



The Christian life is a journey.

TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the “landscape” we are passing through in this trail-laced, wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. *TrailNotes* is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we’re learning and doing.

ElderTalk: “A last-minute song, but not a last-minute plan of salvation”

Jadaé Fox

Do you have a favorite Christmas song? There are so many good choices. One of the things I love about this season is the openness to this beautiful collection of music with a rich history and a message that this world needs as much as music with a Gospel message. Just go to our local Walmart and listen.

I believe it would be worthwhile if we spent some time studying the history of some of our favorites. Let’s start with “Silent Night.” The lyrics were written by a Catholic parish priest, Josef Mohr. Faced with the church organ’s failure just before Christmas Eve, Mohr took his poem to the local school teacher, Franz Gruber, who was also the church organist, and asked him to compose a melody that could be accompanied by a guitar. The duo performed “Silent Night” for the first time at their small church’s Christmas Eve service in 1818. Its simple beauty resonated with people and has since become one of the most beloved Christmas carols worldwide.

That carol gained legendary status during the World War I Christmas Truce of 1914. Soldiers on opposing sides along the Western Front sang “Silent Night” in their respective languages, symbolizing a moment of peace and humanity amid conflict.

Let me highlight some of the lyrics. My goal is not to elevate this carol among others. In fact, I have other Christmas carols I enjoy even more. Rather, my hope is to inspire a desire to learn about and appreciate more such carols and songs that we have been given.

Note that each of these lines from “Silent Night” has a clear connection to a truth in the Bible.

- “Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child” — Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23
- “Glories stream from heaven afar” — Luke 2:13-14, John 1:14
- “Shepherds quake at the sight” — Luke 2:8-9
- “Heavenly hosts sing ‘Alleluia’” — Luke 2:13-14
- “Christ the Savior is born” — Luke 2:11
- “Son of God, Love’s pure Light” — John 1:4-5, 1 John 4:9
- “With the dawn of redeeming grace” — John 1:14, Ephesians 2:8
- “Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth” — Philippians 2:9-11, Luke 2:16



A rendition in stained glass of the church in Oberndorf, Austria, where “Silent Night” was first performed.

During this Christmas season, may each of us slow down and remember that Jesus really is the “Reason for the season.” Praise God that during this time so many Christian as well as secular businesses are willing to play music that declares the truth!

Jesus was Lord at His birth. May He be Lord in our hearts, our homes, and our nation. Merry Christmas!



—From Jadaé and all the Foxes



Israel's Temple Timeline:

(Continued from last month)

JOHN KURTZ

The First Holy Temple:

1000 BC to 586 BC

Jerusalem had been held by the Canaanite tribe of the Jebusites up until 1003 BC when King David was finally able to conquer the city (2 Sam. 5:6-10) and brought the Ark of the Covenant into the Jerusalem. David's successor, King Solomon, beginning in 966 BC erected the first permanent structure built for it and for the people of Israel to worship God. (1 Kings 6:1-37) This construction took seven years to finish. In 2 Chronicles chapters 3 and 4, we are given a detailed description as to the size and details of this building. Upon its completion, the Ark was placed in the Holy of Holies, where it remained and could only be visited by the High Priest once a year, on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The "inaugural celebrations" for the First Temple lasted for seven days.

There was a series of miraculous phenomena present in the temple daily, such as the fact that the wind never extinguished the altar fire. For the next 410 years, the Jewish people would bring daily offerings into this magnificent edifice, and here the nation would gather three times a year to, as quoted from Chabad.org, "see and to be seen by the face of G-d." (see Deuteronomy 16:16-17) Here the Divine Presence was manifest. It was the dwelling for God in His physical world, the meeting place of Adonai and His people. This they did faithfully...for a time.



An artist's rendering of the First Temple (Solomon's Temple)
(from: Mandain Project)



An "aerial view" of the entire First Temple complex
(from the Rosh Pina archive)

At the end of his life, King Solomon himself fell prey to self-indulgence, infidelity, and even permitted idolatry to exist in his nation. (1 Kings 10:14-29 to 11:1-13) For that reason God allowed Israel to become divided, the Southern Kingdom, Judah, in which Jerusalem was located, was eventually overcome by Nebuchadnezzar II, the King of Babylon, in 586 BC. The First Temple was plundered and destroyed by the Babylonians. What happened to the Ark of the Covenant is unknown. From that time on, there no longer was that personal relationship between God and His people... up until the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost! Most of Israel's people were taken into captivity by the Babylonians.

The Second Temple:

539 BC to 136 AD

In 538 BC the Babylonian Empire itself was conquered by Cyrus the Great of Persia. He decreed that the Jewish people should be allowed to return to their homeland. The first wave of those captives were led back by Zerubbabel, a descendant of the House of David. They were followed about a century later by a second wave of returnees, led by Ezra the Scribe (Ezra 1-7). More followed during the next 400 years.

Israel's Temple Timeline:

(Continued from page 2)

God/Adonai directed the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 3:7-13 and Nehemiah 2:11-20), an almost Herculean task even under “normal” circumstances, since many of the Jews did not return to Jerusalem following their freedom from captivity. But rebuild it they did, with completion in about 516 BC, or as late as 350 BC. Remember, however, it was without the presence of the Ark of the Covenant! Israel's worship continued, but without His actual presence in the Temple. How empty their worship must have felt to those who truly loved God!

Things went well for the Jews over the next couple of centuries up until their land became a part of the Empire of Alexander the Great. Its Syrian-based rulers' troops desecrated the Temple and imposed Greek-oriented culture upon the people. The former action stired up the Jews into rebellion in 166 BC under their leader Judas Maccabeus.

The Romans took control of Judea in 40 BC. In 37 BC Herod III Antipas (Herod the Great) became Tetrarch (King) of Judea. In keeping with the grand plans that he had for the territory under his rule, and as a way to get the Jewish people to be loyal to him, he “remodeled” the Temple in 20 to 19 BC, although he had already taken eight years gathering all of the construction materials, and it was not entirely finished for about twenty years. Why, it was sixty cubits shorter than the First Temple built by King Solomon, and it didn't have the Greek architectural style which he preferred! He also wanted *his* Temple to be a lasting



A model of the Second Temple following Herod's “improvements” (Thinkstock Photo)

tribute to his own grandure and beneficence, something, as stated by the contemporary Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, to “assure his eternal remembrance” (Antiquities of the Jews, Book 15, section 380). To get some idea as to its enormity, the plaza on which the temple itself sat was about the size of six of today's football fields. On the plaza were located the tables of the money changers and basins for the ritual baths that all who entered the temple proper had to take. The temple may have towered about 20 stories about the ground.

It was this time that God considered to be “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:), sending His Son to save the world from the mess that it had become. This beautifully “remodeled” complex was the version of the Second Temple and its plaza that Jesus would have known and in whose courts He would have walked on occasion.

Although a beautiful temple complex resulted from Herod's efforts, it did not make the Jewish people happy or appreciative. Another revolt took place in 66 AD, resulting in the first Roman-Jewish War. At the conclusion of this conflict in the summer of 70 AD, the Romans breached the walls of Jerusalem, put down the Jewish revolt, and destroyed the Second Temple and its surrounding plaza and walls, leaving behind only a relatively small portion of the western wall surrounding the temple complex. Today this remenant of the Second Temple complex, known as “The Wailing Wall,” is still considered tantamount to sacred to 21st century Jews who continue to pray for its rebuilding.

Thus, by studying the history of this “Temple Timeline” and the events surrounding it, we can better grasp the significance of the birth of our Savior, Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, **הַמָּשִׁיחַ**, Ha-mashiach—the need for His sacrificial death on the Cross for us and the role of the Holy Spirit, which make such a relationship with God possible. We each represent a “living stone” (1 Peter 2:5) of a “Third Temple,” a temple “not built with hands” (Heb. 9:11). Now that's a pretty amazing Christmas gift!

[Note: most of the historical and archeological facts not mentioned in the Bible and included above have come from multiple online sources including the JewishVirtualLibrary.org and Chabad.org]



THANK YOU...

for supporting Operation Christmas Child this year! At GFC we packed about 86 shoe-boxes, which were transported by semi-trucks to the processing center in Charlotte, North Carolina. From there the boxes will be shipped by air and other means to their final destinations over the next few weeks and months. Pray for their safe journeys as well as for those who will be receiving the boxes, that they may experience the love of the One who truly made their gift possible and receive Him with the same enthusiasm that he or she receives their box and its contents.



December 2024



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- 1** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Isaiah 9:1-7.
- 4 & 11** Connect groups meet, 6:30-8:00 pm.
- 5 & 12** Women meet for prayer, 9:00-10:00 am.
- 8** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 2:8-14. 
- 15** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Ephesians 5:7-16; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:5-7.
- 18** GFC Christmas Party 6:30-8:00 pm.
- 22** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Matthew 5:14; Acts 13:47; Daniel 12:3; 2 Cor 3:18. 
- 24** Christmas Eve Service, 7-8 pm.



WE GRIEVE...

and each of us at Grace Fellowship Church extends our sympathy, love, and prayers to Lori Judd on the homegoing of her husband, Brian, on December 7. The family is planning a memorial service to be held in early 2025 on a date to be announced later. Please continue your prayers for Lori, Brian's three children and mother, as well as their extended family.

Grace Fellowship Church

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- Eric Byrom Presiding Elder / Pastor
- Jadaé Fox Elder
- Matt Godsil Elder
- Jerry Mathias Elder
- Cameron Karger Treasurer
- Kay Berry & Jedaé Fox } Office

(A complete list of church functionaries will return next month)