

106-120

106-When John sat on Patmos he was isolated from the world. But, that's obvious. What may not be as obvious is that the world he once knew really didn't exist anymore anyway. Judaism was totally different for the destruction of the temple had eradicated the heart of what Judaism had been. The church wasn't exactly as he'd known it was increasingly a gentile movement. That's not how it had started. Even the empire was in transition. Instability in Rome had opened the door to a whole series of less-than-capable emperors. Yes, he was isolated from his world, but that world really no longer existed anyway.

107-Many who are interested in the Bible world really have no idea of the degree of tensions between Rome and the populace of Palestine. We know they didn't like each other much but let me give you a statistic that will reveal how problematic the whole scenario was. For the first 400 or so years of the Roman Empire they usually had about 20-21 legions active throughout their world. At any given time Rome actually assigned 3-4 legions in the district of Palestine. Really! Basically 1/7th of Roman military might was tied up in a section of territory no bigger than "East Tennessee" or the state of Massachusetts! That's just flat astounding.

108-Have you ever realized that the most important mountain in the Bible psyche really doesn't exist as a geographic location? Sinai, Moriah, Hermon, Carmel, Olivet... these (and others) are all important in the Bible story. But, the most important mountain of all is Mt. Zion. And, Zion doesn't exist! You'll never find it pinpointed on any Bible map. Zion is where God dwells. It's not permanently anywhere that you can point to on a map. How curious is that?

109-Sixty-five years after the Jerusalem temple was destroyed there was one more major clash between Judaism and the empire. You don't read about it in the Bible for it's decades past the last of the Bible writers were alive, but you can't really understand the big picture of the Bible without learning of this last great revolt against Rome. From that point forward it was literally the edict of the emperor that if a Jew even got to the place where he could see the city of Jerusalem he could be crucified for it. It surely is the sad conclusion to the question that the disciples asked in Matthew 24... "Lord, what about this temple and this city?"

110-The "manna" story may give an insight into why some weeks at church you feel really blessed and other times you feel like you walk away unfulfilled. In that analogy God told His people that if they wanted to eat on Sabbath they had to prepare for it. They needed to gather each and every day, and then gather twice as much on Friday if they wanted to eat on Sabbath. Maybe I come away from some worship events empty because I didn't get ready for the filling!

111-There's a part of the observant Jew's ritual that really teaches a special lesson about what Sabbath is and what it is to be. On Friday night two separate candles are lit to start the sacred hours. When the Sabbath ends on Saturday night another candle is lit, this is called the "Havdalah." It's a braided, twisted candle of multiple wicks (usually 6 or more.) The lesson is obvious- when you start Sabbath normal daily life has fractured important things. The Sabbath provides the time and opportunity to have those most important things put back together in unity again. God, man, family, marriage, congregation... all of these things can be put back into their right priority when the Sabbath is allowed to do its work.

112-Did you know that the Shofar (Biblical "ram's horn") can be the horn of any clean animal except for a cow? What's up with that? The Rabbis have a simple explanation- "We don't even want to be tempted to remember the whole Golden Calf story. Let's not have a cow be part of this at all!" Curious!

113-You may consider this a silly exercise in thought, but it intrigues me. Can God break any of His own commandments? If you read the listing of Exodus 20 you realize that He can't steal... all is His. He can't covet for the same reason. He can't murder for life is His... He can give and He can take away whatever is His. Can He take His own name in vain? Can He build an image of Himself? But, can God "break the Sabbath?" That's a curiosity. I'd actually encourage you to wrestle with this.

114-Certain sounds have just been programmed in us to evoke a certain sense of the transcendent. A chant, a pipe organ, a gong... these each evoke something deeply embedded in many of us. For Judaism it's the sound of the shofar. It's so significant that Judaism understands that the greater blessing is not in being the one who blows the horn but being one who has the privilege of hearing the horn!

115-The "star of David" is really not an ancient "logo" for Israel. In truth, it's rather contemporary (from the early era of "Zionism" in the late 18th c.) Still, if you look at the flag of the modern state of Israel it's actually not the "Star of David" that should cause you to consider the long history of the nation... it's the colors. The blue stripes on white triggers a long-held reminder of how God commanded He would "mark" His nation back in Numbers 15.

116-We surely might assume that Moses and his people didn't have a clue as to why God gave various commands for issues of public health and hygiene. Many of those areas of restriction can easily be seen as being incredibly wise through the lens of contemporary science. One of those, of course, would be the dictates related to issues of blood contamination. Today we have deep insights into the repercussions of blood-borne pathogens. In those days it was simply a matter of faith to assume that God knew best.

117- The first non-priest Israeli who went through the Jordan into the land may have been a Gentile. Really! After the priests the tribe of Judah led the way. The venerable old patriarch of Judah was Caleb. The Bible calls him a "Kenazite." We don't know if that's a family name or a neighborhood name or a "tribal" name. If it's related to "tribe" that means Caleb could have been one of the converts who admired the God of the plagues and nobly joined in and then made his mark on the nation. Caleb might have been a converted Gentile. How great is that?

118- An eye for an eye was never justice. A 23 year old killing a 74 year old is not exactly the same thing as a 74 year old killing a 23 year old. If you have excellent eyesight and I have 20/400 our loss is not exactly the same. "An eye for an eye" was more equitable than many common punishments of the age but Jesus knew it was never justice.

119- Satan needs your help. Really. In the system God established no one could be condemned on the testimony of only one. There had to be at least two "agreeing" witnesses. So, when "the accuser of the brethren" testifies against you in the judgment he's not going to find support from God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit or any of the angels if you are a forgiven friend. We really need to stop helping him build his case by self-recrimination, don't you see?

120- David took five smooth stones. It wasn't that he thought he was going to miss. He knew he needed four in reserve because it was the age of "kindred avenger" and the Bible tells us that Goliath had four brothers!