

# Looking Up Instead of Around

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*Fiddler on the Roof* is a 1971 American musical film based on the 1964 Broadway stage musical of the same name. Set in Imperial Russia just over a decade before the Bolshevik Revolution, the film focuses on life in a Jewish community in the fictional Ukrainian village of Anatevka. Particular attention is centered on a poor, hardworking dairyman named Tevye, who tries to find husbands for the three oldest of his five daughters yet finds himself, at times hilariously, moving further away from his religious and cultural traditions to accommodate their wishes to marry for love.

The film portrayed people of different economic statuses who were mostly occupied with the lives of their families, relationships with their friends and neighbors, the welfare of their businesses, and how their children's lives may be improved by working with Yente, the matchmaker, to find the right husband or wife. They all depended on each other for various things they needed to make life as comfortable as possible. Village residents knew that they could go to Tevye for milk, cream, and cheese; Lazar Wolf to get meat butchered; Motel, the tailor, to repair or make clothes; and the synagogue and rabbi for spiritual guidance and advice for all kinds of matters. While there was wariness regarding their gentile neighbors far back in the minds of some, things were generally peaceful with them.

However, after a while, the czar sent an officer into the region to visit the constables of villages that had Jewish

residents in their jurisdiction. The constables were ordered to gather local mobs and engage in a pogrom, that is, attack the Jews and their property. The attack in Anatevka took place during the wedding of Motel and Tevye's eldest daughter, Tzeitel. The constable reluctantly obeyed the czar's order and limited the attacks as much as he could, especially at the wedding.

Months later during the winter, the czar issued an edict ordering the Jews of Anatevka and other nearby villages in the district to sell their homes and leave the area within three days or be forcibly removed by the government. As the stunned and grief-stricken residents started to pack their things and prepare to leave, Motel asked:

"We've been waiting for the Messiah all our lives. Wouldn't this be a good time for Him to come?"

This sudden and catastrophic interruption of their routine life and desired plans, the shattering of their normalcy bias, caused them to gaze upward and hope in God through the coming of the Messiah.

As Israel was preparing to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land, Moses warned them, after they had fallen into the routine of enjoying the prosperity of the land, not to forget the Lord who delivered them from slavery in Egypt and blessed them (Deuteronomy 8:10-14). The Book of Judges, however, illustrates how Israel many times became complacent, drifted away from God into idolatry, and fell into doing what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:5). When their enemies overcame and subjugated them, Israel remembered God and cried out to Him, and He raised up a deliverer to save them.

More than 2,500 years ago, the prophet Zechariah described a time of unprecedented distress that will come upon Israel and Jerusalem (Zechariah 12) in the Last Days. It is a time described by the prophet Jeremiah nearly a century earlier as

“the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:4-7) and about 600 years after that by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 as a time of “great tribulation.” Doubtless, during this time, many among the Jewish people will ask the same question as Motel did in *Fiddler on the Roof*. The answer to that question will come from the Messiah Himself when they cease looking at themselves or around for salvation and look up.

“I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that **they will look on Me whom they have pierced**; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.” (Zechariah 12:10)

When all the nations of the earth are gathered against them, the Deliverer, Messiah Jesus, will return in great might and power to save Israel and reconcile them to God by taking away their sins (Isaiah 59:20; Romans 11:25-27; Revelation 19:11-21).

As we seek to make a living, take care of our families, engage in careers, provide for the future of our children and grandchildren, and build connections with friends and neighbors, it is easy to become so preoccupied with these good things and what we think we need to do to pursue them successfully that the Lord is given merely lip service or forgotten, and His coming kingdom is moved farther back in our minds.

Holding fast to the things of this world causes many to place their hope in getting their favored politician or political party in power to bring about a “golden age” of prosperity for themselves and their children rather than looking up to the Lord Jesus as the only One who will bring the true and lasting golden age when He comes. They forget that trusting in the things of this world is a vain hope that leads to disappointment and suffering (Psalm 146:3). When the

consequences of misplaced trust and hope come, the false sense of security is broken, and an opportunity to look up to the Lord for deliverance comes (Psalm 107:10-15).

The same Deliverer who came to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24) was also **pierced for our transgressions** (Isaiah 53:5) to bring salvation to the gentiles (Romans 11).

Do not be lulled into complacency with the cares of this life and be surprised by a sudden crisis before you turn to the Lord. Trust in the Lord Jesus today and have the blessed, bedrock hope that encourages us to look up to Him instead of around at earthly things that distract, are subject to change, and cannot deliver (Colossians 3:1-4).

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, **looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus**, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” (Titus 2:11-14)

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