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MORE BIBLICAL GOLD

The old man was dying. His sons had long believed their father had gold buried somewhere on the family farm. As they gathered around, in his dying moments, he pointed out to the property and said, “Gold! Gold!” Searching for the gold, they dug up every inch of the land. They didn’t find the gold they were looking for, but having turned over the soil, it was now good for planting. They decided to plant corn. The “gold” came up in the form of golden corn and they prospered.

Often Christians have little earthly gold, but they have discovered “gold” in another form: they are “rich in *faith!*” (James 2:5). In Christ they have “greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Heb. 11:26). Peter, though without silver and gold, had something greater: he could say to the lame beggar, “In the name of Jesus Christ rise up and walk,” and the man was instantly healed! (Acts 3:6).

In our study of scripture, even when we dig in familiar ground, some extra digging may result in “gold” that is commonly overlooked.

The account of David’s sin with Bathsheba is well-known; but there are some connected details that are not as well-known. The baby born from the adulterous union, according to the prophet Nathan, would die. He also prophesied that evil would rise against David from within his own family; he had sinned in secret, but in a most public way he would be shamed; on a housetop, in broad daylight, a rival king would engage in sexual relations with his wives (2 Sam. 12:11,12).

In the course of time, the prophecy found fulfillment. Sadly, the rival for David’s throne was his own son, Absalom. Public opinion turned against David and he fled for his life. In those days, it was a custom for a new king to inherit the possessions of a former king, including his harem. So to symbolize that he was now the man in power, Absalom publicly—on the housetop—“went in unto his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel” (2 Sam. 16:22).

Absalom committed these despicable acts—acts of great hurt and humiliation to David—upon the advice of Ahithophel. AHITHOPHEL! And who was he? By comparing scripture with scripture, we discover that Ahithophel was Bathsheba’s *grandfather* (2 Sam. 11:3; 23:34). Thus we may understand the unique reason for his retaliation against David: David had led his granddaughter into adultery and murdered her husband!

Absalom, taking possession of the king’s house, used the rooftop as a stage for his vulgar display. Ironically, as things came around and David reaped judgment, the humiliation would take place on *this* rooftop—the *same* rooftop from which he looked upon Bathsheba with lust! (2 Sam. 11:2; 16:21, 22).

After a Sunday School teacher read the story of David seeing Bathsheba while walking on the roof of his house, a young boy asked: “What kept him from falling off the roof?” The boy was thinking of the steep roofs that were common in the area where he lived. Not knowing any better, the teacher hastily replied: “Don’t question the Bible, boy!” Upon hearing this, a teacher in an adjoining class whispered to the teacher: “The answer to the difficulty is, ‘With men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible.’” Neither one had the *correct* answer!

Without explaining it in architectural terms, the fact the Bible mentions that people walked on their housetops, spent time on their housetops, sometimes prayed on their housetops, and placed a safety railing around their housetops, clearly shows that flat roofed houses were common (Matt. 24:17; Pro. 21:9; Lk. 5:19; 2 Sam. 11:2; Deut. 22:8; Acts 10:9; Matt. 10:27).

This is an example of how the Bible (or other literature) while telling one thing, may also reveal *other* things, howbeit indirectly.

For example, the Bible says, “A merry heart does good, like medicine” (Proverbs 17:22). While making a point about a merry heart, this well-known verse tells us something else: that medicine can be a good thing. If *all* medicines were evil, as some suppose, this verse would not make sense.

The same can be seen in the statement of Jesus: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Matt. 9:12). If *all* physicians were evil, this saying would have no point. Paul referred to Luke as “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). If being a physician was an evil practice, this term would not fit.

There have been groups and churches that forbid their members to take medicine or go to a doctor. They suppose this is turning to the arm of flesh, instead of trusting God. But believing in divine healing does not mean physicians or medicine serve no valid purpose. Since all sickness is a part of the curse, any way by which it is overcome—through medicine, surgery, climate, diet, exercise, or prayer!—can certainly fit within the framework of God’s abundant provision.

When we read in the Bible that Peter's wife's mother was miraculously healed by Jesus, we not only learn of her healing. We learn something else, obviously: *Peter had a wife!* (Matt. 8:14,15).

Paul, writing to believers at Ephesus, said: "Husbands, love your wives" (Eph. 5:25). Beyond what these words say, something else is revealed. Some husbands were evidently unkind, uncaring, and unloving toward their wives. Why else would he mention this?

A husband and wife who had been married quite a few years were watching television together. The wife asked: "Don't you think some of the excitement has disappeared from our marriage?" He said, "Let's wait until the commercial and we can talk about it."

We usually think of a "widow" as a woman whose husband has *died*. But here is something that is not well-known: In biblical usage, a woman can also be called a widow because her husband *deserted* her (Strong's Concordance, H488, H490).

A woman in 2 Samuel 14:5 said, "I am a widow woman, *and my husband is dead*." If "widow" *only* meant a woman whose husband was dead, for her to add the words "and my husband is dead" would be nonsense. This would be like saying, "I am a woman whose husband is dead, and my husband is dead"!

Isaiah, in poetic language, described a woman who had married in her youth, but who was eventually refused and forsaken by her husband. In this state she was living in "widowhood" (Isa. 54:1-10)—not because her husband died, but because he left her.

Following the Absalom incident, the former wives of David were described as living in "widowhood" (the same word translated "widow") even though David was still living (2 Sam. 20:3).

The Bible tells us Noah's three sons had *wives*. This does not seem too significant at first glance, but it does enter into the discussion about *how long* it took Noah to build the ark!

When judgment was pronounced—that man's days would be 120 years (Gen. 6:3)—nothing was said about a flood or building an ark at that time. Noah then would have been 480 years old (for he was 600 at the time of the flood—Gen. 7:11). Later, when he was 500 years old, his sons were born (Gen. 5:32). And it was later still, *after these sons had grown up and married wives*, that Noah was told to build the ark. "Make an ark....I do bring a flood of water upon the earth....and you shall come into the ark, you and your sons, and your wife, and your sons' wives with you" (Gen. 6:14-18).

So the time involved in building the ark could not have been 120 years, as sometimes supposed. A tradition handed down in the book of *Jasher*; right or wrong, says it took five years.

Sometimes even an ordinary and simple word can imply something beyond its basic meaning. The people in Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, are quoted as saying: "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not *all* with us?" (Matt. 13:54-56). Notice the

word "all." This implies three or more. If there were only two sisters, it would be, "Are not *both* of them with us?"

The *tense* of even a small word can be weighty. In John 5:2 we read: "Now there IS at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which IS called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, HAVING five porches..." It is commonly supposed that the Gospel of John was written *after* the destruction of Jerusalem (which happened in A.D. 70). But how could this be? How could it be said: there "IS" at Jerusalem a pool, it "IS" called Bethesda, it "HAS" five porches, if Jerusalem no longer existed?

Some deductions can be based on simple logic. If we read that Moses came *down* from a mountain, the implication is he had already gone *up* the mountain, even if this was not actually stated. Having quoted from Psalms 68:18, "When He [Christ] *ascended* on high," Paul used this same logic: "Now this, 'He ascended'—what does it mean but that He also first *descended*...? He who descended is also the One who ascended...that He might fill all things" (Eph. 4:8,9 NKJV).

When the Bible says Moses "wrote" and later "read" certain words to the Israelites (Exodus 24:4,7, etc.), we learn something else: *Moses knew how to read and write!* Most didn't. In the book of Revelation, sent to the seven churches, the intro says: "Blessed is he who reads *and those who hear* the words of this prophecy..." (Rev. 1:3). Most would have only *heard* the words; they did not know how to read.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father had two sons. The younger son went to his father and asked for his inheritance. Upon receiving it, he journeyed into a far country and spent it foolishly. It is sometimes believed that only the younger son received his inheritance ahead of time. Actually the father gave *both* sons their inheritance, not just the one (Luke 15:12).

We know that AB in biblical usage means *father* and appears in various names like Abraham, Abiathar, Abner, Absalom, etc. BAR, on the other hand, means *son*, as in the following:

Barabbas (Matt. 27:16), son of Abba.

Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6), son of Jesus (Joshua).

Bar-Jona (Matt. 16:17), son of Jonah.

Barnabas (Acts 4:36), son of Nabas.

Barsabas (Acts 1:23), son of Sabas.

Bartholomew (Matt. 10:3), son of Tolmai.

Bartimaeus (Mk. 10:46), son of Timaeus.

Even today, many names in English are based on the word "son." Some obvious examples include: Johnson, son of John; Jackson, son of Jack; Wilson, son of William; Anderson, son of Andrew; Harrison, son of Harry; etc.

In the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins, it is sometimes supposed that when the groom's arrival was delayed, the *foolish* ones fell asleep. Actually, "they *all* slumbered and slept" (Matt. 25:5). Another point: though the parable involves a wedding, and mentions the groom, the *bride* herself is never mentioned!

Jesus gave a parable about a king who arranged a Marriage Supper for his son. But the invited guests made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.

So the king's servants went out into the highways and gathered together "both good and bad," and the wedding hall was filled. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless." This man was then bound hand and foot and thrown out (Matt. 22:1-14).

Whatever else this parable teaches, it cannot be talking about a Marriage Supper of the Lamb *in heaven!* How would an unrighteous person get to heaven? No one, so far as I know, believes that if someone goes to heaven, he would be thrown out after getting there! The obvious setting for this parable, then, has to do with *this* life.

Jesus said, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them *also* I must bring and they will hear my voice; and there will be ONE flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16 NKJV). Later, he prayed that those who would believe in him would "all be ONE" (John 17:20,21).

From the early church to the present, many differences—most on non-essential points—have existed among Christians. For this reason, some suppose the prayer of Jesus about his followers being "ONE" has never happened. But—good news: *It has!*

The "other" sheep, non-Jewish converts that would come to Christ, were the Gentiles. Did both—Jews and Gentiles—become ONE in Him? Yes indeed.

"For He Himself is our peace, *who has made both ONE*, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us...so as to create in Himself *ONE new man from the two*, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in ONE body through the cross" (Eph. 2:14-16).

"By ONE Spirit we were all baptized into ONE body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). "For we, being many, are...ONE body" (1 Cor. 10:17).

Being one in Christ did not mean all Christians understood everything exactly the same, a point that is evident in numerous New Testament passages (1 Cor. 3:1-4; 11:17; 15:12; etc.). Of course "unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13) is the goal, but being one in Christ does not require that brothers be identical twins. Even in diversity there can be unity—when the common focus is that of "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

In Laodicea, archaeologists have found an ancient inscription dedicated by a slave to the master who granted his freedom. The master's name was Marcus Sestius *Philemon*. Could this be the same Philemon to whom Paul wrote and for whom a book of the New Testament is named?

If Philemon ultimately granted the runaway slave Onesimus his freedom, the inscription at Laodicea could reflect that decision. Philemon was a church leader and Christians met in his house. But this was in Colossae, not Laodicea. However, the two cities were only a few miles apart. In the book of Colossians, Paul mentions Laodicea five times. He tells the Colossian Christians to greet the brethren in Laodicea and exchange letters he

wrote to each church (Col. 4:15,16). That the inscription dedicated to Philemon could refer to the Philemon we know from the Bible is, at least, an interesting possibility.

In the book of Revelation, the message to the church at Laodicea reproved them for being "lukewarm"—neither cold nor hot. The Lord warned that if they did not repent he would vomit them out of his mouth (Rev. 3:16). This brings to mind just now an old sermon by John R. Rice: "Church Members that Make God *Sick!*"

Biblical commentators have suggested, and not without some good reasons, that this metaphor is linked with the Laodicean water supply. Unlike the therapeutic *hot* water of nearby Hierapolis or the refreshing *cold* water of Colossae, the aqueduct-supplied water of Laodicea appears to have been lukewarm and, for some, probably nauseous. They could relate to a message about lukewarm water that caused vomiting.

Laodicea, according to Strabo, was well-known for its school of medicine. Here it was that a famous ophthalmologist practiced and a medicine for the eyes was produced. In this setting, the message by Jesus was especially weighty: they were "blind," spiritually speaking, and needed to anoint their eyes with "eye salve" so they could see (Rev. 3:18).

The believers at Laodicea were told to "hear" God's message (Rev. 3:22). Galen, a noted physician of the second century, wrote that a certain compound to improve hearing was originally made only in Laodicea, though later became available elsewhere.

Laodicea was a wealthy city. When it was destroyed by an earthquake, the people refused aid from the Roman government and rebuilt on their own. Apparently a "have need of nothing" attitude carried over into the people of the church there, for while they claimed to be "rich" and "had need of nothing," Jesus said they were "poor," needing the true spiritual "gold" (Rev. 3:17,18).

Christ's words about lukewarm water, nausea, blindness, eye salve, hearing loss, and riches, provided powerful analogies to which the people there could relate. All these centuries later, understanding some of this background at Laodicea provides a depth we would not obtain with a mere surface reading.

Finally, in his message to the church at Laodicea, the Lord promised to "dine" or "sup" (KJV) with the one who would hear His voice and open the door. Scholars, using the Greek terms, tell about the three daily meals of that time:

There was *akratisma*, breakfast, which was usually no more than a piece of dried bread dipped in wine. The midday meal was *ariston*. A man did not go home for this. It was more like a picnic snack eaten by the side of the road or in the city square. And there was *deipnon*, the evening meal, the main meal. The day's work was done, and so it was unhurried, relaxed. There was time for conversation and fellowship.

It is this third meal, *deipnon*, that Christ offers to share. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and *dine with him, and he with me*" (Rev. 3:20). What an awesome invitation from Him who is Lord of lords and King of kings!



Greg Albrecht and Ralph Woodrow

April 14 and 15, 2010, were special days of ministry and fellowship with Greg Albrecht and Plain Truth Ministries. Greg and I did five programs together.

Having once been part of a group that claimed to be the only true Church of God, they now hold an interdenominational, Christ-centered view. Having passed through a cult-like valley of fruitless legalism, they have now, by God's grace, attained the higher ground of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Greg and his wife Karen, along with staff members of Plain Truth Ministries, honored us with a special dinner at a very unique Mediterranean restaurant.

Contact information: Plain Truth Ministries, Pasadena, CA 91129; toll free phone: 1-800-309-4466; website: www.ptm.org.

VIDEO MESSAGE

by Ralph Woodrow:

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