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GOD HAS A PLAN FOR MAN

*Now reader, go along with me,
Away back to Eternity;
Before there was a ray of light,
Before there was a day or night,
Before a prayer was ever prayed,
Before the world was ever made.
Before there was a moon, or sun,
Before old time itself begun;
Before there was a now, or then,
Before there was a where, or when.
Before there was a here, or there,
Or anything, or anywhere...*

—poem by E. U. Cook, 1891.

BEFORE the foundation of the world God had a **plan**.

It is sometimes supposed that when Adam and Eve sinned, it was a **surprise** to God—that He was shocked! But the fall into sin was no surprise to God. *Before* he ever created Adam and Eve, *before* the garden was planted in Eden, even *before* the foundation of the world, God had a **plan** for man.

Salvation from sin was no “last minute arrangement” on the part of God. “His own purpose and grace, was given to us in Christ Jesus BEFORE time began” (2 Tim. 1:9). We are redeemed with “the precious blood of Christ...who was foreordained BEFORE the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19, 20). Because God had a plan of redemption—even before the foundation of the world—it is obvious he KNEW mankind would fall into sin and be in need of this redemption!

In Genesis we read that “the LORD God planted a garden eastward *in* EDEN, and there he put the man whom he had formed” (Gen. 2:8). We might assume that it was called Eden at the time Adam and Eve lived there. Was their mailing address something like: Adam and Eve, 7 Paradise Lane, Eden, Mesopotamia? Not very likely!

Be assured it is not a “salvation issue,” but a good case can be made for Eden being the name by which this land area

later became known. We should bear in mind that the events recorded in Genesis cover thousands of years—from Adam to Joseph. The writer of Genesis, believed to be Moses, commonly used names for places as they were known *at the time he wrote*. This was a common practice in Scripture and historical literature in general.

For example, an article about **New York** in the *Americana* says that “Verrazano sailed his ship into New York Bay in April 1524 but left after a brief visit.” We all understand, of course, that it was not called New York Bay *at the time*. New York was not there. The name New York did not come into use until many years later, in 1664.

For one of many *biblical* examples, in Genesis 12:8 we read that Abraham journeyed “to the mountain east of **Bethel**, and pitched his tent.” But Bethel was not called Bethel at that time. It was many years later that Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, named it Bethel. “Jacob...called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of that city had been Luz previously” (Gen. 28:18, 19). The writer of Genesis simply used the word Bethel because it was known by this name *at the time he wrote*.

Genesis mentions a river at the time of Adam that flowed by the “land of HAVILAH” (Gen. 2:11). But that land was not known *by this name* at the time of Adam, for Havilah—the man from whom it was named—was not born until centuries later. He was a great grandson of Noah (Gen. 10:7).

It is quite common for a country to be named after a person. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, from which the nation of Israel is named. Even “America” comes from the name of a man: *Amerigo* Vespucci, an Italian explorer.

As with the name Havilah (and others), the land area that came to be known as Eden was probably based on a man’s name. We read in Scripture about “the children [desendants] of Eden” (Isaiah 37:12; 2 Kings 19:12). And Eden, at the time of Ezekiel, was mentioned as a **country** with whom the king of Tyre carried on business—right along with places like Tarshish, Syria, Damascus, and Israel (Ezek. 27:17-24).

Genesis says “the LORD God planted a garden **eastward** in EDEN.” This was in the eastern part of the country or land that came to be known as Eden. Eden and the garden were not one

and the same. We could not correctly speak of “Yosemite National Park” as “California.” Yosemite National Park is *in* California. The garden was *in Eden*.

In our study of Scripture, by reading *carefully* we can understand things that might not be apparent otherwise. We recall the words of Matthew 24:15: “Whoever reads, let him *understand*.”

We know from Scripture that when Moses led the Israelites across the Red Sea, it was *miraculous*, as was the crossing of the Jordan River by Elijah and Elisha (Exod. 14:22; 2 Kings 2:8). But when the Israelites crossed Jordan on dry ground under the leadership of Joshua, while also a miracle, it may have been the result of a landslide upstream.

The Interpreter’s Bible commentary says: “While not minimizing the fact of divine intervention which the narrative insists upon, it is possible to link the event to natural causes. Frequently in recent history earthquake shocks have collapsed sections of the high clay bluffs beside the river into the narrow stream, effectively damming its flow.” Such landslides have happened a number of times—in 1914 the flow was stopped for 24 hours and in 1927 for 21 hours.

Notice what the biblical wording actually implies: “The waters which came down from upstream stood still, and rose in a heap very far away at Adam, the city that is beside Zaretan. So the waters that went down into the...Salt Sea, failed, and were cut off; and the people crossed over opposite Jericho” (Josh. 3:16).

It was probably at this *same* place, many years later (at the time of David), that a ferryboat operated to take people across the Jordan River (2 Sam. 19:18). There was also a ferryboat there in New Testament times. This would be easy to overlook until we consider the word *Bethabara*. “Beth” means *house*, providing the basis for places like Beth-lehem (House of Bread), Beth-esda (House of Kindness), Beth-el (House of God), etc. Beth-abara, means Ferry-House (Strong’s Concordance, 962), implying the existence of a ferryboat at this location on the Jordan River.

There are reasons to believe it was at this *same* location that John baptized many people, *including Jesus!* Multitudes traveled there from Jerusalem and other places (Matt. 3:5), implying a location that was accessible by some kind of road. We know there was a road from Jerusalem to Jericho (Luke 10:30). Because there were not a lot of roads that led to a crossing of the Jordan (this is true even today), there can be little doubt it was the Jericho Road that continued the short distance on to the Jordan River (cf. Josh. 3:16).

Because of the way Jericho is mentioned with the Jordan River, it appears this was also where Elijah and Elisha crossed, a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared, and Elijah was caught away by a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:4-11).

Putting this all together, several commentators have argued—and with plausible reasons—that a location where John Baptized people, including Jesus, was where the road from Jerusalem led to the crossing of the Jordan. And, this was

in the same area that the Israelites, under Joshua’s leadership, had entered the Promised Land!

Back at that time, twelve men, one from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, “took up twelve **stones** from the midst of the Jordan...and carried them over with them to the place where they lodged, and laid them down there....And those twelve stones which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal” (Josh. 4:1-3, 8, 20). The area that came to be known as Gilgal, was a couple miles west, between Jordan and Jericho. These stones served as a memorial to commemorate the crossing of the Jordan River by the Israelites (verse 7).

Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to John’s baptism supposed they were righteous because of their *fleshly* descent from Abraham. They would say, “*We* have Abraham as our father.” John countered this false belief with these words: “I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these **stones**” (Matt. 3:5-9).

Stones in and around the Jordan River are mentioned in Scripture (Josh. 4:3). When John used the term “*these stones*,” he was probably referring to actual stones at that location to illustrate his point. Stones, of course, being lifeless could not produce life. But with God, all things are possible. A similar point was made by Jesus: If people did not praise God, “the **stones** would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40).

It is interesting (and perhaps significant) that, centuries before, it was from this very area where John was baptizing, that twelve **stones** had been taken to serve as a memorial of the Israelites crossing into the Promised Land.

Apparently it was not an uncommon practice to use stones for a monument—and sometimes even give it a name. Jacob and Laban did this with a heap of stones, using words like Jegar Sahadutha, Galeed, and Mizpah, all of which indicate it would serve as a “**witness**.” It was then said, “May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another” (Gen. 31:44-49).

This wording has sometimes been quoted on religious greeting cards to convey a warm, loving thought for those who are absent from one another. But in the biblical context, it seems more likely these two men needed the LORD to watch them *because they did not trust each other!* (verses 50-52).

When the Israelites crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, two tribes—Reuben and Gad—settled on the east side of the river. There was also a lack of trust among them. An issue arose that nearly led to war, but an agreement was reached that they would all serve the LORD God, symbolized by an altar that was built. In the wording of the King James Version: “The children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar ED [meaning *witness*]: for it shall be a **witness** between us that the LORD is God” (Josh. 22:34).

Years ago, the pastor of a church in British Columbia (Canada) where I spoke many times, showed me this verse with the name “Ed.” It was especially meaningful to him because his name was *Ed*—and he was a *witness* for God. My middle name is Edward, so I suppose I can claim ED also.

Another stone monument—this one set up by the prophet Samuel—was called **Ebenezer** (meaning “Stone of Help”). It commemorated God’s help in attaining victory over the Philistines. “Then Samuel took a stone and set it up...and called its name Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the LORD has helped us’.” (1 Sam.7:12).

Because of Charles Dicken’s 1843 Christmas story about Ebenezer Scrooge, “Ebenezer” is commonly thought of as a person’s name. But that is not the way it was used in Scripture.

If we, today, were to make a spiritual application, an “Ebenezer” could be an object that reminds us of God’s presence and help in our lives. One of the verses of the old hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” says,

“Here I raise mine **Ebenezer**; hither by thy help I’m come.”

Even a church building—though only a building in itself—could (in a sense) be an “Ebenezer,” a place where people receive help from God.

Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta is probably the best-known predominately black church in America. Martin Luther King Jr. served as pastor from 1960 until his assassination in 1968. In 1974 King’s mother, Alberta, the church organist, was shot and killed by a terrorist as she sat at the organ. As of this writing, Raphael Warnock serves as pastor of Ebenezer Baptist and is also a United States Senator.

About twelve years ago, while passing through Atlanta on what was a somewhat hurried trip to the east coast, I visited the various sites at the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park, including the museum, King’s house, his tomb surrounded by a large reflection pool and, just across the street, Ebenezer Baptist Church.

“Ebenezer,” in Scripture, was a stone set up to symbolize God’s help. A large stone was sometimes used in another way in Scripture, especially in the deserts of the Bible lands:

Wells were considered the property of certain tribes. When migrating, they would cover a well with a large stone to protect the water supply from sandstorms until their return. If certain landmarks were obliterated, the exact location of a well would be lost. In that case they would probe in the sand, hoping to “strike the rock.” When found, the sand would be scooped away and the well uncovered.

In their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, one of the challenges the Israelites faced was to find water for themselves and their animals. On one such occasion, “Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank” (Numbers 20:7-11). It is commonly believed that this was a huge and obvious rock in that dry desert. And this may be correct.

But, George M. Lamsa, noted translator of the Bible from Aramaic manuscripts, says the rock Moses smote was the (not so obvious) cover of a *well*. To “smite a rock” in Aramaic does not literally mean to belabor a mass of mineral matter, he points out, but rather to strike a stone which has been placed over the top of a well that has become covered with sand. It is compa-

rable to the English expression “to strike oil,” which means, “to find oil.” This, Lamsa believed, was the case with Moses when he gathered the people together and with divine guidance was able to strike the rock and locate the well.

Our first reaction to this interpretation—that the miracle involved a *well*—might be that of total rejection. *But*, turning to the very next chapter, this interpretation does appear to have support, for the source of the water on this occasion was specifically called a *well*!

“They went to Beer [a Hebrew word meaning well], which is the *well* where the LORD said to Moses, ‘Gather the people together, and I will give them water.’ Then Israel sang this song: ‘Spring up, O *well*! All of you sing to it—The *well* the leaders sank, Dug by the nation’s nobles, By the lawgiver, with their staves” (Numbers 21:16-18).

If indeed the rock Moses struck was a well cover, buried with sand, we can easily picture the workers digging away the sand, removing the cover, and allowing the water to flow out.

Later in Israelite history, there was an incident in which Samson obtained water in a unique way. In a conflict with the Philistines, he found a “fresh **jawbone** of a donkey, reached out his hand and took it, and slew a thousand men with it” (Judges 15:15 NKJV). As a result, he named that place Lehi (meaning Jawbone). Afterward, Samson was thirsty. “God split the hollow place that is in Lehi [Jawbone] and water came out,” from which he drank and was refreshed. Not realizing there is a play on words here, some suppose he drank water out of the *jawbone*. But it is much more likely the water sprang out of the ground at Lehi, the *place*.

“Therefore he called its name *En Hakkore* [the **spring** of him who called], which *is* in Lehi *to this day*” (verse 19). The fact it was still there years later, implies it was a *spring* from which Samson drank, not the jawbone of a donkey.

The commentary by Barnes states the water came from a hollow place in Lehi and was commonly called Samson’s Spring in the time of Jerome. *The Pulpit Commentary* states very clearly that it was a spring in the ground that provided the water. Adam Clarke agrees.

Josephus, the 1st century Jewish historian, wrote: “And when [Samson] came to a certain place, which is now called the Jaw-bone, on account of the great action there performed...God was moved with his entreaties, and raised up a plentiful fountain of sweet water at a certain rock; whence it was that Samson called the place the Jaw-bone (Lehi), and so it is called to this day” (Josephus, Book 5, 8:8, 9).

There is no reason to suppose that after Samson “cast away the jawbone out of his hand,” he then went and picked it up again to get a drink out of *it*. Instead, God provided a spring in Lehi, the *place*.

During this incident, it is said that Samson slew a *thousand* Philistines. Here is a trivia question—and answer—about the word “thousand”:

Question: If we were to spell out numbers—one, two, three, four, etc.—how far would we have to count until the letter “a” would be reached?

Answer: *One thousand!* Let's try it. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen.....one thousand.

Because of the feats Samson accomplished, some might suppose he was a **giant**. Not true. "The *secret* of his strength was not known" by the Philistines or Delilah, who pressured him to reveal the secret: "Please tell me where your great strength lies." Finally he told her: "If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be *like any other man*" (Judges 16:4-20). If Samson was a giant, the reason for his strength would have been obvious.

Goliath the Philistine, on the other hand, was in the giant category. According to 1 Samuel 17:4, he was "six cubits and a span," generally figured as about *nine feet nine inches tall*. He cried out, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together" (verse 10). The Israelite soldiers were nervous in the service and having hysterics in the barracks! Then one of God's young people, David, appeared on the scene and accepted the challenge. The victory that resulted is well-known.

I used to play the guitar and sing about this:

***When David stood before Goliath with his sling,
The giant laughed [ha ha ha] at such a puny little thing.
But David knew his faith in God would stand the test,
He threw the rock, God did the rest!***

***If you believe, you shall receive.
There's not a trouble or care the good Lord can't relieve.
He is just the same today,
All you have to do is trust and pray.
Believe! You must believe.***

The Faith Chapter confirms it was "by *faith*" that David was valiant in battle (Heb. 11:32-34).

Another giant was Og, king of Bashan. His King Size Bed measured 13.5 feet long and 6 feet wide, a strong indication of how big he was (Deut. 3:11). When twelve Israelite men were sent to search out the land of Canaan, they encountered men of great stature—giants—causing them to feel like mere "grass-hoppers" in comparison (Num. 13:32, 33)!

Bob Williams (1910-2009)—affectionately known by many as "Borneo Bob"—was a dear friend of mine during the later years of his life. When he took the gospel to Borneo, beginning in the late 1930s, he did not face **giants** in the sense of stature, but the challenges he faced were **gigantic**. Most of us have heard of the "wild men of Borneo"—these were the people to whom he went, some of them hostile head hunters. Anything the word "heathen" conjures up was there—filth, disease, superstition, ignorance, demonism.

The only gods they knew about were the ones described by the witch doctors—gods who were angry with them, filled with hate and vengeance. For them to hear about the Creator of heaven and earth, the one true God who "so LOVED the world" (John 3:16), was like a new and glorious revelation.



Ralph Woodrow and "Borneo Bob" Williams (2005).

Over time the message of God's love caused (literally) thousands of these people to come to Christ through Bob's ministry.

Many of us have long been familiar with Frederick M. Lehman's 1917 hymn, "The Love of God," which so beautifully expresses the love message. All of the verses are good, but the third verse stands out: If the oceans were ink, every stalk was a quill, and every man was a scribe—to write the love of God would drain the ocean dry....

Lehman did not take credit for writing the third verse. These lines were "found penciled on the wall of a patient's room in an insane asylum." But, evidently, the patient was not the author of those lines, as sometimes assumed. Lehman, himself, had heard them many years before at a Nazarene Camp Meeting.

The basic thought had been around a long time. The Jewish poem, *Akdamut*, written centuries ago, spoke of the seas being ink and all the reeds pens. Here, in closing, are the words of "The Love of God," Verse Three:

***Could we with ink the ocean fill
and were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stock on earth a quill
and every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
would drain the ocean dry
nor could the scroll contain the whole
though stretched from sky to sky!***

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