

Not All That Simple!

In our generation translators have labored to bring us simplified versions of the Scriptures. These have been helpful in making the language more understandable but their shortcoming is in the failure to simplify the theology. For instance, the words “there is one God” are simple to understand, but the nature of God is not all that simple.

Incredible as it seems now, I was nurtured by teachers who often commented on how easy the Bible is to understand, yet there was constant discussion, debate, and division about its teachings. Many times, when someone inquired of some deeper meaning, they would be told, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29). In such an answer some of the things revealed were being swept under the rug of secrecy. We were afraid to explore beyond simplistic answers. All that fear has not been relieved yet.

Under the heading above, I am intending to discuss a number of topics in a series in forthcoming issues of this mailout, if the Lord wills. My hope is to embolden the fearful to ask and face questions and to broaden some concepts while raising some unanswered questions intended to provoke further study and greater respect for differing opinions.

1. The Exodus

Those of us ancients who predated the “exodus” led by Charlton Heston in *The Ten Commandments* had to rely on our own imagination to picture the dramatic scenes. No doubt all this generation has allowed that movie to shape its images.

Although I went to see the movie with skepticism about its authenticity, I will have to admit that I was deeply impressed with its presentation. I had only pictured an easily organized migration of a few hundred people, but the movie expanded my concept. In looking again at the exodus as recorded in the book of *Exodus* about forty years later, however, I have to declare, “It is not all that simple!”

The seventy offspring of Jacob were given the land of Goshen because they kept cattle and sheep. There they multiplied and became a great people in their 430 years in Egypt (Exo. 12:40). At the time of their exodus, they numbered 600,000 men able to go to war besides women and children (12:37). They left Egypt with a formidable army of 603,550 men twenty years old and upward equipped for battle (13:18; 38:26; Num. 1:46).

If the family of each man included five persons, that would make 3,000,000 persons in the march out of Egypt, along with a large “mixed multitude.” The number might have been much higher than that. Added to the persons were “very many cattle, both flocks and herds (12:38; 17:3). No, folks, it was not all that simple! This was one big operation!

In being really conservative, let us use the figure of 2,000,000. That escape was like moving out every person in the Portland metropolitan area or a city like Houston in one night. It takes more than thirty minutes to drive through Houston on IH-10 at speed limit. Or, think of moving out every person in such states as Arkansas, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Kansas, or Mississippi. How far could a mass of people like that move in a day? They could hardly sneak out in the middle of the night undetected!

Each family would need to take such provisions as food, water, cookware, tents, and bedding. No doubt, they took other treasured possessions and their pets. This would require donkeys, camels, or oxen and carts. Whether the cattle and sheep were in combined droves or with their owners, they would require much space, food, and water.

After their initial supplies were depleted, they would need about two million pounds of food and a million gallons of water daily for the people, besides providing for the cattle. They would need wood for cooking. And that would be for forty years. You military people might want to work out the logistics of such an awesome operation.

Among two million people there are always many aged, crippled, gravely ill, and disabled people to consider. In a group that large there are new births and some deaths every day. And what of sanitary provisions and privacy? If Ahab’s Rentals had a portable toilet for each hundred people, he would have

needed 10,000 of them on wheels for the migrants. And there would still be the problem of where to dump the waste.

If a conservative number of four to the family with their possessions and cattle were allotted a ten-by-ten foot travel space, there would be 500,000 spaces. If they traveled five families abreast making a 50 foot width, there would be 100,000 units making 20,000 files extending 200,000 feet, or about 38 miles, behind. Four to six days would be required for the last rank to reach where the first started from, thus it would take that long to cross the Red Sea. (My math is subject to correction.) It is unlikely that their IH-1 out of Egypt was wider than 50 feet. Or, did the emigrants go as a drove trampling the property of other citizens and through rough terrain?

Since their cell phones were not very dependable in those days, think of the problem of communication in organizing and expediting this whole venture.

Enough of that. Now, what is my point? This is it: Everything that we read about in the Scriptures is just not all that simple!

If you wish to probe further, we might ask some questions. Did God transport them miraculously? Are too many factual details omitted to reveal the whole story? Was the account embellished by a Hebrew historian in order to boost nationalism and/or to emphasize the greatness of God? Was this a traditional, inaccurate record preserved by God's providence as a general historical account? *Is the exodus account really all that simple?* []

2. God's Attention To Individuals

God knows you individually, does he not? He sees you every moment, hears your every word, knows your every thought, understands your every feeling, and guides your every step. That is comforting to believe.

The world population is about 6-billion people. God shows no respect of persons, so he gives constant individual attention to each of the 6-billion of us. And he is conscious of the many billions who have already departed this life. This concept is simple to state but it is not all that simple when we try to explain how it can be.

It is no surprise that we cannot explain all the nature and capabilities of the divine Creator, yet some concepts can give us greater assurance. God surely will not judge us adversely for probing deeper in an effort to comprehend how he can give billions of us individual attention constantly.

What is your concept of God? Is he an awesome, oversized man 28 feet tall towering over us even as he sits on his throne? When we try to picture him in any physical form, we are simplifying him beyond recognition. God is Spirit who can manifest himself in various ways. The one God has manifested himself as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as he has served different capacities. His divine nature has been dispensed in different capacities in human beings.

Jesus prayed that "they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us ... that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me..." (John 17: 20-23). "God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts," Paul adds (Gal. 4:6). He had already revealed, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

This was not a physical, sensational experience, for Paul prayed that God "may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the **inner man**, and that Christ may dwell in your **hearts** through faith..." (Eph. 3:16f). This indwelling of God made them individually temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) and collectively a temple of the Presence of God (Eph. 2:22). The Spirit of God indwells all his children (Rom. 8:9-11), however, all do not received the same measure of his gift (Eph. 4:7). The three manifestations of God as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit indwell our hearts – our minds rather than our blood-pumping hearts. Their indwelling in our bodies is only in the sense that our bodies house our spirits.

In view of this indwelling in our very minds, instead of lifting up hands and sending prayers toward the Milky Way or looking beyond the Big Dipper or the Southern Cross in prayer and praise thinking he is located out there, we can think of his presence within our own spiritual beings. We don't have to sing "*I want to be where you are.*" Does not our relationship with him make him within us instead of at some

remote distance though he does permeate the universe? (You think of his dwelling place as being over the warmer zone rather than the North Pole, don't you?) His dispensation of himself in each of us makes him a personal deity. We need not shout our prayers or even whisper them. He knows our thoughts. We can talk to him who is within us by communicative thoughts. He is a very personal deity.

Would you greet God if you met him on the street or in the aisle of the church? Even the Safeway employees are required to look customers in the eye and greet them. That is for business purposes. Do you pass persons in whom the Spirit of God lives without acknowledging them? They are the most accurate representation of God you will see in this life. In slighting them, you slight God! Interaction with another is the interaction of two spirit-filled hearts. Can we not say that such is a form of God giving us individual attention?

No, understanding the personal attention of God is not all that easy; neither are the suggestions that I am offering all that simple. However, believing this may bring a sobering realization of his personal interaction in our lives. It is easier to state it on paper than to commit our trust to it.

Fruit of the Spirit

May a non-believer, Buddhist, or Muslim exhibit love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness (reliability), gentleness, and self-control – *fruit of the Spirit* (Gal. 5:22)? We grant that they can. Then, do they do it without the Spirit, or do they have the Spirit?

There is a measure of God in each human. Man is made in the image of God, which is a spiritual image since God is not physical, and God has breathed into him the breath of life. All life is from God. From parent to child that original life has continued to be passed on through the generations. That is not just a physical energizing, for the passages above indicate that the Spirit dwells in our hearts. Thus he gives spiritual direction – the *law written on the heart, God's own principle of action which is love* – to all people of all times. In different times and cultures men may not worship according to Biblical revelation, but when they worship a Creator, they are worshipping the same God we serve. They may not know a lot about him, but we don't know the mysteries of God either.

Paul addressed those who were worshipping God as the *unknown deity*. He assured the Athenian worshippers that they were on the right course as those who “seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for **‘In him we live and move and have our being’**; as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ **Being then God's offspring...**” (Acts 17:27f). They recognized the fatherhood of the one they served in veiled understanding. A measure of God's gift was in their hearts. God could work good through them. For those who have not his revelation, God will judge them according to the law written in their hearts.

If humans are cloned, and since it is possible, it probably will be done very soon, the life in that creature will be but a continuation of that part of the Spirit of God common to all mankind.

I am still doubtful that there is intelligent life on other planets, but if there is life in other beings, what is its source? We are limited in our choice of answers. Either it came from matter or it came from the Source of Life. You have already answered that by your belief or atheism.

Eventually, God will reclaim that measure of himself that he dispensed in each person, whether saint or sinner. At death, “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecc. 12:7).

In concluding this essay I will throw you another question to ponder. In order for Jesus to “come again”, will he have to leave us and no longer indwell us so he can “return”? Will he go away again so he can return again?

These are suggested thoughts that I leave for your pondering. I fully value the question Zophar put to Job: “Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the almighty?” (Job 11:7).

It is not all that simple, is it? []

3. Adam and Eve in Eden

In your earliest childhood, if you were in Bible classes, you were impressed with the delightful, though disappointing, account of the creation of Adam and Eve and their experiences in the Garden of Eden. Most believers have accepted that brief and simple account without hesitation, not because they could explain all its details, but just because it is recorded in the Bible. Such faith is to be commended.

Should such faith, however, deter us from asking questions and cause us to ignore facts that we might not have considered before? There seems to be a prevailing fear that we will lose our simple faith if we probe more deeply. We begin this review of the account of Adam and Eve with the admission that *it is not all that simple*.

The name of Adam is found fourteen times in the first five chapters of Genesis. His name is listed in records of genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1:1, in Luke 3:38, and Jude 14. Paul is the only writer who connects him with theology (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:22, 45; 1 Tim. 2:13-14). Eve's name is used twice in Genesis and twice in the New Covenant scriptures.

Since neither Adam nor Eve is mentioned in connection with the promise to Abraham, with the Law of Moses, by the prophets, or by Jesus, that is a sufficient cause to question how the couple fitted into Jewish theology.

The promise to Abraham, the Law of Moses, the prophets, and Jesus all related to the sinful nature of mankind. The narrative of Eden deals with sin more definitely than with biology or scientific origins. Could it be that the Jews regarded the account as a divinely approved allegory dealing with the human predicament without arguing its historicity? Is the account to be interpreted literally, or does it contain figurative representations designed to accommodate our limited understanding.?

Before you form a posse to dispatch me, please consider the questions to be raised in this essay. If you reject the evidences presented and continue to hold traditional views, that is your prerogative; however, those who may hold a different view may not have left the faith necessarily. After a candid appraisal, you may have to agree that, whichever view you hold, *it is not all that simple!*

Even among the more conservative students, I judge that most do not think that a literal snake tempted Eve. A literal snake cannot reason, know the will of God, know human language and converse in it without even having a voice or voice box or ears with which to hear. Is the snake really more subtle, cunning, or ingenious than all other wild creatures? A snake does not eat dust. The figurative use of *serpent* is verified in Scripture as "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9; 20:2). So who is to insist that all the Genesis account is literal?

Also, I presume that you will all agree that, when it is stated that Adam was made of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7; 3:19; See Ecc. 12:7), the composition included more than literal dust. We, too, are created of dust but a great part of our bodies is water and minerals. He forms us of "dust" beginning in our mother's womb and continued by what

we consume the rest of our lives. His creation of our bodies is by stages and a process over a period of time. So we allow for accommodative language detailing this part of the narrative and have no hangup about it being literal. The “dust” pertains to all that is earthly in us.

When a baby is born, it acts by instincts rather than reason and understanding, for those faculties are developed through varied experiences over a matter of years. We are not told how Adam and Eve came to know language and develop communicative skills. Were their brains like computer hard drives into which God installed software programs of knowledge of their bodies, their emotions, their world about them – a full education of theology, gardening, physiology, biology, psychology, zoology, geography, astronomy, etc.? What level of education and experience would they be given? If they were given full knowledge, why was it not passed on to their descendents? If they were lacking in these things, were they imperfectly made?

It is generally accepted that there was no death until after the fall. Both the first couple and the animals ate food. Would they have died if they ate nothing? If they ate any living thing, it would have caused its death. If Adam pulled up a plant in caring for the garden, would the plant have died? How did predatory marine creatures survive without eating other marine life? If all were vegetarian until after the flood, why did Abel, the second born son, raise sheep? God would have had to reconstruct those herbivorous animals which later became carnivorous. As the animals bred, did all the tremendous amount of discharged but unused sperm continue living?

The boy who agreed to work a month for an employer for one penny the first day to be doubled each day would be owed more than half a billion pennies at the end of the first month. That illustrates the exponential multiplication possibilities of each insect, creature, and plant if there were no death. In a short time the fast-multiplying insects would smother the earth.

Can, or could, a person eat knowledge? They were forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil as though God did not want them to have that knowledge. Yet, after they were warned not to eat, they then had knowledge of good and evil before they ate. Their violation was not out of ignorance.

If Eden was a place of perfection as we have assumed, it would need no dressing, or cultivation, yet Adam was given the task of doing that. Because there was no death, he would not have had so much as a dead stick or sharp bone to use as a tool. Did God provide tools and skills for him? If so, why would later generations not have learned the use of such tools?

“The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20), yet she had actually given birth to no children at the time. Speaking of naming, Adam gave names to all the creatures (how many species?) on the day of his creation before Eve was created and brought to him. An impressive zoo there! We might wonder if he wrote down their names and what became of the list. And we can wonder where they slept and found protection from the weather and what they used for dishes, vessels, and grooming. Add to the list of wonders the points that they were ashamed of

their nakedness even though they were husband and wife, and that they were able to hide from God when they heard him (a Spirit) walking in the garden.

You may think I am attacking the credibility of the Bible, but that is not my purpose. I am proposing, however, that some, or many, things in the account of Adam and Eve in Eden may not be literal. You may have a quick explanation for each point that I have raised, but how do you know it is an accurate explanation? I am not denying that God can do what he wishes. I am saying the account of creation and Eden *is not all that simple*.

Many believers (millions, I assume) interpret the account of creation and that of Adam and Eve in Eden as being **theistic** rather than **scientific** and **historical**. They do not question the power of God or his work in creation but, recognizing problems with the scientific approach, they are willing to accept an allegoric meaning. The narrative is believed to be preserved divinely to point all human kind of all ages to the one God as the source of all and to indicate that the human predicament is caused by rebellion against the Creator, while also at the same time revealing God's concern and ultimate provision for redeeming man.

No scientific theory should be made into a necessary tenet of faith. Nowhere in the theology of the Scriptures are the process of creation, the stages of creation God might have utilized, and/or the length of time used, made into a dogma of saving belief.

In a different context in discussing debatable issues, Paul urged, "So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves" (Rom. 14:22). Whatever your conviction is, live by it, but don't reject your sincere brother whose convictions differ from yours.

That is a Spirit-approved rule to follow in all debatable matters of theology for we must admit that *they are not all that simple*. []

4. Refining Our Faith

The heavy machinery roars and the crush of rock is thunderous. This process is followed by application of intense heat. Surely, drastic measures are being taken to destroy something.

Actually, that is not the case, however. This is part of the process of producing delicate necklaces, brooches of intricate filagree, and artfully engraved jewelry of gold. Some gold has been found in nugget form needing little refinement, but generally it is not all that simple.

Although they know they do not have all the answers, some disciples seem comfortable and content with their limited understanding. They have "picked up" a few nuggets of faith. Their present set of beliefs offers refuge from the discomfort of facing new ideas and change. They are in fear of any questions or newly found knowledge that creates uneasiness.

Simple, trusting faith – how appealing! There is a difference, however, in simple and simplistic. We may ask, for example, is it simple or simplistic to believe that the sun circles a 6000 year old, flat, four-cornered earth with God on a throne in a specific place just above one’s particular location on earth from which heaven is up and hell is down (all of which can be “proved” by Biblical prooftexts)? If I hold on to such beliefs, that is my prerogative, even though I tend to freeze progress of learning of both religion and science by my limiting attitude. Since our relationship with God is not determined by a correct understanding of these things, I err when I condition fellowship upon conformity to my beliefs in such matters.

A more convincing and rewarding course is that of continual search for, and understanding of, previously unrecognized truth. That path holds no fear of what will be learned and its traveler is ready to initiate changes made necessary by better understanding. Faith is refined by questions – even questions expressing doubt. There is more faith in honest doubt than in holding on to the time-worn creeds, assumptions, and “cut and dried” explanations of men.

Valid faith which rises above suppositions and wishful thinking must be based upon truth. The author of the following quotation is unknown to me. I wish that I could claim credit for it but I am just pleased to copy it: *“To love truth sincerely means to pursue it with an earnest, conscientious, unflagging zeal. It means to be prepared to follow the light of evidence even to the most unwelcome conclusions, to labor earnestly to emancipate the mind from early prejudices, to resist the current of desires and the refracting influence of the passions, to proportion on all occasions conviction to evidence, and to be ready, if need be, to exchange the calm of assurance for all the suffering of a perplexed and disturbed mind. To do this is very difficult and very painful, but it is clearly involved in the notion of earnest love of truth.”*

Such an attitude may call for the crushing, pulverizing, and application of the intense heat of refinement to the ore of our learning over and over, not in an effort to destroy faith, but in order to refine it. When the disciples pled of Jesus, “Increase our faith” (Lk 17:5), they were expressing this attitude not knowing what it might cost them. Tests of faith, even those of persecution and various distresses, help to cast out the dross. Peter told disciples, “...you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:6f).

Your response to my “*Not All That Simple*” series has been confirming though I would expect that some of you are disagreeing privately. If you are upset by them, you may “unsubscribe” as one concerned woman did. I don’t want to ruin your day.

There is rightful concern for the “weak” brother. I have reason to suspect that some who are afraid that that my writings will offend the weak brother may be the weak ones themselves. I don’t want to weaken your faith. So far, even after my “*Six Days of Creation*” in *Free To Speak* and “*The Great Belly-Button Controversy*” in *Freedom’s Ring*, Vol. 1, No. 9, almost all response from you has been affirmative. I have heard of no weak brother losing his faith. On the contrary, I have received response more like the one below from Larry Amyett, Jr. <so2001@swbell.net>.

Thank you for your article “Adam and Eve in Eden.” I’ve long taken the Genesis Story as allegorical even though I was raised to take it literally. I especially appreciate

your statements 'No scientific theory should be made into a necessary tenet of faith.' And later 'Whatever your conviction is, live by it, but don't reject your sincere brother whose convictions differ from yours.'

When I was a child I was told that accepting Scientific Creationism was a requirement and that it was impossible to be a Christian and accept evolution at the same time. So once I saw sufficient evidence for evolution to convince me it was factual (I've always had an intense interest in science and technology) I abandoned my faith. Can you believe I was just 14 years old at the time! Looking back I wish I had my faith. A teenage boy certainly needs the Lord with all of the challenges and temptations presented against him.

I finally returned to the Lord, thanks to my wife, while we were in college. Her faith was the door by which the Holy Spirit was able to reenter my life. Through her our blessed Shepherd was able to bring me back safely into the fold.

Your writings are a comfort and a blessing to me, Brother Hook. I'm so glad every time I receive a Freedom's Ring newsletter from you. It really brightens my day and gladdens me."

Well-meaning people, by binding their scientific beliefs on this boy, put an unnecessary obstacle in his course causing him to stumble. In our simplistic approach it has been difficult for us to see the truth of that, and only the Lord knows how many we have driven away because of it. Trying to shield our children and converts from hard questions which they will surely confront later concerning this and other subjects is an evidence of fear.

On a radio broadcast nearly fifty years ago, I spoke for thirty minutes demanding that a person could not believe evolution and the Bible, and hence, could not be a Christian while claiming to believe both. At the conclusion of my message the announcer motioned for me to come into the control room. Expressing some perplexity about my assertions, he confidently claimed,, "I believe in evolution and the Bible and I am a Christian." What could I answer? Could I tell him it was impossible? I learned a sobering and humbling lesson that morning as the roles of teacher and learner were reversed! He was not playing with the same hand of theological cards that my teaching, training, and tradition had dealt me. I was confused as to which suit was trumps.

While living in that city, there was a young man in our congregation who confided in me that he believed in evolution. His "*weak faith*" brought him to every service of the church even though he lived fifty miles away! Through the years he has served diligently as a teacher and an elder. Do you still say that is impossible? What I am saying here is far wider in its application than just to the questions I raised about Adam and Eve in the Genesis account.

When we pose questions that shake our current explanations, we sometimes are warned that "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever..." (Deut. 29:29). Meaning: If I don't already understand and agree, it is one of the "secret things" to be avoided! But why be afraid to restudy the things that are revealed? Is not pursuit of knowledge commendable?

We are not too timid about making explanations that God did not reveal. In the Genesis account, for instance, it is commonly explained that Adam and Eve were given skins to cover their nakedness because blood had to be shed for their sin, and that Abel's

sacrifice was acceptable because it was a blood offering. Sounds good! A neat explanation! But where did you learn that? Such an explanation has not been *revealed!* Those are suppositions! However, God has revealed why he accepted Abel's sacrifice while rejecting Cain's. Please read Chapter 4 of *Free As Sons* where I have dealt with the revealed answer.

Suppositions and explanations which differ from mine are proud displays of treacherous human wisdom. Mine are wise conclusions discreetly drawn from "necessary inferences!" ☺ .

No, it isn't all that simple! Let's keep the refining and polishing process going. Pondering questions whose answers might have escaped us should be no cause for rejecting evidences which we cannot deny.

What purpose has led me to state these things which do not put a writer on the most favored list? My aim is not to convince you of a certain process and time period God used in making us. The trump suit is the Gospel of which concepts of creation are not a part.

My aim is to emphasize that other sincere believers may differ from you in their studied conclusions and that either they or you who make those conclusions a test of fellowship are at fault. []