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THEY ATE EACH OTHER UP

The Duel
by Eugene Field

The gingham dog and the calico cat
Side by side on the table sat;
'Twas half-past twelve, and (what do you think!)
Nor one nor t'other had slept a wink!
The old Dutch clock and the Chinese plate
Appeared to know as sure as fate
There was going to be a terrible spat.
*(I wasn't there; I simply state
What was told to me by the Chinese plate!)*

The gingham dog went "Bow-wow-wow!"
And the calico cat replied "Me-ow!"
The air was littered, an hour or so,
With bits of gingham and calico,
While the old Dutch clock in the chimney place
Up with its hands before its face,
For it always dreaded a family row!
*(Now mind: I'm only telling you
What the old Dutch clock declares is true!)*

The Chinese plate looked very blue,
And wailed, "Oh dear! What shall we do!"
But the gingham dog and the calico cat
Wallowed this way and tumbled that,
Employing every tooth and claw
In the awfulest way you ever saw-
And oh! how the gingham and calico flew!
*(Don't fancy I exaggerate!
I got my news from the Chinese plate!)*

Next morning where the two had sat
They found no trace of dog or cat;
And some folks think unto this day
That burglars stole the pair away!
But the truth about the cat and pup
Is this: they ate each other up!
Now what do you really think of that!
*(The old Dutch clock, it told me so,
And that is how I came to know.)*

I don't know how familiar Eugene Field was with either the scriptures or churches. He could easily have

gotten the inspiration for his famous duel between the gingham dog and the calico cat from any number of congregations. As much as we like to imagine, or hope, otherwise, the majority of church fights and splits are not over doctrine, but are over personalities. One person barks, the other miaows, and soon there is nothing left of either them or the congregation.

When was the last time you heard of a congregation split over immersion? Who argues these days over whether Jesus came in the flesh or not? Has any congregation really been split recently over the question of whether non-Jewish congregants must be circumcised? Instead we see people leave over whether we need a new building, the color of the carpet or walls, or whether the congregation may clap when it is announced that a member received an award. Even in the first century congregations split over preachers. Most people leave in a huff, and take others with them, because they want things the way they want things. (I am not talking of those who leave a congregation because they will be more comfortable elsewhere. I mean those who actually destroy congregations and reputations over insignificant, non-doctrinal matters.)

Paul called this "I want it my way" attitude "the lust of the flesh." He even summarizes Eugene Field's "The Duel." "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." (Gal 5:15-16)

Let us never eat each other up. Just because you are a dog person and I am a cat person doesn't mean we can't be brothers.

CONTENTS

They Ate Each Other Up	1
More Men With a Name of God	2
No Good Deed	4

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MEN WITH A NAME OF GOD

The October 2004 issue of Minutes With Messiah contained an article about men with the name of God. A number of men, and at least one woman, in the Bible have names that include the syllable “ja,” “jo,” or “je,” thus giving them the distinction of having God’s name in theirs. By looking at their names we can see some of the attributes of God. We can aspire to be like God in the way that these names encourage us to emulate his attributes. This article will continue with more men with a name of God.

God is Lord

If it is something special to have a name containing that of God, how much more special would it be to have two names of God in yours. This is true of several men. The prophet Joel (God is God) and others bearing that name, and a son of David, Adonijah (The Lord is God) are dually named with a designation for God.

In the United States we have gotten away from the term “lord.” When we do use it, it usually carries the

As lord, God has the prerogative of being the judge in addition to being the legislator.

meaning of one who is the best at what he does, such as “Lord of the Dance.” Some countries use the formal “M’Lord” (my Lord) in addressing the aristocracy by birth or by hard work. In current or former countries of the British Commonwealth, at least those who are more recent members than the United States, the title carries more meaning. It is a title of honor, whether deserved or not, and carries with it certain privileges. In Gilbert and Sullivan’s operetta, “The Pirates of Penzance,” the title characters are forgiven their piratical indiscretions, no questions asked, when it is discovered that they are actually members of the House of Lords.

The word holds an even greater meaning in the Bible. As in England, it is used of the ruler. Frequently (at least 44 times) in the Old Testament we find the phrase, “my lord, the king” used of earthly kings. It sometimes carries the meaning of a master, as in relationship to a slave, servant, or employee. It is, as in Adonijah’s name, used of God, the honored ruler and

master of creation. (Some translations, such as the King James Version, the New English Bible, and the Revised Standard Version, have adopted the convention of rendering the Tetragrammaton, YHVH, as LORD in small capitals. This is to avoid using the name that the King James Version sometimes renders as Jehovah. To translate it as “Lord” is technically inaccurate, however.)

The lord has jurisdiction over a certain area. Lord Dunsany or Alfred, Lord Tennyson (to mention some of the more literary peers of England) represented or were over particular regions of the British Isles. As such they exercised a certain amount of jurisdiction. God also has his jurisdiction. He is “the Lord of the whole earth.” (Micah 4:13; Zech 4:14) “For the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.” (1 Cor 10:26) But for God that would be such a limited realm. He is also Lord over heaven. “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth.” (Matt 11:25) His jurisdiction is over all other lordships. “For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords.” (Deut 10:17) More than that, he is above any that would claim to be a god. “For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.” (Ps 135:5)

As a lord, as the Lord, God has certain prerogatives. One of the functions of England’s House of Lords, at least in its original intent, was the formulation of laws. God is also a legislator. Every verse in Psalm 119 contains a reference to God’s laws, ordinances, commands, or some other related word. A small sampling follows. “Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments.” (Ps 119:4-6)

God’s commands are not limited to the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law of Moses. God had legislated for the whole world. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” (1 Jn 5:3)

In the United States we are proud that our constitution provides for separation of powers in a system of checks and balances. Thus the Congress legislates, the President administers that legislation, and the courts interpret it. God, however, has the prerogative of being the judge in addition to being the legislator. Who better than a perfect God to judge a perfect judgement? “For he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.” (Ps 96:13) Everyone will face his judgement. “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the

quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word.” (2 Tim 4:1-2)

Of course, if God is Lord and God, as in the names of Joel and Adonijah, then we bear certain responsibilities. In the Middle Ages, when a man became lord of the manor, his principal subjects went through a rite of fealty. They swore their allegiance to their lord, acknowledging his position over them, and offering their sword in his service. God gave Jesus lordship over all men, and we owe him the rite of fealty. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Php 2:9-11) That ceremony of surrender to his lordship involves confession (acknowledgement) that he is our Lord. It also involves humility. We figuratively bow our knee by surrendering not a sword, but our entire lives. Our responsibility is then to serve the Lord.

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. (Col 3:23-24)

God Saves

Several Levites had the name Jeshua. Beyond that, some of the most famous names in scripture also mean “God saves”—Joshua, Isaiah, and Jesus.

Isaiah is probably best known to Christians as the prophet of the Messiah, thus a prophet of his own name. “I, I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.” (Isa 43:11) “All flesh shall know that I the LORD am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.” (Isa 49:26; 60:16) “He hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isa 53:12) Because of his name Isaiah could have said, like Moses did, “God will send a prophet like unto me.”

If Isaiah was the prophet of his name, Joshua is the type of his name. A type is a picture of what is to come in reality, just as in printing the type is the reverse image of what is to be printed. In some ways Joshua typifies Jesus. As Jesus, he was willing to preach God’s message even when others were disagreeing and disagreeable. After spying out Canaan, Joshua stood up for God in the face of ten other spies. (Numbers 14) But more than this, Joshua is noted by the writer of Hebrews as a type of Christ because of his role as the leader into the Promised Land. As is sometimes true in typology, Joshua was an imperfect picture of Jesus. He led the people in the conquest, but was unable to finish the job. Jesus had to finish it for him.

For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. ¹⁰For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Heb 4:4-6, 8-9, 11) (The King James Version says “Jesus” in verse 8, but the context clearly indicates that the writer was speaking of Joshua. Some later translations have corrected this error.)

Jesus is the savior promised by Isaiah and typified by Joshua. He was proclaimed savior at his birth. “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” (Lk 2:11) He was recognized as

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savior during his life. “And many more believed because of his own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.” (Jn 4:41-42) He was preached as savior after his death. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 5:30-31) He is the only savior. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

God sent his only begotten son to the cross to save the world from sin. God is Lord and Judge. But God is also Savior. His righteous judgement may be satisfied by his righteous son. We just have to give our fealty to this Lord, and he will save.

No Good Deed

The book of Esther is primarily a history of the establishment of the holiday of Purim (which comes on March 25 in 2005). There is an incident in the story, however, that may be instructive independent of the holiday. It involves Mordechai, the uncle of the Esther of the title of the book and the real hero of the story.

It seems that Mordechai spent a lot of time sitting in the gate of the palace. He may have been there to beg. He may have been there to act as a lobbyist for any Jews who had business in the palace. We are not told. What we are told is that he overheard two of the doorkeepers plotting against the king. Why would these two let such a man overhear them? A couple of thoughts come to mind. They, like everyone else in the palace, were unaware of Mordechai's relationship to one of the king's wives. They may have been just plain stupid. Mordechai may have been such a regular fixture in the gate that he was invisible to them. Or they may have thought that since he was of a captive people, although possibly native born, that he would agree with them and thus keep quiet. If it was the last of these reasons, then they figured wrong. Although a member of a captive ethnic group, Mordechai was an honorable man. He did the right thing. He reported the plot to Esther, who reported it to the king in her uncle's name. The two plotters were hung, and Mordechai's deed was recorded in the chronicles of the realm. (Esther 2:21-23)

Four chapters later (and don't ask how long a period of time a chapter is), King Ahasuerus suffered from insomnia. Now, there are various cures for insomnia. One is to read a boring book. So the king started reading the chronicles of the land. This may have been like reading the genealogies in the Bible, but one incident stood out that kept the king from going to

sleep. He read about Mordechai reporting the plot of Bigthana and Teresh, the doorkeepers. Kings are nothing if not thorough, so he asked what reward had been paid to Mordechai. When told that no reward had been made, the king knew something must be done. Accounts must be settled.

Haman the Agagite, a bitter enemy of Mordechai, was waiting to talk to the king about hanging Mordechai. Why was he waiting in the king's dressing room so late at night? Or had the king been reading until morning? The scripture doesn't say. Maybe Haman's bitterness was so great that he was willing to wait up all night for the king. Regardless, when the king asked him what should be done for the one the king wanted to honor he naturally thought he must be the honoree. Beware, oh Hamans of the world; hatred and pride combine to bring you down. Haman devised a glorious scenario to honor himself. Then he learned that it was Mordechai who would be so honored, and that he was appointed the lowly job of herald. And so Mordechai was honored for doing what God would have had him do.

Even ending the story here, is it truly independent of Purim? The theme of the holiday is that God will protect his people, and that reward may come from an unexpected direction. This incident really just shows that Purim applies on a personal level as much as on a national level. Mordechai's honor came through his enemy, and just as that enemy was seeking his head.

Some people say that no good deed goes unpunished. God shows here that no good deed goes unrewarded. It may not happen at once. It may take four chapters of God's time, but God will recognize us when we do the right thing.

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