

The Man Who Would Be King

by Andrew Prowse

There is no mistaking the power and omnipresence of the king. On the streets of Memphis, Tennessee, when passers-by cry out "Hail to the king!" there is little doubt that they are referring to the living legend—Elvis.

This year, nearly one million people will visit the temple of the King—Graceland—and pay approximately \$16 for the privilege of doing so. Graceland, under the auspices of Elvis Presley Enterprises, is presided over by Priscilla Presley, who in 1982 transformed what used to be a financial burden into a gold mine by opening its hallowed halls to the public.

On her 25th birthday last year, Elvis' daughter and sole heiress Lisa-Marie, took possession of his kingly legacy that is valued at well over \$100-million. Surely, Elvis is happy knowing that his little girl is being taken care of—possibly something not uppermost in his mind during the mid-70s when he was giving away Cadillacs and incurring hefty gambling debts, all the while becoming more and more dependent upon the colorful tapestry of substances that would eventually lead to his death at Graceland on August 16, 1977. Elvis' life story does not, however, stop there.

For legions of devoted followers, Elvis is very much alive. Not just in their hearts and in their vinyl collections, but in real flesh and blood. Elvis sightings are an almost weekly phenomenon.

Since a woman first spotted him eyeing some back ribs in a Piggily Wiggily supermarket outside of Lexington, Kentucky, Elvis has been seen at various fast food establishments and several trailer parks. While conveniently, these phenomena are beneficial to the marketers of Elvis Presley Enterprises, they in fact hold a much deeper meaning. For the hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who travel to Graceland every year, the trip isn't about buying an Elvis T-shirt, admiring his favorite purple Cadillac or even being dazzled by his gold lame suit. No—for those camped outside the gates of Graceland, as well as for those across the globe who pitch tents there in spirit, there is a religious aspect to Elvis and his legacy.

So, perhaps it is not surprising that the suggestion has been made that Elvis and Christ are in fact one. This idea is not without merit, for the similarities are remarkable. Five weeks after the crucifixion, at the harvest festival of Pentecost, the disciples saw a vision of Jesus. Significantly, it was approximately five weeks after Elvis' death that he appeared at the Piggily Wiggily. These types of striking comparisons were enough for author A.J. Jacobs to produce an insightful book entitled *The Two Kings—Jesus•Elvis* (Bantam Books, 1994).

Here are just a few of his discoveries:

- Jesus walked on water, Elvis surfed.
- Jesus is the Lord's shepherd, Elvis dated Cybill Shepherd.
- Jesus delivered us, Elvis stamps help to deliver.
- Jesus was resurrected, Elvis had a famous comeback special in '68.

Not convinced? On the eve of his death, Jesus surrounded himself with the twelve disciples for the Last Supper. Elvis, on the eve of his death, surrounded himself with the twelve substances for his final fix.

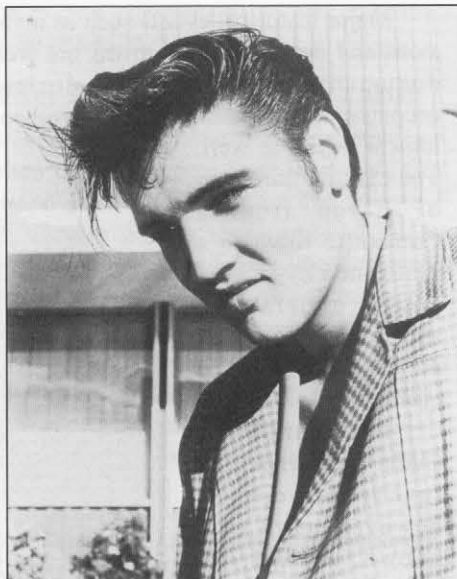
Three days after Christ was buried, women who went to his tomb to anoint his body were shocked to find that he was not there. After a three song encore in Little Rock, Arkansas, women who rushed the stage were equally perplexed at the disappearance of Elvis and the subsequent announcement that the King had in fact "left the building."

It is no surprise that theologians and Elvis fans alike are "all shook up" by these discoveries. Is it possible that the King of Kings would choose to unveil himself through rock'n'roll? Was this the way to speak to the masses? We know that in his lifetime Elvis' songs were called "devil music," that he liked performing in the desert of Las Vegas, and that he encouraged fans to adorn him by placing necklaces over his head (Hawaiian Leis in fact). Yet many questions remain: why would the King star in such films as *Clambake* and *Blue Hawaii*? Why would he choose a Burger King restaurant to reappear in? Perhaps we will never know.

As Elvis Presley Enterprises aggressively plans to open a Tokyo theme park and expand its marketing efforts into former Communist republics, they probably do not care...just as long as he is not forgotten.

And surely he won't be. As Graceland officials succinctly explain: "So much of who and what Elvis was and what he did and how he lived can tell us a lot about ourselves." And, no doubt, his commandments can teach us a few additional things:

- 1) Don't be cruel
- 2) Love tender
- 3) Let him be your teddy bear
- 4) "Only fools rush in"
- 5) Always say "Thankyou, thankyou verymuch"
- 6) Return to sender
- 7) Don't be a hounddog
- 8) Dance to the jailhouse rock
- 9) Red pill—wake up, white pill—sleep
- 10) You can do anything, but lay off of blue suede shoes ●



The Second Coming?
[The Estate of Elvis Presley/Graceland]