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“THAT’S INTERESTING!”

A person may not necessarily agree with a statement made by another. If a response seems in order, he might say (in words attributed to Abraham Lincoln): “That’s an interesting subject for someone interested in that subject!” Or, simply (in shortened form): “That’s interesting!”

I hope some of the thoughts I am about to share will be meaningful. I am spreading the table before you – take what you want. You can eat the meat and throw away the bones, if that be the case. You are free to agree or disagree. Or you may just say: “That’s interesting!”

I have put together a little quiz to start things off – twelve brief Bible questions and answers:

1. *What book of the Bible was named after a bartender?* **Nehemiah.** As a servant, the duties of Nehemiah required him to be a bartender for king Artaxerxes: “I was the king’s cupbearer...I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king” (Neh. 1:11; 2:1).

2. *What preacher got so angry at some of his members he beat them up and pulled out their hair?* Again, **Nehemiah.** “In those days...I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair” (Neh. 13:23,25).

3. *What king gave his daughter a burned city for a bridal gift?* **Pharaoh.** “Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up, and taken Gezer, and burnt it with fire...and gave it for a dowry to his daughter, Solomon’s wife” (1 Kings 9:16).

4. *What preacher, married to a prostitute, prayed that pregnant women would miscarry and have their breasts dry up?* **Hosea.** The context explains the situation, but the wording of his prayer is this: “Give them, O LORD – what will you give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts” (Hosea 9:14).

5. *What two women were the mothers of their half-brothers and whose father was their children’s grandfather?* **The two daughters of Lot** (Gen. 19:30-38).

6. *What very famous biblical personality murdered thirty men and took their clothes in order to pay off a bet?* **Samson.**

“He...killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of clothing to those who had explained the riddle” (Judges 14:19).

7. *When Samson told the secret vow regarding his long hair, what was the woman’s name who cut his hair off?* Delilah? **No.** It was a MAN who cut off his hair (Judges 16:19).

8. *Samson and other men are mentioned in the Bible as Nazarites. Could a woman also take a Nazarite vow?* **Yes.** “When either man or WOMAN shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite...” (Num. 6:2 KJV).

9. *We often read about the lamb that the Israelites partook of at Passover. Could a goat serve the same purpose?* **Yes.** “Your lamb shall be without blemish...you may take it from the sheep or from the goats” (Exodus 12:5).

10. *By what man did 78 women have 88 children?* **Rehoboam,** David’s grandson. “Rehoboam...took eighteen wives and sixty concubines, and begat twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters” (2 Chron. 11:21).

11. *Where are pistachio nuts mentioned in the Bible?* Genesis 43:11. A present for Joseph included – along with fruits, honey, and spices – **pistachio nuts** and almonds. Such is the reading of the NKJV, the margin of the KJV, and confirmed by Strong’s Concordance.

12. *What woman ate her own son?* **A woman of Samaria.** “There was a great famine in Samaria...so we boiled my son, and ate him” (2 Kings 6:29). This also happened in Jerusalem during times of extreme famine: “Women cooked their own children; they became food for them” (Lam. 4:10).

Back in the 70s when I lived for a while in Visalia, California, there was a TV program sponsored by the (non-musical) Churches of Christ in the valley. It was called “One Way,” aired live, with several pastors sitting at a table with their Bibles. People were encouraged to phone in with their Bible questions. I phoned and asked: “Can a house get leprosy?” along with the reference: Leviticus 14:44.

One of the men quickly took the question and began to wax eloquent that houses do not get leprosy, people do, and spoke of Jesus cleansing lepers. The pastor sitting next to him

tapped him on the shoulder and showed him this verse. At that point he did back down and realized that the Bible does indeed speak of a house getting leprosy. See Leviticus 14:33-57.

GIDEON who is mentioned in the Faith Chapter (Hebrews 11) is usually remembered for his part in defeating the Midianites. Starting out with a large army, he operated a draft-in-reverse policy. Anyone who did not want to fight could go home and most did. But despite a vast numerical disadvantage, a great victory was obtained for Israel.

But there are other details about Gideon (who also went by the name Jerubbaal) that are not as well-known. In his campaign against the Midianites, he pursued two of their leaders, Zebah and Zalmanna, and captured them. And he said to Jether his firstborn, "Rise, kill them!" But the youth would not draw his sword; for he was afraid, because he was still a youth (Judges 8:20). So Gideon killed them himself (verse 21).

While in this pursuit, he asked the men of Succoth to supply food for his soldiers. When they refused, Gideon told them he would be back and torture them. "I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers!" (Judges 8:7-16). The commentaries explain how these torture methods were carried out.

Having received considerable gold from the plunder, Gideon made it into an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah. And all Israel played the harlot with it there. It became a snare to Gideon and his house (Judges 8:27). Commentators are divided as to what this ephod actually was, but this wording leaves little doubt about its lewd and idolatrous nature.

Gideon was a polygamist. Gideon had *seventy sons* who were his own offspring, for he had *many wives* (Judges 8:30). In addition to the seventy sons of Gideon, his concubine who was in Shechem also bore him a son, whose name he called **Abimelech** (verse 31). This son, especially, was bad news.

When Abimelech grew up, he hired worthless and reckless men; and they followed him. Then he went to his father's house and killed his brothers, the seventy sons of Gideon all but Jotham the youngest son who was able to hide (Judges 9:4,5).

Think of the intense grief suffered by the *mothers* whose sons were brutally murdered! A mother's love is deep for her child (Isa. 49:15; 66:13; John 16:21). When the Gibeonites hung seven sons of Saul and left their bodies hanging for several months, a mother by the name of Rizpah stayed there. "She did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night" (2 Sam. 21:10). The Bible tells about two mothers, even though they were harlots, who dearly loved their little babies (1 Kings 3:16-27).

After Abimelech murdered Gideon's sons, his half-brothers, he continued on a killing spree. But then, at Thebez near a wall, a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull. Then he called quickly to the young man, his armorbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A WOMAN killed him.'"

So his young man thrust him through, and he died (Judges 9:52-56).

The biased belief that women were inferior was so strong, even in his dying moments Abimelech could not bear to think people would say a **woman** killed him!

When Gideon initially received the commission to deliver his people, the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the **terebinth tree** (Judges 6:11). The KJV uses the word *oak*, but the NKJV (here quoted) is more specific: the terebinth tree. There are good arguments for this wording. Not that it matters, but it was from the sap of this tree that the solvent turpentine was made. The Douay Version comes right out and calls it the *turpentine tree*.

Another kind of tree provided temporary shade for Jonah at Nineveh (Jonah 4:6). Several Bible commentators present arguments that indicate this is the tree that produces seeds from which castor oil is made.

We read earlier about Gideon's **seventy** sons. Later, another king also had seventy sons: Ahab. At the order of Jehu, their heads were cut off and placed in baskets. It is gruesome to imagine: seventy bloody heads in baskets! So Jehu killed all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his close acquaintances and his priests, until he left him none remaining (1 Kings 10:1-11).

Who was ZERUIAH?

We know that Zeruiah (who is mentioned 26 times in the Bible) was a *woman* a mother but *who* was she?

JOAB, a well-known commander of David's army was one of her sons. He is often referred to as Joab the son of Zeruiah (2 Sam. 2:13, etc.) ABISHAI, one of David's thirty-seven mighty men who once saved David's life was another one of her sons. He is often referred to as Abishai the son of Zeruiah (2 Sam. 21:15-17; 1 Sam. 26:6, etc.). And there was ASAHIEL, who was also one of her sons (2 Sam. 2:18), a military leader in David's army (2 Sam. 23:24).

But, again, Who was Zeruiah their mother?

We may be prone to skip over the historical genealogies recorded in the Bible, but sometimes they reveal details that otherwise might be unknown. Such is the case regarding Zeruiah. Zeruiah was David's **SISTER** (1 Chron. 2:16). So, her three sons (Joab, Abishai, and Asahel) were David's nephews.

Another prominent leader in David's army was AMASA, whose mother's name was Abigail. She also was a sister of David as is spelled out in the genealogy (1 Chron. 2:16,17).

When Absalom sought to overthrow the kingdom of his father David, Absalom made Amasa captain of the army instead of Joab (2 Sam. 17:25). After the revolt was crushed and Absalom died (2 Sam. 18:16-17), David was invited back to Jerusalem and restored as king. Strangely, he retained Amasa (2 Samuel 19:13). Unfortunately for AMASA (son of David's sister Abigail), JOAB (the son of David's other sister, Zeruiah) killed him to regain his position as head of Israel's army.

Joab said to Amasa, "Are you in health, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword that was in Joab's hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground....Amasa wallowed in his blood in the middle of the highway (2 Sam. 20:9-12).

Just before David died, he gave instructions to Solomon to have his sister's son Joab killed (1 Kings 2:5, 6, 29-31). These are only a few of the details about people murdering and being murdered at the time of David. Imagine how deeply hurtful all of this must have been, especially when it involved close family members.

When there was a plot in Jerusalem to kill Paul, a young man heard about it and was instrumental in saving his life. We are not told that young man's name, but he was the son of Paul's SISTER (Acts 23:12-22). Details like this tend to go unnoticed, but because of this, we know that Paul had a sister.

Paul was taken to Caesarea, faced more questioning, and was ultimately placed on a ship to Rome. After landing at Syracuse in Sicily, they fetched a COMPASS and sailed to Rhegium (Acts 28:13 KJV). A compass? We immediately think of a little instrument with a needle pointing to magnetic north. But this could not be the meaning here. What we call a compass was not even invented until centuries later!

The expression fetch a compass (Strong's Concordance, #4022) simply means to *come around*. It is no different than when the Israelites were to compass the city of Jericho seven times (Josh. 6:4); or David was to fetch a compass (2 Sam. 5:23), that is, to circle around behind his enemies; or the kings of Israel and Judah fetched a compass of seven days' journey (2 Kings 3:9).

It seems natural especially since Paul was on a ship that fetch a compass meant the use of an instrument to point them in a certain direction. This was obviously not the meaning. It is no major point, admittedly, and probably only interesting to someone interested in it!

Some have wondered if the **airplane** was predicted by Isaiah. "I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth" (Isa. 58:14). But this is simply a figure of speech. The same was said of the Israelites after coming out of Egypt. God caused them to ride on the high places of the earth (Deut. 32:13; cf. Exod. 19:4). Unless we are ready to teach that Moses and the children of Israel flew in airplanes, we should not stretch this figure of speech beyond its intended meaning.

When I was about 12 years old, the teacher of a Sunday School class drew our attention to a verse in the book of Nahum. He believed it was a prediction about **automobiles**. "The chariots rage in the streets, they jostle one another in the broad roads" (Nahum 2:4, cf. Jer. 46:9). But this was not a prediction about automobiles and wrecks on modern highways. The setting was the *ancient* city of Nineveh (Nahum 1:1), these chariots were pulled by horses (Nahum 3:2,3), and were later burned with fire (Nahum 2:13).

Moving right along, I don't suppose it is necessary for me to point out that round tires, mufflers, and hoods mentioned

by Isaiah were not automobile parts! These were terms designating various ornaments and fancy clothing worn by Israelite women at the time (Isaiah 3:18-23).

Other clothing items within the biblical account are interesting. The robe worn by Moses' brother, a high priest, was decorated with pomegranates! "...pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet...all around its hem, and bells between them" (Exod. 28:33).

Jewish priests, while ministering in the temple, wore linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies. They were not allowed to wear wool or clothe themselves with anything that causes *sweat*" (Ezek. 44:17, 18).

John the Baptist wore a garment made of *camel's hair* (Matt. 3:4), a striking contrast to the fine clothing of kings (Matt. 11:8). Apparently sandals made of *badger skin* were highly regarded (Ezek. 16:10). Some translations have porpoise-skin or sealskin.

The practice of stripping captives of their clothing was so common, the Hebrew word translated "captive" means to **denude** (Strong's Concordance, 1540). At one time 200,000 women, boys, and girls were taken captive, many were stripped naked, even including their shoes (2 Chron. 28:8, 15). The king of Assyria led away captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, with their buttocks uncovered (Isa. 20:4).

THOMAS, one of the original apostles chosen by Jesus, is widely known as "*doubting* Thomas," based on John 20:24-25. However, he was not the only doubter. At one time or another ALL of the apostles had doubts!

"Now when Jesus was risen...he appeared first to Mary Magdalene...she went and told them that had been with him....When they heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, BELIEVED NOT" (Mk. 16:9-11). The words of Mary and other women, seemed to them like idle tales, and they DID NOT BELIEVE THEM (Lk. 24:10,11).

The name **Thomas** in Hebrew means TWIN. He was also called **Didymus** (John 11:16; 20:24) which is simply the Greek equivalent, meaning TWIN. I think it is safe to assume he was a twin. As such, he and a brother or sister, were Womb Mates (pun intended). In the Bible, Jacob and Esau are the best-known twins (Gen. 25:22). Perez and Zerah are also mentioned as twins (Gen. 38:27-30).

In more recent times, a list of well-known people who had a twin brother or sister would include Ann Landers, Ellen G. White, Jerry Falwell Sr., Elvis Presley, Marty Robbins, Ed Sullivan and Liberace.

John 16:3 or John 3:16? Some years ago a story circulated by social media that Al Gore was asked his favorite verse in the Bible. He, *allegedly*, said it was John 16:3. This verse (a statement of Jesus) says: "These things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. If that actually happened, it is obvious he meant John 3:16. The whole thing is questionable because at other times the same story circulated, only it was George Bush that said it, or John Kerry, or Barack Obama!

If anything like this actually happened, it is understandable that in the pressure of a campaign, giving numerous speeches and interviews, a speaker could easily transpose numbers. And not just politicians, but preachers also— including myself— have made mistakes.

Years ago, some Christian people I knew bought a large old house in Bloomington, California. After considerable remodeling, when they were ready to open it as a Christian rest home, they asked me to come and conduct a dedication ceremony. A small group of us marched around the property, prayed, and dedicated it to the Lord. That night I preached at a church in nearby San Bernardino. I briefly mentioned I had dedicated a rest home that afternoon. Well, that's what I thought I said. I did not catch it at the time, but after the service someone told me I said restroom instead of rest home! Some may have been puzzled as to how one would go about dedicating a restroom!

One day while driving to church, a question came to my mind: What is the first **color** mentioned in the Bible? If one starts reading Genesis, before completing Chapter One, he will have the answer. GREEN (Gen. 1:30).

When the gospel writers Matthew, Mark, and Luke use the word “**verily**” (KJV) it is a single word. But when *John* uses the word, he always *doubles* it: “**Verily, verily** I say unto you...ö

Most chapters in the New Testament have less than 66 verses. But in the 66th verse of John 6 we read: “From that time many of his disciples went back and *walked with him no more.*” Notice the reference— three sixes. **666** (cf. Rev. 13:18). The original manuscripts did not have chapters and verses (such being added much later), so a verse having a certain number proves nothing, but maybe it's interesting?

The writer of Psalm 84:10 said: “I had rather be a DOOR-KEEPER in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” We might suppose a doorkeeper meant a janitor or one whose duties compare with a person today who stands at the door of the church, welcoming those who attend, shaking hands. But this is probably not the meaning at all, for the word translated “doorkeeper” (Strong's Concordance, #5605) means *to snatch away, i.e. terminate*. The word does not have a friendly tone! A doorkeeper was probably more like what we call a *bouncer*.

We come now to the close of this article— *finally!* To its credit, the Bible is quite candid in telling not just the good, but also the bad and indifferent, about the people and events it mentions. While some of the biblical material we covered was **interesting**, not everything was **edifying**. So to end on a positive note, we will *quote* John 3:16 (a reference mentioned earlier only in passing):

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”



Palm Springs, as the name implies, has palm trees—and springs. If one follows Palm Canyon Drive south of town, there are over 3,000 native palm trees in the rugged Indian Canyons. These are the *Washingtonia filifera* (California Fan Palm). More grow here, it is said, than anywhere else in the world! What a delight it is to walk along the streams in this lush oasis, past unusual rock formations, and through groves of stately palms!

In the Bible, palm trees are often mentioned, beginning with the seventy palm trees and twelve springs of water at Elim (Exod. 15:27). Palm trees were a welcome sight to weary travelers, as a place of refuge and life-sustaining water. It is understandable how from early times the palm came to symbolize hope, victory, life!

The palm was prominent in the decoration of the Jerusalem Temple. Along with cherubim and flowers, carvings of palm trees were overlaid with gold. Palm trees were inscribed throughout the Temple—on doors, walls, supports, and gate posts (1 Kings 6; Ezek. 40-41).

As a symbol of victory, when Jesus made his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, people took palm branches and went out to meet him (John 12:13). In the closing book of the Bible, followers of the Lamb—a great multitude that no one could count—are pictured wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands (Rev. 7:9).



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