

Fish Tales
(From the Belly of the Whale)
Fifty of the Greatest Misconceptions Ever Blamed on The Bible

Hook, Line, and Sinker

#50-1

by

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FISH TALE:

*An improbable story that alludes to the tendency of
fishermen to exaggerate the size of their catch; figuratively,
a great big lie.*

An Unrelenting Search

YOU BELIEVE *The Bible* is the inspired word of God, but can you always tell the difference between a genuine message from it and a counterfeit version? Take, for example, the following truths that are said to come straight from Holy Writ. Which of them would you say are genuine and which would you say are counterfeit?

Jesus was just a poor carpenter's son before His real ministry began.

Only humans get into Heaven; sorry, no pets allowed.

Jesus was born on December 25th.

Theology and science are natural enemies because of their inherent incompatibility.

Hell, like Heaven, is a place of perpetual existence.

Nobody knows the day or the hour of the Second Coming of Christ, not even Jesus.

The verse: "Wives submit to your husbands" is a one-way street.

"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" tells us God demands punishment in every case without exception.

"Slaves obey your masters" proves that slavery is biblically sanctioned and therefore God-ordained.

If you're like most people, you'd probably say they're all genuine, right? But actually, they're some of the greatest misconceptions ever blamed on *The Bible*, because as it turns out, all of these so-called "truths" are false. That is to say, they are if you look to the Scriptures to verify such things.

To that end, *Fish Tales (From the Belly of the Whale)* plunges you headlong into an unrelenting search for biblical truth that will forever change how you think about the word of God. Along the way, you'll discover that *Fish Tales* not only exposes the origins of such misconceptions, but it also restores *The Bible's* original message of hope and inspiration, which once made it humanity's brightest light in a darkened world.

The Mirror of Truth

IT'S BEEN SAID that confession is good for the soul. If that's true, then I'd like to make my confession, here and now. When I look in the mirror, I'm never quite sure about what I see. Is it the face of a fearless seeker of truth, or of one afraid of embracing the truth? I can't help wondering: What is it about a person that causes them to eagerly run toward the light one day and then eagerly flee from it the next? Why do I find myself abandoning the truth that so often rescues me just when I need it most?

But wait. Could there be another reason why I'm so divided? Is it because *The Bible* often creates as much confusion as it does clarity? After all, it's not only the source of the very best that humanity can offer the world, but it can also be the source of the very worst. And how is that even possible, anyway? Does that mean there's a better way to interpret its message? And if so, am I alone in the search for this better way or actually one among many? Certainly I'm not the first person to ask the question: What is truth? And I'm certainly not the last to wonder why no one bothered to offer an answer.

Then it dawns on me: Maybe we *were* told the answer, but we didn't like the answer we were given. So, when we ask how *The Bible* can inspire both the best and worst in humanity, maybe the problem doesn't lie so much with the book itself but with something altogether different. But what?

Or should I say ... who?

Of course, the Scriptures describe the role that many have played in this great whodunit of the ages. Naturally, there's God. There is—if you believe *The Bible*—the devil. There are the myriad ones who've made their way across the stage of biblical history: Adam and Eve; and Cain and Abel; there's Noah and his family, and Abraham and his descendants; Moses, the prophets; Jesus and the apostles. And just like every great story, each of these timeless tales has a hero and a villain. More often than not, though, while it's easy to blame all our problems on the devil for his role in humanity's downfall, or God for letting it happen, it turns out that the real villain is us.

When we look in the mirror of truth, in those moments when we're being perfectly honest with ourselves, what do we see but two faces staring back at us? No doubt this is the source of many a cartoon where we see an angel sitting on someone's shoulder and a demon sitting on the other while the torn soul in the middle wrestles with the irrefutable logic of what's being whispered into either ear.

The idea is as old as the story of the Garden of Eden. Eve gazed thoughtfully at the Forbidden Fruit in her hand, knowing full well she shouldn't eat it. But right there in her ear was the voice of reason, whispering innocently: "Did God *really* mean what He said?"

Of course, we insist that, given the same opportunity, we'd have done things differently. We'd never make the same mistake she and Adam made—if given the chance, that is.

So what did God do? He figured out how to call our bluff, so that every day and every hour, we *are* faced with the same dilemma. We're faced with having to make a choice between the advice that we're hearing in one ear or the other. "This is the right path." "No, this is it." "Are you *sure* God said to go this way?"

And sadly, because we're all made of the same stuff as our first parents, we, who insist we'd do things differently, end up betraying our own cause, just as they did. The Apostle Paul described our dilemma quite eloquently:

I've discovered this principle in life—that although I want to do what's right, I inevitably do what's wrong. I love God's Law with all my heart, but there's another power within me that's at war with my mind.¹

¹ Romans 7:21-23

Yes, Satan, as the voice in one ear, does all he can to shipwreck our lives; and yes, God, as the voice in the other ear, does all He can to steer us clear. But guess what, folks? We're still the only ones to blame for repeating the same mistakes that were made so long ago.

But all is not lost. Because in looking at this age-old drama, this inevitable chain of events doesn't spell the end of us. In the hands of the eternal God of redemption, we find ourselves on a new path that teaches us something we could never have learned had we not failed so miserably to begin with. Thus, the end of ourselves, which seemed like such a tragedy at first, actually winds up acting as the prelude for a transformation of biblical proportions.

It's to just such a journey of discovery, then, that I invite all those who've ever asked the same questions that I have: What makes *The Bible* so easy to misinterpret? What forces conspire against us to complicate matters? And what can we do to counteract those forces in order to lay hold of the truth that's literally staring us in the face?

Turning Light into Darkness

ONE OF THE MOST famous pictures in Scripture is that of Jesus calling His disciples to follow Him and become "fishers of men."² But as marvelous as this scene is—one that speaks of a God Who is ever seeking to save the lost—there's also an ominous flipside; another fisherman is just as determined to fill his boat with fish. That fisherman is Satan; and he has his own crew of fishermen, the children of disobedience in every age, who love darkness more than light.

Whereas Jesus and His crew fish for men with words of truth, Satan and his bunch snag their prey with words of deceit—a succulent bait which disguises the hook that spells the end of any and all unsuspecting fish.

It's this competition, then, between truth and lies, between God and Satan, between two factions of fishermen, that lies at the heart of this story. A whopper of a fish tale, it is, however, not a fish tale in the usual sense, though it does contain certain elements of the tall tale. But in this case, these elements are not interjected to brag but to supply an antidote to the devil's hook of lies. Any exaggeration or distortion of truth in this tale will be engaged strictly to demonstrate the difference between the original form of truth and its refashioned counterpart.

What we're talking about is none other than the truth that the Lord of the Sea Himself has given to His fishermen: *The Bible*.

In the hands of Jesus' fishermen, God's word is a hearty tool that elicits the most cherished commodity in creation—*trust*, or, as it's expressed in biblical terms, *faith*. "Without faith," the Scriptures tell us, "it's impossible to please God."³ By faith, the ancients parted the waters, raised the dead, and opened the gates of Heaven. Naturally, something this precious to God is the greatest threat to the prince of this world, Satan, who never stops trying to thwart this truth-affirming, faith-creating word of God.

Yet ironically, the one thing the devil has going for him in his quest—the only thing, really—is that contained within the very nature of God's word is a peculiar conundrum. The word is presented to humanity in the form of a paradox, designed not only to reveal the ways of God but also to conceal them. This is done, according to the edict of Heaven, to allow access to the things of God to the faithful while at the same time to bar access to thieves and robbers. Unfortunately, though, that means the very tool that God uses to spark His rescue effort of humanity also contains the slimmest of potentials with which the enemies of God can nullify that divine effort.

It's this double-edged nature of *The Bible*, then, that lies at the heart our dilemma, and why we're so often faced with two apparently opposing realities inspired by a single source. That's why it's so easy to dissect truths of Scripture from their context and reshape them into new versions of "truth."

Slaves obey your masters; judge not or else you'll be judged; wives submit to your husbands; an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth—all familiar concepts that have their origin in Scripture. Yet every one of them, when reinterpreted apart from their proper context, is used to justify behavior that's clearly opposed by the true spirit of Scripture, from cover to cover.

The maddening result: Although *The Bible* has inspired many of the finest contributions to human

² *Matthew* 4:19; *Mark* 1:17

³ *Hebrews* 11:6

culture, like the universal brotherhood of mankind, the existence of the human soul, and the equality of every individual on this planet, it's also inspired some of the most damaging, such as slavery, genocide, and warfare.

How and why can such contradictory energies be fueled by the same source of inspiration? And more importantly, how is this paradoxical nature of Scripture exploited by the enemies of truth who seek to confound our understanding of it at every turn?

These questions are precisely what this book, *Fish Tales (From the Belly of the Whale)*, will seek to answer, so that by better understanding the numerous factors that contribute to this dilemma, we'll be that much closer to disarming their effect in our lives.

Counting down one misconception after the other, we'll analyze how these biblical concepts have become so misconstrued over time, revealing the three-step principle involved in this process.

Step One: To create a great misconception, latch onto any idea that forms a legitimate basis of biblical truth. Step Two: Isolate that truth from its context and then discourage any reference to other verses that might contradict it. Step Three: Repeat this new version of the so-called "truth," in zealous opposition to all that's contained in the initial version of said truth.

While this process might seem at first too simple to be of any real effectiveness, any doubt as to its power is eliminated upon seeing this three-step principle in action.

For example, if you ask a hundred people, you'll find that practically everyone believes *The Bible* says, "Money is the root of all evil." Here we have a classic case of a great misconception. That's because, one, it presents us with a solid slice of scripturally-based truth; two, it's examined entirely in isolation from its original context; and, three, it's quoted so often and with such conviction that it's actually entered the lexicon of human ideology.

Such simple steps, yes; but consider how effective these three simple steps are, after all. Consider how often you, too, have been tempted to believe that money is the root of all evil—that is, if you consider yourself a true believer of *The Bible*.

Of course you'd only be tempted to believe it should you resist the urge to check Scripture for yourself, because then you'd discover the Apostle Paul really said that the "love of" money is the root of all evil, and not as most people assume, that money, in and of itself, is the offending root.

So, if you've ever wanted to know why *The Bible* presents such a contradictory reality, then it's time to take your own plunge into the belly of the whale. There, you'll discover that just because the sacred truths of Scripture have often been distorted by those who wish to turn light into darkness, this isn't the final chapter of the tale. And in the end, you'll find that when God sets forth His intention in Scripture, He actually means what He says and says what He means, regardless of centuries of disinformation that contribute to the greatest misconceptions ever blamed on *The Bible*.

Concepts in Misconceptions

THE BIBLE is undoubtedly the most influential book of all time. To many, it's a wellspring of divine wisdom; to others, the source of insidious disinformation. It inspires mankind with the deepest solemnities, and it conjures up the darkest horrors. It stimulates the sublime, and justifies the perverse.

Much of the world's greatest literature and art springs—like Athena, fully grown—from Scripture: Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Rembrandt's *Belshazzar's Feast*, Michelangelo's *David*, and DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*. It's profoundly impacted philosophy, science, technology, and politics: Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, Kepler's *Laws of Planetary Motion*, da Vinci's *Codex on the Flight of Birds*, and Jefferson's *Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms*.

But unfortunately, *The Bible* has also been used as a force for evil in the world, as many individuals, institutions, and movements have twisted its truths to serve their own purposes. Through a subtle manipulation of its message, Scripture has been used to justify the enslavement of humans, the subjection of women, and the slaughter of the animal kingdom. As the inspiration for social engineering, it's produced such ill-fated ventures as Utopianism and Socialism, and such dastardly movements as the Salem Witch Hunts and the Spanish Inquisition. Manifested into a social system, it's been used to underpin inhumane political regimes like Fascism, Nazism, and Communism.

In light of such historical evidence, it's clear that no one is immune from *The Bible's* ability to both

bless and curse anyone who encounters its strangely contradictory contents. When one expects to find a basis for hope and peace in Scripture, we find instead the seeds of despair and strife. Instead of illuminating our hearts with light and truth, it imparts darkness and confusion.

Just think how often in your own experience you've been confronted with some apparently profound gem of wisdom, only to find yourself wondering why it just doesn't seem to ring true. You ask yourself about the source of this so-called "gem." So you search your heart, you search every book you can find on the subject, and more importantly, you search the Scriptures, hoping to discover the origin of this gem. Yet much to your chagrin, you find you've fallen short of your goal. Nowhere is that particular truth expressed the way it was told to you. Why, you ask, should this be the case?

Sadly, it's because in many instances the so-called "truths" we're being sold are nothing more than a bill of goods, a mere shadow of the original facts. They're "truths" that have been watered down, regurgitated, and repackaged under a different frame of reference from the one in which they were first conceived. Worse still, when you search *The Bible* from cover to cover, you find that the verse as it was quoted to you is conspicuously absent, as is anything even remotely resembling it. So you're left more confused than ever and haunted by the thought that there's no point in searching any longer because there's no real basis for truth in the first place.

Yet, like a thirsty pilgrim, you cling to the hope that eventually you'll stumble onto the spring of truth. And you do so because that's the way God made us. Built into our very nature is a yearning for the truth, a hunger that by God's design can't be stifled, no matter how much the world, the flesh, and the devil conspire to dull it. As the great Christian apologetic C.S. Lewis pointed out:

We're like people who must believe in the reality of Heaven even though we've yet to go there ourselves, even as people who may have never tasted food or water would still know that such things as food and water existed simply because we're men and women who hunger and thirst for them.

In other words, even if we'd never seen or tasted food or water, we'd at least know of their existence because of our desire for them. As such, we could never resist the urge to find food and water, no matter how hard we tried to live without them.

Likewise, we must persevere in trying to discover the true meaning of what our hearts and minds grapple with daily. We must continue striving to understand the true nature of reality, because otherwise we're robbed of our most valuable quality, which is our desire to seek truth and grasp at it, regardless of what others may think of our homely efforts. We do so because something deep down inside us can and does comprehend the truth when we see or hear it, in spite of all our doubts and fears to the contrary.

This ability to instinctually recognize the truth is, in fact, the essence of what it means to be human. In this, we catch a glimpse into one of the most sublime paradoxes mankind has yet to contemplate, as Albert Einstein explained: "The great mystery of the Universe is ... its comprehensibility."

That said, how do we go about rescuing the truth from these centuries-old incursions? How do we strip away so many layers of disinformation? Our first order of business, I believe, is to consider how biblical misconceptions get started in the first place. Like most fallacies that humans insist on embracing, a great misconception is always based on a foundation of genuine truth. The more closely an idea seems to originate from a legitimate basis, then all the better, no matter how absurd or outrageous that idea appears.

Such is the case with the familiar adage: "Once in grace, always in grace." It doesn't matter that it's not in *The Bible*. People assume it's there because it sounds scriptural. That's because, in principle, it is based on real biblical wisdom. The only problem: The principle speaks of God's integrity and faithfulness, and not—I repeat, *not*—of those who are trying to connect with Him because He can be trusted.

Unfortunately, the idea that once you've entered into a relationship with God you're locked into a perpetual relationship with Him, no matter what you do thereafter, simply has no scriptural foundation. To this very point *The Book of Hebrews* is quite emphatic, from first to last. According to it, you stay in God's grace if, and only if, you continue in the way you began.⁴ You begin your relationship with God by having faith, and therefore you must continue the trip, right up until the end, with the same kind of

⁴ *Hebrews* 3:14

faith that got you started.

Otherwise you end up like those miserable Israelites, who began their wilderness journey in faith, having witnessed God's deliverance at every turn, only to find themselves wandering in a circle for four long decades, just a few miles short of the Promised Land.⁵

So, apart from having to get over the shock that this verse isn't in *The Bible*, the next question is: How does one tell the difference, logically and honestly, between the original truth and its counterfeit?

The answer: In spite of all the forces that obscure the truth, the forms of disinformation still persist in revealing conspicuous patterns, so that upon further inspection of these patterns, a higher truth emerges which enables us to discern the original from the counterfeit.

To demonstrate this, let's consider the next aspect of a great misconception. Take an actual truth found in *The Bible*, and isolate it from its context. Again, the more subtle that this process of isolation is executed, all the better. In this way, almost any manner of disinformation can be blamed on *The Bible*.

A classic example of this technique involves a famous passage in the twenty-fourth chapter of *The Gospel of Matthew* where Jesus' disciples asked Him when the End of the Age would occur. As tradition would have us believe, Jesus told them that not even He knew when it would occur, that only His Father in Heaven knew the day or the hour. But if you examine the context of His conversation, you might be surprised to find out that Jesus really said:

Heaven and Earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away. No man knows about *that* day or hour, not the angels in Heaven, or the Son, but only the Father.⁶

From this, we see that Jesus was talking about the day when Heaven and Earth will pass away, and not His Second Coming, which as anyone who's studied *The Bible* knows will be followed by the long-awaited Millennial Reign. Then, after the Millennium, Satan, who's bound for the duration of this thousand-year period, will be loosed for "a little season," after which he leads one final rebellion against God and is then thrown into the Lake of Fire.⁷

By allowing the context of this statement to convey its meaning, we're able to determine what day and hour Jesus was really talking about. He was describing an event that occurs at a different moment in the biblical timeline—after the Second Coming, after the Millennium, after the "little season," after Satan is thrown into the Lake of Fire, and after the Final Judgment.

Following all of these events, then, the twenty-first chapter of *The Book of Revelation* opens with the words:

And I saw a new Heaven and a new Earth, because the first Heaven and first Earth had *passed away*, and the sea was no more.⁸

Another persistent pattern of the great misconceptions of *The Bible* is to take a truth found in Scripture and, through a sustained campaign of manipulation, create a new version that eventually becomes synonymous with the original truth, thereby replacing it in the memory traces of humanity.

For example, there's the case of probably the most familiar verse ever to be blamed on *The Bible*. In its original form, it reads as the Apostle Paul warning Timothy that "the love of money is the root of all evil."⁹ But so many centuries of distortion have woven such an impenetrable blanket of tradition over this passage that everyone is now convinced that Paul said, "*Money* is the root of all evil." Such a huge shift in meaning, and all accomplished through the omission of just three little words: "...*the love of*."

Likewise, *The Bible* contains the well-known prohibition in the form of the Sixth Commandment. In it, we read: "You should not kill." As a result, generation after generation have read this verse as condemning any form of killing, no matter how justified it might seem in human terms. Usually one hears this verse being intoned in the context of self-defense or police protection.

But anyone who takes the time to read this passage in the original Hebrew language will discover that it actually reads: "You should not *murder*." Naturally, this interpretation dramatically shifts the

⁵ Hebrews 3:8-19

⁶ Matthew 24:35-36

⁷ Revelation 20:1-10

⁸ Ibid. 21:1

⁹ First Timothy 6:10

meaning of this passage, thereby easing the conscience of many a dutiful soldier or police officer.

By correctly translating such words, we're also able to understand events which have long plagued readers of *The Old Testament*, who find themselves confused by a God Who apparently has no problem with sending the Israelites into battle after battle, in the much-understood Conquest of Canaan.

So there you have it. You've seen just how to create a great misconception of *The Bible*. Understand this subtle yet powerful process, and you'll be better prepared to reverse its effect in your own life. Let's review.

Step One: Latch onto a truth that seems to be so thoroughly based on Scripture that upon hearing it your audience is convinced it's in there, as in: "Once in grace, always in grace." Never mind that you can't find it in *The Bible*. So what; it sounds like it is, right?

Step Two: Isolate a known passage from its context so that ever after no one suspects there might be an alternative meaning of those words, like when Jesus said, "No one knows the day or the hour, not even Me." Who cares if this passage isn't referring to the event that tradition claims it does, as long as everyone agrees that it is.

And finally, Step Three: Repeat this new version of the "truth," until eventually whatever truth was once obvious is rendered altogether alien from its initial reality, as with the supposed verses: "Money is the root of all evil" or "You should not kill."

In this way, even a solid mountain of truth can be whittled away until there's nothing left but a dusty pile of clichés. Thus, what Jesus said has never been truer:

You reject the commands of God so you can keep your own vain traditions, but by persisting on teaching such nonsense, you simply make God's word useless to you.¹⁰

From the Least to the Greatest

NONE OF THE following essays are intended to say all that can be said on the subjects addressed here. They're merely "ice-breakers," if you will, designed to begin reversing the ages-long atrophy that has stymied a *Bible*-oriented view of them. In doing so, I hope to begin a new chapter in their ongoing history.

As for the order in which they appear, I assure you a great deal of thought has gone into their arrangement. Numerous factors have been considered, particularly the way that certain misconceptions have inspired the most harm to the largest segment of humanity for which the God of *The Bible* undoubtedly intended a far kinder fate. However, because the accuracy of which ones should be considered the greatest misconceptions is a matter of personal conscience, I don't claim their order is verifiable according to any divine principle of understanding on my part.

Another important factor is how the order of the list itself helps to illuminate the main argument of this work, which is to answer the question of how these misconceptions came into being in the first place. Because of this, it must be noted that should the reader skip ahead to those misconceptions that interest only them and so, "rearrange their order," as it were, an understanding of their content will be altered. In short, the order of the list, though not set in stone, does contain a logical flow in which the reading of one essay will lend itself to a better understanding of the one that follows, and so on and so forth.

That said, I can assure the reader that all due diligence has been exhausted in trying to provide a logic to their unfolding, from the least of the fifty misconceptions to the greatest. Therefore, in addition to ordering the list in terms of their social impact and the way this order affects its reception, the next factor that was considered was the degree to which certain ideas have become "synonymous" with The Bible as opposed to their being merely "endorsed" by it.

By that I mean that many of the misconceptions on the list, like the Israelites always being slaves in Egypt prior to the Exodus, or God sending serpents after them once they began their wilderness journey, clearly originate from The Bible. But because they've never been seen as more than incidental stories, they can be easily neutralized by pointing out the scriptural context in which they've been written. Granted, such tall tales are maddening, particularly because of the way they undermine an appreciation for the integrity of God's word. But they're still not as dangerous as those that have moved

¹⁰ Mark 7:9, 13

beyond the status of mere anecdote and taken on the aura of Scripture itself, such as “Money is the root of evil,” or “You should not kill,” or “Once in grace, always in grace.” The misconceptions that fall into this latter category, due to their having insinuated themselves into the very fabric of Scripture, are much more difficult to counteract; and for that reason alone, they find themselves nearer to the top of our list.

But first, it's time to lay a foundation for verifying the soundness of such decisions, time now to proceed to the first portion of our list en route to that greatest of all misconceptions ever to be blamed on *The Bible*.

REEL ONE

The Hook

#50-34

Misconception #50

Before the Tower of Babel, Everyone Spoke Just One Language

THE FIRST BOOK of *The Bible* tells us of an ancient world in which all humanity spoke a single language. Then, at some point, the people united to thwart God's purposes and, as a result, were punished for their rebellion by being scattered. This scattering was done, according to *The Book of Genesis*, through a miraculous event known as the “Confusion of Tongues,” whereby God simultaneously rendered all humans incapable of understanding the language of any family but their own.

Naturally, this story has many implications. Interpreted as an origin myth, scholars have assumed it's simply a quaint tale designed to explain the inexplicable—of how all the different languages of humanity began. As such, this story seems to provide a neat and concise—however far-fetched—answer in our pursuit to understand the origins of human culture.

In the case of this present study, though, we're not just trying to understand the foibles of human language; we're trying to determine if *The Bible* can be accepted as a valid record of history and not just a series of naïve traditions conceived by so many misguided primitives. And to do this, we require more than stories like this to explain our origins; we need to know if *The Bible* has the ability to say what it means and mean what it says. Then and only then are we capable of having what *The Bible* calls “faith.” And when I say that, I don't mean having faith in tales of magical worlds and mysterious acts of sorcery. I'm talking about having faith in a world that God alone can order for the sake of a humanity that can perceive that world in all its sublime wonder.

With that in mind, let's examine what *The Bible* has to say about this phase of human development and how centuries of tradition have altered the scriptural context in which this story sprang. The eleventh chapter of *Genesis* records:

And the whole Earth was speaking one language, and it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. And they said to one another, “Let's build a city and a tower whose top will reach Heaven, and let's make a name for ourselves, or else we'll be scattered.”

And the Lord said, “Look, the people are united, and they all have one language, and now nothing will be restrained from them which they've imagined to do. Therefore, let's go down and confuse their language so they'll no longer be able to understand one another.”

So the Lord scattered them across the face of the Earth, and they stopped building their city. And that's why the name of that city is called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world.¹¹

So there you have it—an origin story that provides us with a concise explanation, however fantastic, of how humans evolved from a single language root into a multi-branched tree of languages. Pretty straightforward stuff, right? I mean, thousands of years of tradition must be accurate about what *The Bible* says, wouldn't you agree?

But wait; not so fast. Don't forget our three laws of disinformation! First, latch onto a genuine truth of Scripture. Second, isolate that truth from its context. And third, repeat the new version of the "truth" until it's rendered altogether alien from its original meaning.

Now, let's see how this process has affected this familiar *Bible* story. First, place the story, depicted in the eleventh chapter of *Genesis*, on a pedestal of boundless conviction. Then, excise it from the rest of the book to create the impression that Scripture has nothing else to say about it. And finally, repeat this version of the story, again and again, thereby removing any doubt that *The Bible* or any of its supporters are anything but in complete agreement with this revised version.

The end result: From the beginning of time, mankind always spoke in a single language until they attempted to unite in an unholy alliance to undermine heavenly authority. Then God got fed up and, to subvert their power grab, He divided their language into many different ones, thereby scattering their efforts to the wind. The End, right?

Again I say: Not so fast!

Still, I can sense an argument from many people. You may be asking: "But won't I be rejecting *The Bible* if I no longer believe this story the way it's been told all these years?"

Fortunately, the answer is: "No, you won't be rejecting *The Bible* if you simply allow it to fill in the missing pieces of the puzzle on its own."

Never mind about human traditions that have only managed to provide us with an incomplete picture of this story, because as it turns out, *The Bible* really does have more to say on this subject than we've been led to believe. What's more, it's imperative that we come to a fuller understanding of what it says about this subject because so many people's faith are depending on a genuine awareness of what the Scriptures really say, and not merely a half-baked version of them.

I mean, if *The Bible* supposedly reports on important events in humanity's history, then shouldn't it be allowed to speak for itself? In the end, it'll prove its own ability to validate itself. If not, then the skeptics and naysayers will forever think themselves capable of toppling the truth of Scripture. Therefore, it's always our job as truth seekers to dig to the bottom of every mystery, no matter how much it may rattle our own cherished traditions.

And to think: The antidote for this kind of disinformation is simply a willingness to read *The Bible* for oneself. Stranger still, we only have to read the chapter immediately preceding the eleventh chapter of *Genesis*. Let's see for ourselves:

Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah: They are Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and to them were born sons after the Great Flood. The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one of them *after their own tongue*, after their families, and in their nations. And the sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Phut, and Canaan. These are the sons of Ham, *after their tongues*, in their countries, and in their nations. And to Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth, the oldest, even to him were born children, including Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram. So these are the sons of Shem, after their families, *after their tongues*, in their lands, and after their nations.¹²

Imagine that: In a plain and simple way, *The Bible* itself defies the misconception that before the Flood everyone spoke just one language. The tenth chapter of *Genesis* depicts a world where, before the Tower of Babel was ever conceived, the sons of Noah already spoke separate languages, each according

¹¹ *Genesis* 11:1-9

¹² *Ibid.* 10:1-31

to their own nation, country, and family, much as in today's world where geographical divides cause a language to splinter into a multiplicity of dialects.

In light of this context, then, we might better understand the hidden meaning in that simple phrase in *Genesis* that we've already visited but that can now be seen differently. Let's review that phrase.

And the Lord said, "Look, the people are united, and they all have one language, and now nothing will be restrained from them which they've imagined to do."¹³

Now that we've allowed Scripture itself to provide the much-needed context for this statement, the picture that emerges is one of a multilingual culture that existed before Nimrod's rule. Under the sway of Nimrod, however, a once-diverse people were assimilated into a homogeneous group, and all facilitated by this trend toward speaking a single language. It was this shift from multiple languages, then, to a single language that set the stage for a worldwide rebellion against God, as indicated by the words: "The people are united; they all have one language, and *now* nothing will restrain them."

So, as it turns out, it was Nimrod's homogenizing process, where everyone spoke the same language, that was at the heart of this rebellion, and which was undoubtedly why God struck at this aspect of it. In short, if a unification of language turned humanity into a virtually unstoppable mob, then a restoration of that diversity was all that was needed to quell such a rebellion; hence, the Confusion of Tongues.

With this new view in sight, the only question that remains is: If *The Bible* itself never insisted that mankind always spoke a single language before the Tower of Babel, then why would tradition have been so persistent as to this rendition of history?

The answer, I believe, lies in the frame of reference that became prevalent in the Age of Enlightenment, when mankind came to embrace reason and rationality in favor of revelation and spirituality. More importantly, in terms of this study of the processes of disinformation, it should be noted this shift in our worldview didn't occur overnight. It was the by-product of centuries of abuse that grew out of an overemphasis on revelation knowledge, in which modern man became suspicious—and rightly so, though I disagree with the end result of such pessimism—of a privileged few who claimed to have a corner on wisdom at the expense of the uninitiated.

In rejecting the notion of divine intervention, modern thinkers began to view the history of knowledge as an exclusively human enterprise. From this, the idea sprang up that societies underwent periodic transformations that evolved from a lower, primitive state to a higher, civilized state. In turn, this view of the incremental progression of human culture was overlaid onto the societies that were depicted in the biblical record as well. Accordingly, the first families and nations depicted there would've been seen as being incapable of anything but the most primitive modes of thought.

As such, a story about the origins of human language would've suffered from this same *a priori* position. Therefore, anything in *The Bible* that even hinted at this now-familiar pattern—from simple to complex, from single to many—would've been assumed to be the correct one. Thus, the story of the Tower of Babel, in which the earliest families of humanity seemed to all be speaking a single language from the start, provided a perfect synthesis between science and theology. Too nice a fit, in fact, for anyone to dare disagree that it might not actually be true, even though it requires a total disregard for the *Genesis* record as a whole, which, upon further review, clearly contradicts this cherished paradigm.

Misconception #49

All the Curses Inflicted by God are Perpetual in Nature

ONE OF THE most confusing things we humans face when considering God's personality is the way *The Bible* describes Him as being both a God of infinite love and a God of unquenchable anger. A consuming, dreadful fire, on one hand, and a calming, gentle breeze, on the other. It's this double-edged nature of God that more than anything else stabs at our confused minds. Exactly

¹³ *Genesis* 11:6

how can a supposedly loving God not only pronounce blessings of hope upon humanity but pronounce curses of doom on them as well?

It'd be so easy to simply shrug one's shoulders and write it off as just another of those impenetrable mysteries of God that no one dare question. But unfortunately, by avoiding this issue, we end up overlooking a very important aspect of God's personality. Therefore, we'll do our best to address this issue, if only for the sake of trying to scratch the surface regarding this much-misunderstood subject.

The starting point in trying to understand this side of God's personality is to first examine our own heart—spiritually speaking, that is—because it's actually an extension of the divine nature that God placed in all of us. As such, our emotions and reactions run the gamut of human experience; we love and we hate, we nurture and we destroy, we bless and we curse. So why wouldn't we expect the God Who made us to do the same thing, even if what He does is by nature on a much grander scale?

With that in mind, let's look at one of the most well-known curses of God in Scripture.

According to tradition, *The Book of Genesis* records the time when God confronted Eve for eating the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, whereupon He pronounced a curse that impacted not just her but every one of Eve's female descendants.

To the woman God said, "I'll intensify your sorrow, even to the point of your giving birth in pain so through suffering you'll bring forth your children. Not only that, but your desire will no longer be satisfied through your own bidding, but you'll be controlled by your husband, and from now on he will dominate you."¹⁴

Ever since that fateful day, the history of the world, like a great mirror held up to confirm or deny the truth of God's word, has borne witness to all of it. Ever since, women really have endured the pain of childbirth, the struggle for personal freedom, and the domination of men in every area of their lives. All of it testifying to the genuineness of that primordial prophecy.

Considering the apparent effectiveness of such a curse, the only question that remains is: Was this curse ever intended to be perpetual in nature? In other words, once God uttered it, was it supposed to be a curse without restriction, without end?

Well, based on the attitude of those who claim to believe in Scripture, you'd certainly think so, wouldn't you? Think of how many *Bible*-believing men love to quote this verse just when they find themselves losing an argument with an intelligent, strong-willed woman. That's when they suddenly feel it's their heavenly duty to make sure that no woman ever gets one over on one of God's divinely-inspired men.

Then, having successfully completed "stage one" of every good disinformation strategy, they just as quickly move on to "stage two" by isolating this verse from any others in Scripture that extol the overwhelmingly positive impact women have had throughout biblical history.

And moving on to "stage three," they repeat this well-worn verse so often and so passionately that even God Himself is sometimes tempted to believe that half of His creation is superior to the other half. Never mind that when we ask the husband where his wife is, we refer to her as his "better half." Just ignore annoying, anecdotal details like that, and keep repeating the story the way it's always been told, and before you know it, you, too, will discover just how effective this method is in lording it over any woman of your choice.

So, there you have it: Another perfectly orchestrated attack on the truth as it's recorded in *The Bible*.

But, returning to our earlier question: Is that all there is to the story of Eve's curse? Yes, the historical record testifies that God meant what He said; yes, men have done their damndest to make it stick—howbeit doing so while in a self-induced state of amnesia concerning those curses in *Genesis* that pertain to them. Nevertheless, does any of the foregoing prove that God intended for this curse of Eve to last forever?

After all, everyone has a stake in answering this question, not just Eve and her daughters, because if they're forever cursed, then that also means Adam and his sons are, too. So keep in mind, when we seek to answer this question concerning Eve, there's much more at stake than some of us might first have imagined.

So, what does *The Bible* have to say about the curses that God has pronounced upon His creatures?

¹⁴ *Genesis* 3:16

Is there really nothing more than perpetual doom for every recipient of His wrath? Let's take time, then, to search out what else the Scriptures say about this very perplexing subject.

Actually, the verse in *Genesis* immediately preceding the curse of Eve supplies us with the antidote that we're seeking. In it, *The Bible* records the curse that God uttered against the serpent who was, after all, the true instigator in this whole tragic affair.

And the Lord said to the serpent, "Because you've done this thing, you'll be cursed beyond all animals, and as a result, you'll crawl around on your belly, eating dust your entire life. And I'll create hostility between you and the woman, between your children and her children; and it'll crush your head, and you'll bruise his heel."¹⁵

According to most theologians, this verse actually contains the primordial kernel of every biblical prophecy that will ever unfold up to the end of time. And considering its ambiguous nature, it's very important that we take some time to break down its meaning.

All biblical scholars believe that, even though God seems to be cursing the serpent who deceived Adam and Eve, He's really talking to Satan. Addressing the creature that motivated the serpent in the first place, God tells the devil that He'll create hostility between him and humanity, and because of this hostility, a war will ensue between the devil's children and Eve's children. But in the end, it's going to be a child of Eve, which is to say, Christ Jesus, Who'll destroy the power of Satan.

Understood in that context, the same verse in *Genesis* could read:

And the Lord said to the serpent: "Because you've done this thing (in conspiring to trick Eve), you'll be cursed beyond all animals, and as a result you'll crawl around on your belly, eating dust your entire life. And I'll create hostility between you (speaking of Satan, who was really behind the actions of the serpent) and the (descendants of the) woman, between your children (of the devil) and her children (of humanity); and it's this child (of Eve's, which is to say, Christ) Who will crush your head (which speaks of Satan's power), and you (the devil) will bruise His heel (that is to say, the human component of the Messiah)."

Tying all this together, we can deduce that when Jesus was nailed to the tree of Golgotha, it was to fulfill this prophecy in *Genesis*. As the Apostle Paul later described it:

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having been made a curse for our sakes, because it is written: "Anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed!"

In this way, the blessing of Abraham is able to come upon the Gentiles because of what Jesus Christ has done so that we might receive the promise of God's Spirit through our faith.¹⁶

Once again, we can thank God for His written word when it comes to defending ourselves against those who'd hunt and peck us to death with their limited view of what *The Bible* supposedly says. In other words, without reconciling the paradox of God's written record with humanity's historical record, we might as well tell a woman living in today's world that when she goes into labor, she should bravely cope with the pain without the aid of modern medicine. Tell her God wants her to suffer the pains of childbirth because it's His perfect will for her to endure the pain, just as Eve was forced to endure the pain. Then tell her it'll always be God's desire for her to suffer the pain of childbirth, because He was the One Who instigated this curse in the first place. Pretty absurd, don't you think?

Of course it is; which is to say, it is, according to an appropriate understanding of God's word, in relationship to the Advent of Christ, which states:

Christ suffered for us, having left us an example so that we should follow in His footsteps...

When He suffered, He never threatened anyone in return, but He committed Himself to the One Who judges righteously and bore our sins in His own body on that tree so that we, being dead to our sins, should live for the sake of righteousness, by whose stripes we were healed.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Genesis* 3:14-15

¹⁶ *Galatians* 3:13-14

¹⁷ *First Peter* 2:21-24

In light of these facts, then, why would anyone believe that all the curses of God are perpetual in nature?

One reason is because most people suffer from a shortsighted view of Scripture. The tendency is always to focus on just one aspect of *The Bible* while de-emphasizing the rest of the story. So, because the deepest truths of Scripture are paradoxical in nature, it's virtually impossible to grasp the totality of God's word using this approach.

Consequently, people start evaluating God's personality in terms of their own limited view of Scripture. Human pet peeves then become God's supposed pet peeves; human interpretations of the human condition become God's supposed view of the human condition, and so on. In this, it's just as Jesus warned us about so long ago: "The traditions of mankind invariably nullify the word of God."

What happens next?

Not surprisingly, you eventually have a world running rampant with skeptics and critics. Skeptics love to deny that God curses or blesses anyone for any reason; critics seek to downplay the idea that the death and resurrection of Christ ushered in a new era of grace and peace.

But no matter. Regardless of all the naysaying of skeptics and critics, Christ accomplished something on Calvary that allowed God to lift His curse from anyone who'd simply trust Him. And for that, we who've received the gift of God's grace and peace in that act of trust will forever be grateful—men *and women* alike.

Misconception #48

When the Disciples Asked Jesus When He'd Establish His Kingdom, He Said They'd Have to Wait Till the End of the Age

THE DISCIPLES of Jesus nervously huddled about their self-assured leader as they quizzed Him about their uncertain future. Brutally oppressed by their Roman overlords, the disciples were anxious for Jesus to tell them something that would give them hope in a world where all hope seemed lost: "Lord, when will the glorious promises of our God finally deliver us from oppression and set us free?" "How much longer, Jesus, will You wander about as a mere itinerant preacher while we wait so patiently?" "And with our lives hanging in the balance every moment, what is taking You so long to manifest Your power?"

To which Jesus casually replied: "I'm afraid that, My friends, is something that will simply have to wait till the End of the Age; until then you're just going to have to grin and bear it like good little soldiers in the cause."

So a disciple asked, "Well, if that's the case, then can You at least tell us what the signs of Your Second Coming will be? What should we look for as the End of the World approaches?"

Jesus then began His famous discourse about His reappearance in the Last Days, much to the dismay, I'm sure, of everyone there who were all hoping for at least a ray of hope in their own lifetime.

So goes the story—at least, as it's told and retold in most churches to this day.

But is that really the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help us God? Certainly, Jesus couldn't have been so indifferent to the suffering of the very people He was about to sacrifice His life for. So what gives? Let's take a moment to discuss what seems to be lacking.

The real culprit in this scenario lies in the fact that we're dealing with a translation problem. In this case, the passage in *Matthew* fails to convey its total meaning because the Greek word used to describe the word for "coming," as in the Coming of the Lord, is *parousia*, which can just as easily be translated "presence." Said Matthew:

And Jesus left the Temple and was going His way, when the disciples came to look at the buildings there. But Jesus said to them, "Do you see this place? I tell you with all certainty that not one stone here will be left standing; it'll all come crashing down someday."

And as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, and said, “Please tell us when this will occur; and what will be the sign of Your Coming (*parousia*), and the End of the Age?”¹⁸

Then later in the same chapter, we find that Jesus said:

For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even to the west, so also the Coming (*parousia*) of the Son of Man will be.¹⁹

And still later:

But as it was in the days of Noah, so also the Coming (*parousia*) of the Son of Man will be... The people at that time had no idea what was going to happen to them until finally the Flood came and swept them all away; so likewise, the Coming (*parousia*) of the Son of Man will be.²⁰

In every instance, then, what Jesus said to His disciples was far beyond what they were capable of understanding at the time. They equated the “Coming” of Christ with the event Jesus described as the “someday” when the Temple was going to be destroyed. In hindsight, however, we can now see this wasn’t the case in the mind of Jesus, Who understood what humanity would only realize after a great deal more history rolled on to fill in the hidden meaning of His words.

Only in hindsight can we now see that Jesus wasn’t describing a future coming, as the disciples had assumed. He was describing the advent of His abiding “presence,” which had already occurred in their midst, even though the disciples would require much more time and experience to fully grasp what that meant.

Only by allowing for this alternate interpretation of the Greek word, *parousia*, can we now rethink our previous view of Jesus’ response to His disciples and see the answer He gave them in an entirely new light.

Because of the dire nature of their circumstances, the disciples would have found it very difficult to grasp the logic of a deliverance that was too far off in the distant future to do them any good. And doubtlessly, Jesus would’ve understood this. To say otherwise would be absurd. But tradition is a tough thing to shake. All that most people focus on is that when the anxious disciples pressed Jesus to “send in the cavalry” to rescue them, He proceeded to blow their minds by telling them about future events, such as wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, and false prophets.

In the face of such bewildering predictions, it’s easy to imagine the disappointment that the disciples must have felt.

But, as we’re beginning to see in our analysis of the laws of disinformation, any pessimism about the events predicted for the End of the Age must be understood in terms of our own natural tendency to isolate most biblical texts from the context in which they actually exist. Seen in isolation, the gloomier predictions in these famous passages are usually assumed to be the only ones found there. Thus, those who think Jesus never offered His disciples anything but gloom and doom, do so only because they ignore the rest of what He said about the promise of His “presence.”

It’s true: Trials and tribulations are the lot of anyone who dares to follow Christ. But it’s just as true that “anyone who endures to the end will be rescued,”²¹ and that, en route to that rescue, “where sin abounds, grace abounds much more.”²²

So, when we re-examine the situation in its totality, we see that Jesus’ intention was never to disappoint His disciples with the bad news that He was forestalling their salvation until some future time. Instead, like the Good Shepherd that He was, He was telling them about the reality of His *parousia*, His abiding “presence.” Because even though His present work couldn’t be completed in their lifetimes, and much would have to wait until such time as had been determined, nothing could prevent His

¹⁸ *Matthew* 24:1-3

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 24:27

²⁰ *Ibid.* 24:37, 39

²¹ *Ibid.* 24:13

²² *Romans* 5:20

parousia from accomplishing great things for them, then and there, even in the midst of their current predicament.

At first, this may be difficult to comprehend, but try to think of it in the following terms.

Since God's first promise in *The Old Testament* to send a Savior to His people, there have been many aspects relating to the nature of this Coming One. Eventually, the body of literature that grew up around this tradition was such that it sometimes was in danger of getting lost in translation. Expectations, hopes, and fears all added to the difficulty of ferreting out what God intended us to know about this Person we were to expect. Centuries of tradition pit one interpretation of a biblical passage over against another. Texts were removed from their context. Distortions were repeated. But of course all of this is to be expected, right? It's just the three laws of disinformation at work, naturally. No problem; the Lord of the Word knows how to provide a solution to cut through all the clutter.

Because God understands the tricky nature of disseminating the truth via the written word, He deigned to send numerous deliverers, messiahs, and saviors to facilitate the process. Beginning with such luminaries as Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, God raised up many great men in preparation for the eventual arrival of the One Who was to come. We know this because of early prophecies regarding a deliverer contained in extra-biblical texts like *The Book of Jasher*, also known as *The Upright Record*. According to scholars like Cyrus H. Gordon, *Jasher* was a literary source from which biblical authors borrowed to write their books. Proof of this, they say, is the way *The Old Testament* quotes from *Jasher* twice: First, in *Joshua* 10:13, and then in *Second Samuel* 1:18. Certainly anyone familiar with Scripture has heard the story of how God helped the Israelites in their battle with the Amorites. In the midst of the conflict, Joshua prayed:

'Oh, Sun, stand still over Gibeon, oh, Moon, over the Valley of Aijalon.' So the Sun stood still and the Moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in *The Book of Jasher*.²³

As it so happens, in *Jasher*, we find a prophecy that would have been impossible for the people of that day to distinguish whom the prophet was referring to. Even when we read it today, this prophecy can easily be understood as describing the coming of Jesus, Who was to be *the* Messiah. But as it turns out, this prophecy actually was predicting the life and mission of Moses, who was *a* messianic figure. Only through the hindsight of history, then, would mankind eventually come to a genuine realization of whom God had been speaking about in His drama of prophecy.

The disciples of Jesus fell victim to this same phenomenon. To a man they expected that all the prophecies of the Savior they'd read about their whole lives would be fulfilled in a single, glorious arrival. Promises of blessing and promises of judgment were assumed to be all rolled out into one divine lump. Only over a gradual period of time would they—and us—begin to absorb Jesus' explanations that God's plan of the ages was an unfolding plan. It was never God's intention to execute His rescue effort in a single, blinding moment but, rather, was to proceed through a series of connected events, each one coming after the other, like wave upon wave rolling onto the seashore.

So, having examined some of the ways the meaning of God's word becomes obscured, let's discuss how *The Bible* helps to provide a counterbalance to the laws of disinformation...

So ends this preview of *Fish Tales (From the Belly of the Whale): Fifty of the Greatest Misconceptions Ever Blamed on The Bible*. To read further, please get the whole book, which is available on this website.

²³ *Joshua* 10:12-13