

READING WORDS THAT AREN'T PRINTED

Genesis 2:15-25
Genesis 3:1-13

Faith Community
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Introduction

A woman enters an elevator. She is the only one in it. At the next stop, the doors open, and a large, young black man enters the elevator. The woman clutches her purse closer to her body. Her palms begin to sweat. She slowly edges her way back into a corner. When the elevator doors open, she hurries out into the lobby.

A police officer is questioning people about an accident involving an SUV and a large truck. One witness tells him he saw it happen. "The guy driving the truck swerved to miss a car and sideswiped the SUV."

"The driver of the truck was a man?"

"Yes, of course."

It turns out the person driving the truck was a woman. Often we see what we expect to see. We see what we have been taught to see, rather than what is actually there.

Some people have been taught that African-American men are dangerous and they react as if that were true. The man who witnessed the accident knew that men drive big rigs, not women, so that's what he saw.

All of us find what we expect to find – we see what we have been taught to see.

I

A similar thing happens when we read the Bible. Sometimes we see not what is actually there, but what we've been taught to see. We find in the Bible what we expect to find.

For example, everybody knows about the three kings who come to visit baby Jesus when he's born. We have all sung that song, "We three kings of orient are..." Problem is there are no kings in the birth story. The New Testament calls them MAGOI, Magi – wise men, sages, astrologers, even magicians. But there is nothing about royalty in this story.

Some people who seem to really know the Bible know the names of the three wise men - Gaspar, Melchoir, and Balthasar, which is great except in the Bible they are never named. The names first showed up in about the sixth century. Some kids probably had to learn those names in church school, but they aren't part of the Bible.

Another question: Who came to the manger first, the wise men or the shepherds? Yes, it's a trick question – the wise men come in Matthew, the shepherds come in Luke. None of the gospels has both wise men and shepherds. We blend the two stories together.

When you read the Bible, read what is actually there, not what you want to see or what others have told you is there. Read the Bible, not for what you expect, but for what is written. Sometimes it's very surprising.

II

We all know the creation story in Genesis. We have probably read it several times. God created man and woman and put them in the Garden of Eden. They were allowed to eat from any tree in the garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They enjoy their time there. Then one day Satan comes to Eve and says, “Did God tell you not to eat from any tree in the garden?”

“No, only from the one tree in the middle.”

Satan says, “But really if you eat that your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

So Eve takes the apple and eats it. Then she goes to Adam and entices him to eat it too. Suddenly they knew they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

Soon God comes to them and sees what they have done. God throws them out of the garden and declares the Fall of all humanity. In this act all humanity has been brushed with sin. This is the origin of original sin. We all know at least the basics of this story.

III

Let’s read the Genesis account. Watch carefully for the key elements of the story – Satan’s temptation, eating the apple, Eve’s tempting of Adam, and the Fall of humanity.

What did you notice about the story? Did you hear anything about an apple? No, it is the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. No apple is mentioned in the Bible’s account.

Also, Satan is nowhere in this story. The creature that talks with Eve is a serpent, a snake. It is one of the animals God has just created which is craftier than all the others. Satan is not in this story. Was it a real surprise to find that Eve does not tempt Adam?

“She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.” Eve doesn’t lure Adam into eating, she simply serves him. Where do you suppose the idea of Eve tempting Adam came from?

There is also nothing in the creation story about the Fall of Humanity. The words “Fall” and “Original Sin” are nowhere to be found in this story. “God sent him forth from the garden to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man.” Nothing is said here about the Fall of humanity. Adam is sent out of the garden.

IV

So much has been layered onto this story that isn’t in the Bible. When we read it, we read interpretations into it, assuming that someone’s interpretation is the Bible message. We can even read the text over and over again and still not see that what we assumed is in the story really isn’t there.

Read the Bible with a discerning eye – absorbing what is said and careful to watch for what is not said. This is especially true when we are sure we know what the story is about.

Conclusion

The Bible is a rich, deep, treasure. It is God's word to us. To get the most from it, read what actually is there. Don't read the words that aren't printed. Often the interpretations we read into the Bible make it easier than it is. When we look carefully at what is really there, we find a profound book that is surprising, sometimes disturbing, and which is our guide for life.

Amen.