

THEY DON'T PUT THESE IN SERMONS

by W. Dale Murphy • 2026 Edition

FREE PREVIEW — INTRODUCTION, CHAPTER 1 & CHAPTER 2

This preview contains the Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2 of the complete book. Chapter 2 — “Would God Do That?” — is where the evidence begins. The full 10-chapter edition is available for \$3 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com

Introduction

One bright Sunday when I was eighteen, my life took a sharp turn. Like many young people in the early '70s, I was swept up in the fervor of Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Suddenly, the world was ending, Jesus was coming back, and my chemical engineering scholarship at the University of Tulsa felt trivial compared to the "Truth". I dropped a scholarship in chemical engineering, transferred to Oral Roberts University, chased geology degrees to find Noah's Ark/Evolution/Creation, and spent nine years trying to prove the fundamentalist worldview.

But in the meantime, I was actually reading the Book.

I didn't just read the highlighted verses in the study guides or the comforting passages everyone knows. I read the parts the pastors skip. I read the sections that are never turned into catchy choruses or preached from the pulpit on a Sunday morning. What I found wasn't a foundation of rock, but a shifting landscape of sand—contradictory, often cruel, and deeply, humanly flawed.

In 2004, I published these findings under a title that was meant to be a warning: *Read the Bible; It Will Scare the Hell Out of You*. I wanted to scream from the windows like the guy in the movie, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!". But I realized later that the title did exactly what a bad sermon does—it signaled to people what to think before they even opened the cover. Fundamentalists thought it was a "hellfire" book they already agreed with; skeptics thought it was just more religious noise and stayed away.

The truth is, the most "scary" thing about the Bible isn't what's in it—it's what is kept from you.

This book, *They Don't Put These in Sermons*, is a return to my original mission. It is a guided tour through the "Godlyland" I had to flee—a place that eventually claimed my marriage and my children's attention when I could not follow them inside.

We are told the Bible is the "verbally inspired, fully inerrant Word of God". But they don't tell you that many of its books are anonymous, composite works written centuries after the events they describe. They don't tell you that the "God of Love" in the New Testament is inextricably tied to an Old Testament figure who behaves with the inconsistency of a tyrant.

I am not here to tell you what to believe. I am here to show you what they aren't showing you. Let's look at the "rotten roots" together and see if the foundation still holds.

I remember seeing a placard my father's office wall which someone hid years prior. It was not prominently displayed, but was there nonetheless.

Though I haven't seen it since 1998 when he died 28 years ago at 72, I recall these words inscribed beside the image of an elderly man in a rocking chair:

"Old age is when you have all of the answers, but nobody asks you any questions".

Had he lived, he'd have been 100 years old this year of 2026. He was in the WWII generation.

I am now that same age: 72. I'm in the Baby Boomer generation, often called the Vietnam War generation. His father was in the WWI generation.

So many generations are named from the wars of their eras because there are so many wars that is sorta kinda just "happens". The beat goes on.

"The more things change the more the stay the same".

That is true in many areas of life with one of the most tragic this seemingly endless parade of war after war after war. The reasons why are varied, and numerous.

While I'm no expert in the specific reasons for particular wars, I do have long experience examining the nature of the foundational underlying roots of many of them.

It seems most souls riding on this perilous "pale blue dot" have no idea the of the nature of these roots. They maybe simple "accidents of history" at best, or " manipulations by masqueraders" at worst, but likely some combination of both. In either case, these accidents, these manipulations, these errors of perception have created millennia of misery.

And I can prove it. In the recent lingo of controversial podcasters: "I have the receipts".

While there may be no one is asking me questions personally these days per my father's old placard, I hear the echoes of these questions in the angst that pervades our modern malaise. Indeed I've collected a whole lot of clues in the past 50 years, which, when connected and collated, show a way out.

I can say with certainty that these ancient roots are diseased, have been rotting for years, and need to be finally exposed to the light of day. Exhumed, and replaced.

Though I may not have "all the answers" per my father's placard, I have found a way to expose and cut out the roots at the base of our most pernicious pervasive problems poisoning our planet with perpetual peril, generation after generation.

This doesn't have to continue. Things are different now. People are questioning so many things formerly accepted as fact, as a given. Secrets are being revealed. Minds are opening.

A slight tweak to the opening lines of a Boomer era TV series, the Six Million Dollar Man is this: "We can rebuild it. We have the technology."

And though the aphorism "The more things change the more they stay the same" is mostly true, it is not always true. Fortunately there has been one momentous change in the past few years.

I have a plan to use that change to make another momentous change, perhaps the most sought after change in history.

There was advertising slogan said while attempting to save my father's favorite automobile brand from oblivion: "This is NOT your father's Oldsmobile".

I have a plan to share some discoveries I've made this time around. And if my plan works, people will awaken to the tragic "accident" of history that perpetuates the seemingly never ending saga of warafterwarafterwar. It could genuinely change the course of history. It is certainly the most important discovery I've made this time around. And "with a little help from my friends" we'll "get 'er done", and most of the world will surely rejoice.

This book is a sequel to a book written 23 years ago. While it reveals the fears and tears and eventual joys that have happened through those 23 years, perhaps more importantly: it echoes the original journey, following the original format, but in an entertaining way. I think it will be genuinely engaging, with humor and witty analogies, especially when we get into the Bible sections between Chapters 2 through 4, now in a MUCH more readable, actually funny format.

The original introduction from the 2004 Read the Bible It Will Scare the Hell Out of You can be found via this QR along with multiple others inserted into the text of this sequel. It will take you to the much more detailed information contained in the original.

The chapters in this sequel follow the original 2004 book, plus additional chapter 10:

Note on the song lyrics:

At the beginning of each chapter I opened with a quote. Many authors through many years have put an apropos quote from others at the start of chapter, often a bit of poetry.

I've followed the same custom. But for my generation, the poets' verses came through the radio, laced and graced with music. It was the soundtrack of our lives, for music was everywhere, perhaps most importantly wafting from the dashboards of our cars via the ubiquitous AM radios.

My generation was, and still is the Baby Boomers. We were all still very much alive and engaged 23 years ago. Now we are dying off, soul by soul, little by little being dismissed by younger generations as frustratingly inflexible, out-of-touch, thus quips such as "Ok Boomer".

In this sequel, I considered dropping these musically quotes, for so few will still recognize them, and might even be put-off, confused, and think "Ok Boomer" this book is obviously gonna be totally irrelevant to today.

Please forgive these "ancient" music posts, and maybe just maybe try looking them up, for they are accessible to all with a few taps, or even voice requests to the mega-ubiquitous phones. You may be surprised by the harmonies, the heart, the soul of these songs. It wasn't just "sex, drugs and rock and roll."

CHAPTER 1

WHO AM I AND WHY AM I DOING THIS?

"I long to wake up in the morning and find everything has changed, and all the people that I meet don't wear a frown; but everyday is just the same, I'm chasing rainbows in the rain, and all the dreams that I believe in let me down...." — Petula Clark, "Who Am I?" 1966

Twenty-three years ago the title of the original 2004 book appeared on the marquee of the church where my wife and children were attending: "Read the Bible It Will Scare the Hell Out of You". I have seen it on other churches periodically over the years.

Relative to my own experiences in Christianity, the marquee message was especially appropriate, but not in the sense intended. I had indeed read my Bible, and it was the Bible that provided the final push which drove me away from Christianity. It scared the Hell out of me to suddenly be rudderless, to realize that I had spent nine years and thousands of my father's dollars preparing myself to further the causes of a religion which was built, not upon rock, but upon sand.

It was a painful book to write.

When we have such chaos in our society, with headlines repeatedly bemoaning the unraveling of our moral fabric, why would I want to discredit one of the few forces attempting to hold things together?

Indeed, I remember back in '87 when I left our new Jeep Cherokee overnight at a commuter bus park-n-ride lot only to discover the next day a thousand dollars worth of damage done by someone who probably got \$20 for the cassette/radio at a pawn shop. A Christian wouldn't have done that, nor a devout Hindu, Jew, Buddhist, etc. Perhaps only a devout atheist could steal without fear of some sort of eternal retribution.

But is religion necessary to teach us that it is wrong to steal?

I believe all would agree: "We hold this truth to be self-evident, that it is evil to steal radios from cars at park-n-rides."

It is intuitive. Everyone knows it is wrong, atheists included.

But religion is seen by most as a necessary tool for enforcement: "Cowboy change your ways today or with us you will ride, a tryin' to catch the Devil's herd, across these endless skies." That is the classic lyrical painting from the old Western song "Ghost Riders in the Sky", depicting in poetic terms whatever afterlife torture you choose to believe in. I suppose most would imagine that, without our religions, the world would be just one big Sodom and Gomorrah.

As Benjamin Franklin said: "If men are so wicked with religion, what would they be without it?" How could I even consider attacking one of the few civilizing forces left in our world today?

A few years ago, a video clip circulated widely of a famous country singer — one whose name everyone knows — tearfully crediting God with saving him from decades of addiction, failed marriages, and self-destruction. He was sincere. The change in his life was real. Nobody who watched it doubted that something had genuinely happened to him.

[2026 update: This kind of story — the celebrity rescue narrative — remains one of Christianity's most effective recruitment tools. It surfaces on social media daily, on podcasts, in stadium revivals. The format hasn't changed since Billy Graham. The sincerity hasn't changed either. That's what makes the question so hard.]

Did God do it, or did finding a reason to change do it? In 1973, I would have voted God. By 1983, I reluctantly had to assume he just found a reason to change. By 1993, I discovered that it might not be an either/or question, and by 2003, I think I found an explanation that finally makes sense. "But hey, what does that matter? He got better. That's what matters, and he gave the credit to God. Why don't you leave well enough alone! Stop muddying the waters. If it worked, 'Praise the Lord!' If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Why discredit something that has the power to do such good? Can't you find something more productive to do with your time?"

That's a tough question for a short answer. Reading this book will provide the long answer. The short answer is: "It may not be broke, but it shoreuff is breaking, and has been breaking for years, with pieces falling down everywhere doing massive damage." Is it possible that there are unintended consequences to perpetuating a system based on fallacy just because it works some of the time? Is it possible that the cure is worse than the disease?

It is my thesis that the Bible is not credible, and that the god described in the Bible is so un-god-like, that either he was not involved in this story at all, or the record we have of his involvement is radically flawed. It follows from this that evangelical fundamentalist Christianity is not credible. And since Judaism and Islam are also rooted in the Old Testament, they too are incredible.

Unfortunately, most of the world's major religions claim exclusivity, that they are the only true way. It has always been like this, but recently this has come into sharper focus as militant Muslims fly planes into tall buildings in their zeal to attack the Great Satan, America.

[2026 update: As this revised edition goes to press on February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel have launched a coordinated military strike on Iran — Operation Shield of Judah — timed symbolically on the eve of Purim. Three peaks, same Old Testament range. an analogy you'll see in Chapter 10 in the letter to my children from 23 years ago. The feud continues. What I wrote in 2004 about planes full of jet fuel has been updated by the technology, but not by the theology.]

We in this Christian land are offended by this barbarism. Christians send planes full of food and medicine for their missionary programs, not full of jet fuel for maximum destruction. Of course, I don't intend to broad-brush all Muslims as crazed terrorists, and we must remember the Crusades and the

Inquisition. Even if it does turn out the hijackers were Oswaldian patsies unwittingly playing in a much larger game, they felt they were involved in a noble cause, as can be seen by reading the notes they left behind the night before 9-11. They did it in good conscience, thinking they were doing God's will.

What I am trying to illustrate is the root of the problem: the belief that we're right and you're wrong and something's gotta be done about it. The love of money may be the root of all evil, but the belief that "We're right and you're wrong" is the root of all religious wars, both ancient and modern. It is essentially a disease. It has plagued mankind for years, with each religion thinking that if they could just convert, or conquer, the rest of the world, then we'd finally live in truth and peace. Is it possible that there will never be a cure for this disease until the roots of the disease are exposed?

Ironically, three of the religions in the current spotlight for recent fistfights — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — all claim portions of the same holy books as their roots: the early books of the Old Testament. I believe this book will illustrate that these roots are rotten. "There's battle lines being drawn, and nobody's right, if everybody's wrong...." However, due to the nature of religion, the chance of ever seeing these rotten roots exhumed and exposed to the light of day is essentially nil. But if indeed this is the case, it seems insanity for someone not to get up and say: "Hold it! I think it's time we stop, hey what's our ground, everybody look what's going down: the very foundation of our religions is flawed." Of course, it is also insanity to think anyone would listen. The world is too big, the hate is too strong, the history too long. But I learned something from the 3rd grade Christmas program: "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." I for one refuse to perpetuate such a diseased system. In the spirit of Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death," I concluded that, though there's not much I can do about the course others may take, as for me: "Give me mental liberty, or give me Hell!" "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." I'm going to do something!

Well, I suppose that's a little too pompous for this early in the book. Back to more mundane matters like the theft of car radios.

THE DISCONNECT: MOST CHRISTIAN NATION ON EARTH, HIGHEST INCARCERATION RATE

The ramifications of religion go far beyond car theft. I only brought that up as an example of one of the many maladies which I could be accused of accelerating as a result of writing this book. Unfortunately, when competing religions claim exclusivity, that they are the only way, not only do they foment inevitable conflict, the credibility of all of them begins to break down, and with it, their efficacy in preventing car theft. When the credibility of religion as a whole breaks down, the belief in the possibility of a fiery pit where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth also diminishes.

I have recently been surprised once again by examples of this during my employment as a wellsite geologist. Oil-rig roughnecks are not noted for virtuous lifestyles — no surprise there, unless they are also professing to be Mormons. Don't misunderstand me. They are not bad guys, they're just not good

Mormons. I've always thought of Mormons as serious about their faith. Perhaps that is a result of growing up in Baptist country where every Mormon I had contact with was a white-shirted black-tied missionary. But to me, these Mormon roughnecks were an illustration of the disconnect between professed belief and actual action. It is so common among your typical ordinary garden variety Christians as well. I remember Billy Graham or Bill Bright expressing the opinion back in 1972 that 90% to 95% of American Christians are "carnal Christians," just going through the motions, half-hearted about their faith.

As I was writing the original book in 2003 I was reading the front page of the Wyoming Casper Star Tribune as bemoaning the "skyrocketing" auto and home burglary rates. It is a safe assumption that the majority of these thieves grew up in the USA, the most heavily evangelized country on earth. I would bet that most of them still believe in God and in eternal torture for those committing their type of activities. How can we explain this disconnect between belief and action?

My point is that here in the most evangelized country on earth, we have the highest incarceration rates of any industrialized nation. There is a disconnect. It isn't working. In fact, it is getting worse. True believers say that is just a sign of the end times and wicked God-hating people are roaming the earth grabbing for all the gusto they can get. They have been saying that for generations.

[2026 update: The incarceration statistic has not improved. The United States still leads the industrialized world in incarceration rates, and the percentage of Americans identifying as Christian has declined steadily — yet the correlation between evangelical fervor and social dysfunction that motivated this chapter in 2004 has only become more visible, not less.]

To further drive home the point, I'd like to express a totally outrageous unsubstantiated opinion as an illustration of unintended consequences. At the dawn of the industrial revolution, well-meaning child labor law legislation was passed to protect children from 16-hour days in factories. This evolved over the years to a point where a fine man in my hometown was recently turned in to the authorities for hiring a youth, at her request, to work in his store so she could earn some money and learn the business. Due to this "better for the children" environment, this little girl had to quit. Because of the abuse of unscrupulous factory owners in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, children have essentially been removed from the world of work, and for several generations now we have had to build artificial worlds for kids to stay in until they are ready for the real world. As a result, they rarely get ready for the real world, but instead remain sharply focused on sports, skateboards, and MTV. Sports, especially football, has replaced religion as the opiate of the people, or at least the American male.

My English teachers would be, like, dismayed at that last sentence. In fact there are lots of them in this book. Don't I, like, remember that run-on sentences are a no-no? Sure, but by now you can tell I question authority, and I thought that stringing it together like that would be more effective at conveying the idea that well-meaning actions can have unintended consequences. As I said above, I think there are unintended consequences in trying to prop up belief systems built on faulty foundations, even if some short-term civilizing effects are realized.

My position is that the picture we have been given in the Bible is fatally flawed. Christians have been evangelizing with this picture for about 2000 years. It isn't working very well. To repeat the Benjamin Franklin quote from the beginning of this chapter: "If men are so wicked with religion, what would they be without it?" Is it possible they are wicked because these religions are based on fallacy?

WHO I AM: THE 4-CYLINDER MIND

I'm just a soul whose intentions are good; oh Lord, please don't let me be misunderstood. (The Animals - 1965)

Born in Arkansas, and raised in small-town Oklahoma by loving parents, I look back on my childhood as perhaps the happiest time of my life. My father was a physician, so materially we were without want, yet not spoiled with excess. We lived about five miles outside of town on a 60-acre ranch with a 10-acre lake in the middle of it, along with an adjoining 400 acres of neighboring property on which to roam. For my two younger brothers and me, it was heavenly: swimming, horseback riding, fishing, guns, building fences to keep the cows in, and fireworks anytime. Being out at the ranch kept me from hanging out in town, and perhaps from getting involved in the ills of the turbulent '60s.

I was one of the "smart kids," #3 in a class of 360, and, though not as "cool" as the jocks, I was popular and respected. Under my senior picture someone on the yearbook staff put the words: "He's smart in math and trig, but he likes other figures too."

Now, before you get the impression that I'm setting myself up as some kind of intellectual authority — I am not. I've met plenty of people with much sharper minds than mine. An analogy: My old Scoutmaster had two International Scouts. His 1964 model had a 4-cylinder engine. His 1967 had a V-8. On flat pavement, no contest. But on rough terrain — the kind of terrain we were always on — that little 4-cylinder with its more balanced center of gravity and better gear ratios would go places the V-8 couldn't follow without the heavy front end bogging down getting stuck in the mud. I drove my 4-cylinder brain the only way I knew how: with persistence, curiosity, and hard work during my academic days, followed by a willingness to get mired in the mud if that's where the road went. There are a lot of people with bigger smarter brains than me. We notice these things when we enter the ocean of humanity, no longer the "big fish in a little pond". The reason I'm mentioning this #3 in high school and later #1 in geology class at the University of Oklahoma is to establish that I'm not an idiot, I have been in the trenches, done the hard work, and emerged with three degrees.

We had a very active Boy Scout troop in our church, in large part due to a stellar scoutmaster with an unofficial motto of "never cancel a campout." Some of the coldest snowiest ones are indeed the most memorable. The sponsoring church was the First Presbyterian Church, my family's church.

Church in those days was just something you did. It was not the most pleasant thing to do, but it was the right thing to do, sort of like "doing your time" after which you'd be rewarded with everlasting life. My favorite part of the service was the Doxology, when we'd stand and sing "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow..." I can still picture the shape of an old fashioned Christmas ornament I'd

form with my fingers on the back of the pew in front of me as the Doxology was being sung. It meant that in just moments we'd be out in the bright sun on the way to another splendid Sunday of water-skiing. The taste of those pork rinds and that Cragmont ginger ale and sparkling punch from those old pull-tab cans... Ah, those were the days.

EXPLO '72: GODSTOCK AND THE BEGINNING

A Sunday in 1972 was different, however. One of those Sunday school lessons was to change my life forever. The teacher shared a popular Christian book she had been reading called *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey. The world was coming to an end; Jesus was coming back.

I was both stunned and excited. I thought Hal Lindsey was the first person to have ever tied all those Biblical prophecies together with world events, and that indeed it was about all over. He kept cited verses about accepting Jesus and “getting saved” throughout the book, so I figured I'd better do so, just to be safe.

Though I was not aware of this being a required step from what I'd picked up in my church, I had been primed for this by my girlfriend who got me to talk to her Baptist pastor about their views. I vaguely remember it involving getting saved and being immersed instead of sprinkled at baptism. I suppose I didn't see the significance of this at the time I spoke to him. It seemed like just another of those petty differences that I figured must be at the root of why our little town had Presbyterians and Baptists and Methodists and Wesley Methodists and Episcopalians and Catholics and Nazarenes and Church of Christ and the Christian Church, and even those mysterious Assembly of Godians and Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. Who could make sense of all this, and why try? Surely God was not that picky, considering all the apparent confusion. But since I was told that the world was coming to an end and the guy who figured it all out was saying everyone had to get saved; better safe than sorry. Some even quipped about it being "Fire insurance".

About four months later something big came along: “Explo '72”. A small group from my Presbyterian church attended.

It was amazing.

No hymns from the church; but modern rock and roll music with titles like "Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music."

I found out there was a lot more to being saved than being safe. Campus Crusade for Christ had put together the event. It was a week long “teach-in” during the day, and rock festival at night at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas. 80,000 people attended. Some later called it “Godstock.”

Most were kids my age. They were serious about religion, about Jesus, and His plan for their lives. His plan involved saving souls, the Great Commission, and everyone had a job to do. We were battling Satan who was trying to suck souls down to Hell. Indeed, the old hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers” took on new meaning. I didn't know specifics, and I didn't figure I'd “march in the cavalry or shoot the

artillery,” but one thing was for sure, I was in the Lord’s army.

I had no reason to question or doubt. After all, Billy Graham was there! This has to be the real thing. Now I had a mission, a purpose in life, and I was excited.

"What the world, needs now, is (not) plastic, sweet plastic"

Having just graduated from high school, I had received an academic scholarship to the University of Tulsa to study chemical engineering. Chemistry and physics had been enjoyable subjects in high school, and when TU offered me the scholarship, what the heck. Gotta make a living. But now my whole worldview had changed: “What the world, needs now, is not plastic, sweet plastic.”

Forget chemical engineering.

The world was coming to an end, and most everyone was headed for Hell unless we got real busy real fast. David Wilkerson of Cross and the Switchblade fame even had an endtimes vision to warn everyone to get ready. The Rapture was coming. Christians were going to get caught up to meet the Lord in the sky. Cars would wreck and planes would crash to the ground if they were piloted by Christians.

Thirty years later, it is still just around the corner. The same scenario received renewed attention recently as a result of the vastly popular runaway best seller Left Behind series. It is pretty much the Late Great Planet Earth warmed over, but expanded to ten times its original size by the addition of a dramatic story line in an effort to make it more engaging for the lost souls they are seeking to save. It is pretty much the same product: drama pulls people in before they can decide whether they agree with where it's going. Nobody fast-forwards through the first act.

[2026 update: The Left Behind franchise has now spawned films, video games, and a streaming series. The theological content has not changed. The packaging keeps improving. The end times, as of this writing, remain just around the corner.]

I attended the University of Tulsa for one year, half-heartedly taking chemistry classes, and whole-heartedly participating in the Wesley Foundation, a Methodist sponsored campus Christian outreach. What great people, what great times: Bible studies, retreats, a discipleship course, witnessing to other students, and just the fun of being involved in something important, something that mattered; for nothing else mattered more. “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” [Matthew 9:37] I can remember the excitement, the contentment, the joy of walking back to the dorm after a night at the Wesley Foundation, with the verses of one of my new favorite Christian pop songs playing in my head:, “Maranatha, Maranatha, the Lord is coming home; we must prepare our hearts so we can meet, meet Him.” Ah, those were heady days.

I’m sure it is a ritual in all dormitories on all college campuses: the late evening bull sessions. For me, of course, in my new position in the Lord’s army, I’d use these opportunities to attempt a harvest of souls. After all, time was short, and the laborers were few. These were not all your typical Joe Sixpacks who didn’t want God messing up their "lifestyles". A few had real questions, seemingly valid

objections to Christianity, which in my short life as a serious born-again on-fire Christian, I had yet to be exposed to. I made mental notes of them, and determined to find answers, hopefully sooner rather than later.

There had to be answers. This had to be right, right? I mean, Billy Graham wouldn't lie! This was truth; it had to be. It's in the Bible. The B-I-B-L-E, that's the book for me.

Christmas of 1972, my first Christmas as a "real" Christian, that's what I requested as a Christmas gift from my parents: a New American Standard Bible. That was the "best" Bible in the opinion of the discipleship crowd at the Wesley Foundation. I'm one of those who took the church marquee seriously when it said: "Read the Bible—It will scare the Hell out of you!"

The Revised Standard Version I'd received at the end of my Communicants' Class from the old Presbyterian Church a few years previously was pretty much brand new, since I had barely cracked the cover. Why bother? The minister tells you everything you need to know, if you can stay awake.

I had received the Living Bible version of the New Testament at Explo '72. It was easy to read, and a great intro for hungry new Christians, but now I needed answers; I needed the best. My parents got one for me.

I had one of those fat multicolor pens of that era, and each time I'd read through that Bible, I'd use a different color. That 1972 Bible is here by my side now as I write this, a treasured worn possession, though it hasn't seen much wear for around 20 years now. It did indeed end up scaring the hell out of me, but not in the sense implied by the church marquee. I'll always regard it fondly, as a reminder of those former early happy days when I was off on a great adventure, in search of God's perfect plan for my life.

In the meantime, in addition to my Bible, I read other Christian books. Most were selected in search of answers to questions from those dorm discussions.

One of the more common objections was evolution. The Christian bookstore directed me to a book called *After Its Kind* by Byron Nelson, written in the 1920's, which pointed out flaws in the theory of evolution, and alternative interpretations of the data in harmony with the Bible. After telling my mother how great Nelson's book was, she gave me a book she herself had been given years before: an original 1961 copy of *The Genesis Flood* by Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, which was in many ways an updated version of Nelson's book. It proved to be the spark which initiated the current evolution/creation debate that each year gets ever more heated, emotional and controversial. That book was to be another pivotal influence on my life.

I enrolled in a couple of theology classes and a philosophy class at the University of Tulsa as electives while continuing with the required science classes. As my freshman year was drawing to a close, having heard no booming voice from heaven, I decided that perhaps the "still small voice" they talked about might be all I'd have to work with.

So what was I to do next? I'd heard stories of audible voices from God, but was assured that those cases were rare. I was to just be sensitive to God's leading.

My interests? Well if my interests were a direction from the General-on-High regarding my spot in His army, they would have to be directed toward finding answers to those bull session questions. I discovered this field of interest even had a name: apologetics. Where do you learn about that?

FROM ORU TO UFO: THE PATH THAT WASN'T STRAIGHT

My mother had been taking sculpture classes at Oral Roberts University. I learned that Oral Roberts was a faith healer. Wanting so much to believe the miraculous was real, I put my doubts aside. The presence of the miraculous at ORU, to my mind, put God's seal of approval on the place. In the absence of a mighty voice, I took it as the still small voice nudging me in that direction.

The next fall, I was there.

Could there be a more nurturing place on earth for a 19-year-old Christian, hungry for answers to take to a hungry dying world? I was thrilled. Dorm bull sessions now dealt with stories of miracles in the lives of the students and their families. There were also stories from the dark side, the demonic. We were indeed “struggling not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day...” [Ephesians 6:12-13] What better place to “put on the full armor of God” than ORU? This was it, and I was excited.

I decided on a major in English Bible and a minor in Theological and Historical Studies. In a sense, this was the easy road. I could have taken the type of theology major requiring Greek and Hebrew. Yet, I reasoned, surely God wouldn't require the common man to learn Greek to be saved. I had faith that since God had communicated His Holy Word to us in the Bible, surely He made it reliably translatable so that Joe Sixpack and I could understand it. I wanted to help the common man, speaking in his language, not Greek. I'd just trust that those Greek and Hebrew scholars had done a good job of translating my New American Standard Bible.

So life was good. I felt like I was finally on the right path, discovering God's perfect plan for my life.

Besides my studies, I got involved in the CSC, the Christian Service Council, a n extracurricular student activity option at ORU. They had a variety of outreach activities, from traditional projects like helping troubled youth, visiting nursing homes, and helping old people paint their houses, to more aggressive evangelistic activities, like street witnessing.

There was a place along Peoria Street in Tulsa at the time known as The Strip. I suppose every city has a strip, a place where kids come to look for fun, which usually means trouble, and show off their cars “gettin' bugged driving up and down the same old strip.” This was where those considered "at-risk-youth" in those days would hang out. And it was the part of CSC that appealed to me.

Every Saturday night, a group of us would be out there, going two by two, just mingling and striking up conversations which were then steered toward Jesus. Another group would stay in a building along the Strip and act as “prayer warriors,” praying for our success in reaching souls for the Kingdom, and also for our safety. I can't say we had many obvious results. We would console ourselves at the time that at least we were planting seeds which would be harvested in God's perfect time. It was exhilarating.

Yet I was puzzled why we didn't have much success in recruiting additional street witnesses from the ranks of hundreds of ORU students. We had a core of maybe ten who'd faithfully be out there every weekend.

But we needed more. The overall low participation rate in the Christian Service Council relative to the size of the student body was disturbing. Participation in intramural sports was mammoth, but in CSC, well, just not as much fun, apparently. Boys will be boys, you know, and the girls, well, they are going to be where the boys are.

A legitimate excuse, I suppose, yet it was a nagging annoyance in the back of my mind. This was not a normal boys-will-be-boys slice of America. This was among the cream of the crop of Christian youth. Did they really believe that the eternal destiny of the souls of at-risk kids cruising Peoria was at stake? How about the bitter abandoned people in the nursing homes who were more likely to meet their Maker sooner than the drunk-driving kids? Did they ever think about that as they were running for that touchdown? I doubt it, and of course, why should they? God had everything under control, as David Wilkerson's bumper sticker said at the time. They had tough studies to do to prepare them to go into everyman's world, as the Oral Roberts motto went. They had to let off some steam and relax. Football etc. is the all-American way. But to my young Christian mind, panicked over people going to Hell with the world coming to an end so soon, it was a struggle of youthful idealism with football realism. Perhaps it was the recent calculus course I had taken at TU which operates by extending number sequences to extremes. Maybe it was the philosophy course which also carried thoughts to their ultimate limits, in order to find root meanings and consequences. Perhaps it was the urgency of the world coming to an end, for “no one knows the hour or the day,” but pretty close, according to all the fundamentalist prophecy experts. For whatever various reasons, my mind struggled to make sense of the big picture.

"No man has the right to hear the gospel twice when some men haven't heard it once."

I heard a quote somewhere around this time from a missionary whose name I unfortunately cannot recall: "No man has the right to hear the gospel twice when some men haven't heard it once." Now there was something that made sense.

But taking it to youthful ideological extremes, I had to question: “Well then what am I doing out on the Strip?” Those kids have heard about Jesus. Well, maybe they haven't had the Plan of Salvation spelled out for them in the Campus Crusade Four Spiritual Laws tract, so perhaps they haven't really heard the gospel till they've heard that. Of course maybe they are so disgusted over the proverbial hypocrite down the street that they could hardly pay attention to that tract anyway. What constitutes

hearing the gospel? One thing is sure, that missionary with the great quote was out of the gray and in to the black and white in his priorities, for though it may be gray about whether or not that kid cruising Peoria had heard enough about Jesus to be thrown into the pit if he didn't believe, the people that missionary was working with had never even heard the name Jesus. They were an obvious priority, assuming their souls ranked as high in God's eyes as the Peoria kids. We must assume they do, for "the Lord is not wishing that any should perish but for all to come to repentance." [II Peter 3:9] At least the Peoria kids had heard of Jesus, had access to Bibles, and could find out the plan of salvation if the truly hungered and thirsted after righteousness. Poor old Moosa Moochabacka in Africa didn't even have a chance.

THE MOOSA PROBLEM: WHAT ABOUT THE HEATHEN?

Can we picture this judgment day scene? God, faced with Moosa Moochabacka from a village that no missionary ever reached:

"Let's see, you're Moosa Moochabacka. I don't see your name written in the book of life here. Did you accept Jesus as your personal savior? Oh... one of those. Never even heard of Jesus? Jesus told the original disciples to tell their disciples to get the word out, that 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.' I guess it didn't work out so well... Sorry, but those are the rules.... Yeah, I know I made the rules, but 'On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?' [Romans 9:20]"

"The Devil's in the details" as the saying goes. But details put more "flesh" on a story, make absurdities and injustices feel more real. Drama draws us in, helps us feel. "You never really understand something 'til it happens to you".

Moosa was a real student. I met him at a real university.

Let's get real with these implications, this feel, this tragedy, if true. Play it again Sam:

How would God handle Moosa?

"Let's see, you're Moosa Moochabacka. I don't see your name written in the book of life here. Did you accept Jesus as your personal savior?"

Oh...one of those.

Woops. There sure are a lot of you!

Never even heard of Jesus?

Jesus told His disciples to tell their disciples to tell the next ones to get the word out, that 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.' [John 14:6]

I guess it didn't work out so well. I was trying to guide them, but the Devil got in there and confused things. Maybe I should have stepped in and put a little more pressure on Satan to leave my messengers alone.

But, as you know; well I guess you don't know, the way I set things up, the Christian people down there have to recruit "laborers for the harvest" and pray for Me to bind Satan and help the missionaries and such.

I heard a bunch of them praying, but there just weren't really enough to bind that wicked Devil completely, so the missionaries must not have made it to your village, I guess.

That's really tough. Sorry, but those are the rules....

Yeah, I know I made the rules, but But who are you, oh man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' " [Romans 9:20]

Things got so messed up after the Garden of Eden. One little rule is all I gave them!

That tricky Devil disguised himself as a snake, and it has been down-hell, I mean down-hill ever since.

It even got so bad in Noah's time that I wiped everybody out, except for Noah's family. Tried to get a fresh start.

Didn't work.

What a mess.

I was sorry that I even made man in the first place [Genesis 6:6].

And everyone of you folks have sinned and fallen short of My Glory! [Romans 3:23].

All of you need big-time punishment. I couldn't do the Flood thing again because I promised with that rainbow. Eventually I'm going to burn everything up with fire, but I wanted to save a few of more of you so we can have a good time up in heaven.

That's why I sent My son Jesus down there to take that the punishment for you. I thought it was a pretty nice thing of Me to do!

Before I sent Him down we tried doing lots of sacrifices, burnt offerings, wave offerings, things like that. I gave them lots of rules about it in the Old Testament days. They are all written down in books like Leviticus.

They killed hundreds of thousands of cattle, sheep, doves, and such, but it just wasn't enough.

I can't stand sin! Sinners just can't be in My presence!

Sorry things didn't work out for you, but, as I told Moses: 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' [Romans 9:17 & Exodus 9:16]

Looks like you'll be spending eternity burning in Hell.

I make the rules and you follow them! We've got to move along here. Next!"

Surely it couldn't be that bad for old Moosa. But why else do they send out missionaries? Not just to do dental work. It is to do dental work so they can also hand out Bibles. Because Jesus told them to

go tell it on the mountain to save everyone from condemnation to Hell.

Do Christians really believe this?

In most cases, the answer would seem to be yes.

Why else do they send out missionaries? To save souls, and, of course, provide medical care, instruction on hygiene, dental work, etc.

But surely God would issue “Exempt-from-John 14:6-Get Out-of-Hell-Free cards” for Moosa and the people in his village who hadn't even heard the name of Jesus.

Accepting that bit of divine mercy, isn't it logical that all villages like Moosa's would be better off receiving "Get out of Hell free cards," even if they did continue to suffer with rotting teeth? Could it be better in the long run that the missionaries not even show up, or at least keep their mouths shut about Jesus?

This troublesome question first came to my attention when I was a new Christian at the University of Tulsa. It has never been answered satisfactorily. It remains one of the many molehills in a very large pile.

Prayer rugs and turbans on the dorm room floor.

This was brought home to me more vividly several years later as a graduate school at the University of Colorado. I had a roommate from Egypt studying for his PhD in electrical engineering. Every day he'd pull out his prayer rug, lay it on the floor of our dorm room, and bow to the east. He was Muslim. He even had turban-clad Muslim leaders come in to talk to me, to try to convert me to Islam, because, he told me, he would have to give account of himself to his Maker some day about whether he had done a good job of trying to spread the truth of Islam.

Can you imagine me saying to his Muslim friends, “Oh great! Thanks for bringing me the truth. Where do I sign?”

They were like aliens to me, and of course their religion was just as alien as they were.

It would take a lot more than that for me to give up Christmas and Silent Night and all the other trappings of my heathen Christian roots to embrace the truth of Islam.

I'm sure it was the same for Moosa years before at TU when I tried to convert him. Do you think Moosa will get a “Get out of Hell Free Card”, or did I give him "too much light"?

Of course, if the Muslims are right, I'm in big trouble, for they did show me some of their light in that dorm room.

How much light is enough?

How about for those kids on the Strip?

If people from any one country are likely to be refused requests for Get Out of Hell Free cards, it would be those in the USA. They were raised in the USA, where 90% of the world's evangelists are hammering away at 6% of the world's population, as I recall the statistics from those days.

What about those statistics? Even if they are off somewhat, I think we'd all have to agree that we live in the most evangelized nation on earth. I'm sure all those evangelists claim to be doing God's work, and are praying fervently for His leading. Though they may never "march in the infantry, ride with the cavalry, or shoot the artillery", I am certain they feel confident that they are in the Lord's army, following the Great General in Heaven as they battle the forces of darkness in their quest to fulfill the Great Commission [Matthew 28:19-20].

The battle has been raging for over 2000 years now. How's it been going? Is God leading? Why the 90%/6% ratio if that's the case? That leaves only 10% of the world's laborers-for-the-harvest working to get in 94% of the crop.

Is God ignoring requests for guidance from all these laborers, or is that ratio indeed what He intends? Is the United States just lucky? Remember the quote from that missionary above: "No man has the right to hear the gospel twice when some men haven't heard it once." Another quote I heard circa that time:

"There is nothing more useless than a candle burning in broad daylight"

We have lots of candles here; there is very little light over there. Is this what God wants? And with all the light we have here, how are we doing? Can we see clearly now? Is the rain gone? Have all the bad feelings disappeared?

We in the United States have had, I think most would agree, more of the Christian religion pumped into our veins than any other country in recent history. It has been too many years for me to remember, but as mentioned above, either Billy Graham or perhaps Bill Bright (who started Campus Crusade for Christ and Explo '72) said that he estimated that 90% to 95% of American Christians were half-hearted, lukewarm.

How can that be? Becoming a Christian is supposed to be a life changing experience, where you invite Jesus into your heart and give your life to Him. Actually, most of those 90% are what I was, pre-Explo '72: "Water-ski Christians," just doing their time.

It has been my experience that nowhere but church and school can you see people singing with an almost complete lack of facial expression. Instead of a united front singing "Onward Christian Soldiers," most American church-goers are a fractious bunch united in the back pews dreaming "Take Me Out to the Ballgame."

The factions seem almost endless, as illustrated by the list of churches cited previously from my beloved hometown. Immerse or sprinkle, Saturday or Sunday, instruments with the music or a cappello, evolution or creation, speak in tongues or that-may-be-demonic, handle snakes or shake and quake, once saved always saved, Moroni or Billy Graham, etc, etc.

I'm not denying there aren't some exciting fired-up churches out there. I used to attend some of them. The farther away we could get from the old hymns, the better. We made a joyful noise unto the Lord. We were not lukewarm. That was something you dare not risk, for Revelation 3:13-16 warned us: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.... 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.'"

Some souls have special priority to us mere humans. My father...

Verses like that one caused me another worry: my father. While I was out trying to save as many souls from the pit as fast as I could, some souls have special priority to us mere humans, for though we and God are "not willing that any should perish", we are especially not willing that our own family members should perish.

He was raised a Methodist. Had he really gotten saved? He was definitely lukewarm, and thus in line for regurgitation per Revelation 3. Hopefully the Baptists were right, and it was "Once Saved, Always Saved."

He had been a chaplain in military school. I had seen the award for that at my grandmother's house. But that lukewarm verse was scary.

My mother and I had "gotten saved" about the same time I did. She had the wisdom of age to back off, and not pressure my father. I did not, until I had created a religious wall between us.

It must have caused him pain to be spending thousands of dollars to send his son to ORU, only to have his son come home to harass him over his relationship with God. I thought I was being tactful, but based on the sometimes stern responses I got from an otherwise very gentle man, I evidently pushed too hard. I am glad I was able to apologize to him before he died.

THE GEOLOGY LAB TYPEWRITER: WHERE THIS BOOK BEGAN

At the University of Oklahoma, something else occurred of great import to the development of my views. At an impasse in discussion with a fellow student named Robert Cruce, we traded books. I gave him *Flaws in the Theory of Evolution* by Evan Shute. He gave me *Some Mistakes of Moses* by Robert G. Ingersoll. His book influenced me much more than mine influenced him. It was written in 1879, reissued in 1967, and from its pages leapt many of the objections to the Bible I had been collecting for years, storing on those overloaded shelves, awaiting God's answers in His perfect timing. A realization dawned: here was a man who 100 years earlier had very ably pointed out these common-sense difficulties. Why had I not heard of him before? Could no one answer these objections?

It was at about this point that I began to consider the possibility that answers would never come. It was one of the loneliest, most frightening periods of my life.

At the University of Colorado, I fell into a bull session dominated by a bunch of Church of Christ'ers, and was talked into meeting with one of their church leaders who, I was assured, had all the answers. In the course of the discussion, he suggested that I write out my questions so he could deal with them on his own time, and get back with me. He predicted that just the act of writing them out would let me see that, in reality, they weren't all that insurmountable after all.

For some reason, I agreed to do it. Somehow, even in the midst of graduate studies, by February of 1981 this little exercise of problem-writing became a sarcastic one-and-a-half-inch-thick collection of skepticisms and supportive material. I typed most of it myself, in the small room off the side of the sedimentary petrology lab, using one of the grad school typewriters. It had just the opposite effect on me than he was predicting. I sent him a copy via my Church of Christ friends, but never heard back from him.

That typing job, in that geology lab, is the origin of the book you are holding.

[2026 update: That inch-and-a-half of typed pages has followed me in various boxes for forty-five years. This time around — and I use that phrase deliberately, for reasons that will be clear by Chapter 9 — I am finishing what I started in that geology lab. The Church of Christ answer-man never did write back. Perhaps this book will find him.]

I graduated with a BS in geology in 1980 at the top of my class, selected to receive the AIPG Brunton Award by the faculty, and voted to receive the W.A. Tarr Award by my peers. I mention this not to boast — I told you I'm a 4-cylinder, not a V-8 — but because the most typical response I have gotten over the years when I try to explain my withdrawal from Christianity is that the objections I raise are just a smoke screen hiding something else. I must hate God. I must have a moral problem. I must have never really gotten saved. The suspicion is always that there must be a hidden sin behind my sincerity.

So: I graduated at the top of my class. I was a straight-arrow kid who never tried drugs, never ran with a bad crowd, never gave my parents a moment's serious trouble. I was not running from God. I was running toward the truth. Those are different directions, and I want you to know which one I was headed before you decide which category to put me in.

THE WALL THAT COST ME MY FAMILY

I'm getting a taste of my own medicine, for my children got sucked into a fundamentalist church, and were followed shortly thereafter by my wife. It started out innocently enough. Someone invited them to AWANA — a sort of Christian boy/girl scouts where instead of learning about nature and how to tie knots, they'd meet weekly to play games and memorize Bible verses. I thought it would be good to be exposed to Bible stories as a part of their education. But this was the hook. As the first beer is made palatable by peers, so also is Bible memorization.

What I thought of initially as good mental exercises began to take root. AWANA led to Sunday school, and Sunday school to youth group, and youth group to Christian rock music, all beating variations on the theme of John 3:16. When I would try to let them know the reasons I no longer accepted that worldview, my comments were not received gratefully.

My kids were gone to three, four, and five church activities a week. All their interests and friends were church-related. I may be the only father in the whole country who was disappointed that his children had gotten involved in a church. It's hard for Daddy's too-hot hikes and too-high-on-the-hill ski trips to compete with church-sponsored fear-factor nights, squid-bowling at summer camp, and trips to big city malls. Good-bye Daddy. Hello youth pastors.

Though they never said they thought I was going to go to Hell, I knew what they were being taught. It is what I was taught 30 years ago. A wall gradually went up. I remember how a similar wall dampened the last 26 years of my relationship with my own father — a wall I built with my own evangelical hands, in good conscience, trying to save his soul. I am glad I was able to apologize to him before he died.

Sometimes back then I flashed back to that wall and it felt like instant karma's was gonna get me. It did.

[2026 update: The marriage ended in 2018. The children are adults now. The wall that was being built in 2004 was eventually dismantled, at cost to everyone involved. Chapter 10 will bring this story forward. Some things have changed. The love underneath all of it has not.]

IN 1981, I FINALLY SAW THE MOUNTAIN

You can't make a mountain out of a molehill. But if you have enough molehills, piled on top of each other, the pile becomes a mountain. Unless you step back and see the size of the pile, you are not able to see the mountain. In 1981, I finally saw the size of the mountain.

Back in 2003 I had in front of me an article I'd saved from a Denver paper regarding a group formed by two Wall Street businessmen: Fundamentalists Anonymous. There is a lot of pain out there. There has to be a better way. I feel I should make some effort to record my experiences, in an effort to find that better way.

My conclusions are blasphemous: the Bible is not the inerrant word of God; in fact, it is probably not even the errant word of God, for the god portrayed in the Old Testament, and validated by the New Testament as the same yesterday, today, and forever [Hebrews 13:8] is little more than a raging ogre, prone to deadly violent temper tantrums. I am not going to leave you with nothing, however. I still believe in a supreme source of some sort and have recently encountered research providing strong evidence for the eternal life of our souls. It is an eternal life far more fair, more exciting, more grand than just sitting around on clouds playing harps, or in fiery pits feeling pain. So please, finish the book

before rushing out to the park-n-ride with your crowbar.

I have become, over the 45 years since I exited Christianity, more, not less confident in my views.

All is not well in Christendom. Many have looked over the walls.

Like the Man of La Mancha, I can dream the impossible dream, to fight the unbeatable foe, to right the un-rightable wrong. As I remember it, the actor playing Don Quixote who sings that song is in a dungeon awaiting execution for defying the church during the Inquisition. He did not go along with the crowd, or at least with the church, which forcibly represented the crowd in those days. Don Quixote was indeed hopelessly confused, tilting at windmills. Perhaps I too am hopelessly confused. Perhaps I am deceived by that wicked Devil, dead wrong, and headed for Hell as a result. But as surely as those windmills looked like the enemy to poor old Don Quixote, the Bible looks like the Great Enchanter to this tired frustrated soul — essentially a giant stumbling block in the road for those searching for the truth.

I feel like the little mouse in that cartoon which circulated via office copiers a few years back — "The Last Great Act of Defiance" — giving a hand gesture just before the enormous hawk snatched him up. It may do no good, but at least I didn't cower and hide.

[2026 update: That cartoon mouse has been sort of a mascot animal for twenty-three years now. The hawk is larger. My arm is still raised.]

This is not a scholarly treatise. I have avoided all the heavy difficult-to-follow theological arguments. Joe Normie and Mary Muggle can understand the material I will present. This is an attempt to set forth the common sense reasoning involved in my rejection of the Bible as the Word of God. In substance, there is really nothing new here. The only thing new is that it is repackaged in a recent, personal, emotional story — not just textual debate buried in some textbook on Higher Criticism. Perhaps for that reason, people today will be able to relate to it.

For what it's worth, that is the story of my disenchantment with the evangelical worldview. Next is the Biblical evidence.

THE LAZARUS REALIZATION

Much of the Biblical evidence comes from the Old Testament, which some easily dismiss as peripheral, claiming that the New Testament is what really matters. For this reason I'd like to begin with a problem from the New Testament. It is not so "in your face" as the Old Testament passages we'll examine. It is subtle, hidden, easily missed, yet when pointed out, becomes a massive red flag which signals: "Warning: proceed with caution; deceptively thin ice and unreliable information ahead!"

How could I have done all that Bible study, taken all those theology classes, and of course, sat through all those sermons, and never noticed this?

Lazarus. Every Christian knows the name. Jesus raised him from the dead. The Book of John gives us the dramatic image of Jesus uttering the words: "Lazarus, come forth!" with Lazarus then walking out of the tomb wrapped up like a mummy. This was no ordinary miracle. Lazarus was Jesus' friend. When Jesus hears that his friend Lazarus was dead, his response is the shortest verse in the Bible: "Jesus wept."

It is not as though He hadn't been forewarned, however. Martha and Mary, Lazarus' sisters, sent word to Jesus that he was sick, and to please come help. Yet Jesus waits around for two days, waiting for Lazarus to die so that he could be raised from the dead. That would be much more impressive than simply another case of healing the sick. Indeed Jesus says: "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe."

John 11:39-45 — "Lord, by this time there will be a stench; for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me." And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." And he who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Many therefore of the Jews, who had come to Mary and beheld what He had done, believed in Him.

So what's my problem with it? What did I fail to notice about it for nine years?

This: It is only in ONE of the four gospels. It is only in John. Matthew, Mark, and Luke make no mention of it.

How can that be? The healing of Peter's sick mother-in-law made it into Matthew, Mark, and Luke. So did the story of the woman who touched the hem of His garment, plus many others. Yet these were more "minor" miracles, treated with three or four verses, not a full chapter like the Lazarus story. It seems incomprehensible that Matthew, Mark, and Luke could have included so many "smaller" miracles in their gospels, and then when they got to the Lazarus event, reasoned: "Naaah, I wasn't all that impressed with that dead-four-days stuff, so I doubt anybody else would be either. Think I'll leave that out so I can give more space to the cursing of the fig tree!" Can you imagine it? Of course not, because it is absurd.

The implications are staggering; the effects were devastating. The "Lazarus Realization" was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. It is what motivated me to stop reading through the eyes of faith and put on the glasses of skepticism. If the Book of John could not be trusted, what else could not be trusted?

The happy world of fundamentalist Christianity that I had entered in 1972 had slowly begun to seem a little like Disneyland, where you get occasional glimpses over the walls to remind you that, though it is fun, and though it would be nice to stay forever, you can't — for Disneyland is not reality. I suppose I could name that evangelical world I lived in then "Godlyland." For me, the Lazarus

Realization was the equivalent of ten minutes to midnight at Disneyland, when the lights start going off, and the loudspeakers say: "The park will be closing in ten minutes."

My trip to Godlyland was over. It was terrifying to leave.

Now, some 23 years since I walked out of the gates, the terror has abated, along with the fear of dragging someone to Hell along with me if I was wrong.

In part, I feel an obligation to record my experiences in an attempt to save people some time and frustration, letting them know what I discovered down those paths, since I've already been there.

I used to try to save their souls; now I'm trying to save them some time and frustration and anguish. I wish I'd had a book like this back in '72. Perhaps they existed, and I was not aware of them. I had no reason to search for them, for I had no reason to doubt the worldview I had been given.

Many are happy in Godlyland, apparently not bothered in the least by their occasional glimpses over the walls. I was euphoric for the first years, but eventually I could no longer maintain faith in the face of the mountain of evidence that just did not make sense. There were just too many cracks in the walls revealing that Godlyland was not reality.

The heart cannot rejoice in that which the mind rejects.

It has now been another 23 years since I wrote that last line in the first chapter of my original book. I feel I must speak out. The stakes are even higher. This is no longer just an individual matter, it's possibly a planetary matter.

It is time for another picture, and I have a good one with good modern evidence of something far much grander than the story we've been sold. It still takes my breath away and gives me peace and confidence that all in well in the very long run. "No doubt the Universe is unfolding as it should". It "makes sense of everything that doesn't. When grasped, it keeps people with crowbars out of parking lots, and so much more. We all grasp it eventually, but it's a long time coming. Please keep reading, and thank you.

"It's been a long time coming; it's going to be a long, long time gone... Speak out! You've got to speak out against the madness; you've got to speak your mind, if you dare... And you know, the darkest hour is always just before the dawn; and it appears to be a long, long, long, long time, before the dawn."
— Crosby, Stills & Nash, "Long Time Coming," 1969

CHAPTER 2

WOULD GOD DO THAT?

"They Don't Put These In Sermons" - 2026 Edition

"When the truth is found to be lies, and all the joy within you dies..."

— Jefferson Airplane, "Somebody to Love," 1967

First, let's set the stage with a couple of verses:

Psalm 145:8-9 — "The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works."

Beautiful, right? That could be a sermon right there. The pastor could expand on that for twenty minutes, cite a few other kindred verses, and everyone would go home feeling good about God.

That's the kind of God we expect. Gracious. Merciful. Slow to anger.

But here's what they don't put in sermons.

THE UZZAH STORY: WHEN HELPING GETS YOU KILLED

Almost everyone's heard of the Ark of the Covenant, thanks to Indiana Jones. The movie even got it partly right—bad things happen when you mess with it. In 1 Samuel 6:19, God killed 50,070 people just for looking into the Ark.

Many may indeed believe the object is stored in some giant government warehouse. The movie was reasonably accurate regarding what would happen if someone looked into the ark, for I Samuel 6:19 tells us that God killed 50,070 people because they did just that.

Rules are rules. They suffered the consequences.

No doubt Uzzah knew about those 50,070 people. When it came to the ark, God meant business. As best I can tell, Uzzah was only trying to help in a crisis situation, but God struck him dead anyway.

Uzzah, he knew the score. Everyone knew this. The consequences were... severe. Don't touch the Ark.

Here's what happened:

King David decided to move the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Big celebration—dancing, music, instruments, the whole nine yards. They loaded it onto a new cart pulled by oxen.

Everything's going great until they hit a rough spot. The oxen stumble. The Ark starts to tip.

And Uzzah—good old Uzzah—reaches out to steady it.

Boom. Dead.

God struck him down on the spot.

Now, let me be clear about what happened here. Uzzah wasn't trying to steal the Ark. He wasn't mocking God. He wasn't committing some grievous sin. He was trying to keep God's sacred object from falling into the dirt.

And God killed him for it.

The Bible says God's anger "burned against Uzzah" for his "irreverence." Irreverence? The man was trying to help.

David was so freaked out he refused to continue the journey. He left the Ark at someone else's house for three months—probably thinking, "Better you than me, buddy."

Here's my question: Why didn't God just kill the oxen?

Seriously. If God felt like someone had to die because the Ark almost fell, why not zap the animals that stumbled? That would've been just as impressive. Would've really driven home the "don't mess with the Ark" message.

Instead, God killed the guy trying to prevent a disaster.

Is this the "gracious and merciful" God from Psalm 145? Slow to anger? Because this looks like instant rage over a reflex action.

One of the seminary professors I wrote to back in 1981 tried to explain it to me: "The Ark represents God's holiness. Uzzah should have known better than to touch it, even with good intentions."

Okay, but... he was preventing it from falling in the dirt. Which seems worse: Uzzah's hand touching it for two seconds, or the sacred Ark of the Covenant face-planting in ox manure?

Would the Master of the Universe really be that petty?

Time for a short analogy:

OSHA Violations: The Case of the Helpful Hand

If the Ark of the Covenant was a "Product Liability" nightmare, the story of Uzzah is the ultimate Workplace Safety disaster.

The Scene: King David is moving the Ark to Jerusalem. It's a parade! There are harps, lyres, tambourines, and 30,000 chosen men of Israel. They've put the Ark on a "new cart" (which sounds respectful) pulled by oxen.

The "Incident": As they reach the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumble. The Ark starts to tilt. It's about to slide off the cart and hit the dirt.

The Reflex: A man named Uzzah, who is walking beside the cart, does what any of us would do. He reaches out his hand to steady the Ark. He's literally trying to save the "Presence of God" from a face-plant in the mud.

The Text (II Samuel 6:7): "And the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God."

The "Safety Inspection": In our world, if a worker prevents a valuable piece of equipment from falling and is accidentally electrocuted, we call it a tragedy. In the Bible, God is the one who "trips the circuit." Uzzah's reward for trying to help was a lethal "holy shock."

The Transition: Even David—the man after God's own heart—didn't find this "holy." The Bible says "David became angry because of the Lord's outburst against Uzzah." He was so shaken that he refused to take the Ark any further that day. He basically said, "If this is how You treat Your friends, I'm not sure I want You in my house."

THE CENSUS: WHEN GOD PUNISHES THE WRONG PEOPLE

Here's another ne. This time, God gets angry at King David for taking a census.

Now, God had told Moses to take censuses before (Numbers 1 and 4), so apparently it's okay sometimes. But this time? No good.

According to 1 Chronicles 21, Satan tempted David to count Israel's fighting men. David does it. God gets furious.

Fair enough—David disobeyed. So God offers David three punishment options:

1. Three years of famine
2. Three months fleeing from enemies
3. Three days of plague

David, trusting in God's mercy (oh, the irony), chooses the plague. Surely a merciful God will go easy on them, right?

Wrong.

God sends an angel with a sword. The angel starts killing people. Lots of people.

70,000 people die.

Finally, David pleads: "Wait! I'm the one who sinned! Why are you killing them? These people are innocent! Kill me and my family if you want, but leave everyone else alone!"

God apparently hadn't thought of that. He tells the angel to stop.

Let me repeat: God killed 70,000 innocent people to punish David for taking a census.

Not David. Not David's family. Random citizens who had nothing to do with the decision.

When one of the seminary professors responded to my questions about this story in '81', he said: "Censuses were usually for military purposes. This shows David was congratulating himself on his military power instead of trusting God. The deaths were a reminder that David had no power except what came from God."

Okay, but... 70,000 people had to die to teach David a lesson about pride?

Analogy time. God gave David three choices. I'll give you five:

Analogy 1: THE COURTROOM

PROSECUTION: "Your Honor, the Defendant (The Almighty) admit to killing 70,000 civilians. His defense? The King took a 'unauthorized head-count' of his own people."

JUDGE: "Wait. The King counted his subjects, so the 'Good Shepherd' slaughtered the sheep? That's like a librarian burning every book in the building because the assistant filed a card incorrectly."

DEFENSE: "It was a matter of 'Divine Pride,' Your Honor."

JUDGE: "I'm sure the 70,000 corpses feel much better knowing the Plaintiff's ego is intact. Motion for sanity check granted."

Analogy 2: THE TRUE CRIME SERIES

"Welcome back to 'Serial Scriptural.' Today's case: The Census Killings. Imagine waking up and finding out your entire family died of a plague because your Governor decided to update the voter registration rolls. There was no warning. No trial. Just a 'Divine Outburst' that wiped out the population of a small city to make a point to one man. Is it a tragedy? Or is it the ultimate Power Trip?"

ANALOGY 3: THE SOCIAL WORKER (CPS) EVALUATION

"The 'Father' in this scenario displays a terrifying lack of empathy. To punish one 'child' (David), he harms 70,000 other children who had nothing to do with the infraction. This is 'Displacement Aggression' on a cosmic scale. We recommend immediate removal of all 'sheep' from this Shepherd's care."

ANALOGY 4: THE CORPORATE BOARDROOM

"Look, we had a data breach. David accessed the 'Human Resources Census' without a permit. To ensure data integrity, we had to liquidate 70,000 'assets.' It's a heavy loss for the Q3 workforce, but it ensures that the CEO remains the only one with the 'Master Password.' Profit is down, but Fear is up 400%."

ANALOGY 5: THE "NEIGHBORHOOD ARSONIST" (The Classic Jim)

"It's the ultimate version of the Arsonist Parent. God burns down the whole neighborhood to teach His kid not to play with matches. The kid learns the lesson, sure—but he's the only one left alive to talk

about it."

THE INDIANA JONES MOMENT

As noted at the beginning of this chapter when introducing the Uzzah story, almost everyone's heard of the Ark of the Covenant, thanks to Indiana Jones. Buried in

The movie even got it partly right—bad things happen when you mess with it, but didn't show the full carnage, just a few compared to the 50,000+.

In 1 Samuel 6:19, God killed 50,070 people just for looking into the Ark."

Yes, less than the 70,000 slaughtered due to David's unauthorized census, but still on the level of wiping out an entire city.

Why did I skip over it in the Uzzah story? Because it deserved its own treatment after revealing that these massacres are SOP, standard operating procedures for the Big Guy in the Sky IF we are to believe His Big Book, the one they wave around and slap and beat but seldom read, except with a study guide close by.

So here it is: separate treatment with a few analogies, because hey, we can't let the Big Guy off for an additional few thousand years. Swords and bludgeons have been replaced by drones and cyber attacks and nukes, thus now the consequences are "Biblical".

That in itself hints at the catastrophic nature of the Old Testament; the oft used word to conjure an image of massive devastation or catastrophe: "Biblical".

Jesus spoke in parables. As we'll note elsewhere in this book, perhaps His parables are a few of the actual things He said, the words that have survived millennia of religification. The older versions of the Bible that put Jesus' words in Red Letters were providing a highlight on about the only thing with real light in the Big Book.

But parables are in a sense analogies, so it is time for some more, to put some "flesh" on this insanity:

OPTION 1: THE COURTROOM

JUDGE: "Let me get this straight. The 'Almighty' killed an entire city's worth of men because they were curious about the contents of a box He left sitting in a field?"

DEFENSE: "It was a 'Holy' box, Your Honor."

JUDGE: "I don't care if it was a box of live grenades. You don't wipe out the population of Topeka because someone lifted the latch. Case dismissed on the grounds of 'Extreme Divine Overreaction.'"

OPTION 2: THE SOCIAL WORKER (CPS) EVALUATION

"We're looking at a Father figure who claims to love His children, but when they get curious and peek in the 'cookie jar'—which happens to be a gold box—He doesn't give them a timeout. He executes

the entire neighborhood. This is a classic 'Ogre' parenting style. It's hard to build a relationship based on 'trust' when the penalty for looking under the lid is a mass grave."

ELISHA: DON'T MOCK THE BALD GUY

Everyone knows about Elijah going up to heaven in a fiery chariot. Great story. Gets lots of pulpit time.

His successor was Elisha. After Elijah's dramatic exit, Elisha performed a nice miracle—he purified some bad water in Jericho so the land could be fruitful again. Threw some salt in a spring, said a prayer, boom—problem solved. Though he's not as well known as Elijah, he was no light-weight. He even got a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit per 2 Kings 2:19-22.

Then we get to the very next verses: 23-24.

And this is where things get weird.

In the "Godlyland" Sunday School version, Elisha is a great man of God who performed miracles. But there is one story they never put on story time. It's the time he called a "divine hit" on a group of kids for making fun of his hair.

If this were handled in a modern court of law, it might look a bit like this:

Courtroom Drama: The Case of the Bald Prophet and the 42 Children

PROSECUTOR: (Pacing the floor) Mr. Elisha, you claim to be a representative of a God of infinite love and patience. Is that correct?

ELISHA: (Nodding solemnly) Yes. I have a "double portion" of the Spirit.

PROSECUTOR: Excellent. Then let's talk about the road to Bethel. A group of youths—the Bible calls them "little children" in some versions—started teasing you. They called you "Baldy." A bit immature, sure. But what was your reaction?

ELISHA: I cursed them in the name of the Lord.

PROSECUTOR: And did the "Lord of Love" send a social worker? Did He send a stern warning about respecting elders? No. Your God sent two female bears out of the woods to tear forty-two of those children to pieces.

[The Omission:] Pause the drama for a moment. Think about the scale. Forty-two children. That's nearly two full school buses. Because a man with a "double portion of Spirit" couldn't handle a joke about his receding hairline.

JUDGE: (Intervening) Mr. Elisha, the court is struggling with the "proportionality" of the sentencing here. Is "Death by Bear" the standard Biblical penalty for name-calling?

ELISHA: The text says I cursed them, and the bears appeared. It's in the Book.

PROSECUTOR: (To the Jury) Members of the jury, this is what "They Don't Put in Sermons." They tell you God loves the little children—"all the children of the world." But apparently, that love has a "hairline trigger." If you mock the Prophet's bald spot, the "Shepherd" becomes a Predator.

Courtroom drama analogy over.

Here's what happened:

Elisha is walking to Bethel when some young boys come out of the city. They start mocking him: "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!"

Kids being jerks, basically. Picking on the bald prophet.

So Elisha curses them in the name of the Lord.

And then—I kid you not—two female bears come out of the woods and maul forty-two of them.

Forty-two children. Mauled by bears. For name-calling.

A seminary professor told me back in '81 that these weren't innocent kids. They were "offspring of apostates who worshiped Baal." Their parents lived in Bethel, "a center of apostasy." These kids had bad attitudes, learned from bad parents.

His question to me: "Is it unjust that apostasy be wiped out?"

Well, I don't know—what do you think?

Here's what I think:

Even if these kids had terrible parents, even if they were little jerks, even if Bethel was the worst city in Israel...

Maybe God could have just scared them?

Send out the bears, have them roar real loud, then send some lightning to zap the bears before they kill anyone. Throw in a booming voice from heaven: "THOU SHALT NOT MOCK THE PROPHETS."

Message delivered. Kids traumatized but alive. Parents rethink their life choices.

Instead, God sends bears to kill forty-two children for calling someone bald.

The God who is "slow to anger and great in lovingkindness" couldn't think of a better response than ursine infanticide?

There's always another analogy:

"If you're the guy who designed the human body to lose hair at age 40, you can't get mad when the neighborhood kids notice the design flaw. Using 'Apex Predators' to solve a 'Bullying' problem is like using a sledgehammer to kill a mosquito on a glass table. You might get the bug, but you've wrecked the house."

It has happened more than once where the god of the Bible punishes someone besides the wrongdoer. Let me tell you 'bout Ahab, the Arab, the king of Samaria:

The Great Vineyard Heist: When God Punishes the Wrong Person

JEZEBEL. That name has made its way into even secular usage over the years.

In the "Godlyland" version of the Bible, Ahab and Jezebel are the ultimate villains. We are taught that God is just and that evil is eventually punished. But if you read the fine print in I Kings 21, the "Justice of God" looks a lot more like a bureaucratic mistake.

Summary: The Crime and the "Plea Bargain"

Jezebel frames Naboth, has him stoned to death, and Ahab takes the vineyard. God is (rightfully) angry. He sends Elijah to tell Ahab: "In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, the dogs shall lick your blood, even yours."

But then, Ahab says "I'm sorry."

The Text (I Kings 21:28-29): "Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah... 'Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days.'"

[The Reality Check:] Read that again. Ahab is the one who wanted the garden. Ahab is the one who let his wife murder an innocent man. Ahab is the one who took possession of the stolen goods. But because Ahab put on some itchy clothes (sackcloth) and looked sad, God decided to give him a pass and punish his children instead.

Here are a few more details:

King Ahab wanted a vineyard. The owner, Naboth, refused to sell—it was his family's inheritance.

Ahab sulked like a toddler. Wouldn't eat. Pouted in bed.

His wife Jezebel took matters into her own hands. She forged letters in Ahab's name, hired false witnesses, and had Naboth framed for cursing God and the king. The elders and nobles of the city went along with it. They stoned Naboth to death.

Ahab took the vineyard.

God was furious. He sent Elijah to confront Ahab with a terrible prophecy: Dogs would lick up Ahab's blood. Jezebel would be eaten by dogs. Their whole family line would be destroyed.

But then Ahab did something unexpected—he repented. Tore his clothes. Put on sackcloth. Fasted. Went around all humble and broken.

And God noticed.

1 Kings 21:28-29 — "Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah... 'Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days.'"

Would God do that?

God forgives Ahab—but still punishes his son?

The son who had nothing to do with murdering Naboth? The son who wasn't even mentioned in the crime?

That kid gets punished because his dad repented too late?

At least Jezebel was going to be eaten by the dogs, for she seems to be the real instigator here.

Imagine you steal a car. You get caught. You're genuinely sorry—you apologize, you make restitution, you change your life.

And the judge says: "Okay, I forgive you. But your son is going to prison for twenty years."

You'd call that judge a monster.

Sermon vs. Substance

- The Sermon: "God is merciful to those who repent."
- The Substance: God's mercy to a murderer is paid for by the murderer's innocent children.

If a human judge said, "Since the killer apologized, I'm going to let him go and put his son in the electric chair instead," we would call that judge a monster. In the Bible, we call it "Divine Providence."

(QR Code For more detail, click the QR code to read the actual verses from the Big Book to see the long scriptural quote I included in the 2004 book, a copy of which is included with the purchase of this book, or to be found on the website TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com.)

Is this story credible? It becomes even more incredible when you look back and see what happened just three chapters before which is next in our list of "Incredibles".

Three chapters earlier, the entire nation saw the most spectacular display of divine power in history.

Before the Jezebel / vineyard Naboth incident, there was another story about Ahab—and this one makes the vineyard tragedy even more absurd.

THE SUPERBOWL OF THE GODS

Before we leave Ahab, we have to look at what happen three chapters earlier, the "Pre-Game Show".

Sports Highlights:

COMMENTATOR: Welcome to the Mount Carmel Invitational! It's the God of Israel vs. Baal. 450 prophets of Baal have been dancing all morning, but Baal is a "No-Show." Elijah is even mocking

them—asking if their god is on vacation or perhaps in the bathroom!

THE HIGHLIGHT REEL: Elijah pours twelve jars of water over his altar. He says a quick prayer. BOOM! Fire falls from the sky, incinerates the meat, the wood, the stones, and even licks up the water. The crowd goes wild! "The Lord, He is God!" they scream. Elijah then personally slaughters all 450 "opposing team" members.

THE POST-GAME BLUNDER: After seeing fire fall from heaven and participating in a mass execution of the competition, what do the people do? Do they become lifelong, unshakable followers?

No. Three chapters later, they are all working for Jezebel, murdering Naboth for a vegetable patch.

THE REALITY CHECK: As I wrote in 2004, this is simply not credible. If you saw a man call down fire from the sky on Monday, you wouldn't join a crooked real-estate scam on Thursday. The characters in the Bible have the short-term memory of a goldfish.

So here's the story:

It was the ultimate showdown: Elijah versus the prophets of Baal.

Elijah challenged them: "You call on Baal. I'll call on the Lord. Whichever god answers with fire wins."

Baal's prophets went first. They danced, shouted, cut themselves—nothing. No fire. No answer.

Then Elijah stepped up. He soaked his altar with water—just to make it harder—and prayed.

Fire fell from heaven. Consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dust, and even licked up the water in the trench.

Everyone fell on their faces: "The Lord, He is God!"

Victory for Team Yahweh.

Then Elijah had all 450 prophets of Baal taken down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered.

Now here's my question: After witnessing a miracle like that—fire from heaven, undeniable proof that the God of Israel is real—how could Ahab and Jezebel and all those elders go back to business as usual?

Three chapters later, they're murdering innocent men for vineyard real estate.

Did they just... forget? Did the miracle not stick?

Or—and stay with me here—is it possible this story was embellished over time? That maybe there was some natural event (drought, fire, something) that people later attributed to God, and by the time it was written down, it had become an epic showdown?

Because if 450 prophets really were slaughtered after witnessing an undeniable miracle, and yet three chapters later everyone's back to worshipping Baal and murdering neighbors...

Then either these people had the worst memory in history, or something about this story doesn't add up.

[Deep-Dive Marker: See 2004 Digital Edition, Pages 40-41 for the Full Text of I Kings 18]

THE PATTERN EMERGES

These aren't isolated incidents. They're not "difficult passages" that can be explained away with better context.

They're a pattern.

A pattern of a God who:

- Kills helpers (Uzzah)
- Punishes innocent bystanders (the 70,000)
- Sends bears to maul children (the 42 kids)
- Punishes sons for fathers' crimes (Ahab's son)
- Demands mass slaughter after miracles (450 prophets)

This isn't "gracious and merciful."

This isn't "slow to anger."

This is an ancient tribal deity behaving exactly like you'd expect an ancient Bronze Age tribal deity to behave—jealous, violent, and shockingly petty.

And here's the thing: I'm not making this up. I'm not taking things out of context. I'm not cherry-picking the worst parts.

I'm just reading what's actually there.

These are the stories they don't put in sermons.

Because if they did, people might start asking the same question I did:

Would God really do that?

MORE MOLEHILLS AHEAD

And we're just getting started.

We haven't even talked about:

- The Egyptian plagues (killing firstborn children)
 - The Amalekite genocide (including infants)
 - Jephthah's daughter (human sacrifice, honored by God)
 - The Levite's concubine (gang-raped to death, then dismembered)
-

- Lot (offering his virgin daughters to a rape mob—then impregnating them later)

Those are coming.

But first, let me address what you might be thinking: "Aren't you taking these out of context? Aren't you ignoring the cultural and historical setting?"

Fair questions. We'll tackle those too.

For now, just sit with these stories.

Read them yourself. (I'll give you the references—they're all real.)

And ask yourself honestly:

If you didn't already believe the Bible was God's Word...

Would these stories convince you it was?

Or would they convince you it was exactly what it looks like: ancient texts written by ancient people, trying to make sense of their world, attributing natural disasters and human cruelty to the gods they imagined?

That's the question that drove me away from evangelical fundamentalist Christianity in 1981.

It was the question that frustrated me in that Wyoming trailer in 2003 as I was losing my family.

And it's the question I'm asking you now.

[QR CODE: Full Biblical passages for Chapter 2]

Scan to read the complete texts of all stories mentioned in this chapter at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com

INTERMISSION: A PEP TALK

Before we continue, I need to address something.

My editor for the original book told me he was getting exhausted reading this book. I completely understand.

These Bible passages aren't easy to read. The language is convoluted. The stories are disturbing. My commentary would not be making sense if my readers were skipping over the actual quotes.

And that, right there, is a powerful indictment of the Bible itself:

Would the Master of the Universe supervise the writing of a book that's so difficult to read that people just give up and listen to preachers instead?

To summarize my dilemma in the Intermission section back in 2003:

If I just tell you these stories in plain English, you won't believe they're really this bad. You'll think I'm exaggerating or taking things out of context.

If I cite verses and expect you to look them up yourself, you won't. It's too inconvenient. Too disruptive. You'll skip it.

If I quote small snippets, I'll be accused of cherry-picking and distorting God's Word.

So I was stuck. Unless these laborious Bible passages were read and understood, my comments and reasoning would make no sense. That is perhaps the premium frustration, the double-edged sword, the damned-if-you-do-damned-if-you-don't dilemma of dealing with this subject.

The masses will keep singing "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet" and stick with feel-good passages like "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

But you should read ALL of your Bible. Not just the parts selected for you by the preachers and study guides.

In this 2026 edition, I'm trying a different approach. I'm storytelling these passages instead of copying them verbatim. I'm putting the full text online at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com with QR codes so you can verify everything yourself.

So I'm asking you: Don't give up.

If I'm wrong and these really ARE the Words of God, then reading them can only do you good.

If I'm right, then you NEED to know it.

"Got to pay your dues if you want to seek the truth, and you know it don't come easy..." (Thanks Ringo, surely understanding the slight tweak. Those in my Baby Boomer generation will remember exactly. Those were the days.)

Intermission over. Back to our feature presentation.

MORE KIDS PUNISHED FOR THEIR PARENTS' SINS

God had taken it out on the children instead of the parents before, in Solomon's time, so Ahab may not have been surprised that his kids were going to take the rap. God punishing children instead of the guilty parents isn't a one-time thing. It's standard operating procedure.

Solomon's Son Gets the Kingdom Torn Away

God appeared to Solomon twice. Gave him specific instructions: "Don't go after other gods."

Solomon did it anyway. He worshiped his foreign wives' gods.

God was furious.

1 Kings 11:11-13 — God told Solomon: "Because you have done this, I will surely tear the kingdom from you... Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son."

Wait—Solomon gets off free, but his son loses everything?

"Dad, why did I lose the kingdom?"

"Well son, I worshiped some idols, but God really liked your grandpa David, so He let me keep it. You weren't so lucky."

[QR CODE] Read it: 1 Kings 11:9-13 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com

David & Bathsheba: The Baby Dies

Speaking of David (the one God loved so much), let's look at his ONE mistake.

According to 1 Kings 15:5, David did what was right "all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite."

(Apparently the writer forgot about that census incident where 70,000 people died. But who's counting?)

Here's what happened:

One evening, David was walking on his palace roof. He saw a beautiful woman bathing.

He sent someone to find out who she was: "That's Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite.

David sent for her anyway. Slept with her. She got pregnant.

Problem: Her husband Uriah was out fighting David's wars.

David tried to cover it up by bringing Uriah home, hoping he'd sleep with his wife and think the baby was his. But Uriah was too honorable—he refused to enjoy comfort while his fellow soldiers were still in the field.

So David sent Uriah back to battle with a letter—carried by Uriah himself—ordering the commander: "Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die."

It worked. Uriah was killed.

David married Bathsheba. She had the baby.

God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David. As punishment:

- The sword would never depart from David's house
- David's wives would be taken and given to another man in broad daylight
- The baby would die

David repented. God forgave him—David wouldn't die.

But the baby?

2 Samuel 12:15-18 — "Then the Lord struck the child... so that he was very sick. David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground... When David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead."

The baby died.

David got up, washed, changed clothes, went to worship, and ate food.

His servants were confused: "While the child was alive, you fasted and wept. But when he died, you got up and ate?"

David said: "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept, hoping God might be gracious. But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

Then David went back to Bathsheba and had another baby: Solomon.

And God loved Solomon.

Let me get this straight:

- David commits adultery and murder
- God forgives David (he doesn't die)
- But God still kills the innocent baby to punish David
- Then God loves the SECOND baby (Solomon) who grows up to be the "wisest man who ever lived" with 700 wives and 300 concubines

Lucky for Solomon he was born second, I guess.

Being a newborn, the illness probably wasn't too traumatic—no worse than circumcision. And we can presume God gave him a "Get Out of Hell Free" card.

Still beats having the kingdom torn from your hands like Solomon's son, or having "evil put upon your house" like Ahab's son.

But here's the thing: Why punish the baby at all?

If God wanted to punish David, HE'S RIGHT THERE. Kill David. Don't kill the innocent child.

Unless... God wasn't actually involved in any of this, and ancient scribes were just trying to make sense of a tragedy.

[QR CODE] Full story: 2 Samuel 11-12 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com

GOD MAKES IT OFFICIAL: I PUNISH KIDS FOR PARENTS' SINS

This pattern of punishing children wasn't a secret. God explicitly told Moses this was how things worked.

Moses had just carved the second set of stone tablets (after smashing the first set in rage over the golden calf). He hiked up Mount Sinai.

God descended in a cloud and stood right there in front of Moses.

Moses must've been terrified. Just the day before, God had told him: "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!"

I picture the scarecrow from Wizard of Oz prostrating himself before the flaming head: "Your Honor! Your Excellency! Your Wizardry!"

God proclaimed:

Exodus 34:6-7 — "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

Wait—what?

Read that again slowly.

God is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, full of lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin..."

BUT He punishes children for their parents' sins up to the fourth generation.

That's your kids, your grandkids, your great-grandkids, and your great-great-grandkids.

All punished for something YOU did.

Does that sound "compassionate" to you?

Does that sound "just"?

If you were going to preach a Sunday sermon on "God's Love," you'd probably quote Psalm 145: "The Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness."

You'd skip the part about punishing innocent grandchildren.

Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain.

[QR CODE] See for yourself: Exodus 34:6-7 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com

THE CONQUEST: GOD'S "MISSIONARY TRIP"

Two verses after God announced He'd be punishing grandkids, He laid out the plan for conquering Canaan.

This was supposed to be God's "Chosen People"—the light of the world, through whom redemption would come.

So surely this was a missionary expedition, right? Build seminaries, send out evangelists, share the Good News?

Nope.

Exodus 34:11-13 — "I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite... you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars..."

Wait—with the whole world at His disposal ("He's got the whole world in His hands"), God couldn't find an empty plot of land?

He had to drive out six different groups of people?

Here's the detailed battle plan from Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 20:10-17 — When you approach a city, offer terms of peace.

If they surrender: Everyone becomes your slaves.

If they refuse: Kill all the men. Take the women, children, and livestock as plunder.

But for nearby cities (the ones God promised you): "You shall not leave alive anything that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them... as the Lord your God has commanded you."

Everything that breathes.

Men, women, children, babies, animals.

Total annihilation.

Why? "In order that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods."

Okay, but... if you're killing EVERYONE, who's left to teach anyone anything?

And if the threat is "detestable things," why let the women live in the distant cities? Aren't they the most likely to tempt men with foreign gods? (We'll see this exact problem with Solomon's 700 foreign wives later.)

Here's what I think: God had nothing to do with this.

This is just barbaric, unjust tribal warfare—the kind that happened all over the ancient world—with a religious veneer slapped on centuries later to justify it.

[QR CODE] [The conquest instructions: Deuteronomy 20 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com](https://www.TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com)

STONE YOUR OWN FAMILY FOR APOSTASY

What if some survivors from the conquered cities talked to Israelite kids? What if they convinced them that maybe golden calves were actually pretty cool?

God had an answer for that too:

Deuteronomy 13:6-10 — "If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entices you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods'... you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. So you shall stone him to death."

Read that again.

Your brother. Your son. Your daughter. The wife you cherish. Your best friend.

If any of them suggest worshiping other gods—even in private—you must kill them yourself.

Your hand must strike the first blow.

No mercy. No trial. No investigation.

Just execution.

And it gets worse:

Deuteronomy 13:12-17 — If you hear that people in one of your cities have turned to other gods, investigate thoroughly. If it's true:

"You shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword. Then you shall gather all its booty into the middle of its open square and burn the city and all its booty with fire as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God; and it shall be a ruin forever. It shall never be rebuilt."

Kill everyone. Kill the animals. Burn everything. Leave it as a permanent ruin.

This is the Thought Police.

No freedom of religion. No cultural exchange. No tolerance.

One wrong opinion? Stone your family. One wrong city? Burn it to the ground forever.

And we're told this is the Word of a loving God.

[QR CODE] See the text: Deuteronomy 13 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com

SEEING A PATTERN YET?

Let's review what we've covered so far:

1. Uzzah — Killed for trying to steady the Ark
2. Census victims — 70,000 killed for David's pride
3. 42 children — Mauled by bears for name-calling

4. Ahab's son — Punished for his father's sin
5. Solomon's son — Lost the kingdom for his father's idolatry
6. David's baby — Killed for David's adultery and murder
7. Official policy — Punish children to the 4th generation
8. Conquest orders — Kill everything that breathes
9. Family execution — Stone your relatives for wrong beliefs

This isn't "gracious and merciful."

This isn't "slow to anger."

This isn't a God I'd want my kids learning about.

And we're just getting started.

There are more molehills to pile onto this mountain. Stories about:

- Egypt's firstborn slaughtered (while Israelite kids get a pass)
- Levites killing 3,000 of their brothers over the golden calf
- Lot offering his daughters to a rape mob (then later impregnating them in a cave)
- And so much more...

Am I making this up?

No.

It's all in your Bible. You can verify every single story at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com.

I'm not a demon-possessed God-hater. I'm just reading the book they told me would "scare the Hell out of me."

It did—just not in the way they intended.

THE MIDIANITE SEDUCTION AND SLAUGHTER

Despite all God's warnings about foreign women and golden calves, sure enough, the Israelites fell for it.

Numbers 25:1-9 — While camped at Shittim, the Israelite men started having sex with Moabite women. The women invited them to sacrifice to their gods. The men ate the sacrifices and bowed down to Baal.

God was furious.

He told Moses: "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel."

But before they could organize the mass execution, something happened:

An Israelite man brought a Midianite woman right into the camp—in front of Moses and everyone—while people were weeping at the tent of meeting.

A priest named Phinehas saw this. He grabbed a spear, followed the couple into a tent, and speared them both through their bodies.

God was pleased. The plague stopped.

24,000 people had already died.

God praised Phinehas for his "jealousy" and rewarded him with a covenant of peace.

Then God gave new orders: "Be hostile to the Midianites and strike them."

Analogy time!

CORPORATE BOARDROOM

"The Midianite brand is a competitor we can no longer tolerate. We aren't doing a merger; we're doing a total 'Delete.' Wipe the servers, burn the inventory, and terminate all staff—including the interns and the livestock. We want zero 'Midianite' presence in the marketplace by Monday morning."

[QR CODE] [The plague: Numbers 25 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com](#)

"SPARE THE VIRGINS FOR YOURSELVES"

So the Israelites went to war against Midian. They killed every male, burned their cities, and brought back the women and children as captives.

Moses was furious.

Numbers 31:15-18 — Moses said to the officers: "Have you spared all the women? These are the very ones who, on Balaam's advice, caused the sons of Israel to trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, so the plague came among the congregation! Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves."

Let's pause here.

"Spare the virgins for yourselves."

That sounds... sexual. What else could it mean?

And here's the practical question I can't get past: How did they check for virginity in the middle of a war zone?

Line them up and ask politely? Call in the obstetrical team? Go by age—all girls under 10? Under 14?

And if it was by age, weren't those younger girls ALSO taught about Baal? My daughter had memorized dozens of Bible verses by age 7. Surely some of these Midianite girls knew their parents' religion.

Wasn't the whole point of this war to eliminate the threat of foreign gods?

So why risk keeping 32,000 young women who could tempt Israelite men later?

Unless... this wasn't really about religious purity at all.

Always an analogy

COURTROOM

JUDGE: "So, the 'Holy Man' Moses is upset because the soldiers saved some survivors? And his solution is to kill the little boys and the non-virgin women, but keep the 'virgin girls' as... what, exactly?"

PROSECUTION: "The text calls them 'Spoils of War,' Your Honor."

JUDGE: "I'm fairly certain 'The Spoils of War' is just an ancient tribal euphemism for 'Human Trafficking.' I'm issuing a warrant for Moses on 32,000 counts of kidnapping."

God's Share: 32 Virgins

Here's where it gets even more bizarre.

God told Moses to divide the plunder—including the captured people—between the warriors and the congregation. And to give God a cut.

Numbers 31:28-40 — The Lord's share was calculated as a "levy":

- From the warriors: 1 out of every 500 (people and animals)
- Total virgins captured: 32,000
- Warriors' share: 16,000 virgins
- God's levy from the warriors: 32 virgins

The text lists God's share right alongside the animals:

- 675 sheep for the Lord
- 72 cattle for the Lord
- 61 donkeys for the Lord
- 32 human beings (virgins) for the Lord

What did God do with His 32 virgins?

The margin notes in some Bibles say they were "heave offerings"—which in Exodus 29:27 meant cutting the leg off a goat and waving it in the air.

So... did they wave the virgins in the air? Or cut their legs off like the animals?

I'd like to believe God secretly beamed them up in a non-fiery chariot and dropped them off somewhere safe. But the text doesn't say that.

It lists them right alongside the livestock. As property. As plunder. As offerings.

Bizarre. Simply bizarre.

THE SOCIAL WORKER (CPS) EVALUATION

"The 'Entity' in question is ordering the systematic extermination of nursing infants. There is no possibility of rehabilitation or 'correction' here. This is a level of 'Intergenerational Trauma' that cannot be measured. The recommendation is a permanent restraining order between 'The Almighty' and the human race."

[QR CODE] The full accounting: Numbers 31:25-47 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com

Back to the Future

So we've jumped around the Old Testament quite a bit, giving examples of some of the more well known personages like Moses, David and Solomon. But thus far we've skipped over Saul, the first king of Israel. He and David didn't get along so well. We'll get into some of that later.

Moses had a pretty rough time leading the Chosen People out of Egypt, lots of ethnic and religious "cleansing" was done, at God's direction of course. We've already seen that it was still going on in David's days, after Saul. But Saul deserves some ink, or digits here, because he too was quite the cleanser. Genocide was the norm in those days, with hints of it today, echoing from history into these Digital Days.

SAUL: Mr. Clean?

THE AMALEKITE GENOCIDE: KILL EVERYTHING, INCLUDING THE BABIES

Most people have heard of the Ten Commandments. Fewer have read 1 Samuel 15.

Here's the setup: God has a grudge. Centuries earlier, the Amalekites had harassed the Israelites during the Exodus. Now it's payback time — and God's instructions to King Saul are about as unambiguous as anything in the Old Testament:

"Go and completely destroy the Amalekites. Do not spare them. Put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."

Men. Women. Children. Infants.

Not soldiers. Not leaders. Infants.

Saul obeys — mostly. He kills everyone and destroys everything. Except he spares the Amalekite king Agag, and lets his army keep the best sheep and cattle, figuring they'd make excellent sacrifices to God.

God was furious.

Not about the killing of infants. About the sheep.

Samuel arrives and delivers the verdict: because Saul saved the animals and the king instead of killing absolutely everything as ordered, God is revoking his kingship.

Saul protests: "But we saved the animals to sacrifice to YOU."

Samuel's famous reply: "To obey is better than sacrifice."

Then Samuel personally hacked King Agag to pieces. And the Lord "regretted" making Saul king.

WHAT?

The Grudge: Imagine someone tripping you in the hallway in 4th grade. Now imagine your great-great-grandson tracking down that guy's great-great-grandson 400 years later and burning his house down. That's the "Amalekite Directive." God was still mad about a border skirmish from the Exodus, so He ordered Saul to settle the score.

The Order: God didn't just want a military victory; He wanted a total erasure.

- The Targets: Men, women, infants, nursing babies, oxen, sheep, camels, and donkeys.
- The Command: "Do not spare them." No prisoners, no souvenirs, no survivors.

The "Sin": Saul carries out the massacre, but he makes two "mistakes":

1. He keeps the enemy King (Agag) alive as a trophy.
2. He keeps the best sheep and cattle, claiming he wants to sacrifice them to God.

The Fallout: You'd think God would be 99% happy. Instead, He's 100% furious. He tells the prophet Samuel, "I regret that I have made Saul king." When Saul tries to apologize, Samuel tells him that "to obey is better than sacrifice" and informs him he's fired.

The R-Rated Ending: To show Saul how it's done, the "Man of God" Samuel calls for King Agag and personally hacks him to pieces with a sword in front of the altar.

"That's like a shop owner telling you to take a sledgehammer to a perfectly good truck because the previous owner's grandfather once stiffed him on a bill. You scrap the frame, but you save the engine. The owner doesn't say 'Thanks for saving the parts'; he fires you and locks the gate because you didn't turn every single bolt into scrap metal. If the boss is that obsessed with junk, he's running a vendetta, not a shop."

A Few Things Worth Noting

The infants. Nobody in the text objects to killing babies. Samuel's rage is entirely about the livestock. The slaughter of infants is just... the assignment. Carried out without comment.

The contradiction hiding in plain sight. In verse 29, Samuel tells Saul: "The Glory of Israel does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a human being, that He should change His mind."

And then — six verses later, in verse 35 — the text reads: "The Lord regretted that He had made Saul king."

Same chapter. Twenty-two verses apart. God doesn't change His mind. God regretted His decision.

We'll see this same pattern in Chapter 4 — the contradiction so brazen it appears in the same chapter of the same book. You'd think an editor would have caught it. Unless nobody expected anyone to actually read the whole thing.

Nope. Saul wasn't clean enough.

In fact all these cleansings, all these genocides, didn't do a damn thing. From Moses, through Saul, through David and on through Solomon. You'd think the Big Guy might have changed His approach after 400 years. Seems He's just bumbling along like the rest of us, but with a helluvalot more rage.

And David's going to up the temperature. Maybe that'll do it?

DAVID'S WAR CRIMES

Remember David? "The man after God's own heart"?

Of course you do! I Kings 15:5 says "David did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite."

One would think that over all those years and generations since Moses, God would have had set things up pretty well for His Chosen People, but such appears not to be the case.

Maybe the land God had led His chosen people to hadn't been in the best of neighborhoods.

Have they built those seminaries and instituted a Gandhi-style peaceful approach to those other countries around them?

You'd think after all those years since Moses, after all those warnings, God would have Israel well-established with seminaries and peaceful missionary programs.

Nope.

2 Samuel 8:1-6 — David defeated the Philistines. He defeated Moab and "measured them with the line, making them lie down on the ground; and he measured two lines to put to death and one full line to keep alive."

Two-thirds executed. One-third enslaved.

Then he defeated the Syrians—killed 22,000 of them. Made the survivors his servants.

And here's the really disturbing part:

2 Samuel 12:31 — When David captured Rabbah (capital of the Ammonites): "He also brought out the people who were in it, and set them under saws, sharp iron instruments, and iron axes, and made them pass through the brick kiln. And thus he did to all the cities of the sons of Ammon."

Under saws. Iron axes. Brick kilns.

That sure sounds like burning people alive to me.

This wasn't some rogue commander. This was David—the man after God's own heart. The ancestor of Jesus.

Perhaps God knew that these people were just unconvertible and headed for Hell, so why bother with them?

I suppose some seminary professor like those I corresponded with back in 1981 might still be saying they were still purifying the religiously incorrect, but using this same justification for the slaughters that Moses had presided over hundreds of years before just doesn't seem plausible. These massacres by David were many generations later.

David and all his people went back to Jerusalem after the fighting, so it would appear things were still pretty well set up for living space, not needing to purify any more land. He even turned some of his captives into servants, implying that their bad influence wasn't as much of a concern as in Moses' time. (I never understood the attraction of golden calves, but apparently people back then just couldn't resist them.)

It seems to me that instead of heading out in the spring to fight as was the custom of kings back then that David could have suggested something different for a change. He probably could have found somebody, perhaps Nathan, to organize a Superbowl type event like Elijah would do years later and attempt to lure people away from their false gods to the real God with a fire from-Heaven show.

Yet of course, what do I know? "There is a way that which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." [Proverbs 14:12], and God works in mysterious ways.

Maybe slaughter was the best thing, for even Elijah's big Battle of the Gods event didn't have a lasting effect.

Still, it really bothers me that David brought the people out of the conquered city and "set them under saws and sharp iron instruments and iron axes and put them in the brickkiln" which surely sounds to me like being burned to death.

Perhaps this is where the Catholics got some of their ideas and justifications for the Inquisition. I'm not sure what the brickkiln was, but without any further clarification from the Good Book, it doesn't sound too far removed from Hitler's crematoriums.

[QR CODE] David's conquests: 2 Samuel 8, 12:26-31 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com

Family Feud & "Third time's the charm"

Let's look at another battle story from the history of God's chosen people. This one is a little different from the others.

Here's a family feud story that's... unusual.

In Judges 20:1-48 we read where a Levite's concubine was gang-raped to death in the town of Gibeah (in Benjamin's territory). The Levite cut her body into 12 pieces and sent them throughout Israel as a call to action.

All Israel gathered—400,000 soldiers—and demanded Benjamin hand over the guilty men.

Benjamin refused. Civil war.

First battle: Benjamin killed 22,000 Israelites.

Israel went to God: "Shall we again go to battle against Benjamin?"

God said: "Go up against him."

Second battle: Benjamin killed another 18,000 Israelites.

Israel went to God AGAIN, weeping and fasting: "Shall I yet again go out to battle?"

God said: "Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand."

Third battle: God finally helped. Israel killed 25,100 men of Benjamin. "They surrounded Benjamin, pursued them without rest and trod them down opposite Gibeah toward the east. Thus 18,000 men of Benjamin fell; all these were valiant warriors. The rest turned and fled toward the wilderness to the rock of Rimmon, but they caught 5,000 of them on the highways and overtook them at Gidom and killed 2,000 of them...The men of Israel then turned back against the sons of Benjamin and struck them with the edge of the sword, both the entire city with the cattle and all that they found; they also set on fire all the cities which they found."

Just another day at the office of Holy War.

Here's my question: Besides the barbarity of it all, if indeed the Good Book is reporting accurately here, it is puzzling to me why God would act this way.

Israel loses 22,000 men on the first day of battle, and then asks God if they should go out again.

God says yes, yet they lose 18,000 in the next battle.

Was this a case of God playing "Let's you and him fight?"

Was God having a tough time deciding to assist in a quarrel between brothers?

The third time's the charm though: God shows up and strikes Benjamin, who must have had thoughts akin to Tommy Smothers: "God always liked you best!" (with a nod to my Boomer brethren who can still see that album cover in their minds).

The Israelites then chase the fleeing survivors, slaughtering and burning all.

Would God do this?

Why did God say "yes" twice but only help the third time?

40,000 Israelites died in the first two battles following God's direct command to attack.

Was God testing them? Did He forget to mention He wouldn't help until round three?

Maybe this is where we got the saying "the third time's the charm."

[QR CODE] Judges 20: 1-48 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com

ELIJAH CALLS DOWN FIRE (TWICE)

As we continue to examine whether God really is slow to anger, full of lovingkindness, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, we'll look at what happened to Ahab's son.

Remember Ahab's son Ahaziah? The one God promised to punish instead of punishing Ahab? Probably not. Tough for me too, but hey, gotta wade through this stuff. So, let's try to remember that, instead of punishing Ahab, God had promised to bring evil upon the house of his son.

His son was Ahaziah, and sure enough, he did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Whether this was because the Lord brought evil on his house, or because he brought it on of his own free will, I do not know.

I guess the folks who chant "The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it" would have to admit the poor guy didn't have a chance, because God had promised to punish his father by bringing evil on his son. That may be the most logical conclusion.

Surely his dad Ahab had told him about the Superbowl of the Gods, and the fire from heaven and all that. If my father had told me of a spectacle of that magnitude, I'd have been pretty impressed. But then God may have hardened his heart, like He did to the pharaoh over and over at the time of the Exodus.

I guess another explanation could be that he was a momma's boy, who spent more time with his mother than his dad, which in his case was unfortunate, for remember Jezebel was the only one in all Israel who didn't attend the Superbowl, and perhaps for that reason, or perhaps because she was just basically bad, she stuck to her god Baal. Was it his mother's fault?

For whatever reason, sure enough, he served Baal instead of the true God.

When Ahaziah fell through a lattice roof and got injured, instead of consulting the true God, he sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub (a foreign god). What bad luck to have been a momma's boy.

God sent Elijah to intercept the messengers with a prophecy: "You shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die."

Ahaziah was not pleased. He sent a captain with 50 soldiers to arrest Elijah.

The captain found Elijah sitting on a hilltop and said: "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'"

Elijah's response: "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty."

Fire came down. All 51 dead.

Ahaziah sent another captain with another 50 soldiers.

Same demand: "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down quickly.'"

Same response from Elijah: "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty."

Fire came down again. Another 51 dead.

Finally, Ahaziah sent a THIRD captain with 50 more soldiers.

This one was smart. He begged for his life: "O man of God, please let my life and the lives of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight... fire came down from heaven and consumed the first two captains... but now let my life be precious in your sight."

God told Elijah: "Go down with him; do not be afraid."

So Elijah went.

Total body count from Elijah's fire-calling: 102 soldiers.

There you have it. The third time was the charm, at least for the third captain and his soldiers.

I feel sorry for the first two sets, however. Of course, I feel sorry for any soldiers killed in battle. I suppose it is just all in a day's work for them, but to be burned up by fire from God is extra bad.

We can hope that they believed in Elijah's true God and were only obeying orders, or that they at least got Get-out-of-Hell-free-cards for their service. Soldiers die all the time, though typically not by fire from heaven.

If I was God and needed to get Ahaziah's attention, I believe I would have started earlier and burned up only one person instead of 100. If I just had to burn somebody, I'd have picked the real villain in this story, Ahaziah's mother, the wicked Jezebel. It would have been just as impressive, in fact more so, since she was high profile. Maybe Ahaziah didn't really believe the unnamed witnesses of God's firebombs.

His mother being consumed by fire when he was say, 14, out in the vineyard she'd helped steal from poor old Naboth, perhaps that image of her melting like the Wicked Witch in the Wizard of Oz might have stuck with him.

But hey, I'm not God and further more, "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it?" [Romans 9:20]

"For the wisdom of man is foolishness in God's sight" [1 Corinthians 3:19]

In other words, "Shut up and sit down, and though I typically don't burn people up nowadays like I did in Elijah's time, you better believe all this stuff, or you'll surely burn later."

Woops, excuse me. When's the next praise service?

Now here's what bothers me about this story:

[QR CODE] [Elijah's fire: 2 Kings 1 at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com](#)

CHAPTER 2: FINAL THOUGHTS

Let's review the molehills we've piled up so far:

From earlier:

1. Uzzah killed for steadying the Ark
2. 70,000 killed for David's census
3. 42 children mauled by bears
4. Punishing sons for fathers' sins (Ahab, Solomon)
5. David's baby killed for David's sin
6. Official policy: punish to 4th generation
7. Conquest orders: kill everything that breathes
8. Stone your own family for apostasy

Now add:

9. 24,000 killed in plague over Baal worship
10. 32,000 virgins captured - "spare them for yourselves"
11. 32 virgins given to God as a levy (alongside livestock)
12. Captives put under saws and brick kilns (burned alive?)
13. 40,000 Israelites die in two battles God told them to fight (before helping in round 3)
14. 102 soldiers incinerated for following orders

These aren't isolated incidents.

This is a pattern.

And we haven't even gotten to:

- Egypt's firstborn slaughtered
- The Levites killing 3,000 of their brothers

- Lot offering his daughters to a rape mob (then impregnating them)
- Jephthah sacrificing his daughter
- Laws requiring rape victims to marry their rapists
- And so much more...

I'm not making any of this up.

Every story is in your Bible. Every quote is verifiable at TheyDontPutTheseInSermons.com.

The question isn't whether these stories are in the Bible.

The question is: Would the Master of the Universe really act this way?

Or is this exactly what you'd expect from ancient warring tribal people attributing their cultural practices and warfare to divine command?

When I read these stories—really read them, not just the cherry-picked verses in Sunday school—the "truth I found was lies, and all the joy within me died."

That's what Chapter 2 is about.

The truth scares the Hell out of you.

Just not in the way the church marquee intended.

*Next up: Chapter 3 — "Sex in the Bible: The Picture of Marital Harmony?"

Spoiler alert: It's not.*

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