

HOLY MYSTERIES



WHAT THE BIBLE'S MOST
UNUSUAL STORIES

REVEAL

WAIT? WHAT DID I JUST READ?

Key Passage(s): Ruth 4:1-8

Story Highlighted: The Sandal Moment (Ruth 4)

⁴ Meanwhile Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there just as the guardian-redeemer he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, "Come over here, my friend, and sit down." So he went over and sat down.

² Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, "Sit here," and they did so. ³ Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, "Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. ⁴ I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line."

"I will redeem it," he said.

⁵ Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property."

⁶ At this, the guardian-redeemer said, "Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it."

⁷ (Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalizing transactions in Israel.)

⁸ So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it yourself." And he removed his sandal.

FOCUS:

- There are some strange stories in the Bible
- These stories are often used by skeptics as a challenge to the authority of the Bible
- Knowing the role these stories play in our faith is important
- Strange stories in the Bible are often the most revealing

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think God allowed unusual or shocking stories to be included in the Bible?



QUESTIONS:

2. What do strange or unexpected stories show us about how God works?
3. Why is it important that the Bible doesn't hide human failure or brokenness?

RUTH 4

4. Why do you think this exchange had to happen publicly at the city gate?
5. Why do you think the Bible pauses to explain this sandal custom?
6. How does the removing of a sandal foreshadow what Christ does for us?



THE CASE OF THE TALKING DONKEY.

Key Passage(s): Numbers 22:21-34

Story Highlighted: Balaam's Talking Donkey (Numbers 22)

²¹ Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials. ²² But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. ²³ When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat it to get it back on the road.

²⁴ Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides. ²⁵ When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat the donkey again.

²⁶ Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. ²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff. ²⁸ Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"

²⁹ Balaam answered the donkey, "You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you right now."

³⁰ The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?"

"No," he said.

³¹ Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell facedown.

³² The angel of the Lord asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. ³³ The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared it."

³⁴ Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned. I did not realize you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now if you are displeased, I will go back."

FOCUS:

- A donkey sees the angel of the Lord before a prophet does
- Pride blinds us
- Spiritual blindness can affect even the most committed of spiritual people/leaders
- Sometimes God speaks through unexpected sources
- Story Highlighted: Balaam's Talking Donkey (Numbers 22)



QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think Balaam—the prophet—couldn't see the angel, but the donkey could?
2. Can someone be spiritually experienced and still miss what God is doing? Why?
3. Balaam keeps moving forward even after multiple warnings—why do you think that is?
4. Are there areas in your life where you sense God saying "stop" but you're still trying to move forward?
5. Where might God already be trying to get your attention, but you've been overlooking it?



THE HAND THAT WROTE ON A WALL

Key Passage(s): Daniel 5:1-30

Story Highlighted: The Handwriting on the Wall (Daniel 5)

⁵ King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. ² While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³ So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

⁵ Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. ⁶ His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.

⁷ The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. ⁹ So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

¹⁰ The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "May the king live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale!" ¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. ¹² He did this because Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

¹³ So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah?" ¹⁴ I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. ¹⁵ The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. ¹⁶ Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

¹⁸ "Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. ¹⁹ Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. ²⁰ But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. ²¹ He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.

²² "But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. ²³ Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. ²⁴ Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

²⁵ "This is the inscription that was written: mene, mene, tekul, parsin ²⁶ "Here is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. ²⁷ Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.



²⁹ Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

FOCUS:

- Pride, divine judgment and accountability are themes that echo across Scripture
- Biblical warnings are given when arrogance replaces humility
- God is a judge who evaluates with perfect justice
- The finger of God: writings on the wall or in the sand are exposing what was hidden

QUESTIONS:

1. What would your response be to a literal hand writing on the wall?
2. If something like this happened today, do you think people would believe it or try to explain it away?



QUESTIONS:

3. Have you ever experienced—or witnessed—a moment where God disrupted someone's path?
4. What might be a "warning sign" or gentle conviction God is showing you right now and how should you respond before it becomes more serious?
5. Why is fear of consequences not the same as true repentance?



ELISHA AND ANGRY BEARS

Key Passage(s): 2 Kings 2:23-25
Story Highlighted: Elisha and the bears. (2 Kings)

²³ From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. "Get out of here, baldy!" they said. "Get out of here, baldy!" ²⁴ He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys. ²⁵ And he went on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Sama

FOCUS:

- Knowing the context of so-called "odd" stories matters
 - A gang of young men threatened a prophet in a culture that had already rejected God
 - Rejecting a prophet was the same as rejecting God's authority
 - Contempt for God eventually brings consequences
 - God is loving, but God is also holy, righteous, and just
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QUESTIONS:

1. What stands out to you most in this story—and why does it feel so shocking or strange?

2. What details do you notice about the setting (Bethel, the road, the group of youths)?



QUESTIONS:

3. Why might Bethel (a place associated with false worship at times) matter in this story?
4. How do you reconcile the severity of the response with your understanding of God's character?
5. What might this teach about reverence—not just for people, but for God Himself?



FALLING ASLEEP DURING A SERMON MIGHT KILL YOU

Key Passage(s): Acts 20:7-12

Story Highlighted: Eutychus Falls from a Window and dies, then is raised from the dead (Acts)

⁷ On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. ⁹ Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. ¹⁰ Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" ¹¹ Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. ¹² The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.

FOCUS:

- A young man falls asleep during a sermon, falls from a window and dies
 - God has compassion on human weakness
 - God is a God who restores the fallen
 - God can work through his disciples in ordinary moments
 - Christian community gathers and responds to crises and cares for one another
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QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever felt spiritually, emotionally, or physically exhausted like Eutychus? What happened?
2. What does this story reveal about how God responds to our limitations, fatigue, and imperfections?



QUESTIONS:

3. How did the community respond when Eutychus fell? What can we learn from their response?
4. How does this story point us to Jesus and the hope of resurrection?
5. What areas of your life feel "lifeless" and in need of God's renewing power?



MAGICAL BONES, A TRANSFIGURATION AND A RESURRECTION

Key Passage(s): 2 Kings 20-21; Matthew 17:1-8; Matthew 28:5-7; John 20:16-18

Story Highlighted: Elisha's bones bring a man to life, Jesus appears with Moses and Elijah, Jesus is resurrected

2 Kings 20-21

²⁰ Elisha died and was buried.

Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. ²¹ Once while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders; so they threw the man's body into Elisha's tomb. When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet.

Matthew 17:1-8

¹⁷ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

⁴ Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." ⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

Matthew 28:5-7

⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

John 20:16-18

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her

FOCUS:

- A dead man's body touches the bones of Elisha and the man comes back to life
- Jesus is presented beside the greatest prophets but declared as God's Son
- The greatest miracle is not Elisha's bones, it is Jesus Himself
- God brings life out of what appears dead, resurrection is possible and will be the key to salvation
- God's greatest work often begins where we think the story is over. Why do you think God included such a brief but remarkable story about Elisha's bones?



QUESTIONS:

1. What does this miracle teach us about God's power over death?
2. Why do you think Moses and Elijah appear at the Transfiguration?
3. How do these stories strengthen your confidence in God's promise of eternal life?
4. Where do you need to trust God's life-giving power in a situation that feels hopeless today?
5. Of the stories taught in this study which one is your favorite and why? Which one is the hardest for you to relate to and why?

