

Biblical Oddities

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Introduction

The Bible contains many well-known stories. We all know about the time David killed Goliath, and we know what happened when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. We also know that Cain killed Abel and that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

However, the Bible also contains a lot of lesser-known stories. People know all about the time Moses delivered Israel from the land of Egypt, but few people have heard about the time God tried to kill Moses. The story of Abraham is well-known, but few people can tell you the story of Demas.

There are many fascinating stories, tidbits, and truths in the Bible that rarely see the light of day. Do you know about the ocean in the sky, or about Rahab the dragon? Have you heard about the Watchers or the Council of Heaven?

In this book we are going to take a look at some of the oddest and most unusual passages in the Bible. Be prepared to be amazed – and challenged. What you are about to learn might change your perspective and give you a new appreciation for the Word of God.

Jonathan Cooper
8/7/2013

The Birth of Manasseh

King Manasseh was quite possibly the most wicked ruler that Judah ever had. He reigned for 55 years and did much evil in the sight of the Lord:

2 Kings 21:1: “Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother’s name was Hephzibah.

2 And **he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord**, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.”

The wickedness of this man was truly horrifying. For example, *he offered his own children as burnt offerings*:

II Kings 21:6: “**And he made his son pass through the fire**, and observed times, and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards: he **wrought much wickedness in the sight of the Lord**, to provoke him to anger.

7 And he set a **graven image** of the grove that he had made in the house, of which the Lord said to David, and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever:”

Not only did he perform human sacrifice, but he also polluted the Temple by putting an idol in it. Manasseh didn't stop

there, though. The king also murdered a great many innocent people:

II Kings 21:16: “Moreover **Manasseh shed innocent blood very much**, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; beside his sin wherewith he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of the Lord”

Manasseh's wickedness was so great that God was still angry about it decades later – long after the king had died. In fact, the king's sin led directly to the destruction of Judah itself. God destroyed the land of Judah as an act of vengeance against the great sins of this wicked king:

II Kings 24:2: “And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, **and sent them against Judah to destroy it**, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servants the prophets.

3 Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, **for the sins of Manasseh**, according to all that he did;

4 And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon.”

So, then, we see that Manasseh was an incredibly wicked man. There is a lot that can be said about that, but what I want to focus on is the fact that he became king when he was 12 years old:

2 Kings 21:1: “Manasseh was **twelve years old**

when he began to reign, and reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hephzibah.

Manasseh's father was Hezekiah, and Manasseh began reigning right after his father died. Hezekiah was a good king who feared the Lord. At the end of Hezekiah's life he fell sick, and the prophet Isaiah told him that he was going to die. When Hezekiah heard this he cried out to God and asked the Lord to spare him:

2 Kings 20:1: "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; **for thou shalt die**, and not live.

2 Then he turned his face to the wall, and **prayed unto the Lord**, saying,

3 I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore."

God heard Hezekiah's prayer and granted his request:

2 Kings 20:4: "And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying,

5 Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, **I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee:** on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the Lord.

6 And **I will add unto thy days fifteen years;** and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend

this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.”

God extended Hezekiah's life by 15 years. This is important, because Manasseh was 12 years old when he began to reign. That means *Manasseh was born during those 15 extra years that God gave Hezekiah.*

If Hezekiah had died during his sickness then Manasseh would never have been born. II Kings 24:3 tells us that the reason God destroyed Judah and deported the Jews who lived there was because of the sins of Manasseh. If Manasseh had never existed then history might have turned out very differently. The extra 15 years of life that Hezekiah asked for – and received – led to the destruction of Judah and the deportation of those who lived there. That one request led to the destruction of his entire nation.

There are many times when we pray for something and God tells us “no”. When God does that we tend to get upset about it – especially when we are praying for something that is good and wholesome. All Hezekiah wanted was another fifteen years of life. What could possibly be wrong with that? There was nothing sinful or wicked about it – but the consequences of that request were dire.

It is not a bad thing to pray; in fact, the Bible commands it. We *should* cast all our cares upon the Lord, because He does care for us. We should make our requests known to God. But we need to remember that God knows far more than we do. We may think that our prayer is entirely innocent and harmless, but – like the prayer of Hezekiah – it may have dire consequences that we can't possibly see. When God tells us “no” we should trust Him. He really does know what is best.

The Curse of Joshua

When Joshua destroyed the city of Jericho he pronounced a curse upon anyone who would ever dare to rebuild the conquered city:

Joshua 6:26: “And Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, **Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho:** he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.”

At the time this seemed like an odd thing to say. These verses do not explain his curse or elaborate on it; instead Joshua simply pronounces the curse and then moves on to attack the next city. His curse is never mentioned again in the book of Joshua. It is a very small thing – just one verse – and it's easily forgotten about.

However, the curse *does* come up again. The Bible mentions it centuries later, in the book of 1 Kings. Joshua foretold that the man who rebuilt Jericho would sacrifice his oldest and youngest sons to do so, and that is exactly what happened:

1 Kings 16:34: “In his days did **Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho:** he laid the foundation thereof in Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof in his youngest son Segub, **according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Joshua** the son of Nun.”

Since these two events occur in separate books of the Bible it is easy to miss the connection – but the connection *is*

there. Events took place exactly as Joshua had foretold all those centuries earlier. When Hiel rebuilt Jericho he sacrificed Abiram his firstborn and Sebug his youngest son (most likely as offerings to get false gods to bless his efforts). Jericho – the city that Joshua destroyed and turned into a heap – was rebuilt on the altar of human sacrifice.

One thing that I Kings makes clear is that Joshua's curse was actually the word of the Lord. God is the one who spoke through Joshua, and His prophesied curse came to pass. There was a long delay before fulfillment came, but fulfillment did come. The curse was fulfilled in a very graphic and literal manner.

The city of Jericho still stands today; it is now home to 18,000 people. You now know who rebuilt the city – and the terrible things he did to rebuild the city that God had cursed.

The Stones of Fire

There are some mysteries in the Bible that do not have answers. At times the Bible will mention something astonishing in passing and then simply move on without providing any more details. All we are given is a tantalizing glimpse.

A great example of this are the stones of fire, which are mentioned in Ezekiel 28. That chapter has a lot to say about the devil, who is referred to as the king of Tyre. (Why Satan is referred to this way and not simply as “Lucifer” is beyond the scope of this book.) At first the discussion is easy to follow. When Satan was created he was full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. He was in the garden of Eden and was covered in precious stones:

Ezekiel 28:12: “Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God; **Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.**

13 Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; **every precious stone was thy covering**, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.”

So far the passage is a bit surprising, but it's easy enough to understand. Satan was not created as an evil being; instead he became the devil by choosing to sin. Satan became proud and that pride led to his downfall.

Then we come to this:

Ezekiel 28:14: “Thou art the anointed cherub

that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; **thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.**”

As God describes the glory that once belonged to Satan, one of the key things that’s mentioned is that he “walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire”. It seems that in Heaven, in the holy mountain of God, there is something awe-inspiring called the stones of fire. These stones are mentioned again a few verses later:

Ezekiel 28:15: “Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.

16 By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and **I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.**”

When God pronounced judgment upon the devil He says that He will cast him out of the mountain of God and destroy him from the midst of the stones of fire. Satan's access to them is going to be revoked.

Sadly, the stones of fire are never mentioned again in the Bible. We know where they are located and we know that they exist, but that is all that we are told about them. They are one of the many mysteries of the Bible – but that does not mean they will remain a mystery forever. One day all those who are saved will reach Heaven and gain access to the mountain of God. When that happens we will have access the stones of fire and will be able to see them for ourselves. I suspect they will be quite a sight!

The Body of Moses

The book of Jude is fascinating. It contains some very unusual material that cannot be found anywhere else in the Bible. One example of this is Jude's account of an argument between Michael the archangel and the devil:

Jude 1:9: “Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed **about the body of Moses**, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.”

Jude tells us that there was a time when Michael argued with the devil about the body of Moses. This raises a host of questions: what was the devil trying to do? Why did the devil want the body of Moses? What was going on? When did this happen?

Sadly, the Bible does not answer any of these questions. Many people have come up with all kinds of speculation about this verse, but that's all it is – baseless speculation. It's impossible for us to know what the devil was trying to do because the Bible doesn't tell us. It is all shrouded in mystery.

Some people have gone to apocrypha in order to find answers, but the apocrypha is not a good source of reliable material. These supposed “extra” books of the Bible are frauds and forgeries. Those who run to them as a source of truth will only find deception. It would be nice if there was a real “Assumption of Moses” manuscript, but there isn't. There are only forgeries, written in order to deceive the gullible.

So why did Jude even mention this? A fight between an archangel and the devil is a pretty riveting event – but Jude barely mentions it in passing and provides no details whatsoever. The

reason he does this is because the fight itself isn't really his point. This is the passage in context:

Jude 1:8: “Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and **speak evil of dignities.**

9 **Yet** Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, **durst not bring against him a railing accusation,** but said, The Lord rebuke thee.”

The whole reason Jude wrote his letter in the first place was to warn believers against certain ungodly men who had crept into the church and were causing a great deal of trouble. One of the characteristics of these men was that they spoke evil “of dignities”. Believe it or not, in this context the word “dignities” refers to *demons*. The reason we know this is because in the very next verse Jude gives us the example of Michael. When the archangel was arguing with the devil he could have really let him have it, but instead he rebuked the devil in the name of the Lord and left it at that. Jude's point is that even *Michael the archangel* would not bring a railing accusation against demons, even when he was talking to *the devil himself*. Peter makes the same point:

2 Peter 2:10: “But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to **speak evil of dignities.**

11 Whereas **angels,** which are greater in power and might, **bring not railing accusation against them** before the Lord.”

In verse 11 Peter says that the angels do not bring a railing accusation against “them”, and in verse 10 we see that the word “them” refers to dignities – the exact same word that Jude used. Both Peter and Jude are warning us against bringing a “railing ac-

cusation” against demons.

The whole reason Jude gives the example of Michael arguing with Satan is to show how we should behave. When Michael confronted the devil he simply said “the Lord rebuke you”. He turned the devil over to God for rebuke.

The Bible warns us to be on our guard against demons. It tells us that the devil is a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. The forces of darkness are arrayed against us and the Bible tells us to stand our ground and resist the devil.

That being said, God is the one who will judge the forces of darkness and bring an end to them; it is not our place to lecture them. If even Michael the archangel would not bring a railing accusation against them then we shouldn't either; if he delivered the devil over to God for rebuke then we should do the same. That is the point Jude was making, and that is why he brought up the body of Moses.

It would certainly be great to know what the angelic fight was all about, but we are simply not told – and the reason we are not told is because it is beside the point. Sometimes we can focus on unimportant (but fascinating) matters and miss the bigger picture.

Tartarus

One of the most fundamental tenants of Christianity is that there is a place called Hell where the unrighteous are tormented. All those who die without having repented of their sins and believed in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior are sent there. It is a horrible place of fire and brimstone. The souls that are in Hell remain there until the Great White Throne judgment, which is spoken of in Revelation 20:11-25. At that point Hell is emptied and the souls that were in it are judged for their sins – and then they are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:15), where they are tormented day and night, forever and ever.

The doctrine of Hell is common knowledge and is well-understood. What is *not* common knowledge is that there are actually two different Hells. There is the Hell that everyone is familiar with, and then there is a separate place called Tartarus.

We find this surprising fact in the book of 2 Peter:

2 Peter 2:4: “For if God spared not **the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell**, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;”

The word “hell” here is not the normal word for Hell. This is how my Greek lexicon defines it:

Tartaroo: (Strings #5020) Found only in its verbal form in 2 Peter 2:4, meaning to consign to Tartarus (which is neither Sheol of the OT, nor Hades of the NT, nor Gehenna, nor hell, but the place where certain angels are confined, reserved unto judgment). This punishment for these angels is because of their special sin.

As you can see, Peter used a special Greek word that is not used anywhere else in the Bible. The word refers to a separate place of torment that is *not* the usual Hell, but is something different.

In order to find out what is going on we need to study the verse a bit more closely. Peter tells us that when certain angels committed a certain sin, God cast them into Tartarus. There the fallen angels are held captive in chains, and they will remain there until the day of judgment. Tartarus, then, is a special prison that is reserved for certain angels who committed a certain sin. But just who are these angels and what was their sin?

We know that there are many demons that are not confined to Tartarus. These demons roam the Earth and cause tremendous amounts of trouble. However, some demons did something so terrible that their right to roam the Earth was revoked. Instead of being allowed to torment mankind until the day of judgment, they are held captive in utter darkness.

Jude also speaks of this and gives us a bit more information about what sin they committed:

Jude 1:6: “And **the angels** which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved **in everlasting chains under darkness** unto the judgment of the great day.

7 Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.”

In verse 6 Jude tells us the same thing that Peter said – that there are certain angels who sinned and were chained in darkness to await Judgment Day. Jude then says that these angels sinned “even as” Sodom and Gomorrha did. What sin did Sodom commit? Well, according to Jude, the citizens of Sodom gave

themselves over to fornication and “strange flesh”. In other words, the sin of Sodom was sexual in nature – *and so was the sin of these angels*. The sin of the angels was “even as” the sin of Sodom.

Does the Bible record a time when certain fallen angels committed a sexual sin? As a matter of fact, it does. We find this in the book of Genesis:

Genesis 6:1: “And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them,
2 That **the sons of God saw the daughters of men** that they were fair; and **they took them wives** of all which they chose.
3 And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.
4 **There were giants in the earth in those days;** and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.”

Here we are told that beings known as the “sons of God” took human women as wives and had children with them. These children became “giants” (literally, nephilim; Strong’s word #5303) and were incredibly powerful creatures. Who were these “sons of God”? Well, that phrase is only found three times in the entire Old Testament, and each time it is used (Job 1:6, Job 2:1, and Job 38:4) it refers to *angels*. Angels are called the sons of God because they were all created directly by God Himself. Genesis 6 tells us that certain fallen angels went after “strange flesh” and had children with human women. That unholy union created the nephilim – strange and powerful creatures that were half-human and half-demon. This was a very terrible sin in the sight of God. Not only did He destroy the nephilim in the Flood, but He

also took the fallen angels who committed this sin and locked them up in Tartarus so they could not do it again.

It may seem strange to us to think of a fallen angel doing such a thing, but it really shouldn't. No one would express amazement if they heard that a demon possessed someone, or murdered someone, or beat someone up, so why are we amazed at the thought that they might commit sexual sins as well? Is that really so hard to believe? It's true that the angels in Heaven do not marry, but we are talking about demonic angels, not Heavenly ones. Demons do a great many things that the angels in Heaven would never dream of doing.

This is not the only time that the nephilim are mentioned in the Bible. The spies that Moses sent out to look over the land of Canaan reported that they saw nephilim there:

Numbers 13:33: “And there **we saw the giants**, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.”

This time the nephilim were serving as a barrier to keep the Israelites out of Canaan. Satan apparently thought that if he populated Canaan with these powerful giants then that might stop the Israelites from conquering the promised land – but he was wrong. God gave the land over to Israel, and under the leadership of the courageous Joshua they entered Canaan and possessed it.

That was the last time the nephilim are mentioned in the Bible – but it is possible that they might make another appearance in history. Some people have speculated that Satan will attempt this plan once more before the Second Coming. That, however, will be discussed later in the book.

Enoch

No book of Biblical oddities would be complete without mentioning Enoch. He is probably the most famous oddity of all! A great many people are familiar with the story of the man who never died. We find him mentioned in the first book of the Bible:

Genesis 5:23: “And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:
24 And Enoch walked with God: and **he was not; for God took him.**”

Enoch lived to be 365 years old, and then God simply took him. Instead of dying, Enoch was translated so that he would not have to see death. The book of Hebrews tells us that the reason God did that was because Enoch's faith pleased God:

Hebrews 11:5: “**By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death;** and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that **he pleased God.**”

By faith Enoch pleased God and walked with Him, and one day God took him and he was gone. Enoch's faith literally saved him from death.

But that is not all that there is to know about Enoch. The book of Jude tells us that Enoch was a prophet who spoke of the Second Coming:

Jude 1:14: “And **Enoch** also, the seventh from Adam, **prophesied** of these, saying, Behold, **the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his**

saints,

15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

As far as can be seen in the Biblical record, Enoch is the very first prophet. Thousands of years before the *first* coming of Christ, Enoch spoke of the Second Coming. He foresaw the day when the Lord would return to Earth with His Church and execute judgment upon the ungodly. (This is discussed in greater detail in Revelation 19:11-21.)

But there is still more. Enoch named his son “Methuselah”. Methuselah is famous for living longer than anyone else mentioned in the Bible (a staggering 969 years). What many people don't know is that his name is actually a prophecy. Methuselah means “when he dies, it will come”. Sure enough, the year that Methuselah died, the Flood came and destroyed the world.

That brings us to our last fascinating fact about Enoch. Because Enoch lived by faith and pleased God, Enoch never saw death; instead he was *raptured*. In fact, God removed him from the world *before* the Flood came and destroyed it. Thanks to his faith in God, Enoch did not have to live through that time of judgment; instead he was spared.

Enoch, then, can be seen as a symbol of the Church. Just as Enoch pleased God by living by faith, so the Church pleases God by living by faith. Just as Enoch was raptured so he did not have to see death, so one day Jesus will return and rapture the Church, and those who are alive when He comes will never see death. Just as Enoch was taken before God poured out His judgment upon the world, so the Church will be taken before God pours out His judgment upon the world. The parallels are astonishing.

Yes, it is true that Enoch was taken centuries before the

Flood happened – but people lived for so long back then that the Flood occurred *within a single generation of his departure*. After all, the Flood came the year that his son died!

There is no way to know when the Rapture will occur. All that the Bible tells us is that it is imminent; it can happen at any time. Enoch was taken before God poured out His wrath upon a wicked world – and we will be taken as well.

The Urim and the Thummim

The Old Testament sacrificial system is not very well known today. People simply don't study it – and because they don't study it they miss out on a number of astonishing truths.

One of the most amazing parts of the sacrificial system was something called the Urim and the Thummim. These mysterious items were used to communicate directly with God. The priests in the Old Testament used them to ask God questions and receive direct and specific answers. It would be like writing a letter to God *and then actually receiving a letter in return*. There is nothing like it today, but it existed throughout the Old Testament and was used on many occasions.

The Bible tells us almost nothing about what the Urim and Thummim were or how they worked. This is all that we know:

Exodus 28:30: “And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually.”

We know that they were in the breastplate – and that's the extent of our knowledge. We don't know how they worked, what they looked like, how the priest used them, or how God spoke through them. What we do know is that God used them to give very specific answers. For example, God told the people were Saul was hiding:

1 Samuel 10:22: “Therefore they enquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come

thither. And the Lord answered, **Behold he hath hid himself among the stuff.**"

The Lord also gave David a host of very specific instructions:

1 Samuel 23:2: "Therefore David **enquired of the Lord**, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And the Lord said unto David, **Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah.**"

1 Samuel 30:8: "And David **enquired at the Lord**, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, **Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.**"

2 Samuel 2:1: "And it came to pass after this, that David **enquired of the Lord**, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, **Go up.** And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, **Unto Hebron.**"

2 Samuel 5:23: "And when David **enquired of the Lord**, he said, **Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees.**

24 And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines."

As you can see, these responses went far beyond a simple "yes" or "no". The response could also be very short or quite

lengthy. However, God did not always respond. There was a time when King Saul inquired of the Lord and God refused to answer him:

1 Samuel 28:6: “And when Saul enquired of the Lord, **the Lord answered him not**, neither by dreams, **nor by Urim**, nor by prophets.”

As you can see, the Urim were quite amazing. Wouldn't it be nice to have a system like this today where you could essentially send God text messages and receive written responses back? It certainly is appealing – but there is a reason God retired the Urim and the Thummim. The truth is that God has given us something better. In place of this ancient messaging system God has given us His Word, which is able to equip us to perform all good works:

2 Timothy 3:16: “All **scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God **may be perfect**, thoroughly furnished **unto all good works.**”

In the Old Testament the Scriptures had not yet been completed, so God allowed mankind to ask Him questions through the Urim and Thummim. In our time, however, the Bible has been finished. Its contents are enough to make us *perfect* and to thoroughly furnish us to do *all* good works. This means that *there are no good works that the Bible does not equip us for*. There are no situations where we need additional direct revelation from God that is not found in the Bible! It contains everything that we need in order to perform all good works. We no longer need the direct revelation from God that the Urim and Thummim provided. In fact, God no longer provides direct revelation; instead He has given us His Word and has pointed us to it. That is where we must

turn our attention if we want to discover God's will.

The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was one of the most famous pieces of the Old Testament sacrificial system. The Ark was kept in the Holy of Holies inside the Temple. No one was allowed to enter that room except for the High Priest. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood on the mercy seat in order to make atonement for the sins of the people. (The mercy seat was the top portion of the Ark – the part that had the images of angels.) The Holy of Holies did not contain any candles or artificial light; instead it was lit by the glory of God. When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies he came into the presence of God Himself.

As you can see, the Ark was a very special thing – and a very holy thing. It was kept in the holiest room in the Temple and was where God manifested His glory. Because of this, God had a host of special rules regarding how the Ark was to be handled. The consequences of breaking these rules and profaning the Ark were very severe – and that is what I want to talk about.

There was a time when the nation of Israel came to see the Ark as a sort of good-luck charm. I Samuel 4:1-3 tells us that when Israel lost a battle against the Philistines they decided to take the Ark into battle with them. They were confident that somehow the Ark would wield magical powers that would make the Philistines lose. Instead of looking to God they looked to the Ark itself – and they lost badly. The Philistines captured the Ark and excitedly brought it to the temple of their god Dagon. However, that turned out to be a mistake:

I Samuel 5:2: “When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.

3 And when they of Ashdod arose early on the

morrow, behold, **Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord.** And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.

4 And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; and **the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold;** only the stump of Dagon was left to him.

5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.”

The Philistines' intent was to show that their false god Dagon was superior to the God of the Ark – but that's not how things turned out. After the first night they found their idol face down before the Ark. After the second night Dagon was face down once again – but this time his head and hands were cut off. The God of the Ark was winning, and the false god Dagon was not faring very well.

So the Philistines decided to start moving the Ark around. Everywhere the Ark went it brought disaster:

I Samuel 5:6: “But **the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them** of Ashdod, and **he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods,** even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

7 And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, **The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us:** for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.

8 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Is-

rael be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither.

9 And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, **the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction:** and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts.

10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, **They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.**

11 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, **Send away the ark of the God of Israel,** and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

12 And **the men that died not were smitten with the emerods:** and the cry of the city went up to heaven.”

As you can see, it didn't take very long for the Philistines to begin panicking whenever they saw the Ark of God coming their way. The hand of God was against them, and those who weren't killed were tormented. The Ark caused the Philistines so much trouble that after seven months they decided to send it back to the Israelites.

But the story is not yet over. When the Philistines sent the Ark back it arrived at Bethshemesh. However, instead of treating it with reverence, the men of that city decided it would be a great idea to open up the Ark and see what was inside it. This proved to be a fatal mistake:

I Samuel 6:19: “And he smote the men of

Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even he smote of the people **fifty thousand and threescore and ten men:** and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.”

Fifty thousand people died because they decided to open up the Ark and look inside it. They violated God's commandments regarding how to handle the Ark, and they paid for it with their lives.

After this happened the men of Bethshemesh decided that they were done with the Ark and told the men of Kirjathjearim to come and get it. They came and got it, and it remained with them for twenty years.

Eventually King David decided to move the Ark back to where it belonged. However, instead of following the instructions God gave for moving the Ark, he decided to have it moved on an ox cart instead. This was another fatal mistake:

2 Samuel 6:6: “And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, **Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it.**

7 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and **there he died** by the ark of God.”

The Ark was supposed to be carried on poles by the priests. It was *not* supposed to be carried on an ox cart. When it was transported by oxen, the cart shook and the Ark became unsteady. When Uzzah reached out and grabbed the Ark in order to steady it, he was struck dead on the spot. God struck him dead because he had violated the rules regarding the Ark's handling: the Ark was a very holy thing and men were *not* allowed to touch it.

When this happened David stopped the procession and the

Ark stayed at the house of Obbedom for three months. David then tried to move the Ark again, and this time he followed God's instructions – and everything went fine.

Today there are a number of people who are eagerly searching for the Ark of the Covenant. If it was found it would certainly be hailed as one of the greatest discoveries of all time – but I can say with assurance that it will never be found. The Bible tells us exactly where the Ark is currently located, and it's not anywhere on Earth. The Ark has been moved elsewhere:

Revelation 11:19: “And **the temple of God was opened in heaven**, and there was seen in his temple **the ark of his testament**: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.”

Where is the Ark? In Heaven. It's *not here on Earth* – which means that all of those Ark-seekers are never going to locate it. God has put it out of mankind's reach.

An Angel Preaches The Gospel

Before Jesus ascended into Heaven He told His disciples to preach the gospel to the entire world:

Mark 16:15: “And he said unto them, Go ye into **all the world, and preach the gospel** to every creature.”

Preaching the gospel to the whole world is quite a big job. However, it's not a hopeless task. The reason we know this is because Jesus *also* told His disciples that before He returned the gospel would be preached to the entire world:

Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom **shall be preached in all the world** for a witness unto all nations; and **then shall the end come.**”

This has led some people to believe that the Rapture will not happen until everyone has heard the gospel. This sounds plausible, but it is wrong. The return that Jesus was speaking of was the Second Coming, *not* the Rapture. The Rapture is a signless event; it can happen at any time. Nothing else needs to happen before the Rapture takes place. The Rapture and the Second Coming are two different things – but that is beyond the scope of this book.

It is true that the gospel will be preached to the entire world before the Second Coming (which will take place at least seven years *after* the Rapture), but the Church is not the one who will finish that monumental task. Instead it will be done during the Tribulation by an angel:

Revelation 14:6: “And I saw another **angel fly** in the midst of heaven, having **the everlasting gospel to preach** unto them that dwell on the earth, and **to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,**

7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.”

Notice the clarity of this passage! The preaching (and the passage *does* use the word “preach”) is being done *by an angel*, not by the Church. The passage is also clear that the angel is preaching the “everlasting gospel”, and that this gospel is being preached to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people”.

The Church was given the task of reaching the world with the gospel, but that job will actually be finished by an angel, not by us. After the angel has finished its task, Jesus will return and the end will come.

We don’t often think of angels preaching the gospel, and rightly so; that task has been given to us in this age. But one day the Church will be gone and an angel will preach the gospel to the entire world.

The Spirit Of The Beast

Everyone knows that animals don't have souls. This is common knowledge throughout Christendom; it almost goes without saying. That is why this particular passage is so surprising:

Ecclesiastes 3:18: "I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.

19 For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, **they have all one breath**; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity.

20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.

21 Who knoweth the **spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?**"

As Christians we know that when a person dies there is a part of him that lives on after death. Although we usually refer to it as the person's soul, Ecclesiastes calls it the "spirit of a man". However, Ecclesiastes goes on to say that *animals also have a spirit*. The spirit of a man lives on after death – and the spirit of the beast does as well. That is the whole point of verse 21: after death, something happens to both the spirit of the man and the spirit of the beast.

Now before you get too excited, there are a lot of things that this passage does *not* say. We know exactly what happens to the *human* spirit after death: it either goes to Heaven to be with

the Lord, or it goes to Hell to be tormented. We also know that when Jesus returns He will resurrect our corpses and put our spirit back into our body – but that promise was given to men, not to animals.

But what about this “spirit of the beast” – what happens to it? All the verse says is that it goes “downward to the earth”. The spirit doesn’t seem to go to Heaven or to Hell. The verse doesn't say if this spirit endures forever, or if one day the creature’s body will be resurrected and its spirit will be restored. While we know that there are animals in Heaven and in the Millennial Kingdom, the Bible doesn't even hint that there might be a resurrection of animals. It is entirely possible that the animal’s spirit somehow dissipates after death, but to be honest I don’t know. I have not found any other verses that talk about this and I don’t want to read too much into this one verse.

But it’s an intriguing verse, all the same. There may be more to animals than we realize. The fact that animals are more than just biological machines was hinted at in the story of Balaam. The donkey that Balaam was riding was able to see the angel of the Lord, even though Balaam could not:

Numbers 22:23: “And **the ass saw the angel of the Lord** standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way.”

The passage does not say that God somehow opened the donkey's eyes so that he could see the angel. Instead, the donkey simply saw what Balaam could not see and acted quickly to save his master. That was an act of *spiritual discernment*. The donkey saw the angel, understood the situation, and acted accordingly. There may be more to animals than we know.

Do animals have souls? It certainly seems possible – but there are a lot of unanswered questions about them. It is also possible that animals can see angels, even when we cannot. There

have been many times when I have seen dogs rush to the window and bark at what appeared to be nothing in particular. Perhaps there really was nothing there – or perhaps, in some rare cases, there was something out there that was not visible to human eyes. Our animals may have better eyesight than we do. It would not be the first time that they saw something that was hidden to us.

The Council of Heaven

In the book of I Kings we find one of the strangest passages in the entire Bible. The prophet Micaiah tells us that there is a Council of Heaven that gives God suggestions on how to accomplish God's will on Earth:

I Kings 22:19: “And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw **the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him** on his right hand and on his left.

20 And the Lord said, **Who shall persuade Ahab**, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.

21 And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him.

22 And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, **I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.** And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: **go forth, and do so.”**

To say that this is unexpected is an understatement. This is one of the most unusual truths in the Bible – so let's take a little bit of time to delve into the matter.

First of all, we need to understand that this is not a myth or a bizarre fantasy. Micaiah makes it clear in verse 19 that what he is saying is the “word of the Lord”. This scene *actually happened*. God really did ask “Who will trick Ahab into going out and dying in battle?” and then took suggestions. The Lord then picked the suggestion that would work and commanded the spirit to go do the job. It is entirely possible that this is something that

God does on a regular basis.

Before anyone jumps to the wrong conclusion, I want to point out that God knows all things and has all power. God did *not* ask this question because He was genuinely at a loss and didn't know what to do, and also He didn't ask it because He was weak and needed help. He knew exactly how He would handle this situation before He created the world, and He was fully capable of handling it without assistance from anyone.

What we are seeing here is something a bit different. We all know that God works through people on Earth to accomplish His will. This passage tells us that God does something similar in Heaven with the angels. I don't know how often this happens, but God apparently brings situations before His angels and asks for their input, then dispatches them to do His work.

This passage gives us a little glimpse at the way things are done in Heaven. It's certainly not what we would expect – which is what makes it so fascinating.

Smite Me

In the book of I Kings we find a very odd story. A prophet went up to his neighbor and asked him to smite him:

I Kings 20:35: “And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the Lord, **Smite me, I pray thee.** And **the man refused** to smite him.

As you can see, his neighbor refused to hit him – and I imagine that most of us would have done the same thing. After all, hitting innocent people is almost always a bad idea. Who wants to be guilty of beating someone up?

However, in this particular case, saying no was the wrong thing to do:

I Kings 20:36: “Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the Lord, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, **a lion shall slay thee.** And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him.”

Since the man would not hit the prophet, a lion came and killed him. (Yes, he actually *died* because he didn't do it!) The prophet then found someone who was a lot more accommodating:

I Kings 20:37: “Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. **And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded him.**

38 So the prophet departed, and waited for the

king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face.”

Why did all of this happen? Well, the short version of the answer is that God had sent the prophet to condemn the king for being disobedient. In order to do this, however, the prophet needed to be wounded so that God could use him as an object lesson. It was therefore vital that the prophet actually be wounded – and in order for that to happen, someone had to wound him.

If you take another look at the first verse you’ll notice that when the prophet commanded his neighbor to smite him he did so “in the word of the Lord”:

I Kings 20:35: “And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour **in the word of the Lord**, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him.

In other words, the prophet was not saying “smite me” of his own accord; he was saying it as the prophet of God, and as a direct commandment from God Himself. When the neighbor disobeyed he was actually disobeying God – and the man was killed for his disobedience.

Fortunately, we don't have to worry about committing this type of sin anymore. Things are different in the Church Age; among other things, there are no prophets of God left. If someone comes up to you and says “God told me to tell you to hit me”, you can safely tell them that they are crazy. In the past God spoke to people in a wide variety of ways, but now He speaks to us through His Son:

Hebrews 1:1: “God, who at sundry times and **in divers manners spake in time past** unto the fathers by the prophets,
2 Hath **in these last days spoken unto us by his Son**, whom he hath appointed heir of all

things, by whom also he made the worlds;”

God no longer speaks to us through prophets, dreams, or direct personal revelation. Those days are over. Today if we want to hear the words of God we must read the Bible – for that is the only place where His words can be found.

What we have here is a case where God told someone to hit one of His prophets, and when the man failed to do so he was killed for his disobedience. That surely qualifies as one of the oddest stories in the Bible.

The Watchers

In Daniel 4 we learn that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had a dream that troubled him. During his dream a “watcher” appeared:

Daniel 4:13: “I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, **a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven;**”

This watcher says a number of things and then concludes with this:

Daniel 4:17: “This matter is by **the decree of the watchers**, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that **the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men**, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.”

Everyone is familiar with the angels – a group of supernatural beings that go around doing the will of God. When people think of angels they usually think of guardian angels, who watch over God’s people.

But who, exactly, are the watchers? Verse 17 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar’s insanity was being imposed by the decree *of the watchers*. The watchers decreed it so that people might know that God is the one who appoints kings and deposes them. In other words, the king’s insanity was done for the glory of God *by the watchers*. Given that these watchers can enact binding decrees on the most powerful rulers on Earth *and then carry them out*, it would seem that these mysterious watchers have a great deal of power.

As far as I can tell, this is the only chapter in the Bible that mentions the watchers. In Revelation, however, we find this unusual creature:

Revelation 4:8: “And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and **they were full of eyes** within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.”

The four beasts were said to be “full of eyes”. Could they be the watchers? It’s impossible to say, but it’s interesting to think about.

What the book of Daniel tells us is that there is a council of “holy ones” that has great power and that does things on behalf of God's glory. If the watchers really are angels then this expands the scope of angelic activity. Not only do angels watch over God’s people and battle the forces of darkness, but they apparently also issue binding decrees.

We are used to the idea of *people* taking the initiative to do something for the glory of God, but it’s a bit jarring to think that *angels* might do the same thing. We tend to think of angels as a race of robots that only acts when God gives them an order. Yes, angels clearly act when God commands them – but is it possible that in some cases they might take the initiative? Might there be more to them than we think?

Small Things

Not all oddities have to be giant and life-changing. There are a lot of small oddities in the Bible that are easily passed over but which add character and color. For example, Job was apparently a big fan of adding salt to food:

Job 6:6: “Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?”

I think that’s a terrific verse of the day. Can’t you see it stitched on pillows or elaborately framed and hung on the wall? That verse definitely belongs in the kitchen! I can just see it now, hanging over the stove: “Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt?”

That verse also tells us that Job believed that the white of an egg was pretty tasteless. (What do you think the odds are that he added salt to it?)

Speaking of food, the book of Proverbs warns us to moderate our intake of honey lest we overdo it and vomit:

Proverbs 25:16: “Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, **lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.**”

I’m pretty sure you will never find a poster with that verse on it.

A number of famous sayings come from the Bible. For example, if you’ve ever said that you escaped by the skin of your teeth, you can thank Job:

Job 19:20: “My bone cleaveth to my skin and to

my flesh, and I am escaped with **the skin of my teeth.**”

Job's friend Eliphaz was the first person to ask if someone was older than the hills:

Job 15:7: “Art thou the first man that was born? or **wast thou made before the hills?**”

People who say that something is just “a drop in the bucket” can thank Isaiah:

Isaiah 40:15: “Behold, the nations are as a **drop of a bucket**, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.”

The idea of a labor of love was first mentioned in one of Paul's letters:

I Thessalonians 1:3: “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and **labour of love**, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;”

Speaking of letters, in the book of Jeremiah the Lord mentions a very unusual writing instrument:

Jeremiah 17:1: “The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and **with the point of a diamond**: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars;”

Writing with “the point of a diamond” – now there’s a modern idea! Apparently that concept was also a “modern idea” a couple thousand years ago. It makes you wonder how many other

“modern” ideas are actually very old – but that is a discussion for another time.

Nehushtan

A few years ago I was sitting in church when my friend Donnie approached me with a Bible trivia book. He asked if I was willing to answer some questions, and since I felt pretty confident about my knowledge of the Bible I agreed. The very first question he asked me was this: what is nehushtan? I had absolutely no idea – in fact, I didn’t even have a guess. That’s when I knew I was in trouble.

As it turns out, there is an interesting story behind “nehushtan”. Back when Moses was leading the nation of Israel through the wilderness, the Israelites sinned yet again. This brought down God’s judgment upon them:

Numbers 21:5: “And **the people spake against God**, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.
6 And **the Lord sent fiery serpents** among the people, and they bit the people; and **much people of Israel died.**”

Israel asked Moses to pray for them so that God would get rid of the fiery serpents. However, when Moses interceded on their behalf God did something unexpected:

Numbers 21:7: “Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And **Moses prayed for the people.**
8 And the Lord said unto Moses, **Make thee a**

fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.

9 And **Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole,** and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.”

Instead of removing the serpents, God had Moses make a replica of the serpent and put it on a pole. Whenever a person was bitten, all they had to do was look at the serpent that Moses had made and they would be saved. (You can see the clear parallel between the serpent on the pole and Christ on the cross.)

The next time the serpent on the pole is mentioned is in the book of 2 Kings. There we find out that the Israelites had turned the serpent into an object of worship:

2 Kings 18:4: “He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and **brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made:** for unto those days the children of Israel did **burn incense to it:** and he called it **Nehushtan.**”

There it is – the word “nehushtan”! Don't blink, because if you do you'll miss it.

It is a shame that Hezekiah had to destroy the bronze serpent, but the Israelites gave him no other choice. They had turned God's symbol of salvation into an idol, and it was now a source of paganism. Just as the Israelites once misused the Ark of the Covenant as a good luck charm to win battles, so the Israelites missed the entire point of the bronze serpent.

The Vision of Zerubbabel

The book of Zechariah is filled with odd and unusual visions. One of the strangest can be found in chapter 4:

Zechariah 4:4: “And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep.

2 And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold **a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof:**

3 And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof.”

We can immediately see that this is one of the most complicated visions in the Bible. Normally visions consist of seeing just one object – like a man on a red horse (Revelation 6:4) or a flying roll (Zechariah 5:2). This vision, though, has a lot of parts. Zechariah sees a candlestick, a bowl, seven lamps, seven pipes, and two olive trees.

If we just randomly guessed what this vision meant we could probably come up with all sorts of different interpretations. However, I don't think we would ever come up with the interpretation that Zechariah was given:

Zechariah 4:4: “So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, **What are these, my lord?**

5 Then the angel that talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these

be? And I said, No, my lord.

6 Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, **Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit**, saith the Lord of hosts.”

I am sure that you could spend *days* thinking over the candlestick, bowl, lamps, pipes, and trees, and not arrive at the interpretation of “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit”. This, incidentally, is why it is so important to *use the Bible to interpret Biblical symbolism* instead of just deciding for yourself what something means. The actual answer can easily be something you would never have guessed.

This interpretation, while illuminating, still leaves a lot of questions. How on earth does a candlestick, a bowl, some lamps, some pipes, and some trees symbolize *that*? What is the connection?

I looked up the passage in a number of commentaries and found wildly different interpretations. Apparently there isn’t a lot of agreement here – which is to be expected, given the cryptic nature of these verses.

The chapter does give us one further clue. We find it a few verses later:

Zechariah 4:11: “Then answered I, and said unto him, **What are these two olive trees** upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof?

12 And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?

13 And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord.

14 Then said he, **These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord** of the whole

earth.”

The two olive trees are the “two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord”. That alone is newsworthy – after all, did you know that two anointed ones stand by the Lord? Just who are these anointed ones and what do they do? This passage doesn’t say, but the book of Revelation has the answer. It turns out that the two anointed ones are the two witnesses:

Revelation 11:3: “And I will give power unto my **two witnesses**, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

4 **These are the two olive trees**, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

5 And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.”

The two witnesses are one of the most famous parts of the Tribulation. During the first half of the seven-year Tribulation these two witnesses will testify on behalf of God. The Lord will grant them power to smite the Earth and kill their enemies. At the end of their ministry the Beast will overcome them and kill them, and their dead bodies will lie in Jerusalem for three and a half days. At the end of that time the Lord will raise them back to life and they will ascend into Heaven.

There is a great deal of speculation about just who these two witnesses are. Some scholars think that they are two random Jews, while others believe that they represent Moses and Elijah. In my opinion I think that Moses and Elijah are the most likely candidates. Moses represents the Law and Elijah represents the prophets. Moses and Elijah were both on the mount of Transfiguration, and Malachi 4:5 says that the Lord would send

Elijah back to Earth before the Tribulation began. If you were going to send two people to Israel to testify on behalf of God, it would be very difficult to find two candidates who were better than Moses and Elijah.

So that unravels part of the mystery: the two anointed ones are the two witnesses from Revelation. But what about the rest of the vision?

From what I can tell based on the passage, it seems that the bowl is on top of the candlestick. The olive trees supply oil to the bowl, and the oil is then routed through the pipes and to the lamps in order to supply the lamps with the oil they need to keep burning. It's an automatic system that does away with the need to manually refill the lamps (which was one of the Temple duties in the Old Testament).

In the Bible, oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Jesus once told a parable about ten virgins, and in that parable five of the virgins ran out of oil for their lamps. In this system that would never be a problem because the lamps are directly connected to the source of oil and will never run out.

I think that the answer to this vision can be found in the middle of the chapter. We skipped a key verse:

Zechariah 4:7: "Who art thou, O great mountain? **before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain:** and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

In the system of pipes and bowls and trees, the bowls have an endless supply of oil. They don't have to worry about running out; that's not an issue. They will always have everything that they need to keep burning.

In verse 7 God tells Zerubbabel that he will be unstoppable. The task that he is facing seems insurmountable, but it won't be because God is with him. Perhaps the vision is intended to show him that God is supplying him with a constant stream of

His Spirit. God has connected him to the Source, and his lamp will never run out. Zerubbabel will have everything that he needs to turn that mountain into a plain (or to rebuild the Temple, which was his actual goal). After all, it will be done “not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit”!

In The Ages To Come

In the book of Ephesians we find this remarkable, encouraging passage:

Ephesians 2:4: “But God, who is rich in mercy, for **his great love wherewith he loved us,**
5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)
6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:
7 That **in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace** in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”

There is a lot in these verses that merits further study. For example, verse 6 contains a fascinating reference to our sitting “together in heavenly places in Christ”. That verse should certainly get our attention, but it's not what I want to look at right now. Instead I want to explore verse 7: “that in the ages to come He might show us the exceeding riches of His grace”.

When we think of God’s grace we often think of salvation from our sins – and so we should, for it is by grace that we are saved. The death of Christ has purchased forgiveness for our sins and bought us freedom from the wrath of God. We know that when we die we will go and be with the Lord, and when Judgment Day comes we will be declared innocent. That is an amazing and precious promise – but there is more.

This passage reminds us that God has bigger plans for us. When Christ spoke of our salvation He repeated time and time again that those who are saved will inherit everlasting life:

Matthew 19:29: “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and **shall inherit everlasting life.**”

Matthew 25:46: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous **into life eternal.**”

John 5:24: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, **hath everlasting life**, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

John 6:27: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth **unto everlasting life**, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.”

Everlasting life means that we will never die; our existence will never come to an end. We will live on and on forever – not in a dreary eternity of boredom, but in the joyous presence of God Himself. Ephesians 2:7 tells us that God has big plans for us. In the ages to come God is going to show us the *exceeding riches* of His grace! The riches of His grace far exceed our imagination. We have only begun to glimpse what God has planned for us.

This is not the only place where the Bible speaks of the ages to come. They are also mentioned in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 22:3: “And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and **his servants shall serve him:**
4 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and **they shall reign for ever and ever.**”

What will we be doing for all of the endless ages of eternity? We will be serving God. How will we be serving God? By reigning forever and ever. Revelation 1:6 says that God has made us kings and priests, and that is not an idle statement; we *are* kings and we *will* reign.

But who will we be reigning over? After all, a king must have subjects; otherwise he is king over nothing. Revelation 22 does not answer that question, but the book of Isaiah gives us a hint:

Isaiah 9:6: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, **The mighty God, The everlasting Father,** The Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

Notice what verse seven says: of the *increase* of His government and peace there will be no end. In other words, the kingdom of God *will never stop growing*. It will experience infinite, endless growth for all of eternity.

Since the people in Heaven neither marry nor are given in marriage, we will probably not have children after the resurrection. Since the Heavenly angels don't have children either, that strongly implies that the kingdom's growth must come from somewhere else.

Is it possible that God will continue to create new races in the ages to come? It's true that God worked for six days and then rested on the seventh day, but God did *not* promise to never create anything ever again. In fact, Revelation 21 tells us that one day God will create a new heaven and a new earth. Might God be planning on creating other things in the future as well? If He does, we know that they will be good because Revelation also tells us that after the Great White Throne judgment there will be no more sin, sorrow, pain, or death (Revelation 21:4). No matter what happens in the future, the time of evil will truly be over once and for all.

What I do know is that in the ages to come God will show us the exceeding riches of His grace – and that is an extremely exciting thought. As hard and painful as this life is, it does not begin to compare to the glory that will be revealed in us. Better days are coming – and they *will* last forever.

The Vengeance of Zechariah

When Christ was dying on the cross He asked His Father to forgive those who crucified Him:

Luke 23:34: “Then said Jesus, **Father, forgive them;** for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.”

Stephen did the same thing. When the Pharisees stoned him for testifying about Christ, he asked God to forgive his murderers:

Acts 7:59: “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, **Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.** And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Based on these two examples it would be easy to think that this was the universal response to being martyred, but that's not the case. There is a rather odd exception to this rule, and it is found in the book of II Chronicles. When King Joash forsook the Lord and served idols, Zechariah (the priest, not the prophet) rebuked him:

II Chronicles 24:20: “And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord, that ye cannot prosper? **because ye have forsaken the Lord,**

he hath also forsaken you.”

The king did not want to hear this, so he had Zechariah killed:

II Chronicles 24:21: “And they conspired against him, and **stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king** in the court of the house of the Lord.”

When the king commanded that he be stoned to death, you would naturally expect Zechariah to forgive him. After all, that’s what Stephen did when he was stoned. However, that’s not what happened. Instead Zechariah asked God *to avenge him*:

II Chronicles 24:22: “Thus Joash the king remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son. And when he died, he said, **The Lord look upon it, and require it.**”

It would be easy to think “Well, Zechariah was just upset about being killed and he set a bad example. We should ignore him and copy the example of Stephen.” The problem with this theory is that *the Lord listened to Zechariah*:

II Chronicles 24:23: “And it came to pass at the end of the year, that the host of Syria came up against him: and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all the spoil of them unto the king of Damascus. 24 For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men, and the Lord delivered a very great host into their hand, because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers. So

they executed judgment against Joash.
25 And when they were departed from him, (for they left him in great diseases,) **his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest**, and slew him on his bed, **and he died**: and they buried him in the city of David, but they buried him not in the sepulchres of the kings.”

Zechariah asked God for vengeance *and he got it*: King Joash was defeated in battle and then murdered.

So what are we to make of this? I think the answer is actually simple: there is a key difference between the case of Zechariah and the other two examples. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus was crucified out of ignorance:

1 Corinthians 2:7: “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:
8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: **for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.**”

When Stephen was stoned to death, Saul (who later became the apostle Paul) approved of it. Paul later explained that the reason God forgave him for persecuting the church was because he did it out of ignorance:

I Timothy 1:12: “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;
13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but **I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly** in unbelief.”

Christ forgave the people who crucified Him out of ignorance, and Stephen forgave Paul who also sinned out of ignorance. Zechariah, though, was *not* murdered out of ignorance.

You see, Zechariah's father was a priest named Jehoiada, who was a good friend to King Joash. As long as Jehoiada was alive the king faithfully served the Lord:

II Chronicles 24:2: "And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord **all the days of Jehoiada** the priest."

After Jehoiada died, however, the king forsook the Lord and served false gods:

II Chronicles 24:17: "Now **after the death of Jehoiada** came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them.

18 And **they left the house of the Lord God** of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass."

When King Joash forsook the Lord, Jehoiada's son Zechariah rebuked the king (just as Jehoiada would have done if he had still been alive). That is when the king had him stoned to death.

Paul said that he received mercy because he sinned out of ignorance. King Joash, though, didn't sin out of ignorance. He actually stopped following God and turned to idols, and he had the son of his lifelong friend Jehoiada *murdered* for rebuking him. Joash did not sin out of ignorance; he sinned willfully and deliberately. Joash knew better but he chose to sin anyway, and so when Zechariah was dying he cried out for God's judgment – and God sent it.

It is one thing to sin in ignorance and unbelief; it is another

er thing entirely to abandon God and start murdering those who serve Him. It is true that sinning in ignorance does not somehow make the sin “ok”; the wages for all sin is death, and God does not turn a blind eye to sin just because the person who is doing it doesn’t know any better. A sin that is committed in ignorance is still a sin.

What I am saying is that Stephen understood that he was being killed out of ignorance and unbelief, and so he asked God to pardon their sin. Zechariah, however, was *not* killed out of ignorance and unbelief; he was killed by someone who knew better and had deliberately forsaken God. King Joash had already rejected God’s mercy, so Zechariah cried out for vengeance.

This is how the apostle Peter put it:

2 Peter 2:20: “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, **they are again entangled therein**, and overcome, **the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.**

21 For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”

Peter actually says it is better to *not know God at all* than to know Him and turn from Him. We would do well to heed his words.

Angelic Oddities

Angels are a very popular subject. The Bible mentions angels more than 200 times and has quite a bit to say about them. Despite their popularity, though, much of what the Bible has to say about them is ignored. A lot of the popular common knowledge about angels is actually wrong. For example, all of the angels in the Bible are men (there is no mention of any female angels), and no angels sang at Christ's birth. I realize that everyone "knows" that angels sang when Christ was born, but the Bible is clear that they actually didn't. Take a look for yourself:

Luke 2:10: "And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host **praising God, and saying,**

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The angels *said* "Glory to God in the highest". They didn't sing it. "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" is a great song, but it's not Biblically accurate.

My aim is not to make an exhaustive list of everything that the Bible has to say about angels, but instead to mention a few bits of information that tend to get overlooked. For example, **angels have a sense of curiosity:**

1 Peter 1:12: “Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; **which things the angels desire to look into.**”

The angels are quite interested in our salvation! That subject grabs their attention. This makes sense if you think about it, because salvation was only given to mankind. When the devil fell and brought down many angels with him, God did *not* launch a plan of salvation for angels. It is impossible for fallen angels to be saved because Christ became a man died for the sins of *men*. He did not become an angel and die for the sins of angels. Since the angels do not have a redeemer, all of the angels who have sinned are lost forever with no hope of salvation. (Now, I am not saying that demons *want* to be saved; what I am saying is that salvation is impossible for them.)

This means that salvation is an experience that no angel will ever have. The gospel is only for mankind, and the angels are curious about it.

The angels are also **interested in the apostles:**

1 Corinthians 4:9: “For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, **and to angels**, and to men.”

Paul points out that the apostles are a spectacle to the world, to men, *and to angels*. Since the angels are interested in the gospel, it only makes sense that they are interested in the ministers that God appointed to preach the gospel. Even though God used the apostles in mighty ways, the apostles were despised, persecuted, abused, and (in many cases) executed. These church leaders (who, incidentally, were appointed by Jesus Christ Him-

self) were set forth as being the least, appointed unto death.

Before Jesus was crucified He warned His disciples about this. He told them that “he that is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matthew 23:11), and He warned them that the highest positions of authority in the kingdom were purchased through immense pain and suffering (Matthew 20:22). Serving God in an ungodly world was not going to be easy. The apostles were made a spectacle to everyone – including angels.

The Bible also tells us that one day **we will judge angels**:

1 Corinthians 6:3: “Know ye not that **we shall judge angels**? how much more things that pertain to this life?”

Some people have tried to argue that this verse is talking about human messengers, not angelic beings. However, the whole point Paul is making is that since we will one day judge *angels* then surely we can judge matters between fellow Christians!

I believe Paul is saying that one day we will be given authority over the angels. Christ said in Revelation 3:21 that “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne”. Christ certainly has authority over the angels; if He is going to share that authority with us then that would confirm the idea that one day we will rule over them.

Another odd fact is that apparently there is **angelic food**. When the psalmist talked about Israel’s journey from Egypt to Canaan he said this:

Psalm 78:24: “And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven.

25 Man did eat angels’ food: he sent them meat to the full.”

Do the angels really eat food, or is the psalmist just being poetic? It’s hard to say based on just that one passage, but there is

also the curious experience of Elijah:

I Kings 19:5: “And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then **an angel touched him**, and said unto him, **Arise and eat.**

6 And he looked, and, behold, **there was a cake baked on the coals**, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again.

7 And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.

8 And he arose, and did eat and drink, and **went in the strength of that meat forty days** and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.”

While Elijah was sleeping, an angel cooked him a meal that was so potent that it not only revived him, but it gave him enough energy to travel for 40 days and nights! That angelic food was incredibly powerful.

We’re not done yet though. The apostle Paul tells us that the Mosaic Law was **ordained by angels**:

Galatians 3:19: “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and **it was ordained by angels** in the hand of a mediator.”

This seems rather astonishing, but it’s not the only place we find this idea in the Bible. Paul is echoing what Stephen told the Pharisees right before he was killed:

Acts 7:52: “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them

which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

In other words, the angels were actually involved in giving the Law to mankind! They played a role that is rarely talked about.

There is one more point that I'd like to bring up, and I have saved the strangest one for last. Paul says that **women should keep their heads covered in church** because of the angels:

1 Corinthians 11:10: "For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head **because of the angels.**"

I don't think that Paul is talking about messengers between churches or anything like that; I think he really does mean angels. There is more going on here than it seems.

As we mentioned earlier in our discussion on Tartarus, in the days before the Flood there was a time when some angels became enraptured with the beauty of human women and had children with them (Genesis 6:1-2). This, however, was an awful sin, and God imprisoned the angels who did this (Jude 1:6; II Peter 2:4). Angels are not permitted to marry women – but as odd as it may seem, some angels actually find women tempting. I think that Paul is saying that when women wear hats (or some other symbol of authority) they remind the angels that they are under authority and are not available.

I know this seems strange, but we often forget that angels can be tempted by sin. The fact that one third of all angels chose to join Satan's rebellion (Rev. 12:4) is a sober reminder that even angels can fall into sin – and once they fall there is no going back. We can obtain forgiveness through Christ, but angels cannot.

Time and Chance

I once came across an article that said that “chance” was an evil idea that had no place in Christian theology. The author claimed that nothing ever happened by chance because God governs all things.

While I agree that God is sovereign, I do not believe that “chance” is a bad concept. The word “chance” does appear in the Bible, and the book of Ecclesiastes actually says that random chance has a significant impact on mankind:

Ecclesiastes 9:11: “I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; **but time and chance happeneth to them all.**”

It's true that in one sense there is no such thing as chance. God does govern all things and His control is absolute. As the book of Proverbs points out, even things like the throw of dice are governed by God:

Proverbs 16:33: “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof **is of the Lord.**”

So, then, from *God's* perspective there is no such thing as chance. From our perspective, though, things are a bit different. When we “just happen” to meet an old friend in the supermarket, it may be true that the meeting was foreordained by God before the world began – but the fact remains that out of hundreds of trips to the store you only met your friend one time, and there is no good reason to believe that you will see him again in your next

visit.

When God looks into our future He sees certainties, but all we can see are probabilities. There is no good reason for me to believe that next time I go to church I will be attacked by a tiger or will find a \$500 bill lying on the ground; statistically speaking, neither of those events happen very often. If a cow happens to fall out of the sky and destroys my car while I am visiting a friend, we would say that I was “unlucky” because, statistically speaking, events like that are rare. The word “chance” is just a way to describe events that happen infrequently. It does not mean that God was unaware of the event or did not ordain it, but it does mean that we had no good reason to expect it to happen.

The point Ecclesiastes is making is that the fastest person does not always win the race and the strongest nation does not always win the battle. Sometimes unexpected things come up and the faster person loses to the slower one, or the weaker nation overcomes the stronger one. We like to think that the “best” person always wins, but that doesn't always happen. Sometimes a good manuscript is rejected while a bad manuscript is published. Sometimes the better candidate gets passed over for the job. Victory does not always go to the most deserving person, and the reason is because unexpected events can have a tremendous impact.

From our perspective there is a great deal of luck and chance involved in life. There may be two people who worked equally hard, but one of them might fail because they ran into an unusual setback that no one could have foreseen. Very rare and life-changing events (also known as “time and chance”) really do happen to us all, and they have a definite impact on our lives.

So do not be too hard on the word “chance”. It conveys a concept that is worth thinking about.

The Seven Thunders

The book of Revelation is full of symbolism, mystery, and things that are rather odd. Its most mysterious secret is probably the riddle of the Seven Thunders:

Revelation 10:1: “And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:

2 And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth,

3 And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, **seven thunders uttered their voices.**

4 And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, **Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.”**

As soon as the passage tells us that the seven “thunders” said something, it then states that John wasn’t allowed to tell us what they said! All we are permitted to know is that they did, in fact, say *something* – but their words are a complete mystery.

I have done some research on this passage, and as far as I can tell no one has any idea what they said. There is a lot of speculation, but there are no answers. Since the seven thunders are not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, there is no way we can find out what they had to say. This is one of those things that God has hidden from us.

Some people think that when we get to Heaven we will know everything there is to know – that as soon as we set foot in Paradise we will be zapped with the full knowledge of God. However, that is not the case. Only God has all knowledge; it is one of the things that make Him who He is. We will never share the full knowledge of God. However, a day will come when we will know more than we know now:

Ephesians 4:11: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 **Till we all come in the unity of the faith,** and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:”

During this part of history God has appointed some as pastors and some as teachers so that we might learn and become one in the faith. One day, however, that task will be accomplished. At that point the roles of evangelist and pastor and teacher will be done away with. They won't be needed anymore because we will *all* be mature in the faith. We will not know everything that God knows, but we will have achieved perfection. (It is possible to be perfect without knowing everything. For example, in order to obey God perfectly we need knowledge of His commands, not knowledge of quantum physics. It is possible to obey God without having a complete understanding of how subatomic particles behave.)

There are some things that God has chosen not to tell us. The mystery of the Seven Thunders is not the only example of this. On one occasion Paul was given a vision of Heaven that God did not allow him to discuss:

2 Corinthians 12:1: “It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) **such an one caught up to the third heaven.**

3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, **which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”**

One aspect of God that we tend to overlook is that sometimes God deliberately keeps things hidden. The book of Proverbs talks about this:

Proverbs 25:2: “**It is the glory of God to conceal a thing:** but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.”

Sometimes God keeps things hidden for thousands of years. Adam and Eve knew that a Savior would come, but the full details were not revealed until the days of the prophets. There are some things that God has chosen to reveal to us, and there are other things that God has kept secret. That is simply God's prerogative. As the Bible says:

Deuteronomy 29:29: “**The secret things belong unto the Lord** our God: but **those things which are revealed belong unto us** and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

It is entirely possible that God will keep some things a

secret for all of eternity. There are other things, though, that God has revealed to us – and He has revealed those things *so that we might serve Him*.

The Seven Thunders is one of the great mysteries of Revelation, but it will not be a mystery forever. The day will come when it will finally be time for the Thunders to speak, and when that happens we will be in Heaven to hear it. We will then know exactly what John was not permitted to reveal.

The Powers In Heaven

Sometimes the most famous verses in the Bible are the very verses that we have the most trouble understanding. We have become so familiar with them that we overlook what they actually have to say – and that is unfortunate.

Take this verse, for example:

Ephesians 6:12: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, **against spiritual wickedness in high places.**”

What does this verse say that we wrestle against? Spiritual wickedness in high places. If that doesn't seem to mean anything in particular then what if we were to render the phrase as “spiritual wickedness in Heavenly places”?

The Bible has more to say about spiritual wickedness in Heavenly places than we think. Do you remember the story of Job?

Job 1:6: “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and **Satan came also among them.**

7 And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

8 And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

9 Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?

10 Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

11 But **put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath**, and he will curse thee to thy face.

12 And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.”

What destroyed Job’s life and took away everything that he had, including his health? Spiritual wickedness in high places. What brought about the biggest trial Job ever faced in his life? Spiritual wickedness in high places. What caused Job to say that he wished he had never been born (Job 3:11)? Spiritual wickedness in high places.

When we read the book of Job the message that we usually get out of it is “Sometimes God allows things to happen to us to try our faith”. Somehow we overlook the other key message from the book: “Satan accuses us before God, and sometimes God gives Satan permission to test us”. The book of Job graphically demonstrates that *we have an adversary* and that adversary *can actually go to Heaven and accuse us before God Himself*.

How much suffering and pain is caused by this? The apostle Paul is pretty blunt: he says that our real problem is not flesh and blood but *spiritual wickedness in high places*. That is the real challenge that we face in life – just as it was the real challenge that Job faced.

The point is that we have a very powerful enemy who has access to Heaven and who uses that access against us. The word “Satan” actually means adversary, and Satan is called that *be-*

cause he is our adversary. The real battle that we face in life is the battle against the devil and his army of fallen angels.

The worst part about this is that many modern Christians think that demonic activity is something that is limited to Bible stories. This idea that demons are a threat to us and actually cause us real problems doesn't even cross their minds. Not only are they not fighting this battle, but they're not even aware of it – but it is very real. The New Testament warns us about it repeatedly:

Ephesians 2:2: “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, **the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:**”

There is a spirit who works in the children of disobedience. The lost are not “free moral agents”; they are slaves to darkness. They are under the control of the forces of evil, and only the power of God can set them free. Notice how clearly Paul says that *there is a spirit who works in them* – and it is not the Holy Spirit! The prince of the power of the air is not there to help them. He is actively attacking the gospel and snatching it away from people:

Matthew 13:19: “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, **then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away** that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.”

The Bible has a lot to say about fighting these forces, but that is a topic for another time (although Ephesians 6:9-18 is a good place to start). The point I want to make is that we *do* have an opponent. Our adversary is very real, and we need to resist him so that he will flee from us (James 4:7).

One day, however, our adversary will fall. Jesus said that one day something momentous will happen:

Mark 13:25: “And the stars of heaven shall fall, and **the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.**”

Will God be shaken? No. Will the holy angels be shaken? No. The heavenly powers that will be shaken are *the evil ones*. Right now Satan has access to Heaven (which can be seen in the case of Job), but during the Tribulation that access will be revoked. The holy angels will fight the unholy ones and will cast them out of Heaven once and for all:

Revelation 12:7: “And there was war in heaven: **Michael and his angels fought against the dragon;** and the dragon fought and his angels,
8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

9 And **the great dragon was cast out**, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: **he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.**

10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for **the accuser of our brethren is cast down**, which accused them before our God day and night.”

This event is not in the past but is in the future – and we, the Church, will actually be in Heaven when it happens. A day is coming when Satan and his unholy angels will be forcibly removed from Heaven and will forever lose their ability to accuse us before God. Satan will be trapped on Earth – and ultimately doomed. After the Millennial Kingdom the devil will make one last attempt to overthrow God, but he will fail:

Revelation 20:10: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

We do have an adversary, but his days are numbered. His doom is sure and it is inevitable. It is only a matter of time.

The Evil Eight-Year-Old

There are many people who claim that all children are entirely innocent. These people teach that children don't understand good and evil; since they're young, God doesn't hold them responsible for the things that they do. Although God holds adults responsible, He lets children go free.

If you believe that then you might find this verse a bit shocking:

II Chronicles 36:9: "Jehoiachin was **eight years old** when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and **he did that which was evil** in the sight of the Lord."

An eight-year-old "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord". An *eight-year old*. Let that sink in for a minute: God Himself called an eight-year-old child *evil*.

How could God do such a thing? Because God is no respecter of persons. Nowhere in the entire Bible does God ever say that children are incapable of sin or that God doesn't hold children responsible for what they do. In fact, He says quite the opposite:

Proverbs 20:11: "**Even a child is known by his doings**, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right."

This idea that children are incapable of sin is simply not Biblical. A graphic illustration of this can be found in the book of 2 Kings. After Elijah was taken up to Heaven, Elisha encountered a mob of little children. These children told Elisha that they

wanted him to “go up” as Elijah had – in other words, they wanted him to die. These children hated God's anointed prophet and wanted him dead. God's response to this was quite brutal:

2 Kings 2:23: “And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth **little children** out of the city, and **mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.**

24 And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And **there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.**”

Do you see how God responded? God could have said “Well, they're just little children so I'm going to let this pass” – but He didn't. Instead God sent two bears to *tear the children limb from limb*. I repeat: the passage says that these were *little children* – and God brutally slaughtered them for their sin. Their young age did not save them. Sin is sin no matter how old you are – and the wages of sin is death.

This idea that God doesn't hold children responsible for what they do is not Biblical. God did not hesitate to call an eight-year-old child evil, and He did not hesitate to judge the sins of a mob of children who were threatening Elisha. It's high time that we started believing what the Bible actually says about children, instead of believing what we wish was true.

God Hates The Wicked

One of the common sayings in the Church today is that “God loves the sinner but hates the sin”. In other words, while God doesn’t like what the wicked are doing, He loves them personally; God has a problem with their actions but He doesn’t have a problem with them as people.

If you have been taught to think like that then you might be shocked when you come across verses like this one:

Psalm 5:5: “The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: **thou hatest all workers of iniquity.**”

Notice that this verse does not say “God loves everyone; He just doesn’t like their sin”. Instead it is quite blunt: *God hates all workers of iniquity.*

That is not the only place where we find this idea. Take this verse, for instance:

Psalm 7:11: “God judgeth the righteous, and **God is angry with the wicked every day.**”

Does this verse say that God is angry with people's *sin* every day? No, it doesn't. It says that God is angry with *the wicked* every day.

You see, in modern times we have lost sight of the fact that God is actually angry with the wicked. We've forgotten that the wrath of God is piled up against those who have rejected Him. The lost are actually God's enemies, not His friends:

James 4:4: “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? **whosoever therefore will be**

a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

That is what makes the Cross so amazing: God was not dying for His friends, but *for His enemies*. God showed His awesome love by dying *for those He was angry with*:

Romans 5:6: “For when we were yet without strength, in due time **Christ died for the ungodly.**

7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, **while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

Let me repeat that: Christ did not die for His friends, but for His enemies. He showed love and compassion to people who deserved His wrath.

We do the lost a great disservice when we hide the fact that God is angry with them. The message of the gospel is not “You need to come to Jesus because God loves you and wants to do wonderful things in your life.” None of the apostles ever preached that message to anybody. Their message was quite different: they told people to save themselves from the wrath of God. Jesus Himself told people that if they did not repent and believe then they would perish. Their message was clear and direct: God is angry with you because of your sins, and if you do not repent you will be damned. However, God (in His great love) has made a way for you to be saved, and you need to run to Jesus and save yourself from the wrath to come.

These days the lost are not being told that God has something against them. All they hear is “God loves you”. The reason they don’t understand that they are in trouble is because preachers aren’t telling them. Instead pastors say things like “God has a great plan for you” or “God wants to make you rich and happy”.

The message that the apostles preached is *not* what is being preached from pulpits across the country.

It is a terrible, terrible thing to walk up to a lost person and say “God loves you and wants to give you a better life” and then not say anything else. The lost *must* be told about the wrath of God. They must be made to understand that they have wronged an infinite God and that if something is not done they will face His infinite wrath. They must be told that they are in very great trouble. That is what Jesus and His apostles did – and that is what we must do as well.

God Tries To Kill Moses

In Exodus chapters 3 and 4 God told Moses to go to Egypt and demand that Pharaoh release the Israelites. After some initial objections Moses agreed to go:

Exodus 4:19: “And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, **Go, return into Egypt:** for all the men are dead which sought thy life.
20 And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and **he returned to the land of Egypt:** and Moses took the rod of God in his hand.”

At this point something truly unexpected happened. As Moses went on his way to Egypt, God met him in an inn and tried to kill him:

Exodus 4:24: “And it came to pass by the way **in the inn, that the Lord met him, and sought to kill him.**
25 Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.
26 So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.”

This passage is extremely unexpected. God had just finished talking to Moses and their conversation had ended on good terms. Moses was doing exactly what God had told him and was on his way to Egypt. So why did God suddenly try to kill him? The resolution to this dire emergency is equally strange: how did

Zipporah (the wife of Moses) know what to do? For that matter, why did Zipporah have to do anything? Why wasn't Moses the one to act?

In order to understand this passage there are a few things that we need to know. First of all, the word "met" in verse 24 ("the Lord met him") is the same Hebrew word that we find in verse 27, where it says that Aaron "met [Moses] in the mount of God". It means that God actually met Moses *in person*. This is a theophany – a preincarnate appearance of Christ. Jesus came to meet Moses in person so that He could kill him. This is not the first time in the Old Testament that Jesus had met someone in person; in Genesis 32:24-30 the Lord spent the night wrestling with Jacob (although His intent there was obviously not to kill him).

So why was God so upset with Moses? It was because Moses had broken His covenant. When God made His covenant with Abraham He instituted circumcision. The consequences of not being circumcised were pretty dire:

Exodus 4:14: "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, **that soul shall be cut off from his people**; he hath broken my covenant."

(Incidentally, note the rather gruesome pun in the verse: if the foreskin was not cut off then the person would be cut off.)

Moses – the man God had chosen to lead the Israelites to the promised land – had failed to circumcise his own son. How could Moses possibly lead Israel when he had broken God's covenant and failed to faithfully lead his own house? God simply could not allow that, so He went and grabbed Moses.

That's right – God actually grabbed Moses. Notice how the passage says that after Zipporah performed the circumcision God "let him go". That Hebrew word "let go" literally means "relax". Think of it as relaxing your grip on someone. That is why Moses didn't perform the circumcision himself: since Jesus had grabbed him, Moses couldn't do anything. Zipporah was forced to

do it herself.

That brings up another question: why did Moses fail to circumcise his son? The most likely answer is Zipporah. Notice how angry she was over the whole situation and how much she hated circumcision. It's likely that Moses didn't circumcise his son because his wife was passionately against it. If that's the case then it's interesting that Zipporah – the one who had opposed her son's circumcision – had to be the one to circumcise him.

Here is something else to think about. Zipporah took the foreskin and “cast it at his feet”. Who is the word “his” referring to? One would assume that it was referring to Moses, but it doesn't make sense that she would cast it at her husband's feet; after all, he wasn't the one who was demanding it. Since Jesus was actually standing there demanding that this be done, isn't it more likely that in her anger she cast it at *His* feet? She does call him a “bloody husband”, but that's not unusual; in the Old Testament God often referred to Himself as Israel's husband (for example, see Isaiah 54:5 and Jeremiah 31:32).

After this event Moses sent Zipporah back home. The reason we know she was not with Moses when he led the Israelites out of Egypt is because when Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) came to visit Israel in the wilderness he brought along Zipporah and her children:

Exodus 18:1: “When Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father in law, heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, and that the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt;

2 Then Jethro, Moses' father in law, took **Zipporah**, Moses' wife, **after he had sent her back**,

3 And her two sons; of which the name of the one was Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land:

4 And the name of the other was Eliezer; for the

God of my father, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh:

5 And **Jethro, Moses' father in law, came with his sons and his wife unto Moses into the wilderness**, where he encamped at the mount of God:

6 And he said unto Moses, I thy father in law Jethro am come unto thee, and thy wife, and her two sons with her."

It seems that Moses initially started out for Egypt with his wife and children, but after the encounter in the inn Moses sent Zipporah and his two sons back, and they rejoined him later. Given that Zipporah is never mentioned again and that Moses later married someone else (Numbers 12:1), it's possible that they separated after this.

Moses broke God's covenant in order to keep peace in his family – but that peace was just temporary. Not only did his disobedience almost cost him his life, but it apparently destroyed his relationship with his wife. Moses may have thought that he was buying himself a little peace, but that's not how things turned out in the end. It would have been far better if he had just obeyed God in the first place.

Following David's Example

One of the odd facts about King David is that he was the youngest of Jesse's sons. David had a number of older brothers, but God was not impressed with any of them:

I Samuel 16:5: "And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice.

6 And it came to pass, when they were come, that **he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.**

7 But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because **I have refused him:** for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this.

9 Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this.

10 Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these.

11 And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him:

for we will not sit down till he come hither.”

David was held in such low esteem by his family that when Jesse brought his sons to Samuel he didn't even think about including David. David was an outcast. When his father sent him to bring food to his brothers (who were on the front line fighting the Philistines), Eliab demonstrated exactly why God had rejected him:

I Samuel 17:28: “And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, **Why camest thou down hither?** and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? **I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart;** for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.

29 And David said, **What have I now done?** Is there not a cause?”

The reason David went to the front line was because his father told him to bring his brothers food. Eliab was completely out of line – but his attack on David was so routine that David's response was “What have I done this time?” David was used to unjust attacks; that was the story of his life.

David's family was not a fan of David, and there is no evidence in the Bible that this ever changed. One thing we do know, though, is that when David killed Goliath someone was paying attention. Later in the Bible we find out that one of David's nephews followed in David's footsteps and killed a giant:

I Chronicles 20:6: “And yet again there was war at Gath, **where was a man of great stature,** whose fingers and toes were four and twenty, six on each hand, and six on each foot and he also was the son of the giant.

7 But when he defied Israel, **Jonathan the son of Shimea David's brother** slew him.”

David may have been rejected by his brothers, but Jonathan decided to follow in his uncle's footsteps. The family outcast had become the family role model.

They Shall Mingle Themselves With The Seed Of Men

In the second chapter of Daniel we learn about a dream that greatly disturbed King Nebuchadnezzar. When Daniel stood before the king he told him his dream:

Daniel 2:31: “**Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image.** This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof was terrible.

32 This image’s head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass,

33 His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay.

34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.”

After telling the king his entire dream Daniel then provided the interpretation. Daniel explained that God was showing him what the future held. Toward the end of his explanation Daniel said this:

Daniel 2:43: “And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, **they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men:** but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay.”

Notice the highlighted part: Daniel said that “they” would “mingle themselves with the seed of men”. That’s a rather odd phrase, isn’t it? Who is “they”? What is this verse talking about?

If you look up this verse in other translations you will get mixed results. Some translations preserve this odd phrase (which is a direct translation of the original Aramaic), while others butcher it beyond recognition. The Geneva Bible preserves it, as does the ASV and the NAS. The ESV and the NIV butcher it, though: instead of just translating it they offer their own interpretation of it (although the ESV adds a footnote that points out what the original Aramaic actually says). Incidentally, that is one of many reasons why I dislike the NIV. I don’t want their *interpretation* of the passage; what I want to know is *what the passage actually said*.

The original Aramaic really does say “they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men”. This implies that something very strange is going on. If “they” are going to mingle with the “seed of men”, then it seems rather obvious that “they” *are not part of mankind*. Daniel explains that this mingling doesn’t work out very well: the iron and the clay just don’t mix. We humans are the clay; we were made from dust and we return back to dust. These others, though – the “they” – are depicted as being iron. They are trying to mix with the clay, but what results is very brittle.

Are there any other times in the Bible when some foreign element tried to mix itself with mankind? I believe the answer is yes. As we discussed earlier in this book, Genesis 6:1-4 speaks of a time when fallen angels married human women and produced the nephilim – a race of powerful beings that were part human and part demon. In other words, “they” mingled themselves with the “seed of men”.

Interestingly, Christ told us that just before the Second Coming things would be like they were in the days of Noah:

Matthew 24:37: “But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of

man be.

38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.”

Just as people were going about their lives right up until the Flood killed them all, so people will be going about their lives right up until Jesus returns. But there are other parallels as well. Just as the Flood was God’s judgment upon a wicked world, so the Tribulation will be God’s judgment on a wicked world. Just as Enoch was taken from Earth and spared having to live through the Flood, so the Church will be taken from the Earth and be spared having to live through the Tribulation. Finally, before the Flood happened demons intermingled themselves with the seed of men – and we are told that in the last days “they” will also intermingle themselves with the seed of men.

This means that the world may once again see more nephilim. Satan has already tried that trick twice: the nephilim appeared before the Flood in the days of Noah, and the nephilim were in the land of Canaan when Israel conquered the Promised Land. Satan has used them in the past to try to thwart God’s plan, and he may try it again.

Some people have speculated that this might tie into the Mark of the Beast. One of the puzzling things about the Mark is that whoever takes it cannot be saved; they are lost forever and there is no way to repent of it. How is something like that possible? Why would taking the Mark condemn someone for all of eternity?

Here is something to think about: the reason the death of Jesus can save us is because Jesus became *a man*. Jesus had to be a man in order to die in our place; the sacrifice only worked because He was fully man and fully God. His sacrifice, however, is

only good *for mankind*. As we discussed earlier, His death cannot provide atonement for fallen angels. I strongly suspect that since the nephilim are not men then it would not work for them either. Someone who is partly demonic (not just demon-possessed, but *actually demonic*) would not be eligible for salvation.

Some people have speculated that the Mark may be more than a simple tattoo. What if taking the Mark merges you with the demonic and turns you into some kind of transhuman nephilim? If that is the case (and no one knows if it is) then that would explain why the Mark is so permanent. Since you would no longer be human, Christ's sacrifice could not save you – and since there is no way to reverse the process, you could not undo what you have done. Once you have crossed that line you are permanently lost.

Is that the correct interpretation of that verse? No one really knows; it's just a guess. But it's a possibility.

Uriah the Hittite

One of the most famous stories in the Bible concerns the time that King David committed adultery with Bathsheba. When Bathsheba got pregnant David tried to cover up his sin, but his attempts failed. David ultimately decided to hide his sin by having Bathsheba's husband (Uriah the Hittite) killed. Instead of personally killing him, though, David devised a plan to place Uriah in danger and then withdraw so that enemy forces could kill him:

2 Samuel 11:14: "And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it **by the hand of Uriah.**

15 And he wrote in the letter, saying, **Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die."**

It must have taken quite a lot of nerve for David to have Uriah carry his own death sentence to Joab, but that's not what I want to focus on right now. What often gets overlooked is that Uriah was not just a random soldier in David's army. Uriah was actually an important man, and David probably knew him well.

The reason we know this is because 1 Chronicles 11 lists the mighty men of David. These were David's special forces; they were the heroes of his army. These people were great men who did great deeds. David's mighty men were divided into two groups: there were the three superheroes, and then there was a larger group of heroes. If you read the list of heroes you will discover a very familiar name:

1 Chronicles 11:41: "Uriah the Hittite, Zabab the son of Ahlai,"

There is a similar list in 2 Samuel 23, and Uriah is mentioned in 2 Samuel 23:39. Uriah, then, was not just a common soldier; he was one of David's greatest warriors – a man of tremendous integrity, honor, and loyalty. He was one of David's greatest and best servants, *and David had him murdered so he could steal his wife*. David wasn't murdering some random guy; he was killing someone he knew quite well.

If you are familiar with the story of David then you know that David was one of Saul's most faithful servants. Like Uriah, David was one of Saul's greatest soldiers. Like Uriah, David served Saul faithfully – but Saul was not appreciative. Saul grew jealous of David and spent years trying to kill him. In fact, Saul even took David's wife and gave her to someone else:

1 Samuel 25:44: “But Saul had given **Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti** the son of Laish, which was of Gallim.”

Do you see how all of this makes the situation even worse? David, of all people, should have known what it was like to serve someone faithfully and get punished for it. He should have known what it was like to have your wife taken from you *because it happened to him*. Instead, though, he acted just like King Saul. David persecuted one of his most faithful soldiers and then stole his wife. David went from being the abused victim to being the abuser.

In the end David got what he wanted: Bathsheba became his wife, and their son Solomon sat on the throne and became the king of Israel – and part of the Messianic line. However, David also got something else: God cursed him for the rest of his days (2 Samuel 12:10) and David's life was never the same. David sincerely repented of his sin, but there was no way to undo what he had done.

There is one other component of this tragic story that needs to be mentioned. Some time after David committed this sin

his son Absalom launched a rebellion against him. Ahithophel, David's trusted adviser and counselor, helped Absalom in his rebellion. It turns out that Ahithophel actually had a personal connection to what David had done. You see, Bathsheba's father was a man named Eliam:

2 Samuel 11:3: "And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this **Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam**, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

Who was Eliam's father? Why, it was Ahithophel:

2 Samuel 23:34: "Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, **Eliam the son of Ahithophel** the Gilonite,"

When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband he was actually doing it to *the granddaughter of his most trusted adviser*. I strongly suspect that Ahithophel became very upset over what David had done, and he jumped at the chance to get his revenge. David did more than just murder one of his loyal friends; he also turned his counselor into his enemy.

King Saul's Massacre

When David realized that King Saul was trying to kill him, he ran for his life. On his way out of town, though, he stopped at the Temple and asked Ahimelech the priest for help. After Ahimelech gave him some food and the sword of Goliath, David went on his way.

While David was there Doeg the Edomite happened to see him, and Doeg later told King Saul about it. Saul was outraged and had Ahimelech killed – along with an entire city of priests:

I Samuel 22:16: “And the king said, **Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech**, thou, and all thy father's house.

17 And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord: because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord.

18 And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and **he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons** that did wear a linen ephod.

19 And **Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword**, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.”

One thing the Bible makes clear is that Ahimelech was not

trying to rebel against the king. He had no idea that David had fallen out of favor or that the king was trying to kill him. Ahimelech acted in his integrity – but Saul was enraged and murdered him anyway. Saul went on to destroy the entire city of Nob; he murdered men, women, children, and even animals – all because Ahimelech gave David some bread and a sword.

So why did God allow this to happen? Why did God allow Saul to go on a bloody rampage and kill dozens of priests? Why didn't God step in and protect them, the way God continually protected David?

Sometimes there is no way to know why God does things, but this is not one of those times. You see, this was not a random act of violence. God was actually keeping a promise that He had made many years earlier.

You see, Ahimelech was the son of Ahitub:

1 Samuel 22:11: “Then the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the **son of Ahitub**, and all his father's house, the priests that were in Nob: and they came all of them to the king.”

Ahitub, in turn, was related to Eli:

1 Samuel 14:3: “And Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, **the son of Eli**, the Lord's priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people knew not that Jonathan was gone.”

If you know the story of Eli then you already know where this is going. Eli the priest had two sons who were also priests. These two sons were extremely wicked; they abused the sacrifices that were offered to the Lord. Now, being a priest was a big deal, and deliberately defiling the Lord's offerings was a very serious sin. Since Eli refused to stop his sons from defiling the offerings, God pronounced a curse upon his entire family:

I Samuel 2:29: “Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?

30 Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

31 Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that **there shall not be an old man in thine house.**

32 And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever.

33 And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and **all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.**

34 And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.

35 And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever.

36 And it shall come to pass, **that every one that is left in thine house shall come and**

crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priests' offices, that I may eat a piece of bread."

God promised to slaughter Eli's descendents "in the flower of their age", starting with his two children – and that's exactly what He did. When Saul later murdered Ahimelech and the entire city of Nob he was unknowingly carrying out the judgment that God had decreed upon the house of Eli. There was nothing random about what happened; God was keeping His promise.

There are a number of times in the Old Testament where God cursed entire families because of someone's sin. This seems surprising, but it shouldn't. After all, in the Ten Commandments God did say this:

Exodus 20:5: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, **visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children** unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
6 And **showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me**, and keep my commandments."

If you love God and repent then God will show mercy to you; if you do not then you will not be spared. A good example of this can be found in the case of King Jeroboam. God pronounced a curse upon Jeroboam and his offspring – but God exempted one of the king's sons. The Lord explained why:

I Kings 14:12: "Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house: and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die.
13 And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the

grave, **because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel** in the house of Jeroboam.”

Something good was found in this one child, so he was shown mercy. Nothing good was found in the others, though, so they were not shown mercy. That is how it works.

The massacre of King Saul was not a random act of violence. It is true that Saul certainly meant it for evil; he probably had no idea that he was carrying out God’s sentence against Eli. He was just in a murderous rage, lashing out against everyone who he thought was connected to David. But God used Saul’s rage to accomplish His purposes and fulfill His word.

Rahab The Dragon

If you read the book of Job you will eventually encounter the mysterious creatures Behemoth and Leviathan. As I have discussed elsewhere, there are compelling reasons to believe that both of these creatures are dinosaurs. (If you want to read about them for yourself you can find the behemoth discussed in Job 40:15-24 and the leviathan discussed in Job 41:1-34.) Both of these creatures are fascinating and are worth studying, but it turns out that there is an even more obscure creature in the Bible. I would like to take a look at an animal known as Rahab the Dragon.

The name “Rahab” should be familiar to us. Joshua chapter two tells us about a prostitute named Rahab who helped Israel’s spies escape from Jericho. Although this woman shares the same name, that is *not* the Rahab that I am talking about. The Bible speaks of a very different Rahab:

Isaiah 51:9: “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?”

10 Art thou not it which hath dried **the sea**, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?”

That mention is interesting but it doesn’t tell us very much. All it says is that there was a dragon named Rahab that was associated with the sea. This creature is also mentioned in the book of Psalms:

Psalms 89:9 “Thou rulest the raging of **the sea**:

when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.
10: **Thou hast broken Rahab** in pieces, as one that is slain; thou hast scattered thine enemies with thy strong arm.”

In both of these passages Rahab is mentioned in conjunction with God’s power over the sea. Rahab was apparently some kind of sea creature that God defeated. It’s tempting to think that Rahab may be a reference to some nation (such as Egypt), but the context of these passages simply does not support that.

It should be noted that Rahab is not the only mysterious sea creature that God fought. The Bible uses the exact same language when it talks about the leviathan:

Isaiah 27:1: “In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even **leviathan** that crooked serpent; and **he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.**”

Psalm 74:13: “Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the dragons in the waters.

14 **Thou brakest the heads of leviathan in pieces**, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.”

If “leviathan” was a type of dinosaur, then it’s possible that Rahab was a leviathan. Rahab and leviathan are both called dragons, and both of these creatures are associated with the sea. Both of these creatures are also associated with pride: Rahab actually means “proud” or “arrogant”, and God Himself said that the leviathan was characterized by pride (Job 41:34). On top of that, *God promised to destroy both of them*. That is significant, because neither of these creatures are around today.

There is one more reference to Rahab, and it can be found

in the book of Job. If you read the KJV you won't see it because the translators translated the word "Rahab" to mean "proud" instead of just inserting the name, but it is the same word. This is how the ESV translates it:

Job 26:12: "By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding **he shattered Rahab.**"

Notice that once again Rahab is mentioned in conjunction with God's power over the sea.

When the Bible talks about animals such as dragons it is easy for us to dismiss what it has to say on the grounds that there are no more dragons alive today. I think that is a very short-sighted approach. The fossil record makes it clear that there were many mighty animals that used to roam the Earth but have since gone extinct. The leviathan is simply one of those creatures. The Bible seems to say that the leviathan's extinction was not a random act of chance; instead it was the judgment of God. The Lord is the one who destroyed the leviathan and shattered Rahab. He demonstrated His awesome power by crushing this terrible monster.

Judging by the way that the leviathan is described in the Bible, it's probably a good thing that this animal is no longer around. Can you imagine what life would be like if there were indestructible, fire-breathing animals the size of buildings roaming around the countryside? I think God knew exactly what He was doing when He "shattered Rahab".

The Sad Story of Demas

One of the most obscure characters in the New Testament is a man named Demas. We don't really know very much about him; in fact, he is only mentioned in three verses. Those three verses, though, have a sad story to tell.

Demas is first mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians:

Colossians 4:14: "Luke, the beloved physician, and **Demas**, greet you."

When Paul wrote this letter he was being held in prison in Rome. Despite the dire circumstances Paul was not alone; Luke and Demas were with him. This means that Demas was not just a random person; he was someone who stood by Paul even when the apostle was in jail. In fact, in Paul's letter to Philemon the apostle called him a fellow laborer:

Philemon 1:24: "Marcus, Aristarchus, **Demas**, Lucas, **my fellowlabourers.**"

That is high praise! Demas is one of three people that the apostle Paul singled out for a special commendation. Demas was standing by Paul, fighting the good fight and helping him in his ministry.

Demas is mentioned one more time in the Bible. This mention is found in Paul's second letter to Timothy, which was written toward the end of the apostle's life. This is what Paul had to say:

2 Timothy 4:10: "For **Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world**, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia,

Titus unto Dalmatia.”

Demas, who was once Paul's fellow laborer, had abandoned the apostle. Demas did not finish the race; instead he dropped out just when Paul was about to be martyred. He left Paul just when the apostle's need was greatest. We are even told why he did this: Demas loved this present world. He preferred the riches of this world over the sufferings of Christ. He chose the world over God because he loved the world more.

There is a cautionary tale in this. Demas started out strong but he failed to finish. In the end he fell away and abandoned God. While it is good to start out strong, we must *finish* strong as well. We need to keep the faith and hold on. If we don't then we will face dire consequences:

Ezekiel 3:20: “Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity...he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered...”

I don't know what great deeds Demas did. What I do know is that because Demas loved the things of this world more than the things of God, Demas forsook the Lord – and that is how he will be remembered.

The Book Eaters

There is one point in the book of Revelation where the apostle John eats a book. Yes, you read that correctly: John really *does eat a book*:

Revelation 10:8: “And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.

9 And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.

10 And **I took the little book out of the angel’s hand, and ate it** up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.

11 And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.”

Strangely enough, John is not the only person in the Bible who did this. God told Ezekiel to do exactly the same thing:

Ezekiel 2:8: “But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee.

9 And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent

unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein;
10 And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.

3:1 Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel.

2 So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll.

3 And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.

4 And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them.”

There are quite a few similarities between these two accounts. In both cases God commanded that the prophet eat the book. In both cases it tasted as sweet as honey, but in both cases it produced bitterness (Ezekiel reports this in verse 14). After the prophets ate the book, in both cases they were told that they would have to prophesy. The only difference seems to be the audiences that were involved: whereas John was told to prophesy to many nations, Ezekiel was just sent to the house of Israel.

So what is the point of these bizarre passages? I think that this commentary explains it well:

This symbolical action of eating the roll teaches that, (1) the words of Ezekiel would not be his words but the Word of God; (2) the written word of God would become the very life of the prophet; (3) the eating of the roll by Ezekiel indicated his acceptance of the commission God was here giving him; and (4) that he would need to digest it, assimilate it into his very being, and

Speak nothing else, absolutely, to the people except as God would direct him. As Feinberg stated it, "He who gives forth the Word of the Lord must feed on it himself."

(from *Coffman's Commentaries on the Bible*)

Incidentally, God asked Ezekiel to do all sorts of odd things – ranging from building a model of Jerusalem and attacking it (Ezekiel 4:1-2), to shaving his head and setting the shavings on fire (Ezekiel 5:1-2). Ezekiel did everything that God asked him, but Israel still refused to hear anything that God had to say. As a result the nation was destroyed and the Israelites were carried away into exile. Rejecting the messages of God has consequences.

Fortunately, God no longer commands us to eat books or set our hair on fire – but we are still called to heed His messages. God used a very unusual method to give His words to Ezekiel and John, but the message of judgment that He gave them was quite serious. We would do well to listen to what God has to say.

Paul's Letter to Laodicea

At the end of Paul's letter to the Colossian church the apostle tells them that when they've finished reading his letter they should forward it to the church at Laodicea. They should then read the epistle from the Laodicean church:

Colossians 4:16: "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that **ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.**"

That in itself makes sense. Paul was not writing his letters solely for the benefit of the individual churches; he intended for his letters to be passed around (which is exactly what we do with them today). He wanted the Laodiceans to read the letter the Colossians had, and he wanted the Colossians to read the letter the Laodiceans had.

The problem is that as far as we know *Paul never wrote a letter to the Laodiceans*. The only letter to the Laodicean church is found in the book of Revelation, and it was written long after Paul was martyred. So what on earth was Paul talking about?

There are a couple different possibilities. First of all, it's entirely possible that the letter the Laodiceans had in their possession was not actually written to them. They might have had a copy of the book of Ephesians, and it may be that's what Paul wanted the Colossians to read. If Paul's letters really were being passed around then it wouldn't be surprising to find that they had a copy of someone else's letter.

Another possibility is that Paul really did write the Laodiceans a letter but it was just not included in the canon of the Bible. This may seem disturbing, but it wouldn't be the first time that the Bible referred to a book that was not included in its text.

The Old Testament refers to a number of books that have been lost. For example, there is the *Book of Jasher*:

Joshua 10:13: “And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in **the book of Jasher**? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hastened not to go down about a whole day.”

There's the *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*:

1 Kings 15:31: “Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the **book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel**?”

The *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah*:

1 Kings 14:29: “Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the **book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah**?”

The *Book of the Wars of the Lord*:

Numbers 21:14: “Wherefore it is said in **the book of the wars of the LORD**, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon,”

The *Book of the Acts of Solomon*:

1 Kings 11:41: “And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in **the book of the acts of Solomon**?”

The *Book of Jehu*:

2 Chronicles 20:34: “Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they are written in **the book of Jehu** the son of Hanani, who is mentioned in the book of the kings of Israel.”

The Book of the Decree of Esther:

Esther 9:32: “And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was **written in the book.**”

There is also evidence that Paul wrote several letters to the Corinthian church that are not included in the Bible. As you can see, it's not unreasonable to think that Paul may have written a letter to the Laodiceans that was not preserved. It would not be the first time.

Keep in mind that just because a letter was inspired does *not* mean that it could not have been lost. Everything that Jesus Christ has ever said was inspired, but I'm positive that He said many things that are not included in the gospels. The Bible is *not* a complete collection of everything that has ever been inspired; instead it is a collection of inspired writings that God has decided to give to us and preserve through time.

If there really was a letter to Laodicea then we obviously didn't need it because *if we had needed it then God would have made sure that it did not get lost*. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that the Scriptures that we have been given are enough to equip us to do *all* good works. God did not leave out anything that we needed; He gave us a complete set of instructions.

This is one of those mysteries that we will never be able to clear up. Since this letter is only mentioned one time, there is no way to know what Paul was talking about. But we can know this: the Bible really does contain everything that we need. There is absolutely no need to go on a search for the “missing” books of the Bible.

The Ocean In The Sky

This is one of the strangest things that I have ever found in the Bible, and its implications are staggering. Until I started researching this issue I had no idea how strange these verses really were. This is truly a Biblical oddity – and it occurs in one of the best-known passages of the Bible. The only reason we miss it is because we're not really paying attention.

Take a look at it for yourself:

Genesis 1:6: “And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

7 And God made the firmament, and **divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament:** and it was so.

8 And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.”

Verse 7 is very straightforward: on the second day of creation God divided the waters that were under the sky *from the waters that were above the sky*. That's a bit odd, isn't it? After all, there aren't any waters above the sky. That is a well-established fact and it's not up for debate. There is no ocean in the sky.

Some people have suggested that the Bible is just referring to clouds. After all, clouds are made of water vapor and there is a whole lot of water vapor in the sky. That sounds like a great theory, until you get to this verse:

Genesis 1:14: “And God said, **Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven** to di-

vide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

15 And let them be for lights **in the firmament** of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

16 And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: **he made the stars also.**

17 And **God set them in the firmament of the heaven** to give light upon the earth,

18 And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.”

On the second day of creation God made the firmament to divide two great bodies of water. On the fourth day of creation God put the Sun, Moon, and stars right in the firmament itself. Since the Sun, Moon, and Stars are in the firmament, and since there is a body of water under the firmament *and a body of water above the firmament*, that can only mean that the entire universe is actually surrounded by a body of water. In other words, if you went to the edge of the universe and peered beyond it, you would find an ocean.

But that’s not all. Do you see the word “firm” in FIRMa-ment? The Hebrew word for “firmament” literally means something that is hard and has been beaten out (like a sheet of copper). You can look it up yourself: “firmament” is Strongs #7549, and according to my Lexicon it means “broad plates which have been beaten out”. It refers to something *solid*. This means that the firmament is a *solid* barrier.

Some people have suggested that the firmament was some kind of water canopy that used to encircle the Earth above the atmosphere. There are several problems with this popular theory: not only would such a canopy be a gross violation of numerous physical laws, but the Bible clearly says that the Sun, Moon, and stars are *within* the firmament, and that the body of water was

above them. Even if there was a water canopy that surrounded the Earth, it would obviously *not* be above the Sun, Moon, and stars. The canopy theory simply does not satisfy the text. What the Bible actually says is pretty straightforward: there is a solid boundary around the universe, and beyond that boundary lies a vast expanse of water.

I know how strange this sounds, but we need to keep in mind that this “ocean in the sky” is mentioned outside the book of Genesis. For example:

Psalm 148:4: “Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and **ye waters that be above the heavens.**”

The waters above the heavens! There’s another reference to that mysterious ocean. The psalmist is clear that there are waters *above* the heavens. Just as Genesis said, these waters are literally above the stars.

This verse is also a bit odd, if you stop and think about it:

Exodus 20:11: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, **the sea**, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

If you read Genesis 1:10 you will see that God called the waters on the Earth *Seas* – plural. This makes sense because the Earth has more than one body of water. Exodus 20:11, though, doesn’t refer to “Seas”; instead it refers to one single body of water. This body of water is also apparently separate from the heaven and the earth, since it is listed as being distinct from both of them. God lists the heaven, the earth, and “the sea”. That looks a lot like a reference to the waters that are above the firmament.

What if this solid “firmament” layer is actually the boundary between the Universe and the place where God lives? After all, we find a very curious “sea of glass” in the throne room of God:

Revelation 4:6: “And before the throne there was a **sea of glass like unto crystal**: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.”

Revelation 15:2: “And I saw as it were a **sea of glass** mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.”

How do we know that this “sea of glass” is somehow connected to the firmament? Because *that is exactly how the book of Ezekiel describes it*:

Ezekiel 1:22: “And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the colour of the terrible **crystal**, stretched forth over their heads above.”

Ezekiel tells us that the firmament *is like crystal* – and Revelation 4:6 describes the sea of glass *in exactly that same term*.

There’s one more curious thing about this sea that is above the firmament: one day it will be done away with. This is what the book of Revelation has to say about it:

Revelation 21:1: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and **there was no more sea.**”

Notice that this passage does not refer to “seas”, but to a singular sea. Notice also the categories that are involved: there is

the heaven, the earth, and the sea – as if the sea is somehow separate and distinct from both of them.

Why would there be no more sea? Well, consider this: right now the firmament divides the land of God from the land of Men. We desperately need that divider because mankind is simply not holy enough to live with God. One day, though, God will judge mankind and put a final end to sin and death. He will then remake the universe and dwell with mankind forever. When that day comes there will no longer need to be a dividing firmament or a sea. It will have served its purpose and its time will have ended.

There is one last point that I would like to bring up. On each day of creation the Lord looked at His work and pronounced it either “good” or “very good”. The only time God did not do that was on the second day of creation, when God made the firmament. If the firmament does divide the land of man from the land of God then we can see why God did not call it good. The firmament was a necessary evil – a protective barrier between a holy God and unholy men. One day, though, that barrier will no longer be needed – and when that day comes things will finally be *good*.

Drink Strong Drink With Rejoicing

There are many churches throughout the United States that do not allow their members to drink alcoholic beverages. This prohibition is so strong that it is actually a part of many church covenants. This covenant doesn't mention sins like murder, rape, or drug abuse, but it *does* mention alcohol – which seems to indicate that churches consider drinking to be a more serious sin than any of those things.

Given that context, you may be surprised to learn that this verse is a real, genuine Bible verse:

Deuteronomy 14:26: “And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, **or for strong drink**, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there **before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice**, thou, and thine household,”

You can look up this verse in other translations if you like, but there's no getting around the fact that “strong drink” means exactly that. This verse is not talking about grape juice. It really *does* say that it is a good thing for people to drink alcoholic beverages before the Lord and rejoice.

This verse is found in a passage that is talking about tithing (Deuteronomy 14:22). What the passage is saying is that God would appoint a place where the Israelites were to bring their tithes. However, if that place was too far away then the Israelites could spend their tithe on whatever they wanted (be it oxen or wine) and eat it before the Lord and rejoice. If they wanted to

spend it on strong drink then they could do that.

Now, I'm not going to go into a detailed discussion of the tithing system in the Mosaic Law. That is a complex subject that is outside the scope of this book. My point here is that the Mosaic Law, with its hundreds of regulations, did *not* prohibit the consumption of alcohol. This same idea can be seen in the New Testament. Take a look at what Christ said:

Matthew 11:18: “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.”

Jesus is criticizing His generation for their quarrelsome nature. When John the Baptist abstained from alcohol they accused him of being demon-possessed. When Jesus did *not* abstain from alcohol they accused him of being a drunkard. They were determined to find fault no matter what the situation.

The point is, though, that the Son of Man came *eating and drinking*. In the context of the passage it is obvious that Jesus drank alcoholic beverages. I realize there are some people who look at this passage and try to force it to say “John did not drink and Jesus did not drink either”, but that ruins the contrast that Jesus was trying to draw. The whole point of these verses is that *Jesus behaved differently from John*. If neither of them drank then the verses become meaningless.

Or take a look at this:

Proverbs 31:6: “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.

7 Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.”

There are many people who believe that the Bible institutes a blanket ban on all consumption of alcohol – but that's just not what the Bible teaches. Under the Mosaic Law people were allowed to take *their tithe* and spend it on strong drink. Jesus Himself said that he drank wine.

Are there dangers involved with drinking alcohol? Absolutely. The Bible warns against the abuse of alcohol in many passages. Drinking alcohol can easily lead to all sorts of problems and has destroyed many lives. Are there people who should avoid alcohol because they have either abused it in the past or because they might be tempted by it? Yes there are, and those people should avoid alcohol.

My point is *not* that people should drink alcohol. What I *am* saying is that we need to be honest about what the Bible actually says. It is foolish to claim that the Bible completely prohibits all drinking of alcohol regardless of the quantity or situation; it simply does not say that. There is wisdom in choosing to abstain from alcohol – but all drinking is not a sin.

The Witch at Endor

It is very easy to read a passage and impose our own interpretation on it without bothering to see what the passage itself actually says. A great example of this can be found in the curious case of King Saul and the witch at Endor.

There came a time when Saul faced an upcoming battle with the Philistines. The battle frightened him and he wanted some counsel from God – but God refused to respond:

I Samuel 28:5: “And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, **he was afraid**, and his heart greatly trembled.

6 And when Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.”

Since God wasn't responding to Saul, the king did what he normally did in that situation – he solved the problem by disobeying God. He decided the best thing to do was to seek out a witch so he could talk to the dead prophet Samuel. (Why he thought a *dead* prophet would talk to him when the living ones would not (I Sam. 28:6b) is a great question. Saul was not known for thinking clearly.)

Now, the Mosaic Law strictly prohibited witchcraft (on pain of death), and everyone who had a familiar spirit had supposedly been removed from the land. Despite this, Saul had no trouble finding someone to help him:

I Samuel 28:7: “Then said Saul unto his servants, **Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit**, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, **there is a**

woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.”

Saul was hoping that the witch would be able to use her relationship with a “familiar spirit” (demon) in order to communicate with the dead Samuel. He therefore disguised himself and went to talk to her:

I Samuel 28:8: “And **Saul disguised himself**, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and **they came to the woman** by night: and he said, I pray thee, **divine unto me by the familiar spirit**, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee.

9 And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?

10 And Saul sware to her by the Lord, saying, As the Lord liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing.”

The reason Saul had to disguise himself is because even the witch knew that necromancy was illegal. If he had come as King Saul then the witch would never have agreed to his request. He had to trick her into doing it – and that’s exactly what he did.

After assuring the witch that everything would be fine he made his request:

I Samuel 28:11: “Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, **Bring me up Samuel**.

12 And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? **for thou art Saul.**”

This is where our assumptions start to lead us astray. Virtually every commentary I have ever read on this passage claims that the witch was startled because she wasn't expecting to see Samuel. They claim that the witch was going to trick Saul and became incredibly surprised when Samuel himself showed up. That is a great theory but it is *not* what the passage says. Look at what the witch *actually said*. She did not say "Oh my goodness – it's Samuel!". No, what she said was something completely unexpected: "Oh my goodness – you're Saul!" What surprised her – *according to the witch herself* – was not the presence of Samuel *but the presence of Saul*. King Saul was the one who unnerved the witch and caused her to panic. Despite what the commentaries claim, nowhere in the passage does the witch ever express surprise at seeing Samuel.

Some people claim that Samuel didn't actually appear; they say it was just a demon who was pretending to be Samuel. That is a great theory but it's not what the passage says. This chapter does not say that the witch saw a demon who was pretending to be Samuel; it says that *she saw Samuel*. It does not say that a demon answered her; it says that Samuel answered her. These verses simply do not allow us any alternative: the person Saul was talking to really was Samuel. It was not an imposter.

But let's keep going. Look at what happens next:

I Samuel 28:13: "And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth.

14 And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And **Saul perceived that it was Samuel**, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.

15 And Samuel said to Saul, **Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?** And Saul

answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and **God is departed from me, and answereth me no more**, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.”

Notice what Samuel asks Saul in verse 15: “Why have you disturbed me?” The very first thing that Samuel does is tell the king that *he is bothering him*. Samuel does not want to be there and he is not happy about it. His peace has been disturbed.

Notice, also, that Samuel never says “God sent me to tell you that you will die in battle tomorrow.” Commentators far and wide claim that the witch had nothing to do with this and that God’s power arranged this meeting, but the passage doesn’t support that claim at all. Samuel never says that God sent him to talk to Saul. Stop and think for a moment: God had refused to communicate with Saul by *every single method that God had sanctioned for communicating with Him*. Saul had tried them all and God refused to talk to him. Why on earth would God cast aside all of the acceptable ways to talk to the king and instead choose to talk to him through a method that was not only a sin but *was a crime punishable by death*? Does that really seem reasonable? Another thing to think about: if God had sent Samuel to talk to the king then do you really think Samuel would have been complaining about the situation or would have needed to ask Saul what was going on?

I think it is far more likely that the truth is exactly what it appears to be: the witch used her demonic powers of necromancy to bring Samuel back from the dead so that his departed spirit could talk to King Saul. The witch was not a phony and her powers were not phony either. She had genuine power and she used it.

One thing we need to keep in mind is that there was a time when people (like this woman) entered into relationships with demons and used them to gain tremendous power. A great ex-

ample of this can be found in the New Testament:

Acts 16:16: “And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel **possessed with a spirit of divination** met us, which brought her masters much gain **by soothsaying:**

17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and **said to the spirit**, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”

This woman had a demonic spirit of divination that she used to foretell the future. Some people might scoff at this and say that she was just fooling people, but think about it: if you are going to perpetrate a hoax then *you don't need to be demon possessed!* She had a demon that had powers of divination, and that demon had some ability to foretell the future.

I have no idea what powers the average demon possesses; the Bible does not give us a complete list. What we do know is that demons have genuine powers. We also know that forming a relationship with a demon in order to harness their powers is an *extremely bad thing*.

Do you remember what Christ said when He described the time just before His Second Coming?

Matthew 24:24: “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and **shall shew great signs and wonders**; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”

Jesus didn't say that they would show *phony* signs and wonders; no, He said that they would show *great* wonders. The

reason these wonders would nearly deceive the elect is because *they will be real*. This isn't the first time that we've seen this; Pharaoh's magicians in Egypt were able to duplicate some (but not all) of Moses' miracles.

Somehow over the years we've lost sight of the fact that demons exist and have genuine power. We've forgotten that there were once real witches who were not frauds. King Saul went to the witch at Endor to have Samuel's spirit brought up from the dead, *and that is exactly what the witch did*.

As we saw in Matthew 24:24, Jesus warned us that a day is coming when false Christs will arise and do mighty wonders. These men will do great miracles, but they will do them with demonic power. Jesus warned us of this in advance so that when it happens we will not be deceived. Not all miracles are of God – and that is something we desperately need to keep in mind.

Moses The Deliverer

The story of Moses is one of the most familiar stories in the Bible. If you ask people about it they can do a pretty good job of covering the basics: as a baby Moses was placed into the Nile river, where Pharaoh's daughter found him and then raised him as her child. One day Moses killed an Egyptian, and because of that he had to flee the country and live in the wilderness for the next 40 years. Then, when he was 80, God called him to go to Pharaoh and deliver Israel from bondage.

That is the story that we're familiar with – but that's not the story that Stephen told in the book of Acts. His version of the story was quite different:

Acts 7:22: “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, **he defended him, and avenged him** that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:

25 **For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.**

26 And the next day he shewed himself **unto them** as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

27 But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, **Who made thee a ruler and**

a judge over us?

28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

29 **Then fled Moses** at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.”

Stephen tells us that Moses did not just walk up to a random Egyptian and kill him in cold blood. Instead Moses was actually acting in defense of one of his people. This was not murder; in fact, according to verse 24, Moses was actually defending someone who was innocent.

Verse 25 tells us that *Moses was trying to deliver Israel*. Moses knew that God was going to use him to free the Israelites and he was actively trying to help them. The reason Moses had to flee the country is because *Israel rejected him*. When Moses saw two Israelites who were fighting each other he tried to stop the fight – and got yelled at for his trouble. “Who made you a ruler and judge over us?” When they used Moses' defense of the Israelite *against him*, Moses was forced to flee. It was *Israel* who rejected Moses. It was *Israel* who told the Egyptians that Moses was guilty. *Israel* was the one who refused their deliverer and who tried to get Moses killed. Centuries later God would send Israel another deliverer named Jesus, and Israel would also reject and kill Him.

That, in fact, is Acts 7 in a nutshell: Israel hated and rejected the deliverer Moses, and they hated and rejected the deliverer Jesus. They treated Jesus the same way that they treated Moses and the prophets. Just as they told Moses “Who made you a judge over us?”, they also told Pontius Pilate “We have no king but Caesar”. The Pharisees kept saying “Moses this” and “Moses that”, but the truth is that Israel hated Moses:

Acts 7:39: “To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.”

Israel would not obey Moses. They criticized him, attacked him, and made his life so awful that Moses actually asked God to kill him because he just couldn't take it anymore (Numbers 11:15).

After Moses killed the Egyptian and fled for his life, Moses did not return to deliver Israel for another 40 years. When Moses finally brought them to Canaan, the entire nation actually rebelled and refused to enter the land. Things were so bad that Israel decided to *kill Moses* and return to Egypt (Numbers 14:10).

How did God punish them? By commanding Israel to wander around in the wilderness for *40 years* until that entire generation had died:

Numbers 14:32: “But as for you, **your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness.**

33 And your children shall **wander in the wilderness forty years**, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness.

34 After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.”

When Israel rejected Moses as their deliverer the first time and forced him to flee, Moses stayed away for 40 years. When Israel rejected Moses as their deliverer the second time and plotted to kill him, God commanded that they wander around in the wilderness for 40 years until they all dropped dead. In other words, there were *two* generations of Israelites who rejected Moses and who died for it.

What would have happened if Israel had not rebelled against God at the border of Canaan – or if they had not rejected Moses when he tried to deliver them the first time? There is really no way to tell, but history would certainly have played out differently. Their disobedience on both occasions had serious consequences. The nation of Israel might have reached the promised land two generations sooner if they had only obeyed God.