

# Straight Bible Talk

Manchester Church of Christ, Share Christ's Love and Share His Message

## Curious Interpretations

"The first to plead his case seems right, Until another comes and examines him." This saying from Proverbs has sometimes been paraphrased to say, "There is always another side to the story."

Every religious group has their favorite Bible verses. Those verses are hauled out to support their favorite doctrines. Whether the doctrines are true or not depends upon taking into consideration all that the Bible has to say on the subject.

Taking verses in the Bible out of their context will allow one to prove almost anything. In context, the matter may be quite different.

We want to look at some "curious interpretations" that have been imposed upon the Bible. Ideas that are not true have been supported by such curious interpretations. Others have presented their side. We want to look at the "other side."

Lucifer has come into our language as a name for the devil based on a single passage, Isaiah 14:12, in the King James Version.

The chapter, in Isaiah, opens with this statement: "You will take up this taunt against the King of Babylon, and say, . . ." Isaiah is perfectly clear. His message concerns the King of Babylon, not the devil. But, someone will respond, "There are statements in the passage that cannot apply to the King of Babylon."

That is true. It is proclaimed in poetic form. Poetry often involves symbolism and statements that are not literally true. Because we cannot apply the passage literally to the King of Babylon does not justify ignoring the fact that Isaiah claims

that it is the King about whom he is speaking.

Not only does the context not support the idea that Lucifer is a reference to the devil, there are other problems as well. Modern translations have "star of the morning" rather than Lucifer.

John wrote two passages in Revelation in which Jesus is described as "the bright morning star." (These are found in 2:28 and 22:16.) It is curious that when the Hebrew Old Testament is translated into English, the bright morning star becomes Lucifer and when the Greek New Testament is translated into English it becomes morning star.

But even without this translation problem, it is curious that Lucifer became another name for Satan when there is absolutely no reference to Satan in the passage found in Isaiah. A fertile imagination went to work on Scripture and produced an astonishing result!

Incidentally, the common thread between Jesus and the King of Babylon relates to their sovereign power. As the King of Babylon reigned over the kingdoms of the world in his time, so, Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth for our times. And, unlike the King of Babylon, Jesus will never fall from his position!

Here is another curious interpretation. Consider that blessed passage, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

We have often had people cite this passage to prove that one does not need to be bap-

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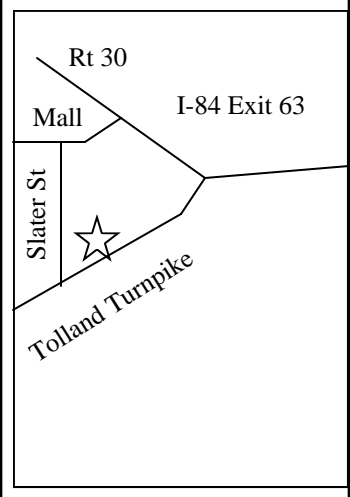
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"Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

Acts 17:31

All scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.



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tized for salvation. Whatever the truth is about the relationship of baptism and one's salvation, that matter cannot be determined from a passage that says nothing about baptism if there are other passages that make a connection between one's salvation and the act of being baptized.

It is as though one could form an opinion about the Sahara desert by observing New York City. It is passages that speak of baptism that tell us the relationship of baptism to salvation and the Scriptures abound in such passages. Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, 22:16, Romans 6:4 and 1 Peter 3:21, are just a few of those passages.

John 3:16 is a true statement, but it does not tell us everything that we need to know about salvation. There is no single verse in the Bible that does that. God gave us His entire Word. It is not to be chopped up into bits and pieces and put back together in some haphazard fashion in order to know the truth.

In fact, God did not divide the Bible into chapters and verses. Someone did that in order to make it easier to find things. But taking those verses out of their context is not a proper way to understand the Bible.

Before Jesus said the words found in John 3:16, he told Nicodemus that a man must be born of water and the spirit in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. That is found in the same chapter.

God put water in salvation and woe to the man who tries to take it out! The Ethiopian understood that. Paul understood that and baptized the jailer at Philippi the same hour of the night as he taught him about Jesus.

Another curious interpretation is one that sees a Pope in Jesus' words to Peter. Here is what Jesus said, (in Matthew 16:18-19) "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Some of what Jesus said on this occasion was repeated to the other apostles later. The phrase that seems to have been distorted refers to Peter as a rock "and upon this rock I will build my church."

There is nothing about Peter being

a Pope. There is nothing said about Peter being the head of the church. In fact, Paul later declared that Jesus was the head over the church. Some interesting verses to consider are found in Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:19-22 and 4:11-12, not to mention also Colossians 1:18 and Matthew 20:20-28.

Much of the time, people arrive at "curious interpretations" because of bad assumptions that are made before opening the Bible. Assumptions are those beliefs that we hold without examining. They simply "must" be true. They are the matters that have been decided by the experts long ago and cannot be wrong.

Scientists long struggled with the problem of determining the path of the planets when they assumed the earth was the center of the universe. The calculations were long and difficult. It was not until Copernicus and Galileo challenged the assumption that astronomers were able to make sense of the motions observed in the heavens.

Bible study is like that. One has to go through all sorts of contortions when the assumptions are wrong. It is far better to approach the Bible with only one assumption. It is the Word of God.