**Bible: Literal Truth?**

**You’ve seen pictures of the mace, that ancient battle club. Medieval priests invented it as a sword substitute because the Bible prohibited them from shedding blood but not from bashing skulls. *(L. M. Boyd)***

**Some think that to say that there are things in the Bible that were not intended to be considered as literally true is to blaspheme. But think for a moment: What about a book of Arithmetic. Must all the problems used in demonstrating the principles be literally true? For instance: “Henry had two sons, James and John. James invested $4,000 in Uganda Railway 3% stock, and $1500 in Garden City shares; John spent $2000 in planting an orange plantation in Australia, which brought in $300 the first year, etc. etc.” These statements are not really true, as a matter of fact the characters are quite likely fictitious, but that does not alter the Truth of the problem, and the student would be merely wasting time, if, before, trying to understand or solve the problem, he were to investigate the literal facts of the case and argue about their authenticity. (A Synoptic Study of the Teachings of Unity, p. 55)**

**Almost all ark-hunting expeditions since World War II have been organized and financed by Americans of fundamentalist faith. They believe that every word of the Bible is literally true, and hope, by finding the ark, to prove they are right. *(Gordon Gaskill, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Bad week for: Intellectual discourse, after Alabama Republican gubernatorial candidate Bradley Byrne was accused in a GOP rival’s campaign ad of believing in evolution. Byrne insisted he’s a creationist who believes “every single word” in the Bible. *(The Week magazine, June 4, 2010)***

**At the reception after a wedding, the pastor was going through the food line. A server asked him, “What piece of chicken would you like, Pastor?” “The leg, please,” he answered. “The thigh or the drumstick?” “My good man,” the pastor responded. “What God has joined together, let no one put asunder.” (George Kottwitz, in The Lutheran Witness)**

**The father notices his son sitting in the corner facing the wall when he comes home from work, and the child says to him: “Moses thought it was tough to cross the Red Sea. He should try crossing Mom!” (The Lutheran Witness cartoon)**

**When blog posts falsely reported that vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin believed that humans and dinosaurs walked the earth at the same time, it made her fodder for plenty of late-night comedy. But this bewildering assertion – one that flies in the face of everything we know about the world – is made by plenty of Americans. Most of these Americans are fundamentalist Christians who believe the Bible to be literal truth. According to the Bible, Earth is only about 6,000 years old, so it would make sense that dinosaurs and humans would have to have lived at the same time. Meanwhile, scientists continue to believe that dinosaurs existed 60-65 million years before the first humans appeared. (Armchair Reader: Vitally Useless Information, p. 178)**

**To our last class of the semester, my religion professor at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania brought his Bible, a stack of blank exam books and his trademark grin. The Bible, he told us, speaks to all life's situations. Accordingly, he had found an appropriate passage for us as we took our final. Expecting a message of hope and comfort, we listened as he paraphrased the ninth verse of Psalm 50: “I will accept no bull from your house.” *(Kevin B. Sheets, in Reader's Digest)***

**I have spent a lot of time searching through the Bible for loopholes.(W. C. Fields)**

**Two seven-year-olds were fighting in their Sunday-school class. One boy told their teacher, “He hit me first. And it says in the Bible it’s all right to hit back.” “Where,” the Sunday-school teacher demanded, “did it say that in Scripture?” “You told us,” said the boy. “You said the Bible said you should ‘do one to others as others do one to you.’” *(James Dent)***

**Some biblical scholars believe that Aramaic did not contain a way of saying “many” and used a term that has come down to us as forty. This means that when the Bible refers to forty days it actually means “many days.” *(Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information, p. 170)***

**If Genesis is literally true, every one of us has descended from Noah. *(Gordon Gaskill, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Billy asks the question during Sunday school class: “But if John the Baptist was Jesus’ cousin, wouldn’t God be John’s uncle?” *(Bil Keane, in The Family Circus comic strip)***

**A minister and a rabbi were discussing the religious merits of their respective hobbies. The minister said “Jesus states in the Sermon on the Mount ‘Look at the birds of the air,’ therefore bird-watching is the only hobby that he commanded us to have.” The rabbi said “That is very interesting but the prophet Isaiah showed us that God's own hobby is model trains.” “Oh come on,” said the minister “where does it say that?” The rabbi said “In chapter 6 it states ‘And his train filled the temple.’” *(Common Concern newsletter)***

**While reading the Bible, Mother Goose says: “I love this verse, ‘But many that are first shall be last. And the last shall be first.’” Grimm: “Try telling that to a sled dog.” *(Mike Peters, in Mother Goose & Grimm comic strip)***

**Southern Baptist preacher Bob Harrington, commenting on his fundamental beliefs: “I not only believe every word in the Bible, I even believe the leather is genuine.” *(Bill Surface, in New York Times magazine)***

**The Bible, when seen past its “letter,” when understood metaphysically, takes on a special meaning -- one which we can use directly in our daily lives. As we trod the unfamiliar path ahead of us, we will be able to reach into the Bible for sustenance, much as we would reach into our knapsack for food. *(Richard & Mary-Alice Jafolla, in The Quest, p. 72)***

**Literal translation of “Sinai” is “bag of sand.” Of “Damascus,” “sackful of blood.” *(Boyd’s Curiosity Shop, p. 170)***

**My husband's professor at Ambassador College in east Texas was discussing the merits of the Bible as literature. “Take 1 Corinthians 5:6, for example,” he said. ‘A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.’ I challenge anyone here to put that thought in a more concise statement.” “Easy,” replied a student. “How about, ‘a little dab will do ya'?” *(Honee Berlin, in Reader's Digest)***

**When you actually get around to it, what we take literally from the Bible is much more important than what we interpret metaphysically. Unity interprets the Bible literally when we read the statement from the words of Jesus to stop wasting your time looking around in the sky, up in some ivory tower, behind some cloud, because the kingdom of God is not there, but within you. We also accept literally that you will finally wake up after being asleep to the Christ in you, your hope of glory. (J. Sig Paulson, Unity minister)**

**Prissy folks who think perfume is sinful had best heed the words of the Bible. In Exodus, it says, “And the Lord said unto Moses, ‘Take unto thee . . . sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall here be a like weight. And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy’ . . .” (Bernie Smith, in The Joy of Trivia, p. 330)**

**Billy, who is trying to hold his glass of milk, says about Dolly: “My cup runneth over because Dolly bumpeth my arm.” *(Bil Keane, in The Family Circus comic strip)***

**Billy tells Jeffy: “The Bible tells us to study math. It says, ‘Go forth and multiply.’” *(Bil Keane, in The Family Circus comic strip)***

**A teacher talking to her class about whales said it was impossible for a whale to swallow a human because its throat was small. Little Ruth pointed out that the Bible said Jonah was swallowed by a whale. “When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah,” Ruth said. “What if Jonah went to hell?” the teacher asked. “Then you ask him,” Ruth replied. *(Rocky Mountain News)***

**The savage Salem witch trials in the seventeenth century were all based on a single line in Exodus: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” *(Noel Botham, in The Ultimate Book of Useless Information, p. 173)***

**The fundamentalists of Christianity hold as one of their basic doctrines, “The infallibility of the Bible.” They are literalists who insist that every word or statement of the Bible is to be considered literally. There never seems to be any explanation by the literalists however, for conveniently overlooking such things as 1 Corinthians 14:34 – “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” (A Synoptic Study of the Teachings of Unity, p. 54)**

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