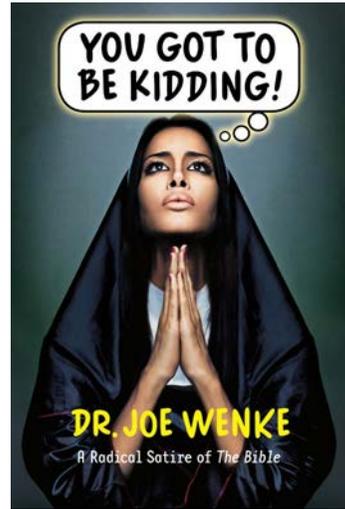


1

ADAM AND EVE



God is looking for Adam and Eve. They both ate a piece of fruit, and he is really pissed.

They're hiding behind some trees in the garden and are looking at their genitals, which they had never really noticed before. For some reason God is having a hard time finding Adam and Eve. "Where are you?" he cries out.

Adam decides to let God know where they are, figuring I suppose that he would eventually find them anyway. God is immediately in Adam's face, really upset about the fact that he and Eve ate the fruit. "Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" he says.

Cornered, Adam puts most of the blame on Eve, but implies that it's sort of God's fault too since creating Eve was his idea. He says, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree and I ate."

God ignores Adam for the moment at least and turns on Eve. “What is it that you have done?” he says.

Eve will take none of the blame either. “The serpent deceived me, and I ate,” she says. So now the serpent’s in trouble, and God really throws the book at him. “Because you have done this,” God says, “cursed are you above all livestock, and above all beasts in the field; on your belly shall you go.”

I don’t know how the serpent got around previously—whether it had legs or wings or whatever, but from now on it has to crawl. That’s a tough punishment. But God is just getting started here. Before he’s done, he makes sure that childbirth will be excruciating for Eve and all future women, and he makes Adam her boss. In fact, he makes men the boss of women forever more. For his part, Adam is going to have to work his ass off to even feed himself. His whole life is going to be miserable. Eve’s too—nothing but misery and suffering. And at the end of it all they die. But here’s the kicker: Everybody else who is ever going to be born gets the same punishment—work your ass off your whole miserable, god-forsaken life and then die.

If you ever find yourself wondering why life really sucks—like what’s the story, why does it have to be this way, I just told you. And now that you know, there’s really only one thing you can say and that is “Thank you, Lord.”

3

NOAH'S ARK

The generations pass, and nothing is working out as far as God is concerned. Just about everybody is behaving badly. There is corruption all around. You get the impression that there was nothing but sex and violence going on 24/7. God gets fed up and wants a do over. So he decides to kill everybody—not just the adults but infants and children too—and start from scratch. Even the animals have to go, although it isn't clear what they did to deserve the death penalty. I assume they were just acting like animals.

God's method is pretty smart, though. He decides to make it rain every single day until the earth is totally flooded, and everybody and everything drowns. Coincidentally this all takes forty days and forty nights. The one flaw I see in God's plan is that the fish should still be able to do OK in a flood since they can swim, although the salt water from all of the oceans getting into all of the rivers would probably cause big problems for the freshwater fish.

God's decision to flood the entire earth and kill everybody and everything is without a doubt far and away the greatest single act of genocide in the history of the world. It makes you wonder what God thought of the pathetic attempts of Hitler, Stalin and Mao to compete in the genocidal sweepstakes. They may have slaughtered millions, but there were still plenty of people left when they were

done. God, however, has his eyes set on just one guy, Noah. Noah was the only guy that God thought was any good. He was so good God even gave his family a pass as well.

Noah was lucky in another way. Not only was he the one guy that God liked enough to spare, he was almost certainly the only guy at that time who was living in the middle of the desert and who had the amazing prescience to learn how to build a boat. So when God tells him to build a huge boat, an ark, Noah is ready.

Now the boat is big, at least for those days. Measured in feet, it was about 45-feet high, 75-feet wide, and 450-feet long. That's big, but hardly big enough to accommodate Noah, his family, all of the necessary supplies for more than a month at sea and, yes, at least two of every living species on earth and whatever it is they might need to survive (God actually tells Noah to bring seven pairs of all of the clean animals and birds and just a pair of all of the unclean animals--I hope that he could tell the difference because I certainly can't).

Scientists have identified more than one million species on earth, not including plants, and they estimate that there are millions more, like maybe more than eight million. Only God would know the total number. For the ark to accommodate at least two of every living thing on earth, giving everybody on it a little breathing room and making sure that there was proper segregation of predators and prey (though I'm not sure then what the predators eat, if not their prey), it would have to be really, really big. It's just a guess, but I'm thinking something along the lines of the state of Rhode Island.

There's also the question of how Noah rounded up all of the disparate and far-flung species, marooned as he was in the Middle East and without any real means of transportation. For example, who went out and picked up the polar bears and penguins? Where was the nearest elephant? And what about the kangaroos and kiwis?

Then there is the question of scale. There are some tiny creatures out there. Did Noah welcome on board all of the insects? Or was there a cut off? Did roaches and mosquitoes make it? How about bed bugs? And how about the worm that was just discovered living in the lungs of a lizard? I also find myself wondering how Noah and his family avoided stepping on all of those insects as they walked about the ark. No matter how careful they were, it must have gotten pretty crunchy at times.

Postscript to the story of Noah's Ark: Imagine the surprise of those unlucky animals, which after surviving the horrific flood were grabbed by Noah as they left the boat and were sacrificed to God in thanksgiving. This was a pretty big sacrifice since we are told that "some of every clean animal and of every clean bird" were sacrificed to an appreciative God. It sort of gives a whole new meaning to the idea that it ain't over 'til it's over.

Second Postscript to the story of Noah's Ark: Does anybody have any information on the bathroom situation on the ark? I have to confess. I don't really want to think about it, but it is an obvious issue.

JESUS, THE MIRACLE WORKER

Some people call the 18 years about which nothing is written about Jesus the “silent years.” We simply have no information at all on this extended period of Jesus’ life.

The last glimpse we have of Jesus at the temple when he was 12 is intriguing. We see a young boy who abandons his parents and goes off on his own without regard to their feelings and who exhibits more than a little attitude when they ask him why he put them through such worry and heartache over his disappearance. We see a precocious teacher and preacher in the making, and naturally we wonder about how he developed over those many years.

How, for example, did Jesus become a miracle worker? Did he just wake up one day and perform his first miracle? Did he have to practice? Did his early miracles always go well, or were there some embarrassing failures? I wonder if Jesus had a sort of Harry Potter period where he was learning to be a miracle worker. I really doubt that he started right off driving out demons or raising the dead.

Actually there are a couple of neat tricks that Elisha performed that would have served as good practice for a miracle-working apprentice. Now I’m not sure how the first one even got into the Bible, but I’m glad it did. It’s so ridiculously trivial that it’s funny. There was a group of guys who followed Elisha around called the Sons of

the Prophets. For some reason Elisha had the Sons of the Prophets all living in the same house. One day, they went to Elisha and told him that the house was too small for them. I don't know how many of them there were, but I bet they had a point. It must have been really crowded and slummy. Anyway they wanted to build a new house, and Elisha said, go right ahead. So the sons started chopping down trees to build a new log house. As they were working away, an axe head fell into some water. This is not exactly the end of the world, but the guy got all bent out of shape because he had borrowed the axe. Right away, though, Elisha comes to the rescue. He asks him where the axe fell, cuts off a branch from a tree, throws it there, and ta-da! The axe head floats right to the surface.

I can imagine Jesus trying out this trick around Joseph's carpenter shop. Maybe Jesus would walk around all day with a stick in his hand just hoping that something would get lost so that he could throw the stick in the right direction and find it—it could be a hammer, a box of nails—I don't know, anything. Maybe one day Joseph misplaced one of his sandals, and Jesus threw his stick, and there it was. I wish I knew how to do this trick because I'm always losing my cell phone.

The other trick of Elisha's that would have really been good for a young miracle worker to practice on is the one where he purifies the deadly stew. If I were editing the Bible, this is another trick that I would have just left on the cutting room floor, but it's in there, and I'm sure that Jesus, as a young biblical scholar and teacher, knew all about it. Who knows? Maybe it was put in there by God just for

him—another good little trick to practice on around the house to hone his miracle making skills before he went prime time.

The story of the deadly stew revolves around another Sons of the Prophets screw up. Elisha tells his servant to make some stew, and one of the sons runs outside and collects some herbs and wild gourds and throws them into the stew. If I had seen that, there's no way I would have eaten that mess, but the servant cooks it all up and serves it to the sons. The guys are eating away when all of a sudden one of them screams, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" I guess the gas pains were kicking in pretty good.

Anyway Elisha knows exactly what to do. He has the servant get him some flour. He throws the flour into the pot and voilà! He turns the poison stew into the best stew you could ever want to eat.

Now I'm sure at one time or another Mary might have cooked up something—maybe a goat stew or a vegan dish of herbs and gourds like the sons did—and while it might not have been poison, it was just not up to snuff. Maybe Joseph would give Jesus a little look, and Jesus would look back and then when Mary left the room, Jesus would grab some flour, throw it into the stew and turn what would have been a disaster of a dinner into the culinary masterpiece of the week. "Wow! This is great stew, Mom," Jesus might say when Mary came back into the room, and Joseph would smile and give his boy a little fatherly pat on the back.

Close-up magic tricks involving food or drinks are always a big hit. The best trick I ever saw was performed by a magician one

night at the Waldorf Astoria in Manhattan. He had everybody in the audience write down their favorite drink on a little piece of paper. His assistant collected the pieces of paper, and then she began opening them up one by one. The magician had a teapot in his hand. When the assistant read out the name of a drink, he asked whose drink it was, and then he and his assistant came over to that person and poured that drink out of the teapot and gave it to the person. That guy poured chocolate milk, orange juice, Chardonnay and a martini right out of that same teapot all in a row. That was amazing. I still have no idea how he did that.

Jesus really liked performing miracles involving food or drink. According to John, Jesus' first public miracle was turning water into wine. This also happens to be my favorite Jesus miracle of all. Everybody knows this story. Jesus is at a wedding with Mary. They run out of wine, and Mary tells Jesus. Clearly she expects him to do something about it, and it's not run to the local wine store. This tells me that he's been doing miracles and tricks around the house for a long time, and she knows he can handle this no wine situation with his eyes closed.

Jesus, however, gets annoyed. He's actually pretty grouchy with his mother just the way he was at the temple when he was 12, so apparently the attitude thing never went away. Jesus says, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

Funny thing is, Mary just ignores him. No doubt, she's handled Jesus and his attitude lots of times before. She just turns to the ser-

vants and says, “Do whatever he tells you.” So Jesus is on the hook to fix the situation compliments of Mom.

Jesus tells the servants to fill all of the jars they have with water. There are six jars, which we’re told hold “twenty or thirty gallons.” For some reason John doesn’t know exactly how big they were. Either way, though, that’s a lot of water and a lot of wine. The servants fill the jars to the brim and take a sample to the master of the feast. He tastes the water, and of course it’s now been turned into wine—pretty good wine, too.

As the master famously says, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then when everyone has drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

As we know, Jesus does a couple of totally amazing food miracles, too. He wasn’t the first, of course. The Old Testament God rained down manna on the Chosen People every day for forty years, and it’s hard to beat that. Elijah and Elisha did food tricks, too, but they were always small-scale, in-the-home type tricks. As I’ve already mentioned, Elijah turns a widow’s jar of flour and jug of oil into the gifts that keep on giving. They just keep producing flour and oil every day until the next time it rains. There was a terrible drought going on because God was punishing the evil King Ahab. I’ll bet the widow was sad when the rains finally came.

Elisha helps out a widow, too. I guess back then widows were first in line to get help from the big time prophets. This particular widow’s dead husband left her owing money to some guy. I don’t

know how much money it was, but it must have been a lot because when the widow tells him she can't pay, he wants her to give him her two children as slaves. All the widow has is a jar of oil to give the guy, so it's a pretty sure thing that he's going to take the kids instead. Elisha tells her to borrow jars of oil from all of her neighbors. She gets a hold of tons of empty jars, brings them into her house and just goes crazy filling every single one with oil from the one jar she already has. There's so much oil that she's able to pay off the would-be slave trader and live off of the money from the rest of the oil.

So these are definitely a couple of good tricks, but they're kind of laid-back and down-home, unplugged, if you will. Jesus taps into the concept of the food miracle, but he takes it to a whole new level. In two absolutely amazing performances, he feeds huge crowds even though there is almost no food. In one case, he feeds 5,000 people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. In the second instance, he feeds 4,000 people with just seven loaves and a few fish. What I like most about these miracles is that Jesus provides so much food from a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish, there are actually leftovers. In fact, both times there are baskets of food left over. That means doggy bags for the apostles and Jesus when they hit the road.

The coolest miracle that Jesus ever performed has to be when he walked on water. I mean here he's suspending the laws of gravity and the curvature of space, and I'll bet he didn't even get his san-

dals wet. Jesus lets Peter walk on water, too, as long as he has faith, which of course lasts about ten seconds.

Most of Jesus' miracles had to do with healing people, and this was the best thing about Jesus. He cared if you were hungry, and he cared if you were broken down or sick, and if you believed in him, he was always happy to feed you or make you better. He makes the mute speak, the lame walk and the blind see. I especially like the time that two blind guys called out to Jesus from the side of the road and the crowd following Jesus told them to shut the fuck up. Jesus stopped anyway, took pity on them and gave them back their sight.

Jesus also cast out a lot of demons. Back then, there were apparently a lot of people who were possessed by demons. My favorite casting-out-demons story takes place right after Jesus just calmed a storm—another one of his best miracles. He's just stepped out of the boat, and he sees a possessed guy coming at him from out of some tombs, which is evidently where he lived. The guy is really crazy, and he can't even be held down by chains, which is apparently the therapy that he had been prescribed. He's so strong, he just breaks the chains and runs around the tombs and up and down the mountains all day and all night, screaming and mutilating himself with stones.

The guy must have been pretty intimidating, but Jesus doesn't even blink. He just starts talking to the head demon inside of the guy, ordering him and all of his demon friends to come out. Somehow, there's a herd of about 2,000 pigs nearby, and the head demon

decides he wants Jesus to send him and his friends into the pigs. I have no idea why, but, hello, the demons are just plain crazy. Jesus says, you got it, pal, and the demons go flying—just like that—into the pigs. Instantly, the pigs go crazy, run down a steep bank and drown themselves in the sea. Pretty cool, to say the least, except for the pigs.

Of course, Jesus' greatest miracles have to do with raising the dead. Lazarus is the best-known example, but he also brings back to life a little girl and a boy. Elijah and Elisha also raised the dead, so Jesus wasn't the first one to do it, but he totally outdoes them with the greatest miracle of all—the resurrection. Jesus raises himself from the dead, and there's just no topping that.