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"Can Any Good Thing … " (Work Station Two)

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rooms filled with hundreds of written records. It is believed that Hazor might contain two such important libraries, and the significance of such a discovery for the history of the region cannot be overestimated. It is like finding a needle in a haystack, but it is what keeps archaeologists returning year after year.

The city of Hazor was also inhabited and expanded during the reigns of Solomon and Ahab. The massive six-entry way gate dating to Solomon was found in the earlier excavations of the 1950s. The city was subsequently expanded under King Ahab.

During the past several years, efforts have been made to clear away the Iron Age remains and continue to expand the exposure of a huge building or fortification system. Chris Chadwick, a senior archaeology major, worked last year for the full six-week season trying to get to the floor of the huge mud brick wall structure. He could not contain his excitement. “Finally we reached the floor where the important pottery would reveal the date of the building,” he reported. “Currently it would seem that the date of the building was Middle Bronze [period of Joseph], but we will have to wait until next season to be sure.” Two of the highlighted small finds of the season was a jar stopper with two Egyptian seal impressions and a seal from Mesopotamia that had never before been attested in Israel.

As one of our graduate students was excavating a wall from Ahab’s city one day, she suddenly noticed a strange figurine. The head was missing, and the arms were gone. But it was immediately recognizable as one of the hundreds of pillared female figurines found in Israel. A number of scholars believe she was the representation of Asherah, consort of Baal, and where was she discovered? In the city of Ahab. The Bible tells us that “four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah,” [ate] at Jezebel’s table” (1 Kings 18:19, NKJV).

As cities like Hazor continue to reveal their secrets, our understanding of the Bible and its world will increase exponentially. It often takes only one find to overturn the most eloquent theory about the past or increase our knowledge of the present. In 2007, Southern Adventist University will again be in the field excavating the “head of all those kingdoms.” If you are interested in a life-changing experience, you may contact the Institute of Archaeology at http://archaeology.southern.edu.

In Firefly, a television show now in syndication, an odd assortment of characters (TV people call this an "ensemble cast"), have been thrown together because of their various but mutual "misunderstandings" with an oppressive interstellar state. In one respect or another, they are all outlaws. Among this group are an elderly man called "the shepherd" because he is a religious person who frequently expresses uncommon spiritual wisdom, and a teenage girl named River, who has been freed by her brother from a facility where she has undergone unknown but sinister experiments by the state to develop her unusually high intelligence into weapons. Everyone aboard the spacecraft is unsettled by River’s mercurial behavior. At one moment she may be serene; at the next she may erupt into astonishing violence and power.

Yet River and the shepherd have developed a kind of close, father-daughter relationship. In one scene, the shepherd enters a room with some food for River. He lays the tray on a table, without looking up, unaware of what she is doing. River is browsing through a Bible, tearing out pages here and there, and the following exchange ensues:

“What are we up to, Sweetheart?” the shepherd asks kindly.

“Fixing your Bible,” River announces, as she continues to rip pages out of the book.

“I, uh—What?” the shepherd responds in alarm.

“No,” the shepherd protests, “you can’t . . .”

“So we’ll integrate non-propositional evolution theory with God’s creation,” River says, unfazed. “Eleven inherent metaphoric parallels are already there. Eleven. Important number. . . . Noah’s ark is a problem.”

“Really?”

“We’ll have it early quantum state phenomenon,” River goes on. “Only
way to fit 5,000 species of mammals in the same boat.”

The shepherd reaches for the book. “Give me that, River, you don’t fix the Bible.”

“It’s broken,” River says. “It doesn’t make sense.”

“It’s not about making sense,” the shepherd sighs. “It’s about believing in something. And letting that belief be real enough to change your life. It’s about faith. You don’t fix faith, River. It fixes you.”

Like River, the character in Firefly, our culture is trying to “fix” the Bible, to bring it into conformity with what it considers to be a higher authority: science. A few individuals and groups are, like River, literally going through the Scriptures and methodically removing content that they consider to be unsupported by human research.

This kind of project has been attempted before. Thomas Jefferson, for example, the author of America’s Declaration of Independence, meticulously edited out any mention of the miraculous in the four Gospels, producing what we know of today as the Jefferson Bible. It includes no reference to prophecies, the Trinity, angels, genealogy, or the resurrection. In Jefferson’s view, Jesus Christ was undeniably one of the great teachers of humankind, but this divinity thing just wouldn’t do. And there have been many other such attempts to envelop Christ among the other major contributors to the great human curriculum: Moses, Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, Mohammed.

But today scientists, educators, the media—even many Christian theologians—are also making every effort to change the way they have previously interpreted the Bible. In this way there’s no apparent need to delete anything in Scripture; all you have to do is change the way you read it. Very neat—very convenient!

Because of this change of view toward the authority of Scripture, until very recently the media have presented a very unsympathetic portrayal of religion—especially of Christianity. More than a decade ago, media critic Michael Medved, a voice crying in the wilderness, complained that “every time you see a member of the clergy or a religious figure [in the entertainment media], he’ll be portrayed as crazy or crooked or both. Hollywood, “said Medved, “sees traditionally religious people as some kind of an enemy.”

And, for some time, this is a depiction that people of faith have had to endure. Being the butt of so much ridicule is no fun, but Jesus did say that we would be reviled and persecuted. This, presumably, could include attacks on the spirit as well as the more extreme attacks on the physical. Persecution can come in more subtle ways than pogroms or physical torture.

And this is why the exchange between River and the shepherd is so refreshing. Throughout popular culture—in TV shows and motion pictures, in the lyrics of popular music, in the thought of writers of books and magazine articles—we are unexpectedly beginning to encounter an ever-growing rejection of the divine status that the Enlightenment has ascribed to human reason and a much more sympathetic depiction of spiritual issues and people of faith. The creative community, at least, has become increasingly willing to return to the frequent depiction and discussion of the transcendent.

U2, four Irish musicians considered to be probably the most popular rock group in the world, sends up a prayer in “Yahweh,” the penultimate song on its live album recorded in Chicago:

Take this heart
A city should be shining on a hill
Take this city
If it be your will
What no man can own, no man can take
Take this heart
Take this heart

Take this heart
And make it break
What is happening here? Is it possible that God can reveal truth even through otherwise uninspired voices? Scripture suggests that this kind of thing has been known to happen.

Nebuchadnezzar, a heathen king, testified to the power of God (Dan. 3:25). Pagan sailors expressed the truth to God’s prophet—who was literally running away from God and was dead wrong (Jonah 1:7-16). Truth came from the mouth of Balaam’s donkey—again, to counter the direction of one of God’s wayward prophets (Num. 22). As the result of a dream, the wife of Roman legate Pilate warned her husband, “‘Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man’” (Matt. 27:19, NIV). And even the demons testify to the divinity of Jesus (Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:23, 24; 3:11; 5:7; Luke 8:28; Acts 19:15).

So when many of the pulpits of our time may be losing touch with the spiritual basis of our lives (or maybe because they are doing so), it’s heartening to hear more than merely occasional rhythms and refrains in popular culture to which we can resonate so that, if we are open to them, faith can “fix” us. If the stones can be made to cry out, is it conceivable that maybe even a rock group can?

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