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Through faith we understand
that the worlds were framed
by the word of God.

—Hebrews 11:3



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Bible Lens

Substance

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from the Responsive Reading

Isaiah 14:4, 5

Thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers.

Although this poem specifically mentions the king of Babylon, one scholar notes its relevance to any authoritarian control. “It is a steadying thing,” he writes, “to hear the great prophet’s conviction that no imperialistic dream, no martial might of any world power, can finally subdue or enslave a race which God has created for freedom. The arrogance of men challenging the authority of God will be broken on his divine purpose.”

from Section 3

6 | Exodus 15:22, 23

Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter.

After three days without water, the discovery of bitter water must have been especially distressing for the Hebrew people—and Moses’ healing of the water a strong reminder of God’s power.

Mārāh is a Hebrew word meaning *bitter*. In addition to being the name of this oasis—the first one found by the Israelites after the Red Sea crossing—it is related to the

name Naomi took after the loss of her husband and sons (see Ruth 1:20).

The wilderness of Shur, near the northeastern border of Egypt, was the site of Hagar’s first encounter with God (see Genesis 16:7).

from Section 4

8 | II Samuel 13:6, 11, 12, 14

Amnon said unto the king, I pray thee, let Tamar my sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat at her hand.... And when she had brought them unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister. And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me;... Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her.

Tamar and Amnon were both children of David, but by different mothers. Although this account tells of Amnon’s love for his half sister, his actions clearly spring from lust. His attack on her is not his only atrocity, however; his subsequent decisions compound his villainy, as Tamar herself protests (see v. 16).

Hebrew history and law provided the option of marriage in situations like this. A precedent for marriage between half siblings is described in Genesis 20:12. And Deuteronomy 22:28, 29 refers to marriage in cases of rape. As difficult as such a step would have been for Tamar, it would have preserved her status in the community. But Amnon’s barring the door against her (see II Samuel 13:17) strips her of all honor—and, as no

An exploration of Bible citations from the *Christian Science Quarterly*® Bible Lessons

“...a lesson on which the prosperity of Christian Science largely depends.” —Mary Baker Eddy

other man would now marry her, removes any possibility of a husband and children. Tamar tears her clothes and pours ashes on her head (see v. 19), signifying her grief and making Amnon’s wickedness known.

10 | Revelation 12:1, 3

There appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:... And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

“Great wonder” uses the Greek noun *sēmeion* —a recurring word throughout the New Testament, most often translated as *sign* or *miracle*. A commentary calls this “the language of prophetic assurance.”

John’s vision of casting out the dragon (see v. 9) is one such assurance. Another source explains, “Reassurance is given that God is in control, however persistent evil may appear, and that ultimately God will bring about judgment and vindicate his people.”

10 | Revelation 12:14

To the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

“A time, and times, and half a time” alludes to three and a half years. Nearly identical wording occurs in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7, and other scriptural verses render it 42 months or 1,260 days (see examples in Revelation 11:2, 3). But no matter how it’s designated,

most Bible authorities view it as symbolizing a limited time of tribulation.

from Section 6

16 | Acts 16:16, 18

It came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying:... But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

In this account, *divination* is translated from the Greek word *pythōn* (a reference to the mythical serpent associated with the oracle at Delphi, in southern Greece). Someone with a “python” spirit was believed to be the mouthpiece of that spirit. The slave girl suffered under both this mental bondage and the economic bondage of her masters.

Paul decisively releases the girl “in the name of Jesus Christ”—a phrase that honors Jesus’ example, declares the Christly source of the command, and invokes the spiritual authority of the Christ. “The prophet’s use of ‘the name’ to heal and make people whole again,” writes a scholar, “is not magical but confessional: Paul’s rebuke of the spirit expresses his surety of God’s triumph over evil.”

Resources quoted in this issue

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A little faith

By Elaine R. Follis

From the December 14, 1998, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*

I'd been looking forward to the trip home for months. Going there is always special for me—the house has so many memories, and it's a place where I can really rest. However, I was in for a surprise.

When I arrived, I found the place in disarray; I wound up sleeping on the floor in an area that had not been cleaned for a long time. It was hard to pray about the situation, because I much preferred to feel sorry for myself. But I knew that wouldn't solve anything for me or for the other people involved, while turning to God would bring the help we all needed. So I quieted down and began to listen, spiritually. It wasn't long before an idea came very clearly to thought: Have a little faith in Me.

That simple idea was just what I needed to hear. I'd been so busy being anxious and unhappy about my problems that I'd lost perspective on what Life truly is. I've learned that Life is God and therefore perpetually perfect and harmonious. Man is the expression of that Life, and so, in fact, I am spiritual, reflecting the goodness and the glory of God, Spirit. That same Life embraces everyone and every element of the universe. Nothing dark and dismal can ever drown it out, diminish its light, or displace its presence.

This realization brought with it a genuine willingness to cast my burden upon the Lord, to paraphrase the Bible (see Psalms 55:22)—to quit carrying around a crushing load of responsibility, resentment, and disappointment. Within the hour, a generous act by some people I scarcely knew set off a series of events that resolved every single one of the many problems that had been overwhelming me.

A little faith. The word *little* is what has stood out to me in the days since this all took place. Christ Jesus commended the power of faith as a grain of mustard seed (see Matthew 17:20), and on this occasion my faith certainly wasn't much more than a tiny speck amid lots of worry. But it was enough to do the job. Good carried the day this time. Faith assures us it always will.

Mary Baker Eddy writes, "Let us have the molecule of faith that removes mountains,—faith armed with the understanding of Love, as in divine Science, where right reigneth" (*The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany*, p. 278). With issues like chemical warfare, terrorists' threats, and the like often in the news, the phrasing of her statement is both interesting and relevant. It underscores the fact that the essence of what's real is not matter; reality is spiritual and expresses God, Spirit. Not matter but "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Despite the distorted testimony reported by the physical senses, faith is the quality that allows us to see spiritual reality as the truth of existence—for ourselves and for the universe as a whole.

The truth is, we all have faith because we all express the God who is faithful, who knows only perfection as the essence of His creation, and is absolutely confident and changeless in that knowledge. Our consciousness of faith grows as we nurture it. And, as I learned that day, just a little is more than enough to start.

To read the entire article, which has been shortened to fit this page, go to jsh.christianscience.com/a-little-faith.