



# ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 7, Issue 29

## The Evil Empire

Jesus Christ throws Christianity under the bus.

### Chapter 4

#### Coming to Know.

A modern advertisement outside the wastes of Nazareth.



*Now Joseph, her husband, being just and not willing to hold her up to infamy, intended covertly to dismiss her. Now at his brooding over these things, lo! a messenger of the Lord appeared to him in a trance, saying, "Joseph, son of David, you may not be afraid to accept Miriam, your wife, for that which is being generated in her is of holy spirit. Now she shall be bringing forth a Son, and you shall be calling His name Jesus, for He shall be saving His people from their sins." Now the whole of this has occurred that that may be fulfilled which is declared by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Lo! The virgin shall be pregnant And shall be bringing forth a Son, And they shall be calling His name 'Emmanuel,'" which is, being construed, "God with us." Now, being roused from sleep, Joseph does as the messenger of the Lord bids him. And he accepted his wife, and he knew her not till she brought forth a Son, and he calls His name Jesus (Matthew 1:19-25).*

The angel appeared to my father in a dream. He came to give him the facts. My father needed it. The facts were difficult to believe. He had just learned from his betrothed that she was carrying, in her womb, the Messiah of Israel. How could he believe it?

Such a story would strain the faith of any man. Nevertheless, his betrothed was pregnant. He assumed that she had lain with another man. In the shock of anger and betrayal, he shouldered a backpack and set off on a run to Antioch. He had no need to see Antioch, but only to be on the road by himself and to process his grief. The thousands and thousands of footfalls could perhaps transport him into a trance of the peace and the joy that he had so recently possessed when contemplating the future of his family—the joy that had now turned to dust.

Nearing Antioch, he thought suddenly of his family of earlier years, of the death of his own parents, of the transitoriness of life, of every futility spoken of by his forefather Solomon—and of every vanity. God had led him to this grim contemplation for the purpose of educating *me* concerning these things. Thus, he found himself curled up on the soil from which he, himself had been formed, weeping to God in an all-too-human fit of wanting, himself, to die. This is when the celestial emissary came. When humanity is at its end, then comes God.

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“And then, *he was there*,” said my father. “Gabriel. The celestial servant of our people. Now whether it was a trance, or if he stood in front of me having taken flesh, I am not aware. But he spoke to me, and the words were as clear and as unmistakable as the words that you and I now speak. He said to me, ‘Joseph, son of David, you may not be afraid to accept Miriam, your wife, for that which is being generated in her is of holy spirit. Now she shall be bringing forth a Son, and you shall be calling His name Jesus, for He shall be saving His people from their sins.’”

“These were his precise words, for he rehearsed them to me, for me to commit them to memory. I asked him to repeat the words many times, and he did. His patience is legendary. I tried him. What was so surprising and relieving was that the emissary from God did not condemn me for doubting my wife. He did not condemn me for succumbing to human thoughts, for what other thoughts do I have? He relayed to me an empathy toward human anguish, which caused me to wonder: had he himself—that is, Gabriel—ever known celestial betrayal? We will someday know. I suspect that it is true. Otherwise, empathy cannot exist.

“No, he refused to condemn me for my inability to grasp Isaiah’s words concerning the virgin coming to be with child. It is not that I doubted that prophecy, but I doubted that the fulfillment of it could possibly have landed into my lap—into the lap of a humble carpenter from Nazareth, sawing wood for a living. Why me? Why us?”

“But alas. These thoughts and ruminations are selfish, for I speak only of myself. What of you?”

I wanted to put my hand on his shoulder, but I would not risk appearing condescending. “Never mind me for now. Tell me more about you.”

“Never mind *you*? But you are the center of everything. Have you truly not known?”

“I have little with which to contrast my thoughts. I am only ten years in. How do I know whether what I think is super-human or not? Do most children my age believe that they can move mountains? I mean, literally move them?”

“No.”

“Like you, I am astounded by the common circumstances surrounding us.”

“‘Astounded’ is a fine word. Never mind moving mountains; your vocabulary is beyond this world. May I be completely honest with you?”

“As always.”

“There are days when I have doubted it. Still. Little tiny pricks of wondering if it’s all really true.”

“Because you live with me. Because you raise me.”

“It is just as you said: ‘the common circumstances.’ When I read the Hebrew Scriptures, the accounts are fluid. Spectacular. There is thunder, lightning, life and death, peril and emergency, tears and treachery, men spitting sand, the flowing of blood, the destruction of armies, the Shekinah glory between the cherubim. The greatness cannot be denied. But then I realize, when thinking further, that we do not see between the lines, that we do not stop to think of the ordinary lives of the prophets and patriarchs. We do not stop to think that they, as we, wrestled the common cares of life. They had wives. Children. Occupations. We marvel at the glory of God between the cherubim in the holy place, but we were not there—were we?—when the tabernacle itself was built, when men sat upon the ground

**“The same hands building the  
Tabernacle fashioned swings,  
totters and slides.”**



sanding the wood, as we sand doors; when they beat the gold to cover the ark, perhaps while drinking beer and laughing and speaking of their lives before they became artificers. They worked and then hurried home, perhaps, to a kiss from their wives or a hug about the knees from their small children. Perhaps they played with their children in homemade playgrounds. Can you imagine that? The same hands building the Tabernacle—these same hands fashion swings, totters and slides for their children.

But of course they did. Mustn't Isaiah himself have woke up each day rubbing the sleep from his eyes? Splashing himself with cold water from a well, popping raisins into his ugly mouth? Please pardon me for that. But the man's breath must have been terrible; I have always thought this, especially about Isaiah. I do not know why, exactly. Reaching for the morning paper? Walking toward afternoon conclaves? Ducking into dim and exciting rooms for conversations with associates—with those not nearly of his spiritual essence—surrounded by the smoke of a hundred cigars?

"And besides that, these men and women of God—our ancestors—sat for hours beneath trees such as this, meditating, talking, just as we talk here. Their carts and donkeys sat over here, as do ours. They named their donkeys, as have we. The donkeys brayed, hungered, reproduced. They died and were buried. Our ancestors educated their children, petitioned for office, ran marathons. I have run many of those! They walked from town to city square, kicking pebbles and swatting away flies as they went. But we never think of that."

"The ordinariness obscures the immensity, if we let it," I agreed. "We ought not let it."

"I am slipping away," said my father. "I know I am, so don't try to talk me out of it."

His thoughts had gone off into a shadow. "Where has this come from? Why do you say it?"

"You must become greater, and I lesser."

"I don't want you to speak that way. I am subject to you. It is the law of Moses, but also of nature."

He looked down and smiled into the blanket. "Yes, isn't that handy. I can tell the Messiah of Israel what to do and he must obey me. How choice! I should take advantage of it while I can."

"Some of what you said has disquieted me."

"See? 'Disquieted.' What a vocabulary that God has given you. But anyway—what were you saying?"

"Of what Gabriel told you."

"Must we discuss it?"

"That's why we're here. Surely you have contemplated it."

"Ten years? What do *you* think? 'For He shall be saving his people from their sins.'"

"Yes. *That*. How shall Messiah be saving the people?"

"I'm afraid that you already know the answer."

"Apart from blood there is no forgiveness from sin."

"It is crawling all over the law. One need only visit the temple any time of day to see it."

"Explain that, and I will tell you if it matches my thoughts."

"Finally," he said, "one dies for the sake of all. The repeated ritual has run its course. The lambs and goats suffice for sin until He Who comes. Death keeps the high priests from ministering to a finality."

(My father was filled with the holy spirit now, though he knew it not. He continued.)

"Year after year, the priests sacrifice animals—living beings, animated and intelligent souls—come from God. By this, Israel's sins are covered. Yet it never permanently succeeds and, indeed, never pretends to do so. It temporarily covers, as the pitch of Noah's boat. The sacrifice of the animals becomes a propitiatory shelter, limited in time and scope, sending away the sins of Israel—like the scapegoat into the wilderness—for another year. Yet the sins of Israel return—year after year, sin after sin. Another priest comes, another goes, and the process repeats itself. A permanent solution? Not to be had."

"The permanent solution sits before you."

"And thus you must die."

He hesitated in his pain—I saw it—so I took a practical tack, steering him onto lighter, more agreeable paths, even droll ones.

"And be raised from the dead," I said. "Death is such an inconvenience. Think of this, father: 'Once for all.' Think of the trouble to be saved. No more paying the priests. No more tithes. No more keeping track of the priestly courses."

The strategy died on contact. "The lambs were not raised," he argued, though weakly.





“But more than a lamb is here,” I said. “And you said yourself that the permanent solution must be to a finality. And so I cannot die.”

“You *can*.”

“What I meant to say is that I cannot stay dead.”

He changed the topic, though only slightly. “We calculated the sixty-nine sevens from Daniel, and everything fits. Here is the passage, for I have memorized it: ‘So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing.’”

“You cringe at the words ‘cut off.’”

“How can I not? And your mother. From the time of the rebuilding of our temple following the Babylonian captivity, to your coming, is sixty-nine sevens of years. Four-hundred and eight-three years. The timing is right. There is no mistaking that this is the era. The era is now. Combine that, if you can, with your mother conceiving from God. Then add the shepherds—those earthy men who got truth. And then pour into the mix the coming of

the great men of the East, three, who followed a planetary alignment. And if that is not enough for you, consider what the messenger said to me in my anguish. No, my son. It is unmistakable. And it *must* be unmistakable for thick-skulls such as your mother and I.

“Oh! And the two prophets at your Dedication. How could I not have mentioned them? Two of them came by holy spirit, right there on the porch. One of them, Simeon, told us that it had been revealed to him by holy spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. Those were his precise words, ‘the Lord’s Christ.’ Then there was Anna, an ancient woman, speaking practically in a swoon. She never left the temple, that woman, but that she worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child that all Israel waited for, who would be for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

“Tell me more of the other.”

“Who?”

“Of Simeon.”

“Yes. The old man. I cannot remember everything.”

“Try. Surely you wrote it down.”

“Your mother did. We have her notebook. We will look

at it when we get home.”

“Please. Try now.”

“Why do you say so? What is the matter?”

“*Please*. If you can. Tell me the words of that prophet.”

“I will tell you as best as I recall. We can look at your mother’s notebook when we get home.”

“Father!” My insistence alarmed him, as it did me. In the words of God’s prophet was something that I dreaded but needed to hear. And the sooner I heard it, the better.

“Son, I will do my best. He took you in his arms and his words came as a prayer. He took you in his arms and raised his eyes to heaven. I will tell you what he said—I will be paraphrasing, but it was certainly as a prayer that he crafted it, and he prayed right in front of us and in front of many bystanders: ‘Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, You now dismiss Your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel.’ That’s the best that I can recall it, and—”

“Do not guess at this. He actually said, ‘a light for revelation to the Gentiles?’”

“That much I’m sure of. And for the glory of Israel.”

“I know about the Israel part. But a light for the Gentiles? This is the new thing. But this is how you recall it?”

“I am telling you as I remember it. What is wrong?”

“The Gentiles.”

“I am certain that he said ‘Gentiles.’ And a light of revelation, or something near that. If I’m wrong, then—”

“No. You’re not wrong.”

“How do you know that I’m not wrong?”

“I just do. You ran to Antioch.”

“Why do you ask that? You know that I did.”

“Wait here. Wait for me.” I had already risen from the blanket and was walking away. Looking back, I said to him, “I must walk now. A short way. Please stay here and wait for me.”

“But—”

“Trust me. Wait for me. I am leaving to pray.”

“I understand that you must pray, but—”

“Good. Stay seated here. Remain here and watch.”

“How long?”

I did not answer him. I could not then do it, and I would never do it, not in his lifetime.

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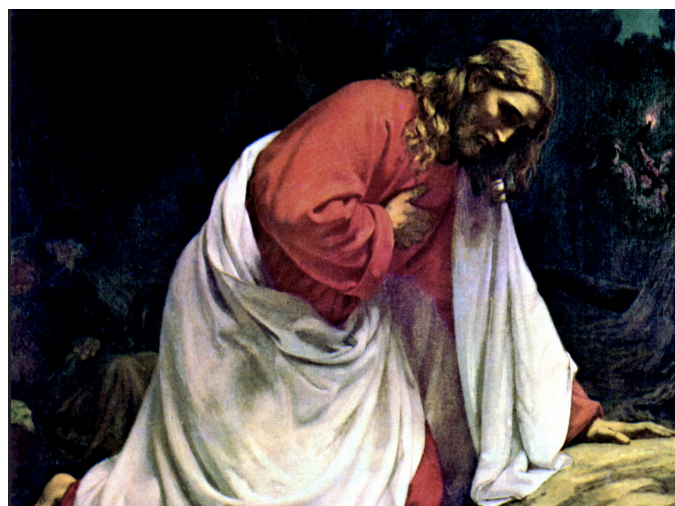
A thousand paces away, out of sight, a rock presented itself in an oasis-like cluster, all of it fashioned by God. I fell upon the rock and cried out to Him, “Oh, my Father!

Out of your fullness, deliver me from my enemies. In Your very house are those who hurt me, for your people covet you, but the world, they hate. With their lips, they praise You, but their hearts are far from You. And for these, even, You have sent me to bear their sins; to bear the sins of those not knowing You—for this purpose I have come, and to this task is my heart’s cry. But rescue me, now, from my doubting. *To die for those who, in vain, take your name! To die for those who would vex my soul, count my bones, condemn me to death in Your dwelling place, by Your name.* O, God. For these, also, You ask me to offer my soul?

“As the lamb of God, You have appointed me. The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. But now this! A bearer of the sins not only of Your favored people, but for those afar—*Gentiles*—whose iniquities are higher than heaven and more numerous than the stars—uncountable. You call me to bear not only the sins of Israel, but for those of the whole world also. Truly, then! It is more than a Lamb for Israel, my life. And so, my Father, it is not *merely* as the Lamb of God that I have come. It is not *merely*, then, to answer and exceed the daily rituals of Your House, that I have come.”

I knew then that whatever suffering would afflict me, would afflict me beyond the pale of the lambs, so gently slain upon the altar by benevolent priests.

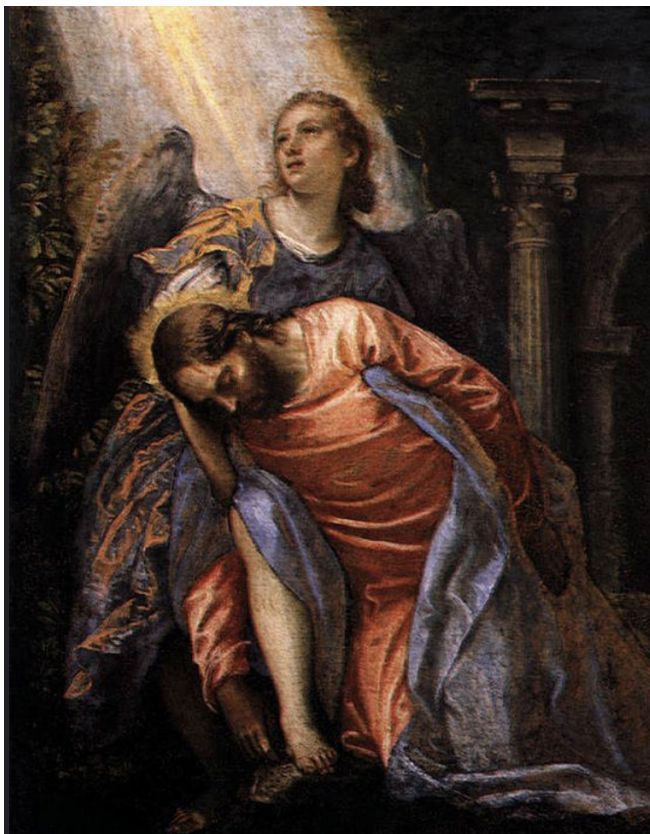
Now it came. The pains came steadily upon me, slowly at first, crawling upon my skin like multi-legged evil things—even as I knelt at the implacable rock. So I sent my cry to God. Witness: *pain to my hands, to my feet, up into my head.* My back became of fire, as though torches burning me from behind. I flinched hard within this, crying out again to my God in its grip, not for joy but dread.



The human arose in me: see how it came. See now how Adam reached into me to tug at the depths and afflict me. *Adam!* I was of Israel, yes, but also of the progenitor. The prophet at the Dedication had said it; “A light of revelation to the Gentiles.” And so there it was, as unmistakable as the sixty-nine sevens and my virgin mother. And then, from God, my Father: Simeon, sent from above; seeing dimly but firmly on the truth; the unknown, unheralded prophet felt but the fringe of the great human need, reaching back, not to Abraham, but to the first man of Earth. As Christ, they would cut me off. As a son of Adam, they would murder me. “Not only for the sins of Israel, but for those of the whole world also.”

As this horror descended, my fingers rose inadvertently to my forehead, and there, where I touched, appeared great drops of blood, thick and wet where I touched; shocking me. I dragged my fingers down the brow of my nose, then into my mouth. It was everywhere. I tasted it; it was mine. The full horror of all human depravity struck me as a fist into my face to break me, and my words then came apart from any volition of my own will—

“You are He who took me out of the womb; You made me trust while on my mother’s breasts. I was cast



upon You from birth! From my mother’s womb, You have been my God! Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have surrounded me.

Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They gape at me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it has melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue clings to my jaws; You have brought me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet! I can count all my bones. They look and stare at me. They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

“But You, O Lord, do not be far from me; O my Strength, hasten to help me! Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion’s mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! *My Father*, if it is possible, let this cup pass by from Me. However, not as I will, but as You!”

The sun, hidden by cloud until then, appeared from a rift in the dark bank. And then—

“I will declare Your name to My brethren! In the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel. And come to Him, all you offspring of Adam. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from me; but when I cried to Him, He heard me. As He hears me, so He hears all. For now, the answer to all their misery walks among them.”

Returning to my father, I found him asleep. I nudged him awake with my foot.

“Son?”

“Father. Could you not wait even one hour with me?”

—JSOJ

(To be Continued.)

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*Martin, thanks for your hard work. You really hit on the issues that are real for me. I think your new book. “The Evil Empire” will be just what people need to hear. I can’t wait to read the entirety and get it to as many people as I can. Thanks again for all you have done and continue to do. —from the mail*