to lose salvation if indeed a person was once justified.*¹⁶ I had found the origin of my *õnce saved always saved* belief.



Martin Luther¹⁷

Martin Luther (11/10/1483 ó 02/18/1546), a German monk, Catholic priest, professor of theology and creator of the Protestant Reformation in 16th century. Luther taught that salvation is in no way dependent upon the thoughts, words, and deeds of the person justified. It is not earned by good deeds but is received only as a free gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.¹⁸ Salvation provides a divine verdict of acquittal. God declares the sinner "not guilty," because Christ has taken his place. Salvation is an event, not a process, and it is only for the Elect *ó but even the Elect could lose their salvation.* Calvin (above) changed this.



In the Roman Catholic Church, salvation is a process ó not an event ó in which a sinner changes from the state of unrighteousness to the state of holiness by accessing the merit of Christ, made available in the atonement, through faith and the sacraments of the Church. As the individual progresses in his Christian life he continues to receive God's grace both directly through the

Holy Spirit as well as through the sacraments. *The effect of combating sin in the individual's life causes him to become more righteous both in heart and in action.* But, if one falls into mortal sin he may lose justification, but it can be gained back through the sacrament of confession. Mortal or grave sins must be committed with full knowledge, both of the sin and of the gravity of the offense -- *abortion, adultery, atheism, defrauding a worker of his wages, divorce, extreme anger, false allegations, sex with someone of the same gender, perjury, prostitution, rape, suicide, etc.*

What did I learn from my journey back in time? My church's beliefs were composed of parts of beliefs that came from all of the above ó Roman Catholic Church, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jacobus Arminius, Samuel Davies, George Whitefield and Charles Finney. My belief system was like a salad made of bits and pieces of other beliefs. All of the people above and the religious institutions claimed that their beliefs were true because they were based on the Bible ó *and all of them also had their own beliefs about the Bible.* One thing became very clear -- a majority of my beliefs didn't exist before the 16th century -- therefore, they weren't around at the time of Jesus!

Interestingly, the verses that many of the above used to support their beliefs came from the writings of Paul -- not Jesus. (You may have noticed the same thing.) **Martin Luther** gets the credit for formulating and popularizing the salvation doctrine of *õgrace without works.* **Luther, however, took Paul's ideas out of context.** The idea that õworks of people are unimportant to God would have

been incomprehensible and offensive to Paul. *What would Paul have thought about the belief that millions base their salvation on is very clear in the quote below:*

Be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odor of a sweet smell. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as becomes saints; nor filthiness, nor foolish talking, or jesting, which are not befitting: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know of a surety, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no man deceive you with empty words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 5:1-6)

Paul's "grace" message didn't exempt his listeners from being held accountable for what they did or did not to others – and neither did the teachings of Jesus. What is the core requirement for salvation in the teachings of Jesus? **It is "love."** Jesus made this absolutely clear when he was asked which commandment is the greatest commandment.

You shall love YAHWEH your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.** On these two commandments hang all the Torah and the Prophets.¹⁹

It is upon these commandments that Jesus based his salvation message. The requirements appear to be easily understood ó "love God" and "love your neighbor as yourself." However, there is a serious problem ó *when we read the word "love" we don't think the same thing Jesus thought. What do most Americans think when they read the word "love"?* Below is the definition:

- (1) *to have affection for;*
- (2) *to have a profoundly tender, passionate affection for;*
- (3) *to have a strong liking for; take great pleasure in.*

Love for most Americans is a feeling ó *a feeling based on the likes and dislikes of individuals. Love is an emotional abstract feeling, not concrete actions.* Our language is the product of a Greco-Roman world where abstract words are prolific. Greco-Roman thought is more concerned with appearance.²⁰ **Abstract** is defined as *thought of apart from concrete realities, specific objects, or actual instances.*²¹ **But, Jesus thought and taught in Hebrew.** In his Jewish world, thought is related to concrete actions that are related to the five senses -- *hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste.* Hebrew thought is more concerned with function.²² **Concrete** is defined as *constituting an actual thing or instance; real.* **When Jesus used the word "love," he thought of concrete actions, not abstract feelings.**

The Hebrew word for "love" is AHAV. Its root is HAV, which literally means *to give*²³ ó ***to love is to give!*** AHAV and its derivatives in the Hebrew Scriptures have a strikingly pragmatic character. *Not only does love presuppose a concrete inner disposition which is based on experiences and events, but it includes conscious acts done in behalf of the person who is loved or the thing that is preferred.*²⁴ In Hebrew, **to love God is to be faithful and loyal to Him by keeping His commandments.**²⁵ *In Judaism neighbor is inseparable from man, there is no 'man' without 'fellowman,'* **no faithfulness to God without faithfulness to neighbor.**²⁶ Now, see if you recognize "love" in the teachings of Jesus about eternal life?

*When the **Son of Man** comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left . . . Then the King will say to those **on his right**, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. . .” Then he will say to those **on his left**, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me. . .” Then they (the group on the left) will go away to eternal punishment, but the ones who did acts of righteousness to eternal life.”²⁷*

The people in the group on the right *ōloved their neighbors as themselves,ō those in the group of the left didn’t love their neighbors.* Jesus wasn’t the first to teach this message. It is found from Genesis 1 to the end of the Hebrew Scriptures *ó especially in the prophets. òLove” is the foundation of the Bible.* *ōLoveō* is also a very popular word in Christianity today, but it is not *ōloveō* as defined by Jesus above. People have strong feelings and affections for God, while ignoring the conditions of their neighbors. They become very emotional and have strong feelings as they sing and pray. You may be surprised to discover that something very similar was happening centuries before Jesus:

Call with a [full] throat, do not spare, like a shofar raise your voice, and relate to My people their transgression and to the house of Jacob their sins. Yet they seek Me daily and they wish to know My ways, like a nation that performed righteousness and did not forsake the ordinance of its God. They ask Me ordinances of righteousness; they desire nearness to God.

“Why have we fasted, and You did not see; we have afflicted our soul and You do not know?”

Behold, on the day of your fast you pursue business, and [from] all your debtors you exact [payment]. Behold, for quarrel and strife you fast, and to strike with a fist of wickedness. Do not fast like this day, to make your voice heard on high. Will such be the fast I will choose, a day of man’s afflicting his soul? Is it to bend his head like a fishhook and spread out sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord?

Is this not the fast I will choose? To undo the fetters of wickedness, to unite the bands of perverseness, and to let out the oppressed free, and all perverseness you shall eliminate. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and moaning poor you shall bring home; when you see a naked one, you shall clothe him, and from your flesh you shall not hide. (Isaiah 58:1-7)

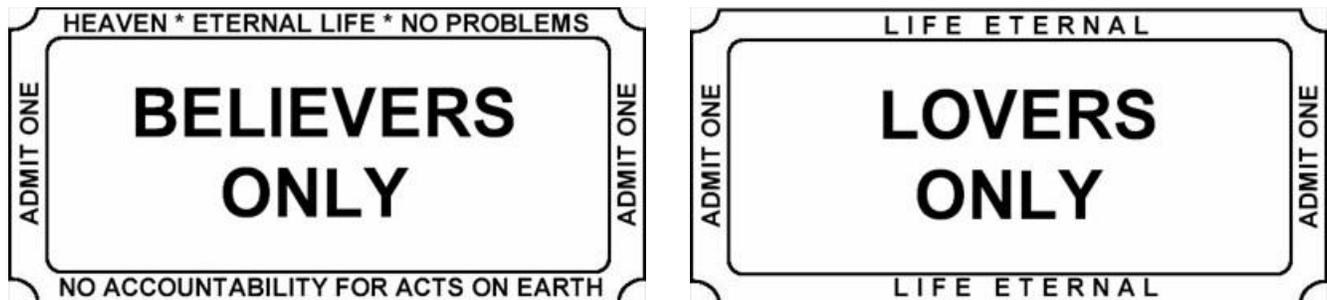
The people were actively involved in religious rituals, but not actively involved in doing what was important to God. *This cycle is repeated generation after generation. Moses, Samuel, Ezekiel,*

Jeremiah, Hosea, Habakkuk, Malachi, etc. all repeat Isaiah's warning. The Jewish people understood something about those warnings that most Christians do not understand:

*In the theology of the Hebrew Bible, human wickedness, the inhumanity of man to man, undermines the very foundations of society. The pillars, upon which rests the permanence of all earthly relationships, totter and collapse, bringing ruin and disaster to mankind. This idea is one of the dominant themes of Scripture and runs like a thread of scarlet throughout its literature. The Psalmist, in excoriating the perversion of justice in the law courts, makes use of the same motif. He denounces the exploitation by the wicked of the poor and the fatherless, the afflicted and the destitute. Through such deeds, he says, "all the foundations of the earth are shaken."*²⁸

Our beliefs about what God values and wants us to do are very important. In the first account of Genesis, the Creator makes it clear that **the creation of human life is the pinnacle of creation.** He only created humans in His image *ó make sure you understand that this is all humans, not just Jews* **ó and that makes every human life valuable and precious.** Before God created humans, He created light, a barrier, dry land, water, food, heavenly bodies, water-creatures, animals, etc. *ó everything humans need to live the life He created for them.* From the Creator's point of view, these are the divinely ordained rights of every human -- *and that is the foundation of God's system of justice ó which we saw as the standard mankind will be judged by in Jesus's message above.*

Now, let's compare my former church's ticket to heaven to Jesus's ticket for eternal life.



According to my church's ticket, everything was about individuals. Our actions towards others did appear to be that important, because there was no accountability to the institution or God. There were seasonal sermons about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, etc. *ó usually around Thanksgiving and Christmas -- but nothing was said about Jesus linking the acts to eternal life.* Jesus wasn't talking about a program *ó he was teaching a way of life.* ***What do the salvation doctrines reveal about the values of the religious institutions that promote them?***

The main purpose of this article is to challenge readers to do what I did and investigate the origins of their religious beliefs and rituals *ó especially if salvation is involved.* Just knowing when and where they came from will change your life. What we believe affects our lives in many ways, but most importantly it helps us understand the standards we use to judge our actions and those of others *ó including our religious and political leaders.* The future of a nation with millions of individuals who do not share a common standard or values looks bleak. ***But, can you imagine what would happen if over 100 million Americans, who value their Judeo-Christian heritage, agreed on a common standard with shared values? What would Jesus & Moses think?***

BHC

April Memorials

In Loving Memory

**WILLIAM
LESTER
STEWART**

April 26, 2005

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

In Loving Memory

**CHARLES L.
“CHUCK”
GREGORY**

January 25, 1925
April 11, 2010

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

As We Remember Them

*May their memories inspire us to
seek those qualities of mind and
heart which they shared when we
walked life's journey together.*

*May we help to bring closer to
fulfillment their highest ideals and
noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our
loyalty to those things which we
valued and shared --
faith, love, peace and devotion.*

*As long as we live, they too will live;
for they are now a part of us, as we
remember them.*

(Inspired from prayers found in Yitzhor
Reflections - The New Mahzor - The Prayer
Book Press)

In Loving Memory

**GEORGE
WASHINGTON
HARLESS**

October 1864
April 6, 1923

*May you dwell under His
wings in complete
SHALOM forever!*

שלום

SHALOM
*Peace, totality &
wholeness!*

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BHC Bible Study Guideline

*Our Belief Systems must be large enough to include all the Facts;
Open enough to be tested; and,
Flexible enough to change when errors or new Facts are discovered!*

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- ¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altar_call
- ² <http://tdl.org/txlor-dspace/bitstream/handle/2249.3/632/images/image03.jpg>
- ³ <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/religion/finney.html>
- ⁴ Lecture 4; Dr. Terry Matthews, Ph.D. (Duke); RELIGION 166: Religious Life in the United States; <http://www.wfu.edu/~matthetl/perspectives/>
- ⁵ Lecture 4; Dr. Terry Matthews
- ⁶ The Relentless Revolution: A History of Capitalism By Joyce Appleby; p. 132.
- ⁷ <http://christianstudy.homestead.com/files/classes/predestination/lesson3/lesson17.jpg>
- ⁸ <http://media.salemwebnetwork.com/Christianity/HistoryTimeline/31103.jpg>
- ⁹ Religion in the Old South By Donald G. Matthews; p. 17
- ¹⁰ Lecture 4; Dr. Terry Matthews, p. 19
- ¹¹ Lecture 4; Dr. Terry Matthews
- ¹² Lecture 4; Dr. Terry Matthews
- ¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobus_Arminius
- ¹⁴ http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/f5/Arminius_5_flopped_and_cropped.png/125px-Arminius_5_flopped_and_cropped.png
- ¹⁵ <http://www.thedailybell.com/images/library/John-Calvin.jpg>
- ¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Calvin
- ¹⁷ <http://www.internetmonk.com/wp-content/uploads/luther-portrait.jpg>
- ¹⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther#Justification_by_faith_alone
- ¹⁹ Matthew 22:37-40
- ²⁰ http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/2_culture.html
- ²¹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/abstract?s=t>
- ²² http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/2_culture.html
- ²³ <http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=2988>
- ²⁴ *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* edited by G. Johannes Botterock and Helmer Ringgren, translated by John T. Willis; © 1974 William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, Michigan; p. 106.
- ²⁵ Encyclopedia Judaica; vol. 11 col.
- ²⁶ Essence of Judaism (1936), 193
- ²⁷ Matthew 25:31-46
- ²⁸ *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* by Nahum M. Sarna © 1966 by the Melton Research Center of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; Shoken Books, New York, NY; p. 55.
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