

# A Pilgrim's Progress: Suffering in the Life of John Bunyan – A Christian View of Suffering

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn considers the lessons presented by the life and writings of the famous author of The Pilgrim's Progress to give each of us a better understanding of the role of suffering in the lives of followers of Christ.*

## A Suffering Pilgrim

John Bunyan is known to most people today as the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a book he began writing in prison. It tells the story of "Christian," who makes his way from the "City of Destruction" (which represents this world) to the "Celestial City" (which represents Heaven). It's been described as "perhaps the world's best-selling book" (after the Bible), and has been "translated into over 200 languages."[\[1\]](#) Written in the form of an allegory, it essentially relates the story of Bunyan's own Christian journey.[\[2\]](#) And just as *his* life was full of trials and suffering, so also "Christian" must face many hardships and difficulties as well.



Bunyan was born in England in 1628 at a time of great political and religious unrest. In 1644, at just fifteen years old, both his mother and sister died within a month of each other. Later that year, "when Bunyan had turned sixteen, he was drafted into the Parliamentary Army and for about two years was taken from his home for military service."[\[3\]](#) He married in 1648, at about the age of twenty, but his wife died just ten years later, leaving him with four children, the

oldest of whom was blind. He married again the following year, in 1659, but incredibly, just one year after this, “Bunyan was arrested and put in prison.”[\[4\]](#) His wife, who was pregnant at the time, suffered a miscarriage, probably because of the added stress which this ordeal created. She was then left to care for Bunyan’s four children while he spent the next twelve years in jail.[\[5\]](#)

As you can see, Bunyan was no stranger to suffering. Indeed, he had an intimate, firsthand acquaintance with heartache, trials, and difficulties. But what crimes had he committed to be cast into prison? Essentially, the charges against him were two: first, “he refused to attend the services of the Established church” of England; and second, he “preached to unlawful assemblies.”[\[6\]](#) You see, Bunyan had converted to Christianity during his first marriage and had become a powerful and respected preacher. But in the volatile political and religious climate of that day, the freedom of Nonconformist preachers like Bunyan eventually came to an end. And when it did, he was arrested and put in prison.

In the remainder of this article we’ll look at some of the trials this man endured, how he responded to them, and what they might teach us as we each make our own spiritual journey.

## **The Pilgrim’s Conversion**

*The Pilgrim’s Progress* is one of the best-selling Christian books of all time. But as Bunyan tells us in another of his books, the autobiographical *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, before becoming a Christian he had few equals in “cursing, swearing, lying and blaspheming the holy name of God.” Indeed, prior to his marriage, he says he was “the very ring-leader of all the youth . . . into all manner of vice and ungodliness.”[\[7\]](#)

Bunyan’s young wife had a very godly father. When he died, he

left her two books which she brought into her marriage: *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and *The Practice of Piety*. According to Bunyan, although these books did not awaken him to his "sad and sinful state," they nevertheless did arouse within him "some desires to religion."[{8}](#) One of the practical effects of these new desires was Bunyan's regular attendance at a local church.

Soon Bunyan also began to read the Bible. He then came under such powerful conviction of sin that he scarcely knew what to do. "Sin and corruption," he wrote, "would as naturally bubble out of my heart, as water would bubble out of a fountain. . . I thought none but the devil himself could equalize me for inward wickedness and pollution of mind."[{9}](#) Bunyan was plunged into a state of despair over the greatness of his sin which, he tell us, "continued a long while, even for some years together."[{10}](#)

Eventually, after years of spiritual and emotional agony, Bunyan described "what seemed to be the decisive moment."[{11}](#) He was heading into the field one day when suddenly this sentence broke in upon his mind: "Thy righteousness is in heaven." At this, he says, "I . . . saw . . . that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse: for my righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, *the same yesterday, and today, and for ever* (Heb. 13:8)." "Now," he said, "did my chains fall off my legs indeed . . . my temptations also fled away . . . now went I . . . home rejoicing, for the grace and love of God."[{12}](#)

After years of spiritual anguish, Bunyan had been set free by the grace of God from some of his worst fears and torments. But as we'll see, this was not to be the end of his experience with suffering. As one set of trials was ending, another was soon to begin.

## The Pilgrim's Imprisonment

According to Bunyan, five or six years after his conversion, in about the year 1655, some of the believers in his local congregation began entreating him "to speak a word of exhortation unto them."[{13}](#) Although initially hesitant, Bunyan agreed to their request "and suddenly a great preacher was discovered."[{14}](#) Apparently, word spread quickly through the English countryside. According to one author, "In the days of toleration, a day's notice would get a crowd of 1,200 to hear him preach at 7 o'clock in the morning on a weekday."[{15}](#)

Unfortunately, it was not to last. In 1660, the same year in which Charles II was brought home as king in the Restoration of the Monarchy, John Bunyan was arrested and imprisoned "for preaching without state approval."[{16}](#) Officially, he was charged with being in violation of the Elizabethan Conventicle Act of 1593. According to this Act, anyone found guilty of "abstaining from coming to church to hear divine service, and . . . being a common upholder of several unlawful meetings . . . could be held without bail until he or she submitted to the authority of the Anglican church."[{17}](#) As a Nonconformist preacher, this Act applied to men like Bunyan.

What's interesting, however, is that Bunyan could have gone free at any time, so long as he agreed to give up preaching. But as he was firmly persuaded that he had been called by God to this ministry, he was completely unwilling to abandon his calling. He thus spent the next twelve years in prison, largely cut off from his wife, children, friends, and church.

I say "largely cut off" for, strange as it may seem, it appears that Bunyan was occasionally let out "to see his family or make brief trips."[{18}](#) Of course, this was the exception and not the rule. Nevertheless, by "the standards of the seventeenth century the conditions in which he was held were not particularly brutal."[{19}](#) On the other hand, Bunyan was largely fortunate in this respect: "hundreds of Dissenters

died in prison, and many more came out with their health broken by foul, over-crowded conditions.”{20}

Although these qualifications must be admitted, we must never lose sight of the fact that Bunyan was willing to endure twelve long years of this suffering, rather than agree to give up preaching. And thankfully, as we’ll see, God brought a great deal of good out of His faithful servant’s suffering.

## The Pilgrim’s Writings

Most people today know John Bunyan as the author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, but this is just one of many works written by the metal-worker turned minister. His first book was written in 1656, when he was twenty-eight years old. But by the time of his death, some thirty-two years later, he had authored fifty-seven more!{21} John Piper notes:

*The variety in these books was remarkable: books dealing with controversies (like those concerning the Quakers . . . justification and baptism), collections of poems, children’s literature, and allegory (like *The Holy War* and *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman*). But the vast majority were practical . . . expositions of Scripture built from sermons for the sake of . . . helping Christian pilgrims make their way successfully to heaven.*{22}

What’s especially astonishing about the size and variety of Bunyan’s literary legacy is that it came from a man with almost no formal education. As a child Bunyan had been taught to read and write, but nothing more. He had no university or seminary degrees in which to boast. And yet his diligent study of the Bible, born mainly out of a burning desire to find peace with God, made Bunyan mighty in the Scriptures. Indeed the Bible, more than any other book, would be the primary influence upon his many writings. So evident was this to Charles Spurgeon, the famous nineteenth century Baptist

preacher, that he once wrote of Bunyan:

*He had studied our Authorized Version . . . till his whole being was saturated with Scripture; and though his writings are . . . full of poetry, yet he cannot give us his Pilgrim's Progress—that sweetest of all prose poems—without continually making us feel and say, "Why, this man is a living Bible!" Prick him anywhere; and you will find that his blood is Bibline, the very essence of the Bible flows from him.* {23}

Not even his suffering in prison could dampen Bunyan's enthusiasm for the Word of God or for writing. Indeed, if anything, it increased it. Some of his best-known works were written from the confines of a prison cell. These include *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, written during his first imprisonment, as well as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, apparently completed during a second, briefer period of imprisonment in 1677. {24} Bunyan's writings are surely one of his greatest gifts to the church.

## **Lessons from a Suffering Pilgrim**

A thoughtful examination of John Bunyan's reflections on the purpose and value of suffering can give us much wisdom in how best to deal with it in our own lives. Near the end of his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he appended a brief account of his imprisonment in the Bedford jail. In it, he tells of how he tried to prepare himself for imprisonment, and possibly even death, when he realized that he might soon be called upon to suffer for the cause of Christ. Naturally, as one might well expect, one of the things he did was pray. He was particularly concerned to ask God for the strength to patiently endure his imprisonment, even with an attitude of joy (Col. 1:11). {25}

However, it's the second thing he says that I find especially interesting and helpful. He reflects on the words of the

apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:9: “[W]e had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (NASB). Commenting on this verse, he then makes the following two observations:

*By this scripture I was made to see that if ever I would suffer rightly, I must first pass a sentence of death upon everything that can properly be called a thing of this life, even to reckon myself, my wife, my children, my health, my enjoyments and all, as dead to me, and myself as dead to them. . . . The second was, to live upon God that is invisible; as Paul said in another place, the way not to faint, is to look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen, they are eternal*[{26}](#).

Bunyan realized that, like it or not, suffering, pain, loss and death would all come to him in one way or another. Indeed, sooner or later every single one of us must ultimately face these terrifying realities. How, then, can we best prepare to meet them? As Bunyan reminds us, if we only prepare for prison, say, then we will be unprepared for beatings. But if we stop our preparation with beatings, then we will be unprepared for death. But we cannot evade or cheat death forever. And thus, concludes Bunyan, “the best way to go through sufferings, is to trust in God through Christ, as touching the world to come; and as touching this world.”[{27}](#) This was how Bunyan lived, and with God’s help it was also how he died. May the eternal and unseen God grant each of us the grace to follow his example.

## Notes

1. Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 375, cited in John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God: The Fruit of*

- Affliction in the Lives of John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001), 60.
2. W. R. Owens, "Introduction," in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (New York: Penguin, 1987), xxiii.
  3. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 49.
  4. *Ibid.*, 54.
  5. *Ibid.*
  6. Owens, "Introduction," xv.
  7. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. W. R. Owens (New York: Penguin, 1987), 8.
  8. *Ibid.*, 10.
  9. *Ibid.*, 24.
  10. *Ibid.*
  11. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 52.
  12. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 59.
  13. *Ibid.*, 67-68.
  14. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 53.
  15. *Ibid.*
  16. *Ibid.*, 47.
  17. Owens, "Notes," in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, 127, n. 137.
  18. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 48.
  19. Owens, "Introduction," xvi.
  20. *Ibid.*
  21. Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 60.
  22. *Ibid.*, 60-61.
  23. Charles Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 159; cited in Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, 77.
  24. Owens, "Introduction," xvi-xvii.
  25. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 79.
  26. *Ibid.*
  27. *Ibid.*



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# “Where Are the Rest of Jesus’ Teachings?”

I have been searching for text/documents/anything that Jesus taught. He had over three years of anointed ministry, and only a few lines in the Gospels are recorded. Where is the rest of His teachings? I doubt that He wrote them down to a great extent, but surely some of his followers wrote down His teachings.

It’s great to hear about your excitement for the teachings of Jesus! May the Lord increase your tribe!

There is, unfortunately, a lot of nonsense written about Jesus—both at the scholarly and popular level (though doubtless more at the popular level). The fact of the matter is that the earliest and best historical evidence concerning Jesus and his teachings is to be found in the New Testament. Nothing else even comes close.

Of course, Jesus is mentioned in some ancient non-Christian sources. I have written a brief article about it here: [probe.org/ancient-evidence-for-jesus-from-non-christian-sources-2/](http://probe.org/ancient-evidence-for-jesus-from-non-christian-sources-2/)

Additionally, the Gospel of Thomas appears to contain some of Jesus’ actual sayings. According to New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman, probably about 1/3 of this gospel contains actual sayings of Jesus (or something close), about 1/3 of the sayings are full-blown Gnosticism (espousing things that Jesus never taught), and the final 1/3 are somewhere in between these two.

But here’s the thing. The Gospel of Thomas is an early second

century production. The other apocryphal and pseudepigraphical gospels are later still. By contrast, all of the New Testament documents (including the four gospels) are first century productions. So bottom line: if you want to know what Jesus really taught, you need to read the New Testament (and the NT gospels in particular). Indeed, the reason scholars think that some of the sayings in the Gospel of Thomas are probably authentic sayings of Jesus is because they are consistent with sayings we find in the New Testament Gospels—the earliest and most historically trustworthy documents we have concerning the life and teachings of Jesus.

A few other books you might enjoy by good, solid, evangelical Jesus scholars:

1. *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels*, by Craig A. Evans:

[www.amazon.com/Fabricating-Jesus-Scholars-Distort-Gospels/dp/0830833188/](http://www.amazon.com/Fabricating-Jesus-Scholars-Distort-Gospels/dp/0830833188/)

2. *Reinventing Jesus: How Contemporary Skeptics Miss the Real Jesus and Mislead Popular Culture*, by Komoszewski, Sawyer, and Wallace:

[www.amazon.com/Reinventing-Jesus-J-Ed-Komoszewski/dp/082542982X/](http://www.amazon.com/Reinventing-Jesus-J-Ed-Komoszewski/dp/082542982X/)

3. *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*, by Gary R. Habermas:

[www.amazon.com/Historical-Jesus-Ancient-Evidence-Christ/dp/0899007325/](http://www.amazon.com/Historical-Jesus-Ancient-Evidence-Christ/dp/0899007325/)

May the Lord greatly bless you in your studies!

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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# **“I Stopped Believing After Visiting an Atheist Webpage; Can God Forgive Me?”**

I accepted Christ but then I went to the atheistic page that convinced me and I stopped completely believing for a few days. Later, I realized it was a mistake and repented. Can God forgive me? Am I apostate? Hebrews 6:4-6 is why I'm afraid.

Thanks for your letter. Hebrews 6:4-6 is a highly disputed passage with a variety of interpretations on offer. Fortunately, however, I do not think that we really need to delve into any of these in your case. The sort of sin that is in view in Hebrews 6:4-6 appears to be a very willful and determined apostasy from Christ. It appears to picture someone who, in spite of numerous spiritual benefits experienced, nonetheless turns his back on Christ and utterly rejects Him forever. In other words, the passage seems to suggest that anyone who has committed this sin will never turn to God again in repentance. Their heart has been (or is) irrevocably hardened against God and they will not repent.

But this is clearly not you! As you say in your letter, you realized that you had made a mistake and you thus repented and turned back to God. Sometimes atheist websites can seem convincing and a believer might be temporarily fooled by them, so to speak. But for a true believer, this will be very temporary indeed (as again, your own case shows). For the true believer has the witness of the Holy Spirit within him (or her) self—and this witness testifies to the truth of Christ

with all of the authority of God himself!

The bottom line, I think, is this: anyone who is willing to repent of their sin and turn to Christ for forgiveness and salvation cannot have committed this sin. For the person who has committed this sin is irrevocably hardened against God and will never again be brought to repentance.

One final note. As believers it is important for us to grow in our understanding of the riches of our faith. Although some believers are called by God to engage with the material on atheist websites, the Lord always prepares such believers exceedingly well beforehand. Personally, I would encourage you as a brother in Christ to stay away from the atheist websites. The fact is, these sites are utterly wrong in their denial and rejection of God. They will not encourage nor build you up in your faith. Instead, I would recommend daily reading (and actually studying) your Bible, getting involved with a good Bible-believing and Bible-teaching church (and small group), and reading good works of theology and Christian apologetics. Take the time to carefully read something like John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, for example. And for apologetics, read the articles on the Probe website ([www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org)) – and check out the material as well on William Lane Craig's site, Reasonable Faith ([www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)). Don't waste your time—I say this in all seriousness—with atheist websites. Rather, go deep in your study of the Bible, Christian theology, and Christian apologetics. You won't regret it!

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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# Those Admirable English Puritans

*Michael Gleghorn corrects a number of misunderstandings and stereotypes about the Puritans, suggesting there is much about them to admire.*

## Introducing the Puritans

J. I. Packer begins his book, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, by comparing the English Puritans to the California Redwoods. He writes, “On . . . the northern California coastline grow the giant Redwoods, the biggest living things on earth. Some are over 360 feet tall, and some trunks are more than 60 feet round.”<sup>{1}</sup> A bit later he draws this comparison: “As Redwoods attract the eye, because they overtop other trees, so the mature holiness and seasoned fortitude of the great Puritans shine before us as a kind of beacon light, overtopping the stature of the majority of Christians in most eras.”<sup>{2}</sup>

Of course, in our day, if people think of the Puritans at all, it’s usually only for the purpose of making a joke of one kind or another. As one author notes, “the Puritans are the only collective stock-in-trade that virtually every cartoonist feels free to use to lampoon society’s ills.”<sup>{3}</sup>



But who were the Puritans really? When did they live? And, most importantly, why should we care?

Many scholarly studies of English Puritanism begin by noting the variety of ways in which the term “Puritanism” has been used and defined. Christopher Hill begins his book, *Society*

*and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, with a chapter entitled, “The Definition of a Puritan.”[{4}](#) And John Spurr, in his book on English Puritanism, has an introductory section on “Defining Puritans.”[{5}](#) But we’ll leave it to the scholars to haggle over details. For our purposes, it’s good enough to say that the Puritans were English Protestants who were influenced by the theology of the Reformation. They were zealous to “purify” not only the Church of England, but also their society, and even themselves, from all doctrinal, ceremonial, and moral impurity—and to do so for the glory of God.[{6}](#) The time period of English Puritanism spans roughly the years between 1550 and 1700.[{7}](#)

So that’s who the Puritans were, but why on earth should we care? Personally, I think it’s because the Puritans can offer us a great deal of wisdom, wisdom that could really benefit the church and society of our own day. As Packer reminds us, “The great Puritans, though dead, still speak to us through their writings, and say things . . . that we badly need to hear at the present time.”[{8}](#)

## **The Puritans and God**

Before going any further, we need to come right out and admit that, at least on the popular level, the Puritans really seem to suffer from an “image problem.” According to J. I. Packer, “Pillorying the Puritans . . . has long been a popular pastime.”[{9}](#) Likewise, Peter Marshall and David Manuel observe that “Nearly everyone today seems to believe that the Puritans were bluenosed killjoys in tall black hats, a somber group of sin-obsessed, witch-hunting bigots.”[{10}](#) Of course, like Packer, they regard this view as “a monstrous misrepresentation.”[{11}](#) But when a view is so widely held, we seem to be in for an uphill battle if we want to suggest some ways in which the Puritans were admirable!

So where do we begin? Let’s briefly consider the way in which Puritans sought to live their lives before God. The

*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, a teaching device highly esteemed by many Puritans, [{12}](#) begins by asking, “What is the chief end of man?” That’s a great question, isn’t it? They answered it this way: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” [{13}](#)

Now what follows if this answer is correct? Well first, it would mean that human life is *objectively* full of meaning, value, and purpose, for God exists and (as General Maximus asserted in the hit movie, *Gladiator*) “what we do in life echoes in eternity.” [{14}](#) But second, in claiming that “man’s chief end” consists not only in *glorifying* God in the here and now, but also in *enjoying* Him *forever*, we see the potential for the complete and eternal fulfillment of human existence. For what could be better than enjoying God, the greatest good, forever and ever?

It is doubtless for reasons such as this that the Puritan theologian, William Perkins, defined theology as “the science of living blessedly forever”! [{15}](#) He understood that theology is not some dry, academic discipline, with no relationship to the rest of one’s life. Rather, theology is all about knowing God personally. And this, according to Jesus, is eternal life, the life of supreme blessedness (John 17:3). So the first reason for seeing the Puritans as admirable is that they sought to live their lives in such a way that they would glorify God and enjoy Him forever—and what could ultimately be wiser, more fulfilling—or more admirable—than that?

## **The Puritans and Books**

Now some may have thought of the Puritans as ignorant, or anti-intellectual—people who either feared or hated learning. But this, claims Leland Ryken, is “absolutely untrue.” Indeed, he says, “No Christian movement in history has been more zealous for education than the Puritans.” [{16}](#) Many leaders of the Puritan movement were university educated and saw great value in the life of the mind. One can list individual

Puritans who were interested in things like astronomy, botany, medicine, and still other subjects from the book of nature.[{17}](#)

Above all, however, Puritanism was a movement which prized that greatest of all books, the Bible. Puritans loved their Bibles—and deemed it both their joy and duty to study, teach, believe and live out its promises and commandments. According to Packer, “Intense veneration for Scripture . . . and a devoted concern to know and do all that it prescribes, was Puritanism’s hallmark.”[{18}](#)

Indeed, so great was this Puritan veneration for Scripture that even those without much formal education often knew their English Bible exceedingly well. A great example of this can be seen in John Bunyan, the famed author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Although he did not have much in the way of formal education, one of his later editors declared (doubtless with *some* exaggeration) that “No man ever possessed a more intimate knowledge of the Bible, nor greater aptitude in quoting it than Bunyan.”[{19}](#)

For Puritans like Bunyan, the Bible was the inspired word of God. It was thus the highest court of appeal in all matters of Christian faith and practice. Indeed, since the Bible came from God, it was viewed as having the same divine authority as God himself. It was therefore worth one’s time to know the Bible well, and to be intimately familiar with its contents. As two contemporary scholars of Puritanism remind us, the Bible was both “the mirror before which each person could see the . . . status of one’s soul before God, and the guidebook for all human behavior . . .”[{20}](#)

The Puritan stress on knowing, believing, and obeying God’s inspired word is refreshing. What might the church in America look like if it *really* recaptured this Puritan vision for the importance of Scripture? Here the writings of the Puritans can still be a valuable resource for the church today, which is



yet another reason for seeing them as admirable.[{21}](#)

## The Puritans and the Church

Even in our own day, the Puritans remain fairly well-known for their desire to “purify” the Church of England from anything which, in their estimation, smacked of doctrinal, moral, or ceremonial impurity.[{22}](#) The Puritans were passionate about the purity of the church. But how were they to determine if a particular doctrine or practice was suspect?

For the Puritans, it was only natural that God’s inspired word, the Bible, should serve as the final authority in all such matters. If a doctrine was taught in Scripture, then it should also be taught in the church. And if not, then it shouldn’t. The same standard would apply to all moral and ceremonial issues as well. Scripture was to have the final word about whether any particular doctrine or practice was, or was not, to be taught or permitted in the church of God.[{23}](#) Of course, this is right in line with what we said above about the Puritan devotion to Scripture.

But once one is committed to judging everything *within* the church according to the standard of Scripture, it probably won’t be long before one’s view *of* the church undergoes a similar biblical scrutiny. Such scrutiny soon led Puritans to “the notion that the church is a spiritual reality.” The church is not the building in which the redeemed gather to meet, it is rather “the company of the redeemed” themselves.[{24}](#) Doubtless this was one of the reasons why the Puritans were eager to purify not only the church, understood in a corporate sense, but themselves as individuals as well.

It also helps explain the Puritans’ devotion to both the fellowship of the saints and the discipline of an erring brother or sister in the faith. The Puritan pastor Richard Sibbes urged God’s people “to strengthen and encourage one another in the ways of holiness.”[{25}](#) And Robert Coachman

reminded his readers that “it is no small privilege . . . to live in . . . a society” where one’s brothers and sisters in Christ “will not suffer them to go on in sin.”{26}

But isn’t it all too easy to allow Christian fellowship to lapse into something that is superficial, boring, and sometimes even frankly unspiritual? Yes; and this is why the great English Puritans are quick to remind us (sometimes in the most forceful of ways) that we must continually seek, in our fellowship together, to promote both faith and holiness, along with a deep love and reverent fear of the Lord our God. And isn’t that an admirable reminder?

## **The Puritans on Marriage and the Family**

If there’s one thing that almost everyone thinks they know about the Puritans it’s that they “were sexually inhibited and repressive,” right?{27} But just how accurate is our knowledge about the Puritans on this score? Well according to some scholars, it’s wide of the mark indeed.{28}

Of course, it’s certainly true that the Puritans believed, just as the New Testament teaches, that human sexual behavior should be enjoyed only within the marriage relationship between a husband and wife. And naturally enough, they disapproved of any sexual behavior outside of this relationship. But within the union of heterosexual marriage, the Puritans were actually quite vocal proponents of a rich and vibrant sex life. Indeed, one Puritan author described sex as “one of the most proper and essential acts of marriage” and encouraged married couples to engage in it “with good will and delight, willingly, readily and cheerfully.”{29} And need I add that the Puritans thought it important to *practice* what they preached?!

But with Puritan couples so “readily and cheerfully” enjoying their sexual relationships within marriage, they naturally had to give some serious thought to the raising of children and

the purpose of the family! So what did they have to say about such matters?

For the Puritans, the family ultimately had the same purpose as the individual; namely, “the glory of God.” The reason this is important, notes Ryken, is that “it determines what goes on in a family,” by setting “priorities in a spiritual rather than material direction.”[\[30\]](#)

The Puritans rightly saw that if one wants a spiritually healthy church and a morally healthy society, one must first have spiritually and morally healthy individuals and families—for the former are inevitably composed of the latter.[\[31\]](#) Hence, if we want healthy churches and societies, we must also prize healthy individuals. And such individuals are best produced within spiritually and morally healthy families.

Now I personally find it difficult to argue with the Puritan logic on this point. And although they lived in a different era, Puritan views on the purpose of the family really seem to offer “some attractive possibilities for our own age.”[\[32\]](#)

And now we’ve reached the end of our discussion of English Puritanism. Of course, the Puritans also had their faults—and I’ve no desire to pretend otherwise.[\[33\]](#) But I hope you’d agree that there’s much to admire about these oft-maligned and misrepresented giants of the past. And I also hope this might encourage you to read (and profit from) these giants for yourself!

## Notes

1. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 11. I should probably note that the California Department of Parks and Recreation gives figures slightly different from those in Packer’s book, but this is really immaterial for my purposes in this article. See, for example, “How Big are Big Trees,”

California Department of Parks and Recreation, accessed February 12, 2015, [www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=1146](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=1146).

2. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 11.

3. Bruce C. Daniels, *New England Nation: The Country the Puritans Built* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 230.

4. Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 1-15.

5. John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603-1689*, ed. Jeremy Black, *Social History in Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 3-8.

6. Definitional help was gathered from the sources cited above, as well as the article by Mark A Noll, "Puritanism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 897-900.

7. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 11.

8. *Ibid.*, 16.

9. *Ibid.*, 21.

10. Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory: 1492-1793*. Revised and expanded edition (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2009), 211.

11. *Ibid.*

12. According to Packer, the Puritan Richard Baxter used this catechism to help instruct (and encourage) his parishioners in the truths of the Christian faith. See Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 45.

13. This catechism can be found many places on the internet. See, for example, "The Westminster Shorter Catechism," The Westminster Presbyterian, accessed February 15, 2015,

[www.westminsterconfession.org/confessional-standards/the-westminster-shorter-catechism.php](http://www.westminsterconfession.org/confessional-standards/the-westminster-shorter-catechism.php).

14. For a philosophical defense of this view, please see the chapter entitled, "The Absurdity of Life without God," in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 65-90.

15. William Perkins, *A Golden Chain, or The Description of Theology* (1592). In *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward. Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics 3 (Appleford, England: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 177; cited in *Reformed Reader*, ed. William Stacy Johnson and John H. Leith (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 7.

16. Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 7.

17. See the brief discussion in Charles Pastoor and Galen Johnson, *The A to Z of the Puritans* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), s.v. "Science."

18. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 98.

19. *The Works of John Bunyan: Allegorical, Figurative, and Symbolical*, ed. George Offor, vol. 3 (London: Blackie and Son, 1859), 396.

20. See Pastoor and Johnson, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. "Scripture."

21. Packer says much the same thing. See *A Quest for Godliness*, 16.

22. For the Puritans, of course, this was typically some vestige of Roman Catholicism. I purposefully chose not to mention this on the radio, however, because I did not want any of our listeners to somehow get the mistaken idea that this was an anti-Catholic program. It's not. My purpose in this program is to extol the virtues of the Puritans—not to vilify

some other segment of the Christian community.

23. Leland Ryken has an excellent discussion of this issue in his chapter on “Church and Worship” in *Worldly Saints*, 111-135. See particularly pp. 112-115.

24. This, and the previous quotation, are both taken from Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 115.

25. Richard Sibbes, “The Church’s Visitation” (London, 1634), cited in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 133.

26. Robert Coachman (or Cushman), *The Cry of a Stone* (London, 1642), cited in Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 133.

27. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 39.

28. See, for example, Ryken’s chapter on “Marriage and Sex” in *Worldly Saints*, 39-55.

29. William Gouge, *Of Domestical Duties* (London, 1622), edited, updated and revised by Greg Fox (Puritan Reprints, 2006), 158.

30. Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, 74.

31. Ryken provides numerous examples of this view from the writings of *Puritans in Worldly Saints*, 74-5; 84-7.

32. *Ibid.*, 73.

33. See Ryken’s chapter, “Learning from Negative Example: Some Puritan Faults,” in *Worldly Saints*, 187-203.

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# C.S. Lewis, the BBC, and Mere Christianity

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn explains how a series of radio talks during WWII became one of Christianity's most cherished classics.*

One can rarely predict all the consequences which will follow a particular decision. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Two days later, France and Britain declared war on Germany. World War II was officially underway. Back in England, C. S. Lewis was “appalled” to find his country once again at war with Germany. Nevertheless, he believed it was “a righteous war” and was determined to do his part “to assist the war effort.”[\[1\]](#)

At this point in his life, Lewis was already a fairly successful Oxford don. “His academic works and lively lectures attracted a large student following.”[\[2\]](#) Although he published a number of academic studies, Lewis also enjoyed writing popular literary, theological and apologetic works. In 1938 he published the first volume of his science-fiction trilogy, *Out of the Silent Planet*. And in 1939, as the war began, he was working on *The Problem of Pain*, a thought-provoking discussion of the problem of evil and suffering.[\[3\]](#)



It was this latter work which attracted the attention of James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting for the British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC. Welch and his assistant, Eric Fenn, were both committed Christians who firmly believed that Christianity had something vital to say to the men and women of England as they faced the horrors and challenges of war. According to Welch:

In a time of uncertainty and questioning it is the

responsibility of the Church – and of religious broadcasting as one of its most powerful voices – to declare the truth about God and His relation to men. It has to expound the Christian faith in terms that can be easily understood by ordinary men and women, and to examine the ways in which that faith can be applied to present-day society during these difficult times.{4}

After reading *The Problem of Pain* by C. S. Lewis, Welch believed that he had found someone who just might meet his exemplary standards of religious broadcasting. He wrote to Lewis at Oxford University in February 1941, and asked if he might consider putting together a series of broadcast talks for the BBC.{5} Lewis responded a couple days later, accepting the invitation and indicating a desire to speak about what he termed “the law of nature,” or what we might call “objective right and wrong.”{6} Although Lewis could hardly have known it at the time, this first series of talks would eventually become Book I in his bestselling work of basic theology, *Mere Christianity*.

## Right and Wrong

*Mere Christianity* originated as a series of talks entitled *Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe*. Lewis pitched his idea to James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting at the BBC, in the following terms:

It seems to me that the New Testament, by preaching repentance and forgiveness, always *assumes* an audience who already believe in the law of nature and know they have disobeyed it. In modern England we cannot at present assume this, and therefore most apologetic begins a stage too far on. The first step is to create, or recover, the sense of guilt. Hence if I gave a series of talks, I shd [sic] mention Christianity only at the end, and would prefer not to unmask my battery till then.{7}



In certain respects, this was a rather difficult time to be involved in religious broadcasting. Most of the talks were not pre-recorded, but were given live. And because of the war, the British government was anxious to insure that no information that might be “damaging to morale or helpful to the enemy” end up in a broadcast.[{8}](#) As Eric Fenn, the BBC’s Assistant Director of Religion, who worked closely with Lewis in the editing and production of his talks, later recalled, “. . . every script had to be submitted to the censor and could not be broadcast until it bore his stamp and signature. And thereafter, only that script—nothing more or less—could be broadcast on that occasion.”[{9}](#)

Lewis not only had to contend with these difficulties, however, he also had to learn (as anyone who writes for radio must) that this is a very precise business. Since “a listener cannot turn back the page to grasp at the second attempt what was not understood at the first reading,” the content must be readily accessible for most of one’s listening audience.[{10}](#) Additionally, the talks must fit within a narrowly defined window of time. In Lewis’s case, this was fifteen minutes per talk – no more, no less. As one might well imagine, Lewis initially found it rather difficult to write under such constraints.[{11}](#)

Eventually, however, the combination of Fenn’s coaching and Lewis’s natural giftedness as a writer and communicator paid off. The talks were completed and successfully delivered. The BBC was pleased with its new broadcasting talent and quickly enlisted Lewis for a second series of talks.[{12}](#)

## **What Christians Believe**

This second series would be titled *What Christians Believe*. Since these talks would require Lewis to more directly communicate some of the core truths of the Christian faith, he sent “the original script to four clergymen in the Anglican,

Methodist, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches for their critique.”[{13}](#) Although Lewis was a brilliant and well-read individual, he was nonetheless a layman with no formal training in theology. Since his desire was to communicate the central truth-claims of Christianity, and not just the distinctive beliefs of a particular denomination, he wanted to be sure that his talks were acceptable to a variety of Christian leaders. Although a couple of them had some minor quibbles with certain things that Lewis had said, or not said, they were basically all in agreement. This was important to Lewis, who later tells us, “I was not writing to expound something I could call ‘my religion,’ but to expound ‘mere’ Christianity, which is what it is and was what it was long before I was born and whether I like it or not.”[{14}](#)

The BBC was elated with this second series of talks, liking them even more than the first. According to Justin Phillips, who wrote a book on the subject, it was this second series of talks which most closely fulfilled James Welch’s original vision as Director of Religion for the BBC “to make the gospel relevant to a people at war. It speaks of the core doctrines of Christianity and explains them in plain English to the general listener.”[{15}](#)

Eric Fenn, who helped with the editing and production of the talks, wrote appreciatively to Lewis afterwards to tell him he thought they were excellent. He then asked if Lewis might consider doing yet another, even longer, series sometime in the near future.[{16}](#) Lewis would agree to the request, but he was beginning to get a little disenchanted with some of the unanticipated consequences of his success. Already a very busy man, with a variety of teaching, writing, and administrative responsibilities, Lewis now found himself, in addition to everything else he was doing, nearly overwhelmed by the avalanche of mail he was receiving from many of his listeners. This Oxford don was clearly making a powerful connection with his audience!

## Why Was Lewis So Popular?

According to Justin Phillips, “Even though Lewis was a prolific correspondent himself, even by his standards it was all becoming a bit too much to cope with.”[{17}](#) Indeed, were it not for the able secretarial support of his brother Warnie, Lewis may *not* have been able to keep up with it all.

Jill Freud, one of the children evacuated from London at the start of the war, lived with the Lewises for a while. She recalled just how much help Warnie offered his brother, whom they called “Jack”:

He did all his typing and dealt with all his correspondence which was considerable – so huge it was becoming a problem. There was so much of it from the books and then the broadcast talks. And he was so meticulous about it. Jack wrote to everybody and answered every letter.[{18}](#)

Indeed, Warnie later estimated that he had pounded out at least 12,000 letters on his brother’s behalf![{19}](#) So what made Lewis so popular? What enabled him to connect so well with his readers and listeners?

In the first place, Lewis was simply a very talented writer and thinker. When it came to communicating with a broad, general audience, Lewis brought a lot to the table right from the start. But according to Phillips, the BBC should also be given some credit for the success of the broadcast talks. He writes, “The attention given to Lewis’s scripts by his producers in religious broadcasting made him a better writer.”[{20}](#)

Ironically, even Lewis’s rather volatile domestic situation may have contributed to his success. Lewis was then living with his brother, who had a drinking problem, a child evacuee from London, and the adoring, but also dominating, mother of a friend who had been killed in World War I. Phillips notes:

All this helped to 'earth' Lewis's writings in the real world. . . . It took him out of the seclusion of the Oxford don . . . and gave him a real home life more like that of his listeners than many of his professional colleagues.{21}

Finally, Lewis combined all of this with a rather disarming humility in his presentations. He wasn't pretending to be better than others; he was only trying to help. And his listeners responded in droves.

## The Impact of the Broadcasts

The BBC eventually got a total of four series of talks out of Lewis. Each of the series was so successful that the BBC continued, for quite some time, to entreat Lewis to do more. But according to Phillips, Lewis was becoming increasingly disillusioned with broadcasting. The BBC issued one invitation after another, but nearly eighteen months after his fourth series concluded Lewis had turned down every single one of them.{22} Although he would eventually be tempted back to the microphone a few more times, the days of his broadcast talks were now a thing of the past. While he was glad to be of service in this way during the war, Lewis never really seemed to care that much for radio. Indeed, in one of his less serious moods, he even blamed the radio "for driving away the leprechauns from Ireland!"{23}

In spite of this, however, the impact of the broadcasts has been immense. Since first being aired on the BBC, these talks have generated (and continue to generate) a great deal of interest and discussion. *Mere Christianity*, a compilation of the talks in book form, continues to show up on bestseller lists even today.{24} And Phillips, speaking of the cumulative impact of *all* of Lewis's writings, observes that while numbers vary, "in the year 2000 some estimates put worldwide sales of Lewis's books at over 200 million copies in more than thirty languages."{25}

As the origin of *Mere Christianity* shows, however, we cannot often predict how it may please God to use (and perhaps greatly multiply) our small, seemingly insignificant, investments in the work of His kingdom. Lewis was simply trying to do his part to be faithful to God and to help his countrymen through the horrors of World War II. But God took his humble offering and, like the story of the loaves and fish recounted in the Gospels, multiplied it far beyond anything Lewis could ever have reasonably imagined.

This should be an encouragement to us. As we faithfully exercise our gifts and abilities in the service of Jesus Christ, small and inconsiderable though they may seem to be, we may one day wake to find that incredibly, and against all odds, God has graciously multiplied our efforts to accomplish truly extraordinary things!

## Notes

1. Justin Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War: The World War II Broadcasts that Riveted a Nation and Became the Classic Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), 4.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. James Welch, *BBC Handbook 1942*, 59; cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 78.
5. Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 80-81.
6. Ibid., 82.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 33.
9. Interview with Eric Fenn by Frank Gillard for the BBC Oral History Archive, 4 July 1986; cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 33.
10. Ibid., 88.
11. Ibid., 87-88.
12. Ibid., 134-35.
13. Ibid., 142.

14. C. S. Lewis, "Preface," in *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1960), vii.
15. Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 153.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 155.
18. Interview with Jill Freud, 19 November 1999; cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 157.
19. Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Companion & Guide* (London: Harper Collins, 1966), 33; cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 158.
20. Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 165.
21. Ibid., 183.
22. Ibid., 268.
23. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967); cited in Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 276.
24. See, for example, [www.bookvideoawards.com/bookstandard/images/BestSellersAwards\\_Program.pdf](http://www.bookvideoawards.com/bookstandard/images/BestSellersAwards_Program.pdf) and [peopleofthebook.us/2007/02/](http://peopleofthebook.us/2007/02/).
25. Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War*, 279.

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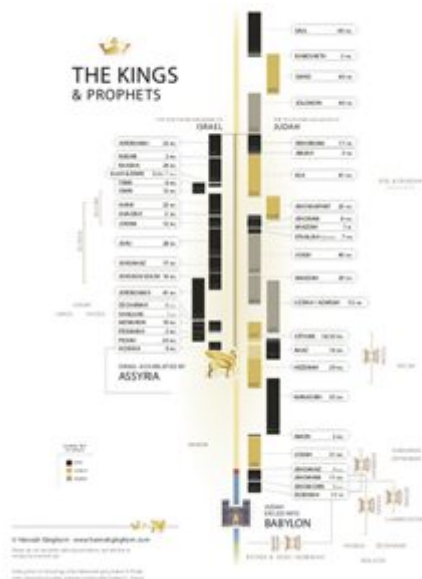
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## The Reliability of Kings and Chronicles

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn shows how the apparent contradictions of two Old Testament historical books can be explained.*



Over the past year and a half my wife has been working on what might be called a “visual Bible.” By training and profession my wife, Hannah, is a [graphic designer](#). She tends to understand things best when she can visualize them in some way. Hence, when she began team-teaching a women’s Bible study that covers the entire Bible in just two years, she felt the need to create visuals of what she was studying in order to help her grasp some of the key points in a single glance. Thus, week-by-week, as she readied herself for class, she also prepared a wide array of graphically-designed visuals of the written contents of Scripture.



Everything was going fairly well until she came to the Old Testament books of Kings and Chronicles. Since these books give us a great deal of information about the kings of Israel and Judah, including the order in which they reigned, the lengths of their reigns, and so on, she decided to create some charts that would present all of this information visually. She had no idea that she was about to enter one of the most baffling and perplexing issues of biblical chronology!

To put it bluntly, the chronology of Kings and Chronicles initially appears to be a hopelessly muddled, and even downright contradictory, mess! Examining this material as an intelligent layperson, Hannah could make no sense of it at all. It also meant that she could not represent the material in a visually coherent way.

Feeling increasingly frustrated, she asked if I knew of any books that dealt with these problems. Although this is an area I know little about, I remembered a book which (I had heard) handled these issues quite well. That book, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, by Edwin Thiele, offered her some much-needed help in making sense of the apparently confused and contradictory information in the books of Kings and Chronicles.<sup>{2}</sup> Although this book did not solve *all* the difficulties she was facing, it did bring a great deal of order to the apparent chaos of this section of Scripture.

In the remainder of this article we'll first consider the problems posed by "the mysterious numbers of the Hebrew kings." Afterward, we'll briefly look at how all these problems have been solved by contemporary scholars, so that what was previously thought of as a hopeless muddle is instead a testimony to the accuracy of the historical parts of the Old Testament.

## **Some Difficulties with Old Testament Chronology**

In the original preface to *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, Edwin Thiele began his discussion with these words:

*For more than two thousand years Hebrew chronology has been a serious problem for Old Testament scholars. Every effort to weave the chronological data of the kings of Israel and Judah into some sort of harmonious scheme seemed doomed to failure.*



*The numbers for the one kingdom could not, it seemed, be made to agree with the numbers of the other.* {3}

Indeed, the difficulties with Old Testament chronology at this point were so great that many scholars simply assumed that the biblical records were unreliable. But why? What was it about these numbers that made so many scholars think they were in error?

Since we'll later be discussing the two different kingdoms of Israel and Judah, let's begin by considering two *imaginary* kingdoms, both of which celebrate a new king coming to the throne on March 1 of the same year. In other words, both kings begin their reigns on exactly the same day. Now one would probably think that, as the ensuing years go by, court historians from both kingdoms would agree about how many years each of these kings have ruled their kingdoms. But in fact, this is not necessarily true.

Suppose that one of these kingdoms counts the first year of their new king's reign from his first day on the throne. If he began his reign on March 1 of the year 2000, then this is considered the first year of his reign. {4} On January 1, 2001, he thus begins the *second* year of his reign. But suppose that in the *other* kingdom, the year 2000 is regarded as the *last* year of the *prior* king's reign. In this kingdom, then, even though a new king began to reign in the year 2000, the official first year of his reign is counted from the beginning of the new year, January 1, 2001. {5}

Hence, although both kings began to rule on precisely the same day, the years of their reigns are counted differently. The first king begins his *second* year of rule on January 1, 2001, while the second king only begins his *first* official year at that time. This is just one of *many* issues that complicate the dating of the kings of Israel and Judah as they're recorded for us in the Bible. Once these issues are taken into account,

however, a completely harmonious chronology of these kings becomes possible. Let's now consider a biblical example.

## A Biblical Case Study

We've been looking at some of the chronological puzzles in the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles. With apologies for the unavoidable names and numbers which follow, let's consider an example.

After the ten tribes split from Judah and Benjamin to form the northern kingdom of Israel, their first ruler was Jeroboam. Jeroboam was followed by his son Nadab. With Nadab we have a series of synchronisms with the long reign of Asa of the southern kingdom, Judah. The first synchronism is that Nadab began to reign in year 2 of Asa.[{6}](#) The Bible then says that Nadab reigned two years and died in year 3 of Asa.[{7}](#) But it is only one year from Asa's second year to his third year, so how could Nadab begin in year 2 of Asa, reign two years, and die in Asa's 3rd year? Next, Baasha, who killed Nadab, is said to reign 24 years starting in year 3 of Asa;[{8}](#) this should surely put his end, 24 years later, in Asa's year 27. But the Bible says that Baasha died in year 26 of Asa, not year 27.[{9}](#) Baasha's son, Elah, reigned two years, and his death was not in year 28 of Asa (that is, 26 plus 2), but in year 27.[{10}](#)

At this point we have a decision to make. We could decide that all of this shows that the Bible is not to be trusted in its numerical and historical statements. This is the path taken by critics who say that these parts of the Bible were invented many years later than the happenings they describe. Or, we could give the authors of these texts the benefit of the doubt and consider that these texts show a consistent pattern. The pattern is that the northern kingdom was counting the years of reign for their kings in the fashion mentioned previously, where a king could count the year in which he came to the throne as his first year of reign, so that even if he only

reigned exactly one year, he would be given credit for the calendar year in which he became king and also for the calendar year in which he died. This is a method that was used by other Near Eastern kingdoms. With this second approach, success has been achieved in reconstructing the history and exact chronology of the Hebrew kingdom period. We will now consider other factors necessary in understanding these so-called “mysterious numbers” of the Bible.

## **Co-regencies and Rival Reigns**

We've seen a pattern in the chronological numbers that the Bible gives for the first years of the divided kingdom. We saw that, in these early years at least, the northern kingdom was counting the year that a king died twice; once for him, and once for his successor, so that one year must be subtracted from a reign length when counting elapsed time. By carefully considering the facts as given in the Bible itself, we can determine when the two kingdoms were using this method of counting, and when they were using the other method in which a king's first year was not counted until he reigned a full calendar year.

The Bible also gives us sufficient information to determine when there was a co-regency. The word “co-regency” is not a Biblical word, but the principle is there. A co-regency begins when the reigning king appoints one of his sons as his successor. This was always a smart thing to do. We have an example in our own time. When Kim Jong Il, the dictator of North Korea, became ill he appointed his son, Kim Jong Un, as his successor so there wouldn't be any trouble when he died. In the Bible, after two of David's sons, Absalom and then Adonijah, tried to usurp the kingdom from their father, the prophet Nathan told David to make it known who was to be his successor. David then had Nathan perform a public anointing of Solomon.[{11}](#) Another example of a co-regency is when Uzziah was struck with leprosy and had to live in a separate house,

so that his son Jotham became the real ruler of the land.[{12}](#)

Other co-regencies are not quite so obvious, but the books of Kings and Chronicles always give us enough information so that we can determine when the years of a king's reign are being measured from the start of a sole reign or from the start of a co-regency. For the northern kingdom, Israel, there are also two cases of a rival reign, similar to the rival reigns of Egyptian pharaohs that Egyptologists take into account when reconstructing the chronology of Egypt. As an example, Omri, the father of Ahab, is said to have reigned for twelve years,[{13}](#) but this only makes sense if the twelve years includes the five years in which he had a rival, Tibni, reigning in a different capital.[{14}](#) Co-regencies and rival reigns are the second major key to understanding the chronology of the Hebrew kingdom period.

## **The Accuracy of Kings and Chronicles**

In previous sections we considered two factors to take into account when interpreting the rich chronological data of Kings and Chronicles. The first is that there were two ways of counting the first year of a king's reign; whether it was to be counted twice, once for him and once for the king who died in that year, or just once so that the king's first year was his first full year of reign. The second factor was that occasionally a king's reign was measured from the start of a co-regency or rival reign rather than from the start of his sole reign. Both principles were applied, although not consistently, by some earlier interpreters.[{15}](#) A third principle, discovered by Edwin Thiele, however, was not used by these interpreters. This principle showed that the southern kingdom, Judah, started counting the years of a king's reign in the fall month of Tishri, while the northern kingdom, Israel, started six months earlier in the spring month of Nisan. Many earlier interpreters thought that both kingdoms started their year in Nisan, but this produced several small

errors that they were unable to reconcile. Unknown to Thiele, all three of these principles had been previously found back in the 1920s by a Belgian scholar.[{16}](#) But Thiele worked out things in a more satisfactory way, and so his *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* should be the starting place for understanding the chronology of the kingdom period.

Regrettably, however, Thiele did not recognize that a problem he had with the texts of 2 Kings 18 is explained by a co-regency between Ahaz and Hezekiah.[{17}](#) His chronology also needed slight adjustments for the reign of Solomon and for the end of the kingdom period.[{18}](#) In our own studies we have followed the corrections to Thiele published in several articles by Rodger Young.[{19}](#) Young responds to the specious claim that the harmony now evident in the chronology of the kingdom period might be the result of a clever manipulation of the data by those who follow the principles outlined by Thiele. Young answers, "The complexities of 124 exact synchronisms, reign lengths, and dates in 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah and Ezekiel negate that possibility unless the data were historically authentic."[{20}](#) With the proper understanding of the methods used by the ancient authors, the chronological data of Kings and Chronicles offer a remarkable testimony to the strict accuracy of the Bible's 400-year history of the two Hebrew kingdoms.

## Notes

1. This article was written by Michael Gleghorn and Rodger Young. Gleghorn's initial inspiration for writing this program resulted from conversations with his wife, who struggled with the "mysterious numbers" in Kings and Chronicles for quite some time before encountering the help provided in the book by Edwin Thiele and, more particularly, the articles of Rodger Young. Mr. Young received a B.A. degree from Reed College, B.A. and M.A. degrees in mathematics from Oxford University, and has done graduate work in theology and biblical languages at the Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City. He

retired from IBM in 2003 and began writing about OT chronology. He and his wife attend the West Overland Bible Church in the St. Louis area.

2. Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, New rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994).

3. *Ibid.*, 15.

4. Thiele describes this as “nonaccession-year dating” or “antedating”. See Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers*, 231.

5. Thiele terms this “accession-year dating” or “postdating.” See *Ibid.*

6. 1 Kings 15:25.

7. 1 Kings 15:25, 28.

8. 1 Kings 15:27, 33.

9. 1 Kings 16:8.

10. 1 Kings 16:8, 15.

11. 1 Kings 1; 1 Chronicles 23:1.

12. 1 Kings 15:5.

13. 1 Kings 16:23.

14. 1 Kings 16:21-23.

15. For example, James Ussher.

16. Valerius Coucke, “Chronologie des rois de Juda et d’Israël,” *Revue Benedictine* 37 (1925): 325-64; *idem*, “Chronologie biblique” in *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. Louis Pirot, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1928), cols. 1245-79.

17. According to Rodger Young, “Several authors put forth this rather obvious solution, among whom were Kenneth Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell, Siegfried Horn, Harold Stigers, R. K. Harrison, Leslie McFall, and Eugene Merrill.” Of course, we could also add Rodger Young’s name to this list as well. For details see Young, “When Was Samaria Captured? The Need for Precision in Biblical Chronologies,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (2004): 580.

18. For a one-year correction to Thiele’s dates for Solomon through Athaliah, see Rodger C. Young, “When Did Solomon Die?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 4 (2003): 589-603. By showing that the dates of Solomon through

Athaliah must be moved one year earlier than in Thiele's chronology, Young has resolved a problem that Thiele addressed by revisions in the third and final edition of *Mysterious Numbers*, but Thiele's revisions merely moved his problem with the reign of Jehoshaphat to the reign of Athaliah. Among those accepting Young's solution of the problem are Leslie McFall, "The Chronology of Saul and David," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 4 (2010): 533 (chart), and Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 133-34, 138. Young has also written extensively on why 587 BC, not Thiele's 586 BC, is the correct date for the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. See "When Did Jerusalem Fall?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 1 (2004): 21-38; "Ezekiel 40:1 as a Corrective for Seven Wrong Ideas in Biblical Interpretation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44, no. 2 (2006):267-70.

19. For those who are interested in pursuing these matters further, please see "Rodger Young's Papers on Chronology" here: [www.rcyoung.org/papers.html](http://www.rcyoung.org/papers.html)

20. Rodger C. Young, "Inductive and Deductive Methods as Applied to OT Chronology," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 18, no. 2 (2007): 116.

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## **Ancient Evidence for Jesus from Non-Christian Sources**

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn examines evidence from ancient non-Christian sources for the life of Jesus, demonstrating that such sources help confirm the historical reliability of the Gospels.*

## Evidence from Tacitus

Although there is overwhelming evidence that the New Testament is an accurate and trustworthy historical document, many people are still reluctant to believe what it says unless there is also some independent, non-biblical testimony that corroborates its statements. In the introduction to one of his books, F.F. Bruce tells about a Christian correspondent who was told by an agnostic friend that “apart from obscure references in Josephus and the like,” there was no historical evidence for the life of Jesus outside the Bible.<sup>{1}</sup> This, he wrote to Bruce, had caused him “great concern and some little upset in [his] spiritual life.”<sup>{2}</sup> He concludes his letter by asking, “Is such collateral proof available, and if not, are there reasons for the lack of it?”<sup>{3}</sup> The answer to this question is, “Yes, such collateral proof is available,” and we will be looking at some of it in this article.

Let’s begin our inquiry with a passage that historian Edwin Yamauchi calls “probably the most important reference to Jesus outside the New Testament.”<sup>{4}</sup> Reporting on Emperor Nero’s decision to blame the Christians for the fire that had destroyed Rome in A.D. 64, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote:

Nero fastened the guilt . . . on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of . . . Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome. . . .<sup>{5}</sup>

What all can we learn from this ancient (and rather unsympathetic) reference to Jesus and the early Christians? Notice, first, that Tacitus reports Christians derived their name from a historical person called Christus (from the Latin), or Christ. He is said to have “suffered the extreme penalty,” obviously alluding to the Roman method of execution



known as crucifixion. This is said to have occurred during the reign of Tiberius and by the sentence of Pontius Pilatus. This confirms much of what the Gospels tell us about the death of Jesus.

But what are we to make of Tacitus' rather enigmatic statement that Christ's death briefly checked "a most mischievous superstition," which subsequently arose not only in Judaea, but also in Rome? One historian suggests that Tacitus is here "bearing indirect . . . testimony to the conviction of the early church that the Christ who had been crucified had risen from the grave."[{6}](#) While this interpretation is admittedly speculative, it does help explain the otherwise bizarre occurrence of a rapidly growing religion based on the worship of a man who had been crucified as a criminal.[{7}](#) How else might one explain *that*?

## **Evidence from Pliny the Younger**

Another important source of evidence about Jesus and early Christianity can be found in the letters of Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan. Pliny was the Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. In one of his letters, dated around A.D. 112, he asks Trajan's advice about the appropriate way to conduct legal proceedings against those accused of being Christians.[{8}](#) Pliny says that he needed to consult the emperor about this issue because a great multitude of every age, class, and sex stood accused of Christianity.[{9}](#)

At one point in his letter, Pliny relates some of the information he has learned about these Christians:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver

it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.[{10}](#)

This passage provides us with a number of interesting insights into the beliefs and practices of early Christians. First, we see that Christians regularly met on a certain fixed day for worship. Second, their worship was directed to Christ, demonstrating that they firmly believed in His divinity. Furthermore, one scholar interprets Pliny's statement that hymns were sung to Christ, *as to a god*, as a reference to the rather distinctive fact that, "unlike other gods who were worshipped, Christ was a person who had lived on earth."[{11}](#) If this interpretation is correct, Pliny understood that Christians were worshipping an actual historical person as God! Of course, this agrees perfectly with the New Testament doctrine that Jesus was both God and man.

Not only does Pliny's letter help us understand what early Christians believed about Jesus' *person*, it also reveals the high esteem to which they held His *teachings*. For instance, Pliny notes that Christians *bound themselves by a solemn oath* not to violate various moral standards, which find their source in the ethical teachings of Jesus. In addition, Pliny's reference to the Christian custom of sharing a common meal likely alludes to their observance of communion and the "love feast."[{12}](#) This interpretation helps explain the Christian claim that the meal was merely *food of an ordinary and innocent kind*. They were attempting to counter the charge, sometimes made by non-Christians, of practicing "ritual cannibalism."[{13}](#) The Christians of that day humbly repudiated such slanderous attacks on Jesus' teachings. We must sometimes do the same today.

## Evidence from Josephus

Perhaps the most remarkable reference to Jesus outside the Bible can be found in the writings of Josephus, a first

century Jewish historian. On two occasions, in his *Jewish Antiquities*, he mentions Jesus. The second, less revealing, reference describes the condemnation of one "James" by the Jewish Sanhedrin. This James, says Josephus, was "the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ."[{14}](#) F.F. Bruce points out how this agrees with Paul's description of James in Galatians 1:19 as "the Lord's brother."[{15}](#) And Edwin Yamauchi informs us that "few scholars have questioned" that Josephus actually penned this passage.[{16}](#)

As interesting as this brief reference is, there is an earlier one, which is truly astonishing. Called the "Testimonium Flavianum," the relevant portion declares:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he . . . wrought surprising feats. . . . He was the Christ. When Pilate . . . condemned him to be crucified, those who had . . . come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared . . . restored to life. . . . And the tribe of Christians . . . has . . . not disappeared.[{17}](#)

Did Josephus really write this? Most scholars think the core of the passage originated with Josephus, but that it was later altered by a Christian editor, possibly between the third and fourth century A.D.[{18}](#) But why do they think it was altered? Josephus was not a Christian, and it is difficult to believe that anyone but a Christian would have made some of these statements.[{19}](#)

For instance, the claim that Jesus was a wise man seems authentic, but the qualifying phrase, "*if indeed one ought to call him a man,*" is suspect. It implies that Jesus was more than human, and it is quite unlikely that Josephus would have said *that!* It is also difficult to believe he would have flatly asserted that Jesus was the Christ, especially when he later refers to Jesus as "the so-called" Christ. Finally, the claim that on the third

day Jesus appeared to His disciples restored to life, inasmuch as it affirms Jesus' resurrection, is quite unlikely to come from a non-Christian!

But even if we disregard the questionable parts of this passage, we are still left with a good deal of corroborating information about the biblical Jesus. We read that he was a wise man who performed surprising feats. And although He was crucified under Pilate, His followers continued their discipleship and became known as Christians. When we combine these statements with Josephus' later reference to Jesus as "the so-called Christ," a rather detailed picture emerges which harmonizes quite well with the biblical record. It increasingly appears that the "biblical Jesus" and the "historical Jesus" are one and the same!

## **Evidence from the Babylonian Talmud**

There are only a few clear references to Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud, a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings compiled between approximately A.D. 70-500. Given this time frame, it is naturally supposed that earlier references to Jesus are more likely to be historically reliable than later ones. In the case of the Talmud, the earliest period of compilation occurred between A.D. 70-200.[{20}](#) The most significant reference to Jesus from this period states:

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald . . . cried, "He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy."[{21}](#)

Let's examine this passage. You may have noticed that it refers to someone named "Yeshu." So why do we think this is Jesus? Actually, "Yeshu" (or "Yeshua") is how Jesus' name is pronounced in Hebrew. But what does the passage mean by saying that Jesus "was hanged"? Doesn't the New Testament say he was crucified? Indeed it does. But the term "hanged" can function

as a synonym for “crucified.” For instance, Galatians 3:13 declares that Christ was “hanged”, and Luke 23:39 applies this term to the criminals who were crucified with Jesus.[{22}](#) So the Talmud declares that Jesus was crucified on the eve of Passover. But what of the cry of the herald that Jesus was to be stoned? This may simply indicate what the Jewish leaders were *planning* to do.[{23}](#) If so, Roman involvement changed their plans![{24}](#)

The passage also tells us *why* Jesus was crucified. It claims He practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy! Since this accusation comes from a rather hostile source, we should not be too surprised if Jesus is described somewhat differently than in the New Testament. But if we make allowances for this, what might such charges *imply* about Jesus?

Interestingly, both accusations have close parallels in the canonical gospels. For instance, the charge of sorcery is similar to the Pharisees’ accusation that Jesus cast out demons “by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.”[{25}](#) But notice this: such a charge actually tends to confirm the New Testament claim that Jesus performed miraculous feats. Apparently Jesus’ miracles were too well attested to deny. The only alternative was to ascribe them to sorcery! Likewise, the charge of enticing Israel to apostasy parallels Luke’s account of the Jewish leaders who accused Jesus of misleading the nation with his teaching.[{26}](#) Such a charge tends to corroborate the New Testament record of Jesus’ powerful teaching ministry. Thus, if read carefully, this passage from the Talmud confirms much of our knowledge about Jesus from the New Testament.

## **Evidence from Lucian**

Lucian of Samosata was a second century Greek satirist. In one of his works, he wrote of the early Christians as follows:

The Christians . . . worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. . . . [It] was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.{27}

Although Lucian is jesting here at the early Christians, he does make some significant comments about their founder. For instance, he says the Christians worshipped a *man*, “who introduced their novel rites.” And though this *man’s* followers clearly thought quite highly of Him, He so angered many of His contemporaries with His teaching that He “was crucified on that account.”

Although Lucian does not mention his name, he is clearly referring to Jesus. But what did Jesus teach to arouse such wrath? According to Lucian, he taught that all men are brothers from the moment of their conversion. That’s harmless enough. But what did this conversion involve? It involved denying the Greek gods, worshipping Jesus, and living according to His teachings. It’s not *too* difficult to imagine someone being killed for teaching *that*. Though Lucian doesn’t say so explicitly, the Christian denial of other gods combined with their worship of Jesus implies the belief that Jesus was more than human. Since they denied other gods in order to worship Him, they apparently thought Jesus a greater God than any that Greece had to offer!

Let’s summarize what we’ve learned about Jesus from this examination of ancient non-Christian sources. First, both Josephus and Lucian indicate that Jesus was regarded as wise. Second, Pliny, the Talmud, and Lucian imply He was a powerful and revered teacher. Third, both Josephus and the Talmud indicate He performed miraculous feats. Fourth, Tacitus, Josephus, the Talmud, and Lucian all mention that He was crucified. Tacitus and Josephus say this occurred under

Pontius Pilate. And the Talmud declares it happened on the eve of Passover. Fifth, there are possible references to the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection in both Tacitus and Josephus. Sixth, Josephus records that Jesus' followers believed He was the Christ, or Messiah. And finally, both Pliny and Lucian indicate that Christians worshipped Jesus as God!

I hope you see how this small selection of ancient *non-Christian* sources helps corroborate our knowledge of Jesus from the gospels. Of course, there are many ancient *Christian* sources of information about Jesus as well. But since the historical reliability of the canonical gospels is so well established, I invite you to read *those* for an authoritative "life of Jesus!"

## Notes

1. F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 13.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Edwin Yamauchi, quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 82.
5. Tacitus, Annals 15.44, cited in Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 82.
6. N.D. Anderson, *Christianity: The Witness of History* (London: Tyndale, 1969), 19, cited in Gary R. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), 189-190.
7. Edwin Yamauchi, cited in Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 82.

8. Pliny, Epistles x. 96, cited in Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 25; Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 198.
9. Ibid., 27.
10. Pliny, Letters, transl. by William Melmoth, rev. by W.M.L. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), vol. II, X:96, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.
11. M. Harris, "References to Jesus in Early Classical Authors," in *Gospel Perspectives V*, 354-55, cited in E. Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?", in *Jesus Under Fire*, ed. by Michael J. Wilkins and J.P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 227, note 66.
12. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.
13. Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 28.
14. Josephus, *Antiquities* xx. 200, cited in Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 36.
15. Ibid.
16. Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament", 212.
17. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.63-64, cited in Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament", 212.
18. Ibid.
19. Although time would not permit me to mention it on the radio, another version of Josephus' "Testimonium Flavianum" survives in a tenth-century Arabic version (Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 41). In 1971, Professor Schlomo Pines published a study on this passage. The passage is interesting because it lacks most of the questionable elements that many scholars believe to be Christian interpolations. Indeed, "as Schlomo Pines and David Flusser...stated, it is quite plausible that



none of the arguments against Josephus writing the original words even applies to the Arabic text, especially since the latter would have had less chance of being censored by the church" (Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 194). The passage reads as follows: "At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders." (Quoted in James H. Charlesworth, *Jesus Within Judaism*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1988), 95, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 194).

20. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 202-03.

21. *The Babylonian Talmud*, transl. by I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935), vol. III, Sanhedrin 43a, 281, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 203.

22. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 203.

23. See John 8:58-59 and 10:31-33.

24. Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 204. See also John 18:31-32.

25. Matt. 12:24. I gleaned this observation from Bruce, *Christian Origins*, 56.

26. Luke 23:2, 5.

27. Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13, in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, transl. by H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), vol. 4., cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 206.

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# **“Why Was Jesus Crucified Outside Jerusalem?”**

**What is the meaning behind Jesus being crucified outside Jerusalem?**

There is an interesting passage in Hebrews 13:10-14 which speaks of Jesus suffering “outside the gate” of Jerusalem. Since this letter was originally written to Jewish believers who were tempted to abandon their Christian faith and return to Judaism and the Temple, the author seems to be encouraging his readers to share Christ’s humiliation and rejection by the Jewish community. This is symbolized by their going “outside” the Jewish community and sharing in Christ’s sufferings. As one commentator puts it, “In essence, the author’s command to ‘go forth to’ Christ was a command to abandon Judaism. Anyone found with Christ—outside of the city gate—would be considered outside the Jewish community.”

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries

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# **“My Girlfriend’s Parents Won’t Accept Me Because I’m**

# Not Saved”

**My girlfriend’s parents do not accept me because I am not saved though I have never put a foot wrong. I would like to know where Probe Ministries stands on this. As a footnote, she has a child which I have accepted as my own.**

Thanks for writing. Although I do not know all the details of your case, there is actually biblical justification for your girlfriend’s parents reaction to you. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians as follows in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16:

*“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’*

This passage clearly forbids believers to marry unbelievers. If your girlfriend is a Christian, then this could at least partially explain her parents’ reaction to you.

Of course, the good news is that you don’t need to continue relating to your girlfriend’s family as an outsider! After all, Christ died for you too! So why not repent of your sin, give your heart and life to Christ, and place your trust in Him for forgiveness, cleansing, and the free gift of eternal life? Of course, you must do so genuinely and sincerely and from the heart. But if you do, then you will (most importantly) be an adopted son of God and a member of His family forever. In addition, if you sincerely give your life to Christ, it might also make you more acceptable to your girlfriend’s parents. Of course, I want to be very clear, that

you do not PRETEND to become a Christian in order to win their approval. That would be a very great sin in the eyes of God. However, if you genuinely and sincerely give your life to Christ and become a member of the family of God, then He may (as an added bonus) grant you the approval of your girlfriend's family as well. And even if He doesn't, you will still have the greatest good that any man can ever have/M a personal relationship with the Triune God, your Creator and Redeemer who loves you, and gave His Son for you. And what could ultimately be better than that?

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Posted July 2, 2014

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## **“Is the Phrase ‘Holy Ghost Fire’ Biblical?”**

I hear people, even pastors, speak this phrase “Holy Ghost Fire.” Is this phrase biblical? Because I've searched the scripture and haven't come across it.

Thanks for writing. This particular phrase does not occur in the Bible. It sounds like to sort of thing that Pentecostal preachers might say in reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The biblical basis for this sort of language would be passages like Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, in which John the Baptist distinguishes his baptism from that of the coming Messiah (Jesus) who will baptize with “the Holy Spirit and

with fire.”

Later, in Acts 2:1-3, we have the account of what happened to Jesus’ disciples on the Day of Pentecost. We are told that “tongues of fire” came to rest on each of them, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other tongues (or languages).

It is probably to passages of this sort that these preachers are indirectly referring. Of course, this raises a lot of questions about the precise nature of the Holy Spirit’s baptism and what it means to “speak in tongues,” etc. If you want to explore these issues further, from a non-Pentecostal perspective, I would recommend visiting [bible.org](http://bible.org) and doing searches on some of the things you’re interested in. This site has a great deal of biblical and theological material, including the NET Bible, all free of charge.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

Posted July 2, 2014

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