

Have you noticed how superhero action thriller movies burst onto local theater marquees each and every summer?

Today's culture cultivates hero worship—if how we spend our time, money, enthusiasm and emotions is any indication of worship, that is. From film stars to sports stars to food network stars and more, it's easy to fix our attention on celebrities whose super stardom is so appealing, so unlike our ordinary lives.

And yet, God's heroes are often just the opposite. The heroes of our faith are likely to be misfits, unpopular, or just plain ordinary people who end up accomplishing extraordinary things for God. I have been looking at the life of John the Baptist, one of those unsung heroes of the faith. His example challenges us to live heroic lives for God.

The third chapter of Luke opens by enumerating seven political and religious leaders of the day—these are the famous and powerful folks, the ones whose images appeared on coins and on statues adorning the city buildings. Then, in starkest contrast, we're introduced to John the Baptist.

The first thing we learn is that John is ministering out of an unconventional place. The Word of God came to John in the wilderness, in the desert. The Dead Sea region was a dry, dusty, barren place. Not only is John's ministry in an unconventional place, but he is also an unconventional person.

To say that John was eccentric is being polite. He was strange. He was weird. He wore camel's hair clothing and a leather belt. Not the kind of fashion that you'd see on any runway, or even in a retail catalog.

John purposely tailored his attire to set himself apart from the convenience and comfort of a normal life; his life and demeanor accentuated the message he was proclaiming. So his preaching was (you guessed it) unconventional.

John was teaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Because of that pressing reality, he urged the people to repent of their sins. Jewish culture included ritual bathing, even immersion. But along with commentator F.F. Bruce and others, I see John's baptism as a new ritual, related to

An Unsung Hero





As believers we're meant to be countercultural because our message is counterintuitive to the world around us. And if we are successful, it is God they will see, and we may fade from memory. This was the unconventional approach of John the Baptist.

Jewish baptism for Gentile proselytes. Imagine John telling his Jewish audience to convert just like a Gentile would. This is not only unconventional, it's no doubt unpopular. It's not the way to win friends and influence people. John is not practicing friendship evangelism here. He's delivering an urgent message to whoever will listen.

And look at the results. "Then Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to Him, and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matthew 3:5-6). Despite John's strong and confrontational tone, people were flocking from Jerusalem to find out what was going on.

If John's crowd-drawing ministry were occurring today, perhaps reporters and political hacks would be scrambling for tidbits of background about John, the son of Zacharias. Maybe agents would be offering him book or movie contracts. Advertising executives might try promoting a new line of camel's hair clothing. Locusts and honey would become the latest craze in the hippest nightspots of Jerusalem. What an opportunity! Grab the spotlight, here's your chance, John.

What does John do? He unselfishly points to Yeshua. "I indeed baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean his threshing floor, and gather his wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:11-12).

And that's what truly heroic ministry is all about, isn't it? Pointing away from ourselves, and to Jesus. How many ministers began preaching Christ and

ended up preaching themselves? Later we see John's disciples complain to John that all the people who were following him were now following Jesus. John surprises them by responding, "He must increase but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Oh, if we could just say that and mean it and live it each and every day! "He must increase, but I must decrease." And John did decrease, didn't he? In a moment, he was off the scene. At the end of his life we find him imprisoned, discouraged and uncertain. The crowds have left, just a few faithful disciples remain. Then, finally, his head is severed from his neck, at the whim of a drunken despot, a vengeful adulteress, and a shameless adolescent.

How humiliating! Is that what we get for committing to unselfish ministry? Maybe, but remember what Jesus said of John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:7-9, 11). I find Jesus' words very challenging.

John's example inspires me to regularly examine myself, to see if I might be missing something of the power of God and the presence of God, because of the conveniences and the conventions of this world. Will you examine yourself along with me?

Do our lifestyle and our location emphasize the authenticity of our message? Do we spend more time honing our convictions or hanging on to our conveniences? Do we surround and protect ourselves with comforts that might take the edge off the urgency, the

power of our message?

How and where we choose to live, how much we allow ourselves to indulge our own preferences, can reflect our understanding and our undertaking of life lived to honor the Lord.

It's great to have a winsome witness and to find tangible ways of extending concern to those we want to reach. Yet, if we want to make a difference, we need to be just as willing to confront, to call people to repentance. As believers we're meant to be countercultural because our message is counterintuitive to the world around us. And if we are successful, it is God they will see, and we may fade from memory. This was the unconventional approach of John the Baptist.

D.L. Moody once said that one may easily be too big for God to use, but never too small. Haven't we seen how God sets apart what is ordinary for His use? Don't we know that He was willing to walk among the most common people so that they might reveal His glory? Isn't that still true today?

He must increase, I must decrease. What would the church of Jesus Christ be like if we held to this creed? What cooperation would flourish between ministries, churches and individuals, if no one cared who got the credit or the most resources or the best people or the biggest name? He must increase and I must decrease. May God grant us the courage to be that kind of people, to have that kind of ministry. Unconventional, uncompromising, unselfish—all so that He might increase, we might decrease and people might be won to the Savior.

David Brickner is also an author, public speaker and avid hiker. For more about David, his writings, speaking schedule and possible availability to speak at your church, see <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/david-brickner>.

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JEWES FOR JESUS™

UNEXPECTED HEROES OF THE BIBLE

The Hebrew Scriptures are full of heroes who, at first glance, would not fit the stereotypical image of the “super” men and women we are prone to admire. God is in the business of using ordinary people for His extraordinary purposes!

SOUND HEROIC?

ABRAHAM

Abraham was so afraid that a king would murder him in order to take his wife that he passed off his wife as his sister. Plus his advanced age and childlessness are not what one would expect for a patriarch of heroic proportions.

MOSES

Moses ended his time as a prince of Egypt by committing murder and fleeing the scene of the crime. He proceeded to live as a lowly shepherd until God announced plans for Moses to deliver His people—at which point Moses tried to refuse God on the basis of a speech impediment.

JOSEPH

Joseph was the baby brother, doted on by his father and a source of irritation to all his older siblings. Powerless to defend himself from the extent of their envy and dislike, he was made a slave and later thrown in jail—not your usual heroic credentials.

HANNAH

Barren and depressed, Hannah was so inconsolable that she refused to eat, despite her husband's obvious love for her.

ABIGAIL

Married to a wealthy businessman who was known to be harsh and evil, the beautiful Abigail may have been considered by some to be a hapless trophy wife. Her job in life was to run the household of a man she could not respect.

NEVERTHELESS

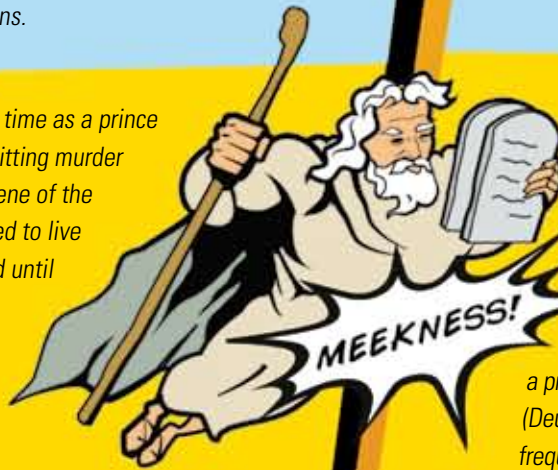
Abraham was faithful to God's call and commands. He became the father of Israel, God's covenant people. He is called “the friend of God” (James 2:23), “faithful Abraham” (Galatians 3:9), “the father of us all” (Romans 4:16).

Moses was obedient to God and led the Israelites out of Egypt. Known for his meekness, patience, firmness and willingness to intercede for those he led, no matter how they strayed, he became the high watermark as far as exemplary prophets: “There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses . . .” (Deuteronomy 34:10). Moses' name occurs frequently in the Psalms and Prophets, as well as in the New Testament.

Joseph rose to great power in Egypt and was a man of forgiveness, charity and compassion. He could have had his brothers summarily executed for what they had done to him. Instead he chose to embrace them, and became God's instrument for preserving the Jewish people through a terrible seven-year famine.

Hannah took her sorrow to God. The promise that she made showed that she wanted a child, not only for herself, but to dedicate to serving God. As a result, she bore Samuel, who grew to become a mighty prophet, judge and kingmaker.

Abigail, highly respected by her servants, was informed of her husband's insulting behavior toward David. Her quickly and wisely-planned intervention turned David from the destruction he otherwise would have unleashed, preventing him from slaughtering many innocent people. She became David's wife and later a queen.

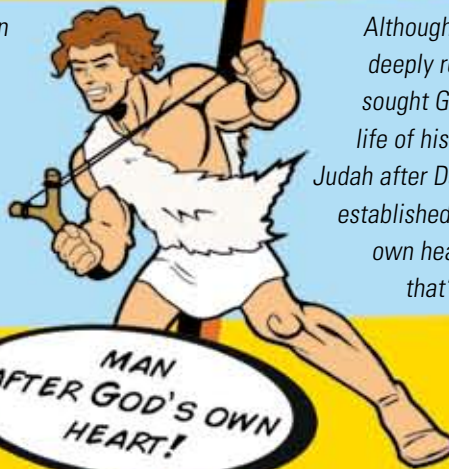


MEEKNESS!

SOUND HEROIC?

DAVID

David was the youngest brother in a family where, when the prophet asked to see all the brothers, no one even thought to call David until the prophet insisted on seeing him. As an adult, he tried to cover a grievous act of adultery with murder.



NEVERTHELESS

Although King David committed deep sins, he deeply repented and was known as a man who sought God's will. His influence for good in the life of his nation was great, since every king of Judah after David was compared to the standard he established. David was known as a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) and that's pretty heroic!

GIDEON

The first time we see Gideon, he's keeping as low a profile as possible by using a winepress to thresh wheat because he is afraid of being seen by his enemies. And he always seems worried about being outnumbered.

Gideon finally obeyed God's call to undertake the task of delivering Israel from the Midianites. First, with ten of his servants, he overthrew the altars of Baal and cut down the asherah. Then he led 300 men armed with torches, pitchers and trumpets against the camp of Midian, crying, "For the Lord and for Gideon" (Judges 7:18). Terror-stricken and confused, the Midianites slew one another. The memory of this great deliverance impressed itself deeply on the mind of the nation (1 Samuel 12:11; Psalm 83:9; Isaiah 9:4; 10:26; Hebrews 11:32).

ESTHER



A Jewish woman with seemingly little to say in the matter becomes part of a Persian king's harem; when trouble is brewing she's not even allowed to talk to him without a special invitation—a pretty precarious position for a heroine!

Esther knew the power of prayer and got people interceding for her as she risked her life to speak to the king without an invitation. God blessed her risk-taking and strategic moves. Today she is known as a pious, faithful, courageous and resolute woman who was raised up as an instrument in the hand of God to avert the destruction of the Jewish people.

DANIEL

A young captive in exile in Babylon, Daniel was offered "the royal treatment" to forget about his God—and many his age would have given in.

Daniel endured the lions' den because he wouldn't give up his faith in God. He was highly favored by the Babylonian king, and became the royal dream interpreter. Through more than 60 years of life in Babylon, Daniel grew ever stronger in his commitment to God. His book is characterized not only by prophecies of the distant future, but also by a sense of wonder at God's presence.

This chart was adapted from and expanded on from a chart that originally appeared in ISSUES, our publication for Jewish seekers. You can see the original at j4j.co/issues158. While you're at it, you might want to read the rest of the edition . . . and maybe pass it along to a Jewish friend!

Quick Questions



Bob Mendelsohn
Regional Director - JFJ AustralAsia

Jewish people will be celebrating the New Year 5776 beginning Sunday 13 September. In the Bible we read, "In the seventh month on the first of the month, you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD." (Lev 23.24-25)

So the question is begged, "If this is the 7th month, why do you call it "New Year?"

The answer is that Jewish people actually have four new years each year, the most significant being Rosh Hashanah (Head of the Year), the anniversary of the Creation of the world, 5776 years ago. On that day "The 10 Days" of Repentance (Aseret y'mei t'shuvah) begin which end on Yom Kippur (The Day of Atonement). We hear the sound of the shofar (ram's horn) 100 times each day which serves to announce a call to repentance for each person. We repent of a long list of alphabetically-listed sins and 'hope' that God hears us. As Jewish believers, we readily say that only in Yeshua are we assured of forgiveness of our sins.

This is a good time of year to send greeting cards to Jewish mates and wish them a year of fruitfulness and joy.



Two Exciting Bible Land Tours Turkey-Greece and/or Israel-Jordan-Egypt

Dr. Kameel Majdali, Director of Teach All Nations in Melbourne (tan.org.au), author of Melbourne to Jerusalem, radio host on the Vision Radio Network, and board member of Jews for Jesus Australia, is offering his 27th and most exciting holy land tour to-date:

First Tour: Bible Adventure Tour: From Egypt to the Promised Land (Egypt, Jordan, & Israel).

Dates: November 25 to 9 December 2015.

Highlights: Cairo, Petra, the Red Sea, Wadi, camel safari, archaeological dig, Hezekiah's Tunnel, & key Biblical sites.

Price: USD \$2,320 plus air.

Second Tour: Book of Revelation Tour: (Turkey & Greece).

Dates: 10-21 November 2015.

Highlights: 7 churches of Revelation (Turkey) & Athens, Corinth, Berea, Thessaloniki, and Philippi (Greece).

Price: USD \$1,849 plus air.

Price includes transportation, hotel accommodation, breakfasts and dinners, comprehensive tour of Biblical and historical sites. Yes, we can help you with the airline arrangements, too.

Let 2015 be the year that you 'walk where Jesus walked.'

For further information: Contact Leanne at leanne@tan.org.au or 03 9802 5040 or write PO Box 493, Mount Waverley VIC 3149 or

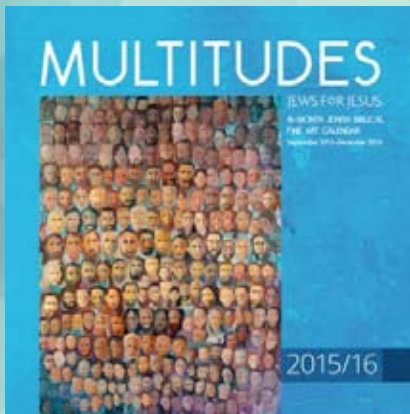
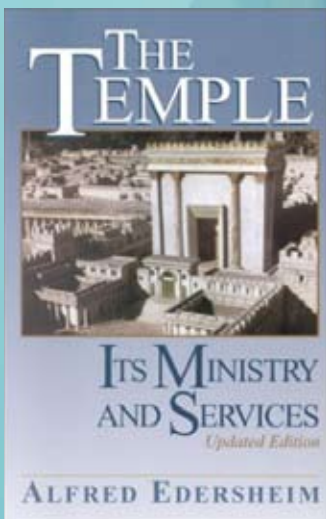
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The Temple (hardback book)

Alfred Edersheim, 19th Century Jewish Christian scholar writes on the Jewish epicentre, its ministries and services. This classic work transports the reader back to the Sanctuary where you will learn for yourself about the priesthood and its traditions in the days of Jesus!

Cost: \$52 (NZ add \$10 per)



Calendar MULTITUDES -- The Gospel of Matthew Illustrated

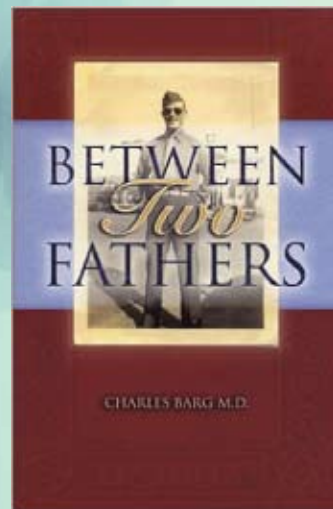
This year Jews for Jesus published our annual 16-month Jewish Biblical Calendar for the year 5776 (September 2015-December 2016) featuring the art work from "MULTITUDES" - the illustrated Gospel of Matthew. 16 of the 20 original paintings are showcased in this beautiful 30 cm x 30 cm calendar.

Cost: \$32 (NZ add \$5)

Between Two Fathers book

The classic conflict between a father and son over issues of the faith, God, Judaism, medical careers, standing in the community. Paperback. This book by Dr. Charles Barg is an intimate portrait of a Jewish boy's journey to adulthood.

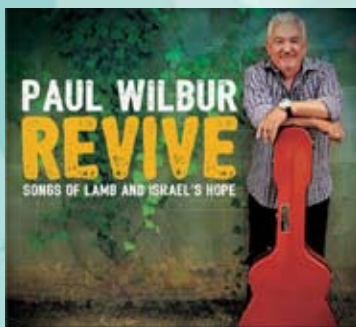
Cost: \$7 (NZ add \$4)



Revive CD

Revived 2015 music with the songs of Lamb, Joel Chernoff, Israel's Hope and Paul Wilbur. If you liked the songs then, buckle your seat belt ...this music will knock your spiritual socks off. You will dance and sing and worship.

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