

1-When a congregation sings "The Doxology" it's more than just a ritual of a well-known tune. It's supposed to mean so much more than just a familiar tune that accompanies "Praise God from whom all blessings flow..." The word "Doxology" literally means "studying the glory." The singing of that melody is supposed to represent our desire to draw near to admire, be bathed in, and become accustomed to what will be the eternal reality for His people.

2-Some of the best parables in the Bible are actually found in the Old Testament. One of the most provocative is found in Judges 9. It's part of the aftermath of the terrible legacy of Gideon... (Yes, "terrible". Look it up.) Many of us would do well to learn the lesson of Jotham's tale of the trees. There are two obvious lessons to be uncovered:

1) Wisdom tells you to define well the best role that Heaven has ordained for you.

2) There's huge danger in being willing to live in the shadow of a bramble. Just look under any blackberry bush.

3-That there's no perfect Bible translation... it's an impossibility. The difference in languages just won't allow it. Even the wonderful old King James Version has some very obvious flaws, but God has shown that He's not just capable of working through flawed mortals in writing and transmitting His thoughts but can work with well-meaning translators to accomplish His purposes.

4-The term that is translated as "worship" in the New Testament provides a fascinating lesson and challenge. We usually equate "worship" with some liturgy or order of service but the Greek term actually means so much more... **Proskuneo** is pronounced "pros-kuneoh" and it literally is a compound term that means, "to fall before in humility" and then "to kiss." Really! The best definition of this worship is to adore. We'd do well to think of that the next time we say anything about "worship", wouldn't we?

5-If you took all of the DNA in every person in the world and put it in a bottle you actually wouldn't need a bottle? In reality, you could fit all of the DNA of every living being in a teaspoon! It's true. Yet, it's those minute strands that define who you are in opposition to every other person on the globe. We are truly "fearfully and wonderfully made."

6-No matter the convolutions of your choices in life, God can still get you exactly where He wants you to be. His providence is that amazing. One of the best stories of the Bible to prove that is found in the last third of Genesis. No matter how many lousy choices Jacob and his sons made, when it came to chapter 50 Joseph reminds us that God can still accomplish exactly what He wants. Isn't that amazing?

7-God's friends are to be the most predictable people in the world. No one should ever be surprised at the response of a child of God to any situation. That lesson is graphically portrayed in the life of Daniel. In chapter 6 the enemies of God's friend know exactly what to expect of him and where they will find him... that's why they can set the nefarious trap that they do. And, the story reminds us that God values that kind of boring predictability!

8-There are two stories in the Bible that are specifically defined as stories that we must continue to repeat over and over again... and one of them is just gruesome! I believe Jesus made a command when He concluded the feast of Simon the Leper and its scandalous footwashing with, "Wherever you speak gospel you must tell this story." But, the other story is just horrible... Yet we are also never to forget the nasty and unpredictable results of sin when we review the episode of Judges 17-19. The ultimate butchery of a young woman also holds lessons for us, too.

9-The book of Genesis actually gives a record of 40% of world history according to Bible reckoning. The chronology of the Bible puts this recorded human history at somewhere around 6,000 years. Genesis alone takes you from around 4,000 b.c./b.c.e. to around 1,500 b.c./b.c.e. of so. That's a monstrous slice of history in only 50 chapters!

10-When God "Exodused" the Hebrew people He was basically moving the equivalent of the population of the Phoenix metropolitan area from central Arizona all the way to Salt Lake City!

11-The book of John (in opposition to Genesis) actually only speaks of 22 days of history. In 21 chapters speaking of the life of Jesus, John gives us only a very, very few highlights... but they are necessary in two ways:

1) They tell us much more about Jesus in Jerusalem where the other three gospels are predominantly Galilean.

2) Though John's chronology is terrible, if it weren't for his reporting we wouldn't actually know that Jesus' ministry was just over three years.

12-There were two roles in Israel at opposite ends of the spectrum, and the top one absolutely needed the bottom one. The position of a Scribe was held in great honor. The Tanner was the lowest legal profession, the Mishnah clarifies that over and over again. But, without the work of a Tanner the Scribe never would have been able to have the parchments upon which he would carry the Text on for later generations!

13-Some of the most important life lessons came very, very early in the Bible. I did a whole series on the radio entitled "Kindergarten Truths" and they were all found in the first chapters of Genesis. One simple one is pretty provocative... "Don't talk to strangers." If Adam and Eve had heeded that warning we might not be in the mess that we are in.

14-There are two kinds of crowns in the New Testament and you clearly want the one and not the other. Stephanoi is the Greek word for the crown we desire. It's the crown granted to the victor. Diadema is the crown that you and I never want to seek to obtain. That's a self-crowning and we have no right to even think about that. Herod and Nero and people like that wear that kind of crown. (In fact, only one citation shows and acceptable Diadema. That's in Revelation 19 where the Son of God goes forth to war. No one is going to challenge His right to place the crown upon Himself!

15-Observant Judaism has several sweet lessons to be learned about the Sabbath, and one of them is that we could try to make it a 25 hour day (or more!) Those who live the ritual consider the Sabbath to begin at least 18 minutes before sundown on Friday. Then the sacred hours are not ended until at least 42 minutes after sundown on Saturday night (or when you see the first three stars in the sky.) That's pretty neat! Get to Sabbath as soon as you can and don't be in a hurry to leave it.

16-The Bible has several names for Satan and one of them really shouldn't be there. We have no problem with him being called acvSerpent or a Dragon or a Lion or a Prince of Darkness. But the one that really doesn't belong is the reference in Isaiah 24, the name "Lucifer." That one was an insertion into the Text by the King James translators. It was a Latin word, never Hebrew and if you're going to be honest you have to admit that it doesn't belong in the Old Testament. It doesn't bother me and I don't feel it's sinister, but it is true.

17-Some people actually believe that dinosaurs actually are spoken of in the Bible. They wonder if the Hebrew word "Leviathan" (which is mentioned in Job 3, 41, Psalm 74 & 104 and Isaiah 27. Some think it means crocodile or a whale type critter, but some actually speculate that this is the Bible's way of acknowledging the presence of dinosaurs.

18-The Biblical Jewish calendar sometimes has 13 months in a year. It's a "leap-month" that comes around 7 times in 19 years and, like February 29, it serves the purpose of keeping things like *Pesach*/Passover or Atonement/*Yom Kippur* from shifting away from their normal slot in the seasons (*Pesach*/Passover in the Spring and Atonement/*Yom Kippur* in the Fall in the Northern Hemisphere.) The month is called "V'Adar" and it sort of means "Adar the 2nd". "V" is Hebrew for "and." You have "Adar" and then randomly you get "Adar" "and Adar."

19-God did not designate the cities of refuge. Oh, He told them He wanted them to establish these sites, but God did not tell them the specific locations. It was one of those items where God, randomly, just said, "This is the end product... now you go and figure it out, do the best you can do." God seems to want us to use our heads and participate with Him.

20-God seemed to be concerned about His people becoming too comfortable, even in the nasty Sinai region. That's the purpose a wandering camp. Apparently God knows that we tend to settle in because comfort and control can be such high values to us. And, we tend to do that even when the "known" that is such a priority to us isn't really what's best. So, He randomly, and without explanation, would uproot His people. He didn't want them to settle in prematurely. Discomfort can help us keep our pilgrim mentality until we finally actually get to "Canaan."

21-Another area where God was a lot less specific than you might expect was in the creation of the temple Menorah (the seven-branch candlestick." God commanded that they get "so much gold and then make a candlestick with seven branches and I'm not going to tell you how tall, how wide, how to decorate... you have fun creating it!" Again, God seems to like our partnership with Him. Pretty amazing.

22-Even within the city of refuge you had to go for refuge if you killed someone by accident. Really! You probably know that the cities of refuge would be the location where you would run for protection from the "kindred avengers" if you killed someone by accident. But, even if you were in a city of refuge you were required to move to a different neighborhood if you needed protection... unless you were a Levite. In that case you had to leave that city of refuge and go to one of the other five for your protection. That's pretty quaint.

23-Caleb was actually more the "born leader" than Joshua. When the two faithful spies came back with "a good report" on God's ability to lead them successfully into the land the other ten cowardly spies and the nation started whining about the giants. It's a little known fact that the Bible is clear that it was Caleb and not Moses or Joshua who first stood up and challenged the whole mob. Really, it wasn't, initially, Joshua. He stood up to agree with Caleb. That opens the door to all kinds of consideration as to why the Lord chose Joshua to be the "heir-apparent" and not Caleb.

24-The first man called "the Lion of God" in the Bible wasn't Jesus. It was a much lesser known character, but an important one. His name was "Othniel" and you find his story in Judges chapter 1. He is the one who courageously stood up to take up the challenge of his courageous uncle Caleb. He stepped up to conquer what Caleb was too old to conquer and he became the heir of the gutsy old leader. It's a great story.

25-God is even gracious in how He slaps our wrists. Even when He disciplines His children He does it with the least amount of pain possible. One of the best stories to teach this is in II Chronicles where a man named Hanani tells the king to grow up... but it's important to know who Hanani was. He was the son of the prophet who had been the mentor of that same king about 26 years earlier. All Hanani was doing was echoing the counsel of his trusted old father... Who would have a better chance at a positive reception than the son of your mentor? God's so good.

26-God uniquely gifted two men to create implements for the Sanctuary in the wilderness, but their children who inherited the skills may have actually turned those gifts to the service of pagan gods. Bezaleel was given unique gifts for working in hard materials and Aholiab was specially talented in the creation of soft materials for the Sanctuary. If you do some tracking through the generations it's a reasonable speculation that their children eventually turned the family trades to the creation of implements for pagan worship. It's a sad story, but a lesson waiting to be learned by all of us.

27-Paul actually crossed paths with one of the worst "traitors" in Jewish history. In Acts 24 Paul crosses paths with Drusilla. She was of Jewish royalty, first engaged to a man and then she dumped him to marry a pagan leader. After only one year she dumped him to run off with a Roman street-fighter named Felix. From slavery Felix "rose to the top" by graft and corruption and violence. She heard Paul's counsel regarding judgment to come and chose to ignore it. Within weeks her husband was recalled to Rome in shame where he committed suicide. She later died (with her son) in the eruption of Vesuvius at Pompeii. "What shall it profit a young Jewish princess if she gain the world and lose her own soul?"

28-The first "Christian missionary" was a person with a severe mental challenge. Matthew 8, Mark 5 and Luke 8 tell you that the first person recorded to have moved off to influence the culture for Jesus is listed as originally being demon possessed. How curious is that?

29-The fact that Matthew 8, Mark 5 and Luke 8 don't agree with each other (whether there was one demoniac or two in the story) is, in a strange way, a way to actually trust the Bible is telling the truth. Matthew was there, Mark and Luke report the story second hand. The fact that there are some discrepancies in the Text actually help to affirm what we are told in II Peter 1 and II Corinthians 4... God wanted to use flawed humans to be part of the process of getting His Word out. If the Bible was absolutely without any flaw or challenge at all I'd not be able to believe that humans had any part in it. Isn't that cool? God risked "perfection" because He preferred participation!

30-Isaiah may be the most contradictory book in the Bible. On the one hand it is filled with images of God that are just totally astounding. You have chapter after chapter of portrayals of the One who establishes and sustains the ultimate "Peaceable Kingdom" that we so long to capture. On the other hand you have the horrible realities of chapter 53 and 54 where it describes that the Son of this God gets abused... and it almost verbalizes that the Father is the one who does the abuse. Don't believe it? Look at 53:4 and 53:10. How challenging is that?

31-God thought of you long before your great-grandparents even thought that you were possible. That, to me, is the huge significance of Jeremiah 1:5. "Before I formed you in your mother's womb..." But, there are passages that even imply that you were in His mind "before the foundation of the world was laid." And, not only did He think of you, He considered you precious. Is there any better theology than that?

32-In honest contradictions to its name, Lamentations may provide the sweetest picture of Providential caring of all the Text. Have you given the book enough of a chance to actually discover that? Let me paraphrase and condense 3:18-24, *My hope is completely gone and all I know is bitterness. But, this crushing has caused me to remember there actually is a reason to choose to hope. If it weren't for the goodness of God I would have already been destroyed and this is because God just doesn't give up. Each and every day I can choose to see that He keeps trying and it's His incredible character that keeps me hanging on. Isn't that a pretty sweet "lament?"*

33-Daniel is the only major character of the Bible, other than Jesus, against whom there is recorded no sin. That is just amazing. But, though God didn't see fit for us to know his failings (compared to the large reporting against Moses or David or Peter or...), Daniel was such a good man that he openly wanted us to know that he was also only a product of grace. Look at Daniel 9:20ff and you'll find that he even accepts some responsibility for the failures of his nation. No wonder God found favor in him!

34-God seems to not favor the use of "holy talismans" in the Bible. There are a number of instances where God just ignored the assumption of the people that some religious object or person would somehow create a protective force field around them. You see that when the Ark of the Covenant was taken in I Samuel 4. You see it in Jeremiah where the people thought the temple would save them. (Jeremiah 7:4) You even see it in the life story of Jeremiah where people thought that God would protect them if they just used the prophet as a shield against attack even though he had told them they were going to be defeated. I wonder what silly assumptions I carry like that?

35-You know that there is honest and real persecution going on today in various segments of the world. In fact, some who track these kinds of things claim that there may have been more Christian martyrs in the 20th century than in the Christian centuries that preceded it combined. I need to think of this when I tend to get too comfortable in a culture that generally doesn't abuse me for my faith. There is Smyrna in the church in every age. Whether it's physical threat or torture or the abuse of a non-believing spouse, I need to pray for those who are being crushed to produce sweet perfume. (Rev. 2:8-11)

36-The second most common female name in the Bible is Mary. (Curiously, the first is Maachah! There are seven of them and six Marys.) But, perhaps the most mysterious woman in the Bible is one of those Marys-Magdalene. We really need to be careful about what we say about her because some of what most people believe is just not some-thing you can support in the Text. She is, somewhat, a mystery woman in reality.

37-One way we can see God being gracious is that He really doesn't enjoy pointing out our failures. We certainly see that in one of the few stories that's told in all four of the Gospels. Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 7 all tell of a woman with a really embarrassing past. It isn't until the last Gospel is written that John actually "spills the beans" by giving the infamous woman a name-Mary. Most assume it's because by the time he writes that book the sweet old saint had died and it wouldn't bring her shame to have "the rest of the story" told. How gracious is that?

38-There have been tons of available "messiahs" in history. You can go from Judas and Theudas of Galilee in Acts 5 on to David Koresh or others in our own era. One of the most curious was a 5th century man named Moses of Crete. He had such a loyal following that when he announced that they should walk off the cliff into the ocean so that they might march in triumph to Jerusalem. A ton of people followed him like lemmings to their death in the sea.

39-Another man who garnered a lot of loyal followers was the self-proclaimed messiah named Sabbatai Zevi. In the 17th century he had such a loyal following that even his open "conversion" to Islam (in order to save his hide) did not deter them. Over a hundred years after his death there were still many who revered him as messiah. Astounding.

40-Most Christians really don't understand why most of Judaism will not accept Jesus as the Messiah. In my mind it actually boils down to two things. One is what Paul expresses in I Corinthians 1. "Cursed be he who hangs on a tree" is a huge part of our Christology, but it really is a "stumblingblock" to others. The other reason can be expressed in a simple concept- "When messiah comes, all will be made right. We are 2,000 years removed from Him and things still are not right." If you're a Christian you may not like that rationale, but it is real in the minds of many in Judaism.

41-Some branches of Judaism actually have historically looked for two parallel messiahs... Messiah ben David and Messiah ben Joseph. The son of David (in their minds) will rule as a conquering king but the son of Joseph will fulfill the demands of a suffering servant in the prophecies.

42-The inaugural "miracle" of Jesus in ministry had a lot more significance than most of us understand. I know I would have been tempted to raise every dead body in the cemetery just outside the wall of the Jerusalem temple if I was going to announce my arrival. But not Jesus. He chose to turn water to wine at a backwoods wedding in a podunk town named Cana in John 2. But, even in doing that Jesus was fulfilling a commonly held prophetic legend that pre-dated Him. It had long been said, "When Messiah comes even the waters will blush in His presence." How cool is that?

43-The ludicrous question of the disciples in John 9 may actually have some logical basis if we can believe what later Judaism taught. "Who did sin, this man or his parents?" Why would you ask if an unborn baby was responsible for his own birth defect? In the early middle ages we find that Judaism actually evolved an explanation for birth deformities. It was the natural result of an obstinate child who wanted to wrestle with an angel just before the moment of birth. (Supposedly a child in-utero knows everything there is to know about God but Heaven knows it's a privilege to actually learn these things so an angel is sent to touch the lips of the child just at the moment of birth to remove the knowledge.) If that were true, then birth defects could be the responsibility of the unborn child!

44-Matthew and Mark seem to be written for a predominantly Jewish audience. Luke and John seem to have been written later because the church was transitioning from a largely Jewish movement to a world movement. God is pretty gracious that way, I think.

45-One of the greatest frictions between Jesus and His disciples was actually just timing. After Jesus fed the mob in John chapter 6 the disciples were absolutely ready to proclaim Him the King. Curiously, isn't that a part of why Jesus came to earth? Wasn't the inevitable proclamation of His role as King part of the package? But Jesus shut the discussion down by ordering them to get in the boat and get across to the other side. (By the way, I believe they sat in the middle grumbling about Jesus' short-sightedness and that's why they were sitting ducks for the storm that night.) Jesus did not deny His Kingship. He just had a different agenda of timing.

46-As long as we are thinking about His timing. Consider the methodical nature of how Jesus approached His death. For the early part of His ministry He short-circuited things that would have hastened His death. But, when the time was appropriate He announced to His entourage that, "I go to Jerusalem to die" and everything He did from that point on almost guaranteed that the collision was going to happen, just in His timing. Fascinating.

47-God having a checklist of accounting is actually a very comforting thing. It may not at all be the threat that I considered it to be when I was younger. The book of Joel teaches that. If you start the book it tells you of the specific critters that are decimating the land. Locusts and cankerworm and caterpillar and palmerworms are said to be the threat. Then you turn to chapter 2 and God runs that same specific litany when He says, "I've been paying attention and I'm going to give you back what the locust (check) and cankerworm (check) and caterpillar (check) and palmerworm (check) have taken from you." That's pretty comforting. It's a whole new view of God "looking down from above taking accounting..."

48-The Bible people held the secular position of a person to be a loss less value in considering their "spirituality" than many of us do. Today we often assume that some Doctor or Professor or accomplished professional should make a better teacher than a janitor. That wasn't at all true in the Bible world. The secular vocation of a person seemed to have very little linkage to the respect they received as a student of the Word. Paul? A tentmaker. The father of the Pharisees and a massively respected Bible voice was a man named Hillel... a wood cutter by occupation. Do you get it? A rail-splitter was the most honored commentator of the spiritual life of his age!

49-"The Elijah Message" does not at all represent a harsh, dividing, exclusionary concept at all in the Bible. Maybe you were raised (as I was) in a system that made you feel that way, but that posture just doesn't have a leg to stand on in the Text. Go back and read it. "The Elijah Message" as predicted in the last verses of Malachi is actually a message of inclusion and embrace and acceptance. When Malachi wrote that he never proposed anything like that at all. What a breath of fresh air!

50-The priests were the only ones in the nation that were not supposed to "rent their kids back from God." The Hebrew phrase is PIDYON HA-BEN- "the redemption of the firstborn." It was a ritual that parents were to enact in order to remind them that their children were only on loan from God. He claimed them all. But, the Levites were never to enact that for they were different in the land. They couldn't be "rented back" for God had unique claim on each of them for life already.

51-We can look at things and never see what's there. The sky is one of the easiest to consider in this truth. Psalm 8 says that if we go out and really "look" at the sky we will, inevitably, be driven toward God. In 1595 the famed astronomer, Johann Kepler, explained why he had turned away from theological studies when he wrote his professor, Michael Maestlin. "Through my effort God is being celebrated in astronomy." We can look at the sky or we can really look at the sky and see God.

52-Dr. John R. Platt said we have over 100 billion brain cells and each of them have thousands of interconnections to others. And his claim is that each individual cell has the capacity to store the memory equal to 30 times the letters held in the volume of an encyclopedia set. About 3,000 years ago Psalm 139 tried to tell us that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." I guess!

53-If you only have a "nickel's worth" or a "penny's worth" of faith that is enough! God can get it done with that little bit of faith because of the "reciprocal nature of faith." It comes from the Greek word for faith that is called PISTAS. *Pistas* implies reciprocity. You give God a penny and He'll respond with a nickel of His faithfulness. At that exchange rate you can risk 2-cents the next time and God comes back with a dime. When you step up to risk a nickel at the next opportunity He comes through with a quarter... and that frees you up to try a dime's worth... That's the *Pistas* pattern.

54-We are only "created equal" in one way. That is the equality of our need. There was some un-named kid who grew up next to Michael Jordan who didn't have the muscle structure or height or DNA... They weren't equal. The man born in the middle of the jungle of Borneo in the year 1317 wasn't at all equal to someone in the famed Kennedy family of Massachusetts who were given so many privileges just by being born in the right family line. It's just a reality that in many ways we are not equal. But Matthew 20 shows us our equality in God. Our ultimate reality is that He knows our deficit and the distance of our deficit is really irrelevant to Him. Amazing.

55-The flood of Genesis is actually not only disaster and catastrophe. It is an evidence of the goodness of God in at least three ways... 1) It shows that God is, ultimately, in charge. 2) It was a tool of salvation. (I Peter 3 changes our focus from all that was lost to the fact that "eight were saved by the flood." That's powerful.) 3) The flood reminds us that God will, ultimately, rid this universe of disease. He will eradicate evil.

56-The "rich young ruler" in the Bible lost all of his dignity and ran to catch up to Jesus because he was jealous. I really believe that, but you might be surprised at who he was jealous of... children. Really! I believe that all three gospels that report the story try to tell us that. Matthew 19, Mark 10 and Luke 18 all share the that the story evolves right on the heels of Jesus blessing children. There was something about how Jesus so easily accepted the children that triggered a sense that something was missing in his well-ordered life. He'd worked so hard to "earn" the approval of Heaven and here these kids (who had earned nothing!) seemed to get it for free. That is a marvelous insight into the famous story.

57-There are several stories in the gospels where Jesus "forced" confession out of people... and the fact that He went "digging" proves that He already knew what was going to be uncovered. (One story like that is in Mark 5 where He turns to say, "Who touched Me?") If He already knew the truth, why did He need them to confess? What did it benefit Jesus? Nothing. Confession isn't for God to gain information. I need to confess so I can open up my side of the pathway to dialogue and friendship. Confession is for me, not for God.

58-As hard as it was, in Luke 2 Mary needed to know that, in the end, her heart would be pierced because of Jesus. It was a truth she needed to hear so that the ultimate out-play of the story wouldn't be completely unexpected. It was as though the doctor was giving her the full picture of the diagnosis. No one wants to hear it, but you can live the remainder of your life more proactively if you know the whole truth.

59-A miracle, in itself, really doesn't prove anything. Pharoah's buzzards did them. Acts 19 says the "seven sons of Sceva" did them and God was not at all impressed... and we shouldn't be, either. The Bible says that God will, at times, work miraculously in this world. But, it also tells us that we should be careful in evaluating miracles and find better and clearer ways to "try the prophets" and test out anything that claims to be representing God.

60-There are only six miracles of Jesus reported to have been "Sabbath miracles." The very fact that the gospel writers made sure that you would know that it was a miracle performed on the Sabbath must be significant. You never find a day of the week assigned to any other healing miracle, there are no designated "Tuesday" miracles or "third day of the week" miracles. Now for the bomb- we can't be sure about the full condition of Peter's mother-in-law in Matthew 8, Mark 1 and Luke 4, but we do know that other five were absolutely not miracles of immediate need. Not one of them was a crisis situation, they were all chronic conditions that could have waited until Sunday or Monday... no one was going to die. So, why did He "cross the lines" and set Himself up for criticism? I believe it's because He truly wanted to. He wanted to challenge and confront the narrow expectations of the conservatives!

61-Confession is a really, really important factor in a growing relationship because it's the only way to keep the door of honesty and transparency and vulnerability open. It may not be comfortable, but it's hugely necessary in healthy relationships. That includes our relationship with God... and God doesn't need it! It's not like you're going to tell God anything He doesn't know so it's obvious that the exercise must be for my benefit even if it is uncomfortable.

62-Kings and Chronicles provides a life insight that is just huge. Granted, heredity is a large factor in shaping issues of life for all of us. On the other hand, there is an equally important influence on life that sets people up for success or failure- environment. But, to a great degree, Kings and Chronicles proves that there is a factor of life that can override heredity and can override environment. That ultimate determinant is choice. Time and time again we see the biographies of men who come from basically the same hereditary line and the same environment scene but the thing that most determines the success or failure of their story is based in choice. Sons from lousy fathers chose God and succeeded. Sons from wonderful fathers rejected God and failed. Choice is the ultimate determinant of life.

63-There's a predictable pattern in the "angry" messages of the minor prophets. In almost every case the prophet pulls no punches about God's frustration and disappointment with His children, but then something pretty astounding happens. In nearly every one of those little books it's like God can only carry that tone of voice so far before His magnificent love and grace just has to take over. It's like a switch flips and He suddenly says, "Oh, come here! I want to snuggle you!" As hard as they are to read sometimes you really need to keep plowing in those little books so you can get the full and final picture.

64-In some ways the Bible actually gives you a living representation of the Luke 15 story of two brothers that come from the "prodigal" parable. Martha was appropriate and proper and very, very jealous of her much more emotional and "irresponsible" sister. And, curiously, it seems that the irresponsible sibling is the one that receives more of Heaven's approval and blessing than her proper and faithful sister. When you think about it Luke 10:38-42 certainly turns the tables on us just as surely as the statement to the older brother does in Luke 15.

65-Jesus was not the "young" man that many of us in modern, western culture believe Him to be. There are some who claim that the average life-span to be expected in the Roman world was about 44 years and not the 70 or 80 or whatever we assume life to be in our time. So, if Jesus doesn't get introduced into His active ministry until the age of 30 He actually was well into "middle age"... especially since he had, by that time, officially been a "man" for about 17 years already!

66-The official life-segment of the "active priest" in the Bible was to be installed at the age of 30 and he was forced into retirement at the age of 50. Several times Numbers 4 tells us that young Levite men were not allowed to be active in Tabernacle service until they turned 30. Curiously, Luke 3:23 tells us that Jesus did not begin active and public ministry until the same age!

67-Dorcas (of Acts 9) may have been so effective in her care for the widows and children that God just deemed that, at that time, the church could not do without her. After all, there were a lot of wonderful saints who went to their graves without any apostle intervening with a resurrection miracle. Wouldn't that be really something? Wouldn't it be amazing if God found me to be so valuable to the church that He just wouldn't let me die? What about you?

68-One word, in so many ways and so many times, encapsulates a tragic position in the schema of God- the word "outside." Outside the garden, outside the ark, outside the camp, outside the wedding feast, outside the gate, outside the New Jerusalem... It is a horrible place to be from Genesis 3 all the way to Revelation 20.

69-We would be terribly discombobulated if we ever went out one night to discover that the stars got scrambled and nothing was where it belonged. How would you feel if Orion got skewed or if the Big Dipper lost its shape or the Southern Cross suddenly was missing several stars? Isn't it amazing that God has given us this remarkable gift, this ongoing visible presentation of security and His permanence? That's the kind of thing that we are reminded of when we "consider the Heavens."

70-The New Jerusalem has gates and walls. That's not news to anyone who has read Revelation 21, but it may be a concept that you've never questioned. Why? We are used to gates and walls being a necessity to keep the bad guys out but that's irrelevant by chapter 21 because all the bad guys are eradicated in chapter 20. So, why are they necessary? Is it because God knows that we are more comfortable when we have boundaries even when they may not be, ultimately, necessary?

71-Some people really have "the radio voice." I know that I've been gifted with a unique voice and I only have Heaven to thank for it because I did nothing to earn it. There are some people who just have wonderful pipes and you have to admire it... but we haven't heard anything yet! What was John trying to describe when he said that listening to God's voice was like hearing "many waters" or cascading waterfalls? What will it be like to hear God sing? (Look it up, Zephaniah 3:17... How cool is that?)

72-Very few of the parables of Jesus were actually original with Him. That proven fact troubles some people but I actually find it very gracious. Jesus chose to use stories already very familiar to His audience, but He always put a twist in them that took the listeners to a better and deeper truth. Just as He would begin I am sure people would say, "Oh, I know that one... wait a minute, that's not the way I heard it before... that says something about God that I never knew before." It's a genius method of teaching and I admire it.

73-You get a much better understanding of Jesus' famous parable in Matthew 18 when you read a kid's word into the story... "There was a man who owed the King a quajillion-quajillion dollars..." You might as well read it that way because that's what Jesus meant. In the language of the New Testament ("Koine" Greek) 10,000 was the biggest number available. You can say something like "144 thousands" but for a single block number when you want to express 100 million you have to say "ten thousand times ten thousand." That's why Jesus couldn't go any higher than 10,000... which still would have been 200 years of taxes to Rome from the two regions of Judea and Perea combined! Now, that's a quajillion!

74-In the King James Bible there's an untranslated Hebrew term that is really helpful for understanding the actions and intentions of God in the Exodus story- *MITZRAIM*. That's a name for Egypt but it's also very closely related to another important term in Hebrew, a word for "birth canal." Genesis 50:11 opens the door to a very colorful consideration. *Mitzraim* implies both Egypt and the fact that Egypt was the birth canal for a new, baby nation that got expelled through the water sack of the Red Sea. Isn't that great?

75-One element of the Passover story (Exodus 12) reminds us of how very considerate and concerned God is for the poor. Part of the mandates of how the Hebrews were to prepare to leave Egypt was how God defined their "going-away meal." They were absolutely required to have a lamb as part of it, but what if a family was too poor to have a lamb? No worries. God made it clear that He would accept their intentions even if it took a whole group of families pooling their resources to be able to get a lamb. You didn't have to be rich enough to have one of your own. Isn't that wonderful?

76-There's a really provocative symbol that's evolved as part of the Passover Seder today that all of us would do well to consider for our lives. Early in the ritual people around the table will dip their fingers into the cup of wine and splatter the juice ten times on the plate that sits clean before them. What's up with that? It's a symbol of "tears for Egypt." It's a way of remembering that there were many, many innocent bystanders who paid for the Pharaoh's ongoing obstinance. In this enactment the participants acknowledge that not every Egyptian was as responsible for the whole tragedy as the leadership... and they need to be remembered as victims, too.

77-It's a curiosity that Elijah is such a dominant figure of the Bible. We certainly don't have anywhere near the volume of biography of that man as we of his student and disciple, Elisha. Elisha is recorded as having performed more miracles. Elisha is even recorded as having "performed" a miracle after he was dead! So, why is Elijah so huge? One reason is the lingering prophecy of Malachi 4. That passage guaranteed that Elijah would cast a long shadow. And, it's a prophecy that many of us still need to explore because it still speaks in ways that many have yet to capture I believe.

78-Paul had to go to synagogues before he approached pagans when he went into a new town. He HAD to. But have you ever wondered why? When you track his *modus operandi* in the book of Acts you find this is always the pattern... first to the Synagogue and then out to the streets. I believe it was primarily because of the Jewish bigotry in his age. If he went to the Synagogue and made a few converts there first the pagans didn't care. It wasn't going to affect their receptivity to his message. But, had Paul tried to introduce a gentile "church" into the Synagogue the doors would have been slammed in his face before he could get in the door.

79-It should not be surprising, but Paul grew up, too. It's supposed to work like that. And, it becomes really evident when you read the writings of Paul in the order in which he wrote them. Granted, we don't perfectly know the chronology but we have a pretty good grasp of it and when you start with I Thessalonians and work your way to II Timothy you find a man who is changing, mellowing, and becoming somewhat more humble... really! But, then again, why should that surprise us? As I said, it's supposed to work that way.

80-Even though God never promised that we'd be immune from trial and persecution and challenge, He still has an ultimate goal- huge blessing. One of the best proofs of that is found in Zechariah 8. In that passage God reveals that His desire for blessing you is related to the influence that your blessing can have on drawing others to God. If and when God brings you blessing His target is not just to make things better for you but in order to attract others to Him. He wants others to see how you progress and have them say, "What do you have that I don't have?" It's an open door to introduce new friends to God when we relate well to our blessings.

81-Judas was not seen as evil by the other disciples. In fact, at times I wonder if they didn't feel some sense of pain and loss over how things evolved that horrible weekend. I believe they lost a friend in Judas. That may be a new thought to you, but I believe its supportable by the words of the disciples themselves. When Jesus shared that a traitor was among them, the Bible records that they all said, "Lord, is it I?" Not one person in the room said, "Oh yeah, we knew that Jesus would eventually unmask you, Judas!"

82-If we want to look at one New Testament church to admire it has to be Antioch. Man, those people just got it right. They are the church that raised funds to send Paul on his way for the first assault of the empire. "We will hold the fort down here, Paul... you go out where we can't go!" Then, when others were trying to rip the church in two they refused to play the game. They immediately appealed to the apostles to help them clarify which side they should land on. Little wonder that this was the church where the name "Christian" was coined. They were the closest thing to "little Christs" that was available!

83-God privileged Peter in a very unusual way. He opened the door to Peter knowing how he was going to die and gave him about 35 years to think about it and prepare for that inevitable fate. What a curious gift that was! In John 21 Jesus clearly revealed Peter's destined fate far in advance of the day and in I Peter 1 the apostle shares that he absolutely understood what Jesus had said and he knew he was closing in on the day of his execution. What a poignant blessing that was for the old fisherman!

84-There's a very logical explanation to how and why things turned sour so quickly for the Hebrews in Exodus 1. When you finish Genesis 50 they are protected and privileged in Egypt. You turn the page and Exodus begins with "a pharaoh who knew not Joseph." History very easily explains this. Joseph went to Egypt at a time when the pharaohs in power were actually not Egyptian. They were an occupying force called "the Hyksos" or "the Shepherd Kings." They were invaders who actually came from the region that had been Joseph's native land so it more easily provided a pathway of acceptance and elevation for Joseph. But, when the invaders were thrown back out of Egypt anyone who looked like the old regime became despised and distrusted and displaced. It's perfectly logical.

85-The land of Goshen, too, is easily seen to be a target of concern for any Egyptian pharaoh. If you look at the geography of Egypt that northeast region is easily the only territory of risk for invasion. The Sahara is to the west. The Mediterranean is to the north. The vast desert extends to the south and a largely barren Africa for a great distance. To the east there's little population... only that northeast corridor was the access point of invasion throughout Egypt's history. That's where Goshen was. That was the frontier of risk... so you'd better hope that those who populate that land would not be potential allies to an invading force. And, didn't those "Hyksos/Shepherd kings" come from that direction too?

86-Gilgal, Shiloh and Bethel have the lingering notoriety of one thing- once upon a time, randomly, they would host the presence of the tabernacle. Those little villages were (for reasons I don't know) the privileged sites of the Tent of the Lord's presence. We don't know how long it would stay at one village before it went to another. We don't even know, for sure, how it was defined that it was time to move once they were in the land (unlike the actions of the cloudy *Shekinah* in the wilderness.) All we know is that these three villages linger in history as the sites of the Lord's privilege whether or not they ever had any other significance in Israel's history (which Gilgal and Bethel did.)

87-One of Rome's greatest generals only suffered one defeat in his illustrious career and it happened in a little village of the Galilee. Vespasian was successfully subjugating various Germanic tribes when the empire sent him to deal decisively with the brewing mess in Israel. Before that campaign had ended the Romans had destroyed Jerusalem and Vespasian had become the Emperor. But, it was not before he was almost captured in the first battle of Gamla. It was the only blemish on his military career and nearly cost him his life. Astounding.

88-In a very unexpected manner the 10 Plagues of Egypt actually reveal the astounding mercy of God. I know that sounds preposterous, but I really believe it. If you read the order of the plagues you will discover that God was as gentle as He could be in trying to bring Pharaoh to his senses. You actually get several plagues in before anyone is even horribly inconvenienced. It is late in the series before anyone suffers pain. No human dies until the last plague. Is that a progression of mercy or what?

89-Let me expand the last factoid: You may think that the logic is faulty because the 9th plague is only darkness. But you have to remember you are dealing with Egypt and a culture that holds the Sun as an ultimate deity. The darkness was choking, it was all encompassing, it couldn't be defeated by just lighting a torch or something. The sun "died" in the minds of the Egyptians and the psychological anguish must have been terrible. This next-to-last plague might not have contained the physical challenge of earlier plagues, but the mental pain must have been horrible.

90-The regalia of the High Priest was amazingly colorful and artistic, but there's a lesson to be seen when you look at the big picture of the whole package. Yes, there were layers of blue and purple and gold and other patterns and embroidery, but under it all the High Priest wore the simple, white base layer of the common priest. I think that's so cool!

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

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

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

94-The Most Holy place in the Sanctuary wasn't much bigger than a one car garage. Isn't that amazing? And what a relief that must have been to the Hebrews when Moses came down from the mountain to announce that the God who overwhelmed all the deities of Egypt was only asking for a little tent instead of the massive structures that they had helped to build for the gods of Egypt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

121- Jesus reduced the “Minyan” by 80%. In Judaism there is no valid, kosher public worship event without 10 Jewish men present. Jesus said, “I’ll accept it if there are only two or three...” Great, yes?

122- You may not know what to do with a worn-out Bible but if you belonged to a synagogue you’d take your used item to be buried in the “Genizah.” It’s a congregational burial site/closet specifically for the purpose of honorable disposal of sacred ritual objects.

123- The original “Eternal Flame” was in the wilderness temple. God triggered the first flame from Heaven and the nation kept that going, even through the Exodus wanderings. They had a metal box in which priests would carry coals from the altar so that they had the “fire starter” for all the burning elements when the temple got set up again. That’s why they could perpetually call it “sacred flame.”

124- Once a year the High Priest had a “wife-in-waiting.” Leading into “The Day of Atonement” there was provision made so that the High Priest would be able to fulfill the command that he “make sacrifice for himself and his family.” What if, God forbid, the High Priest’s wife died the day before? What “family” would he have? It was arranged that he would quickly marry another woman and go on with the ritual. I’m not kidding.

125- Goats got stoned in the Old Testament times. As the “Day of Atonement” came to an end an “able-bodied” man would lead the remaining, living goat (“the Scapegoat”) three days journey into the wilderness. But, as he left the camp the nation would line up along the path of exit and hiss and boo and throw objects at the goat as it ceremonially carried away the remainder of guilt.

126- You probably know that it’s legend that Jeremiah took the Ark of the Covenant out of the temple to protect it from the Babylonian invasion. So, did the “Most Holy Place” just stay empty? No. The priests put a large boulder on the spot to reserve it until the day would come when the Ark could take its place again. The stone was called “The Shetiyah” and it seems that it actually lasted on into and beyond the days of Jesus until the Romans destroyed the 2nd Temple.

127- Be honest. If you (out of a vacuum) were to read about the women listed in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 you might not easily claim any of them because of the scandals associated with each of them. For that reason it's all the more wonderful that Heaven chose to include them. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary all had reasons to blush in the story. Amazing!

128- Herod offered a "homestead act" to get people out of Jerusalem/Judea so that they could populate the historic path of invasion through the Golan Heights and down past the lake. This is an important factor in understanding some of the inherent animosities of those in the south toward the Galileans. After all, didn't they abandon Jerusalem? Didn't they line up with the wishes of evil Herod? (That's only one factor but it's important.)

129- In II Kings 19 God promised the nation protection for at least three years. Then, just like God, He actually stretched it out to about 185. Amazing grace!

130- When anointed the High Priest got bucketed. The process was no token event. Psalm 133 tells us that the oil ran down his hair and his beard and dripped off his robes. That's more of a dedication than some simple splatter, isn't it?

131- There was a time when the High Priest's mother actually ministered to convicts. Why? Because she wanted them to like her and her son. If they liked them they might not pray for the High Priest to die right away so they could be released from a City of Refuge. (The Mishnah tells us this.)

132- Most westerners have a legend that Eve ate an apple in the garden. In historic Judaism it is assumed it was an Etrog. (That's' the citrus fruit that is part of the ritual of *Sukkot*- The Feast of Tabernacles.)

133- The four letter name of God Y-H-V-H (or J-H-V-H) is called "The Tetragrammaton." It's the unknown/unpronounced name that was ONLY said out loud once a year- By the High Priest in the Most Holy Place on The Day of Atonement. That's reverence for you!

134- The “veil” of the temple was not a single curtain, it actually was two panels. But they did not split in the middle like we see on the stage of a theater. The two curtains overlapped. That way the High Priest could enter (on The Day of Atonement) by weaving through the maze and not just flipping the two open and thereby exposing the Holy Place to outside viewing.

135- Pentecost wasn't about the Holy Spirit. It was about Jesus and His role in Heaven. The Holy Spirit was there to “testify” of Jesus (as John 16:13-14 said He would) and to fulfill the promise of Jesus to the early church. Is that a new thought to you?

136- You can't even get out of the 10 Commandments chapter before God provides a method of escape for the times when you fail in your obedience to that law. (He gave rules for building an altar.) Talk about grace!

137- At times God tailored the sacrifices based upon the resources of the one giving it. There were times when a King was required to bring a bull, a priest should bring a ram, a merchant a lamb and a poor couple from Nazareth might only have to bring a couple of birds that they caught for free. How gracious is that? God took into account the “ability to pay” for some of the sacrifices.

138- You didn't have to be a talented artisan or craftsman to create an altar for God. In fact, if you tried to impress God with the size or the design or decoration you immediately negated Him accepting your altar. Exodus 20 tells us that everyone was to just pile up ugly old rocks the way God gave them. He wasn't accepting anyone's arrogance. Those of us who are not as skilled really, really appreciate that!

139- The Egyptians thought the heart was “the seat of the soul.” They threw the brain away when they prepared a body for embalming. The Greeks thought it was the liver. How curious it is that the Bible people were taught about “the renewing of the mind” and that God only His people on the forehead, right on the frontal lobe of the brain.

140- In order to fulfill the Deuteronomy 6 command that “you are to mark your doorposts” the Jews created the Mezuzah. It’s a repository of permanent material, marked with the letter “Shin” (which looks like an English “W” and holds a small piece of parchment or paper (called a “Klaff.”) There are prescribed verses printed on that “Klaff.” Thus, the door is “marked.”

141- As crazy as he was, Herod the Great was one of history’s greatest visionaries and builders. His greatest monument was the expansion of the magnificent Jerusalem temple. But, don’t fall for the concept that he did that because of any great affinity for God. Herod’s temple project was for his own arrogance AND a bit of a bribe to the Jewish people so they might resent him less as an outsider king who really had no business ruling over them.

142- The busiest place in the Jerusalem temple was The Court of Jewish Women. Gentiles were not allowed there but women and children were. So, many of the activities of the temple took place in that enclosure.

143- “Sabbath” in the best definition doesn’t really mean “Rest” or cessation. It’s better understood to be “renewal” or “regeneration” or “re-creation.” That’s why the book of Judges often refers to the pauses in warfare where the people could build up their defenses as “the land had rest.” That may be a new viewing of “Sabbath” to you.

144- Observant Judaism has a way of letting the Sabbath linger. When the Sabbath comes to close on Saturday evening one of the elements used is spices. The goal is to have the essence of the Sabbath linger after the candles are extinguished. Not a bad lesson.

145- Those who really understand do not “keep” the Sabbath. Instead, the “make” it. Keeping anything denotes confinement or narrowness or minimizing. You keep things in a bag or a dog on a leash or money in a bank. When you “make” something you are engaged it expanding it, enriching it. So, “making” Sabbath is much more proactive and creative. It’s a much healthier sense of what Sabbath is to be.

146- One of the most horrific words in the Bible is “Hoshek.” It’s the Hebrew word for “darkness” but not your common darkness. *Hoshek* is a choking darkness, a black hole that negates light. You don’t defeat *Hoshek* by lighting a torch in Egypt’s ninth plague. *Hoshek* is a horrifying absence of light. That’s the stuff that Jesus would call “outer darkness.”

147- There is, within the Text, a direct challenge to the concept that God took eons to create the world. One is “*erev v’ boker*”, the “evening and morning” claim for each day. The other is that the listing shows vegetation created prior to the “Sun, Moon and stars.” How do you keep plant-life alive over long periods of time without photosynthesis? Just asking.

148- Contrary to what many Christians seem to believe Jesus actually was a very, very loyal law-keeper. He may not have kept all the man-expected minutiae of the law in the manner demanded by the ultra conservatives but He did, for the most part, do what a good Jew was supposed to do in His day. As a result He probably did make sacrifice because not every sacrifice was tied to the remission of sin. Some were just statements of gratitude.

149- Judaism teaches that if you can pronounce God to be blessed at least 100 times a day you are starting to get there. That’s a great concept!

150- There are three Hebrew words that somewhat define the concept or expectations of “Kingdom” in the Bible viewing. I don’t know which is the most important- *Malqut* (God’s sovereign territory), *Shalom* (comprehensive wholeness) and *Bracha*- “Blessing/prayer.”

151- Many of us, in the same circumstance, would have been Pharisees. The evolution of the Pharisee came about as a natural response to the history of the people. God told the prophets that the nation had been punished for disobedience and the natural response was to do whatever it took to never be caught disobedient again. Multiplying laws and expectations is actually a more “logical” way to guarantee obedience when you think about it.

152- Sadducees were pragmatists. They looked at the world and felt they needed to exist in what is “now.” They didn’t get absorbed in a lot of things they could not see or prove. Rome was “now.” Sadducees simply tried to get along with the current realities.

153- The two polar opposites in the original 12 were Matthew and Simon. Matthew had sold out to the Roman occupation and Simon was a Zealot, a revolutionary bent on eradicating all vestiges of Rome in the land. How Jesus thought He could put those two in the same boat is a mystery. (And, curiously, there is historic evidence that they became very close on down the line before they died. How magical is that?)

154- Unlike our western weddings, the Jewish wedding is a predominantly groom-oriented event. That’s a really important lesson to consider when you think of how often the 2nd Coming of Jesus was equated with a wedding in the eyes and minds of the Jewish New Testament writers. Think about it.

155- We all know Jacob went goofy over Rachel and Leah got treated really badly. But, did you know that when it was all said and done Jacob specifically mentioned that he wanted to be buried beside Leah? (Let’s not deny that some of it had to do with where Abraham and Isaac were buried.) Still, it’s interesting that Leah was elevated in the end. Curious.

156- The groom stomps on a glass to end a Jewish wedding. There are two reasons for that- 1) Celebration should be tempered by a reminder that the Temple was destroyed and does not now exist and, 2) “Former things are passed away, all things have become new...” Marriage does that.

157- Rabbis have said that if God is big enough to create all things by merely speaking He probably didn’t need full sentences or even a full word. God is so great that He could have created all by pronouncing only one letter. The consensus came to be that God would have done it by the letter “Bet.” That’s the first letter in Genesis 1:1, it’s the first letter in the word for “Blessing”, it’s the first letter in every formulated Jewish prayer. Not a bad thought.

158- Every Friday night a Jewish man is offered the chance to renew his marriage vow to his bride. That's what the recitation of Proverbs 31 is all about in the Sabbath-welcoming ritual.

159- If the sun was the size of a basketball the earth would be a pea about 270 feet away. But the closest star would be 14,000 miles away from the basketball! "When I consider the Heavens..." I guess!

160- Herod built a marble city and a man-made harbor on the coastline of Israel so the nation could become a full participant in the Mediterranean shipping and commerce. Caesarea Maritima was one of the crown jewels to his genius and his arrogance. Without it his nation was forever doomed to remain second class in the Roman world. (It also provided a place for Paul to sit in jail for two years and have two trials.)

161- Olives in the Bible world- soap, deodorant, cosmetics, food, fuel, sacrifice, boiling oil in warfare, medicine, therapeutic purposes, currency, cooking, ritual object for worship in the temple, anointing medium... What a really, really valuable commodity olives were in those days!

162- Two of the most important Jewish entities in the Bible world have historically only been known by Greek names. How contradictory is that? *Sanhedrin* and *Synagogue* are both Greek words. You rarely find them referred to by any other name. Those never were Hebrew or Aramaic terms. Amazing.

163- The "Deacon" role created in Acts 6 actually has a precursor in the Jewish temple structure. "Elders" and "Deacons" are a lot like the difference in role that was found in the ritual leading priests (*Kohanim*) and the rest of the Levites who took care of the nuts and bolts of the Sanctuary.

164- II Chronicles 34 and 35 remind us that God can express His plan but we humans can short-circuit His designs. Josiah was prophesied to "go to his grave in peace" but he chose to ignore God and go out on an ill-advised warfare campaign and died in battle. Consider that!

165- The God who never changes actually does “change”... sort of. The Bible is filled with stories where God “changes.” He doesn’t destroy the nation. He doesn’t cause Adam and Eve to die “in the very day.” He finds a way to accommodate “the soul that sinneth” so that it doesn’t have to die. He grants more time to Nineveh... on and on the Bible shows God “changing.” But the one thing that is the overwhelming un-changingness of God is that in every story where He does “change” it is ALWAYS in the direction of mercy. God never “changes” to be more harsh. Never! Take comfort in that!

166- The Hanukkah lamp teaches a great Bible lesson. Most Hanukkah lamps have 9 “candles.” But, of those 9 one will always be a bit separated from the others. The reason? That is the *shamash*, the “servant” lamp. Each night of the ritual the *shamash* is the first one lit and it becomes the source for lighting the others. It serves the rest of the lampstand. Pretty cool!

167- Here’s an amazing truth- We have MANY more failures recorded against the life of David than we do of King Saul. But, David is the one that is called “the friend of God.” Brew on that for a while...

168- The definition of “First Born” is not exactly what you may think. If a woman has a girl first she never has a “firstborn.” (Sorry about that.) If a woman has a C-section first and then later has a boy by natural delivery that second boy is actually the “first born” for he has “breached the womb.” I’m not making this up. The Mishnah defines this.

169- When an observant Jew mounts a Mezuzah to the doorpost he does it at a 45 degree angle. If it was straight up and down, too vertical it’s a sign of not being concerned enough about this world. (Too “heavenly minded.”) If it’s only horizontal it is not aching for Heaven enough. 45 degrees signifies a heart for Heaven and hands and feet for this world. Interesting.