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TWO ARRIVALS: DALLAS & JERUSALEM

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On November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated as he rode in a motorcade through downtown Dallas, Texas. JFK was preparing for the next presidential election, for his second term, in the fall of 1964. In his presidential visit to Texas, JFK stopped in San Antonio, Houston, and finally, Fort Worth-Dallas.

After being greeted by the crowd at Love Field, in Dallas, President and Mrs. Kennedy walked to a waiting Lincoln limousine. The plastic bubble on top had been removed, making the limousine open, easier for the President to see the crowds and be seen by them. They were joined in the Lincoln by Texas Governor John Connelly and his wife—Vice President Lyndon Johnson and his wife, native Texans, occupied another car in the motorcade.

The procession left the airport and started on a ten-mile route through downtown Dallas on the way to the Trade Mart, where the

President was scheduled to speak at a luncheon. He never arrived.



In a similar and yet not so similar scene many years before Jesus entered Jerusalem to shouts of praise—a triumphal entry on Palm Sunday as it has come to be called.

Jesus was a compassionate prophet and teacher. He gave new life, encouragement and justice—he was the champion of the poor, the oppressed and the sick and diseased. They loved Jesus. They saw and felt his love. They hoped he would overthrow the occupation armies of Rome and free them from all its tyranny, from their humiliation and poverty.

It seemed like this triumphal entry would lead to great things. The crowds did not realize that the triumphal entry was overshadowed by the cross, the instrument of torture and death.



The crowds cheering President Kennedy and his entourage didn't realize it, but the President of the United States, elected in a democratic presidential election, seemingly welcomed by a festive crowd in Dallas, was about to be shot and killed.

This young President was seen as an advocate for the poor and oppressed, who challenged Americans to ask not what their country could do for them but what they could do for their country.

Everything looked fine on that beautiful day in November as the President's motorcade turned toward the book depository in which assassin Lee Harvey Oswald waited in a pre-meditated fatal ambush. Dallas was alive with excitement as the motorcade turned toward that infamous book depository, as a rifle slipped out of a window, and soon Lee Harvey Oswald had President John F. Kennedy in his sights.



Jerusalem was alive with excitement when Jesus came into town. He wasn't necessarily the center of attention—it was Passover time and people from far and wide crowded the city. Jesus rode a donkey, not a luxurious Lincoln convertible, and he had no Secret Service protecting him. The crowds welcomed him, hoping he could be their champion. They wanted a winner, not a loser, which in a few days is exactly what Jesus turned out to be, in their eyes. In a few days, many who had enthusiastically welcomed Jesus realized he was not the champion they wanted, and they encouraged Pilate to "crucify him."

The crowds wanted physical deliverance, rescue and salvation. They wanted a powerful leader who would vanquish their oppressors. But Jesus was the Lamb of God coming to Jerusalem to do, once and for all, what no human or

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no religion or no government could ever do. Reconcile, forgive and give eternal life.

In his first few days of that week, in what many now call Passion Week, Jesus was outraged by the oppression and injustice, the rank materialism and greed that had overtaken faith, and his actions and teachings, in turn, outraged the religious authorities and pushed them to the brink.

During his last few days on earth in Jerusalem, Jesus boldly told the people that religious legalism, under any name, regardless of its constituent parts, was bondage. He compared the religious oppression of his day to being hypocritical, putting on a good show, like shining the outside of a coffee cup, only to leave the inside uncleansed.

The religious leaders realized Jesus had to be stopped, and they conspired with the Roman military leaders to arrest Jesus and charge him unjustly. Judas, the treasurer, with his belt stuffed with silver coins as his payment for betrayal, identified Jesus as the one the religious authorities wanted to have killed.

They mocked Jesus. They humiliated him. They tortured him. They made him carry the very instrument of his death to the place where they would drive spikes through his body and impale him on his cross. It was a prolonged, violent outpouring of rage on the part of humans—those who were present and those who were not—toward God, who is love.



JFK's head jerked back as Lee Harvey Oswald's aim

found its mark. He slumped toward his wife Jackie, bleeding on her pink suit. The Lincoln sped away to Parkland Memorial Hospital, but little could be done—the President was pronounced dead only some 30 minutes after he was shot.

The search for answers continues to this day. Conspiracy theories abound, and those who support a particular hypothesis usually choose one that implicates adversaries they despise. Seldom does anyone support a theory that places blame on someone they cannot detest and loathe. Those of us who were alive then remember exactly where we were when we first heard of JFK being shot in Dallas.



Of course, none of us are old enough to remember the crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem. It was so long ago it is relatively easy to avoid and sidestep any personal culpability for the gruesome circumstances surrounding the death of Jesus and the hate that motivated his torture and execution.

The old gospel song "Were You There" (1899) dares to ask each one of us, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?... Where you there when they nailed him to the cross?... Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?"

Were YOU there when they crucified our Lord?



Those of us who are old enough to remember television coverage and still photos published in



magazines of the riderless horse drawing the coffin of JFK, the world leaders attending, and the heartrending photo of three-year-old JFK Jr. (“John-John”) saluting his father’s coffin.

Any similarities between Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem and JFK’s visit to Dallas end with their burial and what happened next.

Jesus’ body was also taken to his burial in a tomb, but without the pageantry, acclaim and worldwide media focus accorded JFK.

You can visit the John F. Kennedy Eternal Flame at his gravesite at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. His grave reminds us, as all graves do, of our own mortality. We’re reminded that death has the last word. JFK’s grave reminds us that graves are occupied—filled with the dead bones of those who once lived.

The burial of Jesus was not the end of his story—his tomb is empty.

He entered Jerusalem giving himself over, in self-sacrifice, to receive the hatred of humanity. Irony of all ironies, he is and was Creator of all who hate, reject and crucify him. He willingly accepted hatred and absorbed it so that he might love all of us, the whole world, and in so doing, forgive all of us.

Jesus delivered us all from death—on his Cross, he gave us forgiveness and gave us the hope of our own resurrection, which will happen because our risen Lord lives! ☐

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THE LAST SCAPEGOAT

BRAD JERSAK



Definition: “*Scapegoat*” (noun): *a person blamed for something bad that someone else has done or for some failure that occurs.*

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT & THE SCAPEGOAT RITUAL

The *Day of Atonement* (Yom Kippur), described in Leviticus, is considered the holiest day of the year for the Jewish faith.

Today, post-temple Jews (with no temple, priest, or sacrifices) observe the day as the culmination of a ten-day period of fasting and repentance (which begins on Rosh Hashanah). Jewish tradition says on that day each year, God opens the Book of Life to examine the words, actions, and thoughts of those whose names are written there. If the good deeds outweigh their sins, their name remains in the divine ledger for another year. A unique element of *Yom Kippur* today is that the book of Jonah is always read in remembrance of God’s forgiveness and mercy.

In ancient Israel, the Day of Atonement was much different. It focused on the High Priest’s annual entry into the Holy of Holies to offer sacrifices for the sins of the nation. It featured offerings of a bull and a ram, followed by an intriguing ritual involving kid goats, one of which our English translations call “*the scapegoat*.”

Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the tent of meeting. He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the Lord and the other for the