

Although the contents of the following work are instructive, their sole purpose is not simply to instruct. Instead, they are offered as a catalyst to fuel one's God-given imagination so that the infinite mind of the Word might shed some small part of Himself upon all who dare to embrace a knowledge of the sublime as a child seeks to embrace the ineffable mystery of a clear blue sky.

W.K.S. 4.10.16

BOOK ONE

We speak a message of wisdom, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are coming to nothing. We speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that God has hidden and destined for our glory before time began.

The Apostle Paul, *Letter to the Corinthians*

Roll Call of the Intrepid

FIRST, I HAVE to express my gratitude to the intrepid pioneers who provided the core narratives for this work. Just in case anyone thinks that I have concocted the following storyline entirely on my own, I would like to offer this list of discoverers, translators, and scholars whose monumental contributions have provided the biblical texts that form its backbone. For a more in-depth look at their lives and accomplishments, please refer to the Selected *Biographies* section in *The Credits*.

Among the discoverers who have restored to the world such an unexpected array of lost manuscripts, there are: Johann Grynæus (1540-1617), a Swiss Protestant divine, professor of *The New Testament*, and collector of biblical manuscripts; Giuseppe Assemani (1687-1768), a Lebanese Orientalist and Vatican librarian; James Bruce (1730-1794), a Scottish explorer and travel writer; and E.A. Wallis Budge (1857-1934), a British Egyptologist, Orientalist, philologist, and author.

Among the translators who have turned many of these manuscripts into works that could be understood by an English-speaking world, there are: William Wake (1657-1737), a British clergyman, dean at Exeter, bishop at Lincoln, and archbishop of Canterbury; Richard Laurence (1760-1838), a British Hebraist, Anglican churchman, and regius professor of Hebrew at Oxford; Moses Samuel (1795-1860), a British author and translator of Hebrew works; S.C. Malan (1812-1894), a British biblical scholar and linguist of Oriental languages; William Wright (1830-1889), a British Orientalist and professor of Arabic at Cambridge; B. Harris Cowper (1822-1904), a British archeologist, historian, and translator; W.R. Morfill (1834-1909), a British professor of Slavonic languages at Oxford; and R.H. Charles (1855-1931), an Irish biblical scholar and theologian.

Among the scholars who invested their considerable skill and effort into making the various manuscripts accessible to the general population, there are: Theophilus of Antioch (c. 120-181), a Syrian theologian, apologist, author, and chronologist; Julius Africanus (c. 160-240), a Libyan historian, traveler, and chronologist; Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170-235), a Greek theologian, apologist, and chronologist; Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-373), a theologian, deacon, and hymn writer; Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), an Italian historian, political philosopher, and apologist of classical antiquity; George Smith (1800-1868), a British historian, theologian, and author; Joseph A. Seiss (1823-1904), an American theologian, Lutheran minister, and author; E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913), a British clergyman and theologian; Louis Ginzberg (1873-1953), a Lithuanian professor of Judaism and Talmudist; Edgar J. Goodspeed (1871-1962), an American theologian and scholar of Greek and

The New Testament; and Cyrus H. Gordon (1908-2001), an American biblical scholar and professor of ancient Near East culture and languages.

Thanks to the visionary efforts of “so great a cloud of witnesses,” then, I hereby present the following work; I now present *The Book of Tales: Stories That Confirm the 5,500-year Prophecy Given to Adam About the Coming of Christ*.

Arguments for Authenticity

The Seed of Truth

WHAT IS TRUTH? asked Pontius Pilate of his supplicant prisoner; and in doing so, he was essentially asking this question on behalf of all humanity. But according to the canonical record, Jesus offered no reply to Pilate. So why did He not answer him? If God is no respecter of persons, as the Scriptures assure us, then the One Who was to give His life as a ransom for mankind would certainly have answered such an important question. After all, Jesus stated that this was the very reason He came into the world: “To testify to the truth.”¹ Yet based on the Apostle John’s account, Jesus was inexplicably silent as to the exact nature of this truth.

Fortunately, for us, though, John was not the only person who recorded the events surrounding this pivotal moment in history. As it turns out, there is another take on this same conversation, which can be found in the apocryphal record known as *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, formerly called *The Acts of Pontius Pilate*. According to this version of the story, Jesus did answer the question.

So Pilate asked, “What is truth?”

And Jesus replied, “Truth is from Heaven.”

To which the somewhat disappointed Pilate replied, “Then truth is not of this Earth; is that it?”

But Jesus looked the governor squarely in the eye and replied, “Don’t be too sure, my friend, because truth does exist on this Earth, but it does so among those who, having the power of judgment, are governed by the truth and who form proper judgment because of that truth.”²

Confronted by such an alternate version, one must then ask the obvious question. Which version of this story should be accepted as the truth? To which I would reply: Maybe they are both true. After all, when one considers that there are different accounts in Scripture of Noah’s animals and Judas’ death, why would we expect there to be only one version of this event in the life of Jesus? It seems to me that one should look to their own conscience in such matters, because in the final analysis this is all any of us can do in our all-too-human pursuit of historical truth. In other words, one must honestly ask themselves: Do the words of Jesus in this particular story sound like those that would have been spoken by the One Who is the very embodiment of truth? Or do they contradict what one might expect Jesus to have said? The words ring true in both versions, do they not? If so, then why not simply accept the fact that we are dealing with two complimentary versions of the same event.

This, in turn, brings us face to face with the central issue encountered by anyone who reads a work like *The Book of Tales*, because it incorporates, at its core, stories that have all been stitched together from the so-called “apocryphal” record – in particular, *The First Book of Adam and Eve*, *The Secrets of Enoch*, *The Book of Jasher*, *The Letters of Herod and Pilate*, and *The Gospel of Nicodemus*.

¹ *John* 19:37

² *Nicodemus* 3:11-13

Naturally, in my own defense, only those stories that could be corroborated by the canonical record were drawn from, while any that contradicted it were summarily rejected. But far from expecting anyone to accept it all at face value, I am attempting, by way of these opening remarks, to provide a framework to make one's own judgment as to whether the apocryphal record can be trusted as a valid source of truth. Notwithstanding the centuries-old debate surrounding this literature, there are ways that one can approach the issue, and I can assure you that the process I am offering will originate from the teachings and principles that are firmly grounded in the Biblical Canon.

What is truth, then? If one is a staunch believer in the traditional view of only the so-called "received texts," then I would quickly remind them that even Jesus taught that truth was not the same thing to each and every person. According to Him, the whole world can be divided into four distinct groups. Each group, when confronted by "truth," will interpret this information based on their own personal frame of reference, and by virtue of these four different perspectives, what constitutes truth will inevitably end up producing four different results. Truth, then, no matter how obvious it seems can never be received in the same way by all people. Consequently, when Jesus spoke of the dispensing and receiving of truth, He compared it to a farmer who went about scattering seeds in a field, and as can be expected, He predicted four very different outcomes. Some seeds were gobbled up by the birds before they even got planted into the ground. Some seeds fell on rocky ground and sprouted, but, because they lacked depth of soil, withered in the heat of the Sun. Some seeds fell among thorns so that when the plants grew up they choked and died before too long. And finally, there were some seeds that fell among good soil; these proved to be the only ones that were able to produce a healthy crop.³

By the Middle Ages, this idea of the four-fold nature of assimilating the seed of truth became the impetus of a tradition of biblical interpretation that had its origins in the commentaries of the early Christian Era. Said Stephen A. Barney, professor emeritus of English at the University of California, Irvine, the four levels of interpretation involved: One, a "literal" interpretation of the events of the biblical story for historical purposes, with no underlying meaning. Two, a "typological" interpretation that connected the events of *The Old Testament* with *The New Testament*, particularly in the way that events of Christ's life related to the lives of earlier messianic figures who preceded Him. Three, a "moral" interpretation, which involved how one should act in the present, that is to say, a meaning derived from the "moral of the story." And four, an "analogical" interpretation, which had to do with an understanding of prophetic, or future, events of Christian history, that is to say, Heaven, Hell, and Judgment Day. In this way, the four types of interpretation correspond to all three modes of existence—past, present, and future; literal, with our past; typological, connecting the past with our present; moral, with our present; and analogical, with our future.⁴

To illustrate how this four-fold approach applies to Scripture, Dante, called "one of the greatest literary icons of the Western world,"⁵ offered this example:

To clarify this method of treatment, consider this verse: "When Israel went out of Egypt, the House of Jacob from a barbarous people, Judah was made His sanctuary, and Israel His dominion." (*Psalms* 113:1-2) Now, if we examine the letters alone (literally), the Exodus of the Children of Israel in the time of Moses is signified; in the allegory (typologically), our redemption accomplished through Christ; in the moral sense, the conversion of the soul from the struggle and misery of sin to the status of grace; in the analogical sense, the

³ *Matthew* 13:3-9

⁴ *Dictionary of the Middle Ages, Volume 1: Aachen to Augustinism—Allegory*, Stephen A. Barney (Contributor), p. 180

⁵ *Icons of the Middle Ages: Rulers, Writers, Rebels, and Saints: Volume 1—Dante Alighieri*, Elizabeth K. Haller (Contributor), p. 244

exodus of the human soul from the slavery of this corruption to the freedom of eternal glory.⁶

Furthermore, this same idea of the four-fold nature of truth was no stranger to either Jewish or Islamic theology. In Judaism it is known as *Pardes*, which refers to four different approaches to interpreting the biblical text. *Peshat* pertains to the “surface,” or literal, meaning; *remez*, the “deep,” or symbolic, meaning; *derash*, the “comparative,” or similar, meaning; and *sod*, the “secret,” or mystical, meaning.⁷ And in Islam this idea was expressed by Jafar al-Sadiq, the Muslim scholar and Imam, who stated that *The Koran* has four similar levels of interpretation: “*The Book of God* has four things—literal expression (*ibara*), allusion (*ishara*), subtleties (*lataif*), and the deepest realities (*haqaiq*). The literal expression is for the common folk, the allusion is for the elite, the subtleties are for the friends of God, and the deepest realities are for the prophets.”⁸

No wonder that when Jesus spoke about understanding the things of God, He referred to this four-fold principle of awareness. Therefore, with this multifaceted aspect of knowledge in mind, I would now like to address why I am convinced of the authenticity of the books that all but the ancient world—while in the case of *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, the pre-Reformation world—have deemed apocryphal.

The End of Secrecy

TO BEGIN WITH—IN A truly ironic twist—there is the simple fact that this word *apocryphal* contains an obvious clue as to the mystery of why these books were deemed unacceptable and lost to humanity for so many centuries, because, over time, the word has come to signify something very different from its original etymological meaning. To the modern mind, something deemed apocryphal is anything that is considered “doubtful,” “spurious,” or “untrustworthy.” In actuality, its true meaning, based on its root word, is something that is “secret” or “hidden,” as in, anything considered apocryphal is merely a hidden thing to outsiders. In other words, the secret only remains a mystery to those who do not possess the tools of interpretation, but to those “on the inside,” as it were, the otherwise hidden meaning of the thing is fully comprehensible.

When understood in this fashion, the nature of the message contained in books like *Adam and Eve*, *Enoch*, *Jasher*, and *Nicodemus* have been exactly that—a body of divinely-inspired wisdom literature, which has precisely fulfilled this desired intention. In this, it is just as the Scripture declares: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived, all the things that the Lord has prepared for those who love Him.”⁹ Continuing in this same vein, Paul then said, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”¹⁰

Truth seen from this view, then, is never something that is as straightforward as one would hope for. From a biblical perspective, truth is always something that is veiled, hidden, obscure—the very essence of which is perfectly conveyed via the word *apocryphal*. Consider Matthew’s words when he said, “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables. He did not say anything to them without using one. In this way, what was spoken through the prophet was fulfilled: ‘I’ll open My mouth in parables; I’ll utter *secret* things which have been *hidden* since the creation of the world.’”¹¹

⁶ *The Epistle to Can Grande*, Dante Alighieri, pp. 5-6

⁷ *The Jewish Encyclopedia: Biblical Exegesis—Pardes*

⁸ *Spiritual Gems: The Mystical Koran Commentary*, Jafar al-Sadiq, p. 1

⁹ *First Corinthians* 2:9

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 2:14

¹¹ *Matthew* 13:34-35

The word being used here for “secret” is the Greek word *krupto*, which means, “to conceal (that it may not become known).” Notice that this word *krupto*, from which we get our English word *cryptic*, is the central component for the word *apocryphal*. According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, the word *apocryphal* comes to us from the Greek word *apokryphos*. What Webster does not mention, however, is that the prefix *apo* denotes the cessation, or reversal, of the word that it precedes; as in, if the root word means “secret” or “hidden,” then when it is preceded by the prefix *apo*, the meaning of the word changes to that of “the end of secrecy” or “the reversal of being hidden.” Clearly, this means that the real definition of the word *apocryphal* is the “unveiling” of a secret that was previously hidden from view.

Imagine that: The very people who were trying to discredit this so-called “forbidden wisdom” inadvertently chose a word that actually conveyed a latent truth about its destiny. No matter how many centuries of doubt and skepticism obscured its true meaning, the knowledge in these books would one day become “uncovered truth,” and finally be seen for what it truly was – the wisdom of God that had been hidden away until it was time to be revealed. In this, it is exactly as predicted in one of the most ancient texts known to mankind – *First Enoch*:

The word of the blessing of Enoch, how he blessed the elect and the righteous who would exist in the time of trouble, rejecting all the wicked and ungodly. Enoch, a righteous man, who was with God, answered and spoke while his eyes were open and while he saw a holy vision in the Heavens. This the angels showed me. From them I heard all things and understood what I saw; that which will not take place in this generation but in a generation which is to succeed at a distant period, on account of the elect.¹²

Search for Hidden Treasure

APART FROM THE CLUES that the etymological root meaning of the word provide, the prophetic nature of Scripture also supports the idea of the existence of a body of wisdom which – even though it proceeded directly from God – would be lost for an intended duration. Then, at some preordained “set time,” this hidden wisdom would, for the sake of a future generation, be hurled back into the light of day, as if from out of nowhere. This is precisely what Jesus was saying when He announced: “The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand!”¹³ Though the world had experienced various degrees of awareness of God’s existence until Jesus arrived on the stage of history, the world remained in a perpetual state of spiritual dysfunction. But upon being baptized by John – an event that was punctuated by a voice from Heaven – the earthly ministry of Jesus was inaugurated and with it a new era of enlightenment and awareness.

Again and again, the biblical authors spoke of God’s deliberate pattern of hiding and revealing His most important truths. In every age – from the time of Adam, right up to the present hour – the world has ridden a veritable roller coaster of ignorance and awareness concerning the ebb and flow of God’s manifestation. Yet even in those most harrowing of days, when God had withdrawn His presence because of mankind’s utter disregard for Him, there still remained a modicum of God-inspired revelation. In other words, there is, and always will be, more than one level of truth that the Lord is in the business of revealing. First, there is a general revelation of truth that all humanity is capable of perceiving as described by Paul. “Since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that mankind is without excuse.”¹⁴

In addition to this universal awareness of the Divine, there is another aspect of understanding the reality of God, which is not something that can be grasped by the general population. The

¹² *First Enoch* 1:1-2

¹³ *Mark* 1:15

¹⁴ *Romans* 1:20

reason for this is clearly spelled out in *The Bible* so that there can be little doubt as to God's intention. Once again, Paul, as the great interpreter of Scripture, said it best: "We speak a message of wisdom, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age who are coming to nothing. We speak of God's *secret* wisdom, a wisdom that God has *hidden* and destined for our glory before time began."¹⁵

When one begins to see the revelation of God's word in these terms, which could be described as a cosmic bank vault with a time-specific point of unlocking, it is much easier to understand that the role the apocryphal literature has played throughout history is no aberration in the plan of God.

The knowledge of God, then, is not something that one is simply born with or inherits from one's parents. It must be sought after with tremendous effort and determination. Certainly, Solomon, renowned as the wisest man in history, must have had this in mind when he declared: "God in His greatness has concealed many things, while kings have the honor of discovering them."¹⁶ The knowledge that *The Bible* speaks of is never merely surface-oriented; it must be dug for much in the same way that precious metals must be unearthed. "If you cry out for insight and understanding, and search for it like you'd search for *hidden* treasure, then you'll begin to understand and find the knowledge of God."¹⁷

Ironically, however, not only must mankind search for wisdom, but the true Wisdom of God, Whom Solomon personified as a living force, also has the ability to search for us. "Wisdom calls out in the street. She shouts in the public squares; from the top of the walls and the gateways of the city, she cries out."¹⁸ In this way, Solomon made it clear that the Wisdom of God is a thoughtful entity, capable of both pursuing and being pursued. As a result of this unique attribute of knowledge as an active, living force, God and mankind are in a veritable wrestling match when it comes to appropriating it. As so often happens, mankind foolishly spurns the advances of the very wisdom that reaches out to it:

If you had responded to My rebuke, I would've poured out My heart and soul to you. But you rejected Me when I called, paid no attention when I reached out. You ignored all My advice and refused to listen to Me. So, I, in turn, will laugh when disaster overwhelms you. As you mocked Me, I will mock you when calamity overtakes you.¹⁹

In this, Isaiah further elaborated:

I know how stubborn you are, with necks as unbending as iron. You're as hardheaded as bronze. That's why I told you ahead of time what I was going to do. That way you could never say, "My idols did it. My wooden image and metal god commanded it to happen!" You've heard My predictions and seen them fulfilled, but you refused to admit it. Now I'll tell you new things that I've never mentioned before, *secrets* that you've not yet heard.²⁰

With all this in mind, it should come as no surprise that the average citizen of planet Earth thinks that God is either dead or not paying attention. Neither should one be surprised when the typical Christian doubts the possibility that the word of God could actually encompass more than the traditionally accepted sixty-six books. As one can detect from a brief scan of Scripture, truth as God defines it is simply not something that is easily or casually appropriated. For the most part, truth is a *hidden* thing — a *secret* that resides deep in the heart of God, Who apparently shares it only with those of His choosing.

¹⁵ *First Corinthians* 2:6-7

¹⁶ *Proverbs* 25:2

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 2:3-5

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 1:20-21

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 1:23-26

²⁰ *Isaiah* 48:4-6

So the next time some super-spiritual know-it-all starts pontificating about how the apocryphal books were not included in the Canon of Scripture because God declared them unholy or uninspired, just remind them that the Lord is always confounding the self-proclaimed geniuses of this world. “I thank You, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth,” Jesus said, “for *hiding* the truth from those who think themselves so clever and wise, and for revealing it to the child-like.”²¹ And be bold in your conviction, as you fearlessly remind them of the words of our Lord: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered *hidden* in a field. In his excitement, he *hid* it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field – and to get the treasure, too!”²²

Imagine that: How many people would even notice what is being said here? Admittedly, it is a subtle point, but for the purposes of our discussion it looms as an important subtlety, because contained in this parable is a clue for the existence of a body of *hidden* wisdom that someone discovered and then, after having gone to a great deal of trouble to find it, *hid* it again! If I am not mistaken this sounds exactly like the scenario surrounding the apocryphal literature with so much of its inherent mystery and intrigue. What else can this mean but that someone attained, by way of intense search, an understanding of God’s long-lost kingdom and, having acquired this treasured awareness, then *hid* their discovery again in the hopes of recovering it at some future point in time?

Like echoes reverberating down through the corridors of time, this same idea resounds throughout the ages; from the days of Enoch, the scribe, down to that of Asaph, the psalmist:

Oh, my people, hear my teaching; listen to my words. I’ll open my mouth in parables, I’ll utter *hidden* things from days of old – what we’ve heard and known, what our Fathers have told us. We’ll reveal them to our children; we’ll tell the next generation about His power, about the wondrous things that He’s performed on our behalf. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the Law in Israel, which He commanded our forefathers to teach their children so the next generation would know them, even the children who were yet to be born, and they, in turn, would tell their children. Then they’d put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His commands.²³

Then, from the mouth of Asaph, the words were reiterated by the Incarnate Word, Jesus, Who, contrary to popular belief, spoke in parables to veil the truth so they would remain ignorant of the *hidden* wisdom that the Lord chose to reveal to His elect ones. And just in case none of you believes that God is in the business of unveiling apocryphal wisdom, then simply revisit the words of Jesus as recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke:

The disciples came to Him and asked, “Why do You speak to the people in parables?” And He replied, “The knowledge of the *secrets* of the Kingdom of Heaven has been given to you but not to them. Whoever has will be given more and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.

“This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not perceive; though hearing, they do not understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: You’ll be forever hearing but never understanding. You’ll be forever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused. They hardly hear with their ears, and have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see and hear, and understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.”²⁴

²¹ *Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21*

²² *Matthew 13:44*

²³ *Psalms 78:1-7*

²⁴ *Matthew 13:10; Mark 4:10; Luke 8:9*

Having set the stage this way, we next examine how a disparate set of ancient manuscripts, depicting long-forgotten worlds, was adapted so a modern audience can relate to them, followed by a brief history of the restoration of these manuscripts that were once thought to be lost forever. Then, you will be ready to digest the actual narratives in all their dramatic glory.

THE TRANSLATION

The test of a translation, like the test of a book ... is not a line here and there but coherence, movement, action; not how easily we may pull it to pieces and what interesting pieces it makes but how it first interests us, then absorbs us, and finally sweeps us along.

James I. Cook, *Edgar J. Goodspeed: Articulate Scholar*

A Matter of Style

The Latent Message

ONE OF THE MOST difficult aspects in bringing these stories to life for the sake of a modern audience was the all-important decision concerning the style of translation employed in their retelling. Crucial to this process were certain considerations, the first being the original style of writing in which the stories had been presented in their various incarnations up to the present day. As previously stated, *The Book of Tales* is a work that has been synthesized from manuscripts some of which date from the remotest periods of antiquity, such as *The First Book of Adam and Eve*, *The Secrets of Enoch*, *The Book of Jasher*, *The Letters of Herod and Pilate*, and *The Gospel of Nicodemus*.

When I learned of the existence of these stories more than three decades ago, they only existed in collections that had been published in the 1920s, while these in turn were reproductions from even earlier versions of the original manuscripts. Upon my initial reading of them, I felt much like someone who encounters the unfiltered works of William Shakespeare for the first time. These were definitely not stories that one could simply breeze through. Poetic yet mystifying, inspiring yet exasperating, they were written in a style that was clearly as archaic and outdated as anything penned by the Bard of Avon. Nearly incomprehensible at first glance, the sublime meaning of the texts seemed to arise only after a great deal of reading and re-reading, which required many hours of study and contemplation. Over the course of time, however, I not only became enthralled with the stories in these books, but I also became convinced that they were literary treasures in their own right. Unfortunately, because of the convoluted style in which they were written, I could also see why most modern minds would remain unimpressed and untouched by the latent message embedded in them.

After several years of sharing these stories with friends and colleagues—with admittedly mixed results—I noticed that something unusual began to happen as I attempted to engage others with their contents. Gradually, as I continued to read the narratives aloud to those around me, I ceased to simply recite them verbatim as they were found in the books. I found myself “translating them on the fly” in order to better convey the meaning that I felt was trapped in their pages. Only then did people begin to become engaged, with the end result that they started offering remarks like: “These are some very interesting texts. They shed new light on questions I’ve always had about certain aspects of *The Bible*.” And: “This is fascinating stuff. I wonder why we’ve never heard anything about these stories in church.”

Finally, after countless readings of the stories, I came to the conclusion that they represented a startling, behind-the-scenes version of *The Bible*—an extended storyline that constituted an intriguing counterpart to the familiar versions of Scripture. Not only that, but at some point in my journey through this collection of *Tales*, I began to see them as more than a collage of random texts. Slowly but surely, there emerged a distinct pattern of connectivity, which transformed this scattered compendium into a single, continuous timeline—one that literally pivots upon the little-known prophecy of The Great Five and a Half Days—with Enoch as the narrator of a series of stories, beginning with Adam and Eve, then Abraham and Nimrod, and finally Jesus and Pilate.

Unfortunately, there was still one seemingly insurmountable problem with my grandiose plan. Apart from biblical scholars and literary aficionados, I wondered, who in this modern, skeptical world would ever take the time to decipher the content of these stories when they were trapped in a language frame that only hardcore Shakespeare fans could appreciate, let alone understand?

So, like every other author before me, the question remained the same: How could I go about creating believable dialog for characters who existed in some of the remotest chapters of human history? Would I simply resort to parroting the style of the *King James Bible* translators when attempting to depict the biblical past? For me, this would constitute the ultimate failure of nerve, because, quite frankly, I have never been satisfied with biblical movies that took this route. I mean, really, who in their right mind would ever believe that anyone in *The Bible* actually talked like people who inhabited the world of Elizabethan England? Does anybody think, for one second, that Jesus, Abraham, or Adam spoke in iambic pentameter? Of course not. So why should audiences continue to endure such artistic nonsense? To me, it has always been nothing less than a gross oversimplification that just because a story involves historical characters who inhabit worlds unlike our own they must be portrayed as speaking with dialects and accents in order to convey their unique time and place.

A Clarity of Language

WITH THIS AGE-OLD dilemma, one comes face to face with the next critical consideration in trying to present the most ancient of tales to a modern audience. Throughout the history of storytelling, authors have made a concerted effort to flesh out their narratives by means of presenting three crucial elements—the *time* when a story occurred, the *place* where it occurred, and the *characters* who existed when and where that story occurred. Primarily, the way in which the first two aspects of storytelling are portrayed, that is, the “time” and “place” of any given story, have been done in a fairly straightforward manner. Whether the author’s presentation of such matters can be characterized as either profoundly poetic or merely functional in style, the conveyance of time and place is generally more an indication of the author’s personal writing style rather than anything intrinsic to the story itself.

On the other hand, the one aspect of a story that exists apart from the author’s style is the way in which the “characters” of a story are presented, which is done not so much by way of what they *do* but how they *speak*. In other words, regardless of the background and origins of an author, the characters of a given narrative—either fictional or nonfictional—should always speak in a way that is true to that character’s unique background and origins. Whereas an author may depict the time and place of a story in a multitude of ways without altering it, the way that characters speak will inevitably alter the reception of that story. More than any other aspect of the story, how characters speak must ring true to the time and place that they inhabit, or else the audience might interpret everything they do as false or contrived. The depiction of the dialog of a story’s characters, then, is the paramount hurdle with which an author must contend, and never more so than with a narrative like *The Book of Tales*, which attempts to portray characters that clearly have a specific historical setting.

A prime example of dialog that uniquely conveys the setting of a story can be found in the literary works of Mark Twain. Through his clever use of dialect, Twain not only conveys a character's personality but, with little or no back story at all, he also conveys their education level and position in society. On the positive side, Twain's use of dialect provides insight into his characters through a dialog that, by way of texture and sound, reveals a great deal about the setting of the story – one which conveys a truth far beyond the author's mere description of the time and place in which the characters exist. On the negative side, however, trying to read dialog that is steeped in a peculiar dialect is sometimes very difficult to decipher. Often narratives that resort to foreign dialects to convey the background of certain characters work on one level, but because the dialog is so stultified, the actual message of the work is literally lost in translation. As a result, books or movies with dialect-laden dialog might be applauded by one segment of the audience, such as critics or other artists, while the average patron winds up on the losing end because of the difficulties that arise from trying to decipher the dialog. Unable to follow the plot, the reader or viewer disengages from the narrative before they even have an opportunity to get involved with the story.

To avoid such a potential death knell to box-office success, many filmmakers have pursued an alternate route in attempting to convey the settings of their stories. Rather than employ characters that resort to hard-to-understand dialects, they use those who speak in the language of the people they portray while providing subtitles for the sake of the audience. Such is the case in films like *The Longest Day*, *Dances with Wolves*, and *The Passion of the Christ*. In *The Longest Day*, unlike most war films of that time, all the German and French characters speak in their own language, accompanied by English subtitles. *Dances with Wolves* has much of its dialog spoken in Lakota with English subtitles. And not to be outdone, *The Passion of the Christ* does not contain a single word in English. The entire film is comprised of characters who speak Aramaic, Latin, and Hebrew. Yet ironically, in order to convey its ancient message to a modern audience, the filmmakers chose to subtitle the film in what can only be described as “vernacular English.”²⁵

Therefore, when it came time to establish the style of dialog in this modern adaption of ancient tales, all of these potential pitfalls and possibilities loomed large in my mind. As a result, I decided to make every effort to avoid any of the aforementioned clichés. What kind of historian would I be, I asked myself, if I sought to make Enoch and his counterparts speak like characters who had just stepped out of one of Shakespeare's plays simply because audiences expected biblical characters to speak that way? Above all, I sought to achieve a clarity of language with this newly forged rendition. I was not content to simply convey the meaning of these stories in the same way that a literary scholar might do. More than anything else, I wanted these timeless tales to be expressed in a language that could be understood by every strata of society, from the scholarly critic to the ordinary individual.

As it turns out, I am not alone in such an effort. As a matter of fact, the same thing has been happening for many years in respect to updating the Elizabethan English of the *King James Version* of *The Bible*. Not until 1885, with the creation of the *Revised Version*, had any significant changes been made to it since its inception in 1611. Then, in the wake of the growing popularity of modern-day revisions, the twentieth century saw more and more similar endeavors, spearheaded by leading theological minds like Edgar J. Goodspeed, who, in 1939, published *The Bible: An American Translation*. Although these kinds of translations have always been met with a mixture of praise and criticism, Goodspeed insisted that such efforts constituted a necessary evolution in the language of *The Bible*. Said James I. Cook, in his biography of the man:

Nothing horrified Goodspeed more than the popular notion that the modern *Bible* translator merely tinkers with the *King James Version*, replacing its archaic words with their

²⁵ *On the Film: The Passion of the Christ*, Wikipedia

modern equivalents. For him, the case for a new translation rested ... upon the papyrus discoveries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was convinced that these rendered intolerable, not simply the individual words but the entire linguistic style of the *King James Version* and its revisions. The papyri solved the problem of what kind of Greek was in *The New Testament*. It was not the classical or literary Greek of its own day... The papyri showed that *The New Testament* was written in the vernacular Greek of its time, the language of everyday life.²⁶

This is why Goodspeed was so determined that despite all the well-intentioned protestations: "*The New Testament* must be retranslated if it is to reach the modern reader with anything like the force it had in antiquity."²⁷ And for Goodspeed that meant: "The only appropriate vehicle for such retranslation is the common vernacular English of everyday life."²⁸ Therefore, just as Goodspeed sought to make the canonical *Bible* more accessible by updating its language, I have sought to do a similar thing with the apocryphal books. Rather than assigning so many lines of ill-conceived dialog to the people in these stories, I chose to allow them to speak in a language entirely devoid of inappropriate dialects, which, in my view, contradicts an accurate depiction of reality. Let me explain what I mean by that.

So ends this preview of *The Book of Tales: Stories That Confirm the 5,500-year Prophecy Given to Adam About the Coming of Christ*. To read further, please get the whole book, which is available on this website.

²⁶ *Edgar Johnson Goodspeed: Articulate Scholar*, James I. Cook, p. 24

²⁷ *The Making of the English New Testament*, Edgar J. Goodspeed, p. 110

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 110