

# Truth To Wonder

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# Hope And Hebbs

Some will seek to justify their behaviours by arguing that they are 'born this way', and that their brains are hardwired to function and behave in defined, prepared patterns and behaviours. This believed hardwired state of the brain and mind, therefore renders the individual a slave to their biochemistry. If this were the case, then discriminating against any behaviour is theoretically unjust, as the individual who behaves in an irresponsible, inappropriate or even criminal way, is merely following a pre-determined neurological map that they have no control over.

Thankfully however, neuroscience has long shown such an assertion to be false. Back in 1949, the Canadian psychologist Donald Hebb introduced in his book *The Organisation of Behaviour,* the theory that "neurons that fire together, wire together." In other words, when neuron cell A consistently fires to fire another neuron, neuron B, the connection between cells A and B becomes stronger and more efficient. This is called Synaptic Plasticity or Neural Plasticity, where the brain can form new, strong pathways between neurons that consistently work together. This is how a new skill is learnt over time, as repeated practice of that skill develops the pathway between the respective neurons until the link is strong and efficient. It is then that the repeated action becomes a learnt skill that can be done with efficacy.

The plasticity of the brain has been confirmed again and again in neuroscience since the work of Donald Hebb back in the 1940's. Countless neurological studies have confirmed exactly what Donald Hebb theorised and his name has since been attributed to the foundational mantra of neuroscience. That being those neurons that "fire together, wire together." This is now known as Hebb's Law, a foundational understanding of the modern understanding of the intricate workings of our brains.

Interestingly, such neural plasticity is not reserved for the learning of new skills through repeated practice. It is also evident in the formation of habits and repeated behaviours. When a new habit begins, the neural pathway for the required task is thin and inefficient. Think of the first time you may have cracked your knuckles for example. As it was a new activity for your brain, you had to make a conscious decision to crack your knuckles. Then over repeated determined and conscious choices to crack your knuckles, the neural pathways used in the brain to perform this function, became stronger and more efficient in their connection. This is turn lead you to needing to use less and less conscious effort to crack your knuckles, until the neurological pathways became so efficient, that you now crack your knuckles without thinking.



Studies have shown that it takes on average 21 to 66 consecutive days of repetitive action for a new behaviour to become wired into the brain. This process of Hebbian learning as it is known, can be further accelerated if the new habit/behaviour is attached to an already established action. For example, if you decided to start flossing daily, the action would become routine to you far quicker if you attached it to your morning/nightly routine of brushing your teeth.

Many times, these new habits/behaviours form so efficiently, that a cue or outside trigger can be enough to cause the brain to perform the associated action. For example, if I started biting my nails or grinding my teeth when I am stressed, the first few times I performed this action, I would make a conscious choice to bite my nails or grind my teeth in such situations. Over repeated use of this action in stressful situations, the neural pathways would become so strong, that they would activate on cue without me even making a conscious choice to bite my nails or grind my teeth. Hence why someone who is biting their nails or grinding their teeth in a stressful situation, is often unaware they are doing it. Their brain has become so efficient at associating the cue with the reaction, that it performs the act without conscious effort.

Whilst it is easy for new behaviours/habits to be built up in the brain under Hebb's Law, it is very difficult to rewire what has become established neurologically. Thankfully, the plasticity of the brain means that it is possible to rewire it through two neurological acts. Firstly, there is 'Synaptic Pruning'. This is where the

individual makes a conscious effort to identify the triggers of their habits/behaviours and take steps to avoid them. For example, if you have a habit of checking your phone first thing on waking up in the morning, you can rewire the brain to stop this habit by making the decision to leave your phone in another room when you go to bed. You are simply avoiding the trigger or cue for the habit chain to begin. This then weakens the neural pathways for that habit/behaviour over time until it doesn't fire automatically anymore.

Secondly, there is the Substitution Rule (Rewiring). Rather than going 'cold turkey' on the existing habit/behaviour, you intercept the habit cue and choose a different response to it (a substitute). This takes the existing neural pathway of the old habit/behaviour but redirects it to a more beneficial outcome. For example, instead of leaving your phone in a different room every night so you don't immediately pick it up on waking in the morning, you replace that act on waking with a time of prayer. Rather than looking for interaction immediately with emails, the news feed, etc, you are looking for an interaction with your Lord and God.

Whilst these neurological discoveries are fascinating, none of them should catch the Bible believer by surprise. The Holy Bible makes it abundantly clear, time and time again, that we are a slave to sin (Romans 6:16-17, Romans 6:20, John 8:34), with our thoughts and desires following these long-established routines of wicked behaviour. We initially chased after such sins because of the allure of the fleshly reward they gave. The sinful acts promised a pleasing sensation, whether that be physical, mental or both, and so we made a conscious choice to indulge in them. The more we indulged in them, the more the brain formed neural pathways that made the choice to indulge in them more efficient. Soon, we found ourselves indulging in them when we weren't even that inclined to perform them, they had become routine, a response to an external trigger. Soon, we become addicted to it, enslaved to sin. As we can see then, there is a neurological aspect as to why the Apostle Paul says what he says in Romans 7:19-21.

The neurological ways of combating such ingrained habits/behaviours have long been established in Holy Scripture. Synaptic Pruning was being done by faithful servants of God for thousands of years under the simple practice of 'fleeing from sin'. The Apostle Paul made it clear that avoiding bad habits/behaviours and choices in the first place, was the best remedy when he said 'flee also youthful lusts' (2 Timothy 2:22).

The second part of 2 Timothy 2:22, displays the second neurological 'hack' as to how we can rewire our brain for the better, through Substitution Rule. Paul instructs Timothy to flee youthful lusts, and then replace them with 'righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them call on the Lord out of a pure heart.' The instruction is to replace the wicked habits/behaviours with a mind that chooses godly thoughts and desires and seeks the Lord with a pure heart. Thus, every time we face the temptation to return to an old habit/behaviour, we are best to take that thought and replace it with a thought of the goodness of our Saviour, asking Him that He would deliver us from the evil that is tempting us.

Herein is a tremendous hope as to why we are to count it all joy when we fall into temptations and trials (James 1:2-3). Such times, gives us an opportunity to choose to rewire our brains through a conscious choice to pursue Christ and not our fallen lusts. Such times of temptation can be used to rebuild our brains into a machine that functions cleaner and more efficiently for the glory of God, also ridding us of the damaging habits/behaviours we were once slaves to. This is why we are told such times try our faith, and when our faith is founded upon the strength and grace of Christ Jesus, we are blessed with a wondrous patience. That patience being the freeing of our minds from the shackles and chains of being enslaved to sinful acts and lusts. We are given a patience that reveals the treasure of this world for what it is, muck; and instead wait for a bountiful eternal reward in Heaven!

We are not consigned to a life enslaved to our biochemical, neurological makeup. Our mind is not simply our brain. The brain is a marvellous tool that can be refined and moulded into a staggeringly complex vehicle, for our minds to come to freedom in a personal relationship with our Creator God through Christ Jesus! There is tremendous hope in all these discoveries that none are too far gone to be reached by the saving arm of Jesus Christ, and that He can indeed heal what many have told themselves is too broken for healing. You may have been born in sin; we all have. Yet you need not die in sin! You can find freedom from the vices/habits/behaviours/choices that are heavily enslaving you every day, and you can find it in the Son of God! He alone can truly shatter those chains and give you a hope that one day, the body that still struggles with

sinful lusts at times, will also be set free from its weaknesses. It too shall be glorified and made whole, as the spirits of His redeemed are now reborn in Him! Whilst we wait, for that blessed day, let us take captive our thoughts (2 Corinthians 10:5), showing our obedience to our Saviour and God, so that we can know with certainty, that because we desire to follow His commandments truly, we truly love Him indeed (John 14:15). Amen.

## A Moment Of Encouragement

Being a faithful believer in Christ, can often feel like a very lonely existence. This is made to feel more real by how increasingly secular modern life has become. Such worrying trends of societal drift are concerning enough for the mature Christian, yet it is doubly so for Christian parents looking to instil a fear and reverence for the Lord God and His Word, into their dear little ones.

So it was with cautious hope, that I greeted the news of potential parent prayer group being started at my youngest child's school. I attended the first meeting with a degree of hesitation as to what might take place. What I found though was a small collection of sincere parents who were wanting to be some small witness for the power of prayer to the school populace. The prayers were thoughtful yet earnest, as each attendee offered their petitions to the Lord with a welcome honesty. Everyone was understandably nervous on meeting each other for the first time (myself included). Yet coming away from the meeting, I felt encouraged by what I had seen and heard. The trusting and open appeals to the Lord's goodness and provision that sought His will to be done, was a welcome boost to my own soul.

I later found out that the headmaster of my youngest child's school, had been keen for the group to start and will hopefully join the meetings when his schedule allows him. This news went along with the times I have seen him speak at school assemblies, where he often weaves well worded witnesses into his message to the staff and children alike.

Though the witness is small and humble at this point, it has been wonderfully encouraging to know that there are other faithful Christian parents at the school. I had passed by them hundreds of times in the playground without ever knowing they were brothers and sisters in Christ. Yet, through this fledgling venture started by a mum with a burden to serve the Lord in this small way, we who were once nameless strangers to each other, are now a smiling encouragement to each other in the playground, all by the Lord's grace.



I very much pray that the Lord will bless and watch over this fledgling group, and indeed the quiet work being done by the school headmaster and the other Christian staff working there. It can so easily be the case, as Elijah found, that we assume the worst and believe that we alone are holding the fort for Christ Jesus. This incorrect thought can further isolate us from potential encouragement from other believers, as the Devil will always look to dishearten and discourage the Lord's own. If the Devil cannot stop the will of God, he can make believers so discouraged and drained that they become ineffective witnesses of God's loving will. When such discouragement takes hold on a Christian's life, it can sometimes lead us to remove ourselves from the needed correction and encouragement of other brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. We must remember that the Lord will always have His witnesses, all the way through to the close of this world. We may not know of them, but again as Elijah found out, God knows who they are and where they are; that should be sufficient for us to not become downcast in our efforts for Gospel.

So be encouraged brothers and sisters! There are others, you are not alone in your love for Christ Jesus! Knowing this, earnestly pray for them, even though they may not be known to you yet, this does not prohibit your prayers for the Lord's keeping of them. Then perhaps, if it be good in the Lord's sight, He will lead you to meet some of those other faithful servants. That should be a great and motivating hope to each of us today,

to keep labouring for the glory of Christ Jesus and the Gospel. For through Him, we can know encouragement for these mortal days that will prepare us for eternal glories in Heavenly splendour. Amen.

## The Bankrupting Of A Nation

Britain is in increasingly dire financial straits, no one will disagree with such a statement. Government borrowing continues to rise, with the welfare budget being an enormous pull on the nation's finances. As the news reports are consistently highlighting, the bill faced by PIP claimants is rising rapidly. However, what is often being neglected as part of the news, is the amount being awarded to claimants with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and ADHD.

Since 2019, awards given to new claimants on mental health grounds have increased from approximately 2500 per month, to 8,800 per month in 2024. Current data from the DWP suggests that between 100-250 new PIP cases based on psychiatric troubles are awarded **every day**. Indeed, it is estimated that over 1.5 million claims (about 39% of the total awards given) are paid out to psychiatric conditions.

The huge cost of such claims is pulling on the ever-stretched financial resources of our crumbling nation, to the point that our military effectiveness is being hollowed out at a truly dangerous time in world politics. It could be argued, however, the greater issue is that all this is symptomatic of a nation whose spiritual armaments are being hollowed out. In the last few years, what had been the gradual decline of Christianity in Britain over previous decades, has accelerated at breakneck speed. In the corresponding time, the strain on people's mental health has dramatically increased, as the data highlighted earlier clearly shows.

Historically, Great Britain's time of wealth and prosperity, was clearly during the same era when the nation was a 'Christian Nation.' God blessed these lands with an empire that was the biggest ever known, both measured by land mass and population. It covered 13.71 million square miles (35.5 million square kilometres), totalling 23.8% of the Earth's total land area at its peak in 1920. It governed over 413 million people by 1913, which was equal to roughly 23% of the world's populace at the time.

Now if we look at the average weekly church attendance in 1910-1920, it stood at 25%. If we include those who attended every month, that number rises to 40%. That makes a quarter of Britain weekly church goers (also not included those who attended independent churches) at the height of Britain's empire. There is clearly a link between the populace's faithfulness and the blessing of the said populace by God. Conversely, the numbers today show that under 5% of Britain's population attend church even semi-regularly (once a month). Furthermore, it is estimated that 66% of the current population never attend any religious services. Britain is quite clearly a secular nation now, and the wealth of the land has plummeted in a correlation that cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence.

It is well known amongst psychiatric circles, that religious faith significantly increases the stability of an individual's mental health. What we have witnessed in our own land, is the self-destructive slide into a much publicised 'mental health crisis'. A crisis that has filled the gap where Christian faith once stood strong amongst the populace as a protective measure against such struggles.



Many do struggle with issues such as anxiety, depression, etc (Spurgeon for one knew such struggles well). Yet, the long-term answer to such troubles is not in expensive secular counselling sessions or well-meaning but often misguided welfare payments. The answer lays in giving such affected lives a tangible solution to their struggles, one that is relevant and personal to their own, individual need. That of course is the Lord Jesus Christ. His

treatment plan is available 24/7, at any location, with universal eligibility, a 100% success rate and completely free!

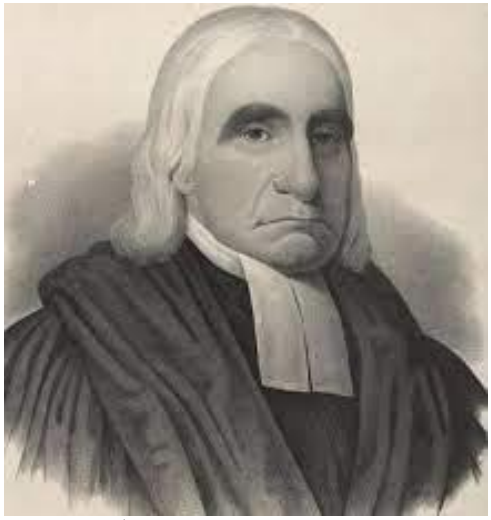
The answer to the strained economy, the crumbling morality of the land, the increasing mental health crisis, and the very safety of the nation is all to be found in one glorious place. Nay, it is to be found in one glorious person! This is what makes it even more wonderful, that the answer to our land's woes is held in the loving, gracious and merciful hands of the same God who first blessed these Isles generations ago. He has not changed in His desire for us to know Him and live in delighted obedience to His commandments, those given for our good and His glory. He stands ready and able to forgive this land, and not only that but heal it and make it a monument to His goodness, mercy, grace and love to all the world! He has done so with these lands once (research what Britain was like just before the work of Wesley and Whitefield!), and He remains able to do so again! As Spurgeon observed, the grace of Christ far exceeds the sins of man. Let us pray for our land, our nation, our people, that God may have mercy upon us as He did upon the wicked Ninevites under the preaching of Jonah.

## Howell Harris (1714-73)

Something remarkable happened across the British Isles in the 18th century. Whilst these isles were plagued with all manner of social/political storms, partly due to a generally lifeless national church, God raised up a collection of men that led Britain back from the brink of revolution. Men such as Wesley, Whitefield, Rowland, Williams, and another powerful preacher called Howell Harris.

Harris was born in Trefeca, near Brecon in southwest Wales in 1714. Working as a schoolmaster at the time, Harris came to Christ in the Easter of 1735, having heard a fiery sermon in his parish church. The intensity of Harris' conversion led into his immediate and passionate desire to reach sinners with the good news of the Gospel. So, he began visiting friends and neighbours to read to them from godly books. He wrote in one of his 280 surviving diaries that he had, "some insatiable desires after the salvation of poor sinners; my heart longed for their being convinced of their sins and misery."

It wasn't long however before Harris starting preaching or "exhorting" as he termed it. By 1736, Harris had organised new converts to Christ, into small 'societies' or *seidau* for their continued support and fellowship. It didn't take long for 50 of these societies to have emerged and become a thriving network of believers across the region.



Unknown to Harris, Daniel Rowland was also being used by God to undertake a similar work in West Wales. The two met in 1737 and quickly began to combine their skills and resources, effectively creating the Welsh Methodist movement.

Not long later, in 1738, George Whitefield contacted Harris, and visited him after having returned to Britain from the American colonies. When Whitefield saw Harris in action and heard the power of his Gospel preaching, Whitefield desired to "catch some of his fire" (referring to Harris). As the two became good friends, Whitefield took Harris back to London with him, and it was there that Harris met John and Charles Wesley. From there on, Harris divided much of his time between England and Wales, often finding himself as a peace maker between the sometimes fractious factions of the revival in England (Wesleyan, Calvinist and Moravian).

Harris was a powerful and effective preacher of the Gospel, yet he was also a skilled organiser and administrator. He linked the Welsh Methodist movement to the English Calvinistic Methodist movement,

becoming General Superintendent of the movement in Wales, working alongside Whitefield and effectively acting as his deputy.

When Whitefield returned to the American Colonies in 1744-48, Harris took on more responsibility in the Methodist movement. However, the heavy workload, spiritual responsibility of leadership, and constant travel over many, many years, meant Harris was near total exhaustion and physical breakdown. Furthermore, Harris relationship with Daniel Rowland became increasingly strained, as the two saw each other as rivals, with Harris often feeling inferior in that he was not an ordained clergyman like Rowland. It was also during this time that some were beginning to become unsure as to some of Harris' theological views. For example, Harris' sometimes confused language on the Trinity caused questions to rise amongst his doubters.

The gathering storm clouds over Harris eventually collapsed overhead. It appears the toll of all these factors led him down a bad path, as he began an inappropriate relationship with a Sidney Griffith, the estranged wife of a squire from North Wales. Harris wrote in his diary that God had revealed to him that his then wife was soon to die, and so his growing relationship with Griffith was allowed to his mind.

Harris sought to enable Griffith with prophetic gifts and demanded she was given a place of prominence at Methodist Association meetings. It wasn't long before Whitefield acted on this troubling development, and Harris was removed from the Tabernacle Society in 1750. Harris' voice in the Welsh Methodist revivals would never be the same again, as Rowland and William Williams became the leads of the movement.

In the following years, Harris reconciled with his long-suffering wife, Anne, after the death of Griffith in 1752. He concentrated his efforts at that time in establishing what some would call today a religious commune in his home of Trefeca. His pioneering agricultural work in this community earned him election to the Breconshire Agricultural Society in 1756. During the Seven Year's War (1756-63), Harris also actively worked as a recruiting agent in East Anglia for the Protestant stand against Catholic France.

Before the close of Harris' life, there was a partial reintegration to the Welsh Methodist movement. Thanks to the publication of William Williams popular hymn book in 1762, another revival broke out in Wales, and Harris was able to return to his early bond with Daniel Rowland in furthering the revival. However, Harris was not the force he once was, and his work was very much in the background of Rowland and Williams.

Howell Harris was a powerful Gospel preacher and was the first of the leaders of the Methodist movement to come to faith in Christ Jesus. This made him a pioneering voice in the movement, as he was the first to preach in the open air, and the first to see the powerful work of God in revivals. His organisational skills remained a feature of the Welsh Methodist Movement for decades to come, making it the largest denomination in Wales by the turn of the 20th century. Yet for all his merits, he was still a mortal sinner. His affair with Sidney Griffith brought the Methodist movement into disrepute, almost completely derailing it at the time. Some also disliked his manner, as they viewed him as arrogant, belligerent and authoritarian.

As with all men of God, Harris' life displays the wonders that God can perform with a humble heart that is in step with His own. Yet it also shows that all glory for such wonders remains firmly upon the name of Christ Jesus, and not the preacher. For every man, no matter how mighty and imposing the servant may seem, is still a sinner and will stumble into sin. So, whilst we are to be thankful for the labours of such men as Harris, we are never to venerate them or place them above the name of Christ Jesus.

## Grief – The Thief of True Peace

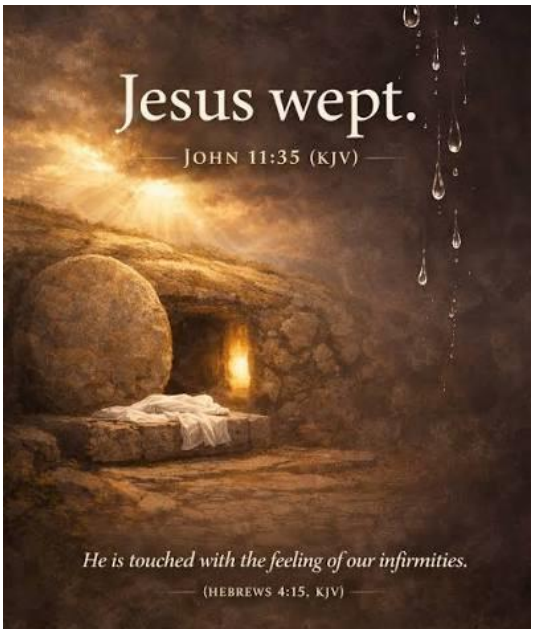
Grief is a strange and vulgar beast. It lurks continually in the shadows of the day. Those hard and testing days when the strain of mortal life become too great to bear, driving us to find some shade and shelter out of the draining heat of the day. Yet when we retreat to those places of seeming rest, the snarling, spitting serpent that is grief strikes at us when we are already weakened.

That is the poetic version. One that doesn't fit the cruelty, the unending exhaustion that grief can constantly plague a life with an unrelenting pain of loss. To many, grief is felt at the loss of a loved one. Those who have lost a spouse; a parent; a child; a sibling; a relation or a friend. Grief is a horrible blow to any life in that it robs us of that very thing we never take thought of until it is gone, our peace. One day, our world may be settled. The next, it is destroyed. When we try and make sense of the loss, our minds, our tongues, fail to begin to comprehend the robbery of our souls that has taken place. That is what it is to know loss. It is to have experienced a cruel robbery of a part of our own being.

Loss seems to strike like an expert sniper in that it takes out the one whom we leant on to give our life structure, purpose, security, meaning and expression. And so, when it hits, we don't just those we one we loved, we lose a part of our own existence. Such a blow shatters worlds; it demolishes an even basic understanding of our lives and it clamps down hard on the tongue of expression, leaving us empty of any sense of interaction with those that remain. Those wounded souls who see our pain and look to ease our suffering; yet we are locked behind a thick pane of glass across our hearts. We see them, we hear their kind words, but they are muffled. We see their outstretched hand towards us, and so we timidly reach out to grasp that embrace our soul craves, and yet all we touch is that hateful pane of glass across our hearts. That barrier that declares to us that world is no longer ours to know.

Sometimes grief can be caused by a loss of what was once hoped for, what was expected for our life. Those so struck down with miserable illnesses and diseases, can suffer so very greatly in the heart, sometimes worse than even in the physical sense of suffering. They lay trapped in a body that has betrayed them, robbing them of a world that once dazzled with promise and potential. What they are left with is emptiness and a cruel thought that they have been left behind to simply fade away, whilst others shine brightly through their accomplishments and achievements. This type of grieving in some ways is crueller than the loss of another, in that there is no way of separating oneself from the pain. It is always there, and no distraction of the day can be strong enough to silence its howls of sorrow.

Oh, do I grieve. I grieve quietly in the stillness of my home. Alone, away from all comforts of people, locked in a body that betrayed me 26 years ago, I am left to wrestle with this fiend that is grief. Doubtless some of you will know such an existence. What words can come close to understanding the suffering, the constant wound that weeps into our every thought, our every move, our every word, each day! There are two words my dear friend that express what our broken hearts cannot. Those heavy but precious words, "Jesus wept."




When words fail, tears flow, and they speak of a thousand truths the tongue cannot begin to express with any true accuracy. As Jesus stood at the tomb of his dear friend Lazarus, He simply wept. He who holds all power over life and death, stood in the midst of awful grief so that He might know of the pain for Himself. He could've remained safe, a stride away from the trench of sorrows, merely peering in to see the grief filled agony of those trapped within and prescribed a remedy from a safe distance. Such is the manner of many doctors, who whilst they may be skilled in their trade, refuse to know the deep sorrows of suffering their patients experience in their ailments. The Lord Jesus is the Great Physician, and so He stepped into the trench of grief to know for Himself the poison of loss upon the human heart.

Jesus refused to simply see the tears of those surrounding the tomb of Lazarus and tell them coldly to dry their eyes and watch His power over death. Such coldness and bluntness can be the way of many of us. How many times have we looked upon those who are wounded, grieving, or tear laden, and told them to simply get a grip on themselves and stop the crying. This can be especially true of the Christian, those well-meaning but cold hearts that say to the broken hearted with a flat, coolness of tone, 'There's no need to cry, you know the one you miss is in glory.' The grieving heart is left between two worlds by such flat words. They are left between a world of their very real sorrow and

a world of promise and hope; yet there they stand equally between the two, unable to take a step to either side with any real commitment. And so, they stumble through countless days, made to limp by the grief they were unable to truly release, yet unable to run for joy in the hope of glory to come.

So, they drift, constantly caught between two worlds: one of grief, one of promise. They become the double minded man which the Apostle James warns of, becoming unstable in all their ways (James 1:8). One moment, they are vulnerable and wounded, as the sorrow of grief quietly weighs on their spirit. Another moment, they are bounding with hope of what is to come in glory. Yet another moment, they are filled with anger over what they have had taken from them and never been able to truly accept. Such lives wound others often without ever realising it, as their volatility of behaviour strikes out unmeaningly to those close to them. This can lead to those hurt lives to abandon them out of self-protection, further isolating the grief filled life in their own sorrows.

Yet to this miserable state we remind ourselves of those two words, the shortest verse in all the Word of God, "Jesus wept." To the life so caught in a daze of seeming unending grief, see how your Master lived. He wept. He wept openly before all those who looked to Him for strength, poise and calm in the storm of grief they were experiencing that day. Mary and Martha cried out to Him to help their brother Lazarus. The crowds looked to Jesus for an offering of peace and deliverance. Yet before He did such miraculous works, He wept. In some ways, this is a great miracle too. For many of us, the thing we do in our pride of the flesh, is refuse to show our weakness, our pain, our loss. To refuse to be ruled by pride and the opinion of others in such moments of suffering, is the greatest strength anyone can live.

And so, we are to follow our Master, and allow the tears to flow, for He is close to such a broken heart (Psalm 34:18). In those hours of heavy weakness, when all we know is pain of loss and the exhaustion of grief, He calls on us to 'be still and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10). The Hebrew for 'be still' is *raphah* and depicts a body gone limp in total surrender to rest. If we do not halt the tears of grief but allow them to flow and surrender fully to the call of our merciful Saviour to rest in His power and victory over sin and death, then we can know His peace. A blessed peace that truly passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). A peace that reigns over the broken body and the weary soul, soothing the troubled spirit, ministering to us of the Father's love towards us. So, when the body is too weary, the soul too sorrowful, the spirit too troubled to find the words to even pray, we are to rest and be still in the love of God. A love that was revealed in all its eternal glory in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Ancient Copycats

In Numbers chapter 21, we have the account of the rebellious Israelites being punished by God through an infestation of poisonous snakes amongst the camp. Such was the potency of the venom, that anyone bitten would soon die from the toxic poison. God, however, in His mercy, told Moses to craft a brass serpent wrapped around a staff and place it in the camp. The instructions to the people were that those who had been bitten and thus soon to die, would find full healing from the poison by simply looking upon the brass snake erected amidst them. This was of course a powerful symbol of the saving power of Christ Jesus. He who was lifted up in the midst of the people, and all those who looked upon Him in faith and repentance of sin, would be healed from the poison of their sins.

These Biblical events of Numbers 21 happened approximately 1500-1400BC and would've likely become well known in the ancient world as a miraculous deliverance of the God of Israel. Some would dismiss this account as a mere fanciful tale, an ancient myth that has no correlation to any other ancient civilisation. Yet in the highly revered civilisation of the Ancient Greeks, we see how the Biblical record inspired a wide-ranging medical practice throughout the Hellenistic world.

It was a common belief in the Hellenistic world and indeed beyond, that illness and disease was often due to that person being affected by an evil force, often come upon them due to their own wicked actions. A clay tablet found in King Ashurbanipal's library in Nineveh (668-627BC), contains the following words:



‘The evil curse fixes a man
A raging voice over him is fixed
The evil curse is a great calamity
That man the evil curse slaughters like a lamb
His god from over him departs
His goddess stands angry at his side
The raging voice like a cloak covers him and bears him away.’

To combat these believed spiritual sources of physical ailments and infections, Asclepieons (healing centres) were built across the Greek speaking world, with two famous centres being at Ephesus and Pergamum (the location referred to in Revelation 2:12-17).

Asclepieons were so called after the god Asclepius, a divine healer and the son of the Greek god Apollo. On entrance to the Asclepieons, patients would take a cleansing bath before beginning several days of body cleansing dieting (detox centres are nothing new!). Patients would sleep in special chambers where they awaited a visitation from Asceplius in a dream. This dream would then be interpreted and provide the much hoped for cure. The interesting part is that the god Asceplius, was identified by his carrying of a staff entwined with a serpent. This symbol is still used in many medical settings today as a symbol of healing practice.

Could it be that this widely known ancient symbol of healing, a staff entwined with a serpent, all began with the Biblical events of Numbers chapter 21? The events as recorded in the Bible far precede any of the Asclepieons, and the fame of the events that befell the Israelites that day in the wilderness, likely travelled far and wide across the ancient world. Remember that Rahab was dwelling in pagan, Canaanite Jericho when she heard news of the impending arrival of the Israelites into the region. The inhabitants of Jericho were afraid because they had heard the miraculous events that had led to the Israelites exodus from Egypt. It is clear then, that the events of such miracles became widespread news across the region.

Furthermore, it is interesting how many cultures in the regions surrounding ancient Israel, began to associate illness and disease with the arrival of an evil that had been sent due to the wickedness of the sufferer. Such a belief marries up very nicely with the events recorded in Numbers chapter 21, where it was the wicked and rebellious actions of the Israelites that caused the arrival of the poisonous snakes, and thus their need for healing from divine source. The very fact that the same symbol of a snake wrapped staff became a widespread symbol of healing throughout the ancient world, speaks of a singular inspiration. Given that the Biblical event precedes all these other cultures adoption of the symbol, testifies that the events of the Bible were the original truth.

## The Gospel, The Gospel, The Gospel

They say when buying a home, it’s all about ‘location, location, location.’ People will often compromise on things they might like in a property, just as long as they can live in a desired location. In many ways, the same truth should apply to how we as Christians live our lives. We should be prepared to let go of what we might like but don’t need, all so that we can be located near to God.

Yet how do we come to the point where we can let go of what we think we want, so that we can grasp something that we know is what we truly want? That can be the hardest sacrifice in the search for the right home, and it is no different when we search for a home, a resting place for our weary hearts.

The answer to this conundrum, as Corrie Ten Boom observed, is to hold everything very loosely, so that when God removes it from our lives, it doesn’t hurt us. A young man recently gave a variation on this point, when he

held a sharp knife in his hand, holding it as though he was holding it tightly. He noted that if someone was to remove the knife from his hand with him holding it tightly, it would cut him deeply. If, however, he held the blade loosely, it would not harm him if someone were to take it from him. God will remove things from our lives. It may be a loved one, a job, a home, a friend, our health, etc. If we have held onto anyone of these things too tightly by putting our hope, our joy, our identity, our security in any of them, it will be truly painful when they are removed from us.

The heavy truth is that all of these things will at some point be removed from our lives. We came into this life naked and with nothing, and we shall leave it naked and with nothing (Job 1:21, Ecclesiastes 5:15, 1 Timothy 6:7). The likely oldest book in the Bible (Job); the book filled with rich reflective wisdom (Ecclesiastes), and an epistle of pastoral love and guidance (1 Timothy), all say the same thing. We are to hold nothing of this world tightly, for one day it will go. Our Lord, rich in mercy and grace, does not want to see His adopted children suffer needlessly, and so His Word warns us to not cling unto anything apart from Him, so that we are not broken by the inevitable losses of this life.

So, in His protective love, God will remove things that have become idols from our lives. This may look different for each of His adopted children. For one, it may be that their career has become an idol to their heart. One day however, that career will come to a close, and all the labours of that life will go to another. That other person may not use all the accumulation of your labours well, and so your worldly legacy will soon fall away. This, as Solomon says, is a "great evil." (Ecclesiastes 2:18-21).

For another child of God, it may be that a family member has risen quietly to become an idol to the heart. That family member is then treated differently to others, causing them to be become vain and puffed up, whilst those neglected become bitter and resentful towards that preferred person and the one who has become a worshipper of them. So much hurt in many families and indeed churches, has arisen from such a subtle evil.



And yet for another child of God, that idol may have been their own strength, their skills and expertise. They speak boastfully of their accomplishments, their endurance, their wisdom, and rarely speak of the enabling grace of God in His daily provision throughout their lives. And so, when the inevitable day comes, when the body fails them and their strength is departed from them, and their achievements are forgotten and ignored by the next generation, they become hard of heart and bitter in spirit. Such is the way of the foolish, as Jeremiah speaks in Jeremiah 17:5.

There are many other ways an idol of the heart can be erected in the life of believer in Christ. Yet our God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:9), and He will not share His glory with a false god. He is jealous also for our safeguarding, as He stands the bold and resolute Good Shepherd, keeping His flock safe from the roaring lion that is Satan. He looks to keep us safe from our own fallen nature. A nature that is prone to wander, prone to leave the God we love, as the old hymn sings. He moves to guard us from the inevitable heart break that will come when these idols of our hearts are removed from our lives. He does not want to see us live so foolishly, and so He will take as well as give, and in doing both of these things, He is doing what is good and right (Job 1:21).

And so, it is often through God's removal of these idols from our hearts, that He moves to show us what our souls are truly yearning for. That is of course, Him. And yet, in our fallen flesh, we will get distracted by the events of the day, and soon find ourselves building another idol in our hearts. Our family may have failed us, and so we make our jobs our god. For if we cannot rely on the goodness and generosity of our loved ones, we shall bring security to our days through our own efforts, our own strength. And so, the cycle of foolishness continues, grieving the Spirit of God all over again.

Ah, but how the grace of the Lord abounds all the more over the works of sin (Romans 5:20). God will move to witness to our hearts of His tender and constant provision to our days. He will look to remind us that the location we really desire to dwell is with Him! The wise and humble of spirit will at this point hear the gentle correction of the Father, as the Holy Spirit testifies to our hearts that we have been mightily blessed of God in a wonder of ways, throughout every day! Even those days when we drifted far from Him, He never stopped caring for us. Instead, just like the father in the Prodigal Son parable, He ran to meet us when we returned in repentant heart unto Him.

However, how many of us are truly humble enough to receive this loving correction and return to rest in dwelling in Him once more? Too often, we will still hold onto those things we think we want, refusing to yield them unto God, gripping them tightly out of fear of what might happen if our grip was to loosen. We have all done it. 'If I do not obsess over my job, I may lose it, and then how will my family survive!' Or, 'If I do fret and worry constantly about my children, they will drift away from me and I will lose them forever!' Once more, there are many fears that can be used to justify the clinging on to what we think we want, or what we think is best.

To such ingrained fear, and such a deep clinging onto an idol of the heart, there is but one remedy. Only one cure will lift the blindness of the soul and reveal to us where the location of our hearts, our souls, our spirits should always rest. That being the Gospel.

When we preach the Gospel to ourselves, we are reminded of the magnitude of work done by God to deliver us from fear, from sin, from death. It reminds us, that He loved us first (1 John 4:19), even when we were yet sinners, all to show the world His goodness, mercy and love (Romans 5:8). It reminds us that the Just (Christ Jesus), died for the unjust (we wretched sinners), so that we might be quickened in the spirit (1 Peter 3:18), thus being freed from the heavy chains of sin and death. The Gospel brings clarity and perspective to every facet of life, whether it be work, rest or relationships. It liberates us from a spirit of fear, and enables us with power and love, to give us a sound mind (1 Timothy 1:7), so that we can truly see where the most blessed of all locations to be in is.... that being with Jesus Christ.

So, when we are stripped of everything, when the idols of our hearts are put away, and we hold all things loosely, we can grip the promises of the Gospel tightly. When the day comes when we bid goodbye to someone we love, it will be painful of course, but we still have the promise of Christ Jesus, that where He is, we will be too. When we lose our health and we rely on the labours of another to maintain our daily life, it will be hard to accept, but we still have the promise that we will be as Christ Jesus is now, in Heaven with a glorified body. When we lose our income, it will be worrying to our flesh, but our hearts can cling to the Gospel truth that we are of worth to God, and that He will sustain us.

The Gospel is liberation! It is freedom from the mortal, fleshly tendency to grasp onto things and people tightly, in the hope that we can shield ourselves from the horrors of this sin filled world. Yet God in His mercy, grace and wisdom, knows that these things too will break down and leave us vulnerable in a wicked world. And so, He declares to all weary hearts, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). We can stop labouring to secure our own lives, and rest in a most beautiful location, one that our hearts desperately long for. That location being where the Apostle John rested his head, on the bosom of Christ Jesus (John 13:23). There is no better location to be found resting in than there, in the embrace of the Saviour of the world, the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Restoring Of The Locust Years

**Joel 2:25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the great palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.**

The prophet Joel reveals a glorious hope held dearly by many beleaguered Christians throughout the generations of time. The image used of four different insects, the locust, the cankerworm, the caterpillar, and

the palmerworm, following one after the other, reveals an image of a crop being progressively destroyed, one stage after another, until nothing is left. The life of the weary and bruised Christian can feel like this. One who looks back on years lost to addiction, sinful behaviours, illness, denial of opportunities, and see nothing but an empty thought that all that time is lost forever, and that no good can come from it.

However, my weary and downcast friend, look upon the fourth word of Joel 2:25, and see that beautiful word **restore.** The Hebrew word for this is **shalam,** meaning a 'full restitution' or to 'make whole or complete'. **Shalam** is the root verb of the Hebrew word **shalom** (peace), for in the Hebrew, peace does not just mean an absence of trouble, it also means a wholeness, desired completeness, prosperity.

The assurance of God to His own is that He is uniquely able to make whole what was completely laid to waste in the past. All those years, those days you mourn over that you will never get back; God can restore to you what fruits would've come from those years if lived differently. For God is a God of restoration and restitution, meaning that He will not simply rewind the cosmic clock of time so that you or I can have a 'do-over'. For if He were to do so, what assurance would we have that we wouldn't make a mess of it all over again anyway! Our hope would be rooted in ourselves. Whereas by God restoring what was lost through His power, our hope rests firmly on Him and Him alone. Such a truth can bring of immense levels of joy and hope for the coming days, and be a great remedy for a broken heart looking back on life and thinking, 'What if...'

To see the work of God's restitution of what the locust ate, we need only look at the life of Moses. Forty years he spent in the palaces of mighty Ancient Egypt. All of it was lost one day after he murdered an Egyptian slave master, when he saw a fellow Hebrew being greatly harmed. Having realised that his crime had been witnessed and that Pharaoh's anger would be stirred up against him, Moses fled into the wilderness.

For forty years, an equal time to that in the palaces of Egypt, Moses lived in the harsh and brutal conditions of the wilderness. He was living in poverty, tending another man's sheep (his father in law's, Jethro), when he came across the Burning Bush. Here, at the old age of 80, God called Moses to his greatest work. Those forty years lost in the wilderness were not lost forever, they were restored to Moses, as in serving the Lord God, he was given forty years as the leader of his people. In that time, he led them from captivity to freedom, delivered them the Law of God, and shepherded them as God's chosen people. This was no meagre restoration of the wilderness years, it was a full utilising of them, for as one preacher said, 'God is no man's debtor'.




The years lost to the locust, the cankerworm, the caterpillar and the palmerworm, were not without their purpose. In the misery of those years, we cannot see what good God can draw out of them in future times. Yet those forty years in the wilderness that Moses spent shepherding another man's sheep, not even his own, he was learning. He was learning how to survive in a harsh climate; he learnt the pathways through the rugged terrain, where the places of water would be, so that when he would lead the children of Israel through it all, he was skilled and prepared by God to do so. Without that suffering, Moses would not have been ready or capable of so great a task.

In my own life, I have seen this moving of God. My mother was not a woman of great health. Yet she lived with a refusal to lay down and wither away. She lived with a quiet, steely determination and a compassion towards others who struggled similarly. Our family were not blessed with material wealth, yet my mother was resourceful and wise, making the most of every opportunity and every resource. She taught me and my brothers well, so that when similar struggles came to my life, I would not be left stranded and without hope. I had been taught in the years of struggle for my parents, not only how to survive, but to thrive in the provisions of God!

Similarly, when my now wife was going through an ongoing and terrible storm of life in her tender youth, my weak health meant that I had learnt compassion in a manner that no textbook can give. My prideful spirit had been broken so that when my now wife needed hope, I could show her from personal experience, that the

only sure ground of hope that is tested and true is in the Lord Jesus Christ. If I had not suffered so in the years before this coming together with my now wife, I would've been a very different person, one unequipped for the challenge that laid ahead of me. In my misery of sudden illness, I could not see the fruit that would come from the wasted crops that the locust had eaten. Yet God, in His gracious wisdom, knew what He could do with such a meagre offering.

At this point, we see the crucial aspect. God can restore what was lost if those wasted years are offered up to Him in hope and humility. It took the Prodigal Son to take that first step back towards his father in hope of being taken back somehow, for him to be received by a joyful father who ran to meet him. That father was looking out for his son in hopeful anticipation of his return, yet the son had to turn around from his sinful course and show that he was ready at last to be the son fit for his father's household.

It was the same for Moses, for he could've simply ignored and walked past the Burning Bush, and resigned himself to the thought that it was nothing for him to investigate. Moses didn't submit to such resignations of life, even in advanced years of being 80, he 'turned aside' from his path to see that bush that burned but was not consumed. God can take those years that were lost, and draw out from them skills, knowledge, experience that can bring help and hope to others. He can take the drunkard, the addict, and take the years lost to such vices, and use that knowledge of the suffering that life has brought, to reach others who are cast down in their sorrows and sufferings.

The literal years of time may be gone, but the product of what could've come from those years, God is more than able to restore to a life. As someone who has lost 26 years of life to illness, who has recently sat in quiet depression over what pitiful amount my life has yielded, such a promise from God, brings a great hope for whatever time left He has appointed unto me. I hope and I pray it gives you hope too. Amen.

## Just A Tiny Gap Needed

It never fails to astonish me how the Lord can use the slightest, smallest 'door opening' in a sinful heart, to enable the seed of the Gospel to enter through and thereby take root in that life. Often, when we are witnessing to another of the need for salvation in Christ Jesus, we can become too desperate in our manner. Such a frantic and panicked approach can sometimes put people off coming to faith in Christ Jesus. For how can we speak of the Prince of Peace when we are clearly living in fear and worry? The message may be true, but the manner of the messenger pours doubt onto it all.

The panicked and desperate air we can give off in such an interaction does not reflect well the peace we are to know as redeemed children of God. The lost before God who are looking for some peace of soul, as they carry the heavy burden of sin upon their fallen heart, are looking for rest, for peace, for hope and comfort. Yet, if we come to them speaking of peace and hope in Christ Jesus, but appear hectic, panicked and desperate, it undermines the very point we are trying to make with our appeal to them. The words may be correct, the theology sound, but our agitated tone, our troubled face and nervous, desperate energy fails to support what our words are proclaiming.

When Professor John Lennox appeared on the popular podcast *Diary of a CEO,* the host of the show concluded by saying that the most convincing thing that Professor Lennox had put forward for the truth of Christianity, wasn't any of his keen and astute academic points. The host noted that it was Professor Lennox's calm, peaceful and hopeful manner when discussing heavy topics of life, that spoke the loudest of the truth of Christianity.

Herein is a sometimes difficult or even painful lesson for the young servant of Christ Jesus to learn (and old even). That sometimes, a simple sentence, a quick, hopeful comment, or indeed a well-placed word of correction, made for Christ Jesus and the Gospel, can create a crack in the armour of the proud and rebellious heart. Through that crack, the Holy Spirit can do wonders of regeneration of the wicked heart and make a new creature in Christ Jesus.

To give a personal example of this very point, I had an old school friend to whom I would frequently witness to. This enterprise went on for years and years, generating very little response. The friend was always polite and would humour me in my attempts to show him the need for salvation in Christ Jesus; yet it didn't come, no matter how convincing an argument I put forward.

Many years later, after the Lord intervened and drew that same old friend to saving faith in Him, that friend told me something. He said to me that one day I made a passing comment on the search for peace and purpose in life, and that it was to be found in Jesus Christ. That apparently, not all my wonderful theological discussions rich with apologetics, historical proofs, etc, was the turning point for him (not that any of these things are worthless, far from it!). As he relayed that point to me, I sat back and tried to recall when I said it. For the life of me I could not ever remember saying it. I could remember countless other things I had preached to him, but that one statement, my mind was blank. It was so blank that I said to the friend, "Are you sure I said that to you?" His reply was certain and immediate. "Oh yes, it was definitely you." Not long after that comment I apparently said to him that landed on his heart, that old friend was moved by a Billy Graham sermon and came to saving faith in Christ Jesus.

The point I make is that all those frantic but well-meaning appeals I made to him didn't land. Yet that one calm, hope filled passing comment did. The Lord took hold of my tongue and used it to impart a needed statement that was supported by a manner that was so calm at the time, it can't even remember having done it! What wonders the Lord can perform!

One day recently, as I sat in my bedroom pondering all these things, something caught my eye. It was a bright but somewhat crisp morning and so I had opened the bedroom window the tiniest amount to let a bit of air flow into the room. As I sat there cogitating, a large piece dandelion fluff gently hovered past my eyeline. I was pretty surprised, as I wondered how such a large thing got through such a tiny gap in the window and remained fully intact?!

Then a little smile emerged on my face as I sat and though on how this was a beautiful picture of what God does to a heart, so that the good news of the Gospel can enter therein. He will move to enable a small opening to a sinful heart, just like my bedroom window that morning. Then He will send the message of the Gospel into that once closed off life. When that life is in a moment of reflection, it will notice the gentle and full beauty of the Word of God, like I did in noticing the gently floating dandelion fluff in my bedroom. The unbroken gentleness of the love of God catches the eye, and then the heart, bringing that happy truth of Heaven, that Christ Jesus has come to us, with gentleness of heart and purity of love. It's amazing how such little drops of nature, can be seen to speak of the manner of its Creator.

To learn such a happy truth is so freeing to the Christian soldier. They are freed from that heavy feeling that they must convince that lost soul of the need for salvation in Christ Jesus that very moment! The zeal is good, the fear that it is now or never for that lost soul to find salvation in Jesus, not so. We are to keep that sense of earnestness for the salvation of the lost, but never lose the awareness that it is God that saves, on His time, not ours. When we learn this, our witnessing for Him will reflect that heavenly peace, whilst being delivered with a tone of calm, hopeful assurance. Such a witness is a great glory unto God and speaks of His very nature unto a heart longing to find peace at last and forever. Amen.

## Amazing Dandelion 'Fluff' And The Gospel

After writing the previous article, I thought I'd investigate the physical properties of the humble dandelion 'fluff'. That little, fragile, white cloud of a seed that catches the breeze so gently and floats away happily to the amusement of many young children. That little white fluffy structure is scientifically known as a *pappus*. The delicate composition of the 'fluff' enables the seed to act like a tiny parachute or miniature glider, that can take advantage of even a small breeze.

The bristles on the pappus have a staggering level of aeronautic complexity to them, thus enabling them to float on the air for long distances. The bristles create a unique ring-shaped vortex of air (this is known as a separated vortex ring), which generates amazing levels of lift to the seed, thereby enabling it to easily float for mile after mile on even a low/moderate breeze.

Regarding the dandelion flower itself, and the seed head itself is an industrious little fellow. Just one dandelion flower head can produce 50 to 150 seeds, whilst a fully-fledged dandelion plant can release up to 5,000 seeds in a single year!

The transformation from the familiar yellow dandelion flower we all know, to the white puffball of fluff we see floating through the sky, comes when the yellow flowerhead closes post-pollination, sheds its yellow petals, and reopens as a white seed head. These seed heads are attached to the plant by small horseshoe shaped structures. These little marvels of engineering have a particular property that declares the ingenious nature of our Creator God. That horseshoe shaped anchor requires a much greater level of force to detach from the plant if it is applied downwards. This ensures the seeds are only released when a wind blows upwards, thereby carrying them away for what could be many, many miles.



Meditating on these remarkable fingerprints of design within the humble dandelion fluff, a gentle and comforting picture of the Gospel and its movement through history, comes peacefully into view. Consider how the Word of God, the Holy Bible, was grown to its fullness over time by the perfect timing of our Lord God. Each new revelation over the generations, was like another day of growing in strength and beauty known by the emerging dandelion flower in the Spring sunshine. Then, when the Word of God was complete, and the canon was closed in the bringing together of the 66 books of the Bible, it was ready. It was ready to emerge like the dandelion seed/fluff, primed to take flight across the lands and bring the good news of the Gospel to far flung peoples.

Yet this would only happen when the Lord God sent the right winds of the Holy Spirit to carry it unto its desired locations, to be effective in the saving of repentant hearts far and wide. For the forces of darkness looked to blow hard and buffet the tender and wondrously crafted seed that is the Word of God. Evil doers looked to stop the seed of God's Revealed Word from taking flight, and so they tried to ensure its gentle seeds were destroyed under harsh conditions of persecution and trial. Yet, just as the humble dandelion seed/fluff is quietly but resolutely anchored to its host, enduring those tests of the harsh elements, so too is the Word of God. It remained ready for the day of the gentle upward wind to come, just like the Word of God. For the Word of God has endured many attacks, those looking to stop its spread far and wide. Yet, its truth and purity were anchored well in the Lord God Himself, and only His decree would enable the releasing of its seeds of salvation unto the joyful, upward winds of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, God has used the faithful labours of many individuals over the generations to spread the seed of the Gospel, just like a single dandelion flower able to produce hundreds and hundreds of seeds for its expansion of beauty across the lands. God can use one life, to produce many seeds of faith across a wide stretch of the globe; this has been witnessed so many times in the fruitful labours of many humble and faithful missionaries.

So, next time you see some dandelion fluff blow across your path, marvel for a moment. Marvel at the simple elegance of its appearance, reflecting the simple truth of the Gospel itself. Marvel at its intricacy of design and efficiency of engineering, reflecting the intricacy of execution that the Gospel of Jesus Christ alone holds. Marvel at how that little seed, weak and humble in nature, can travel beyond borders to carry its joy, reflecting the very movements of the Gospel itself. For God uses the simple and humble heart to carry the joyful news of salvation in Christ Jesus, to peoples far and wide. Amen.

# History of Whate'er My God Ordains Is Right

This movingly beautiful hymn was originally written in German under the title *Was Gott tut, das is wohlgetan* in 1675 by Samuel Rodigast, a German poet, academic and pastor's son.

The hymn came to existence whilst Samuel was working as a teacher and prorector (deputy lead to head/chief executive of a university) at Greyfriars Gymnasium in Berlin. A close friend of Samuel, Severus Gastorius, a composer who lived in Jena, Germany, had become severely ill. Seeing his dear friend struggle so deeply with both the physical and spiritual distress of his dire situation, Samuel wrote the now famous hymn to comfort his stricken friend.

The stirring yet comforting words of the hymn brought great hope and peace to Severus. It moved Severus so deeply, that when he had recovered sufficiently from his severe physical condition, he composed a melody to match the words. Still far from physically strong, Severus' earnestness to match the words penned by his friend Samuel to the newly composed melody, led Severus to have a choir come to his bedside and sing the hymn to him.

It wasn't long before word of this new, moving and theologically rich hymn had spread throughout Germany, with it becoming a firm favourite in the Lutheran movement. It was first published in 1681 in the Weimar Hymnbook. It was through this hymnbook, that the hymn drew the attention of a certain J.S Bach, the great composer. It quickly become a great source of inspiration for his own compositions, featuring in some of his most notable and celebrated cantatas. It wasn't until the 1800's that the hymn was translated into English, with the work done by Catherine Winkworth, a woman of great linguistic ability who translated many of the great German hymns into English.

The theme of the hymn brings hope to those struggling with hardship and suffering, all from the view of God's sovereignty and pastoral love. The hymn looks upon the sufferings of the weak and ill, not from the view of divine abandonment or displeasure, but as a "bitter cup" given as medicine by God to a wounded and suffering soul. Men such as C.H Spurgeon would go on to preach extensively on this very theme, on how physical suffering and illness is often used to bring the soul to deeper, closer union with the unflinching love of God. It is a hymn that has brought me great comfort recently during a difficult season, never failing to bring me to exhausted but thankful tears. Not tears of sadness, but tears of exhausted relief that God needs nothing from me, only that I rest in His everlasting love. As Spurgeon preached once, when the body is too weak to even pray, the sweetest praise that can be given to God in such times, is to simply rest in His love.

The hymn's call to trust in the goodness, provision and love of God, even in the hardest of times, acknowledging the grim realities of a life lived in a sin filled world. It doesn't hide away from such bitter times but encourages the weary and suffering Christian that God will hold us so that we will not fall, even though we are spent on every level. Because of this divine love and care, we can leave our troubles and fears with Him in fullness of confidence that He is with us throughout.

Here are the words of this tremendous hymn:

Whate'er my God ordains is right:
his holy will abideth;
I will be still, whate'er he doth,
and follow where he guideth.
He is my God; though dark my road,
he holds me that I shall not fall:
wherefore to him I leave it all.

Whate'er my God ordains is right:
he never will deceive me;
he leads me by the proper path;

I know he will not leave me.
I take, content, what he hath sent;
his hand can turn my griefs away,
and patiently I wait his day.

Whate'er my God ordains is right:
though now this cup, in drinking,
may bitter seem to my faint heart,
I take it, all unshrinking.
My God is true; each morn anew
sweet comfort yet shall fill my heart,
and pain and sorrow shall depart.

Whate'er my God ordains is right:
here shall my stand be taken;
though sorrow, need, or death be mine,
yet am I not forsaken.
My Father's care is round me there;
he holds me that I shall not fall:
and so to him I leave it all

## Who Are Those Two?

The identity of the Two Witnesses seen in the Book of Revelation, has stirred up much debate over the centuries. The two most common thoughts on who these two witnesses of God might be, focuses on either a combination of Moses and Elijah, or Enoch and Elijah. Let's investigate the merits of both these guesses, being careful to always remember that ultimately, only God knows their identity until they are sent to fulfil their task.

The combination of the Two Witnesses of the Book of Revelation, being Moses and Elijah, has many interesting and Biblically relevant supporting points. If you subscribe to a Pre-tribulation rapture, where the Church has been 'snatched away/caught up' (the literally meaning of the word 'rapture') and taken to Heaven before the Tribulation begins, we can see the Jewish significance to Moses and Elijah returning as the Two Witnesses. This is because with the Church removed from the earth, God will restart the prophetic clock of Daniel's 70 weeks, and return to His dealings with His chosen people, the Jews (hence why the 70th week is referred to as 'Jacob's trouble' – Jeremiah 30:7).

Both Moses and Elijah are incredibly significant to Israel. Moses is of course the Law Giver, the one who wrote the Torah under inspiration from God (the Jewish name for the first five books of the Bible), formally known as the Torat Moshe, or the 'Torah of Moses'. He is the one who led the nation of out slavery in Egypt, and up to the borders of their homeland, Israel, some 3500 years ago. He also established, under the guiding hand of God's commands, the nation's structure, making them a recognisable people distinct from the lands around them. As a result, he is heralded to this day by Jews as 'Moshe Rabbeinu', or 'Moses our Teacher', reflecting their view of him as their greatest ever prophet.

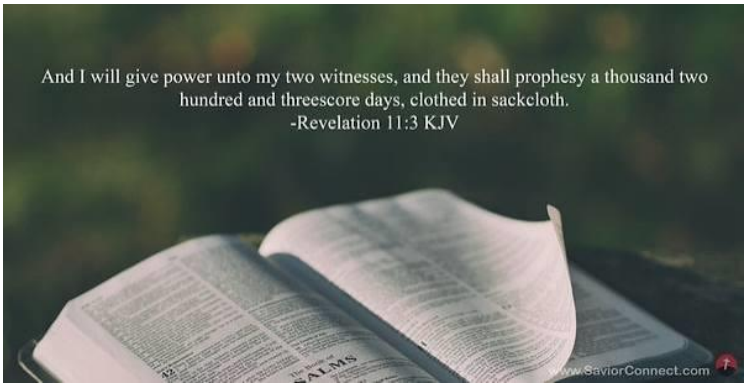
Elijah also holds immense significance to the Jewish people to this day. At the Passover meal, a special cup of wine is poured and left untouched on the table. Late in the meal, a child is sent to the front door to open it holding the cup of wine and symbolically invite Elijah into the home to join the meal. This is done in the hope of speeding forward the arrival of the Messiah, a role Elijah is believed to hold in Judaism to this day. That cup of wine used to symbolise the call for the arrival of the Messiah is called the 'Cup of Elijah'.

Elijah was a powerful prophet who stood for the God of Israel in the face of widespread idolatry under the wicked rule of King Ahab and Jezebel. This guarding of the true faith of the nation is still applied by Jews to

Elijah, as he is viewed as the 'Angel of the Covenant'. That covenant being displayed in the continuation of circumcision, where at the 'Brit Milah' (ritual circumcision), an ornate chair is set aside and is called the 'Chair of Elijah'. This is in accordance with the Midrashic texts (collection of extra-Biblical rabbinical texts) that says that Elijah complained to God over the abandoning of the covenant between Israel and God by the people. It then says that in response to Elijah's appeal, God instructed Elijah to attend every subsequent circumcision to guard the future witness of the Jewish people relating to this commandment. This is why the 'Chair of Elijah' is still put out at circumcisions today.

Every Saturday night, Jewish families end their Sabbath rituals with a song called 'Eliyahu Hanavi', where a prayer is sung that pleads for Elijah's speedy return and thus usher in the arrival of the Messiah. Furthermore, in Jewish legends, it is said that Elijah often returns to earth disguised as a traveller or beggar, where he intervenes for struggling Jews. Or he sometimes returns in this appearance to aid those with complex theological questions.

As you can see, both Moses and Elijah are immensely important to Israel as a nation, to this very day. It wouldn't be a surprise therefore, if God were to send these two giants of the Jewish nation, to act as His witnesses as detailed in the Book of Revelation, chapter 11. Both these men would bear a powerful testimony of the deity of Christ Jesus, and His fulfilment of being the Messiah, to a deeply sceptical nation. The Jewish people would be confronted with their greatest teacher, their greatest prophet, the Law Giver in the form of Moses; and their much prayed for returning prophet, who guards their covenant with God as a people, as seen in Elijah, both declaring that Jesus Christ is their Messiah! Such a potential witness would be further upheld as it was these two men who stood on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus Himself! (Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36).




Furthermore, the miracles that the Two Witnesses perform in Revelation chapter 11, mirrors the miracles performed by Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament. Revelation 11:6 states that the Two Witnesses will have the power to turn waters into blood, perfectly mirroring what Moses did in Exodus 7:20. Also, Revelation 11:6 states that they will strike the earth with every kind of plague, just as Moses did in Exodus chapters 7-12.

Compounding this reflection of the Two Witnesses with the miracles of Moses and Elijah, we see again in Revelation 11:6 that they will have the power to stop the rains from coming. Elijah did this very thing in 1 Kings 17:1, where Elijah declared a three-and-a-half-year drought, the exact timeline of the testimony of the Two Witnesses as described in Revelation 11 (1260 days of witnessing). Lastly, Elijah called down fire from Heaven on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18, and with doing so twice in 2 Kings 1:10-12. Revelation 11:5 speaks that those who try to harm the Two Witnesses during their ministry, will be consumed with fire.
The links between the lives and ministries of Moses and Elijah and the potential identity of the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11, are fascinating. This is heightened when it is considered under the lens of a Pre-Tribulation rapture of the Church, where God deals with Israel under the weight of Daniel's 70$^{th}$ prophetic week as the time of 'Jacob's Trouble'.

Now if we consider the possibility of Enoch being one of the Two Witnesses, alongside Elijah, we see potentially even stronger arguments for this suggestion. Concentrating on Enoch, we can see how his witness fits neatly into the events of Revelation 11. Enoch, like Elijah, never died. Both were translated into Heaven, the only two lives to have done so. This lines up very neatly indeed with the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11.

Having both Enoch and Elijah as the Two Witnesses, would provide a unique testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ, as they would provide testimonies from before and after the Flood. Indeed, it is a marker of the End Times that people would scoff at the truth of Noah's Flood 2 Peter 3:3-6), and so by having the great-

grandfather of Noah return to testify of the nature of the evil that dominated the Pre-Flood world, would act as a powerful witness indeed.

On this consideration, we can look at how Enoch fathered Methuselah at the age of 65, and see how Enoch used the naming of his own son, as a possible warning of God's impending judgment upon the wicked Pre-Flood world. For Methuselah as a name can have two meaning interpretations. Strong's Concordance breaks the name down as meaning 'Man of the Javelin/Dart/Sword.' However, other theologians and Hebrew scholars suggest that the name can mean 'His death shall send' or 'when he dies, it shall be sent'. If the latter rendering holds merit, then this speaks powerfully of Enoch's position as a profit of judgment, a position reflected in the only recorded prophecy given by Enoch in Jude verses 14-15 ("Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, To execute judgment upon all..."). This would make Enoch's return a potent, undeniable confirming witness of God's impending judgment, from someone who bridges our current world from the Pre-Flood world (thereby bringing judgment of all, just as the prophecy states).

The years and timing of Enoch's life also make for fascinating reading in relation to his possible role as one of the Two Witnesses of Revelation chapter 11. For when Enoch was translated, sixty-nine years passed before the birth of Noah (meaning 'rest'), perfectly reflecting the sixty-nine weeks of Daniel's prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27. For sixty-nine spiritual weeks were to pass from the command to rebuild Jerusalem until the arrival of the Messiah, He who would give His people the rest they longed for (as reflected in the name 'Noah'). Enoch would be well versed in a testimony of God's timing of judgment and His offer of rest to be found in the Prince of Peace that is Jesus Christ.



Building upon this consideration, note how Enoch was the seventh generation from Adam. With seven being a consistent Biblical symbol of perfection and rest, Enoch prophesied on the One who will bring that full and final perfection of rest both to the reborn heart, and the horrific events witnessed in the world throughout the Tribulation.

Being part of the Pre-Flood world, Enoch could speak as a non-Jew, thus highlighting how the Gospel is open to all to receive, whilst the possible inclusion of Elijah, as a Jew as the other witness, upholds that there is no separation between Jew or Greek in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). This would continue the message of the Gospel through a portion of the seven-year Tribulation, further highlighting how all peoples throughout all the generations of time, have all been saved by faith in Jesus Christ. This is turn could be viewed as opening up the interpretation of a Post-Tribulation rapture.

These are just a few considerations on this fascinating topic, and we must be cautious in not overcommitting to a conclusion, as ultimately only God knows the identity of the coming Two Witnesses. It is incredible however, to look at these hypotheses and see how neatly, how intricately and how consistently every thread, every prophecy, every life lived is all being interweaved by the Lord God to true immensity of wonder! This should cause us to step back from such investigations and simply marvel at His power, and bend the knee unto Him, in awe at how He has called us to be a part of this incredible plan of salvation. Then as we look on in awe at God's plan, we can await our Saviour's return with an eagerness and joy of heart that speaks boldly of the returning King!

## Are You Long Nosed?

My family sometimes tease me about my bigger than average nose (I get my own back by playfully teasing my wife about her being 'vertically challenged'). Yet would you ever have thought that the Old Testament Hebrew for our English word 'longsuffering', which is *erekh appayim,* literally means 'long-nosed'.

In ancient Hebrew, the word for nose or nostril (*aph*) was often used to describe anger, due to the flaring of the nostrils when someone breathes heavily from anger. Thus, being a 'short nose' could refer to someone who has a short fuse or hot temper. Whereas an individual who is 'long nosed', is someone who is calm, patient and slow to anger. This imagery is wonderfully encapsulated in the Exodus 34:6, where God is revealed to be "slow to anger" (this is one of my eldest daughter's favourite verses).

In this revelation of God's longsuffering nature, we see how God's ways are truly different to our ways (Isaiah 55:8) in that we will often get quickly enraged by injustices and evils done against us (whether this is warranted or not). Our tempers will blow, and our breathing will quicken as we snort the air loudly and deeply through our nostrils, displaying our inner irritation to the world.



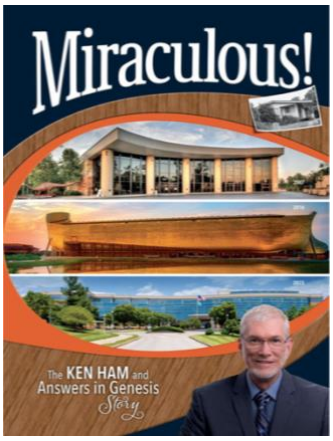

God, however, takes a calm, long and considered breath in when such evils are committed against Him. He has not overlooked those evils committed, turning a blind eye to them, as that would violate His perfect justice. He does however show restraint from impulsivity of action (temperance), and in doing so, all the generations of mankind have been mightily blessed! For if God was like us and was 'short nosed' or prone to quick anger, countless lives would've been lost to Hell forever. Whereas because He is 'long nosed' or slow to anger, taking a calm and long breath in the face of attack and rebellion, we have each been afforded time to come to repentance of sin. That long, considered inhale of God in the face of our wickedness against Him, has given you, me and countless others the time and opportunity to come to Him through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and find salvation from our sins!

The history of the world can be poetically viewed as one long inhaling breath of God. He who stands outside of time, takes one long, mighty but calm breath in in restraint against the face of mankind's sin against Him over the generations. One day however, He will exhale. His patience with evil will end, and when all His elect have been called to saving faith in Christ Jesus, He will exhale His judgment against the unrepentant. He will destroy the forces of the AntiChrist with but His breath, the "spirit of his mouth" (2 Thessalonians 2:8), fulfilling the words of Isaiah 11:4, where we read that He shall slay the wicked with the "breath of his lips."

Yet we redeemed in Christ need not fear this day, for there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Unto us, His exhaling will be the sweet sound of completion, when He rests knowing that all that were given to the Son for salvation have been redeemed and delivered unto everlasting glory (John 6:9). That day shall mirror the peace of exhalation that Christ gave on the Cross when He said triumphantly "It is finished" and gave up the ghost (John 19:30). The Cross opened up that glorious day to come for each of we His redeemed, and it will bring everlasting glory to the Lamb of God.

It is a beautifully poetic image to consider how all of history can be seen to be encompassed by one breath of God. Yet this would be a fitting poetry that matches the very immensity of the eternal Lord God. Such wonders bring perspective to our days, when everything seems so frantic, hard and painful. Endure and be thankful dear friend, for in this hour of God's long suffering of sin and evil, many are finding eternal refuge in Christ Jesus. Endure and be thankful that it will not be long before God exhales in His just judgment of sin and evil, and He will set all things right again. Then we will join Him, in perfect, peaceful rest. That rest sealed at Calvary, confirmed at the empty tomb, and fulfilled in the New Jerusalem. Amen.

# Resource Corner



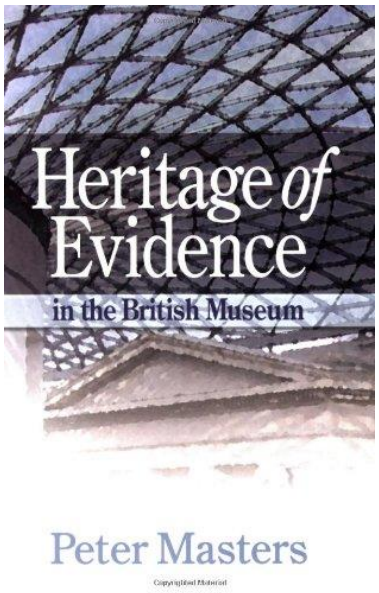

## Miraculous!: The Ken Ham and Answers in Genesis Story

The incredible, true account of how God used a passionate Australian science teacher to launch a global ministry defending the authority of Scripture from the very first verse. Discover behind-the-scenes challenges, spiritual battles, and God's undeniable provision in bringing about Answers in Genesis and its attractions.

*Miraculous!* is a fascinating account of faith, "Red Sea moments," battles, God's miraculous provision, and so much more. It's not merely a history of the ministry or even of Ken Ham's life, but instead is a Christian journey involving teaching, lessons learned, challenges in trusting God when the way ahead seems impossible, and accomplishments beyond what could have humanly been expected. It's a remarkable journey—truly miraculous!

- Relates first-hand, personal stories and testimonies from Ken Ham and others.
- Includes historical photographs—some of which have never been made public before.
- Describes the gathering of the AiG founders and certain other key individuals.

Pages: 272
Format: Hardback
Published: 2025. Available from Answers in Genesis UK




## Heritage of Evidence: In the British Museum

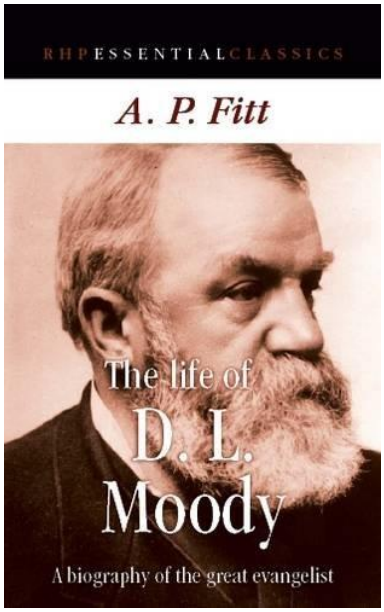
In today's atheistic climate most people have no idea how much powerful evidence exists for the literal accuracy and authenticity of the biblical record. The British Museum holds a huge number of discoveries that provide direct corroboration and background confirmation for an immense sweep of Bible history.

Heritage of Evidence in the British Museum' by Dr Peter Masters provides a survey of Bible-authenticating exhibits. It has been designed as a guide for visitors, and also to give pleasure and interest to readers unable to tour the galleries. It is also most suitable for people who need to see the accuracy and inspiration of the Bible.

The 'tour' described in Heritage of Evidence started life over 40 years ago and has been used by thousands of people. Almost every item viewed on the tour receives a full colour photograph. Room plans are provided for every gallery visited showing the precise location of artefacts, and time-charts relate the items to contemporary kings and prophets.

Heritage of Evidence is enriched by pictures and descriptions of famous 'proofs' in other museums also.

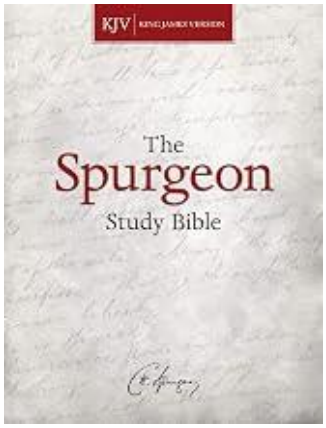
Available from Amazon




## The life of D.L. Moody

D. L. Moody had a profound effect not just on his native America but on Great Britain and other countries as well, and his name continues to be known across the world as one of the great men of God through history. But what shaped the man? How did he get to the place where he was so mightily used by God? How did he live? What were his methods of working? For those wanting to learn some of the secrets of effective ministry, much can be gleaned from reading this account of his life. Written by his son-in-law, it makes for gripping reading. "Moody once heard someone say 'The world has yet to see what God can do with, and for, and through, and in a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him.' The statement took hold of him. He thought to himself, 'I will try my utmost to be that man.' The hunger for more spiritual power was upon him. 'I was crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit. Well, one day, in the city of New York—ah, what a day!—I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name. I can only say God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths; and yet hundreds were converted.'" — A.P. FITT ARTHUR PERCY FITT was son-in-law to D. L. Moody and served as his secretary.

Available from Amazon, Re-vived.com

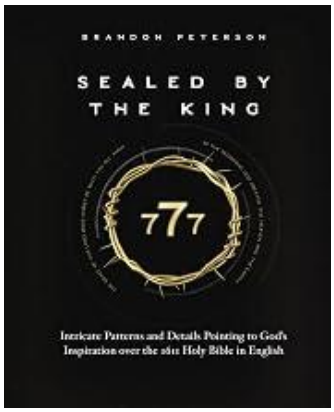



## KJV/AV The Spurgeon Study Bible

Often called the "Prince of Preachers," Charles Spurgeon preached to more than 10 million people in his lifetime, and his written sermons have impacted millions more. The *KJV Spurgeon Study Bible* features thousands of excerpts from Spurgeon's sermons, plus:

- Introductory biography of Charles Spurgeon
- Study notes crafted from Spurgeon's sermons
- Sermon notes and outlines in Spurgeon's own handwriting
- "Spurgeon Quotables" inserted throughout the Bible
- Book introductions with book overviews in Spurgeon's own words
- Concordance
- Presentation page for gift-giving
- Full-color maps

Available from Amazon




Sealed By The King: Intricate Patterns and Details Pointing to God's Inspiration over the 1611 Holy Bible in English

The most influential and printed book in history is the 1611 Authorized Version of the Bible, otherwise known as the King James Version. Little did we suspect that the name of Jesus Christ is signed and sealed into that same book in ways that no man could have ever conceived.

This detailed collection of notes displays the absolute sovereignty of God, who declares with authority and power:
MY COUNSEL SHALL STAND, AND I WILL DO ALL MY PLEASURE.

Did you know... Moses + Jesus + Christ (John 1:17) = 7×7×7×7 appearances in the KJB? *(Excluding antimentions such as false Christs)* (Detailed on p. 70)

Did you know... Father + Son = 7 mentions in Revelation, 7×7×7 mentions in the Gospels, and 70×7 mentions in the entire Bible? *(Excluding antimentions such as Father Abraham)* (Detailed on pp. 88-94)

Did you know... Jesus Christ is mentioned 7 times in Revelation and T7×7 times in the entire Bible?
What is T7×7, you ask?

T7×7 = (7×1)+(7×2)+(7×3)+(7×4)+(7×5)+(7×6)+(7×7)

When you write it out line by line, it forms a perfect triangle with seven sevens on each side.

Like this...

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7 + 7 + 7 + 7 + 7 + 7 + 7 = Total mentions of Jesus Christ in the KJB (Detailed on p.96)

Perhaps such a notion- that an English Bible could be perfectly inspired by God- would be laughed off if 4 or 5 of these "miracles" were presented as isolated incidents without any corroborating evidence. After all, you can take any large body of text and extract artificial patterns if you search hard enough.

But the sheer magnitude and magnificence of patterns found in the KJB, and detailed in this book, overwhelmingly stomps "random chance" to the ground.

The question is not "if" these things were directed by the supernatural mind of God. The questions are "where...? when...? why...? how...?"

Here are a few titles / summarizations of the notes that are detailed within:

- The 777 Code of Matthew 1:1
- The 777 First and Last Words of the Bible ("In" Gen 1:1 / "Amen" Rev 22:21) in Genesis & Revelation.
- God Directly Speaking 7×7×7 words in Genesis 1, and 7×7 words in Matthew 1
- The Father + The Word + Holy Ghost (1 John 5:7) = 777 mentions
- God + Jesus + Holy Spirit = 777+777+777 mentions in the New Testament

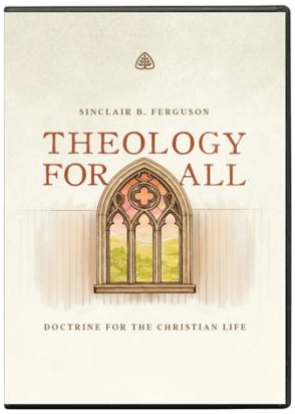
- Moses + Jesus + Christ (John 1:17) = 7×7×7×7 appearances in the verse text of the Entire Bible
- The #777 mention of Jesus is in the same verse as the #77 mention of Holy Ghost
- Jesus + Christ = 777+777 appearances in the Bible
- *And many, many more*

Large appendices are also included at the end, featuring:

- A timeline of when these miracles first appeared in the text of the KJB *(Not all of them were present in 1611)*
- Complete verse and word counts for every book and chapter in the King James Bible
- A verse comparison displaying corruptions in modern Bibles (including the NKJV)

Availabe from Amazon

Theology For All (DVD series)




What difference does theology make in the Christian life? At first glance, the study of doctrine may seem like an abstract discipline reserved for pastors and scholars. But knowing God is vital for every believer—theology shapes how we think, worship, and live before the One who saved us.

In this 36-part teaching series, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson guides us through the core doctrines of the Christian faith and shows their importance for our lives. With clarity and warmth, he explores the whole range of systematic theology, revealing how a deeper knowledge of Scripture strengthens our love for God, enriches our hope in His salvation, and guides us to live according to His will.

Available from Re-vived.com

**Thank you for reading Truth To Wonder Magazine. I hope and pray it brought a sense of wonder over the Lord's goodness and provision, and how we can have a sure hope in the truth of God's Word.**

**Truthtowonder.org**