

Strange Scriptures

That Perplex the Western Mind

Clarified in the Light of Customs and Conditions in Bible Lands

by

Barbara M. Bowen
Bob Jones University, Greenville, S. C.

Copyright @ 1944

CHAPTER NINE

TOMBS AND TENTS

“She Covered Him With a Mantle” (Judges 4:18).

“AND Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him. Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.”

This is very, very difficult for a Western mind to understand. In imagination let us make a visit to the camp of some Bedouins and learn of their strange manners and customs and something of their strange way of thinking and doing things. To these people nothing would be more natural than Jael's action.

We must remember two things First, there is an unwritten law, yet one that even the most unprincipled would never dare violate, the duty of entertaining strangers. You could not possibly pass an encampment of Bedouins without their coming out and inviting you in to rest and using almost the same words, to you as used by Jael, “Come in, my lord, come in and rest.”

Secondly, no strange man is ever permitted to enter the woman's part of the tent. They have another unwritten law that such an offender is worthy of death, and any relative of the woman is obliged to carry this law into execution.

If a woman allowed a stranger to enter the woman's part of the tent, she, too, would be worthy of death.

In Judges, fourth chapter, we are told that Sisera was escaping when he passed Jael's tent. She, with true hospitality, invited him to come in and rest. She, of course, expected him to enter the men's or public part of the tent only, as any man would do. Sisera wanted a good hiding place, and of course, no place could be safer than the woman's part of the tent for no Israelite would intrude there. Jael was not a Jewess, but a Kenite.

He, no doubt, pushed his way into the woman's section of the tent against Jael's wishes, for entering here was the greatest insult and exposed her to dishonor and also death. She is placed in an exceedingly hard position. If she ordered him to leave, he would likely have killed her to save his own life, while to allow him to stay, would have exposed her to the anger of her husband, who would at once condemn her as unfaithful, and stone her to death as the common law provided.

She decided she must protect herself, and when he fell asleep, she pinned him to the ground with the tent pins. She knew well how to use tent pins, for the women take down and put up the tents.

We are told that she gave him milk to drink when he asked for water. Water is scarce in that dry country and they would have goat's milk to drink, probably sour milk, leben, which is very refreshing.

Jael is called blessed in Judges 5:24, not because she committed murder, but because while defending her own character and her life too, she was ridding the Israelites of a very cruel tyrant.

Judges 4:3 says, **“he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.”**

The atrocities at which these words plainly hint are all known to Jael. Again and again she has been appalled by the tale. And here is the one man from whose planning brain and fearful will the whole have sprung. He is on the way to Hazor, Jabin's capital, where fresh forces await him. After rest he will go on and renew the conflict.

We do not need to be Israelites to feel the gratitude that glows in the word:

“Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent” (Judges 5:24).

The Needle's Eye (Matthew 19:24)

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

Let us examine a city gate which has the *“needle's eye.”* City walls have several large gates of iron, which are always two-leaved. In Isaiah 45:1 we find these words: **“I will open before him the two-leaved gates.”**

When we read of Samson taking the **“doors of the gate”** it means he unhitched both leaves. (Judges 16:3). **“And Samson arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them.”**

Gates are closed at sunset and not opened until sunrise. This is still the case in all eastern walled cities.

When once the gates were shut, they would not be opened except to admit a great official who might be on an errand of importance. The chief captain sends Paul from Caesarea “**at the third hour of the night**” (Acts 23:23) — about 9 p. m., a wise precaution because no one could possibly pursue them until the gates were opened at about six the next morning. The apostle therefore had nine hours' start, which made it impossible for anyone to overtake him on the way.

When any person has to be admitted or allowed to leave the city by night, a small door fixed into the larger one is opened. This smaller door was called the “*needle's eye*.” Matthew 19:24 says, “**It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.**”

Now let us try to picture the scene to which Jesus refers. Camels laden with large bags of barley, wheat, charcoal, or wood, were coming into town daily.

The burdens are well balanced on either side of the camel's back, and stand out sometimes three or four feet on the right side and on the left. You can see, therefore, that a camel needs a wide gate to admit him and his great burden. Every traveler in the East knows from experience what it means to meet a camel coming along a street which is only just wide enough for the beast to pass through. You cannot stand against the wall; your only possible way to do is to stoop very low and allow the camel to pass by, the burden then being above you.

Hence the meaning of the Lord's words was easily understood by His hearers. A camel with its burden cannot enter the needle's eye.

Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem has a very fine “*needle's eye*.”

Maniacs in the Tomb (Mark 5:2-16; Luke 8:26-36)

These are very sad but remarkable accounts of demon possession, and we are apt to pity, but to think that cases like these existed only in Bible days and Bible Lands; but there are very many similar today — furious and dangerous maniacs, who wander about the mountains and sleep in caves and tombs. At their worst they are unmanageable and have strength no normal person could ever possess.

I have seen cases that chains would not hold, they would snap a strong chain as we would a piece of string. Mark says they went naked — and they do today. It is one of the most common traits of demon possession that the victims refuse to wear clothes.

A few months ago we visited a little mud-hut town where there were several demoniacs running naked, never speaking a normal language, but making noises like wild animals. They would eat only what they could steal, and their manner of eating was worse than that of a wild creature.

These poor wretches are held in very great reverence by Moslems, who, through some terrible perversion of ideas, believe them to be inspired and peculiarly holy. The manifestations of satanic power are so inhuman and terrible that no one seeing these poor creatures as we did could believe anything else but they were controlled by satanic spirits, and Mark and Luke knew what they were writing about.

No one is in a position to judge unless they have spent days or weeks among them. But – the Bible Lands with their caves and tombs do not have all the poor possessed maniacs.

Christ Three Days and Three Nights in the Heart of the Earth? (Matthew 12:40).

This Scripture says Christ was, and according to the traditions of our church, our Lord was crucified on a Friday afternoon and then was raised from the dead very early Sunday morning. However, this is not three days and three nights. We notice that the Bible does not say He was crucified on Friday, but it does say He was crucified on “**the day before the sabbath**” (Mark 15:42). The Jewish sabbath began Friday night at sunset and lasted until Saturday at sunset, so we have naturally thought that Christ was crucified Friday. But, besides the weekly sabbath which fell on Saturday, the Jews had other sabbaths. The first day of their Passover week, regardless of what day it came was always a sabbath (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23:7; Numbers 28:16-18).

Now we need to know whether the sabbath after Christ’s Crucifixion was the weekly sabbath or was it the Passover sabbath? God’s word does not leave us to guess about this important event, for John 19:14 tells us that the day of the trial and crucifixion was “**the preparation of the passover.**” So we see it was not the weekly sabbath (Friday)., but it was the day before the Passover sabbath, which fell that year on Thursday. This would prove beyond doubt that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday.

Astronomers have gone into this matter very thoroughly and have figured out in the year of the crucifixion, generally accepted as having been 30 A.D., that the moon was full on April 6, which was Thursday, and the day on which the Passover would have been celebrated. This would prove that our Lord Jesus was crucified on Wednesday.

Superscriptions on the Cross (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19).

In Matthew 27:37 we read, “**And set up over his head his accusation written, This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.**”

In Mark 15:26 we find, “**And the superscription of his accusation was written over, The King of the Jews.**”

Luke 23:38 tells us, “**A superscription also was written over . . . This is the King of the Jews.**”

Now we turn to John 19:19: “**And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.**”

No two of these agree. What is the difficulty? Can all four be correct? The answer is so very clearly given in these very passages. John 19:20 tells us that in order that all the people of different tongues might read it, the charge upon the cross on which Christ was crucified was written in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin; in Hebrew for the common people, in Latin for the Romans, and in Greek, as that was the universal language.

Matthew wrote especially for the Jews and gave the inscription as it was in Hebrew. Mark gave the inscription as it was in Latin, and Luke as it was in Greek. John gives it in the full Roman form, “**Jesus of Nazareth.**”

There is no difficulty at all if we notice exactly what the Bible tells us.

Impure Bible Stories

Unbelievers of different degrees are always saying that parts of the Bible are unchaste, and not fit to be read in a mixed audience. Well, there are chapters and verses that were not intended to be read in public, but these chapters are absolutely not filthy. To be sure, they speak in the very plainest terms of the vilest sins known, but only in order to expose their loathsomeness, and as a warning; but this is not impurity.

The way a story is told and for what purpose, makes it clean or vile. If the writer is making a joke of sin, it is then indecent. Sin is pictured and called by its right name in the Bible, and the terrible results related to make man with his sinful heart turn away from these sins.

The Bible was not all written for public reading, but it was written for a purpose. We have in our library several very valuable medical books, but there are pages and passages in them we would not think of reading in public: they were never written for that, but are excellent and very helpful in their own place and time. They are written to describe conditions that do exist, and they give warnings of what will come to pass if the warnings go unheeded. We wouldn't think of refusing to read and understand these valuable warnings just because we could not read them in public. The Bible, too, has many warnings of what will happen if sin in the human heart is allowed to run its course, but that does not make the Bible an unclean book.

Only people with filthy minds can ever call the Bible filthy. Let us be as fair with God's Word as we are with other books that are written to help and warn humanity of the many dangers around us.

David's Sin (II Samuel 11).

This chapter gives us the account of the downfall of a “**man after God's own heart.**”

He had been surrendered to the will of God, was a generous, kind man, and desired much to keep in God's plan for his life. But, he fell in a moment of weakness. He got his eyes off God and God's Word, he played with temptation; and one sin led to another to cover up the first. His sin led him down, down to the deepest depths of vileness and dishonor. He committed one of the most outrageous crimes one man ever committed against another.

There is no use trying to excuse this sin to skeptics, there is absolutely no excuse. God did not excuse him, but sent His prophet to rebuke him saying: “**By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme**” (II Samuel 12:14).

The people considered David a very great man, a great hero, and unless the Bible writers had been guided by God Himself, they surely would have tried to cover up David's contemptible sin. But the Bible does not do so, and thank God for it, the Bible exposes the sin and holds up the sinner as a warning.

David was forgiven, but he drank very deeply from the bitter cup he had prepared for himself. David suffered through his children what was just the fruit of his own terrible sin, and he was perfectly conscious of it.

This part of David's life story, however, has given hope to many a lost sinner to ask, “Is there pardon for me?” Yes, for you. David found mercy and pardon. So can anyone who so desires.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
