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Changing faces

Have we taken the quest for beauty too far?



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When the abuse is over...

... it's far from over. The scars may haunt an abused child for a lifetime.

CHRISTIAN Odyssey

June/July 2007

Exploring Life and Faith



No Contest

Why the argument over Genesis?

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Letters to the Editor

I think (*Christian Odyssey*) needs a wider distribution! And I guess funds could be a problem—as well as “general interest” in this deceived world. Maybe some sort of advertising program could help. Any and every Christian, no matter their denomination, will be benefited by this first-class magazine! I’ll be praying about this—and if I can help in some other way, please help me to know how.

St. Louis, email

Yes—funds are a problem. It is expensive to market a magazine effectively. But perhaps the best advertisement is a satisfied customer. If you enjoy this magazine, why not encourage your friends and neighbors to ask for a subscription? And, when you have finished with your copy, pass it on. If every reader did that we would double our readership.

I am from Fiji and I just got into this beautiful website of Odyssey and found things I had been searching for some time. I am the superintendent of the Ba Boys Home in Fiji and leading young men to Christ. This is an orphanage and the response is great. Thank you for filling in the gaps in our lives through your wonderful studies. May God bless you always.

RP, email

In your article in the April/May 2007 *Christian Odyssey*, you said that no one knew Barabbas’ “real name.” However, the New Living Translation has a footnote for Matthew 27:16 that says “some manuscripts read ‘Jesus Barabbas.’” His name, then, was known to those in Jerusalem.

SG, Kentucky

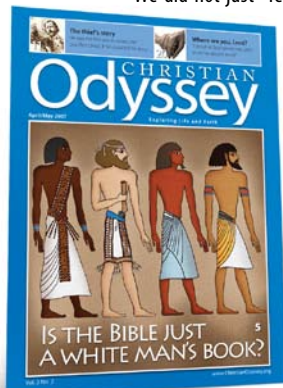
Some few ancient manuscripts do have “Jesus Barabbas” in Matthew 27:16, which would create an interesting parallel to Pilate’s offer: “Shall I free Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Christ?” However, since almost all manuscripts do not read “Jesus Barabbas,” the first name must remain uncertain and is the reason most authoritative English translations only call the “thief” by the name “Barabbas.” It’s possible an ancient scribe could have added “Jesus” in the manuscript he was copying precisely to point up the dramatic comparison. In any case, “Barabbas” is what is called a patronymic name, that is, “bar-abba” or “son of Abba,” which is why the article says Barabbas meant “son of the father.”

I read the Editorial in the recent issue and I had to write and say the movie (*The Passion of the Christ*) had just the opposite effect on me and my family and my small group.

I have never been more moved to worship Christ more fully than after seeing the movie. I have now seen it three times, once when it first came out, the second time in preparation to show it for our small group as follow-up to our study of Isaiah 53 on the suffering servant, and then watched it with the group and discussed it afterward.

We did not just “feel sorry” for Jesus, even though

we flinched through many of the scenes, but were mostly overcome with gratefulness,



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and then humility that our sins required that of Him. The discussion after the small group viewing consisted mostly of how we as disciples of Jesus need to be more moved with compassion for a world, for our friends, and for our family members as Christ was when he said, “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

I am not a “blood and gore” movie fan, but it made the scriptures about his rejection, scourging, and crucifixion a lot more “real” than the very “clean” version of it in my reading of it. I don’t believe I’m “dwelling” on the grisly details of his death, oh, but I am dwelling on the life and freedom that I have in Him that those grisly details led to.

CO, email

I’m happy to know I’m not the only one who did not go see Mel Gibson’s *Passion* movie. Gibson is known for his bloody movies, and I felt as if Christ’s suffering was being exploited in that movie. I have quite a good enough imagination. The Bible account is enough.

SG, email

I am writing regarding the article “It isn’t just how he died.” And, of course, it has been on our minds right now. I could have written the first paragraph myself as far as sentiment is concerned. I did not want the indel-

ible “special effects” left on my mind. The Bible gives us all the detail we need.

When I first came into the church, one of our ministers always gave lots of gory details of Christ’s death and I could not help but cry. It was not necessary!

We should feel sorry for ourselves in a repentant attitude and grateful to Jesus for His depth of love to give us such a wonderful blessing. We owe him our love and following Him to great depth of our learning and growing, a continual process. To do that, we need His love and He has freely given us that in full measure. Praise God!

PR, email

Letters for this section should be addressed to “Letters to the Editor.” Send your letters to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA 91740-0730, or by e-mail to john.halford@wgc.org.

The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We welcome your comments.

Circulation 16,000

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CHRISTIAN Odyssey

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Does there really have to be a conflict between science and the first chapters of Genesis? Can we accept the facts of science and the message of the Bible?

10 Changing faces

Have we taken the quest for beauty too far? Working on a Mercy Ship repairing disease-ravaged faces shows that true beauty really is only skin deep.

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Interview with the President of World Vision. A millionaire decided to take Jesus at his word and has helped change millions of lives.

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Little steps in the right direction

By John Halford

About the time Cho Cheung-hui was beginning his deadly rampage at Virginia Tech, I was in our local drugstore replenishing my prescription. It is an old-style business, offering personal service and fair prices. It is always a happy, friendly place. The people who work there seem to remember everyone by name, and treat their customers with a genuine courtesy.

On that April morning, we were as yet unaware of the drama that was unfolding a few hundred miles to the east. But I was very much aware of a tragi-comedy happening in front of me. A rather bedraggled man, who did not seem to be our most prosperous citizen, was laboriously counting out coins to pay for his prescription. Quarters, dimes, nickels and a few pennies littered the counter as he fumbled in his pockets for more. A few dollar bills were piled up untidily on one side.

Tanya, who was serving him, waited patiently. I wasn't in a hurry, so I—uncharacteristically—waited patiently, too. After a while the man realized he didn't have enough, and went off to find his wife. She arrived with a few more crumpled dollar bills, but they were still \$2.00 short.

"That's all we have," she said. "We had to buy gas to get here."



I drove home, to the news of the massacre at Virginia Tech. A disturbed young man had cut off the lives of more than 30 people, and had cast a pall of grief over the entire nation. Even if we are not affected personally, an act of violence and anger of this magnitude leaves us disturbed and depressed.

Meanwhile, in a little town in rural Indiana, a kind shop assistant had made her part of the world a better place. But surely, such a small incident would be swamped by the great evil.

But that is not so. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells us that he feels it personally, and will remember it whenever we help those less fortunate than ourselves: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of

these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

At the end of the book of Revelation, Jesus promises that there will be a time when "He will wipe every tear from

their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

As I write this, the massacre at Virginia Tech is dominating the news, and will for several more days. The evil consequences of that one terrible act of cruelty, for now, far outweigh on any scale some simple and tiny act of goodness done in a corner. But in the eternal scheme of things—from the point of view of our eternal life in God's kingdom of love and joy—it is the acts of kindness, not cruelty, that will be remembered.

When all is said and done, I think that acts of goodness, such as Tanya did, will have made the bigger and longer-lasting impact. ●



"It was just a very simple, spontaneous act of kindness, but suddenly the day seemed brighter. Doing good has that effect."

They were very embarrassed, but Tanya quickly put them at ease.

"Don't worry. I'll cover it," she said. She went to get her purse and came back with two dollars, put the money in the till and gave them their medicine.

"I'll pay you next time we are in town," promised the lady.

"Forget it. Just pass it on," said Tanya.

After the couple had left, I said, "That was a very kind thing to do."

"Well, I do it when I can," she replied. "I don't always have extra, but when I do, why not help?"

It was just a very simple, spontaneous act of kindness, but suddenly the day seemed brighter. Even if we are not affected personally, doing good has that effect.



No Contest

Why the argument over Genesis?

By Dennis P. Gordon

One doesn't have to be religious to know that a great controversy surrounds the first chapter in the Bible. The way it is written seems to suggest that the whole universe, including the Earth and all life, was made by God in just six days. Some Protestant Christians insist on taking this literally. Genealogies in succeeding chapters are then supposed to lead us to the conclusion that all this happened 10,000 years ago, more or less.

This creationist viewpoint has been forcefully asserted, especially during the latter part of the 20th century, and the media have been very effective in reporting it. There is, therefore, a general sense among the biblically illiterate general public (and even many Christians) that the majority of Christians have always held such a view. This is not the case.

According to Conrad Hyers, author of *The Meaning of Creation*, allegorical interpretations of Genesis 1 were common in the Patristic (early) and Medieval Church, whereas Protestant Reformers leaned toward a literal approach. Martin Luther, for example, criticized Augustine (A.D. 354–430) for Augustine’s allegorical interpretation of the six days of Creation.

Today, there are numerous religious books about the Genesis Creation written by evangelical or fundamentalist scientists who ridicule evolution and rewrite geological history, meanwhile demanding that the Genesis accounts can be interpreted only and wholly literally. Wedded to a particular paradigm, they fail to consider carefully what type of literature it is, why it was written, who the audience was, and what were the historical/cultural and religious settings in which Genesis was written.

The fact is, a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 has nothing to do with science, and it is poor theology to suggest it does. “Young earth” creationists have overlooked the first principles of exegesis. Exegesis is the systematic study of Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning.

When exegesis is done properly, Genesis 1 is seen for what it is—a literary masterpiece, an intelligent, carefully crafted assertion of monotheism against polytheism (many gods), a matter of great significance for the people who were alive when Genesis 1 was written. Many chapters of the Old Testament record how the people of Israel preferred to “go whoring after other gods” than follow the one true God.

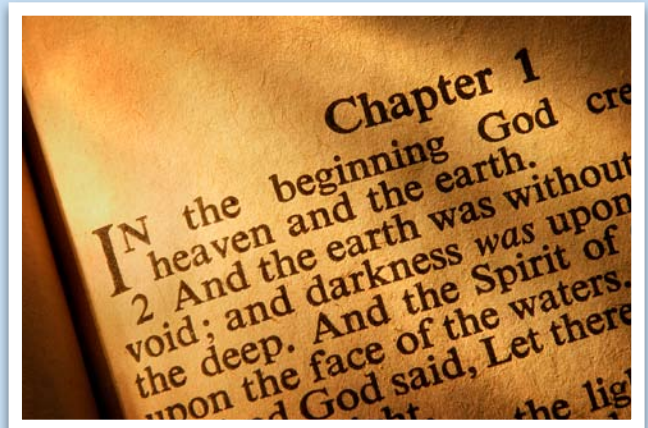
Cosmogony or cosmology?

Moses wrote the Creation account as a cosmogony that was intended to counter the well-known cosmogonies of the pagans.¹

A cosmogony is a story of the genesis or development of the universe and the creation of the world, whereas cosmology is strictly a formal branch of philosophy dealing with the origin and general structure of the universe. We know what the commonest pagan cosmogonies were because they are preserved in cuneiform script on clay tablets.

The best-known cosmogony, the famous Babylonian creation epic known as the *Enuma Elish*, itself based on earlier, pre-Mosaic versions, was written some time after

Moses. When you read a translation of it (see box), you can see what the Israelites were up against. It describes a struggle between cosmic order and cosmic chaos. There are great sea monsters, and the chief divinities, in order of pre-eminence, are the stars, the moon, and the sun. Other gods abound in the cosmogonies—gods of darkness, water, vegetation, various animals, and so on.



Translation of the fifth tablet of the Enuma Elish

Compare the order of deities with that of the celestial bodies in Genesis 1:16, in which the order is deliberately reversed.

He [Marduk] made the stations for the great gods; The stars, their im-



ages, as the stars of the Zodiac, he fixed.

He ordained the year and into sections he divided it; For the twelve months he fixed three stars. The Moon-god he caused to shine forth, the night he entrusted to him. He appointed him, a being of the night, to determine the days; Every month without ceasing with the crown he covered him, saying: “At the beginning of the month, when thou shinest upon the land, Thou commandest the horns to determine six days, And on the seventh day to divide the crown.” When the Sun-god on the foundation of heaven . . . thee, . . . [tablet here damaged]



Exegesis is the systematic study of Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning. When this task is done properly, Genesis 1 is seen for what it is—a careful, intelligent, extraordinarily crafted assertion of monotheism against polytheism. It is stunning in its brevity and effectiveness.

The *Enuma Elish* and earlier cosmogonies help us understand why the Genesis account is written as it is. As one archaeologist has written, Genesis freely uses the metaphors and symbolism drawn from a common cultural pool to assert its own theology about God.

In the beginning...

Let's now look at the structure of Genesis 1 to see how this works (for this you might want to consult a Bible). It starts out with a summary statement: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth [the universe]."

Most of the verses in the chapter hinge upon the next statement, in verse 2: "The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." The following verses explain how God respectively structured and "filled" the conditions of formlessness and emptiness. The six days are arranged in two parallel sets of three (noted as early as Augustine in his *City of God*), such that what is created on days four through six populates the appropriate realm structured in days one through three.

The point of this symmetry in Genesis 1 is that the form of the presentation is at least as important as the content. With this perspective, it is clear that the structural framework is artificial and therefore was never intended by the author to be taken literally as a seven-day historical account (with God resting on the seventh day). The fact of God's creative authority over everything is

certainly intended literally, but the seven-day framework is just that—a framework.

As Victor Hamilton in his 1990 commentary on Genesis 1 wrote, "A literary reading of Genesis 1... understands 'day' not as a chronological account of how many hours God invested in his creating project, but as an analogy of God's creative activity. God reveals himself to his people in a medium [a seven-day week] with which they can identify and which they can comprehend."

How the ancients saw the world

We need to understand that, for most peoples of the ancient world, all the various regions of nature were divine. There were sky gods, earth gods and water gods, gods of light and darkness, rivers and vegetation, animals and fertility. Everywhere the ancients turned, there were divinities to be petitioned, appeased, or pacified.

Each day of Creation in Genesis 1 takes on two principal categories of divinity and declares that these are not gods at all but creations of the one and only true God. This includes humans, none of whom—not even kings or pharaohs—are to be worshipped as gods.²

Hebrew monotheism (one God) was a unique and hard-won faith. The temptations of idolatry and syncretism (blended religion) were everywhere. Later in history, it came to be understood just how liberating was the concept of monotheism. From time immemorial, superstitious

Problem	Preparation	Population
Verse 2	Days 1–3	Days 4–6
darkness	1(a) creation of light (day) 1(b) separation from darkness (night)	4(a) creation of sun 4(b) creation of moon and stars
watery abyss	2(a) creation of firmament (sky) 2(b) separation of waters above from waters below	5(a) creation of birds 5(b) creation of fish
formless earth	3(a) separation of earth from sea 3(b) creation of vegetation	6(a) creation of land animals 6(b) creation of man
without form and void	<i>tohu</i> (the formlessness) is formed	<i>bohu</i> (the void) is filled

Further reading

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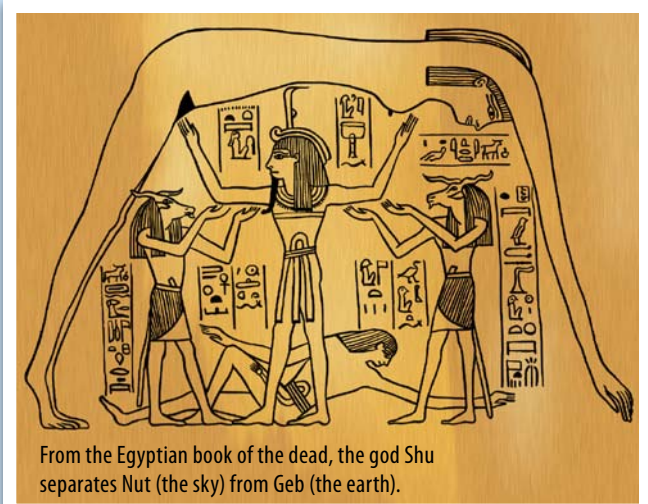
people have attributed natural phenomena, or calamities like earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis, to gods who were beyond understanding (except by a priestly elite) and had to be appeased and not questioned. Genesis 1, on the other hand, asserts that there are no gods but God and that his creation is comprehensible and amenable to investigation. This perspective made possible the scientific study of nature.

Verse 16 of Genesis 1, when understood, is amusing. As an intentional put-down, it deliberately reverses the order of the chief deities of a well-known cosmogony. The sun—called the “greater light” to avoid using the only available Semitic names for the sun, which were names of deities—comes first, then the moon, the “lesser light.” The stars—the highest deities—are barely mentioned in a throw-away line: “He made the stars also”! Not only that, Genesis 1 makes it plain that they are not to be worshipped; they were made to serve—daily, seasonally, and calendrically. And none is accorded astrological significance.

You see the contrast? In this chapter, God overcomes darkness, makes order out of chaos, and even makes the great sea creatures, which, as it happens, are not monstrous. The impressive orderliness of Genesis 1 and its patterned structure are a deliberate response to pagan mythologies. The Hebrew God has no competitor and there is no cosmic battle going on. Everything is under control.

No contest

Genesis 1 is not at odds with modern geology and biological science. This is not an issue here. To insist that it does violence both to Scripture and to science. As Victor Hamilton wrote, “This is a word from God addressed to a group of people who are surrounded by nations whose



From the Egyptian book of the dead, the god Shu separates Nut (the sky) from Geb (the earth).

cosmogony is informed by polytheism and the mythology that flows out of that polytheism. Much in Genesis 1 is patently anti-pagan.... The writer’s concerns were theological.”

Both Henri Blocher and Rick Watts (see Further Reading) have highlighted the similarities and differences between the Genesis account and some themes apparent in Egyptian cosmogonies (something relatively few scholars have attempted). In short, Genesis 1 is a corrective against polytheistic concepts encountered by the Israelites in their old land as well as in their new. ●



Dennis Gordon is a biologist in a government research organization in New Zealand and an Associate Member of the U.K.-based Society of Ordained Scientists. He obtained his PhD in 1973 (Dalhousie University, Canada), was baptized in the same year, and was ordained in 1980.

¹ Moses is taken to be the author of Genesis. As Henri Blocher, Professor of Theology at Wheaton College, Illinois, has written: “We stand... with the contemporary specialists who maintain the traditional positions, those suggested by the Bible itself, which associate Genesis with the work of Israel’s most powerful thinker, ‘our Teacher,’ as the Jews call him, Moses.” And for good reason—his training in Egypt and his later pastoral life uniquely equipped him intellectually and spiritually, as one who was “instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7: 22) and who was filled with the Spirit of wisdom, which he later passed on to Joshua (Deuteronomy 34: 9)

² All humans, men and women equally, not just pharaohs and kings, are said to be made in the likeness of God, with the royal prerogative of rulership (properly, stewardship) over the earth. This equality of men and women, extended to common folk, was revolutionary teaching!

“People, I just want to say, you know, can't we all get along?”

By Mike Feazell

Rodney King, whose 1991 videotaped beating at the hands of Los Angeles police officers gained national attention, uttered those words before a crowd of reporters, cameras and microphones on May 1, 1992, in his effort to help calm the calamitous riots the officers' acquittals had sparked.

On April 29, rioters had seized on the verdicts as an opportunity to vandalize, loot, burn, and kill. The U.S. Marine Corps and the California National Guard were called in to quell the violence, which lasted four days, and in which 55 people died, more than 2,000 were injured, and more than 3,000 businesses were damaged. Fire departments responded to more than 7,000 calls. There was nearly \$1 billion in damage. Smaller riots broke out in other parts of the U.S.

Sometimes “enough is enough” is a necessary catalyst for a productive transition. Sometimes it's just an excuse for wanton indulgence. The hard part is to know the difference. The harder part is to take action without destroying each other.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars... Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that” (essay, *Where Do We Go From Here? Chaos or Community*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1967, p. 62, paperback edition).

Dr. King was not only a U.S. black civil rights leader; he was a Christian, a Christian teacher. He envisioned a world in which Jesus' statement, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one

“Sometimes **“enough is enough”** is a necessary catalyst for a productive transition. Sometimes it's just an excuse for wanton indulgence.”



I imagine Rodney King was shocked at what his run-in with the police had helped trigger. Appealing to the rioters to end the violence, he, like the rest of us, sincerely wished we could all get along.

Most of us do “get along,” more or less, most of the time. It's the times in between, the times of “enough is enough,” when we don't. And to be sure, there are moments when “enough” really is enough. If there weren't, we'd still have slavery in this country. Black Americans would still not be voting, nor would Chinese citizens, nor women. Children would still be working 14-hour days in sweatshops instead of going to school. There'd be no insurance protection nor health benefits for workers, and no mandatory breaks nor grievance processes. But there'd still be plenty of unsafe working conditions and unfair hiring and firing practices. Go back a little further, and we'd still be paying taxes to a government across the sea with no say about our own political, business or international destiny.

another” (John 13:34, NKJV), would be a universal reality. That world did not come in King's lifetime, nor, I dare say, will it come in ours. But his conviction that it should, that it needs to, profoundly changed the present imperfect world for the better.

Can we all get along? When we love one another the way Jesus loved, we can. And many people do. And the fact is, many *more* people get along today than did before Martin Luther King taught a nation by personal example, to the point of being assassinated, that nonviolence changes relationships infinitely more effectively than violence.

We have a long way to go. But it must not be forgotten that, because some people have believed and acted on the words of Jesus, we also have come a long way. There are setbacks and there are advances along the journey. But the advances do not come from giving hatred its head; they come through the work of those who, like Martin Luther King, set themselves to follow the path of the cross of Jesus. ●

Changing Faces

By Brenda Plonis



Nowadays, the fountain of youth wields a scalpel, a bottle of Botox, and collagen injections. Years can be shaved off your life, literally, with a few procedures and surgeries. But have we taken the quest for beauty too far?

A few years ago, I watched the U.S. premiere of “The Swan.” In case you missed this rare moment in Reality TV, the show advertised for “ugly ducklings” and “average” women to enter a beauty pageant. Contestants underwent rigorous plastic surgery, liposuc-

ultimate beauty pageant.”

I called it way over the top.

More than 20 years ago, I watched another show on plastic surgery—only this program focused on a teenage girl with a cleft lip. I don’t know where she was from—I seem to recall some country too distant in my juvenile comprehension to be real. My eyes must have been bulging at seeing the girl’s three lips, though, because I do remember my mother explaining to me that if my cleft palate had been worse, I might have been born with a birth defect like that.

I silently thanked God that I only had two lips.

Since then, I have seen far more split lips, tumors, cleft palates and facial deformities than most people in the nonmedical profession, while working in Communications onboard a Mercy Ship, a floating hospital along the coast of West Africa. Seeing thousands of people who desperately needed surgeries to save their lives put these so-called ugly ducklings into perspective. And it made me want to scream at those

doctors on television that they were wasting their time fixing average “imperfections.”

I wished the contestants had seen Elizabeth, a girl in her 20s. I met her in Togo, in a tiny country most of us have never heard of, located in a sweltering sliver of West Africa. Elizabeth had hopes and dreams like many of us—only she had a hideous grapefruit-sized

“Believing in Jesus didn’t give me a perfect face or body. It gave me something far more precious—his perfect love.”

tion and a new fitness regime over three months—during which time they didn’t see themselves in a mirror until “revealed” to the panel of doctors who had chiseled, tucked and straightened. Two girls competed against each other each week—the winning one advanced to compete with other girls who had gone through similar treatment. Producers called it “the

Joanna

By Joyce Catherwood

Luke 8:1-3; 23:8-12; 24:1-12; Mark 6:14-32; Acts 13:1

John the Baptist had been murdered! It was a chilling example of the powerful currents of intrigue that swirled continuously throughout the palace. My husband, Chuza, managed the vast personal estates of King Herod Antipas, and we had quickly learned to navigate our dangerous environment.

Herod had initially feared John the Baptist, regarding him as a holy man. He had paid attention to John's teachings until John told him it was not lawful for him to marry Herodias, Herod's sister-in-law, who was also his niece. Because of this he put John in prison, though he still feared him and was unwilling to issue the order to have him killed.

John's admonishment to Herod also infuriated Herodias, and she sought opportunity to force Herod to kill him. She arranged for her daughter, Salome, to dance before Herod and all his nobles. Herod foolishly vowed to give her anything she wanted. So Herodias instructed Salome to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Trapped by his own rash promise and wanting to save face before his dinner guests, Herod felt he had no choice but to agree.

I myself had been gravely ill. I tried every conventional remedy. Nothing worked. So I sought and found this Jesus, who miraculously made me whole again! Forever changed by his mercy, I began to follow him as he traveled through the cities and villages of Galilee. Chuza's well-paid position enabled me to help support Jesus' ministry.

At the end of Jesus' ministry, I helplessly witnessed his agony on the cross. And when I later learned how Herod and his soldiers had ridiculed Jesus prior to the crucifixion, I was even more heartbroken, because I knew these men.

Herod had been elated when Pilate sent Jesus to him. For months the king had wanted to see Jesus, from the first time he had heard of him, fearing he was John the Baptist returning from the dead. Herod was fascinated by Jesus' supernatural powers. He knew Jesus had healed me and was determined to witness a miracle firsthand. He eagerly asked Jesus questions, but Jesus did not answer. Herod, not one to be ignored, became increasingly irritated. He and his soldiers began insulting Jesus, scoffing as they draped a brilliant, kingly robe on him, then returned him to Pilate for crucifixion.

After the cruel execution was over, Jesus was hastily placed in a sepulcher. I went with the other women to prepare Jesus for burial. We expected to find his mutilated body, but discovered an empty tomb instead! Stunned and blinded by the dazzling light of two angels, we fell on our faces, trembling. The angels asked why we sought the living among the dead. Our fear immediately turned to rejoicing when we grasped that he was alive!

At the end, everyone, including Herod Antipas, knew this was no ordinary man who had been crucified.

Though now over, my sojourn in the palace provided a unique opportunity to bear testimony of the love and grace of my Lord to Herod and his household. Even Herod's own foster-brother and close companion, Manaen, later became a prominent believer. ●

tumor growing from the side of her face.

Her tumor was malignant; nothing could be done except to help Elizabeth live her remaining days in dignity. My former roommate Dorothy used to make hospice care visits to patients we couldn't treat medically, including Elizabeth.

I often went through my small closet onboard the ship and gave Dorothy clothes that I hadn't worn in a while, or various other amenities like perfume to give to her "patients." Someone had left me a bag of clothes to go through for myself one day—there was a cute strappy checkered dress that I couldn't fit into, and white sandals I wouldn't have been caught dead in.

Dorothy gave them both to Elizabeth, so she pranced around declaring how beautiful she looked, while someone took her photo. Someone else from her village sneered that she would be dead soon anyway—who was she kidding?

But Elizabeth kept smiling. She knew she didn't look normal. She knew she would someday die from the disease raging through her body. She also knew Jesus, and she radiated it from the inside.

Elizabeth, even with a ghastly tumor, knew that physical appearances can be deceiving—they're not always a measure of what's inside a person's heart.

In the end, the "ugly ducklings" shown on "The Swan" didn't need plastic surgery. They needed heart surgery. Without that operation to change the inside, the other surgeries were just a waste of time.

Back in America, I still find myself thinking about Elizabeth every so often. Her face comes to mind when I see the covers of *Glamour*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue* and I realize society has marketed physical "perfection" as important.

Thousands of people receive surgeries through Mercy Ships that save their lives. And I wouldn't have been able to eat or speak properly if I still had that hole in the roof of my mouth. But as far as radically altering our appearance because we want to be physically "perfect"... I think I'll pass.

At the end of the day, I see my 31-year-old face and I notice crow's feet, post-adolescent acne, and that strip of grey that reappears soon after I dye my hair. But my eyes also reveal to others a belief in something bigger than my appearance. Believing in Jesus didn't give me a perfect face or body. It gave me something far more precious—his perfect love. ●



Brenda Plonis is an average-looking freelance writer with big feet, according to society's standards. She'd rather be known for her feet that bring good news as referred to in Isaiah 52:7 than for her looks.

Good news to the poor

World Vision was founded in 1950 by Bob Pierce in response to the needs of Korean War orphans. It has grown into one of the largest Christian relief and development organizations, working with a staff of 23,000 in almost 100 nations. World Vision maintains its historical focus on children, and helps their families and communities not only by supplying immediate needs but also by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. We spoke with Richard Stearns, President of World Vision U.S., about his work.

Christian Odyssey: World Vision is an effective and influential organization. How did you come to be president of its U.S. operations?

Richard Stearns: My story meshes with one in Scripture, the story of the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22). Let me tell you that one first. It starts with a question—a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” I see here a man who is a bit cocky and full of himself—looking for a public pat on the back from Jesus.

Jesus gave him a fairly standard scriptural answer: “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” The man asked which ones, and Jesus answered, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

The man should have stopped while he was ahead, but he was not fully satisfied with the answer and makes the mistake of pressing Jesus further: “All these I have kept,” the young man said, “What do I still lack?”

Jesus looks into his eyes and gives him an answer that pierces his soul and cuts him to the quick: “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

CO: And how does that story connect with you?

RS: Nine years ago I was the CEO of the fine tableware company, Lenox, a half-a-billion dollar enterprise with 4,000 employees. My salary and bonuses were almost a million dollars a year. Like this young man from Scripture, I was prosperous, a leader in my church, respected in my community. I held degrees from two Ivy

League universities. I was happily married with five beautiful children. We lived in a ten-bedroom house on five acres outside of Philadelphia. I was a model church-going Christian—a poster boy for successful Christian living.

But then I had an experience very much like that of the rich young man that shattered my world. Through a series of amazing events, none of which were of my doing, I was asked to serve as president of World Vision.

I was confronted with a stark choice—quit my job, the one I had worked for more than 20 years to attain, take a huge pay cut, sell my house—move my family almost 3,000 miles to a place where we knew no one, and accept a job I didn’t want—with a strong likelihood that I would fail and find myself unemployed a year later.

I fervently wished that the story of the rich young ruler was not in the Bible. As I wrestled with one of the most difficult decisions of my life, I could hear Jesus saying to me: “Rich, you lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor. Then come and follow me. Are you willing, Rich? Will you do this for me?”

The very next verse in this passage of Scripture was devastating. The rich young man, when confronted with the same question, could not do what Jesus asked. “He went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

This was the first time in my life that I truly understood the commitment that God wanted me to make as a follower of Christ. After great anguish and with a heavy heart, I finally accepted that call in June 1998. In July the moving vans pulled up in front of our home to move us to Washington State. And in August I found myself in Uganda in the midst of the AIDS pandemic.

CO: Some people might think that Jesus was talking to that particular man about his particular problem, and we have different problems. What makes you think that Jesus was talking to you?

RS: Jesus clearly stated his mission in Luke 4: He went to the synagogue in Nazareth and read from the scroll of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (verses 16-19).

I see three parts to Jesus’ mission, and they are reflected in the type of work that World Vision does:

- Proclaiming good news to the poor—to people who rarely hear good news
- Concern for the physical and material well-being of the poor



As I wrestled with one of the most difficult decisions of my life, I could hear Jesus saying to me: “Rich, you lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give it to the poor. Then come and follow me.”

- A promise of justice—to set the oppressed and the prisoners free

The question that hangs over all of us 2,000 years later is this: How are we to embrace this mission of Christ in our world? Should not our mission be the same as that of Jesus?

CO: Many conservative Christians put a low priority on helping the poor, on trying to change this messed-up world. Isn't it reasonable for churches to focus on the gospel and to let humanitarian work be done by organizations like World Vision?



RS: Organizations can help, but I don't think we can separate the mission of Jesus into separate spheres. The Bible tells us that the Lord is disgusted with religion that is empty and devoid of deeds. God expects not just belief, but also action motivated by our belief. James tells us

that true religion means that we should care about people, about orphans and widows. It's not enough to listen to the word—we should also do what it says (James 1:22, 27).

But I think the most powerful answer comes in the first chapter of Isaiah. In *The Message Bible*, Eugene Peterson paraphrased it like this:

“Quit your worship charades. I can't stand your trivial religious games: Monthly conferences, weekly Sabbaths, special meetings—meetings, meetings, meetings—I can't stand one more!...

“I'm sick of your religion, religion, religion, while you go right on sinning. When you put on your next prayer-performance, I'll be looking the other way. No matter how long or loud or often you pray, I'll not be listening....

“Say no to wrong. Learn to do good. Work for justice. Help the down-and-out. Stand up for the homeless. Go to bat for the defenseless” (Isaiah 1:13-17).

God wants his people to care for the poor and stand up for justice. We can't just talk about the gospel—we have to demonstrate it, too. God didn't just love the world—he loved it so much that he did something about it—he sent

his Son. Our love for the world cannot be passive, and it can't be limited to the institutional level. It must also be personal.

To me, the most sobering of all Jesus' recorded words are these: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). How could I call him Lord, and not be willing to do what he asked?

CO: You were offered an unusual opportunity. The average person obviously cannot just drop everything like that. In practical terms, what can the average Christian do to share in that aspect of Jesus' work to alleviate suffering and poverty?

RS: Certainly, not everyone should quit their job and join a humanitarian or mission organization. The Body has many parts, and those members working in other places can do their part. However, none of us is exempt from caring about the poor and oppressed. Almost 3 million people have chosen to sponsor a child through World Vision, believing that they can't eliminate poverty altogether, but they can help one child. Others can volunteer at a soup kitchen or other local charity with a ministry to the poor. All of us can hold our elected officials accountable for just and compassionate foreign assistance policies.

CO: Poverty and the problems caused by ignorance seem overwhelming. But some people have suggested that if we really put our minds and resources to work, the major problems could be resolved in as little as 25 years. Is that really an attainable goal? If not, what do you see as attainable goals for World Vision, and those who support you, for the near future?

RS: Global poverty is a massive and complex problem—2.8 billion people live on less than two dollars a day. About 29,000 children die every day of largely preventable causes. But Americans give just 2 percent of all of their charitable giving to international causes even though that is where 99 percent of the poverty is. And the U.S. government gives less than one half of 1 percent of the federal budget to international humanitarian assistance. We can and we must do more. We have solutions to the most extreme forms of poverty. We just need the moral will and the resources to tackle the issues. Our founder, Bob Pierce, once said: “Don't fail to do something just because you can't do everything.” ●

Should you take the Bible *literally?*

By Bernie Schnippert

Has anyone ever looked at you, with a smirk on his face perhaps, and asked, “Do you take the Bible literally?” Before answering, you would be well advised to pause and consider your reply.

The skeptic believes that you will answer “Yes” or “No” to the question. If you say “Yes,” then he will, quite rightly, point out various biblical statements or verses that, if taken literally, have a clearly dangerous or even absurd result. Take Mark 9:42-48, which tells Christians if their hand or foot “offends” them, they should “cut it off,” and if their eye “offends” them, they should “pluck it out.” If you take this literally, you would engage in self-mutilation.

Clearly, this interpretation is nonsensical!

On the other hand, if the believer says he does not take the Bible literally, then the skeptic will retort that the believer has implied that the Bible means whatever the believer wants it to mean. Hence, any person’s interpretation is



theater, read the encyclopedia, or hear a traffic cop bark out an order at an intersection, do you interpret them literally?

Literal or figurative?

When the question is put this way, most of us know that the answer is not a simple “Yes” or “No.” However, most people still don’t know why the answer is not a simple yes or no, and need to have it explained, as this article will now do.

Suppose your friend just bought a sports car and tells you, “I drove my sports car down the road at 90 miles per hour.” Would you take his statement literally? Unless you believe he is a liar, the correct way to interpret his remark is to conclude he drove at 90 miles per hour. It is difficult, if not impossible, to arrive at any other meaning.

On the other hand, let’s suppose he says, “I was flying down the road!” Unless you believe his car actually left the ground and became aloft like an airplane, you do not take him literally. You do understand what he is saying, though. You know your friend was driving fast! He is telling you this by “speaking figuratively,” not literally.

People who study language know that humans communicate verbally through words in more than one way. Sometimes they make literal statements, which should be taken literally, and sometimes they use

“figurative language,” which should be taken “figuratively.” Dictionaries tell us that figurative language is language used in a non-literal way in order to add emphasis.

Numerous types of figurative (i.e., non-literal) expressions exist, such as the metaphor, simile,

“Sometimes people make statements, meant to be taken literally, and sometimes they use figurative language, which should be taken figuratively.”

as good—or poor—as anyone else’s.

So where does that leave us? Should you take the Bible literally?

Ask yourself (setting aside the Bible for a moment), “Do I take whatever anyone says or writes literally?” For example, when your friends speak, or when you read the newspaper, see a movie, go to the

personification, and antithesis. While it is not critical to know and understand the definitions of all such figures of speech to interpret everyday conversation, it can help. It is also important to know that the Bible uses many figures of speech. One study Bible, the *Companion Bible*, lists about 180 figures of speech in the Bible, and explains how each figure is to be understood.

Making the correct interpretation

Usually we discern the difference between literal and figurative speech automatically, without even thinking about it. Often this is because a literal interpretation doesn't make sense, so we switch to a figurative interpretation. When your friend said he was "flying down the road" in his car, you were not tempted to take him literally, because 1) doing so didn't really make sense (you know cars don't fly), and 2) you have heard others use the same expression as a synonym for "fast."

Another way to avoid misunderstanding and ensure you correctly interpret someone's statement is to ask for clarification. Of course, in the case of the Bible, the authors are all dead and cannot be questioned nor give clarifications, so we must use other methods to interpret what they meant.

What are those "other methods"? Are we free to pick whatever meaning we wish to believe, as the skeptic charges in regards to the Bible? Well, of course not.

Everyone knows that in such a case you must perform a careful inquiry and objective analysis to learn what the writer or speaker meant. What everyone does not seem to know, especially Bible skeptics, is that a method exists to try to ascertain the speakers/writer's intended meaning—it is called hermeneutics. Hermeneutics can be defined as, "The theory and methodology of interpretation [of statements], especially of scriptural text" (*American Heritage Dictionary*). One essential tenet of hermeneutics is that figures of speech are not licenses to insert whatever meaning one wants. They are, instead, linguistic devices that are known and understood by linguists to convey truths in a certain way once one has learned about them.

Even with this explanation, we should not conclude that everyone will agree on the exact meaning of every single statement the Bible makes. But people don't agree on the meaning of every single statement of Shakespeare, the President of the United States, or even the meaning of federal and state laws (and laws are virtually always made to be crystal clear and understood literally!). Nor will they ever all agree on the meaning of every single scripture. Furthermore, even if they did agree on the meaning of every scripture, they would not agree on every single doctrine, because scriptures must often be combined to understand a single doctrine.

But just because people will never agree unanimously on the correct interpretation of every single statement

made by another, or every single biblical statement, does not mean we are free to throw up our hands and make up whatever meaning we want. Such a view is nonsense, and it is seen by everyone to be nonsense, even by Bible skeptics when they speak of the meaning of anything except Scripture (in which case they adopt the nonsensical view).

So, again, regarding non-biblical statements, ask yourself: "Do I take whatever anyone says or writes literally?" The correct answer is: "I take the literal statements literally, and the figurative statements figuratively. I use my common sense, my experience, and my knowledge of language and grammar to know the difference and to determine what the figures of speech mean."

And, likewise, what if someone asks you, "Do you take the Bible literally?" The correct answer is: "I take the literal parts literally, the figurative parts figuratively, and I use common sense, my experience, my knowledge of language and grammar, and the techniques of hermeneutics to know the difference and help me interpret the statements."

And, if you want to put in a final "dig" into the skeptics (figuratively, not literally), you can add ... "just like you do any time you hear or read any statement by anyone about anything." •

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How Russia became Christian

By Paul Kroll

Each July 15th, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and some Protestant Christians commemorate the baptism of Prince Vladimir (956-1015). He was ruler of Rus, an area stretching from northwestern Russia to southern Ukraine.

The principal account of this pagan king's baptism and the Christianization of his domain are found in the legendary *Russian Primary Chronicle*, dating from the 11th century.¹ The Chronicle explains that Vladimir had listened to envoys from Islam, Judaism and the Greek and Roman Christian church seeking to convert him and evangelize his people. The wise men he sent to investigate these religions were especially impressed with the church of St. Sophia in Constantinople and the splendor of its religious services.

When Vladimir heard their account, he decided to adopt the form of Christianity practiced at the Byzantine court, the center of what is today the Eastern Orthodox faith.²

Prelude to baptism

Before choosing a faith, Vladimir took time out to besiege the Byzantine city of Kherson, north of the Crimea. The Chronicle tells the story: A man from Kherson, Anastasius, informed him he could take the city by cutting off the springs feeding its water supply. Vladimir followed his advice, forcing the city to surrender.

Next, Vladimir engaged in some hard-ball political bargaining. He promised to be baptized and bring Byzantine Christianity to his people only if emperors Basil and Constantine gave him their sister, Anna, in marriage. If they refused, he threatened to destroy Constantinople, their capitol city, as he had Kherson.

Greatly anguished, the emperors persuaded their sister to agree to the marriage. In a cynical observation of the bargain, one church historian says that Vladimir “captured a Byzantine town in the Crimea and as a price of peace exacted the hand of a Byzantine princess to add to his collection of wives and concubines.”³

Anna arrived in Kherson around 988 with priests to perform Vladimir's baptism. When she heard he was afflicted with a terrible eye disease, she urged him to be

baptized immediately to be healed of the condition.

According to the Chronicle: “When Vladimir heard her message, he said, ‘If this proves true, then of a surety is the God of the Christians great,’ and gave order that he should be baptized. The Bishop of Kherson, together with the Princess's priests, after announcing the tidings, baptized Vladimir. When the Bishop laid his hand upon him, he straightway received his sight. Upon experiencing this miraculous cure, Vladimir glorified God, saying, ‘I have now perceived the one true God.’”⁴

Let the baptisms begin

After his baptism, Vladimir married Anna and prepared his subjects for baptism. He ordered that at a given hour all the people of Kiev—men, women and children—should go to the Dnieper River and be baptized in a grand religious ceremony.

The Chronicle describes the baptismal event and Vladimir's prayer of thanksgiving to God: “When the people were baptized, they returned each to his own abode. Vladimir, rejoicing that he and his subjects now knew God himself, looked up to heaven and said, ‘O God, who has created heaven and earth, look down, I beseech thee, on this thy new people, and grant them, O Lord, to know thee as the true God, even as the other Christian nations have known thee.’”⁵

The eminent church historian Philip Schaff saw this act from a rather disparaging perspective: “Thus the Russian nation was converted in wholesale style to Christianity by despotic power.”⁶ Yet, the spread of Christianity during the 9th through 11th centuries generally worked this way. The peoples of Scandinavia, central Europe and the Balkans were Christianized through the conversion of rulers who supported, often by forceful means, the work of Christian missionaries among their people.

After the Eastern and Western church split in 1054, the rulers and people of the expanding Russian empire continued to follow the Orthodox faith. Under the Czars, Moscow became the religious rival of Latin Christianity, “the Third Rome,” and the bishop of Moscow took the title of Patriarch. As leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, he became a “Russian Pope.” ●



1 Even the most skeptical historians believe the Chronicle provides a generally accurate account of these events.

2 Several decades later, in 1054, a formal split between the church in the East and West occurred.

3 Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, Vol. 1, p. 392.

4 *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, edited and translated by Samuel Hazzard Cross and

Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor in http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/sterk/Byzantine/documents/primary_chronicle.html.

5 Ibid.

6 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 4, “Medieval Christianity,” page 141.

Is the Bible just a white man's book?

By Dan Rogers

In Part One of this article we discovered that God created all people of all races in his image and includes all of them in the saving work of Jesus Christ. According to the Bible, all have sinned, all have fallen short of the glory of God, and all are recipients of his grace through his Son.

The Bible does not set out skin color as a criterion of any kind, regardless of whether a particular people group is specifically mentioned in the Bible. (Part one of this article may be viewed online: <http://www.christianodyssey.org/07/0704white.htm>.)

A number of European Bible scholars of the 18th through 20th centuries wrote as though there were no people of color mentioned in the Scriptures. Others wrote as though the Bible did mention people of color, but interpreted the biblical material in such a way as to justify their subjugation and slavery. Although these unbiblical and ungodly ideas are far less prevalent today, some people of color still are left with the feeling that the Bible is a “white man’s book.”

This article will review biblical passages in which black people are very likely mentioned. Again, it does not really matter whether any particular group of people are singled out for mention in the Bible, because its focus is on how God worked through the people of Israel to bring about the salvation of the whole world, of all peoples, through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the story of the Old Testament is primarily the story of God’s work with Israel. Other nations and peoples are mentioned only insofar as they play into that story. The story of the New Testament is primarily the story of the church, which is ultimately comprised of all peoples from all nations.

Still, there is a strong likelihood that black people did, in fact, have a part in the Bible story. They are mentioned, not because they were black, but because they were there.

Cush

The stories of the Bible took place in and around what we now call the Middle East, and people moved on and off its stage based on their relationship with the nations of ancient Israel and Judah. Consequently the vast majority of the world’s ethnic and racial groups are not specifically identified. But some of those who are identified were black.

There is a strong tradition that some of the descendants of Noah through his son Ham were black. Ham had a son named Cush, which means “black” in Hebrew. Cush is the most common term designating color in reference to persons, people or lands used in the Bible. It’s used 58 times in the King James Version. The Greek and Latin word is Ethiopia. In classical literature, Greek and Roman authors describe Ethiopians as black. Archaeology has found these people to be black. In the book of Jeremiah, the question is asked, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin?”

“...black people did, in fact, have a part in the Bible story. They are mentioned, not because they were black, but because they were there.”

Genesis 10:6-20 describes the descendants of Ham as being located in North Africa, Central Africa and in parts of southern Asia. Psalm 105:23 mentions the “land of Ham” in Egypt, and Psalm 78:51 connects the “tents of Ham” with Egypt.

Other Old Testament evidence

In Genesis 10, Nimrod, son of Cush (whose name means “black”), founded a civilization in Mesopotamia. In Genesis 11, Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldees, a land whose earliest inhabitants included blacks. The people of the region where Abraham came from can be proven historically and archaeologically to have been intermixed racially. So it is possible that Abraham and those who traveled with him could have been racially mixed.

Genesis 14 tells how Abraham’s experiences in Canaan and Egypt brought him and his family into areas inhabited by peoples who were very likely

black. Both archaeological evidence and the account in 1 Chronicles 4 tell us that the land of Canaan was inhabited by the descendants of Ham.

Further black presence can be found in the accounts of Hagar the Egyptian, Ishmael and his Egyptian wife, and Ishmael's sons, especially Kedar. The Kedarites are mentioned many times in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Nehemiah, and the word *kedar* means "blackness."

Still further evidence of black presence in the patriarchal period appears with Joseph's experiences in Egypt. Joseph married an Egyptian woman, Asenath, who was descended from Mizraim, which made her Hamitic. Thus there is a strong possibility that Asenath was black. She was the mother of Ephraim and Manasseh.

The New Testament

The New Testament also contains ample evidence of a black presence. Acts 8 tells the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, one of the first Gentiles to be baptized. He came from a black region, so he may have been black. In Acts 13 we read of Simeon, called Niger, the Latin term for black. There is also Lucias from Cyrene, a geographical location of black people.

Do these references give us absolute proof? No. But the weight of evidence indicates that blacks were not excluded from "Bible action." Modern scholarly opinion refutes the theologians who argued against a black presence in the Bible. But sadly, the past Euro-centrist

interpretation of the Bible, which did recognize a black presence in the Bible, was deliberately used by some in the past to justify the subjugation and enslavement of peoples of color.

I believe it can be argued that there is a black presence in the Old and New Testaments. But either way, what is certain is that the Bible teaches that God has made all people of one ancestry. All humans—male, female, black, white, red, yellow and brown, are God's children. They are all made in the image of God for salvation through Jesus Christ.

The New Testament makes it clear that no one is excluded from God's love and purpose. Paul tells us that there is "neither Greek nor Jew, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 3:26-29). God's Word concerns, involves and speaks to all people inclusively.

We could sum it up in the words of the popular song:
Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious
in his sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world. ●

Author's note: This two-part article is based on a paper I wrote while studying at Emory University in Atlanta. That paper was the product of much research, in the process of which I amassed a large bibliography. There is not space to include it here. But readers who would like further details may access the complete bibliography on www.christianodyssey.com/bible/africans2.htm.

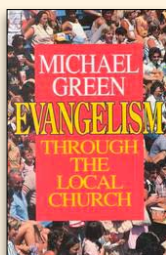
I've Been Reading...

Evangelism Through the Local Church,

by Michael Green

Reviewed by Mike Feazell

A few years ago Dr. Billy Graham visited England, and part of the year of preparation was a study entitled 'Is Your Church Worth Joining?' A tough question but a very proper one. For many churches, frankly, are not worth joining. And lots of people must share that view. The shrinking figures for church attendance in much of Western Europe bear testimony to the fact" (page 83).



Shrinking attendance is one of the major questions facing most churches in the U.S. and Canada. Every church has to face the question: Why should someone want to become a member of our congregation?

As we evaluate the question, Michael Green says, our focus has to return to the gospel itself, to Christ himself, and to taking the positive spiritual steps necessary to conform our local fellowship to the image of Christ. Such a process cannot be accomplished by simply continuing down the old, familiar paths. New spiritual vitality must be introduced into the fabric of the church itself if it is to become a fellowship in which

new believers can be meaningfully nurtured in the faith and prepared for entering kingdom work themselves.

For most churches, this is a challenge of crisis proportions. Michael Green's work may be one of the most practical guides available to help pastors and concerned members find a meaningful path toward becoming the kind of congregation that actually attracts new believing members.

Evangelism Through the Local Church provides more than 500 pages of interesting, inspiring and immediately practical tools for developing a church-wide self-analysis and casting a vision of what needs to be done. It is no longer in print, but used copies are widely available through used book stores, amazon.com, and other online used book outlets. ●

Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992.

The boy in the airport

By Baxter Kruger

On a windy and cold summer day 20 years ago, I stood in the Aberdeen airport in Aberdeen, Scotland, waiting for my older brother to fly in from America. At the time, my wife and I lived in Scotland while I was studying theology with James Torrance. My brother, like me, was a keen golfer, so he was coming for a visit and a few rounds on some of the famed links in bonnie Scotland.

As I waited, I noticed a young man about 30. There were at least 100 other people scurrying about in the airport, but for some reason this young man grabbed my attention. He was obviously waiting for someone and with not a little excitement. Pacing over to the arrivals monitor, he would check his watch and then walk back to the window. This went on for 15 minutes or so, when he stopped his ritual and positioned himself in front of one of the terminal doors.

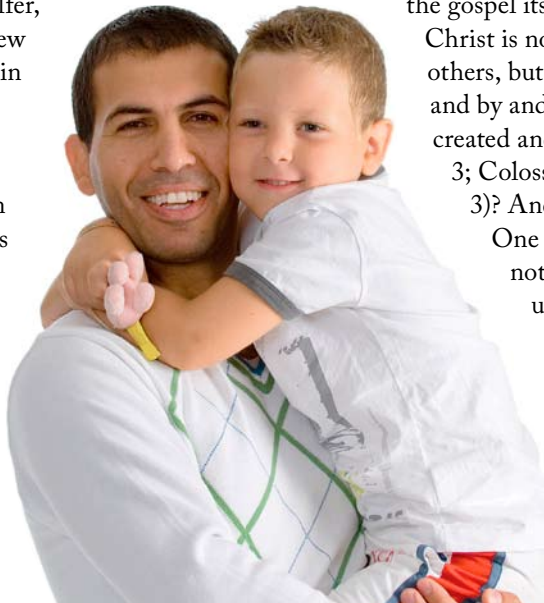
Before long a plane taxied to the terminal, the doors flew open and people hurried through on their way home or to catch their next flight or to find the baggage claim area. Having no clue as to why, I was nevertheless riveted to the young man. Then it happened. A blond-headed little boy of about 11 walked through the doors and stopped dead still. Like an alarmed deer, his eyes scanned the airport. Then he saw his dad and ran to his arms with the fire of the universe. There were tears of joy and laughter. No parent could have watched without tears themselves.

For me, it was like some kind of Einsteinian relativity moment. The airport itself and all within it seemed to slow down, as if everyone had paused to watch. I can still see the little boy's face. He was home. Then I heard a voice inside my own heart calling out, "Baxter, Baxter, there is the gospel."

It was as though the Father was telling me, "The little boy is my Son, Jesus Christ. There is the resurrection. There is the ascension. And there is his

welcome home into my embrace. And the good news, Baxter, is that he has you and the whole world with him."

Could it be that we have underestimated Jesus Christ? Could it be that our American Lone Ranger individualism has blinded us to the core of the gospel itself? Could it be that Jesus Christ is not simply one man among others, but the One in and through and by and for whom all things were created and are sustained (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-3)? And could it be that when this One became one of us he did not break his association with us, but made it far stronger? And could it be that what became of him became of us? Could it be that when he died, we died (2 Corinthians 5:14)? Could it be that when he rose, we rose with him (Ephesians 2:5-6;



“The gospel is the stunning news that the Father’s Son has received us into his life. We don’t make him part of our world; he has made us part of his world...”

1 Peter 1:3)? Could it be that when he ascended, he lifted us up into the Father's embrace (Ephesians 2:6)?

How odd it must seem to the angels to hear preachers imploring us to receive Jesus Christ into our lives, as if we managed to make it into existence and live up until now without him. Have you ever asked your children to receive you into their lives?

Think on this: The gospel is not about us receiving an absent Jesus into our lives. The gospel is the stunning news that the Father's Son has received us into his life. We don't make him part of our world; he has made us part of his world, part of his life with his Father.

Can you see yourself and the human race, and indeed the whole cosmos in that little boy's arms as his father embraced him? Christian faith says, "Amen, yes, Lord, this is who you are and this is who we are. I believe; help my unbelief." ●

New clothes for new people

A study of Colossians 3


By Mike Morrison

Paul has explained that we were buried with Christ and raised to new life in him (Col. 2:12). We are new creations, new people, and our identity is now in Christ. In chapter 3, Paul draws some conclusions about the kind of behavior that should characterize our new identity.

Throughout Colossians, Paul stresses that Christ has done everything that is needed for our salvation. But this does not mean that we sit back and do nothing—Paul gives instructions for how we should respond to what Christ has done.

A life hidden with Christ

Paul begins with general principles: **Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things** (Col. 3:1-2). Earlier, Paul had drawn conclusions from the fact that we died with Christ (2:20). Here, he draws conclusions from the fact that we have a new life with him.



“God is re-creating us, but he does not force this change on us—he tells us to do it: to clothe ourselves in something new.”

Since we are united with Christ, and Christ is with God, that is where we should set our affections. That is what we should desire, and that is what we should think about. This does not mean that we ignore earthly things (Paul has much to say about how we live in this world), but that we bring heavenly qualities to our earthly lives. Paul is moving from a rebuttal of the false teachings, and moving toward a positive statement of how faith works in our lives.

Don't worry about what you used to be. **For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God** (3:3). The old “you” is gone, killed with Christ on the cross and buried with him. Our new identity is in Christ, in God. Although it may not look like it, our real self is to be found with him.

Christ has brought us into the heavenly places (Eph. 1:20), and that should transform the way we think—including the way we think about ourselves. Our new life is to be patterned on the reality that

Christ has brought us into the divine life, into the fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We belong to God, and we should think and act like it.

Our true identity is hidden. “By no means everything about Christian living is apparent, not only to outsiders, for whom much of it appears foolish, but also to Christians themselves, for whom there remains mystery and much questioning until the final revelation.... Its hiddenness necessitates that Christians live by faith and not by sight and, therefore, without all the answers to the meaning of many events in their lives” (A. T. Lincoln, *New Interpreter's Bible* IX, 641).

However, it will be evident to everyone in the future: **When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory** (3:4). Yes, we will be with him in glory in the future—but even now, Christ is our life. We should live in a way that is appropriate for those who live and move and have their being in him.

Out with the old

Paul tells us how to respond to the fact that Christ defines our new life: **Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry** (3:5). We are to eliminate five vices—not just desires for illicit sex, but also for desiring too much stuff.

In chapter 2, Paul criticized the people who said, “Don't do this, don't do that.” But here in chapter 3, Paul has also given a list of things to avoid. There is an important difference. The false philosophy was restricting *things*; Paul is telling us to avoid actions that hurt other people—actions that weaken a sense of community among the people of God.

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming (3:6). God does not like it when some of his children hurt the other children, and punishment is appropriate. But there is no condemnation, and no punishment, for those who died with Christ and now live in him (see Rom. 8:1 and 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Our old life included wrong actions and desires: **You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once**



worthy of the Lord” (1:10).

We are to be like Christ, and we should treat others the way he has treated us: **Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you** (3:13).

The chief virtue, the umbrella term that includes all good behavior, is love—which is also the one-word description of God’s nature. **And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity** (3:14).

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members

of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful (3:15). It is hard to be angry and thankful at the same time. When we remember that we are a barbarian saved by grace, it is hard to be angry at the Scythian who is also saved by grace.

lived (Col. 3:7). But we should stop living that way. **You must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips** (3:8). As people of Christ, our attitudes and words should conform to a new standard. We should eliminate any habits that hurt other people.

Paul concludes with more general exhortations: **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God** (3:16). As we speak to each other and worship together, the message of Christ should dominate our thoughts. He has changed our identity, and that should change everything else.

In with the new

Do not lie to each other. Why? Because you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (3:9-10). We are to change our approach to life because we have a new life.

God is re-creating us, but he does not force this change upon us—he tells us to do it: to put on, or to clothe ourselves, in something new. We are to make choices in the light of who we are. We are to become more and more like Christ is, because that is who we are. “No system of ‘dos and don’ts’ can create the image of God in humans.... The new life of obedience does not depend on [our] own feeble moral resolve but comes from being united with Christ” (David Garland, *Colossians and Philemon*, 203, 207).

Our identity is not in our ethnic group, our education, or our social status. **Here [in Christ] there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all** (3:11). Christ is the epitome, the standard, the model, of everything that humanity was ever intended to be, and everyone finds their true identity in him. Rich and poor, sophisticated and simple, young and old, we are one in Christ.

How then should we live? **Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience** (4:12). Since God has already chosen us, we should respond with these five virtues. These behaviors cannot make us worthy of salvation, but they are part of “a life

Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (3:17). All of life, both words and deeds, are done in Christ, because he is our life. Verses 15, 16, and 17 all end on a note of thanks. Praise God for what he has done for us in Christ! •

Questions for discussion

- Does my behavior reflect the fact that my life is hidden in God? (v. 3)
- Would Christianity have a different reputation if churches preached more against greed? (v. 5)
- If God has wrath (v. 6), why should Christians eliminate anger? (v. 8, same Greek word)
- How do social divisions affect Christian unity today? (v. 11)
- What happens if I don’t put on the clothing that Paul describes? (v. 12)
- In my congregation, do we teach and admonish one another? (v. 16)

We do not have space to discuss all of chapter 3, just as we did not for chapters 1 and 2. Our website includes commentary on all the verses in Colossians.

Hmm...

Grace is not a “thing” – a heavenly gas, a pseudo-substance, which can be passed to and fro or pumped down pipelines. The word “grace” is a shorthand way of speaking about God himself, the God who loves totally and unconditionally, whose love overflows in self-giving in creation, in redemption, in rooting out evil and sin and death from his world, in bringing to life that which was dead.

N. T. Wright,
What Saint Paul Really Said, p. 61

I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.

Helen Keller

I have discovered that the people who believe most strongly in the next life do the most good in the present one.

C.S. Lewis

A man of quality is never threatened by a woman of equality.

Jill Briscoe

I used to think that life was hills and valleys – you go through a dark time, then you go to the mountaintop, back and forth. I don’t believe that anymore.

Rather than life being hills and valleys, I believe that it’s

kind of like two rails on a railroad track, and at all times you have something good and something bad in your life.

No matter how good things are in your life, there is always something bad that needs to be worked on.

And no matter how bad things are in your life, there is always something good you can thank God for.

Rick Warren

Grandmas

Grandmas are moms with lots of frosting.

Author Unknown

What a bargain grandchildren are! I give them my loose change, and they give me a million dollars’ worth of pleasure.

Gene Perret

Grandmother always made you feel she had been waiting to see just you all day and now the day was complete.

Marcy DeMaree

Perfect love sometimes does not come until the first grandchild.

Welsh Proverb

Becoming a grandmother is wonderful. One moment

you’re just a mother. The next you are all-wise and prehistoric.

Pam Brown

Grandchildren don’t stay young forever, which is good because Granddaddies have only so many horsey rides in them.

Gene Perret

It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.

Mark Twain

Christianity might be a good thing if anyone ever tried it.

George Bernard Shaw

Apart from man, no being wonders at his own existence.

Arthur Schopenhauer

Whenever two people meet there are really six people present. There is each man as he sees himself, each man as the other person sees him, and each man as he really is.

William James

There is no stigma attached to recognizing a bad decision in time to install a better one.

Laurence J. Peter

When a man is wrapped up in himself, he makes a pretty small package.

John Ruskin

In Other Words

Who’s afraid of the big, bad... lion?

By James R. Henderson

The Maasai tribe are the great lion hunters of East Africa, and stories of their courage in attack and victory are endless.

When lions are hungry, they are cunning and relentless as they hunt and kill their prey. They will patiently watch a herd of zebra or antelope, looking for the weak or vulnerable animals, and then they pounce. After the kill, little is left for vultures and other scavengers.

Yet the lions fear the Maasai and have learned to flee from them. The saying goes that “the Maasai aren’t afraid of the lions: the lions are afraid of the Maasai.”

Scripture tells us that the devil is like a roaring lion who seeks to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). Yet Scripture also reminds us that if we resist Satan he will flee from us (James 4:7). Just like the lions run from the Maasai, our adversary, despite being more powerful than we are, runs from us as Jesus helps us resist him through prayer and closeness to God.

Be like the Maasai. Send our enemy, that adversarial lion, packing.

