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THE SLEDGEHAMMER AND THE PLUMB LINE

**A Covenant Witness to the Destruction of the Jesus Statue,
the Pattern of Contempt, and the Proper Way to Address
Religious Difference Among the Three Covenant Communities**

On April 19, 2026, a photograph circulated on social media showing an Israel Defense Forces soldier in the Christian village of Debel in southern Lebanon smashing a statue of Jesus the Messiah with a sledgehammer. The IDF confirmed the photograph's authenticity within hours. Tucker Carlson identified this act, and the pattern of conduct surrounding it, as evidence of a deep and documented hostility within segments of Israeli society toward Christianity and Christian sacred symbols. This covenant witness examines that pattern against the standard of the Tanakh, addresses the historical roots of the contempt, applies the Torah's law on the treatment of those outside the covenant community, and establishes the proper covenant method for addressing genuine theological disagreement among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam on the question of sacred images. The evidentiary standard throughout is *Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15*: two or three independent witnesses. No verdict is issued without corroboration.

PART I

What the Evidence Establishes — The Incident and the Pattern

The covenant witness does not issue judgments from single data points. The two-witness standard of *Devarim 19:15* requires that any charge be established by multiple independent witnesses before a

verdict is rendered. In this case, the evidentiary record is not thin. It is extensive, documented by Israeli sources, international reporting, and the IDF's own confirmation.

The Primary Incident — Debel, Lebanon, April 19, 2026

An IDF soldier in the Maronite Christian village of Debel in southern Lebanon was photographed smashing a statue of Jesus the Messiah with a sledgehammer. The statue was located on the outskirts of the village — a civilian community, not a Hezbollah military installation. The IDF confirmed the photograph's authenticity on April 19–20, 2026, stating that *“the soldier's conduct is wholly inconsistent with the values expected of its troops.”* Prime Minister Netanyahu stated the soldier would face harsh disciplinary action. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar called it *“entirely contrary”* to Israeli values. The soldier was subsequently jailed.

The covenant witness notes the official condemnation. It also notes what the *Times of Israel* — an Israeli publication — stated plainly in its editorial response: *“The soldier didn't smash the Jesus statue accidentally, and his actions didn't take place in a vacuum.”* That observation is the beginning of an honest reckoning. This document continues it.

The Documented Pattern — Multiple Independent Witnesses

This is not an isolated incident. The documented record across multiple independent sources establishes a pattern:

2024 — Deir Mimas, Lebanon: IDF soldiers from the Golani Special Operations Unit filmed a mock wedding ceremony inside an Orthodox church, vandalizing the building and uploading the footage to social media. The footage reached international news organizations.

2025 — Yaroun, Lebanon: An Israeli tank demolished a statue of Saint George in the southern Lebanese village of Yaroun.

2023–2026 — Gaza: Israel destroyed more than 1,000 mosques and three churches in Gaza during the war according to local officials. In July 2025, an Israeli tank shell struck Gaza's only Catholic church, killing three people sheltering there and injuring Father Gabriel Romanelli, the parish priest who had spoken regularly with the late Pope Francis. This was the third church struck in Gaza. Netanyahu issued an apology calling it an accident.

March 2026 — Jerusalem: Israeli police stopped Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and Father Francesco Ielpo from praying at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on Palm Sunday — one of the holiest days of the Christian calendar. Following international outcry, arrangements were made for Easter services to proceed.

The Spitting Pattern — Documented by Israeli Organizations

The contempt is not limited to military operations in Lebanon and Gaza. Within Israel itself, the documented pattern is sustained and escalating:

The Religious Freedom Data Center (RFDC) recorded 181 anti-Christian incidents in Israel in 2025. Spitting on clergy and Christian pilgrims constituted 109 incidents — sixty percent of all documented incidents. Over 80 percent occurred in Jerusalem, with the Armenian Quarter bearing the heaviest concentration.

The interreligious Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue — an Israeli organization — documented 155 incidents targeting Christians in Israel in 2025, a marked increase from the 111 documented in 2024. The Rossing Center’s 2025 report states plainly: “*Harassment has become so routine that stepping outside can carry an almost certain risk of abuse*” for clergy in areas such as Mount Zion and the Armenian Quarter.

In October 2023, Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir stated publicly: “***I still think spitting at Christians is not a criminal case.***” This statement was made by a sitting cabinet minister. It is not the position of a private citizen. It is the stated institutional tolerance of a government official for a documented pattern of anti-Christian harassment. The chief rabbis of Israel condemned it. The Torah condemns it. It remains on the public record.

Tucker Carlson is correct: what is documented here is not isolated misconduct. It is a pattern of contempt with documented institutional tolerance at the highest levels of Israeli government. The covenant witness names it precisely for what it is and then applies the Torah’s standard to every dimension of it.

PART II

The Root of the Contempt — History, Wound, and the Torah’s Verdict

The covenant witness does not name a pattern of contempt without examining where it comes from. Honesty requires both the naming and the understanding. Neither excuses the other. The historical root of anti-Christian hostility within certain strands of rabbinic Judaism is documented, documented by Jewish scholars themselves, and the covenant must address it fairly.

The Historical Context — Wound Accumulated Over Centuries

The Toledot Yeshu — a body of Jewish counter-narrative literature about Yeshua of Nazareth, originating in the late antique period and tracing to at least the fifth century CE — represents the formal rabbinical response to Christianity. Its content is hostile: it portrays Yeshua as an illegitimate child, a practitioner of magic, and a deceiver of Israel. It was read in some Eastern European Jewish communities on Christmas Eve as a form of counter-celebration. Its influence has been documented across centuries of Jewish-Christian polemical literature.

Scholars at the Thetorah.com review of the Toledot Yeshu literature state the context plainly: the harsh attitude toward Yeshua in rabbinic literature should be understood against the background of the

near-constant persecution Jews experienced in supersessionist Christian Europe and Byzantium. They saw Yeshua as the ultimate source of their misfortune, and found relief in counter-narrative. The wound was real. The persecution was real. The Crusades, the Inquisition, the pogroms, and the Holocaust all stand as documented evidence of catastrophic violence perpetrated against Jewish communities under Christian banners.

The covenant witness acknowledges this history without minimizing it. It is part of the evidentiary record. Jewish contempt toward Christian symbols did not appear from nowhere. It grew in the soil of real suffering under the cross as a political and military symbol of conquest and persecution.

Where the Torah Parts Ways with the Pattern

But the historical wound does not authorize the contempt. The Torah is explicit. And the chief rabbis of Israel have themselves said what the covenant witness confirms: the practice of spitting on Christian clergy has no basis in Jewish religious law. It is cultural wound operating as religious practice, and the Torah does not sanction it.

Shemot (Exodus) 23:9 establishes the covenant obligation that the history of suffering generates:

“You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.”

This is not a peripheral text. It is one of the most repeated moral obligations in the entire Torah — scholars have counted thirty-six instances of this command across the five books. The reason given is always the same: you know what it is to be the outsider, the persecuted, the one against whom the powerful act without restraint. That knowledge does not justify replication. It forbids it.

A community that has suffered contempt and violence for eighteen centuries under the cross is not given license by the Torah to express contempt toward those who carry that cross. It is given the opposite obligation: because you know the wound, you are forbidden to inflict it. *Shemot 23:9* does not provide an exemption for historical grievances. It provides a command rooted in historical memory: do not do to the stranger what was done to you.

The wound is real. The Torah’s answer to real wounds is not a sledgehammer. It is *Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:17–18*:

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am Yahweh.”

The Torah’s remedy for wound is not accumulated grudge acted out through contempt. It is *tokhachah* — frank, direct, honest reproof. You open your mouth. You speak plainly. You reason. You do not spit. You do not lift a sledgehammer. The covenant way is the word, not the weapon.

PART III

What the Torah Actually Authorizes — and What It Does Not

Those who would defend the destruction of the statue on religious grounds — arguing that the Torah commands the destruction of idols — must be answered from the Torah itself, not from cultural assumption. The covenant witness applies the text precisely.

The Idol Destruction Commands — What They Actually Say

The Torah's commands regarding the destruction of idolatrous objects appear primarily in *Devarim (Deuteronomy) 7:5* and *Devarim 12:2–3*. *Devarim 7:5* reads:

“But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire.”

The context of this command is specific and bounded. *Devarim 7:1–2* establishes the scope: this command addresses the seven nations of Kena'an — the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites — within the specific covenant context of entering the land of Yisra'el. The command is given to the covenant community of Yisra'el, for a specific covenant purpose, in a specific geographic and historical context. It is not a universal license for any Jewish soldier, in any foreign country, in any century, to destroy the religious objects of civilian populations under military occupation.

The Maronite Christians of southern Lebanon are not Canaanites. The village of Debel is not Kena'an. The IDF soldier in 2026 is not **Moshe (Moses)** commanding the covenant assembly at the Jordan River. The command of *Devarim 7* does not apply. It cannot be imported from its covenant context and applied wholesale to a modern military operation in a foreign country against a civilian religious community that poses no idolatrous threat to the covenant community of Yisra'el.

The Torah's Law of War and the Protection of the Civilian

Even within authorized military campaigns, the Torah imposes strict limits. *Devarim (Deuteronomy) 20:10–20* establishes the framework: terms of peace must be offered before siege; the people within a city who accept terms shall be spared. The text distinguishes sharply between combatants and civilian populations. The Maronite villages of southern Lebanon are civilian communities. Their statues are not weapons. Their churches are not military installations. The Torah's law of war does not authorize their desecration.

Moreover, *Bamidbar (Numbers) 15:15–16* establishes the covenant principle that governs all interaction between the covenant community and those who dwell among them or in proximity to them:

“For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a statute forever throughout your generations. You and the stranger shall be alike before Yahweh. One law and one rule shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you.”

One law. One standard. The stranger who sojourns is not subject to a lesser protection. The civilian Maronite Christian population of southern Lebanon — which has lived on that land for centuries, whose churches predate the modern state of Israel, whose president is a Maronite Catholic, and which constitutes the largest per-capita Christian population in the Middle East — is not a population that the Torah authorizes any army to desecrate.

The Covenant Verdict on the Pattern

The spitting on clergy in Jerusalem violates *Vayikra 19:17–18* — the prohibition on harbored hatred and the command to love the neighbor. The mock wedding in the Deir Mimas church violates the dignity obligations of *Shemot 23:9* and the covenant of *Vayikra 19:34*. The destruction of churches in Gaza violates *Devarim 20*'s laws of war. The smashing of the statue in Debel violates *Bamidbar 15:16*'s standard of one law for all. None of these acts has a Torah basis. None of them can be defended from the Tanakh. They are cultural wounds, accumulated grudge, and institutional tolerance of hatred — and the Torah forbids all three.

PART IV

The Proper Covenant Method for Addressing Religious Difference

Tucker Carlson's concern goes beyond the single incident. He is identifying a mental attitude — a cold, documented contempt — toward Christianity and Christian sacred symbols that manifests in 181 documented incidents per year, in mock weddings in churches, in sledgehammers applied to statues, and in a cabinet minister saying that spitting on clergy is “*not a criminal case.*” The covenant witness addresses not only the condemnation but the alternative: the proper way to address genuine theological differences among the three covenant communities on the question of sacred images.

The Three-Community Position on Sacred Images

On the question of visual representations of the divine and the prophets, the three communities hold distinct positions, and those positions must be named honestly:

Judaism: The second commandment of *Shemot (Exodus) 20:4–5* prohibits the creation of any carved image of anything in heaven, earth, or sea as an object of devotion. Orthodox Judaism has maintained this prohibition consistently. The concern about Christian iconography and statuary is therefore rooted in a genuine Torah principle. That concern is legitimate. The method of expressing it is not.

Islam: The Qur'an's absolute prohibition on *shirk* — associating any created being with the divine nature of Allah — produces a parallel position. Islamic tradition has maintained a strict prohibition on visual representation of the divine and the prophets for fourteen centuries. On this specific point, Islam and Torah-observant Judaism share a covenant alignment with the second commandment of *Shemot 20*. That alignment is real and should be acknowledged across the three communities.

Christianity: Christian use of statuary, iconography, and devotional images of Yeshua and the saints reflects a theological tradition that developed through the patristic period and the ecumenical councils. The iconoclast controversies of the eighth and ninth centuries demonstrate that this was never settled without serious internal dispute within Christianity itself. The Eastern Orthodox tradition and the Protestant Reformation have each, from within Christianity, raised concerns about devotional images that echo the second commandment. This is an intra-Christian argument with ancient roots, and it confirms that the Torah's concern about images is not foreign to Christianity's own internal tradition.

The Difference Is Real — and It Has a Covenant Method

The theological difference between Jewish and Islamic prohibition of sacred images and Christian embrace of them is a real difference. It is not a difference to be minimized or glossed over. It deserves honest engagement. And the Torah has a method for that engagement: *tokbachab* — frank, direct covenant witness through the spoken and written word.

Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:17 establishes the covenant method:

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.”

The Hebrew word translated “reason frankly” is *bokbiach tokbiach* (הוֹכֵחַ תּוֹכֵיחַ) — a doubled verbal form conveying intensity and directness. The Torah does not say: absorb the difference in silence. It does not say: destroy what you disagree with. It says: speak. Reason. Reprove honestly. Engage the disagreement through the word.

When a Torah-observant community believes that another community's devotional objects violate the second commandment, the Torah's authorized response is covenant witness: open the Tanakh, cite the text, make the argument, extend the invitation. The second commandment forbids the creation of images. It does not authorize soldiers to destroy the images that other communities have already created. Those are two entirely different acts, and only one of them is sanctioned by *Shemot 20*

The proper covenant engagement with a Christian community about their statues looks like this: “The Torah that your faith community claims to honor records in *Shemot 20:4* a prohibition on the creation of any carved likeness used in devotion. We hold this commandment binding. We invite you to examine it with us. We speak this not in contempt but in covenant witness.” That is *tokbachab*. That is the Torah way.

A sledgehammer through a statue is not *tokbachab*. It is *sinah* — (שנאה) — hatred. And *Vayikra 19:17* explicitly forbids harboring *sinah* in the heart. It is not a gray area. It is a direct prohibition. The

Torah condemns this act. Not the foreign policy analysts of the Western press. Not the international community. The Torah.

The Covenant Witness to All Three Communities on This Question

To the Jewish community: Your position on sacred images is grounded in genuine Torah authority. *Shemot 20:4–5* is unambiguous. But the method for bearing witness to that authority is *tokbachab* — covenant reasoning through the spoken and written word — not physical desecration of objects that civilian communities hold sacred. *Shemot 23:9* and *Vayikra 19:17–18* bind you to a standard of dignity toward the stranger and the neighbor that the documented pattern of spitting, mockery, and demolition violates directly. The Torah that you invoke against the images also forbids the contempt with which they are being treated.

To the Islamic community: Your alignment with the second commandment on the prohibition of visual representation of the divine is genuine and historically documented. Islamic condemnation of the desecration of a Christian statue is noted and affirmed by this covenant witness. The Council on American-Islamic Relations issued a call for intervention following the Debel incident. That voice is appropriate. The covenant witness joins it, grounded in *Bamidbar 15:16*'s standard: one law for all, no nation exempt, including the nations whose populations are Muslim-majority.

To the Christian community: The covenant witness holds the second commandment's prohibition on images in full, as documented in Transmission 10 (Document 67). But the proper response to a sledgehammer through your statues is not simply outrage at the act — it is the deeper question: why was the image made? *Shemot 20:4–5* is the ground beneath both the prohibition and the violation. The violated image was never lawful under the covenant standard. The covenant witness says this with respect, not with contempt, and says it while fully condemning the contempt with which the image was treated. Both truths must be held simultaneously.

PART V

Covenant Verdict — The Plumb Line Applied

The plumb line of **Yahweh's** covenant does not bend in the direction of political alliance, historical sympathy, or diplomatic convenience. It hangs straight. It hangs the same for every nation, every community, every soldier, and every cabinet minister. Here is where it hangs on each dimension of this case:

On the Debel Statue — April 19, 2026:

An IDF soldier smashed a statue of Yeshua the Messiah with a sledgehammer in a civilian Christian village. The IDF confirmed the act. The act has no Torah basis. *Devarim 7's* idol destruction

commands do not apply to Maronite Christian villages in Lebanon in 2026. ***Bamidbar 15:16's*** one-law standard required the same dignity for the civilian population of Debel that the Torah requires for any civilian population. That standard was violated. The act was hatred in practice. *Vayikra 19:17* forbids it. **The covenant verdict is clear:** this was a violation of Torah law by an IDF soldier, and Netanyahu's disciplinary response — while appropriate as far as it goes — does not address the institutional tolerance that produced the act.

On the Pattern of Spitting and Harassment in Jerusalem:

One hundred and eighty-one documented incidents of anti-Christian harassment in Israel in 2025. One hundred and nine incidents of spitting on clergy and pilgrims. A cabinet minister stating publicly that spitting on Christians is not a criminal matter. The Rossing Center — an Israeli interreligious organization — documenting a “*persistent and worrying pattern*” of violence and humiliation. This is *sinah* — hatred — operating as cultural practice with institutional tolerance. *Vayikra 19:17–18* forbids harboring hatred in the heart. *Shemot 23:9* forbids oppressing the stranger. *Bamidbar 15:16* requires one law for all. Every one of these texts condemns this pattern. The covenant verdict is not political. It is the Torah.

On the Theological Disagreement About Images:

The difference between the Torah's prohibition on images and Christianity's embrace of devotional statuary is real, significant, and must be addressed honestly among the three communities. The covenant method for addressing it is *tokhachah* — frank, direct, word-based covenant witness. Open the Tanakh. Cite *Shemot 20:4*. Make the argument. Extend the invitation to examine it. That is the Torah way. Spitting on a priest walking the Via Dolorosa is not the Torah way. Smashing a statue with a sledgehammer is not the Torah way. Physical contempt toward those who disagree with your covenant position is not authorized anywhere in the Tanakh. It is forbidden in multiple texts. The method is the word. The method has always been the word.

The Call to the State of Israel:

The covenant witness calls the state of Israel — as a political entity holding power over the lives of millions of people, including Christian civilians in Lebanon and Gaza and Christian clergy in Jerusalem — to the identical covenant standard it invokes when it names the destruction of its own sacred sites as an offense. *Devarim 1:17* requires impartial judgment. *Bamidbar 15:16* requires one law for all. **The same protection the state of Israel claims for its own citizens and their sacred sites must be extended without partiality to the Maronite villages of southern Lebanon, to the churches of Gaza, to the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem, and to every Christian clergyman walking the Via Dolorosa.**

That is not a political demand. That is the Torah.

Yahweh's word to the house of Yisra'el through **Amos (Amos) 3:2** has not changed:

“You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

The covenant expectation on the house of Yisra’el is not lower than the expectation on other nations. It is higher. Because the covenant obligation is greater. Because **Yahweh** said so. The plumb line does not move.

Three-Religion Covenant Audit

This witness is addressed simultaneously to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam per the evidentiary standard of *Devarim 19:15* applied equally across all three communities.

Judaism

The Torah’s second commandment provides genuine grounds for concern about Christian devotional images. That concern is covenant-authorized. The method of expressing it is not. *Shemot 23:9*, *Vayikra 19:17–18*, and *Bamidbar 15:16* together forbid the pattern of contempt documented by the Rossing Center, the RFDC, and the IDF’s own confirmation of the Debel incident. The chief rabbis of Israel have already said what this covenant witness confirms: this behavior has no basis in Torah law. It is cultural wound operating as religious practice, and it must stop. The covenant method is *tokbachah* — direct, honest, word-based witness. Not spitting. Not sledgehammers. Not mock weddings in churches. The word.

Christianity

The Christian community’s outrage at the desecration of the Debel statue is legitimate and documented. The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, Palestinian pastor Munther Isaac, and international Christian voices are right to condemn it. The covenant witness stands with that condemnation. Simultaneously, the covenant witness holds *Shemot 20:4–5* in full: the second commandment’s prohibition on devotional images is not suspended by the sincerity of the devotion behind them. The Christian community is called to grieve the desecration and also to examine honestly whether the image violated the covenant before the sledgehammer touched it. Both questions must be asked. Both answers must be honest. The covenant holds them together.

Islam

The Islamic community’s condemnation of the Debel desecration — as expressed by CAIR and Muslim voices internationally — is affirmed by this covenant witness. Islamic alignment with the Torah’s second commandment on the prohibition of visual representation of the divine is genuine. Islamic law’s protection of the *dhimmi* — the People of the Book living under Islamic governance — includes the protection of their places of worship and religious symbols. Classical Islamic law forbids

the destruction of churches and synagogues under Islamic rule. This is not a modern political concession. It is classical fiqh. The covenant standard of ***Bamidbar 15:16*** and the classical Islamic protection of the People of the Book are in alignment on the specific question of protecting civilian religious communities from the desecration of their sacred symbols. Every nation, including Muslim-majority nations, is held to this same standard.

Submitted in covenant faithfulness to **Yahweh** and to the public covenant record

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