

91-105

91-What happened when the robes of the priests wore out or got stained in such a manner that it was no longer appropriate for service in the House of the Lord? They got recycled. I'm not kidding! There are sources that tell us that the wicks of the seven-branched candlestick were made from braiding the shredded robes of the priests. That's colorful!

92-No authority today can actually tell you exactly what the breastplate of the High Priest looked like. Yes, we may have a general understanding of 12 stones that representing the tribes being patterned on a base of gold but we know very little else. Were the stones placed by order of the "seniority" of the tribes? Were they placed on the base in the same pattern as where the tribes were camped around the tent of the Lord? We just don't know... and it's probably a good thing for human nature might cause some of us to create a bit of an idol or imitation or something. Some of this is still mystery to us, and probably for a good reason.

93-We truly have no authoritative Jewish source that tells us how the *Urim* and *Thummim* were used to reveal the will of the Lord. Some have speculated that they were like dice. Some thought that one may have been white and the other black and "whichever one landed on top..." or something. Others have claimed that they acted like some kind of "magic 8-ball" kind of thing or something. Others have thought of glowing or clouding... But the truth is that if you go to the Mishnah or traditionally Jewish sources you get nothing but rabbinic speculation. It wasn't something that the Bible fully explained and that's why it's such a mystery in the sources.

94-The Most Holy section (1/3rd) in the Sanctuary wasn't much bigger than a one car garage. Isn't that amazing? What a relief that must have been to the Hebrews when Moses came down from the mountain announcing that the God who overwhelmed all Egypt's deities was only asking for a little tent instead of another massive structure like those they had helped to build for Egypt's gods.

95-Sometimes we are given astounding evidence of the accuracy of prophecy. One of those amazing insights comes from the link between Abraham and Moses. God told Abraham that his family would be blessed but that there would be some mocking and persecution and abuse before it was all realized. Then, Exodus 12 reports that the children of Abraham did step out from the shadow of Egypt's persecution and mocking on the exact anniversary of the prophecy. "On the self-same day..." How amazing is that?

96-Daniel seems to have understood the exact nature of prophecy. In chapter nine it sort of implies that he was sitting by the side of the river with a pocket calculator or abacus (or something) seeking to discover when God was going to lead His people back to freedom from exile. Of course I'm exaggerating about the technology, but he clearly was counting the years from II Chronicles 36 to his day. When he did it he had absolute conviction that deliverance time was near. Daniel trusted the words of God's other prophets too!

97-The Bible reveals that when it's all said and done that Satan won't be in charge of anything. In fact, if there's any justice in this universe he will need to pay for what he's done. The book of Esther gives a bit of an enacted analogy of this when you discover the fate of Haman. He wanted to dance on Mordecai's grave and be exalted. In the end Haman got the fate he intended for Haman. And, the Bible says (Malachi 4:3) that the friends of God will ultimately walk on the ashes of the enemies... sort of dancing on their graves!

98-In spite of the fact that the book of Esther is completely devoid of any reference to God, it contains one of the sweetest parallels to the ministry of Jesus to be found anywhere in the Bible. When the friends of Esther are at terrible risk they need someone who can approach the king on their behalf and be received and fully accepted. That is very much the reality that each of us face. You and I can never approach the holy God. But, never fear, we have an Intermediary who is more than happy to carry our requests and appeals to the throne room to the King. He "ever lives to make intercession" and when He is accepted we are vicariously accepted by the high God, too! That's enough to keep you praising for a while...

99-It's easy to admire the faithful exiles who returned to the land in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. We honor their dedication and commitment to rebuild the land. Ezra 2 tells us that roughly 90,000 people heard the call and responded. But, I have some bad news for you. It is estimated that more than a million Jews may have been living in Persian and Babylon at that time and the vast majority, obviously, decided that staying behind in the alien land was preferable to going home to the hard work of rebuilding. (In fact, we know that the "Babylonian Jewish Community" was the largest population of Judaism anywhere in the world, even into the middle ages- and, that includes the land of Israel! Many just didn't care enough, apparently.)

100-Have you ever noticed that the story of "the rich young ruler" doesn't at all end the way you expect it to? Look it up... it actually DOESN'T end at all! It is a story that let's us speculate as to what might have been. Not one of the three versions (Matthew 19, Mark 10 and Luke 18) actually tells you how the story ended. I like that because it allows us to speculate on various possibilities. I'd like to believe that the one who "went away sorrowful" had time to contemplate the big picture and that he actually came back at a later date to make his commitment to the Lordship of Jesus. Why not?

101-Excellent teachers use a variety of methods to get a lesson across. Great teachers use questions and speculations and and even can be, at times, a bit facetious in order to get their pupils to discover the truth. In some ways I think Jesus was being that way with the previously mentioned "Rich Young Ruler" story. Otherwise, why would He say, "Sell all you have and give to the poor and you earn Heaven" for his answer to the question, "What good thing must I do?" Do we honestly think that Jesus would have just left it there? If that were true we wouldn't need Him and we wouldn't need the cross. Jesus was going for a deeper truth, I'm quite sure of it.

102-In Mark 10 Jesus promises that His followers would have all kinds of things multiplied- homes, parents, brothers, sisters... and Heaven on top of it! He said this in the context of an expressed concern by some of His followers that they were had to give up so much to follow Him. "What? I'm actually promising you more than you could ever have without Me..." Except spouses. Look at the list, there are all kinds of things promised but He doesn't guarantee that He will help you multiply husbands or wives. How curious is that?

103-One of the men who seems to have become very important in the early church actually did not belong in the cluster of early followers by most accounts. The "Ethiopian" who seems to be the first to take insights of Jesus back into North Africa was not Jewish, was not of Judean or Galilean culture and would have been culturally completely out of place with nearly every other early Christian. More than that, in the old system he would have been totally rejected because he was mutilated. As a eunuch he normally would not have found acceptance in anyone's synagogue. Jesus really DID open the doors of the Kingdom a whole lot wider than His followers were used to having as the norm.

104-Does anyone really, really assume that Peter read total "dietary liberty" into the vision of Acts 10? Did this veteran Jew actually believe that God was expecting him to eat cockroaches and rats? I just don't feel that was anywhere near what Peter first thought the vision represented. Of course, by the time he made it to the front door (where Cornelius' entourage was waiting for him) he certainly had it sorted out. He surely was able to give a correct application to the dream. It wasn't about food. It doesn't say anything about dietary issues- either as a release from the old system or an affirmation of the old system. "Now I know..." tells us it was completely about people and not at all about food.

105-God behind history is a fascinating study. One of the areas that I enjoy is the contrast between the world that Alexander the Great created and what the Romans did in its re-creation. Both of those powers absolutely contributed to "setting the world up" for the story of the gospel. The Greeks unified language, but the Romans brought more stability. The Greeks brought international interaction but the Romans approved a degree of religious liberty. There are many more complimentary contrasts and each of them show that both the Greeks and the Romans actually helped create the soil for the birth of the gospel... and it had to be with the Greeks first!