
FRIDAY CHURCH NEWS NOTES

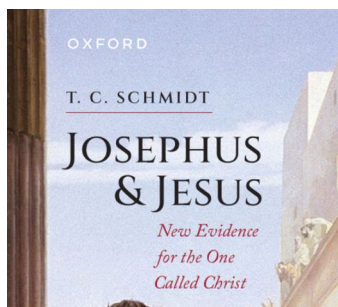
PASTOR CLONES HIMSELF AND USES AI TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

The following is excerpted from “California Pastor,” *Crosswalk*, Sept. 4, 2026: “Justin Lester, Pastor of Friendship Baptist Church, Vallejo, California, has cloned himself using AI so that followers can turn to it when he’s unavailable. ... Using Delphi.ai to create an avatar version of himself, anyone can reach him anytime, anywhere. ... Lester trained the AI model by connecting it to everything he’s ever penned. ‘I connected on YouTube, my TikTok, my Instagram and everything I’ve ever written. So, all the way back to every sermon I’ve ever preached. Books, all of that are in there.’ ... [T]he system has safeguards and is restricted to specific topics. If the system notes that something is too serious, it will prompt them to call him instead.” We don’t know what AI will do with the pastor’s material, and we don’t know what safeguards are in place. It sounds dangerous, since we know that AI has no wisdom in how to use biblical material. AI is useful in a multitude of ways, including the translation of Bible materials, but there are also great dangers, so there must be continual vigilance, prayer, and oversight. “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).



Justin Lester

NEW BOOK ON JOSEPHUS AND JESUS



Josephus and Jesus: New Evidence for the One Called Christ by T.C. Schmidt was published in 2025. Schmidt presents strong evidence that the passage in Josephus describing Jesus is authentic and was not added or tampered with later by Christians as is claimed by some skeptics. The Josephus passage in *Antiquities*, his history of the Jews (c. AD 93), known as the *Testimonium Flavianum*, is the earliest description of Jesus by a non-Christian. Found in all manuscripts of Josephus, it says, “And in this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man, for he was a doer of miraculous deeds, a teacher of men

who receive truth with pleasure. And he led many from among the Jews and many from among the Greeks. He was the Christ. And, when Pilate had condemned him to the cross at the accusation of the first men among us, those who at first loved him did not cease to do so, for he appeared to them alive again on the third day given that the divine prophets had spoken such things and thousands of other wonderful things about him. And up till now the tribe of the Christians, who were named from him, has not disappeared.” *Josephus and Jesus* is available as a free PDF at the Oxford Academic website. See josephusandjesus.com.

CANADIAN MILITARY BANS GOD, BIBLE, AND PRAYER FROM OFFICIAL CEREMONIES

The following is excerpted from “Canadian Armed Forces,” *The Christian Institute*, Aug. 21, 2026: “Mention of God, Bible readings and prayers have been banned by the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) from all official events. ... The policy’s stated intention is ‘to define the boundaries of appropriate language, actions, and symbols during military ceremonies and gatherings’ in order to ‘respect freedom of religion and religious neutrality.’ ... Writing in the *National Post*, Canadian think tank president Brian Dijkema commented: ‘A spiritual reflection that applies to all ultimately applies to none. Trying to appease everyone actually makes no one happy.’ He added: ‘What the government calls inclusion, in this case, is an effort to achieve neutrality that instead turns into secular uniformity, which is not the same thing.’”



TOMB OF PHILIP DISCOVERED

It is thought that the tomb of the apostle Philip has been located at Hierapolis in southwestern Turkey by Italian excavators led by Francesco D’Andria. The city is mentioned in Colossians 4:13 in connection with Colosse and Laodicea. These cities were located about six miles apart in the Lycus Valley in the Roman province of Asia. Hierapolis is located on a ridge above the valley and is famous for its thermal spa, which is still in operation. The water produces brilliant white limestone deposits (called travertine) which are visible from long distances across the valley, including from Laodicea. The Roman ruins of Hierapolis are some of the best-preserved from that era. It is an excellent outdoor museum. Philip is mentioned 16 times in Scripture. He brought Nathanael to Christ (Joh. 1:45), told the Lord that 200 pennyworth of bread would not suffice to feed the multitude (Joh. 6:5-7), was approached by the Greeks who wanted to worship Jesus (Joh. 12:20-21), and said to Jesus, “Lord, shew us the Father and it sufficeth us” (Joh. 14:8-9). According to early tradition, Philip preached at Hierapolis, won converts there, and was martyred by being crucified upside down. For more about Hierapolis, Colosse, and Laodicea, see the free PowerPoint series *Cities and Places of the Bible* consisting of over 2,650 slides in 54 presentations. See the PowerPoints section of wayoflife.org.

99% OF DEMOCRATS SAY ABORTION SHOULD BE LEGAL

According to an Economist/YouGov survey (June 13-15, 2026), 99% of Democrats in America say abortion should be legal with zero or some restrictions. That means a large percentage of Americans are wicked people who support the murder of unborn children. 51% want *no restrictions whatsoever on abortion* up to the last minute before the child is born. 34% want *some restrictions*, such as for minors or late term. 13% want restrictions for when the life of the mother is in danger. **Only 1% said abortion should be illegal and “never be allowed.”** In 2023, Minnesota, which is controlled almost entirely by Democrats, passed a law allowing babies to be killed up to the time of birth. Gov. Tim Walz cheerily signed it into law accompanied by loud clapping by Democrats. Massachusetts followed suit this year.

BAPTISTS AND THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The following is from the J.H. Spencer Historical Society, June 19, 2026: “In 1776 there were 497 Baptist churches in the thirteen colonies with approximately 10,000 church members. The effect of the great Separate Baptist revival was just beginning to be felt as Baptist growth would continue steadily into the 19th century. How did all these Baptists feel about declaring independence and going to war with Great Britain? William Cathcart, pastor of the Second Baptist Church of Philadelphia and editor of the monumental 1881 work *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, gives us the answer. Of the various American preachers who became Tories [supporters of Britain], there was ‘but one of the Baptist faith.’ ... A passion for liberty and a love of religious freedom prompted Baptist preachers throughout the colonies to support the patriotic cause. Several noted Baptist pastors even became chaplains in the Continental Army, including John Gano, David Jones, Hezekiah Smith, William McClanahan, and Thomas B. Montayne. George Washington himself declared, ‘Baptist chaplains were among the most prominent and useful in the army.’ ... What about the English Baptist pastors on the other side of the Atlantic? ... In 1784, London Baptist John Rippon (who pastored the same church Charles Spurgeon would later serve) wrote a letter to James Manning, President of Rhode Island College (now Brown University), stating: ‘I believe all our Baptist ministers in town, except one, and most of our brethren in the country were on the side of the Americans in the late dispute.’ ... It seems Baptists, wherever they have been planted, have been champions of religious liberty. As we celebrate the 250th birthday of the United States of America, may we take advantage of the freedoms our forefathers secured for us. And not just the freedom to gather and worship as we see fit. May Baptists preach and share the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.”

THE VANITY OF MAN'S GLORY

History is replete with accounts of men doing glorious things, but man's glory apart from God's glory is nothing in the end. Consider two examples pertaining to America's defeat of the Barbary pirates in the 18th century. First, is **Stephen Decatur Jr.** He rose to fame in 1804 when, as a lieutenant, he led a small group of American sailors to enter the Tripoli harbor and burn the *USS Philadelphia* which had run aground and been captured by the Barbary pirates. The daring raid denied the ship's use to America's enemies, and he came home to a hero's welcome. In 1815, Decatur reaped even more glory when he commanded a fleet of ten warships to the Barbary coast and was victorious in gaining the release of all American captives and forcing the Barbary nations to pay restitution for merchandise stolen from America and to cease attacking American ships. He returned to another hero's welcome. "The fleet returned to the United States with

the flags of twenty-nine enemy vessels-- the banners were stitched into a mat and presented to First Lady Dolly Madison" (Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East*, p. 74). But five years later Decatur was ignobly killed in a duel with a former Navy captain who held a grudge against Decatur for court-martialing him. The second example is **William Eaton** who led eight Marines and 400 Greek and Arab mercenaries across the desert from Alexandria, Egypt, to attack Derne on the coast near Tripoli. Eaton became a national hero, and the action is memorialized in the U.S. *Marine Hymn*. "From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli, we fight our country's battles in the air, on land, and sea. First to fight for right and freedom and to keep our honor clean, we are proud to claim the title of United States Marine." The Massachusetts legislature generously awarded Eaton 10,000 acres of farmland, but he died a bitter, drunken recluse.

INFORMATION

The Friday Church News Notes is designed for use in churches and is published by Way of Life Literature's Fundamental Baptist Information Service. Unless otherwise stated, the Notes are written by David Cloud. Of necessity we quote from a wide variety of sources, but this obviously does not imply an endorsement. We trust that our readers will not be discouraged. It is God's will that we know the times (1 Ch. 12:32; Mat. 16:3) and that we be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. The News Notes remind us that the hour is very late, and we need to be ready for the Lord's coming. Are you sure that you are born again? Are you living for Christ? "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:11-14). This material is sent only to those who personally subscribe to the Fundamental Baptist Information Service mailing list. To SUBSCRIBE, go to <http://www.wayoflife.org/wayoflife/subscribe.html>. TO UNSUBSCRIBE OR CHANGE ADDRESSES, go to the very bottom of any email received from us and click "Manage My Subscription." Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org.
