

The Invisibles: Bible Characters Christians Never Discuss, But Should

One of the most popular articles in the history of REO is our [“Top Ten Favorite Bible Characters”](#). On that list, you find some of the most amazing humans that ever lived and we are blessed to get to read about them in our Bibles.

But that list was quite predictable, on purpose. The most well known Bible characters are so for a reason. They did incredible things and lived exemplary lives. Today, however, I want to go beyond the obvious and talk about a few Bible characters that deserve accolades but almost never get them. These people also did incredible things but because they weren't as prominent as Moses or Paul, they rarely get taught about in Bible studies or discussed among the great people of the faith.

Today I want to give them their due. Here are a few people in the Bible that rarely get discussed but deserve full sermons dedicated to them.

Bezalel and Oholiab

Listen to what Exodus says about these men:

Then Moses said to the Israelites, “See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills...

Now let me pause here and wonder if a person doesn't know the rest of the chapter, what kind of call would you think Bezalel

had on his life? I mean, he is filled with the Spirit and wisdom and understanding. Is he a priest? A Levite? A prophet?

None of the above. Here is what he and his chosen assistant Oholiab were filled with the Spirit and with wisdom to do...

–to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts. And he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan⁰, the ability to teach others. He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them skilled workers and designers.”

They were filled with the Spirit and wisdom to work with their hands! Christians need to understand and teach the biblical significance of men and women laity who do blue collar jobs (and any non-pastoring jobs). In the Old Testament, they were spiritually qualified by God to the highest level, using phrases we'd use for the most significant spiritual offices. And since the New Testament teaches the priesthood of all believers, I'd say all Christian accountants, janitors, teachers, and electricians are today as well.

We need to teach jobs as ministries. These men help us do that.

Onesiphorus

I owe Tim Campbell the credit for teaching about this man to a chapel full of students at Welch College 20 years ago. Other than a greeting in 2nd Timothy, the extent of what Paul writes about Onesiphorus can be found in two verses in 1 Timothy:

“May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my

chains. On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me.”

What a short, but significant tribute! Not everyone gets to be Paul, but to be the person that loves and encourages Paul like this? That’s someone worth teaching Christians about. May we all be the kind of person who refreshes others, who isn’t ashamed of them even when they are rejected by others, and who seeks them out. I long for that kind of testimony.

Asaph and the Sons of Korah

It is important to note that just because a Psalm is “of” someone, it does not mean that the person or group wrote it. It could be dedicated to that person or something similar. Yet I think it is very likely that Asaph and the sons of Korah wrote the psalms that bear their names in our Bibles.

Considering how deeply music speaks to our souls, confirmed by God by inspiring our biggest Bible book to be a hymnbook, we should know who wrote the greatest songs of the faith that Israel praised God with. Between Asaph and the sons of Korah you find many of the Psalms that have inspired some of the great modern Christian worship songs, like Psalm 42 (“As The Deer”) and Psalm 84 (“Better Is One Day In Your Courts”) and even the less well known but profoundly lyrical Psalm 73, which is found by that name in [Indelible Grace Music](#). I give a shout out to Dr. Matthew McAfee for introducing that song to my church years ago. Few Bible passages wrestle with the unfairness of the world and the justice of God as this one does. What a privilege to sing it.

But even more important to me, Asaph and the sons of Korah penned several heart-wrenching lament psalms, like Psalms 44, 80 and 88. Psalm 80 contains the refrain, “O Lord God of hosts, cause your face to shine on us, that we may be saved”

three times, which [Michael W. Smith turned into a modern hymn as well](#). As far as I know, Psalm 88 has not been turned into a popular modern song, but perhaps that is because it is one of the few psalms that doesn't end on an up note but remains in the darkness. For that reason, it may be my favorite psalm of all.

Both Asaph and the sons of Korah played a huge part not only in writing but leading Israel in musical worship (1 Chronicles 15, 2 Chronicles 20). These are men who should be known.

Micaiah

No, not Malachi or Micah. Micaiah, a prophet so unknown that my computer is giving me the red squiggly line under his name right now. He prophesied during the time of King Ahab and what a thankless, demeaning job that must have been. We get a taste of what his life was like in 1 Kings 22 (and its parallel, 2 Chronicles 18) when Ahab calls him in to advise him about going to war with Ramoth Gilead. It is obvious that Micaiah never prophesies anything good for Ahab because the wicked king says so plainly. It appears that this is the case because Micaiah intends only to speak the truth. And this obviously happens over and over and this has to weigh on his psyche.

It's possible we even get a bit of sarcasm here from the noble prophet because at first he tells Ahab to go to war and Ahab knows he's not being serious. But Micaiah then speaks the harsh predictive reality to him and instead of receiving thanks for the warning, he ends up with a smack to the face. A mere four chapters after Elijah calls down fire from Heaven, another similar prophet is taking inglorious shots to the face in a rather mundane existence. For this, he deserves our respect.

Zelophehad's Daughters

Because the cultures of the Bible were so demeaning to women by our modern standards, we very much need to preach stories like these women standing up to Moses on behalf of giving them their father's inheritance. Zelophehad was a righteous man but had no son. So they boldly stood before one of the most significant leaders in the history of the world and asked for justice. And God took their side. There was no doubt about that because he spoke directly in the passage to affirm their position.

Justice gets thrown around so much in American Christian vernacular I hope we don't miss what it really is. It has been and always will be doing right by those who are denied things they deserve. That is the heart of these few verses in Numbers. So here's to Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah—women of great character that we should honor.

So, at least for today, that is my list. What are some under-appreciated Bible characters you wish we talked more about?

How are Good Works and Salvation Connected?

People love the idea of earning stuff. There are trophies awarded in sports for winning a competition. Money earned by doing some sort of work. Students get a good grade for doing well on a test. The list goes on and on. Most of the time earning what you get is not wrong at all. In fact, much of the time it is good, right, and biblically-based. However, the mindset of needing to earn rewards explains why it is so hard to accept how salvation really works.

What All Christians Need to Accept

As indicated, we didn't and don't earn Salvation. That's a very good thing because it would be impossible for any human to actually do so. It is equally true, however, that now that we have been saved, we should be compelled to do good works for the person and cause of Jesus. Scripture tells us that a faith that does not result in good works is dead (James 2:14-26).

Accepting What You've Already Accepted

Sometimes this is a truth that is hard to really accept even for those of us who have already supposedly accepted it. Sometimes, if we are not careful, we who have known this truth for years can drift into backward ways of unbiblical thinking. Biblical Christian thought goes against the natural way most of society thinks today in so many ones. This idea that we don't have to and can't earn this really good thing, this salvation, is just one of those things. Like so many other Christian counter-cultural thoughts, we will likely be struggling with this issue for the rest of our Christian

lives.

Accepting the counter-cultural teaching of Scripture is something I have had trouble with in the past. Not just this particular truth, but many other biblical truths as well. If we are not careful and alert, unbiblical “spiritual” practices and ideas can become a lazy habit. For myself, sometimes along the road of the Christian life, while I thought I had fully accepted a truth, the Holy Spirit will lead me to take a long look at myself and show me that, no I hadn’t actually and fully accepted it yet, just some of it and that that some of it needed to be revitalized and more fully rounded. This kind of spiritual growth is what happens on the lifelong climb of sanctification.

The Short Story of Salvation

The whole need for human salvation in the first place started in the Garden of Eden. There was one particular tree there known as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This tree was exactly what its name implies. It embodied our free will to choose good or evil, to either willfully obey God or to willfully disobey Him. Adam and Eve, the first couple, chose evil, sin, disobedience of God’s one rule. Therefore, through them all humanity from that day forward was sentenced to death, eternal death.

The entirety of the rest of the Old Testament is God’s path toward the redemption of mankind through Jesus in the New Testament. We’re talking His own beloved Son here – His only Son. God the Father sent His only Son to die for a people who spat in His face and deserved exactly what they got. He did this so that we could be reunified with Him and have access to everlasting life (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9). Doing what God did would be an unthinkable, mind-boggling sacrifice for any parent—and this was our Creator!

After he arose from the dead, Jesus went to heaven to intercede on our behalf before the Father. For our benefit, he left the Holy Spirit to guide His believers to the end. We did not deserve access to the Holy Spirit; He was freely given (Titus 3:4-5).

Yes, acceptance of this sacrifice of God's Son Jesus was and still is the **only** way for us to begin on that Holy Spirit-led path. As Romans 3:23 points out, all of us have sinned and therefore fall short of the glory of God. Because of this, we are completely unworthy to stand in the presence of God. Accepting the sacrifice of Jesus cleanses our sin and makes us able to stand in His presence. It is then that the Holy Spirit leads us up the road of salvation. It will prove to be an up and down road for us, with lots of hills and valleys, but thankfully His work on our behalf does not depend on our constant spiritual highs. His infinite love and grace have got our back.

The Final Answer

Going back to that first question about the connection between good works and salvation, while the two are definitely connected, it's not like one might first assume. Salvation is nothing any human will ever earn by doing good. It was given to us. We were freely given the gift of salvation through the death of Jesus (Romans 6:23). With an authentic salvation experience, we are now bound for heaven, on the road of sanctification with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the end of final glorification in the eternal presence of God. And how does that authentic salvation experience work? It is by fully confessing complete and lifelong acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior in your heart and through your mouth (Romans 10:8-9). That is how salvation comes about. Now we do our good works not to earn salvation, more salvation, or continued salvation, but because Christ saved us, because He commanded

us to do so, because we love, honor, and praise Him for everything He has done for us and for humanity. Now we do so for the rewards awaiting us after this life with Jesus in eternity.

Now we obey His words and do our good works because He is truly our Lord today and forever (Luke 6:46).

Heaven is Home

I've lived a fairly long life – 68 years now. To most people I'm "old," and I'm fond of saying when asked how I'm doing "pretty good for an old man." However, that falls flat when I'm with our seniors at church, or at a luncheon with other pastors and retired pastors, and there are many who are 5, 10, 15, or 20 years older than me.

But the longer I live, the more I remember: "I'm not home yet." Especially in these days of so much turmoil, socially, politically, morally, and even religiously, life is hard to bear some days. The shooting last year at the Texas church brought that home once again. I have cried looking at pictures of the children shot down deliberately in cold blood by a man filled with evil.

The political division, the "me first" mentality, self-identifying, sexual exploitation of children, world hunger, rampant racism, abortion – not only accepted but glorified by so many – cause a heaviness and a sorrow that will never be gone here on earth. We're reminded that:

1. Perfect healing will not take place in this life, but in the world to come.

2. Perfect justice will not take place in this life, but in the world to come.

This means, of course, that we will suffer angst, pain, anxiety, and grief all throughout our lives. Though Jesus is King, though His peace is real, His grace is sufficient, and His power available, things will never be perfect down here.

Some people are recognized for their greatness in this life, while God honors others in the life to come. Henry C. Morrison was a faithful missionary who served the Lord in Africa for over 40 years. He recalls that emotional day when he and his wife boarded a ship on their way back to the United States. His mind flooded with memories of the wonderful experiences they had enjoyed on the mission field. He began wondering what it would be like to return to his Midwestern hometown – will anyone there still remember us? Aboard that same ship, that day with Henry and his wife was the former President of the United States, Teddy Roosevelt. He was returning from a big game hunting trip in Africa. When the ship pulled into the New York harbor, there were thousands of people there to greet him. The crowds cheered and the bands played. There were signs, banners, and billboards everywhere saying, “Welcome Home!”

As the dear missionary and his wife left the ship, they saw that no one had come to welcome them back home. With a heavy heart, Henry Morrison went to his hotel room and told his wife, “Honey, for 40 years we poured our lives into ministry and service. And yet we come back to America and not a single soul comes to welcome us home!”

His wife came and sat down next to her husband. She put her hand on his shoulder, and said to him, “Henry, you have forgotten something. You’re not home yet!”

Do you ever feel like the things you do for Christ are overlooked? Maybe you spend long hours working with children

each day, or you work a mundane office job. Never forget that this world is not your home. Serve your Savior faithfully each day, and He will reward you for your labors – just keep in mind, you’re not home yet.

Earthly crowns are dross to him who looks for a Heavenly one.

– Jane Porter[1. Excerpt from a devotional by Dr. James A. Scudder.]

Here’s just a little of what awaits us!

The Absence of all that’s bad (Revelation 21)

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” There isn’t a more comforting verse in all of Scripture!

The Presence of all that’s good

There’s a joke about two guys who speculate whether there will be baseball played in Heaven. One says “I’ll pray and ask God tonight since you want to know so badly.” The next day, he tells his friend. “Well, I prayed about whether there would be baseball in Heaven, and God answered me. I’ve got good news and bad news.” “Tell me,” says his friend. “The good news is that, yes, there will be baseball in Heaven. The bad news is that you’re the starting pitcher tomorrow!”

The Glory of God in Jesus (Revelation 22:3b-5)

His servants will serve Him. We will see His face, shine in His glory, and sit with Him as Kings.

Eternal

“And they will reign forever and ever” with Him.

Home

"In my Father's house are many dwelling places (mansions)...I am going away to prepare a place for you." John 14:2 CBS

Building 429 sang "This Is Not Where I Belong"

*...all I know is I'm not home yet
This is not where I belong
Take this world and give me Jesus
This is not where I belong*

*So when the walls come falling down on me
And when I'm lost in the current
Of a raging sea
I have this blessed assurance, holding me*

*All I know is I'm not home yet
This is not where I belong
Take this world and give me Jesus
This is not where I belong*

B.J. Thomas wrote the song "Home Where I Belong"

*They say that heaven's pretty,
And living here is too.
But if they said that I would have to choose between the two.*

*I'd go home,
Going home,
Where I belong.
While I'm here I'll serve him gladly,
And sing him all my songs.*

*I'm here,
But not for long.
And when I'm feeling lonely,*

*And when I'm feeling blue.
It's such a joy to know that I am only passing through.*

*I'm headed home,
Going home,
Where I belong.
And one day I'll be sleeping,
When death knocks on my door.
And I'll awake and find that I'm not homesick anymore.*

*I'll be home,
Going home,
Where I belong.*

To conclude, I've asked my son Phillip to write a little something about C.S. Lewis' description of Narnia's version of Heaven in "The Last Battle."



I am hard pressed to find a better depiction of Heaven in any work of fiction than what C.S. Lewis wrote in the final book of "The Chronicles of Narnia." The last few chapters of "The Last Battle" are full-to-bursting with the beauty, grandeur, and awesomeness that awaits those who believe. Food tastes

better. The world is familiar yet deeper, richer, and better in every way imaginable. There are sweet moments of reunion with those who have gone before, as seen when King Tirian is reunited with his father. Yet nothing captures that pull we feel when we think of our heavenly home, that sense of longing – better than these words by one of the characters in those final pages: “I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now.” Heaven is the place we “have been looking for” all our lives. Heaven is home, our “real country.” Heaven is where we belong. What an amazing hope we have as believers!

This life is just the preface. The real story starts when we're home!

“My Times are in Thy Hands”

When did this phrase from Psalm 31:15 from the King James Version first cross my mind and eventually stick there? Was it as a child in Sunday School or Vacation Bible School? Or as a teen in Sunday School or youth group, or hearing a message from my pastor? Or later when I started making it a practice

to read through the Bible yearly? I honestly can't recall when this phrase stuck, but somewhere along the way, it did.

The Psalm itself is powerful, from its opening stanza "In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness," as the writer launches his appeal to the Lord for salvation, deliverance, and rescue. I learned early on that verse 5 was taken on the lips and echoed from the heart of our Lord Jesus as He yielded His spirit to His Father while dying on the cross (Luke 23:46) – the last of the seven final words of our Lord on the cross.

The Psalm is most instructive; trusting in the Lord in the midst of trials, of opposition, of sorrow, and affirming over and over that He will help and deliver. The Beacon Bible Commentary says Psalm 31 is "a striking alternation of lament and praise." [1. Beacon Bible Commentary] We would all benefit by learning this Psalm, making it our very own, internalizing its principles and, indeed, its very words, climaxing with the powerful exhortation of verse 24 "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord."

Right in the middle is verse 15 "my times are in your hands." Some versions render this "my future." Other versions translate "fate," "life-stages," "destiny." I sense that the idea is that all of our life is in his hands, his care, concern, and keeping. Wow! He was with me in the past. He is with me today (and moment by moment). He will be with me always. The CSB translates "The course of my life is in your power; rescue me from the power of my enemies and from my persecutors." [2. Holman Christian Standard Bible] The "course of my life," my whole life, from beginning to end, is under His control. What assurance that gives! His power is greater than any other power!

Robert Browning's beautiful poem "Rabbi Ben Ezra" includes the key line from verse 15:

Grow old along with me!

*The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made.
Our times are in his hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned.
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"*[3.
Robert Browning – "Rabbi Ben Ezra"]

Because of our trust in a Sovereign God, we can have hope even when we fail (and we so often do!). He forgives, He renews, He gives fresh grace, and new beginnings – things we all need.

*I will go on, my past I leave behind me
I gladly take his mercy and his love.
He is joy and he is peace, He is strength and sweet release;
I know He is, and I am His, I will go on.* [4. William J. and
Gloria Gaither "I Will Go On"]

Challenging Men to David-Jonathan Friendships

In trying to keep up with cultural trends that affect the church, I have heard on more than one occasion that the American church struggles to reach men because our worship services are so geared to women. Notably the music.

What I do not want to do here is to contribute to the issue of men feeling that Christianity, as practiced in the U.S., is not manly enough. And I do believe firmly that men and women are different in many fundamental ways, and that the Bible

testifies to this. Being equal does not mean being the same (Genesis 5:2).

But I also want to wonder aloud if sometimes this issue isn't an excuse for why men do not get more involved in the church. The church is far more community-daily, relational discipleship ("as you're going" according to Jesus in Matthew 28:19)-than it is music and atmosphere on Sunday morning.

As such I think Christian men in my culture need something more profound than tweaks to the worship service. They need friendships. And I don't just mean "watch the game on Saturday night" or "play golf together" friendships, though these things could be part of it. I'm talking about the type of friendship that David and Jonathan had in the Old Testament in the Bible.

Here are some of the distinguishing marks of their relationship, as taken from 1 Samuel 18-20.

Jonathan and David's friendship was so deep and intimate it was called a Covenant.

"Covenant" is a word used often in the Bible to describe how God relates to us and in my opinion the best word to describe marriage between one man and one woman. It's a word that conveys serious commitment and deep intimacy, which are phrases that we do not use often to describe male friendships in the U.S. And that is why I do not want to advocate for the feminization of men in Christianity. But the Bible is countercultural and can be uncomfortable, yet very much worth it, to practice. Perhaps women understand this better and it is unbiblical cultural stereotypes of men that prevent us from experiencing biblical covenant with our brothers in the faith.

Regardless, David and Jonathan set the bar high. Men need friendships in the church that makes them as relationally

close as possible.

Jonathan sacrificed generously for David.

He gave him his robe, tunic, sword, bow and belt. This was a significant and generous way to honor his best friend. We can do this with gifts, with money and especially with time. Convenience is the enemy of covenant.

Jonathan spoke highly of David when he wasn't around

It is one thing to speak highly of someone when you are around people who also want to speak highly of them. It's another when you defend someone to his enemies. Especially enemies with power, as his father Saul had. Men need relationships of that kind of integrity. I want to know other men have my back even if it costs them.

Jonathan verbalized his love to David

Over and over Jonathan did things like reminding David he was for him during this frightening time and he had David reaffirm his oath to him because he loved David so much.

In my opinion, our culture bends so much towards talk being cheap and "Don't tell me, show me" that we woefully underestimate the power of words. Words matter.

I grew up in a culture where most men never said "I love you" to each other. When I was at Welch College I can distinctly recall three different guys saying it to me. Each time I was so stunned I don't even think I said it back. But as I've gotten older and less self-conscious about these type of things, I have said it to many men. I don't say it if I know

it will make the other man uncomfortable. And I am definitely not trying to communicate this as some kind of benchmark of maturity. Not every man should be expected to say it. But some way, somehow, even if it's not those three potent words, Christian men should communicate covenant love to each other. It's not less than manly to do so.

Jonathan was willing to risk his life to protect David

I'm convinced that men are designed by nature to protect women but friendship is a willingness to die for the other person. Jesus said it's the greatest demonstration of love. Jonathan faced Saul's wrathful spear for defending David.

Jonathan grieved with David

When they realized how serious the hate was that Saul had for David, they embraced and kissed and wept together. I cannot fathom many moments more intimate between two friends in the history of the world. I have always known that your true friends are the ones who will weep with you and have recently learned that few things create intimacy in relationships like grieving together. Kissing is almost always spoken of in family contexts in the Old Testament. That is how close David and Jonathan were.

Let me close by saying how blessed of God I have been to have men in my adult life like the ones you see in the collage of pictures with the title of this article. I loved being a part of a group of men called "Southtown" my senior year at Welch College. I love being a part of REO today. I've often said of my friend Josh Crowe that filters were abolished long ago and we speak freely to each other and if he has criticism for me I

will listen without being defensive (which I can't say is true in other relationships). My friend Yeomans has listened to me bare my soul dozens of times and offered correction and encouragement without judgment and has visited me in Chicago many times, at great personal cost. When my friend Andy and his wife announced to my church they were expecting their first child I ran on stage where he was playing bass and gave him a huge hug, as excited as I've ever been for someone. When my best friend Matt left Chicago a few weeks ago, I cried several times over a few days. And even though he is more of a mentor than a best friend, all of the above points apply strongly to my pastor, David.

All of these men have been Jonathans to me in some way and I have told many of them that I love them. Without any shame. Yet I don't offer any of this from a place of expertise. As I read about Jonathan and David I realize there is so much more I could be doing for the men in my life.

And as a preacher and a writer, God rarely gives me something he wants to transform in me where he doesn't want me to share with others. So that is my hope today. Be a Jonathan. Be a David. Don't let culture completely dictate how men are supposed to treat each other. May we be countercultural in the ways the Bible teaches.

Five Popular Bible Passages We May Be Misinterpreting (Part 2)

Not long after REO was created, while it was still cooling on the window sill, I wrote an article on [Five Popular Bible Passages We May Be Misinterpreting](#). It created quite a bit of response. In the vein of much of modern Hollywood, I have written this sequel years later.

The point of it, I will repeat from last time, is to challenge how we think about the Bible. I want to push against our preconceived interpretations that perhaps we have never thought much about, the popular ones that do not often get challenged.

I give two disclaimers, though: First, I am not saying that I am positive that the alternative interpretations below are correct. Just that, according to some students of Scripture, they may be. And we should think through them in humility and wisdom, aiming to rightly divide the word of truth. Even if it means saying, "I was wrong." Secondly, I am purposely avoiding passages like Philippians 4:13, Jeremiah 29:11 and the "Where two or three are gathered" verse because they are commonly picked on. These, in my experience, are not. Let's look at them.

Exodus 14:14

Moses answered the people, "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."

Traditional Interpretation: When faced with daunting circumstances, we need to be still and let God fight for us.

Alternative Interpretation: God may want us to move instead of crying out to him.

The next verse is absolutely why I believe this:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on."

I hasten to add that I have heard wise, biblically sound Christian pastors and teachers cite this verse on social media. So maybe I am overthinking it. But at this point, Exodus 14:14 is not a verse I would use to teach people to be still. Psalm 46:10, yes. Instead, I use this pair of verses and their greater context to teach that there is a time to pray but there is also a time to get moving. Prayer is not a substitute for action.

Matthew 27:46

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Traditional Interpretation: God turned his back on Jesus (or abandoned him, or some verb of relational separation) to judge him for the sin of mankind since God cannot look upon sin.

Alternative Interpretation: Jesus, using a rabbinic practice of quoting only the first verse of a Psalm to communicate the entire psalm, is telling the audience that God will save him from this horrific circumstance. As Psalm 22 teaches.

I think "How Deep the Father's Love For Us" has contributed to the understanding of this verse, as it says, "The Father turned his face away." But even without the hymn, I have heard the traditional interpretation over and over in my life. I have always assumed it to be true. Yet read the words of Jeffrey Crabtree in the Randall House Commentary on Matthew:

Was Jesus actually abandoned and calling on God from His sense of that? Or was He primarily saying this for the benefit of His human audience? Some interpreters understand Jesus' question to mean that the Father did in some sense forsake His Son as He hung on the cross as the atonement for the sin of the world (Hendriksen 971; Hagner 33B:844). Others understand Jesus to have been implying, "Read the twenty-second Psalm. It tells you what this crucifixion is about. I may look forsaken (Mt. 27:43) but I am not" (Ps. 22:24). This makes Jesus' quote and question mainly rhetorical...

...It seems probable that Jesus was not forsaken (Ps. 22:24) even though it appeared to those on the ground that He was and even though He Himself felt forsaken (Evans, Matthew 514). He had suffered forty days in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry and endured extreme loneliness in the Garden the previous night in prayer. In like manner, on the cross at the time of His greatest suffering Jesus again felt isolation, only this time the sense of isolation was the most intense of His entire human experience—because He bore the wrath of God for the sins of the entire world.

The interpreter will want to consider the implications of the position he determines to be Scripture's intent. Can the Father and Son really separate in their beings (Jn. 10:30)? Would such a real

[separation agree with Psalm 22:24?](#)[1. Jeffrey Cabtree, *The Randall House Bible Commentary: Matthew*, 466-67]

I find Mr. Crabtree's explanation nuanced and balanced and it causes me to consider it. Yet I add that I am still struggling through this one. And I have not bought the alternative interpretation completely yet. This is not a major doctrinal issue to me but it's still something worth thinking through and wrestling with. Verses like 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Romans 8:3 give me pause in abandoning the traditional interpretation.

John 3:30

"[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease."

Traditional Interpretation: We must increase Christ with our lives and be humble.

Alternative Interpretation: Christ must increase by the very nature of things no matter what we do or don't do.

The word "must" works one of two ways, illustrated by the two interpretations above. We can say, "If you want to take English classes, you must register." You control that. But we also say, "What goes up, must come down." You don't control that. You cannot do anything to affect it, start it, stop it or alter it. It's something that happens *by the very nature of things*. The latter definition is what I think John means.

There are several reasons I believe this but here are three: First, it fits with how John the Gospel author used the Greek word "must" (δεῖ) earlier in the same chapter when he said, **"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up."** Based on verses like Acts 2:23 and 4:28, we know that the death of Christ was something God determined should happen and that humans could not prevent it or cause it. It is God's—and Jesus's—nature to save, just as

it is gravity's nature to bring objects to the earth.

Secondly, this fits with Jesus in Luke when he said, **"If [my disciples] keep quiet the stones will cry out."** Christ will be worshipped because His nature as God demands it and not because we must do it.

And lastly, the context before John 3:30 leaves the interpretation up in the air, but in the verses after he says, **"The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all."** This speaks to Christ nature as above us, which leads me to believe John is explaining why Christ must increase by the very nature of things more than Christ must increase because we must do it.

All of this matters because it helps me understand how Christ as God is bigger than my worship. He must increase as God in the sense that he must be exalted, praised and magnified. And even if free will beings refuse to do so, there are still billions of created voices doing it around the clock.

John 11:33-35

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. Jesus wept.

Traditional Interpretation: Jesus was saddened by the death of his friend and cried as a result.

Alternative Interpretation: Jesus was angry because of the reaction of the people and was overcome with emotional distress.

I suppose it's possible both are true but at the very least I

think this passage needs to be taught as Jesus was angry as much as sad. "Deeply moved" in the verse above is open to interpretation over a range of stressful emotion but it definitely bends to anger in my opinion. And this can be seen in how some prominent translations render it (NLT, HCSB). The people doubted him (vs. 37) and lack of faith often made Jesus angry (Mark 16:14).

Revelation 3:16

So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

Traditional Interpretation: God wants you to be for him or against him, but not on the fence.

Alternative Interpretation: God wants you to be for him and hates lukewarmness.

This doesn't change the main meaning of the passage, but it is possible that when God refers to hot and cold water he means that both hot and cold have a purpose. Cold water is good to drink and hot water is good for cooking, among other uses for both. So God wants us to be useful. Lukewarm water is good for nothing. It's nasty and worth only spitting out.

Let me conclude by saying that when I did the last article, the discussion in the comment section below was very edifying and I actually adapted my opinion of Proverbs 22:6 as a result. So we strongly encourage feedback and interaction, even respectful disagreement.

A Theology of Greeting People

If you want to be inspired in one minute, watch this:

I'll never forget spending a month in Peru in 2007 and having to kiss "hello" several times a day. Having lived in Chicago for a few years at that point I was aware of the cultural greeting but I had never been obliged to participate in it so much. I wasn't one to give intimate greetings to people I didn't know and I especially did not seek out physical contact but down there I figured it was prudent to conform. It was quite a month.

And for years I have considered exuberant greetings a cultural thing. Some people kiss or hug, others shake hands, others just nod. And while I still believe that is true, I have begun to wonder if my culture has devalued the impact greetings can have on others. No doubt there are things my culture does well, but this is one where I have been convicted to learn from others. Not just because I live in a predominantly Hispano neighborhood in Chicago, but also because there are clues in the Bible about how important greetings can be.

Here are a few examples of what I'm talking about:

First, in the book of Ruth when Boaz approached his workers, he greeted them with a sort of Gospel phrase: **"The Lord be with you!"** And they responded in kind, **"The Lord bless you!"**

In the book of Luke, we read that just the **"sound of [Mary's] greeting"** caused John the Baptist to leap for joy in

Elizabeth's womb.

In Colossians 4:18, Paul says he writes the greeting **“with my own hand”**. Of all things he could have written himself, it's the greeting.

In several of his books, he makes greetings a huge deal, as in Romans 16 and Colossians 4, taking almost entire chapters of our Bible to simply greet people.

And more than once he gave the command to **“greet with a holy kiss”**. Which, again, I realize the form is cultural but I think the significance of a meaningful, intimate greeting transcends time.



This is something I perceive a new wave of church planting has figured out. When I see pictures of thriving church plants, I see energetic, smiling people outside with huge signs that say **“We're glad you're here!”** and like things. Some go so far as to cheer as people enter the building, which is something my church does for each child that enters during our yearly VBS. I think we know that people can and do form opinions very quickly when encountering someone or something for the first

time. In fact, while I am not saying I am convinced this is true always, consider the following from Malcom Gladwell's book *Blink*:

Research over the past two decades has confirmed that...a handshake may be all it takes to create a memorable first impression. But what we also know now is just how significant the first few moments of an encounter can be, and to what extent they determine the friends we'll make, the career path we'll pursue and the people we'll fall in love with.

*Tricia Prickett, a psychology student, collected a series of videotaped job interviews to test whether it was possible to guess the outcome simply from observing the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. She found that an observer could predict whether or not the interviewee would be offered the job from watching just the first 15 seconds of the tape – the handshake, the “hello” and very little else. What happened in those few, brief moments was enough to determine the candidate's future[1. Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink*, 87].*

There are a handful of reasons why I think the Bible's emphasis on greeting well coincides with this research.

One is that I think the way we greet can be (though doesn't necessarily have to be) an issue of character. If you knew nothing about that teacher in the video above, do you think from the minute clip you saw of him that you can glean what kind of teacher he is? Probably. For me, I do not like to look people in the eye and I am not a big hugger but since I have been learning this, the number of men I hug as I greet them on Sunday mornings has more than doubled. Because I am convinced this is important enough that in my context I need to be stretched.



Once when we talked about this in our Spanish Bible study, as soon as the topic came up I could feel an energy enter the room in a way I do not think would have occurred in most English studies I have been in. Some expressed that when they moved to the U.S., getting accustomed to less enthusiastic greetings was difficult because in the countries where they come from, greeting is a huge deal. Not just in the hug and kiss, but in the eyes, the smile, the joy, and the whole of nonverbal communication. In fact, the Spanish verb that literally means “to greet” (saludar) seems to have much more potency than its English translation.

It is extremely common for someone to arrive late to our Spanish study and go around the table and greet every single person, even if it pauses the study for a few seconds. This is not something practiced often in my culture and I am learning that it is worth losing a few seconds of study to participate in something that can also be an issue of theology, as Boaz modeled. For me, it is an issue of character.

Secondly, I think greeting people well is a way to communicate to them “I see you. You matter.” In some cases it can communicate, “Whatever I was doing when you arrived is not as important as you are so I will pause and express that enthusiastically.” Any time I go to somewhere for the first time, I absolutely want someone there to help make it less confusing about where I am supposed to be. I want someone to see me and to make me feel secure and taken care of. As a

result, every Sunday I am able, I go and stand at the door of my church and greet people as they enter. I think it matters to morale.

Perhaps nowhere is this more important than how I respond to my wife when she comes home. While I will not say all husbands everywhere must greet their wives well to be good husbands, for me I know it is one of the intentional little things that is a big thing (and, in full disclosure, some days I do not practice this well).

Similarly, a greeting can be a means of building intimacy and encouragement. One of the best friends I have had in my time in Chicago was one of my roommates years ago before we both got married. Our landlord at the time had a hard time remembering our names. He at one point called my friend "Tiger" and at a later point called me "Slugger". To this day we greet each other with those names instead of our real ones. It manifests a depth to our friendship few other things do. There's another young man at our church, a star basketball player, with whom I share a "Cleveland Cavaliers" type handshake, as seen below. Because it means something to him. (The Cavs were the inspiration for the teacher in the opening clip, by the way.)



Also, there have been many times I have shown up to church in a terrible mood and the greetings of one of the other members

will be so exuberant, it melts my attitude a little. That is a huge benefit of church community.

I do not want to over-spiritualize this but as I think the Bible and greetings, I cannot help but think of the Prodigal son. The story details the reaction of the Father to the son coming home:

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

How soon from the moment their eyes met do you think the son knew the Father forgave him? To what extent do you think he understood just from that verse above? Is it possible to preach the Gospel in a greeting? I think it is. My favorite professor at Moody, Dr. Wong Loi Sing, taught us that every gesture we make, from a smile to holding a door to kissing hello, can communicate grace. I think Luke 15 proves this is the most glorious way possible.

What do you think? How important are greetings to you? Let us know your thoughts below, even if you disagree.

REO Pays Tribute: F. Leroy Forlines

I have lost count of the great Free Will Baptist leaders and individuals I have heard say Leroy Forlines had a profound impact on their Christian life. Teacher, writer, speaker,

thinker, and short-term missionary, all of these were chapters in one of the greatest books in Free Will Baptist history. God continues to use his spiritual legacy in all of these roles, educating and inspiring many generations of Christians. His passage through the brief span of time given to all men and women has left a lasting and extremely significant footprint for many generations of disciples who have followed and are following his lead.

Forlines had felt a call to the ministry as a teenager. He was born in 1926 in Greenville, North Carolina, the eldest son of John and Leta Forlines. Early in his life, he worked as a mechanic at Elbert Smith's Esso Station. In October 1944 at the age of 17, he converted to Christianity. Two years later he decided God was calling him to preach. So, in 1948 he moved to Nashville to begin his education for the ministry at Free Will Baptist Bible College. During his time as a student, he preached his very first sermon on a downtown Nashville street corner. It was also during his early years that he was deeply impacted by L.C. Johnson's class on Arminian Theology. Throughout these college years, he had a strong role in student body leadership, serving as the president of his 1952 graduating class.

After graduation, he immediately entered the ministry, serving as pastor of First Free Will Baptist Church in Newport News, Virginia from June 1952 to August 1953. He resigned this role and returned to Free Will Baptist Bible College to join the teaching faculty, a role which he would continue to hold full-time for almost 40 years. In 1957 he met and fell in love with Carolyn Le Fay Gilbert. They married and had two sons, Jon and James.

During those early years in the professorship, he was continuing his own education. In 1959 he attained his M.A. from the Winona Lake School of Theology. In 1962 he earned his B.D. from the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1970 he earned a Th.M from the Chicago Graduate School of Theology.

In 1963, he began working with the Commission for Theological Integrity and was made its chairman. He would remain highly involved in its leadership for the next 50 years. He officially and publicly stepped down as its chairman at the 2012 National Convention.

Although Forlines retired from a full-time position from FWBBC in 1992, he has remained involved in its work, being granted the honorary title, Professor Emeritus. In this capacity, he continued to teach at the college until five years ago. But he kept fairly regular hours in his Welch office until the college campus moved to Gallatin. He has also taught overseas throughout his retirement. Beginning in 1996, with the assistance of Free Will Baptist International Missions he made numerous trips to lecture in Ukraine and Russia to Baptist pastors.

Forlines's ministry has spanned six decades. He has written multitudes of great Christian articles and books during his long ministry. Among his best and most influential may be Biblical Ethics, Biblical Systematics, Morals and Orthodoxy, The Doctrine of Perseverance, The Romans Commentary, Classical Arminianism, and The Quest for Truth. His entire career has been characterized by writing book after book. He just finished another one for which he is now seeking publication. For his hours of writing and study, he uses an office which Sylvan Park Free Will Baptist Church graciously provided after the school's relocation. Welch has an office waiting for him in its Gallatin facilities into which he will soon relocate once again.

Today, Leroy Forlines is a healthy 91-year-old, having celebrated his most recent birthday in November. He and Fay continue to reside in the house they have lived in for almost 55 years.

5 Truths About the Diversity of the First Christmas

O Christmas, do you ever remind us that people think their way of talking, writing, and celebrating is *the* way. Christmas starts quarrels over minutia more than all of the rest of the holidays combined. From what phrases to say to when to listen to music, we ironically turn this allegedly peaceful time of the year designed to put our focus on the birth of the most significant person ever into a self-aggrandizing time of opinions and disagreements. I realize many of these things are not meant to be taken too seriously (I honestly do not care if you consider *Die Hard* a Christmas movie) but if we are honest, we know that we get disproportionately passionate in defending some traditions.

If we study the first Christmas, we find that it was quite diverse. And I have no doubt an application to this is that we really need to realize that diversity matters to God. Much of (and dare I say most of) our way of “doing” Christmas are not absolute truths to be followed and argued. And it may be that these silly differences of opinion about Christmas represent bigger and more serious issues we have with a lack of diversity in things things that do matter. Like worship and community life.

With that in mind, here are five things about the first Christmas and its diversity that can teach us to embrace the differences we have with others.

The worshippers were diverse

Mary was a young virgin. Joseph was a carpenter descended from King David. The Magi were astrologers and may have been kings. The first group of people commanded to go see Jesus were laity shepherds. Zechariah was a priest and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. Anna was a very elderly prophetess. Matthew, an author, was a Jewish tax collector. Luke was a Gentile doctor. The messengers from God to man about Jesus were angels and not even human. And I'd even include the animals as well, since their feeding trough is mentioned by name in the story.

The voices of Christmas are far more diverse than we are accustomed to in our lives. Perhaps Christmas should awaken us to this fact and motivate us to long to hear from a variety of sources on how to understand and serve Jesus. And it could be very edifying to worship with a diverse community and buck against the typical cultural model of a church filled with people as similar to me as possible.

The reactions were diverse

The Angels comforted Mary and the shepherds, both of whom were terrified. The shepherds told people about Jesus and glorified God. Mary pondered the events deeply and treasured them in her heart. The magi bowed down to worship and brought gifts. Anna, Zechariah and Simeon gave prophecies. Simeon held Jesus in his arms. John the Baptist leaped in his mother's womb. Elizabeth gave a glad cry.

How we react to the Christmas season may seem so important to us that we expect others to feel similarly. When in fact there are many ways to react to Christmas and if they do not have anything to do with gift-giving or Santa or even huge family gatherings, they can still be good. As long as they are legitimate reactions to who Jesus is.

The geography was diverse

Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born. After his birth they went to Egypt for a while and then back to Nazareth where he was raised. The Magi were from "the East" and while it is impossible to say for sure where exactly that meant, it was a long distance from Galilee.

The lady who leads the prayer time at my church on Sunday mornings before Sunday school often brings requests from magazines that talk about places and people I have never heard of. I appreciate this instead of always just praying for our church, our neighborhood or our missionaries. God is indeed a God of the whole world and even Christmas reminds us of that.

The prophecies of Jesus as Savior were diverse

Jesus's name means "Jehovah is salvation" so centering the idea of Christmas around "Jesus is our Savior" is perfect. Yet even that phrase was broken down theologically that first Christmas. Consider just in Zechariah's song in Luke 1:67-80 that he teaches, among other things, that Jesus would be:

A Redeemer

This is a word that in and of itself has layers of meaning. A first century Jew who knew their Scriptures could think of Ruth, Job or even Levitical law and understand that Zechariah meant that God sent Jesus to rescue us from spiritual slavery and that in some way he was going to purchase us for God out of our pathetic circumstances. As a family-redeemer. This explains why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6 that "you were bought at a price" and in Acts 20 he claimed the church was "purchased by the blood Christ".

A Warrior King

The literal phrase Zechariah used was “horn of salvation” which is found in several places in his Scriptures to communicate victory over enemies and security and refuge. Combine this with the fact that Zechariah references David, the general king who led Israel to many war victories, some translations call Jesus “a mighty king” in this prophecy.

The Jesus of the Gospels did get angry and even violent (Mark 11) but he came to die and was a willing sacrifice who did not fight back against his human enemies. Yet to Zechariah’s audience, they knew that God was a Mighty Warrior King, as in Isaiah 42:13:

The Lord will go forth like a warrior,
He will arouse His zeal like a man of war.
He will utter a shout, yes, He will raise a war cry.
He will prevail against His enemies.

And then Revelation describes Jesus this way:

“And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His name is The Word of God. The armies which are in heaven were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

We know from the New Testament that our enemies are not other humans. They are Satan, sin and death. And that Christ came to conquer them all. I think the resurrected Jesus is very much an image of the Old Testament Triumphant Warrior God and also of King David the War General, not victorious over the Philistines or Assyrians but over evil forces of darkness and over physical and spiritual death. And I think Zechariah prophecies this. The doctrine of the first Christmas goes much

deeper than the incarnation and the image of baby Jesus.

Our covenant.

Zechariah referenced Abraham, which was the covenant he knew at the time, but we now know a covenant that is better and forever in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:15).

A light to all nations.

Darkness has a strong association with secrecy and wickedness and confusion. All of these things were true of most nations spiritually before Christ. But he came to bring knowledge of not mere morality but of salvation to God for everyone.

And there are more I could discuss. But what all of these phrases have in common is that they describe Jesus as Savior in terminology that demonstrates how profound, complex and marvelous that phrase is.

The object of worship was not diverse

And this is the most important thing of all. It is easy in our culture to bow down to diversity so far that we consider all beliefs and religions equal. And while I do not unnecessarily disrespect any belief or worldview, I without shame proclaim Jesus Christ as my Lord and God, the only means to get to God and the unique object of my worship. Christianity is exclusive by its nature because of Jesus, as any monolithic religion is and as all truth claims have to be in some sense. Christianity is significant not for how inclusive it is of all beliefs, but rather how distinct it is. It desires to be inclusive of all

people, notably all types of people and the New Testament reiterates this over and over. Yet the way to Heaven is narrow. Jesus is the only door.

No matter your traditions this Christmas, the original story is exhaustively about Jesus and his role in human history. It wasn't just a birth. It was a collision of God and humanity that changed everything that matters in eternity.

As always, we welcome feedback in the comment section below.

Five Theological Sounding Words Christians Should Know and Use

In the 15 years of being a pastor and preacher in Chicago, I don't think I have ever one time used the word "Justification" in a sermon. Or "Sanctification". I believe the concepts they entail are necessary to teach but I have always felt that they could be heavy to my audience and I am comfortable explaining them with other words.

That is not the case with all of the "Christian-ese" the American church has. There are some words I do not want to erase from my vocabulary in an effort to make the Bible easier to understand. I believe there are some words that have no good synonyms and are so rich in meaning that the church does well to learn and use them. Because you can't find anything equivalent in secular vocabulary. Christianity has concepts and truths unequaled and unparalleled in the world.

As always I seek balance. I don't want to talk completely in esoteric jargon as a Christian but neither do I want to try to be so hip with my lingo I eliminate all theological terms entirely. And I will say up front that your list may be different than mine. I am not claiming this is the "correct" list on this topic. With that said, here are five I use:

1. Covenant

I have written before that [I do not mind using the phrase](#) "Christianity isn't a religion; it's a relationship." Yet the word "relationship" can be woefully inadequate when describing the relationship our God wants us to have with Him in Jesus Christ. I have a relationship with my uncle. But I don't have a *covenant* relationship.

For millennia, through men like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, God has used this word to communicate how he enters into a relationship with men. And there are consistencies in all of their covenants: a promise on God's part, a symbol or sign to confirm it and a response of a faithful commitment by the followers. It was a very serious relational pact to be entered into. It was not to be taken lightly. It was like a spiritual marriage.

Now through Jesus Christ we enter into a New Covenant, not from the blood of lambs and goats, but through his blood. And we need to grasp the level and seriousness of the commitment that covenant is. No other word in English really captures it. "Marriage" is close but it carries too much in connotation. Yet man-woman marriage is supposed to be a picture of the God-man covenant commitment.

2. Atonement

I have written about this before for REO when writing about

[Leviticus for Good Friday in 2016](#). This word matters to teaching about Christian salvation and how we can enter into covenant with God. No other word (apart from the very similar “propitiation”) in English carries so many layers in meaning and truth.

In general, in both Testaments, it has a threefold significance: a substitute is given in place of our sin, our sin is forgiven and God’s wrath is satisfied. All three of these facts are crucial to our theology and faith. And God gave us a beautifully concise word to capture them together. We see it in Leviticus over and over, we see it change in the Gospels and we see that change explained in Romans and Hebrews. I love the Bible for how I marvel at how it is both consistent and simultaneously divided by a major transformation at the same time. Jesus is now the substitution (not animals) but God’s wrath is still satisfied and my sins are still forgiven.

3. Evangelism

Phrases like “Sharing your faith” and “Witnessing” are great but the word “Evangelize” literally means to preach or proclaim the Gospel. And that is our message. I would put “Gospel” as one of the five words but it has such a deep, rich and multi-faceted meaning it cannot be treated in a short paragraph. Yet I will mention [I still agree with REO contributor David Lytle](#) when he expands the definition of Gospel to the entirety of the content of four books we have on Jesus’s life and not something as simple as “The Gospel is that Jesus died for your sins and rose again.”

Regardless of what Gospel means, we are mandated to share it and we have a ready-made verb to communicate that mandate. Phrases like “Preach the Gospel” conjure up ideas of standing on a stage in front of a crowd. “Evangelism” has less baggage, in my opinion (though the word “Evangelical” may have a ton of

baggage).

4. Lamenting

I suppose this is a word that we hear in English outside of church, but not very often. Yet the Bible has a form of this word as the name of one of its books, which is significant to me.

Christians should know how to lament. And the importance of it. Jeremiah is called the “weeping prophet” and Jesus was a “man of sorrows and familiar with the deepest suffering”. Over 60 of the Psalms can be labeled “Lament Psalms”. And in both testaments over and over God’s people are commanded to weep and wail and all manner of similar verbs (Isaiah 22:12, James 4:9).

But I think there is a theological significance to the word “Lament”. I believe it teaches us how to process the horror that comes from both the evil in the world and in our hearts in a God-honoring and proactive way, instead of a reactive state that similar English words convey.

5. I AM

This one is different and not just because it’s two words. It’s because it’s not a verb or a noun like the others. It is in some way a name for God that connects Old Testament YHWH (another name Christians should know) and New Testament Jesus Christ.

The significance of Jesus saying in John 8:58 that “before Abraham was, I AM” is monumental. They started to stone him for it because his opponents knew he was claiming what YHWH claimed in Exodus 3:14-15. Outside of how fascinating it is that here Jesus claims to be outside of time and that he

cannot be restricted by human logic or the grammar of any language (“before Abraham was, I AM” is linguistically nonsensical in every language I have studied), Jesus saying “I AM” communicates a claim to and self-awareness of his deity. He knew perfectly Scriptures like Exodus 3:14-15 and Isaiah 42:8 and was intentional with his words.

There are many other “I AM” statements by Jesus and perhaps my favorite is in John 18:6 when a detachment of soldiers carrying torches and weapons went to arrest Jesus. He asked them whom they were looking for and they said, “Jesus of Nazareth”. And he replied “I AM”. Some translations add the word “he” as in “I am he” for clarity but I think it makes the meaning less clear. For when he said this phrase, they drew back and fell to the ground. No army in the world can stand up to the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. I think there is power in this name of God as stated in Exodus. And Jesus being God in the flesh and using this name, humbled these men.

Are there theology words you feel similar about?