

STEPCHILD OF THE BIBLE

Questionable Activities

How could Solomon be giving an inspired account of revealed truth when he talks about doing things that are sinful (e.g., 2:3, 8)? This objection overlooks the fact that this book contains no commendation, explicit or implicit, of any of Solomon's activities. Solomon himself commends these activities to no one. In fact, his conclusions and observations urge exactly the opposite (e.g., 2:10).

Accurate Record of Error

Some argue that in the case of Ecclesiastes alone, inspiration guarantees only an *accurate record* of erroneous thinking. The Pilgrim Edition of the Bible notes that "often bad men, mistaken good men, or the devil are quoted accurately [in the Bible], but what they say may not be true." There are several oversights in this argument as well. *First*, on what objective basis can we make this assertion only about Ecclesiastes, and not about any other book of the Bible that appears to pose theological or exegetical difficulties? *Second*, this argument takes a valid observation of what is true in isolated instances within a larger, inspired Biblical narrative and applies it to an entire book of the Bible. *Third*, in cases where inspiration guarantees an accurate record of error on the part of some person, it is invariably the error of a third party. In other words, God (1st party) inspires a Biblical author (2nd party) to record accurately someone else's (3rd party) erroneous statement. (E.g., God inspired Moses to record Satan's lie.) God does not inspire a man to record as part of Scripture his own erroneous thoughts.² This is what guarantees the reliability and trustworthiness of all that the Scripture writers affirm. The point is, in Ecclesiastes *there is no third party*—it is the inspired author himself who does all the talking.

Cultic Abuse

To invalidate the heretical doctrines of certain cults that claim Biblical authority for their beliefs (sometimes citing verses from Ecclesiastes), some bluntly insist that Solomon was just wrong in some of his musings. Try this argument with a misused statement by Moses, Isaiah, Jesus, or Paul (as many liberals, in fact, do). Cults often cite other Bible passages to justify their erroneous beliefs. The abuse of the truth must not frighten us away from an honest and accurate assessment and proper use of the

truth. (Interestingly, *Walter Martin's Cults Reference Bible* provides sound, substantive explanations of cult-abused Ecclesiastes passages without sacrificing the integrity of Ecclesiastes as a whole.)

Difficult Passages

Probably the single most bothersome feature of Ecclesiastes that drives some to dismiss its contents as flawed is its apparent discrepancy with other Scriptures. Perhaps the most frequently cited example of Ecclesiastes' alleged doctrinal aberration is 9:10: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest"—a verse that seems to deny any conscious afterlife. Here are a few other potentially bothersome passages to consider:

- "For in death there is no remembrance of thee [God]; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?"
- "Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee?"
- "The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence."

Do you have any hesitation about affirming the truth of these statements? Hopefully not, since they are located in Psalm 6:5, 88:10, and 115:17, respectively. Yet a contextual reading indicates that these statements are affirming *precisely* the same truth as Ecclesiastes 9:10. Simply put, death ends all of this life's opportunities, whether for labor, service, or praise to God. We would not hesitate to defend the revelatory truth of the trio of statements above. Why? Because they are in *Psalms*. Yet we want to throw out a verse like Ecclesiastes 9:10, which teaches *precisely* the same truth. Why? Because it is located a few pages later in Ecclesiastes—in the only book in our Bible presumed to be flawed throughout. Interchange the references and you would have people unwittingly accusing David of flawed human reasoning.

This is not to deny that there are genuinely difficult passages in Ecclesiastes. But it is to insist that there are better, more consistent, alternative ways of dealing with such problem passages without assigning them to human error. How? The same way we deal with difficult passages anywhere else in the Bible—*exegete, dissect, compare, and contextualize*. To surrender hard statements to

Continued on next page

At a Glance (Continued from page 31)

erroneous human reasoning opens a Pandora's box with serious ramifications for how we handle difficulties in any other book of the Bible.

Sound Warning?

"Don't take your doctrine from Ecclesiastes." But when we take this position regarding Ecclesiastes, we are applying the same reasoning that is behind the partial inspiration view of liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, and that has wormed its way into a defective evangelicalism. ("Don't take your science from Genesis or your history from Joshua.") The baby (doctrinal objectivity and theological certainty) is unceremoniously dumped out the window with the bathwater of "some things hard to be understood" (2 Peter 3:16; yet we don't dismiss Paul's statements when they are "hard to be understood.")

As long as unbelieving liberals and cults hold this book of our Bible hostage—like squatters on our territory—we allow ourselves to be robbed of one of the richest rewards, by one of the wisest of men, in God's revelatory treasury. Rather than, "Don't take your doctrine from Ecclesiastes," here's a better, more consistently Biblical admonition: "Labor to understand the doctrinal context and function of Ecclesiastes." That, after all, is how we treat all the rest of Scripture. And we have more theologically orthodox, exegetically sound resources at our disposal than ever to help us in that endeavor.

There is, however, one last best reason to approach Ecclesiastes with as much reverence for its revelation and as much conviction of its truthfulness as any other book of the Bible. That will be the subject of the next column. We will also explore its thorny problem passages as well as its themes

(which are arrestingly modern and relevant), as we focus on this stunning book of the Bible over the next few columns.

¹ The sources of these statements are, respectively, *The Scofield Reference Bible*, R. W. DeHaan in *The Art of Staying Off Dead End Streets*, *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, and *The Pilgrim Edition of the Bible*. No one should misconstrue any of the comments in this column as an attack on any of these fine resources. As a Christian, I grew up on the *NSRB* and still use it almost daily. The point is, ironically, that "the conclusions and reasonings" of such resources "make no claim to inspiration" and "are, after all, just man's."

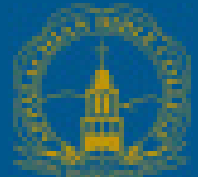
² The only exception to this of which I am aware is Asaph's mistaken thinking reflected in Psalm 73:13; however, he immediately identifies the error of his own thinking in the verses that follow.

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Cross Burning

The U.S. Supreme Court justices ruled April 7 that a law barring cross burning “with the intent of intimidating any person or group” is not unconstitutional, thereby disagreeing with a ruling by a state Supreme Court. “The protections afforded by the First Amendment . . . are not absolute, and we have long recognized that the government may regulate certain categories of expression consistent with the Constitution,” O’Connor wrote. In distinguishing between possible intentions in cross burning, the high court agreed with the Virginia Supreme Court’s decision to overturn the conviction of Barry Black. Black led a 1998 Ku Klux Klan rally in Carroll County, Va., in which a 25-foot-tall cross was burned in an open field with the owner’s permission. The U.S. Supreme Court vacated the lower court’s decision to strike down the convictions of the two other men involved in a cross-burning incident. Richard Elliott and Jonathan O’Mara were convicted for partially burning a cross on the property of James Jubilee, an African American, in Virginia Beach. Part of the high court’s opinion focused on a provision in the Virginia law that treats “any cross burning as prima facie evidence of intent to intimidate.” The

justices ruled that provision, which was added to the law in 1968, is unconstitutional. (Baptist Press, 04/08/2003)

“Sexual Orientation” Bill Defeated

Nashville’s “sexual orientation” anti-discrimination bill was defeated in metro council April 1, eliciting celebration from opponents but caution from those on both sides who say the issue will eventually resurface. The proposal to ban employment discrimination based on “sexual orientation” within the city government—thus covering all public schools—lost 19–18 in the council when Vice Mayor Howard Gentry Jr., who votes only in cases of ties, cast a “no” vote. The dramatic ending capped 60 minutes of debate in which opponents and proponents delivered passionate yet civil arguments before a packed gallery of citizens wearing “No” buttons and “Yes” stickers. The turnout favored opponents roughly two to one. (Baptist Press, 04/02/2003)

Baptized on the USS Harry S. Truman

In the middle of the hangar bay, Avionics Technician 2nd Class Sean Zahornacky, from San Jose, Calif., sits in a water-filled green tub. The large container actually is a joint direct attack munitions (JDAM) crate. What once

carried ordnance for destruction now serves as a vessel for an act of obedience that symbolizes the birth of a new creation and a walk in a new life. Today the JDAM crate is a baptistry—for the first-ever, full-immersion baptism on board the USS *Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75). Many young men and women join the Navy searching for something and ultimately find God, the chaplains say. That’s the case for Zahornacky, who has lived on the *Truman* as part of the ship’s company since 1999. He didn’t have any church background growing up, and said it was very hard for him to admit that he needed God. “If I don’t see A and B, I don’t believe C,” the avionics technician said. But, after many months of prayer, asking questions, and studying the Bible, he accepted Jesus Christ. After the young sailor was baptized, he stood, wet and slightly shivering from the breeze blowing through the hangar, as fellow Christians congratulated him. “I walk inches off the ground after something like this,” Chaplain Dunn said, smiling broadly. “It is such a joy to see a sailor make such a clear commitment in front of his shipmates.” (Baptist Press, 03/31/2003)

Partial-Birth Abortions

Late in March the United States Senate

passed S.3, the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003, by a bipartisan vote of 64 to 33. This is the fourth time a ban on partial-birth abortion has made its way through Congress and the third time a bill has passed the Senate. The first two bills were vetoed by President Clinton, and last year’s bill, passed by the House, never made it to a vote in the Senate. However, this bill is expected to be signed into law. As the Ban Act of 2003 stands right now, the partial-birth abortion procedure would be completely banned, but some want to see an exception made for cases where the health of the mother is threatened. It should be noted that “health of the mother” has come to include physical, psychological, emotional, familial, educational, or financial health. (*The Federalist*, 04/03/2003)

Bug Chasing

Thousands of people knowingly infect themselves with the HIV virus each year, according to *Rolling Stone* magazine—a practice commonly known as “bug chasing” and cited by those who participate in it as the ultimate form of erotic fulfillment. Of the 40,000 new HIV infections each year, as many as 10,000 may be due to bug chasing—a figure that represents a full 25 percent of all HIV cases. Bug chasing

is most commonly associated with homosexual men, *Rolling Stone* reports, and is propagated through a vast Internet network. So why would anyone knowingly infect himself with a fatal disease? One homosexual told *Rolling Stone* it's all about the freedom associated with having HIV. Once you have the most deadly disease on the market, he said, you can participate in any sexual activity without worrying about the consequences. (Baptist Press, 03/31/2003)

Missionary Volunteers Die from Fall

A missionary team from Glover Baptist Church in Norcross, Ga., and Grace Fellowship Church in Snellville traveled to Honduras to serve in a medical clinic. At the close of the trip, hoping to pose for a group photo, they filed onto a wooden swinging bridge, holding on to the cables that served as handrails. T. J. Lathe was the first on the bridge, followed by Amy Cruce. In the next moment the center of gravity apparently shifted as the members all stood on one side, and the bridge flipped and began tossing bodies into the ravine some thirty feet below. Some team members were immediately thrown from the bridge; others hung on and dropped minutes later. Two team members were able to hang on until they were rescued. Cruce was standing over the deepest part of the ravine, a nearly four-story drop, when the bridge flipped, her legs

NOTABLE QUOTES

Blessed are the men who have had praying mothers. The influence of that fact they cannot shake off. They may curse and swear, and go to the very boundary of the pit, and go into the pit, but I question whether through all their sufferings they can ever shake off the influence of having had a praying mother. The mother's devotion comes up in the boy's veneration, love of right, conscientiousness, magnanimous hope, gentle courage.—Joseph Parker

The foundations of national glory are set in the homes of the people. They will only remain unshaken while the family life of our nation is strong and simple and pure.—King George VI

Father and mother living together with their children, tender in their love, pure in their lives, strong in their convictions, simple and orderly in their habits, do infinitely more than presidents and governors, legislators and clergyman can do in making a strong nation.—S. D. Gordon

The Making of a Delinquent:

1. Give the child everything he wants. In this way he will grow up to believe the world owes him a living.
2. When he picks up bad words, laugh at them. That will make him think he is amusing.
3. Never give him any spiritual training. Wait until he's twenty-one and then let him decide for himself.
4. Pick up everything he leaves lying about—books, shoes, clothes; do everything for him so that he will be experienced in throwing all responsibility on to others.
5. Quarrel frequently in his presence. In this way he will not be too shocked when the home is broken later.
6. Give the child all the pocket-money he wants.
7. Never let him earn his own. Why should he have things as tough as you had them?
8. Satisfy his every craving for food, drink and comfort. Denial may lead to harmful frustration.
9. Take his side against neighbors, teachers, policemen. They are all prejudiced against your child.
10. When he gets into serious trouble, apologize for yourself by saying, "I could never do anything with him."
11. Prepare for a life of grief. You are bound to have it.

—Police Department, Houston, Texas

becoming entangled in the cables. She hung upside down for nearly ten minutes, watching as her friends fell one by one into the ravine. Her brother grabbed a bright yellow heavy-duty extension cord and tossed it to her, with instructions to tie it around herself. Just as she wrapped it around her midsection, the bridge shifted, dropping her into the air. Unable to pull her to safety, he lowered her into the ravine until others could ease their way down. T. J. Lathe and Church Brattain were killed in the incident. (Baptist Press, 03/14/2003)

High Court May Overturn Sodomy Law

The high court heard oral arguments in an appeal of a Texas court opinion sustaining a state law banning sexual relations between members of the same sex. The lawyer for two Houston homosexual men asked the court to overturn a seventeen-year-old ruling in which the justices upheld a Georgia law barring same-sex acts. Texas is one of only four states that have sodomy laws that apply only to homosexuals. Nine other states prohibit both homosexual and heterosexual sodomy. The Texas law has "all sorts of collateral effects," including the denial of visitation to a homosexual parent and loss of employment. In 1986 the Supreme Court ruled in the 5-4 *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision there is no fundamental right in the Constitution for homosexuals to participate in sodomy. Much has changed in

the high court and in the states since then, however. Only three justices from 1986—Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Associate Justices John Paul Stevens and Sandra Day O'Connor—remain on the high court. Since that ruling, the number of state sodomy laws has decreased from 28 to 13. In addition to Texas, the states that still have sodomy laws are Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Utah, and Virginia. (Baptist Press, 03/31/2003)

Attention Deficit

The 2003 Academy Awards were the lowest rated of any Oscar telecast since 1974, the year such data first became available. The biggest question of the evening was not who would win the major awards, but which presen-

ters or winners would use their platform to speak out against Operation Iraqi Freedom. As it turned out, the evening was a mixed bag. Host Steve Martin was both funny and respectful, mostly avoiding the topic and closing the evening with: "To our young men and women overseas, we hope you enjoyed the show. It's for you." Several others simply made generic appeals for peace. The most simultaneously obnoxious and heartening event of the evening came when Michael Moore accepted his Oscar for Best Documentary Feature. He pulled the rest of his category's nominees onstage with him and immediately launched into a tirade against President Bush: "They're here in solidarity with me because we like nonfiction . . . but we live in fictitious times. We live in a time where we have fictitious election results

that elect a fictitious president. We are against this war, Mr. Bush! Shame on you, Mr. Bush! Shame on you! And any time you've got the pope and Dixie Chicks against you, your time is up!" During Mr. Moore's speech the camera panned the floor-level audience (the stars), and saw most of them sitting unmoved, neither clapping nor booing. On the way backstage, Mr. Moore repeated the last line to reporters, afraid that it may have been drowned out by the chorus of boos that began midway through his rant. (*World* magazine, 04/05/2003)

Reality TV Marriage Show Pulled

The new reality show *Married by America* will no longer be aired by the Fox television affiliate in Raleigh, N.C., because station executives concluded that "the program did not

reflect prevailing standards of good taste and that the show was clearly demeaning to the institution of marriage." *Married by America* features five singles who, upon evaluations from family and the public, are paired with strangers. According to the Fox website, "Once face-to-face, these new couples will embark on a journey toward matrimony in hopes that they have indeed found their one true love." The couple chosen by America to be married will win \$1 million if they can stay married for 180 days. In comments to Baptist Press after the Raleigh affiliate's decision, Todd Brady said he thinks it's great that the affiliate realizes there are many in America who believe in the seriousness and the sacredness of marriage. (Baptist Press, 03/17/2003)

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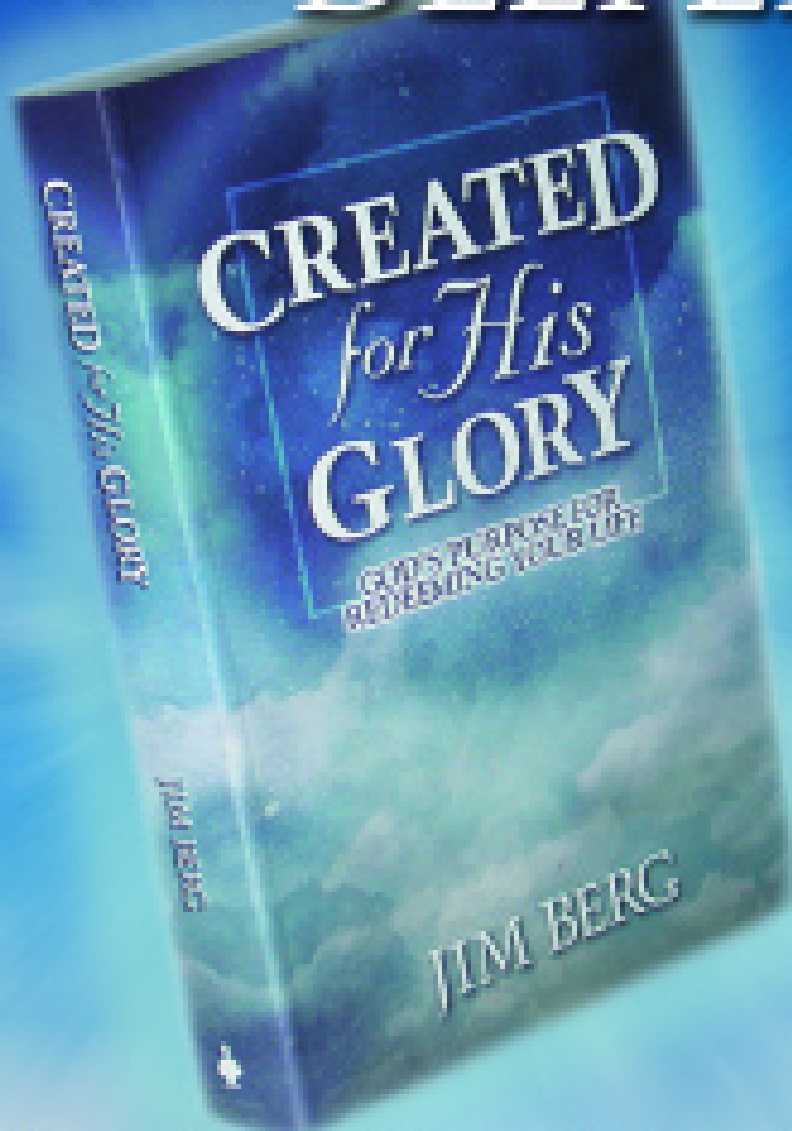


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God Setteth the Solitary in Families

God's people have taken refuge in the Psalms for centuries, and well they should. Psalm 68 is rich with promises and words of comfort. It has been used throughout history as a marching song by those who looked to God for victory. It has been pointed out that the Crusaders sang it on their way to the Holy Land; Savonarola and the monks sang it as they marched to their fiery trial; the Hugaenots called it "the song of battles"; Cromwell's army sang it as they charged Leslie's army. During WWI it was sung more frequently than any other.

There is a phrase in the beginning of verse six of this wonderful Psalm. Near the end of the first stanza that honors God for His might, His majesty, and His mercy, we read the words, "God setteth the solitary in families." What a wonderful truth! No one needs to be alone. Whether orphan or widow, the single person or the lonely pastor or missionary laboring for the Lord in an isolated place, God has a family for those who need a family.

Pastors know that messages on the family can often bring sadness to those who are lonely. It may be that some single person has been reading this issue and felt that sadness again. But remember, "God setteth the solitary in families." God has a place where you can love and be loved. For some it is with friends and neighbors, or by helping another family with its needs. For all it should be a Fundamental, Bible-

believing local church. But even those in prison or the nursing home or otherwise unable to get to church are part of a great spiritual family if they truly know the Lord.

The sad reality is not just that there are so many who have never come into the spiritual family through the new birth, but that so many who have a place set at the table never come to eat. Sad indeed that there are some who must have their spiritual meals taken to their bedside or to the humiliation of a jail cell or the danger of a foxhole on

the battlefield; tragic indeed that a place at the table set with love should go empty for lack of interest or loyalty. Who can't understand the disappointment of a faithful mother who has prepared a nourishing meal for her family only to have them rush

through the house announcing that they don't have time to eat.

Or, consider the frustration of a lady who would arrange a lovely meal for the pastor only to have to call him after he failed to show up to see if there has been an emergency. Imagine that she should find him at home with the explanation, "Oh, I just wasn't able to make it today, but I'll come next time." And yet, that happens to pastors nearly every week. They have prayed for their "family" members and prepared a nourishing sermon, often with a particularly hungry member in

mind; then they stand to preach while looking out to see that many of the family just "weren't able to make it" that day.

Sure, there are legitimate reasons much of the time, but you have to wonder how many people really understand that their church is family. Not only do they need the preaching, the singing, the praying, and the fellowship, but others need the absent one as well. A helpful illustration is given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, where he compares believers to a body. When a member of your body is hurting, you are not likely to rejoice at how much the other members don't hurt. I've often taught my church, "It hurts worse to have a toothache, than it feels good not to." It is doubtful that any one reading this has thought today, "My teeth really feel good!"

Just as many people put off going to the dentist because they will immediately experience sudden and perhaps severe pain to get their longstanding pain relieved, so do people live with the loneliness and stagnation of avoiding church because they don't want the embarrassment of explaining their absence or the pain of conviction involved. You need the fellowship of God's people, and they need you. You are not just hurting yourself;

you are hurting your family. No one needs to be alone that knows the Lord. If you are not a member or not attending a local church, you are missing more than you realize. You are missing the joy of belonging—the blessing of being in a "family."

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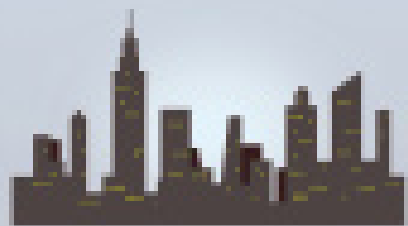
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