

“Where Do Historians Refer to the Earth’s Darkness During the Crucifixion?”

I need some help finding where historians refer to the fact that the sky got totally dark and the stars came out when Jesus was crucified. I remember reading something from Julius Africanus, I think it was, who mentioned this fact, but now that I am looking for it I can’t find it. Didn’t Tacitus refer to Julius’ comment also?

The historian Thallus, in A.D. 52, wrote a history of the eastern Mediterranean since the Trojan War. Although his work is lost, it was quoted by Julius Africanus in about A.D. 221. This is mentioned by Gary Habermas in his 1996 book, *The Historical Jesus* (pp. 196-97). Lee Strobel has a brief section on this in his book *The Case for Christ* (pp. 84-85). The historian Edwin Yamauchi quotes from a footnote by Paul Maier in his 1968 book, *Pontius Pilate*, as follows: “Phlegon, a Greek author from Caria writing a chronology soon after 137 A.D., reported that in the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad (i.e., 33 A.D.) there was ‘the greatest eclipse of the sun’ and that ‘it became night in the sixth hour of the day [i.e., noon] so that stars even appeared in the heavens. There was a great earthquake in Bithynia, and many things were overturned in Nicaea.’”

This, at any rate, should help you track down the source from Phlegon if you like.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

Crime and Punishment – A Christian View of Dostoevsky's Classic Novel

Michael Gleghorn looks at the famous novel through a Christian worldview lens to see what truths Dostoevsky may have for us. We learn that this great novel records the fall of man into a degraded state but ends with the beginning of his restoration through the ministry of a selfless, Christian woman.

Introduction and Overview

In 1866 the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky published *Crime and Punishment*, one of his greatest novels. It's a penetrating study of the psychology of sin, guilt, and redemption, and it haunts the reader long after the final page has been read. It tells the story of an intelligent, but impoverished, young Russian intellectual named Raskolnikov. Under the unfortunate influence of a particularly pernicious theory of society and human nature, he exalts himself above the moral law, grievously transgresses it by committing two murders, "and plunges into a hell of persecution, madness and terror."[1](#)

Raskolnikov had conceived of himself as a great and extraordinary man, on the order of a Napoleon. He tried to convince himself that he wasn't bound by the same tired old moral code that the vast mass of humanity lives in recognition of, if not obedience to—the merely *ordinary* men and women who

accomplish little and amount to less. Nevertheless, after committing his horrible crime, he finds that he cannot escape his punishment: he cannot silence his sensitive and overburdened conscience. In the end, when he can stand it no longer, he decides to confess his crime and accept suffering as a means of atonement.

Joseph Frank observes that Dostoevsky, the author of this story, had “long been preoccupied with the question of crime and conscience.”^{2} In one of his letters, Dostoevsky describes his story as the “psychological report of a crime.”^{3} The crime is committed, he says, by “a young man, expelled from the university . . . and living in the midst of the direst poverty.” Coming under the influence of “the strange, ‘unfinished’ ideas that float in the atmosphere,” he decides to murder an old pawnbroker and steal her money. Dostoevsky describes the old woman as “stupid and ailing,” “greedy” and “evil.” Why, it would hardly be a crime at all to murder such a wretched person! What’s more, with the money from his crime, the young man can “finish his studies, go abroad,” and devote the rest of his life to the benefit of humanity!

Inspired by these thoughts, the young man goes through with the crime and murders the old woman. But, notes Dostoevsky, “here is where the entire psychological process of the crime is unfolded. Insoluble problems confront the murderer, unsuspected and unexpected feelings torment his heart . . . and he finishes by *being forced* to denounce himself.”

This, in brief, is the story of *Crime and Punishment*. In what follows, we’ll take a closer look at the theory which led Raskolnikov to commit his crime. Then we’ll consider why the theory proved false when Raskolnikov actually attempted to put it into practice.

The Ordinary and Extraordinary

Raskolnikov committed two murders, in part simply to see if he really has the bravado to put his theories into practice. But what are these ideas? Where do they come from? And why do they lead Raskolnikov to such heinous actions?

Essentially, Raskolnikov's theory, which was partially developed in an article on crime that he had written, holds that all men, by a kind of law of nature, are divided into two distinct classes: the *ordinary* and the *extraordinary*. This theory, which finds some of its philosophical roots in the writings of men like Hegel and Nietzsche, claims that ordinary men exist merely for the purpose of reproduction by which, at length, the occasional, extraordinary man might arise. Raskolnikov declares, "The vast mass of mankind is mere material, and only exists in order by some great effort, by some mysterious process, by means of some crossing of races and stocks, to bring into the world at last perhaps one man out of a thousand with a spark of independence." The man of genius is rarer still, "and the great geniuses, the crown of humanity, appear on earth perhaps one in many thousand millions."[\[4\]](#)

The distinctive features of the ordinary man are a conservative temperament and a law-abiding disposition. But extraordinary men "all transgress the law." Indeed, says Raskolnikov, "if such a one is forced for the sake of his idea to step over a corpse or wade through blood, he can . . . find . . . in his own conscience, a sanction for wading through blood."[\[5\]](#) So the extraordinary man has the right—indeed, depending on the value of his ideas, he may even have the duty—to destroy those who stand in his way. After all, Raskolnikov observes, such ideas may benefit "the whole of humanity."[\[6\]](#) But how can we know if we are merely ordinary men, or whether, perhaps, we are extraordinary? How can we know if we have the *right* to transgress the law to achieve our

own ends?

Raskolnikov admits that confusion regarding one's class is indeed possible. But he thinks "the mistake can only arise . . . among the ordinary people" who sometimes like to imagine themselves more advanced than they really are. And we needn't worry much about that, for such people are "very conscientious" and will impose "public acts of penitence upon themselves with a beautiful and edifying effect."[\[7\]](#)

But as we'll see, it's one of the ironies of this novel that Raskolnikov, who committed murder because he thought himself extraordinary, made precisely this tragic mistake.

A Walking Contradiction

James Roberts observes that Raskolnikov "is best seen as two characters. He sometimes acts in one manner and then suddenly in a manner completely contradictory."[\[8\]](#) Evidence for this can be seen throughout the novel. In this way, Dostoevsky makes clear, right from the beginning of his story, that Raskolnikov is *not* an extraordinary man, at least not in the sense in which Raskolnikov himself uses that term in his theory of human nature.

In the opening pages of the novel, we see Raskolnikov at war with himself as he debates his intention to murder an old pawnbroker. "I want to attempt a thing *like that*," he says to himself.[\[9\]](#) Then, after visiting the old woman's flat, ostensibly to pawn a watch, but in reality as a sort of "dress rehearsal" for the murder, he again questions himself: "How could such an atrocious thing come into my head? What filthy things my heart is capable of. Yes, filthy above all . . . loathsome!"[\[10\]](#)

This inner battle suggests that Raskolnikov has mistaken himself for an *extraordinary* man, a man bound neither by the rules of society, nor the higher moral law. But in fact, he's

actually just a conscientious *ordinary* man. The portrait Dostoevsky paints of him is really quite complex. He often appears to be a sensitive, though confused, young intellectual, who's been led to entertain his wild ideas more as a result of dire poverty and self-imposed isolation from his fellow man, rather than from sheer malice or selfish ambition.

In fear and trembling he commits two murders, partly out of a confused desire to thereby benefit the rest of humanity, and partly out of a seemingly genuine concern to really live in accordance with his theories. Ironically, while the murders are partly committed with the idea of taking the old pawnbroker's money to advance Raskolnikov's plans, he never attempts to use the money, but merely buries it under a stone. What's more, Raskolnikov is portrayed as one of the more generous characters in the novel. On more than one occasion, he literally gives away all the money he has to help meet the needs of others. Finally, while Raskolnikov is helped toward confessing his crime through the varied efforts of Porfiry Petrovich, the brilliant, yet compassionate, criminal investigator, and Sonia, the humble, selfless prostitute, nevertheless, it's primarily Raskolnikov's own tormented conscience that, at length, virtually forces him to confess to the murders.

So while Raskolnikov is guilty, he's not completely lost. He still retains a conscience, as well as some degree of genuine compassion toward others. Dostoevsky wants us to see that there's still hope for Raskolnikov!

The Hope of Restoration

After Raskolnikov commits the two murders, he finds himself confronted with the desperate need to be reconciled with God and his fellow man. From the beginning of the story, Raskolnikov is portrayed as somewhat alienated from his

fellows. But once he commits the murders, he experiences a decisive break, both spiritually and psychologically, from the rest of humanity. Indeed, when he murders the old pawnbroker and her sister, something within Raskolnikov also dies. The bond that unites him with all other men in a common humanity is destroyed—or “dies”—as a sort of poetic justice for murdering the two women.

This death, which separates Raskolnikov both from God and his fellow man, can only be reversed through a miracle of divine grace and power. In the novel, the biblical paradigm for this great miracle is the story of the raising of Lazarus. Just as Lazarus died, and was then restored to life through the miraculous power of God in Christ, so also, in Dostoevsky’s story, Raskolnikov’s “death” is neither permanent nor irreversible. He too can be “restored to life.” He too can be reconciled with God and man.

While this theme of death and restoration to life is somewhat subtle, nevertheless, Dostoevsky probably intended it as one of the primary themes of the novel. In the first place, it is emphasized by Sonia, Porfiry Petrovich, and Raskolnikov’s own sister, that only by confessing his crime and accepting his punishment can Raskolnikov again be *restored* to the rest of humanity. In this way, Dostoevsky repeatedly emphasizes the “death” of Raskolnikov.

In addition, the raising of Lazarus is mentioned at least three times in the novel. One time is when, in the midst of a heated discussion, Porfiry specifically asks Raskolnikov if he believes in the raising of Lazarus, to which Raskolnikov responds that he does.[\[11\]](#) This affirmation foreshadows some hope for Raskolnikov, for the fact that he believes in this miracle at least makes possible the belief that God can also work a miracle in his own life. Secondly, the only extended portion of Scripture cited in the novel relates the story of Lazarus. In fact, it’s Raskolnikov himself, tormented by what he’s done, who asks Sonia to read him the story.[\[12\]](#) Finally,

at the end of the novel, the raising of Lazarus is mentioned yet again, this time as Raskolnikov recollects Sonia's previous reading of the story to him.[{13}](#) Interestingly, this final reference to the raising of Lazarus occurs in the context of Raskolnikov's own "restoration to life."

Restored to Life

Near the end of the novel, Raskolnikov at last goes to the police station and confesses to the murders: *"It was I killed the old pawnbroker woman and her sister Lizaveta with an axe and robbed them."*[{14}](#) He is sentenced to eight years in a Siberian labor prison. Sonia, true to her promise, selflessly follows him there. Early one morning she comes to visit Raskolnikov. Overcome with emotion, he begins weeping and throws himself at her feet. Sonia is terrified. "But at the same moment she understood She knew . . . that he loved her . . . and that at last the moment had come."[{15}](#) God's love, mediated through Sonia, had finally broken through to Raskolnikov: "He had risen again and he . . . felt in it all his being."[{16}](#)

Although Raskolnikov had previously been something of an outcast with his fellow inmates, nevertheless, on the day of his "restoration," his relations with them begin to improve. Dostoevsky writes:

He . . . fancied that day that all the convicts who had been his enemies looked at him differently; he had even entered into talk with them and they answered him in a friendly way. He remembered that now, and thought it was bound to be so. Wasn't everything now bound to be changed?[{17}](#)

What's more, Dostoevsky also implies that Raskolnikov is being restored to relationship with God. Picking up the New Testament that Sonia had given him, "one thought passed through his mind: 'Can her convictions not be mine now? Her

feelings, her aspirations at least . . .'"[{18}](#) And Dostoevsky then concludes his great novel by stating: "But that is the beginning of a new story—the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life."[{19}](#)

So by the end of the novel, Raskolnikov, as a type of Lazarus, has experienced his own "restoration to life." He is ready to begin "his initiation into a new unknown life." And interestingly, the grace which brings about Raskolnikov's restoration is primarily mediated to him through the quiet, humble love of Sonia, a prostitute. Just as God was not ashamed to have his own Son, humanly speaking, descended from some who were murderers and some who were prostitutes—for it was just such people He came to save—so also, in Dostoevsky's story, God is not ashamed to extend His forgiveness and grace to a prostitute, and through her to a murderer as well. *Crime and Punishment* thus ends on a note of hope, for the guilty can be forgiven and the dead restored to life!

Notes

1. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Bantam Books, 1987). Citation from cover blurb on back of book.
2. Joseph Frank, "Introduction" to Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, ix.
3. The citations from Dostoevsky's letter come from Joseph Frank's "Introduction" to Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, viii-ix.
4. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 229.
5. Ibid., 227.
6. Ibid., 226.
7. Ibid., 228.
8. James Roberts, *Cliffs Notes on Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment*, ed. Gary Carey (Lincoln, Nebraska: Cliffs Notes, Inc.), 70.

9. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 2.
10. Ibid., 7.
11. Ibid., 227.
12. Ibid., 283.
13. Ibid., 472.
14. Ibid., 458.
15. Ibid., 471.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 472.
19. Ibid.

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The Gospel of Judas [Michael Gleghorn]

According to Wilford and Goodstein, in an article for the *New York Times* (April 7, 2006), "The 26-page Judas text is believed to be a copy in the Coptic language, made around A.D. 300, of the original Gospel of Judas, written in Greek the century before." *If* this is the same text referred to by the second century church father Irenaeus, then it probably dates to the second half of the second century. This would put it a full hundred years or so after the New Testament gospels all of which were authored in the second half of the first century A.D.

The evidence seems to indicate that the Gospel of Judas is a Gnostic document. These documents were universally rejected by the early church fathers and for good reasons. In the first place, unlike the New Testament documents (which date to the

first century A.D.), the Gnostic texts are late, dating to the second to fourth centuries A.D. Because of this, the Gnostic documents, unlike the New Testament documents, were definitely not written by apostles or companions of the apostles. In other words, the Gospel of Judas is *not* an eyewitness account written by one of Jesus' original followers. Finally, the Gospel of Judas, like all Gnostic texts, contains teaching and elements which are clearly unorthodox and heretical, at least when judged by the standard of the New Testament gospels. It's for reasons such as these that the church fathers (very wisely, in my opinion) rejected these books as unfit for inclusion in the New Testament.

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This is a very quick and short response to the news announcement about this "gospel." For more in-depth analysis of why the Gnostic documents are not trustworthy accounts of the life of Jesus or His disciples, please see the Nag Hammadi section of "Redeeming The Da Vinci Code" [here](#). My colleague Patrick Zukeran has since written a longer assessment of this document [here](#).

"Why Are Pagans and Their Religion Evil?"

I really want to understand how modern pagans are seen as evil and how their religion is seen as evil; is everything that's not Christian evil? Is it not everyone's personal choice?

You ask some very good questions. First, you ask why modern pagans and their religion are seen as evil. I think what I would say here is that, from a biblical perspective, modern

pagans are not necessarily any more (or less) evil than anyone else. The Bible tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Thus, according to the Bible, all men and women are sinners. We have all thought, said and done things which are displeasing to God and contrary to His perfect moral standards. In this sense, we are all evil and in need of God's forgiveness and grace.

If, as the Bible teaches, Jesus really is the one and only way to God the Father (John 14:6), then all other religions are ultimately false. Of course, it's important to remember that this does NOT mean that everything they teach is false. For example, many non-Christian religions say that we shouldn't lie, steal, commit sexual immorality, or murder. Clearly, Christianity agrees with this and teaches the same thing. Further, Judaism, Unitarianism, and Islam teach that there is only one God. Again, Christianity certainly agrees with this.

In other words, other religions (including various pagan religions) may certainly teach some things that are true and good. But if Christianity is really true, and if Jesus really is the only way to God, then no other religion is ULTIMATELY true (in all that it teaches). In this sense, then, Christians would consider pagan religions "evil." That is, we would consider these religions evil because they are leading their adherents astray and away from the only true God and the Savior Jesus Christ. If Christianity is true, then these religions will ultimately hurt (not help) those who follow them.

Finally, many Christians believe that God has given people free-will. God will not force anyone to become a Christian against his/her will. He offers us salvation, forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift, but He will not force it on us. Thus, people do have a choice regarding what religion they will follow. But God will hold everyone accountable for their choices. And those who reject His gracious offer of forgiveness and salvation through faith in Christ will be held

accountable for their sins and suffer the terrible fate of eternal separation from God in hell. Again, passages like Matthew 25:41-46 and Revelation 20:11-15 make this quite clear. This is why Christians believe it is so important to tell people about Jesus and their need for Him. If He really is the only way to God the Father, then it would be very unloving of us not to tell people about this. Most Christians simply want to see their friends, relatives, and co-workers in heaven. They don't want these people to be eternally separated from God, the Ultimate Source of every good and perfect gift.

I hope this helps. If you're interested in reading about the Christian plan of salvation, please visit Bible.org at http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=276.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

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“You Should Research Reincarnation and the Lost Words of Jesus”

I came into your site because I was interested in what you had to say about reincarnation. I got to looking around and first I do wish to say that it is a wonderful site. I do have some problems with it though. I have been baptized a Baptist. Of course. I used to believe as you do. I have done alot of study on the Bible and other religions. I still believe in Jesus and

that he died for my sins. I love the lord with all my heart and soul. But I do not believe that my father would send me to a place of fire and torment. I have the gift of discernment of the spirit. This has been accepted by several churches in my area. I can tell you all about a person after a short time with them and I see spirits, ghosts demons whatever you wish to call them. I can also see into the future somewhat. I do not try to do any of this, it just happens when it happens. This is a gift the lord gave me. Yet you people tell me I am going to hell for it.

I have found several contradictions in the bible myself, a book that I would at one time have died for. I spent a long time asking God to show me the truth. I believe he did. And still is.

I never picked up a bible till I was 24 years old. I went to church when I was younger, but never payed a whole lot of attention, because I did not feel they were teaching the true word of God. I was 6 years old when I realized this. I am very happy that you love the lord so very much. But even Jesus stated that the Bible would be Tampered with and those that did it would be punished. So why is it so hard to believe that it has happened? You are so ready to believe all the others things that have come true so why not this? A lot of God's word was not even put in the Bible. Do some research yourself on reincarnation and the old church, the older christian belief, and you will find the lost words of Jesus. Did you know that they destroyed the original Bible when they wrote the new King James Version, and then told everybody that it was the original? I believe that you have to worry about being decieved also. Just like the rest of us we must learn the truth for ourselves and stop depending on everyone but God. He says do not trust man, but only him.

Hello _____,

Although (as you yourself realize) we would disagree about the

issue of reincarnation, it seems that the more fundamental issue about which we would differ is the Bible – particularly whether or not it is a trustworthy message from God.

You said you found some contradictions in the Bible, but you didn't say what they were. Have you ever attempted to see if there might be good explanations for such alleged Bible difficulties? If not, and if you're interested in exploring this issue, please allow me to recommend the following site: www.tektonics.org. This site has explanations for hundreds of alleged Bible difficulties.

You also said that the Bible was destroyed at the time of the King James translation. I'm afraid your information is incorrect on this point. For instance, we have thousands of New Testament manuscripts going all the way back to the early second century. The King James translation wasn't done until 1611 – hundreds of years after our earliest manuscripts (which we still have). So it's simply not true to say that the Bible was destroyed at this time. If you would like to explore this issue further, please visit Bible.org at http://www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=5. Here you will find dozens of articles about the Bible by very competent and capable Christian scholars.

Hope these resources prove helpful. Thanks again for writing and God bless you!

Michael Gleghorn
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“If Child Sacrifice Is Sinful, Why Did God Require It of Abraham?”

According to Deut 18:10-12, “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire...” OK, so at least as far back as Moses’ time, human sacrifice was wrong – sinful.

But...why then would God test Abraham by asking him to make a human sacrifice of Isaac? It seems to me that God is asking him to do something sinful to prove his obedience and devotion. That goes against God’s character, doesn’t it?

Thanks for your question. Much has been written about Gen. 22. Let me mention a few important points and refer you to some more extensive answers.

First, notice Gen. 22:5: “So he said to his servants, You two stay here with the donkey while the boy and I go up there. We will worship and then return to you.

The NET Bible comments, “It is impossible to know what Abraham was thinking when he said, We will. . .return to you.” When he went he knew (1) that he was to sacrifice Isaac, and (2) that God intended to fulfill his earlier promises through Isaac. How he reconciled those facts is not clear in the text. Heb 11:17-19 suggests that Abraham believed God could restore Isaac to him through resurrection.”

Second, notice vv. 7-8, “Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father? What is it, my son? he replied. Here is the fire and the wood, Isaac said, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? 22:8 God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son, Abraham replied. The two of them continued on together.”

Again, the NET Bible comments, “*God will provide* is the central theme of the passage and the turning point in the story. Note Pauls allusion to the story in Rom 8:32 (how shall he not freely give us all things?)” (See http://www.bible.org/netbible/gen22_notes.htm).

Finally, we must remember that God never allowed Abraham to actually carry out the sacrifice. God never intended that he actually sacrifice his son. He apparently intended to test Abraham’s faith in, and love for, God. It’s a radical test, to be sure, but one which God never intended for Abraham to actually carry out.

For more information, please visit:

1. www.tektonics.org/gk/humansac.html
2. www.christian-thinktank.com/qkilisak.html
3. www.tektonics.org/whatis/whatfaith.html

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
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“What About Household Salvation?”

What is your view on Household Salvation? (I am thinking of two scriptures: Acts 11:14–“...and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household” and Acts 16:31–“They said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”)

Thanks for your letter. My view on Household Salvation is that each member of the household, upon hearing the Gospel message, can be saved on the one condition of personal faith in Christ. Acts 11:14 MAY be predictive (i.e. predicting that everyone in the household would respond positively to the Gospel with personal faith in Christ). Acts 16:31 makes it clear that personal faith is the necessary condition for salvation. I think this verse is just a shorthand way of saying that whoever believes can likewise be saved. To hold that an entire household could be saved on the basis of one member's faith in Christ would flatly contradict all the New Testament passages that speak of the necessity of personal faith in Christ for salvation.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
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“If Angels Can’t Marry, Then How Could ‘The Sons of God’ Father Giants?”

Hi Michael, I read your answer to [“Is the Genesis Story of ‘The Sons of God’ True?”](#) and have a question about it. Mark 12:25 tells us that angels cannot marry. So I’m confused as to how the sons of God could have married women who then “bore giants”?

Mark 12:25 is possibly the passage most often cited against

the view that the “sons of God” in Gen. 6 refers to fallen angels. And, of course, this view may be correct.

It’s difficult to know with certainty what the passage in Gen. 6 means. However, when one considers how the phrase “sons of God” gets used elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g. Job 1-2; etc.), it’s clear that it’s often used to refer to angels. Also, New Testament passages like Jude 6-7 and 2 Peter 2:4f, seem to lend support to this interpretation.

One of the Bible.org folks addressing this issue at <http://bible.org/question/who-are-%E2%80%9Csons-god%E2%80%9D-genes-61-8> wrote this about the “marriage” issue:

“I heartily agree with Bob Deffinbaugh’s arguments and presentation of this passage in his commentary, Genesis: From Paradise to Patriarchs which is on our web site in the Bible Studies / Old Testament / Books / Genesis section. I believe those who reject this view do so through exegetical gymnastics because of their own refusal to believe this could happen. They often refer to Christ’s statement about angels not marrying, but this is talking about God’s normal plan for them. They were created as a host and were not to propagate like mankind and fill the earth. This in no way says that under Satan’s orders and power they could not leave their own (idios, unique, peculiar, distinct, proper) domain (arche, rule, sphere of rule, influence) and abandon their own proper abode (oike,te,rion, habitation, dwelling place) (Jude 6).”

Since angels have the ability to assume human form, and since fallen angels are said to sometimes “possess” human beings, it seems to me possible that the “Sons of God” in Gen. 6 were angels. But, of course, I don’t know this for sure. And I certainly might be wrong.

If you’re interested in exploring this issue further, please see some of the discussions on bible.org [here](#).

Hope this helps.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe: Reflections on Its Meaning

Michael Gleghorn provides an overview of C.S. Lewis's classic book for children of all ages that ought to be required reading for anyone who can read.

A Very Brief Overview

With the recent release of the movie *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the public fascination with all things “Narnian” has once again been raised. But what are we to make of this wonderful story? What deeper truths might it contain?

In order to answer these questions, we must begin with a very brief overview of the story. Four children—Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy—are evacuated from London to the house of an old professor during World War II. Once there, they soon discover a magic wardrobe that leads to another world! First Lucy, then Lucy and Edmund, and then all four of the children find their way into the enchanted land of Narnia. The country is ruled by the White Witch, who has placed it under a spell so that it's always winter but never Christmas.

Once in Narnia the children learn of Aslan, the great lion and true king of the country. After a long absence, he's now returned. He will deal with the Witch, they're told, and put everything right again. They also learn of an ancient prophecy, that when two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve sit enthroned at the castle of Cair Paravel, then the Witch's reign (as well as her life) will be over. It's believed that the time for this must be near, since Aslan and the four children are now in Narnia.

But Edmund threatens to ruin everything. Unbeknownst to the others, on a previous visit to Narnia he'd met the Witch, eaten her food, and come under her power. Although he really knows that the Witch is bad, he nonetheless betrays his siblings, hoping the Witch will one day make him king. Knowing about the prophecy, however, she eventually decides to kill Edmund. But before she can do so, he's rescued by forces loyal to Aslan!

Not to be outdone, the Witch then appears before Aslan, demanding the traitor's life. Aslan acknowledges the validity of the Witch's claim on a now repentant Edmund, but gets her to renounce it by offering to die in his place. The Witch agrees, and that night she slays Aslan on the Stone Table. She believes her rule in Narnia is now assured. But with the rising of the sun, Aslan rises from the dead! He leads his army to victory against the Witch and her forces. After personally dispatching the Witch, he installs the four children as kings and queens of Narnia, thus fulfilling the ancient prophecy.

This, in a nutshell, is the story. But did the author, C. S. Lewis, intend some deeper meaning? And if so, what is it?

The Search for a Deeper Meaning

It seems that Lewis had at least three objectives in writing his famous *Chronicles*. First, he simply wanted to tell a good

story. And almost everyone who's read the *Chronicles* will agree that he succeeded admirably here, for they're among the best-loved books of all time. Second, Lewis also aimed at using his stories to communicate moral truth, both by precept and example. In this regard, Paul Ford observes that Lewis is something of a Christian Aesop. Like Aesop, he's more than *just* a storyteller; he's "also a moral educator."[\[1\]](#) As Gilbert Meilaender notes:

Lewis . . . believes that moral principles are learned indirectly from others around us, who serve as exemplars. . . . the *Chronicles of Narnia* . . . are not just good stories . . . they serve to enhance moral education, to build character. . . . To overlook the function of the *Chronicles of Narnia* in communicating images of proper emotional responses is to miss their connection to Lewis's moral thought.[\[2\]](#)

Finally, Lewis also purposed to communicate important truths of the Christian faith by translating them into the imaginary landscape of Narnia. But here we must be careful. Lewis insisted that the *Chronicles* should not be read as Christian allegories. Paul Ford observes that in an allegory there are "one-to-one correspondences between philosophical or religious concepts and the characters or events or objects in a story."[\[3\]](#) The *Chronicles*, said Lewis, are not allegories. They're rather what he called "supposals." He explained the difference in a letter, with special reference to the great lion Aslan:

[Aslan] is an invention giving an imaginary answer to the question, 'What might Christ become like, if there really were a world like Narnia and He chose to be incarnate and die and rise again in *that* world as He actually has done in ours?' This is not an allegory at all. . . . The incarnation of Christ in another world is mere supposal.[\[4\]](#)

So while the *Chronicles* should not be read as allegories, it's

still quite true that they're informed throughout by Lewis's Christian faith and imagination. They are Christian "supposals"—and Aslan is *supposed* to be what Christ *might* look like if He became incarnate in a land like Narnia.

Having discussed Lewis's purposes in writing the *Chronicles*, and having seen that they do indeed contain a deeper meaning, we're now ready to look more closely at the most famous of these: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Temptation and Sin

Two of the major themes developed by Lewis are temptation and sin. By carefully weaving these into his story, Lewis is able to address issues of importance both for basic morality and for the Christian faith.

When Edmund first stumbles into Narnia through the wardrobe, he finds himself alone in a snow-covered wood. Cold, and not much liking the look of the place, he almost decides to go home when he hears the sound of bells in the distance. Shortly thereafter a sleigh comes into view, and in it sits the White Witch.

The Witch stops the sleigh and questions Edmund. She knows of the ancient prophecy that, when two Sons of Adam and two Daughters of Eve sit enthroned at Cair Paravel, then her reign (and life) will be over. When she learns that Edmund is human, she raises her wand as if she intends to turn him into stone. But she changes her mind and with feigned friendliness invites Edmund to sit in her sleigh. She asks if he would like something to eat and Edmund requests Turkish Delight (which she magically produces).

As he devours the sweets, the Witch continues to question him. She learns that he has a brother and two sisters. Together, the siblings could fulfill the prophecy that would spell her doom! But the Turkish Delight is enchanted; whoever tastes it

will want more and more. Knowing this, the Witch tempts Edmund. She says that if he will bring his siblings to her house, then she will give him more Turkish Delight—something Edmund desperately wants. She also says that she would like to make Edmund a prince. And later, when she's gone, he will even be king! So the Witch tempts him by appealing to his desire for power and pleasure.

And it works! Before Edmund returns home, “he [is] already more than half on the side of the Witch.”^{5} Later, when all four siblings get into Narnia together, Edmund slips away from the others and goes to betray them to the Witch. His desire for Turkish Delight and to be king leads him to yield to temptation—and sin. It reminds one of what James says in the New Testament: “But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (1:14-15).

Though we might not like to admit it, there's something of Edmund in all of us. Like Edmund, we've all sinned (Rom. 3:23). And unless Someone intervenes who can change both us and our circumstances, then like Edmund we're also doomed to die (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:14-15).

Sacrifice and Redemption

Lewis claimed that the idea for his story, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, “all began with a picture of a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood.” “At first,” he wrote, “I had very little idea how the story would go. But then suddenly Aslan came bounding into it. . . . [and] He pulled the whole story together.”^{6} It's a good thing He did. For without Aslan the traitorous Edmund would have met a very different fate than that which actually befell him.

You see, Aslan's Father, the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea, put some Deep Magic into Narnia at its beginning. The Witch, who

accuses Edmund before Aslan, is quite knowledgeable about this Deep Magic. "Every traitor," she insists, "belongs to me as my lawful prey. . . . Unless I have blood as the Law says all Narnia will . . . perish in fire and water." [\[7\]](#) Aslan agrees that her claim is valid.

Although it looks like Edmund is as good as dead, Aslan, in a private conversation with the Witch, gets her to renounce her claim on Edmund's blood. It's only later that we learn why. The great lion made the Witch an offer she couldn't refuse. He offered to die in Edmund's place. True to His word, He arrives that night at the Stone Table and there He is slain by the Witch.

But that's not the end of the story. Early the next morning, as the sun peers over the horizon, the Stone Table cracks in two and Aslan is raised from the dead. He's conquered death through an even Deeper Magic, unknown to the Witch. As Aslan explains, "Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of Time. But if she could have looked . . . into . . . the darkness before Time dawned . . . She would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards." [\[8\]](#)

It's a beautiful picture of substitutionary atonement. Aslan willingly lays down His life for the traitorous Edmund, thereby redeeming him from the just demands of the Law. It reminds one of what Christ did for us. Paul told the Galatians, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13). Just as Aslan gave up His life for Edmund, so Christ gave up His life for each of us, dying as a substitute in our place so that we might forever share in the life of God!

Reflections on the Movie

As many fans of Lewis's classic story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* have already observed, the movie is really quite good and well worth seeing. It is a generally faithful rendition of Lewis's beautiful and imaginative original. Indeed the film is really at its best when it adheres most closely to the book. It was reported that at one time another group of filmmakers was planning to produce a very different version of the story. Supposedly their plan was to set Lewis's wonderful children's classic "in present-day Brentwood. Instead of a White Witch wooing young Edmund with Turkish Delight, a cool Californian would win him with cheeseburgers."[\[9\]](#) If this is really true, we can all rejoice that such an absurd retelling of Lewis's famous story never saw the light of day. All those involved with bringing *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to the big screen are to be commended for adhering so closely to Lewis's original vision.

But of course no movie is perfect, and *The Lion* is no exception. Possibly two of the biggest disappointments for fans of the book are the diminished role given to some of Lewis's most important dialogue and the diminished importance of the great lion himself. For example, compared to his counterpart in the book, wise old professor Kirke has precious little to say in the movie.

Even more troubling, the extended conversation which the four children have with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about Aslan lacks many of the Beavers' most important declarations. Unlike the book, the movie never refers to Aslan as "the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea." And Mr. Beaver is also denied his famous response to Lucy's question about whether Aslan is actually safe. "Safe?" he asks, "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."[\[10\]](#) Not only was such important dialogue cut, but as Jeffrey Overstreet noted, Aslan's appearances are "painfully

brief." He doesn't "have the time onscreen to earn our affection and awe the way we might have hoped."[\[11\]](#)

In spite of such shortcomings, however, the movie still possesses much of the book's magic. What's more, it retains the crucially important themes of temptation and sin, sacrifice and redemption. Aslan still dies as a substitute for the traitorous Edmund, thereby redeeming him from the just demands of the Law. Finally, as Overstreet observed, "Those who respond to the movie's roar by running to Lewis's book will find Deeper Magic in its pages. Meeting them there, Lewis himself will lead them 'further up, further in'."[\[12\]](#) If the movie leads a new generation of readers to tackle this classic story, then it will indeed have served as a fitting tribute to its author.

Notes

1. Paul F. Ford, "Introduction," in *Companion to Narnia* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), xxviii.
2. Gilbert Meilaender, *The Taste for the Other* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 212-13, cited in Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, xxxi.
3. Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, xxv.
4. C.S. Lewis, *Letters of C.S. Lewis*, ed. W.H. Lewis (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966), 283, cited in Ford, *Companion to Narnia*, xxv-xxvi.
5. C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Collier Books: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1970), 39.
6. C.S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1966), 42.
7. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 139.
8. Ibid., 159-60.
9. Andrew Coffin, "The Chronicles of Making Narnia," *World*, December 10, 2005, 21.
10. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 75-76.
11. Jeffrey Overstreet, "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe,"

[www.christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/lionwitchwardrobe.htm](http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/reviews/lionwitchwardrobe.html)

l, posted December 8, 2005.

12. Ibid.

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“I Can’t Find a Good Reason to Believe in God and the Bible”

I have been reading some of the questions and answers that have been given about god, angels and the rest. Some of the questions make sense but to me almost none of the answers. Just so you know, I am a non believer in all of that and can find no good reason to believe. I tried going to church, going to meetings, bible study, prayer meetings—for me there are no real answers to anything in this life, just excuses. Maybe I am writing this with hopes of finding some.

When I have read the bible I find the good that everyone talks about and speaks of. It is always the same few things. The reason for me is because there is so little of it. I find plenty of ethnic cleansing, wars of extermination, murder of men women and children ordered by god. If the numbers in the bible are true which I do not believe they are, it is just something to try and frighten people. If the numbers of people ordered murdered by or murdered by god are anywhere near what is real, it makes Hitler, Stalin and Mao look like made-up cartoon characters. Yet we read about them and are appalled, so why not god?

I really believe to read the bible without horror one must

undo everything that is tender, sympathizing and benevolent in the heart of man. That is what is the most frightening thing to me about most people who believe. I know I cannot read the bible with an open mind and not be appalled at the majority of the actions of god. I have tried. For me this is not divine love. People are always upset at the amount of violence that is in society, much of it on television—why not by the amount of it in the bible? The treatment of women is one of the most horrible I have ever read...for the most part. In both the old and new testament. That can easily be pointed out in both the laws of the part of the world at that time and in the laws of god.

I do not at all understand how the two most powerful beings in existence cannot solve their own problems and if they can't do that, how am I to believe either of them can assist me in any way? And because they couldn't get along, the entire human race is damned because of that? Makes no sense to me. That to me is like saying one of my siblings did something wrong so I am going to spank all of you for it. And in the case with god it is not because of the siblings it is because he and satan can't get along.

Because of this and many more things I have read in the bible along with research on the meaning of words and laws of that time...I cannot believe. There are too many other teachings that show a much more kinder way of life for human beings. There are many people I have met in life who know that the violent nature of human beings does not exist in all of us...and that is what we live everyday. I believe that in those in whom it does exist, the bible more so than not gives excuses for it to continue. If the entire book is what it is really about, then entire book should be taught. I would love to attend a class bible class that teaches that. I have not yet found one. I know I would be a tough student...not because I want to be...but because I want to know. I just can't take another bible study that does not go into everything in the book

Thank you for writing Probe Ministries. Although it may be a hard thing to read, I believe that God's command to the Israelites to utterly destroy the Canaanites teaches us a very important lesson about God. God is absolutely holy and will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (see Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Proverbs 11:21; Nahum 1:3). The Canaanites were guilty of some of the worst crimes imaginable: terrible idolatry, immoral sexual behavior, and child sacrifice, just to name a few. All the way back in Genesis 15:13-16, God revealed to Abram His plan to give His people the land of Canaan. However, notice that His promise would not be fulfilled for over 400 years. Why? Because, as God said, "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Gen. 15:16). We must not forget, therefore, that God was very patient with the wicked practices of these people. He gave them hundreds of years to repent and turn from their wicked ways. But they chose not to. In the end, God did indeed judge them for their sin—just as He will one day judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31; Matt. 25:31-46; Revelation 20:11-15).

Let me also point out that God, as the Sovereign Creator and Judge of all mankind, has the right to give life and to take it away. After giving the Canaanites hundreds of years to repent, God finally judged their sins by waging a holy war against them through His people. This was a Divine judgment upon the Canaanites for their sins. It was also the means by which God would protect His chosen people from being corrupted by the wicked practices of these peoples (see Deuteronomy 12:2-4; 20:16-18). The lesson we are taught, I believe, is that God takes sin very seriously and will, as the perfectly holy and righteous Judge of all mankind, punish all sin without exception. In the end, not one sin will go unpunished. If any sin went unpunished, God would not be perfectly just. But since He is perfectly just, not one sin will go unpunished. This is a sober warning to all mankind that God is very serious about judging sin. It is quite proper for us to react to these stories with a healthy fear of God's judgment.

Although God's judgment on the Canaanites was severe, the number of peoples killed is not anywhere close to the numbers murdered by Hitler and Stalin. But even if they were, it's important to put these events in proper perspective. After all, God's judgment on those who reject His Son and the free offer of His friendship, grace, love and forgiveness, results in much more severe consequences than mere physical death (see Revelation 20:11-15). Those who reject Jesus' sacrifice on the cross in their place as the only acceptable payment for their sins, will have to pay for their sins themselves. And this involves eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46).

As for [the treatment of women](#), it's very important to recognize that women in ancient Israel, and especially in the early church, were treated far better than they were in the surrounding cultures of those days. All the way back in Genesis 1:27 we are told that BOTH men and women are created in the image and likeness of God. Paul says that in Christ there is neither male nor female, for we are all one in Christ (Galatians 3:28). He urged husbands to love their wives in the same manner that Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). This is a sacrificial sort of love that would even give its life for the beloved, just as Christ did for His church. Christianity actually did more than any other force in the ancient world to bring about an elevation in the status of women.

It's important to realize that man is not punished because God and Satan can't get along. This idea is taught nowhere in the Bible. Men are to be judged and punished for their sins (unless they repent and receive God's mercy through faith in Christ Jesus), just as Satan and his angels are to be judged and punished for theirs. We will not be punished because God and Satan can't get along. Furthermore, we shouldn't think of God and Satan as virtual equals. Satan is a rebel angel, a being originally created good by God, but who rebelled against God and sinned. Satan has no more power relative to God than

you or I. Compared to God, Satan is completely powerless. Indeed, the only power he has is due to the fact that God created him with it, maintains him in existence, and (for the moment) allows him to exercise it in a manner contrary to His perfect moral will. At God's proper time, Satan will be cast into the lake of fire for all eternity (Revelation 20:10). He will never be permitted to wreak chaos and moral rebellion in God's world again.

Finally, I will honestly say that I don't believe there is a higher example of moral purity, holiness and virtue than that of Jesus. If what He taught is true, then the only way to be reconciled to God is through faith in Him (John 14:6). Furthermore, the Bible does not acknowledge that anyone (other than Jesus) is without sin or guilt. The Bible teaches that not one of us is righteous (Romans 3:10), but that all of us are sinners (Romans 3:23). Nevertheless, although the wages of sin is death, the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23). Although Christians are not perfect, Christ Jesus is. And it is to Him that God invites us to look for His grace, mercy, love, forgiveness, and eternal life. "O taste and see that the Lord is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!" (Psalm 34:8).

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries