



***FASCINATING FACTS  
PUZZLING PROBLEMS  
AND MATTERS OF TASTE***

**People of the Bible**

**A Book in the Wartburg Bible Series**

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## **FASCINATING FACTS PUZZLING PROBLEMS AND MATTERS OF TASTE**

Day 1

### ***The Purpose and Value of the Course***

The Bible was not written primarily to entertain its readers or to provide interesting facts about history, geography, or daily life in ancient times, though it does all of the above. The Bible was written to lead us on the path to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. God's law in the Bible also provides a road map for our life's journey. It warns us against sin and provides a guide for our daily lives.

Because of its unique role as God's book for all people, the Bible generates more interest and controversy than any other book. This creates a whole set of issues for translators and readers of the Bible.

One big problem is that most people today are so far removed from the daily lifestyles of the people in the Bible. Things and activities that were common in their daily lives are largely unknown to many inhabitants of large, modern cities. In their daily lives, the people who lived in the United States in 1800 AD were closer to the people of the Bible than they are to us. The last two centuries have greatly widened the gap between our culture and the cultures and daily lives of the inhabitants of the Bible.

This creates the plausibility of our title, *Fascinating Facts, Puzzling Problems, and Matters of Taste* (*Fascinating Facts* for short). Or you might prefer the subtitle: *Interesting Discussions about the Bible*. This set of courses will show how geography, archaeology, ancient records, and studies of material culture can deepen our understanding of people and events in the Bible. This series of plans or courses (*People of the Bible, Places of the Bible, and Events of the Bible*) focuses more on Bible background than on a devotional study of the Bible. It is designed to support our devotional reading of the Bible and to connect us more closely to the people of the Bible.

### **Questions to Ponder**

Today's plan is not so much intended to tell you information but to get you to think about both your distance from and your closeness to the people you meet on the pages of the Bible.

Can we understand and apply the basic message of the Bible to our hearts and lives without an in-depth understanding of Israel's culture and geography?

Does knowledge of biblical geography and ancient culture enrich our understanding of biblical events and strengthen our sense of fellowship with the people of the Bible?

How was the daily life of George Washington, who lived around 1800 AD, closer to the daily life of biblical people than it is to our daily lives?

To answer that question, compare the life of a biblical person to that of George Washington, and then compare yourself to George Washington and to a biblical person in the following areas of life:

- Compare the means of transportation and the time needed for a journey of 10 miles, 100 miles, 1000 miles, and 10,000 miles.
- Compare the tools and the time needed for writing and making a copy of a letter to someone.
- Compare the tools and the time needed for writing and making a copy of the Bible.
- Compare the method, time, and cost of sending a message to someone hundreds or even thousands of miles away.
- Compare the storage, preservation, and availability of food.
- Compare any other areas of life that strike you.

In the lessons of this course we will be providing specific answers to all of the preceding questions. For now it is sufficient for you to think about the journey back through time that we are beginning together and for you to get excited about the answers we will be discovering along the way.

How does Psalm 19 motivate you to undertake a careful study of God's Word? What benefits do you expect from such study and meditation?

<sup>7</sup>The law of the LORD is perfect.  
It revives the soul.  
The testimony of the LORD is trustworthy.  
It gives wisdom to the inexperienced.  
<sup>8</sup>The precepts of the LORD are right.  
They give joy to the heart.  
The commandment of the LORD is bright.  
It gives light to the eyes.  
<sup>9</sup>The fear of the LORD is pure.  
It stands forever.

The just decrees of the LORD are truth.  
They are altogether righteous.  
<sup>10</sup>They are more desirable than gold,  
even better than much pure gold.  
They are sweeter than honey,  
even honey dripping from the honeycomb.



This course can be used with any translation of the Bible, but it was written as a result of specific questions submitted by readers of *The Holy Bible: The Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV)*. More detailed studies of much of the material in this course can be found on the Wartburg Project's website [wartburgproject.org](http://wartburgproject.org).



**FASCINATING FACTS  
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Day 2

**The Method and Goals of the Study**

Since most of the topics which are addressed in these three courses (*People of the Bible*, *Places of the Bible*, and *Events of the Bible*) originated as questions submitted by translators, editors, and readers of the EHV, the individual sections of the course do not necessarily have a direct logical relationship with neighboring sections. We have, however, tried to sort the questions into categories, such as the traditional categories: people, places, and things. Because many of the topics are responses to questions or problems that puzzled readers of the Bible, some of the sections of the courses will not be light reading but will deal with difficult questions. Studying some of them may be challenging, but studying them will reward the effort you put into it.

Before we deal with the specific questions and problems, we will summarize the principles which we use to address alleged problems and puzzles in the Bible.

The duty of a translator is to convey all of the meaning (or all of the openness to more than one meaning), all of the beauty (or all of the ugliness), all of the style (high or low), and all of the emotional impact of the original text into the translation. This is impossible, but in bits and pieces a translator can come close to achieving this goal.

The goal of a translator is not so much to make Judeans sound like 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans but to make them sound like ancient Judeans who speak good English. The goal is not to “say it the way we would say it” but to make Judeans speak in a way we can understand. As much as possible, when reading the Bible, we want to feel we are conversing with friends and entering into their lives.

Sometimes there is no definitive, consensus as to how to translate or interpret a given text, so the interpreter has to make his or her best effort and use that result. For example, a precise identification of each gemstone in the high priest’s breastplate is beyond our reach. In cases where the meaning of a term or verse is uncertain, this should be indicated in a footnote.

The translator should remember he is a translator not an editor. He has no calling to “improve” or “fix” the message the Spirit has given, either in content or in style. As much as possible, the translator’s duty is to say what the author said, in the way that the author said it. This includes not only what

our ancient brothers and sisters are saying but the emotion with which they are saying it.

When editors are dealing with the Bible, they must remember that they have entered sacred ground. When we are creating our own writings, we can make the writing conform to a set of rules that we have adopted. When we are working with the biblical text, we are in a very different set of circumstances. In addressing so-called “Bible difficulties” our goal is not to correct or improve alleged deficiencies’ in the Bible, but to lessen our deficiency in understanding a biblical text by supplying additional information about the context.

### Key point of the lesson

Our primary goal is to grow in our understanding of everything in the Word of Truth. A secondary goal is to guard against common criticisms of the Bible.

Many criticisms of the Bible arise when readers misunderstand or make false assumptions about what the Bible says because they do not understand the context. They then charge the Bible with error.

Have you encountered such criticism in things that you have heard or read about the Bible? Have you ever done the same thing yourself?

One way to remedy such criticism is to study as much as you can about Bible background like geography, archaeology, and history. However, it is not possible for everyone to devote so much time to such study. So the second best solution is to find resources written by students of the Bible who have a high view of the authority and accuracy of the Bible, so that they can share with you the results of their studies. It is a goal of this course to be such a resource.

Our attitude as we study is not to pass judgment on Scripture but to allow the Word itself to remove our weakness of understanding and to lead us to deeper knowledge.

### Point to Ponder

How will meditating on the following verses of Psalm 119 shape our attitude as we prepare for our study?

<sup>18</sup>Uncover my eyes, and I will behold wonders from your law.

<sup>27</sup>Make me understand the meaning of your precepts.  
Then I will meditate on your wonders.

<sup>33</sup>Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes.  
Then I will guard it to the end.

- <sup>34</sup>Give me understanding, and I will guard your law.  
I will keep it with all my heart.
- <sup>35</sup>Make me walk on the path of your commandments,  
for I take pleasure in it.
- <sup>89</sup>To eternity, O LORD, your word is fixed firmly in the heavens.
- <sup>96</sup>I see a limit to all perfection,  
but your commandment has no limits.
- <sup>105</sup>Your words are a lamp for my feet  
and a light for my path.
- <sup>160</sup>The sum of your word is truth.  
All your righteous judgment is eternal.
- <sup>165</sup>Great peace belongs to those who love your law,  
and nothing is a stumbling block for them.
- <sup>174</sup>I long for your salvation, O LORD.





## **FASCINATING FACTS PUZZLING PROBLEMS AND MATTERS OF TASTE**

Day 3

### **People of the Bible**

#### **Goliath**

**How tall was Goliath? The height given in many translations and commentaries, over nine feet tall, seems too tall to be credible.**

Like many questions that come our way, this question, which at first seems to be very simple, turns out to be more complicated than we expected.

Both this question and the answer seem to be very simple. The Hebrew text of 1 Samuel 17:4 says that Goliath was six cubits and a span tall. The standard default value for the cubit used by most translations is 18 inches. A span is half a cubit, 9 inches. The height of Goliath using this as the standard for the calculation would be 117 inches, or 9 feet, 9 inches. Since the EHV regularly uses the default translation of 18 inches for a cubit, that is what we used as our starting point for this verse in the EHV Study Bible.

<sup>4</sup>A challenger who represented the Philistines came out from the camp of the Philistines. He was named Goliath of Gath. He was nine feet, nine inches tall.

It seems that the solution is pretty straight forward, but a look at the footnote in the EHV Study Bible is the first indication that things are not so simple.

<sup>c</sup>17:4 Hebrew *six cubits and a span*. A Hebrew Dead Sea Scroll, some Greek manuscripts, and the historian Josephus have the variant *four cubits and a span*, that is, *six feet, nine inches*, for Goliath's height. A typical Israelite teenager, like David, was probably in the 5-foot-2 range, and Saul, who was a head taller, would be more than 6 feet tall. But if David's cubit was about 16 inches long rather than the default value of 18 inches, Goliath was considerably shorter than nine-foot-nine. This complicated question is discussed in detail in Wartburg Project FAQ 69.

The problem is that the ancient cubit did not have a set, standardized value. Eighteen inches is a rough estimate not a precise value. Ancient measurements were not based on a universal standard, but varied depending on the body size of the measurer or on the size of

the container or measuring stick used to make the measurement, so all measurements in the EHV are approximate.

A *cubit* was the distance from the fingertip to the elbow. Scholars use a standard cubit of 18 inches, but the cubit of a typical 6-foot-tall man is 19½ inches. There also was a long cubit of about 21 inches.

A *span* is the distance from the tip of the little finger to the tip of the thumb with the hand spread out. Scholars use a span of 9 inches, but the span of a typical 6-foot-tall man is 10 inches.

Lesson for the day: In wrestling with a Bible difficulty, don't jump to conclusions; things are often more complicated than they appear.

This topic continues in the next lesson.



**FASCINATING FACTS  
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Day 4

**How to Measure Goliath**

If you were a young Israelite trying to measure the deceased Goliath, how would you do it?

David was probably much closer to 5' 3" than to 6 foot, so his cubit would be considerably shorter than 18 inches, probably 16 inches or even less. We do not know the source of the measurement of Goliath. Did it come from Philistine pre-battle hype, or, as seems more likely, did David or one of the excited Israelite bystanders do a quick measurement of the fallen Goliath before David reduced his height by a foot or so? If Goliath was measured by an Israelite who had a cubit 16 inches long, Goliath's height would translate into about 104 inches, 8' 8". This falls into the range of the largest known modern giants. If the measurer had a cubit of 15 inches, the height would be about 97 inches, about 8' 1".

That brings us back to the variant reading of the Greek Old Testament: 4 cubits and a span = 6' 9" if one uses 18-inch cubits. Many interpreters suggest that the reading of the Septuagint was an attempt by the translator to make Goliath's height more reasonable, but if this was so, he botched the job. If Saul, who was a head taller than other Israelites, was in the 6 foot to 6' 6" range, a 6' 9" Goliath, while formidable, would not be a wonder.

But there is another plausible explanation of the Greek reading. The Greek translator thought that his readers in Egypt, who were familiar with an Egyptian royal cubit of about 21 inches, would not have been familiar with the shorter Israelite cubit and would have been misled by the figure in the Hebrew text. So he translated the data into Egyptian cubits. With a measurement of 4 cubits and a span in Egyptian royal cubits, Goliath would have been about 94 inches or 7 feet 11 inches tall. This is close to the 8 feet 2 inches obtained by assuming that Goliath was measured using a 7½ inch span. If so, this was the earliest known attempt to translate biblical measurements into another measuring system.

Using the average size of Israelite men of the period, which is based on skeleton size, it is likely that David's cubit was less than 18 inches, so Goliath was probably less than nine feet tall but more than eight feet tall. The only people who would have needed a precise measurement of Goliath were his tailor and his undertaker (if he had one). The easiest way to take a

measurement of a person lying on the ground was to place your spans (your two spread out hands) side-by-side on one end of the person and to keep leap-frogging your spans over the person until you reached the other end. Or you could measure him in cubits by placing your elbow on his toe and keep moving your forearm up his body till you reached the top of his head. No more precision than that was necessary.

All the ancient scribes and their readers understood that all measurements made with the ad hoc measurements based on variable body size were approximations which varied with time, place, and person. This was true also of English measurements until relatively recently. The height of horses was traditionally measured in “hands,” so two different-sized farmers could come up with different sizes for the same horse. The “hand” is now standardized as four inches. The “foot” is now standardized at 12 inches, but only a small minority of the world’s population have feet that long. The twelve-inch foot supposedly is based on the physique of Henry VIII.

Using the 18-inch cubit works reasonably well for approximating the size of large buildings, which were laid out using measuring lines or rods designed for that project. In fact, this 18-inch standard splits the difference between 16-inch de facto cubits and 20-inch royal cubits. It also has the virtue of making the math easy: 2 cubits = 1 yard; 1 cubit = 1½ feet. But for real-life, on-the-spot measurements of medium-sized objects, the people involved had to choose the real-life cubit or span of one of the participants. What was important was not the precise size of the cubit, but that the same cubit was used when buying and when selling things.

Misunderstandings or unclarity due to shifting standard of measurement are not just an ancient phenomenon. They continued into modern times. For example, there is a psychological trait called the Napoleon Complex, a popular belief that short men tend to compensate for their lack of height through domineering behavior and aggression. It is named after the French general and emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, who is characterized as an egotist of small stature and fiery temper. The egotist and fiery temper part seem to be correct but what about the small stature?

Was Napoleon really short? It seems he was probably of average height. Napoleon's height was just over 5 *pieds 2 pouces*. Literally translated, this would be 5 feet, 2 inches, a diminutive height for an imposing general. But the French “inch” was about 1.066 times larger than then the English inch. This would make Napoleon’s height about 5'6", not far from the period’s average adult male height. The notion of Napoleon’s small stature seems to have been derived from the way he was portrayed in British political cartoons, which pictured him as a temperamental child. This was perhaps psychologically true but perhaps not true by the yardstick or metre stick. We have to be very

careful when translating measurements across time and space and from one culture to another.

To read more about a related topic, whether we should use the ancient measurements or modern measurements in translating the Bible see the article *Weights and Measures* at [wartburgproject.org](http://wartburgproject.org) or on pages 139-146 in the book *Fascinating Facts*.

Incidentally, if you ask people to name the most famous Philistine, they would probably say “Goliath” or maybe “Delilah,” but, quite possibly, neither of them were Philistines, at least not ethnically speaking. There were other giants living among the Philistines besides Goliath. These giants were probably not ethnic Philistines of the type that had migrated into Philistia shortly before the time of Saul and David. Instead, they were survivors of a giant race of people called the Anakim, who were indigenous to the region. As for Delilah, she may have been an Israelite collaborator, willing to sell Samson for a huge payoff. That leads us to our next topic; lesson 5: Ethnic Identity in the Bible.

Day 7 is a study of Philistine identity.



## **FASCINATING FACTS PUZZLING PROBLEMS AND MATTERS OF TASTE**

Day 5

### **Ethnic Identity in the Bible**

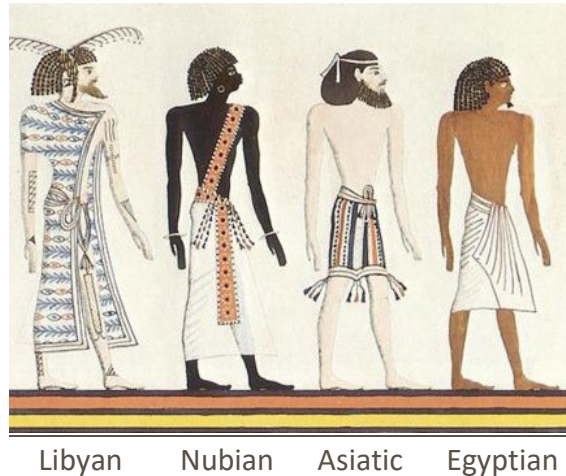
Ethnic identity is a very complicated matter. It may be based on such factors as descent from common ancestors, a common language, race and skin color, a shared material culture, living in a defined geographical area, or being ruled by one government. Take the category *Swiss*. It is a conglomeration of people from three language groups (German, French, and Italian) joined together under a common government within defined geographical borders. Then there is the category *German*. There was a German ethnic identity long before there was a German nation, but the various Germanic peoples were often identified by tribal or territorial names. Even after there was a German nation, there were significant concentrations of people identifying as ethnic Germans in many lands of eastern Europe. To complicate matters further, Germans do not call themselves Germans but *Deutsch*. Their surrounding neighbors call them by such different names as *allemand*, *nemtsy* and *tysker*. Perhaps the most complicated ethnic term of all is *American*, by which we mean inhabitants of the USA rather than all the inhabitants of North and South America. We need a whole catalog of hyphenated names to differentiate different ethnic groups within the category American.

We should expect the same confusion and complications about ethnic identity in the Bible as that which we experience today. Let's start with trying to sort this out by means of looking at one means of ethnic differentiation, namely race and skin color.

### **Skin color in the ancient Near East**

We need to digress for a moment to discuss race and skin color in the ancient Near East. This issue is referred to in many ancient writings and is pictured in ancient art. Egyptian art pictures four basic types or "races": 1) relatively light-skinned Libyans/Berbers on the west; 2) black Nubians or Cushites from the south; 3) relatively light Asiatics/Canaanites from the east; and 4) darker brown native Egyptians. Egyptians saw themselves as lighter than black Nubians and darker than "Asiatics". Native Egyptians were not black, though there were black Cushite "Egyptians" living among them, some of whom even became pharaohs. The last pharaohs, Cleopatra and her

predecessors were not ethnic Egyptians at all, but were “white” Caucasian, Macedonian Greeks.



This information must be used with caution since the coloration can be influenced by the modern reproducers of the paintings, but the general tendency is quite clear. It is supported by the following tomb painting of itinerants from “Asia” (that is, Canaan) who are pictured along with Egyptians. The relationship is the same as that above. The Egyptians are darker brown than the Canaanites.



People of many ethnic groups were present in the land of Canaan/Israel. Some of the inhabitants of the area had Indo-European names. Black Cushites were present, often first arriving as mercenaries in the Egyptian army. If you met groups of Israelites, Jebusites, Girgashites, and Perezites on the street corner, could you distinguish them by their skin tone or their hair and eye color, by their dress, by their first language, or by their accent? Would all of them be classified by as Canaanites because they all resided in Canaan? We simply do not know. And the groups, of course were not homogenous. There were many people of mixed race or ethnicity. There was, for example, a lot of Canaanite DNA among the Israelites;

A statue of a king found in northern Israel has a relatively light skin color, though the skin color may reflect the color of the clay, more than a deliberate attempt to indicate skin tone, There is however a clear distinction between his black beard and light skin. It is uncertain if this is an Israelite or Aramean

king, but since the Israelites were of predominantly Aramean/Canaanite descent, it does not matter for our purposes. At any rate, there is evidence that Israelites in general were noticeably lighter than their neighbors to the south. Jews today are classified as Caucasian (as are Arabs).



Display in Israel Museum  
Widely published in news media

We need to beware of stereotypes about skin color and skin tone and their relevance for ethnic identity. As far as the category *race*, from the biblical perspective there is only one race, the human race.

Acts 17 From one man (Or one blood), he made every nation of mankind to live over the entire face of the earth. He determined the appointed times and the boundaries where they would live. <sup>27</sup>He did this so they would seek God and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. <sup>28</sup>'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'Indeed, we are also his offspring.'

All the descendants of Adam are one race that can “be fruitful and multiply” together. What is the application of this passage?

Almost all markers of ethnicity run across the boundaries of our made-up, somewhat arbitrary ethnic categories. Beware of ethnic and racial stereotypes.

In the next lesson we will take a look at another trait that often is considered to be a mark of ethnic identity, hair color.

Not all Scandinavians are blond (most are brown-haired), and not all natural blonds are Scandinavian. That leads us to our next topic: Did David have red hair?



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**Day 6**

**Did David have red hair?**

Bible readers are often surprised to learn of the tradition that David had red hair, and they may be surprised that in 1 Samuel 16:12, the EHV says David had red hair. The Hebrew word for hair (*se 'ir*) does not appear in that verse. The Hebrew word *admoni* simply means that David was “red colored.” It does not specify what was red about him—his skin, his hair, or both. Reddish skin color and red hair tend to go together. In Genesis 25:25 Esau is called “Red” because he was “red all over, like a hairy garment.”

The word “ruddy,” which is often used to translate this passage makes many people think of a wind-burned Bedouin nomad, whereas “red hair” makes them think of a northern European from Scotland.

There is a tradition which says that David had red hair, but we, nevertheless, have to admit that a description of David’s appearance is not “written in stone” or more precisely, it is not “painted in color” as some pictures of other ancient people are.

In spite of the stereotype that red hair belongs in Ireland, Scotland, and Scandinavia, there were red-headed people in the eastern Mediterranean region in ancient times.

Plausible answers to the question “Did David have red hair?” are “No,” “Yes,” “Maybe,” and “We don’t know.” Let us investigate to see if we can find which answer is most plausible.

The majority of Bible translations reflect one of four options: 1) the term *admoni* does not refer to a natural physical trait of David but to a healthy outdoorsman look; 2) the word refers to a naturally reddish complexion; 3) the word refers to skin colored by the sun and wind, or perhaps blushing; 4) the word may include both a reddish complexion or freckles and red hair, which sometimes go together.

The most common translation of *admoni* is *ruddy*. Two factors give us pause about this translation. *Ruddy* has something of an archaic sound to it. I do not recall ever hearing anyone called *ruddy* in live conversation, only in older literature. Men with red hair and/or freckles are called Red or Rusty not

Rudd. The second factor is that the meaning of *ruddy* is unclear. This translation *ruddy* will not communicate clearly. It is non-committal. The dictionary I used as a young student says that *ruddy* refers to reddish skin color. On the other hand, a recent online word study says: “*Ruddy* is used to describe something that is reddish— like the color of red hair, tomatoes, or a friend's cheeks on a cold winter's day.” This definition leaves all the options open.

In the case of David, the trait *admoni* must be something distinctive that makes him stand out in a crowd. Would he be any more or less sun-kissed than his brothers? Would it be remarkable if his skin was redder than his brothers? Would rosy cheeks be a striking feature? Red hair on the other hand would be quite remarkable.

If David was darkened by the sun, the term would likely be *black*, not *red*. See Song of Songs 1:5-6, where the term *dark or black* does not identify the woman's race or ethnicity but to her low social status. She is not one of the fine ladies who sit in the shade all day. She is tanned and dark because she must work in the hot sun all day. Being sun or wind burned was not a desirable trait in that culture, at least for ladies. But the lady is nevertheless “black but beautiful.”

What about red hair in ancient Israel? Red hair definitely was present in the ancient Near East. The trait does seem to be more prevalent in the north Aegean area than in Canaan. Two famous ladies said to be red-heads were Helen of Troy and Cleopatra (perhaps chemically enhanced). Achilles and Alexander the Great were said to be redheads. Perhaps some of these identifications relate to the stereotype of redheads as strong willed, but there would not be such a stereotype unless there were redheads. The same may be true of the portrayals of Adam and Eve and Mary Magdalene as redheads. Many paintings of the creation depict both Adam and Eve as redheads. In the case of Adam and Eve, at least there is a slim shred of evidence. The claim that red is the original hair color of humanity is linked to the use of the Hebrew roots *adam* and *adamah* in reference to Adam and Eve.

For Egypt, the evidence for the presence of red hair is quite strong. Most interesting is the evidence for Pharaoh Ramses II. He was near 90 at death. His mummy's white hair was died red, but microscopic inspection of the roots of Ramses II's hair and other analysis showed that the king's hair originally was red, which suggests that he came from a family of redheads. (The common practice was to color the grey hair of old age the color it had been when the person was young. Herod, for example, died his old gray hair black.) There is also quite a bit of other evidence for red hair in Egypt.

But is there any objective evidence related to Israelites? A first century tomb south of Jerusalem preserved skeletal remains of a Jewish male which preserved a sample of his hair. The color of the hair was “reddish.”

Red hair is reasonably well represented among today's Jews. The Hebrew name for this is *gingi*, and the red-heads have a website devoted to themselves named *Ginger Jews*. But it seems that this trait tends to be concentrated among those Jews known to have some northern European heritage, so we can't put much weight on it. But just as little, can we look at present-day inhabitants of the Middle East and think that they tell us much about the appearance of ancient Israelites.

It is also wrong to think of Israelites as having a homogenous appearance. They were a mixture of many ethnic lines. The well known ability of red hair to appear across racial lines may be illustrated by the case of Malcolm X, who hated his red hair and his nickname "Detroit Red." It seems quite possible that his red hair was a heritage of Celtic genes from a slave owner. We should be careful about stereotypes and about assumption about traits within certain groups.

But what about linguistic evidence? The Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon (Gesenius was a pioneer of modern Hebrew lexicons) gives the definition of *admoni* as "red, that is, red-haired, German *rothaarig*." Other word studies, translations, and commentaries say the same. But do they have clear evidence for this?

*Admoni* is a word for which we have little evidence of its usage. In the description of animals with red hair (the red heifer—Numbers 19:2), a different word for red is used, an adjective form of the root *adm*. That leaves us only the cases of Esau and David as test cases for red hair. In the case of Esau (Genesis 25:25) the link with his hair color is more strongly implied, but it is not explicit. The case of David is even less specific.

It should be noted that translating *admoni* as *red haired* is not adding anything to the definition of the word. It is simply attempting to define the word. Many words in other languages require more than one English word to translate them.

So after an exhaustive and exhausting study of the evidence, what can we conclude about the answer to our original question "Did David have red hair?" After considerable study we find that plausible answers to the question "Did David have red hair?" are "No," "Yes," "Maybe," and "We don't know." This is quite often the end result of researching this type of debated question.

The EHV's practice is that when we are aware of questions or disputed issues, we try to dig into the issue. By putting one plausible view into the translation and another one into the notes, we invite readers to look at the issue. In this case, it would be easy to justify putting either view into either the text or the footnote. Intriguingly, the EHV's answer to the question "Did David have red hair?" must be, "Yes, maybe, or we don't know for sure." Nor does anyone else. The reason there is unresolved debate about such questions is that there have been plausible options available for centuries.

In the end, it really does not matter which option we choose. The main point is identical: David was very striking in his appearance. He was impressive.

### Point to Ponder: Do Looks Matter?

Think about what these passages from 1 Samuel 16 and 17 say about judging by personal appearance.

<sup>7</sup>But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at how tall he is, because I have rejected him. For the Lord does not look at things the way man does. For man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

<sup>10</sup>Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel. Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.” <sup>11</sup>Samuel said to Jesse, “Is that all of the young men?” Jesse said, “There still is the youngest, but he is tending the sheep.” Samuel said to Jesse, “Send for him, for we cannot sit down to eat until he comes.”

<sup>12</sup>He sent for him and brought him in. David had red hair and striking eyes, and was good-looking. The LORD said, “Get up! Anoint him, because this is the one.” <sup>13</sup>So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers. The Spirit of the LORD rushed on David with power from that day forward.

<sup>33</sup>But Saul said to David, “You cannot go against this Philistine to fight with him, because you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior since he was a youth.”

<sup>42</sup>When the Philistine got a good look at David, he despised him, because David was just a boy, nothing but a good-looking, red-headed boy.

Was God’s choice of David based on his looks?

What was it based on?

What impressed Saul about David’s looks?

What impressed Goliath about David’s looks?

Why do you think the Bible comments on David’s looks?



## **FASCINATING FACTS PUZZLING PROBLEMS AND MATTERS OF TASTE**

Day 7

### **The Philistines**

The identity of the Philistines has been a debated topic among archaeologists in recent decades. The Bible refers to two groups of people, who are in many ways dissimilar, as “Philistines.” The first Philistines are from the time of Abraham and Isaac. They are nomadic herdsmen who are ruled by kings. They are sometimes hostile to the patriarchs’ presence in or near their grazing land, but they are not an existential threat to the relatively small patriarchal band. In Genesis 10 they are classed as a Hamitic people, related to the Egyptians and the Canaanites.

Much later, at the time of the judges and of the first Israelite kings Saul and David, the Philistines are much different. They are a fierce warrior class that posed a threat to the very existence of Israel. They are ruled by five *serens* (a term that may be related to the Greek word *tyrant*). After their power was broken by David, the Philistines remained hostile to Israel, but Israel for the most part had the upper hand in the relationship.

After the Egyptian language was deciphered in the early 1800s, scholars discovered the existence of a group of people called the *plst*, who fought against the Egyptians in land and sea battles around 1100 BC, but who also served as mercenaries of the Egyptian military, including at bases in Canaan. These Peleset are associated with a coalition called the Sea Peoples, who came from across the sea from the Aegean region (Greece) or from Anatolia (Turkey). Archaeologists realized that certain parts of the material culture of Philistia at this time had similarities to the culture of Mycenaean Greece, especially the designs on some of the painted pottery. This Mycenaean influence on the culture was only partial and relatively short-lived. Nevertheless, many archaeologists assumed that the Bible was wrong to speak of Philistines in Canaan long before the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC.

The solution is relatively simple. It is clear that the Bible uses the term Philistines to refer to all the inhabitants of the area we call Philistia regardless of the time period or their ethnicity. (See the previous article on Goliath for an example.)

The question “Who are the Philistines?” is similar to the question “Who are the British?” Both peoples were made up of different layers of migration

that accumulated over time. Celtic peoples, Germanic peoples like the Angles and Saxons, and the frenchified Vikings called the Normans all contributed to the formation of the British people.

The population of Philistia seems to have been augmented during the time of the judges by newcomers whose roots at least in part were in the Aegean and Anatolian regions. This was probably a relatively small ruling class similar to the Normans in England. This incursion made life harder for the Israelites, but the origin and character of the “Philistines” is much more complicated than one migration from Greece.

#### Point to Ponder:

What caused archaeologists to falsely accuse the Bible of being wrong about the Philistines?

What led them to make this mistake?

How can we correct this mistake?

Picture of *plst* warriors from Medinet Habu Temple in Egypt



See *A Literary and Archaeological Study of the Philistines*  
on [wartburgproject.org](http://wartburgproject.org) for a much more detailed discussion.



## **FASCINATING FACTS PUZZLING PROBLEMS AND MATTERS OF TASTE**

Day 8

### **The Magi**

**Who were the Magi? Were they kings or wisemen /astrologers or just wise men?**

The *Magi* (or *Wisemen*) who came to visit young Jesus were learned men from a foreign country to the east, most likely Persia or perhaps Babylon. The original members of the class called *magi* were Persians, but by New Testament times not all magi were Persians. Often magi were involved in the practice of astronomy/astrology (which were not necessarily separate fields at this time). The biblical text does not say that there were three magi. Some traditions say that there were as many as twelve.

The idea of three magi perhaps arose from the three gifts that the Wise Men brought. Gold was very valuable then as it is today. These Gentiles gave gifts fit for a king (Psalm 72:15). Frankincense was a very expensive substance made from the resin of a certain type of tree (*Boswellia sacra*) which was used as a sweet-smelling incense. Myrrh was made from the natural gum or resin of certain small trees (*commiphora*) and was used in preparing a body for burial (John 19:39).

A better reason for proposing three magi was the idea that the Wise Men were representatives of the descendants of Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Medieval paintings of the Magi often portray one of them as black, and the others as shades of brown or white. In this way the three magi were representatives of the whole human race. Whether this tradition is literally true or not, it expresses an important truth: Christ came for all the descendants of Adam and Noah.

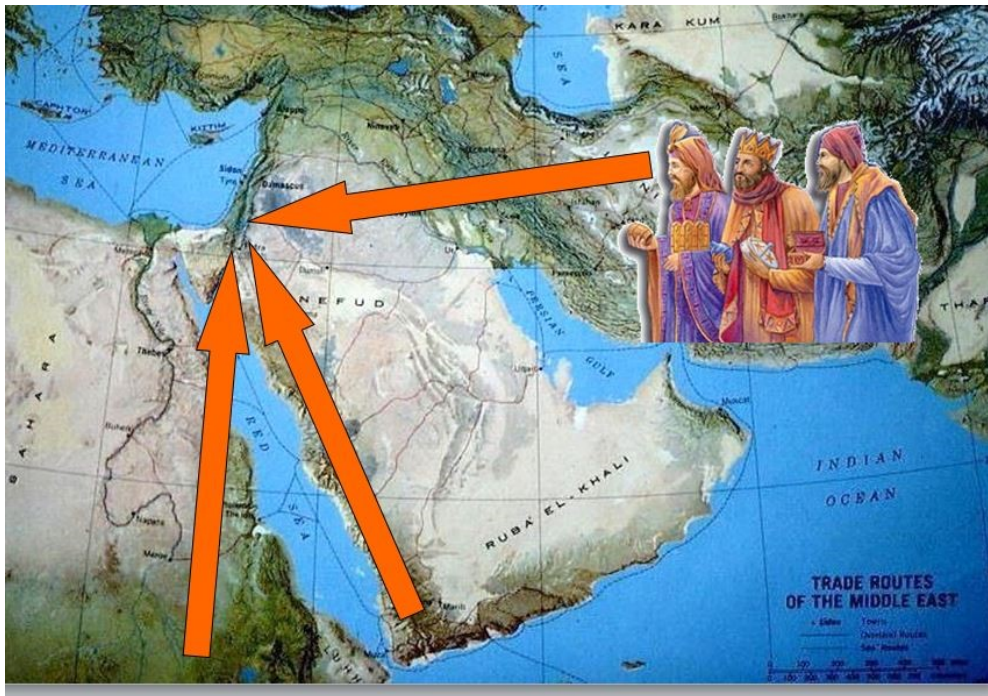
The idea that it was three kings who came to visit Jesus was derived from Old Testament prophecy, such as Psalm 72:10:

The kings of Tarshish and of the sea coasts will bring tribute.

The kings of Sheba and Seba will offer him gifts.

*Tarshish*, a Mediterranean port far to the west, perhaps in Spain or Portugal, was the most distant place that the Israelites were familiar with on the western sea. This location represents Europeans, the descendants of Japheth. *Sheba* and *Seba*, places in southern Arabia and eastern Africa, were the most distant places that the Israelites were familiar with on the eastern sea (the Red Sea and Indian Ocean). They represent descendants of Shem and Ham.

### Three traditional points of origin of the Magi



### Medieval picture of a black Wise Man



The New Testament does not tell us that the Magi were kings. That idea is based on Psalm 72:10-11 and Isaiah 60:1-6. It is very likely that the Magi were not kings. These magi likely were learned advisors to a king or to kings,

as Daniel was (Daniel 1:20; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7). The identification of the Magi as three kings is especially strong in Hispanic tradition.

Contrary to many manger scenes and common notions, the Wise Men were not at the manger that first Christmas. Instead, they arrived some time later when Jesus was a child living in a house. The meager offering which Mary and Joseph could afford at the time of Jesus' presentation indicates that they were still poor forty days after his birth (Luke 2:24).

It is likely that the Magi, however many they may have been, were astronomer/astrologers from Persia or Babylon. According to a legend, early in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, when Persian invaders destroyed many churches in Israel, they chose not to destroy the Nativity Church in Bethlehem because they saw the Magi pictured as Persians in the church's art.

The association of the Magi with descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth is a very nice legend that expresses a great spiritual truth, but nothing in the New Testament text suggests this idea as the historical identification of the Magi.



**FASCINATING FACTS  
PUZZLING PROBLEMS  
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Day 9

## **The Star of the Magi**

Many attempts have been made to provide a natural explanation for the star of the Magi (a conjunction of planets, a comet, a supernova), but Scripture seems to describe a special, miraculous phenomenon, especially because of the way the star moved and then stayed over the place where the child Jesus was. Long before GPS, God directed these Gentile Wise Men to the very house where they could find their Savior. Like the plagues in Egypt, the star may have been a combination of natural and supernatural elements. Possibly it was the appearance or reappearance of a conjunction of planets, with special divine direction. It seems to be an event that would be significant to astronomers but not necessarily spectacular to ordinary observers. The references in the text seem to refer to types of observation significant only to astronomers.

In Matthew 2:2, 9, did the Wise Men see the star “in the east” or “in its rising”? “In the east” certainly has a lot of support in recent translations, but if the Wise Men were from the East why would the text have to tell us that they were “in the east” when they saw the star? We would know that. Or why would the text need to tell us that they saw the star rise in the eastern part of the sky? All stars arise in the eastern part of the sky and march across the sky from east to west. Since the Wise Men were astronomer/astrologers, it was the *appearance* or *reappearance* of a “star” at a certain time and place that was significant to them.

The study of exactly what the Christmas star may have been is a complicated and much disputed topic that we cannot resolve here, but a translation should recognize the astronomical significance of the text of Matthew. “In its rising” in this passage is a technical term that points to the astrological significance of the appearance or the reappearance of a star in a particular portion of the sky. The Greek term translated “from the East” in verse 1 is ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν (*apo anatolon*). *Anatolon* is a plural form, *risings*. The term can typically be used of regularly occurring events such as the rising of the sun. In verses 2 and 9, however, a singular form, ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ (*en tey anatoley*), *in the rising*, is used. This singular form is used of the rising of a star and should not be translated “in the east.” Because of the singular form and the article, this phrase in verses 2 and 9 is probably not a geographical expression like the one in verse 1, but it is instead an astronomical term.

(Greek students, see the article on *anatole* in the *BDAG* Greek Lexicon.) Recent translations that recognize the astronomical significance of this phrase include NET, NLT, ESV, and NRSV. To find out more about the “rising of stars” google the term “heliacal rising.”

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, when Herod was king, Wise Men *from the east* came to Jerusalem. They asked, <sup>2</sup>“Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? We saw his star *when it rose* and have come to worship him.” <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was alarmed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>He gathered together all the people’s chief priests and experts in the law. He asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, because this was written through the prophet:

<sup>6</sup>You, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are certainly not least among the rulers of Judah: because out of you will come a ruler, who will shepherd my people, Israel.”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly summoned the Wise Men and found out from them *exactly when the star had appeared*. <sup>8</sup>He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you find him, report to me, so that I may also go and worship him.”

<sup>9</sup>After listening to the king, they went on their way. Then the star they had seen *when it rose* went ahead of them, until it stood still over the place where the child was.

<sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they rejoiced with overwhelming joy. <sup>11</sup>After they went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>Since they had been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

When you have read the passage above, consider these questions:

What evidence in the text supports the idea that the “star” was not a purely natural phenomenon but a special sign controlled by God?

Where may the magi have gotten the idea of a connection between the Savior of the Nations and a star?

Does the name astrologers suggest any superstition on the part of the Magi?



**FASCINATING FACTS  
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Day 10

## **Elijah**

### **Did Elijah run a marathon?**

In 1 Kings 18, after the LORD's victory over the priests of Baal in the showdown at Mount Carmel, Elijah has a confrontation with Ahab, and he warns Ahab to make a run for it to get to his palace at Jezre'el ahead of the heavy rain that is coming.

“Go up and tell Ahab, ‘Hitch up your chariot and go down so that the rain does not stop you.’”<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, the skies got dark with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab got into his chariot and went to Jezre'el.<sup>46</sup> But the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he hiked up his garments around his waist and ran ahead of Ahab until he came to Jezre'el.

What the text does not tell us is how far it was that Elijah ran through a rain storm and won a race with a chariot. The location of Jezre'el, at the east end of the Jezre'el Valley is, however, well known. Elijah's starting point from the middle of the valley is uncertain, but the distance Elijah ran was about 12-15 miles—not a marathon, but a half marathon.

But Elijah's travels were not done. In chapter 19, he walks to Mount Sinai, a round trip of well over 600 miles. Oh, and then there is also his final chariot ride.

#### **Distant view of Mount Carmel and the Jezre'el Valley**

Jezre'el is to the left near Mt Gilboa.

The west end of Mount Carmel is to the right



Wikipedia Creative Commons 2.5 Credit: Abreekpiano066

You may wish to read the whole story of Elijah in 1 Kings 18:18-48. The following verses put Elijah's run into its context.

<sup>38</sup>Fire from the LORD fell on the sacrifice and on the wood, the stones, and the dirt and consumed them. It even licked up the water in the trench. <sup>39</sup>When all the people saw this, they fell on their knees and said, "The LORD, he is God! The LORD, he is God!"

<sup>40</sup>Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal! Do not let a single one of them escape!" So they seized them, and Elijah brought them down to the Kishon River and slaughtered them there.

<sup>41</sup>Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for I hear the sound of a heavy rainstorm." <sup>42</sup>So Ahab went to eat and drink, but Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. He bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. <sup>43</sup>He said to his servant, "Go up and look toward the sea."

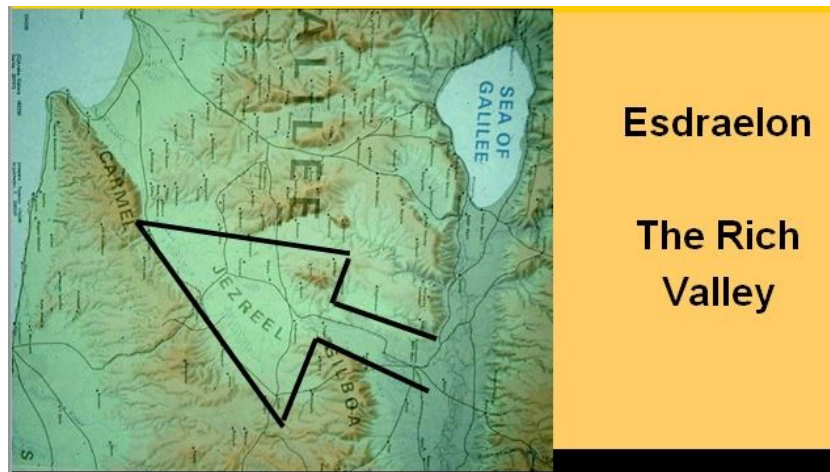
So his servant went up and looked, and he said, "There is nothing." But seven times Elijah told him, "Go again."

<sup>44</sup>On the seventh time the servant said, "There is a cloud as small as a man's hand rising from the sea."

Then Elijah said to him, "Go up and tell Ahab, 'Hitch up your chariot and go down so that the rain does not stop you.'"

<sup>45</sup>Meanwhile, the skies got dark with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab got into his chariot and went to Jezre'el. <sup>46</sup>But the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, and he hiked up his garments around his waist and ran ahead of Ahab until he came to Jezre'el.

Notice that you would not understand the significance of Elijah's run without some knowledge of biblical geography.



The lower line of the arrowhead approximates Elijah's run



**FASCINATING FACTS  
PUZZLING PROBLEMS  
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Day 11

**What's in a name?**

**John the Baptist**

**Was John a Baptist?**

Some people do not like to call John “the Baptist” because they think it will be confused with the present-day denominational name. They prefer John the Baptizer. It turns out both name are correct. The reason is that there are two different Greek words used in this regard in the Greek New Testament.

In Mark 6:24, the Greek text reads τοῦ βαπτίζοντος [*tou baptizontos*]. This is a present active participle from the verb “baptize.” In this verse, John is called “the Baptizer.”

In the very next verse, Mark 6:25, the Greek text reads τοῦ βαπτιστοῦ [*tou baptistou*]. This is a genitive form of the noun βαπτιστής [*baptistes*]. In this verse, John is described as “the Baptist.”

Since the Greek New Testament used two different forms of expression, the EHV does the same in the English translation. As usual, we lean toward respecting the stylistic variations chosen by the inspired authors. That is why it is appropriate to call John “the Baptizer” or “the Baptist.”

John was indeed called a baptist, but it is not necessary to decide whether he was Southern or American. Though there are many people who can be called Baptists, there is only one man who can be called *the Baptist*.



**FASCINATING FACTS  
PUZZLING PROBLEMS  
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Day 12

**What's in a name?**

**Jesus Christ**

**Explain the relationship of Jesus' two names.**

*Jesus* is his personal name. It is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which means *the LORD saves*. His personal name therefore describes his work.

*Christ* is derived from the Greek form of a title that means "anointed." The Hebrew-based form of the title is translated *Messiah*.

If we compare the name Jesus Christ with the name John Smith, Jesus is comparable to John, and Christ is comparable to Smith, which was originally the title of a job, as Messiah is.

In some passages of the New Testament, some translations have the term *Messiah* where other translations have *Christ*. Why the difference?

*Messiah* is an English version of the Hebrew word that means *anointed*. *Christ* is an English version of the Greek word that means *anointed* or the *Anointed One*. In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were installed into their office by being anointed with oil, which seems to symbolize the Holy Spirit.

As the fulfillment of the offices of prophet, priest, and king, Jesus is the Prophet, Priest, and King. He was anointed, not with oil, but with the Holy Spirit and with power (Acts 10:38).

A Hebrew-speaking believer who wanted to refer to the coming Savior as the LORD's Anointed would call him *Messiah* (*meshiach*). A Greek-speaking Christian who wanted to refer to the Savior as God's Anointed would call him *Christ* (*christos*).

The Greek New Testament consistently calls Jesus *the Christ* even when the speakers are Jews. Some English translations retro-translate *christos* back to *meshiach* when the speakers are Jews. A good translation practice is that when the New Testament text has Jesus speak a Hebrew word (as in his frequent use of *amen*) we should follow the text and keep the Hebrew word.

But if the New Testament uses the word *christos* regardless of whether the speaker is Jew or Gentile, we should use *Christ*. Neither practice gives a wrong meaning, but in the EHV we prefer to follow the literary choice made by the writers, who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. If they use a Hebrew-based term, we do too, If they use a Greek-based term, we do too.

A special case is John 4:25. The Samaritan woman says, “I know that Messiah is coming” (the one called Christ). The text itself includes the term *Messiah* and the parenthetical comment that the Messiah is also called *Christ*. (It is not certain if the parenthetical comment is the words of the woman or of the evangelist.) Following the lead of the text, we include both Messiah and Christ in our translation. When the Greek text uses only *christos*, we translate *Christ*.

Do you prefer the traditional translation *Jesus Christ* or the name *Jesus the Christ* to show that *Christ* is a title?

Jesus has one office—Savior. But it is traditional to divide this office into three parts prophet, priest, and king.

Why is Jesus called Prophet?

Why is he called Priest?

Why is he called King?



**FASCINATING FACTS  
PUZZLING PROBLEMS  
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Day 13

**What's in a name?**

**The Devil**

**Why is Devil capitalized in the EHV? Isn't that honoring the devil?**

The Devil does not quite fit into the category “people” since there is only one Devil, and he is a spirit. He is however a personal being. He is the leader of the angels who rebelled against God.

The name the Devil comes from the Greek word *diabolos*, which means “slanderer” when it is used as a common noun. It is already used in the Greek Old Testament as the translation for *satan*, a Hebrew word that means “the enemy or accuser.” *Satan* or *the Satan* is a Hebrew name for the leader of the evil angels. *Diabolos*, *the Devil*, is a Greek name for the leader of the evil angels.

The evil angels who follow Satan, the Devil, are not called *satans* or *devils* in the Bible. They are called *demons* or *unclean spirits*. *The Devil* is a special title of their leader. In English we sometimes use the name *devils* to describe evil people, but this is a derived, secondary usage, not the original biblical use.

The Devil is capitalized because it is a Greek version of the title Satan. Both started as common nouns. Both are now titles, so both are capitalized.

In English, titles are capitalized. Capitalization is not a mark of honor. It simply marks something as a title. That is why we capitalize Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Great Pumpkin.

Capitalizing the Devil simply recognizes that the Devil has become a title for the leading evil angel just as Satan is. All titles are capitalized even if they refer to evil figures like Satan, the Devil, Belial, Lucifer, Antichrist, etc. This does not bestow any honor on the recipient of the title.

**Point to Ponder in Revelation 12:7-10**

<sup>7</sup>There was also a war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon. The dragon fought back along with his angels, <sup>8</sup>but he was not strong enough. There was no longer a place for them in heaven. <sup>9</sup>The

great dragon was thrown down—the ancient serpent, the one called the Devil and Satan, the one who leads the whole inhabited earth astray—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

<sup>10</sup>I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying:

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ,  
because the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down,  
the one who accuses them before our God day and night.

What accusation did the Accuser bring against God's people throughout the Old Testament? (Consider the book of Job and Zechariah 3)

Why can he no longer accuse them?

Day 14

## **Horsemen and Charioteers**

**Why does the EHV often translate the term which many other translations consistently render as “horsemen” as “charioteers”?**

An interesting issue involved in the translation of battle scenes and military rosters is at what point of military history we can begin to refer to horseback riders and cavalry. All the way down through the times of Ahab in the ninth century BC, in both biblical and secular sources, we have no evidence for any significant action by mounted cavalry. The mobile strike forces are chariots not cavalry. Even in lion hunting scenes chariots are common place.

At about the time of Ahab, Assyrian relief carvings picture soldiers shooting bows from horseback. At first, horsemen functioned as mobile, mounted infantry, who served as scouts, as harassers, and as pursuit forces, but not as attack forces to win pitched battles. It seems clear that battles were fought by chariots not cavalry, though some survivors may have fled on horseback. The first really significant use of cavalry as a major component of winning battles in the ancient Near East was by Alexander the Great around 330 BC. It perhaps is significant that in later pictures of his battles, energetic young Alexander is pictured charging on his famous war horse, but the Persian king flees in a chariot, which was already becoming obsolete except in parades and on race tracks.

Notice: no real saddle, no stirrups. A bad battle platform

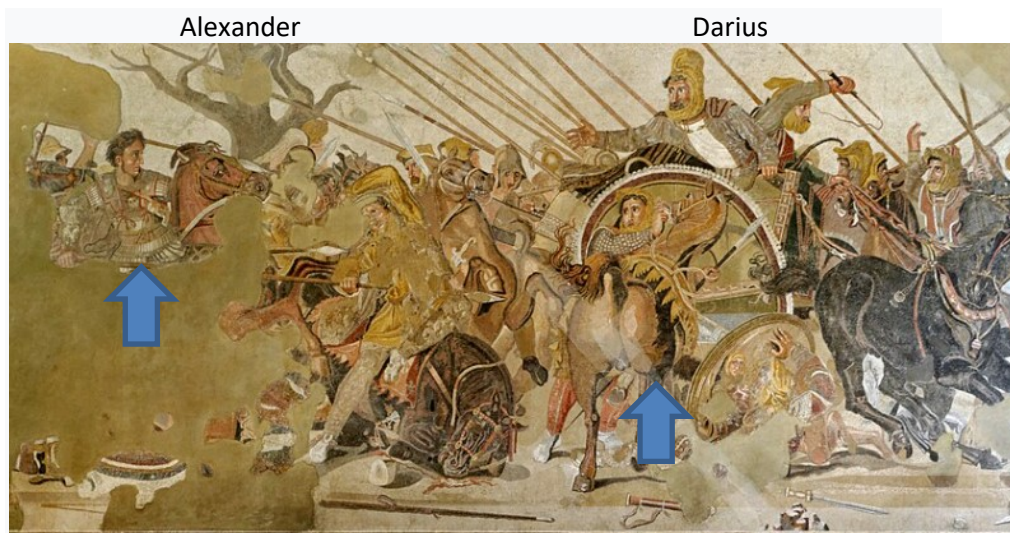


Display in British Museum  
Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

This hunting scene shows the limitations of the equipment more clearly



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National Archaeological Museum, Naples  
Wikimedia Commons

The translation issue therefore is how we should translate the Hebrew word *parosh*. When is it *charioteers* and when is it *horsemen*? Since the battles recorded in the Old Testament involve chariots not cavalry, it seems that *parosh* should usually be translated *charioteer* rather than *horseman*. The term *charioteers* includes the drivers and the archers or spearmen who fought from the chariot.

1 Kings 20:20, “Ben Hadad king of Aram escaped on a horse with his charioteers,” may be the first clear reference to flight on horseback, but verse 21 makes it clear that this battle was a chariot battle rather than a cavalry

battle. It seems clear that the four horsemen in Zechariah 1 are mounted riders, but they are scouts more than attackers. Chariots and charioteers appear in Zechariah 6.

In most Old Testament texts the ratio of *paroshim* to *chariots* is appropriate for the *paroshim* to be chariot crews. So in the absence of evidence for cavalry action and in the presence of clear evidence for the dominant role of chariots in Old Testament battles, the EHV often translates *parosh* as *charioteer*. This case illustrates the need for translators to look beyond the dictionary meanings listed for a word to the context of the word both in the biblical text and outside of the text.



**FASCINATING FACTS  
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Day 15

## **Aliens in the Bible**

### **Were there aliens in the Bible?**

Some people claim that extraterrestrial aliens are recorded in the Bible. They believe that the angels and demons and the creatures in visions like Ezekiel 1 were extraterrestrial aliens whose appearance was misunderstood by primitive ancient people. If you google “aliens in the Bible,” you can find plenty of claims about extra-terrestrials in the Bible. We can safely dismiss this theory because the text clearly defines the heavenly or hellish origin of the visitors from outside our world.

But there is another debate about biblical aliens which is worth a brief look. Some people believe *alien* is not a politically-correct term for foreigners who have residency in a country.

An inescapable feature of living languages is that words have particular (or we could even say peculiar) meanings and carry different emotional impact in different contexts. The same word can refer to green creatures with big bug eyes, to immigrants who have obtained rights to live in a country, and to those who are there illegally. An essential part of being a good reader is that readers have to adjust to different meanings and different connotations of a word in different contexts. The same word may be favorable, neutral, or negative depending on the context,

Some people have misgivings about the translation “aliens” in the Bible because they think readers will think of ET. A stronger argument against the word “aliens” is that it may become politically incorrect to use the term if “illegal aliens” become “undocumented workers” and “legal aliens” become “residents.”

In itself the word “alien” simply means “from a different place or a different group.” In law an alien is a person from a foreign country who is not a citizen of the host country. (The application of the term to extraterrestrials is an extension of the original use.) Aliens may be there to visit briefly, to stay for a while, or to stay permanently. An immigrant is someone from a foreign country who relocates in order to live in another country. They may or may not be recognized as citizens.

We will first comment on the words *aliens* and *foreigners* in the Bible as a whole. This is an important issue in the laws of the Old Testament, in which

the distinction of these terms expresses an important legal concept. The terms *foreigners*, *aliens*, and *temporary residents* are not synonymous or interchangeable. They are overlapping but distinct categories.

The key Old Testament term in question is *ger*. Here is the EHV's translation rule: *Ger* should be "resident aliens" or "aliens residing among you" in its first occurrence in a given context, and may be "aliens" thereafter, particularly in political and legal contexts. *Gerim* were aliens permanently living in a land other than their place of origin. The term "foreigners" is not precise enough, because it is too inclusive a term. Not all *foreigners* were accepted *gerim*. Some were intruders. "Temporary residents" and the old term "sojourners" are not precise enough either, because many *gerim* intended to stay in Canaan permanently, but they could never become "citizens" in the eyes of the previous inhabitants of the land. Take the case of Isaac—he was native-born to Canaan and was not a temporary resident, but he was still a *ger* in the view of his neighbors.

Early in the translation process for the EHV, we were almost convinced by the ET argument to move away from the term "resident aliens," but when we were filling out some legal documents for our project, we accidentally discovered that "resident aliens" was still the legal term used in contemporary U.S. government documents. At the time, the dispute over President Trump's restrictions on visitors from certain countries was very heated. In the relevant U.S. Law Code, the term "alien" was used 355 times: For example: "Whenever the President finds that the entry of any aliens or of any class of aliens into the United States would be detrimental to the interests of the United States, he may by proclamation, and for such period as he shall deem necessary, suspend the entry of all aliens or any class of aliens as immigrants or non-immigrants, or impose on the entry of aliens any restrictions he may deem to be appropriate." The term "alien" is a technical term of law, so it would seem to be the proper technical term for translating Hebrew laws into English. The term *alien* still describes a recognized legal category (for how long, who knows?).

In most cases, therefore, Bible translators should stick with "resident aliens" or "aliens" for *gerim*; use the term "foreigner" for combinations with Hebrew *nakri*; "strangers" for Hebrew *zar*; and "settlers among you" or "temporary residents" for *toshav*. The importance of preserving these distinctions is illustrated in the last verses of Exodus 12:

<sup>43</sup>These are the regulations for the Passover: No foreigner (*ben neker*) is to eat of it. <sup>44</sup>Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him, <sup>45</sup>but a temporary resident (*toshav*) and a hired worker may not eat of it. ... <sup>48</sup>An alien living among you (*ger*) who wants to celebrate the LORD's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part, like one born in the land (*ezech*). No

uncircumcised male may eat of it.<sup>49</sup> The same law applies to the native-born (*ezrach*) and to the alien living among you (*ger*).

*Gerim* had residency rights in Israel. They did not have religious rights unless they joined the faith of Israel. Foreigners and temporary residents could not eat the Passover; circumcised resident aliens could. The NIV, NRSV, and CSB observe this distinction in Exodus 12, but they do not follow it consistently elsewhere. In some contexts, *foreigner* is not as precise as *alien*, so both terms must be used for clarity and accuracy.

Early Israelites had a lot of experience at being *gerim*: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Canaan; Jacob in Aram; Israel in Egypt; and Moses in Midian. Their experiences taught them to be sympathetic to aliens.

Ex 22:21 You shall not wrong a resident alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

Ex. 23:9 You shall not oppress a resident alien, for you know how it feels to be an alien, because you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

Lev 19:10 Do not strip your vineyard clean, and do not pick up the fallen grapes from your vineyard, but leave them for the poor and the alien who live with you. [For example, Ruth.]

Lev 25:35 When your fellow Israelite becomes so impoverished that he cannot support himself, help him as you would help a resident alien or a temporary resident. Let him retain his right to work for a livelihood among you.

The legal distinction is less important in New Testament passages like 1 Peter 2:11, which is making a comparison of status rather than a legal distinction: “I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.” Even here, the terms “aliens” and “temporary residents” express a Christian’s relationship to the world more precisely than terms like “strangers” and “refugees.” They live here, but their citizenship is in heaven.

There are many terms that might initially be confusing to readers because of the use or misuse of those terms in other contexts, but when it is necessary to observe precise distinctions, a translation must use the proper term and, if necessary, use footnotes to help readers understand the distinction. Fuller explanation sometimes must be left for study Bibles.



**FASCINATING FACTS  
PUZZLING PROBLEMS  
AND MATTERS OF TASTE**

Day 16

## **The Hittites**

### **Who were the Hittites?**

There has been a lot of discussion about who the Hittites in the Bible were. In Genesis 23 Abraham deals with a people called Hittites, who seem to be a type of Canaanites, but historians tell us that the Bible is wrong because the Hittites were actually an Indo-European people who appeared in the land that is today Turkey, much later than the time of the patriarchs. Is this a case where the Bible has its history wrong?

Actually, this turns out to be a case where history has its history wrong.

The Bible calls a people who appear in the patriarchal accounts in Genesis *Hittites* or *descendants of Heth*. These Hittites are classified with the Canaanite peoples of the land. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, newly discovered ancient texts revealed a new rival of the Egyptians at about the time of the biblical judges. They were an Indo-European people from central Anatolia (Turkey), whom the historians named Hittites.

Much has been written about the Hittite-Egyptian rivalry, and these Hittites play a prominent role in ancient history books. These people moved into an area of central Anatolia called the land of Hatti, so the historians decided to name these newly discovered people Hittites, on the basis of the apparently erroneous conclusion that these people were related to the Hittites in the Bible. They then pointed out that these Hittites rose to prominence in central Anatolia significantly later than the biblical dates for the patriarchal period. It was concluded that the biblical references to Hittites must be anachronisms based on confused memories of the Hittites that were introduced into biblical accounts, which these historians claimed were written long after the heyday of the Hittites.

But there is a major problem with this explanation. The problem is that these Indo-European rivals of the Egyptians did not call themselves Hittites. They called themselves Neshians (Nesili). When they competed with the Egyptians, they were relatively new arrivals in the land of Hatti in central Anatolia, where they displaced an earlier non-Indo-European people called Hattians. The Neshians kept the geographic name, land of Hatti, which

continued in use for a long time, but they did not call themselves Hattians or Hittites. The Neshians were given the name Hittites by scholars on the basis of the alleged similarity of the name *Hatti* to *Hitti* in the Bible. This error produced a discrepancy between the biblical and historical description of “Hittites.” This discrepancy was not produced by the Bible. It was produced by the historians who erroneously stuck the tag Hittites on the Neshians.

About the Hittites the University of Pennsylvania’s archaeological magazine *Expedition* (January 1974) says:

The first thing to realize about the Hittites is that they are not Hittites. The sad fact is that we are stuck with an incorrect terminology, but it is too late to do anything about it now. This unfortunate situation came about as a result of several deductions made by earlier scholars which, though entirely reasonable at the time, have proved to be false. ...

We now know that these people we call Hittites were Indo-European. ... It is now believed that the Hittites came into Anatolia sometime in the latter part of the third millennium B.C., though exactly when and from where are questions we still cannot answer. ...

The Hittites were indeed a major world power in the period 1700-1200 B.C., but they were not Hittites. That is, they did not call themselves Hittites. They refer to themselves as Neshians, “inhabitants of the city Nesha,” and their language Neshian. But so much for that; the scholarly world had already labelled them Hittites and, like it or not, Hittites they shall forever remain. It is just as well, for the term Neshian only calls attention to our ignorance of this early period; we do not even know where Nesha is to be located ....

There was the evidence all along: what we call Hittite should be called Neshian and the evidence for this had been available since 1887.

That is the simplified version of a complicated story. In the EHV we considered calling the biblical *Hittites* *Hethians* to avoid the confusion historians have created. But since the biblical Hittites are the real Hittites and the historical Hittites are the imposters, we decided to keep the term *Hittites* along with the term *descendants of Heth* and to explain the problem with a brief note.

This has been a rather long explanation, but it is necessary because it warns against a not uncommon occurrence: people misunderstand the Bible and then accuse the Bible of error. Their mistakes are readily corrected, but these charges may be troubling to Bible readers who mistakenly think the Bible has been proved wrong.



**FASCINATING FACTS  
PUZZLING PROBLEMS  
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Day 17

## **The Jews**

There is one translation issue that runs throughout John's Gospel that raises questions of possible offense, so it needs to be addressed. Jesus' bitter opponents among the Israelites are repeatedly called *the Jews* in John's Gospel (5:18; 7:1-15; 8:1-22, 8:40; 10:31-33; 11:8; 18:14; 18:28 and others). As a result, fears have been expressed that this expression of John, who was himself Jewish, will encourage anti-Jewish bias or hatred when it is read in the context of modern antisemitism. It is certainly possible that this book could be misused in that way unless its context and intent are understood. The question then becomes what is the best way to combat this danger: changing John's terminology or explaining his theological point?

John's use of the term *the Jews* is balanced by a number of points. John is the only Gospel in which Jesus says that "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). Jesus, the King of the Jews, was buried by Jews as a Jew (John 19:40). The term is also often used in a neutral sense, meaning Jewish people in general (2:6; 4:9; 11:19; 12:9; compare Matthew 28:15, Luke 7:3). This is the same way that it is used in books such as Esther. It is also used to refer to Jews who believed in Jesus (8:31; 12:11). The term is not in itself a negative, pejorative term.

Yet it must be granted that in the majority of his uses of the term, John is referring to those Jews who opposed Jesus. In this, he is reflecting on the tragedy: "He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him" (1:11). Many times, the use of the term *the Jews* is intended to make this specific theological point about the nation's rejection of Jesus, particularly the actions of the leaders.

This hostility is reflected in numerous instances in the Gospel. Those Jews who accepted Jesus were declared to be non-Jews by being put out of the synagogue (9:22). Jesus was labeled as a Samaritan, an outcast from Judaism (8:48). In John 11:54: "Jesus no longer walked about openly among the Jews. Instead he withdrew into a region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim. And he stayed there with his disciples." If our identification of the location of Ephraim is correct, Jesus had to leave Jewish territory and move to Samaritan territory to escape the hostility against him.

If John has an anti-Jewish agenda, it is striking that he does not record the curse that Jesus' enemies pronounce on themselves in Matthew 27:25, the most Jewish of the Gospels.

When all these factors are taken together, it seems best not to re-write the Gospels but to understand them correctly in their context. A good tool for understanding this issue is Paul's thorough, balanced treatment of the topic in Romans 9–11. The Bible does not need to be re-written or corrected, but it does need to be explained and understood correctly.

Christians need to speak against antisemitism. (Antisemitism is a very strange and inappropriate term for anti-Jewish hatred since both Jews and Arabs are Semitic, but it seems we are stuck with the term, wrong as it may be.) But at the same time, Christians need to reflect the anguish of John and Paul that so many in Israel did not accept the Christ when he came. "He came to what was his own, yet his own people did not accept him." Christ is the only Savior, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Romans 1:16). This is the point John is emphasizing.

Paul makes the same point in Romans 10.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God on behalf of the Israelites is that they may be saved.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but it is not consistent with knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Since they were ignorant of the righteousness from God and sought to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness from God.<sup>4</sup> For to everyone who believes, Christ is the end of the law, resulting in righteousness. ...<sup>9</sup> Certainly, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.<sup>10</sup> For it is with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and it is with the mouth that a person confesses, resulting in salvation.<sup>11</sup> For Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

<sup>12</sup> So there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives generously to all who call on him.<sup>13</sup> Yes, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

This plan or course will be followed by a second course *Fascinating Facts: Places in the Bible*. Among the topics covered there will be lost places in the Bible as well as the locations of the crossing of the Red Sea and Mount Sinai.

