



# Minutes With Messiah

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## *THE RENT IS DUE*

For those of us who do not own our houses, every month we dread hearing, "The rent is due." The rent may be equal to, or even less than, a mortgage, but just the idea that we are paying monthly for something without getting ownership is a problem. When I was in the military, I never knew how long I would live in any given location, so I never purchased a house. As it turned out, I lived for almost twelve years in one military housing unit. I could have bought a house, but we never knew that we would stay there that long. When I retired from the Navy, we started renting. Especially because my first two jobs did not last more than a couple of years, we just kept renting. Even when I spent fourteen years in one job, we never bought a house, and now that I am retired and older it seems that purchasing is out of the question. So every month I think, "The rent is due."

We are all just renters. These bodies we live in are temporary at best. They are not a permanent home. The apostles knew that.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. (2 Cor 5:1-4)

Paul knew he had a house later, but for the moment he was renting a tent. Peter seems to have had the same idea.

Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. (2 Pet 1:13-14)

What is this life, after all, but a mere vapor? We don't have time to purchase a house, even if we could. And so every month we should hear God tell us, "The rent is due."

There is a reason most landlords charge rent. They have obligations, such as the purchase of the property

itself. A landlord is not going to say that all future rent is forgiven, based on how long you have been living in the house. (Would that it were so!) He has to collect the rent. But God is not your typical landlord.

Here is the situation. The landlord comes up to you and says you owe the rent. Not only that, because you have caused damage to the property this month, like you did last month and the month before, you owe the rent plus damages. By all rights, you should be evicted. But wait. The Landlord tells you the rent and all damages have been paid. And not just for this month, but until you should move out. And when you do move out, he will welcome you into a permanent dwelling that is also rent free. That is how God is.

The rent and damages have been paid. God sent his Son to pay the price.

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Cor 6:19-20)

Just before Jesus paid the rent on our tabernacles, he also made the promise of a permanent home. He even said that he was going to be the property manager, and clean the place up for us.

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:2-3)

The rent is paid. We don't have to be reminded the rent is due.

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# EUNUCHS

We were a second or third grade Bible class, playing twenty questions. The other team picked a character from Acts 8, and naturally our first question after determining it was a person was, “male or female.” At that point my mother, as teacher, had the unenviable task of explaining what a eunuch was to a group of young kids. She did so valiantly, but not very convincingly. That round went to neither team.

In the opera world there was a time when eunuchs were in high demand. Young boys were made eunuchs, called *castrati*, to create a strong, clear, high voice. Families who had talented young boys could make a fortune turning them into *castrati*. The last true *castrato* died in the early 1900s, and many say that opera is better for it. The problem was that the choice was rarely left to the child.

In the ancient world, eunuchs were often held in high regard. Because they were not considered a threat to the throne, they often held high positions. Obviously, they were in charge of the house of the wives, but this often led

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It is interesting to think that Potiphar may have been a eunuch in the traditional sense.

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to other high administrative positions. Eunuchs feature prominently in the Bible, and not just the story in Acts 8.

## In law and prophecy

While eunuchs were generally held in high regard elsewhere, they were not so fortunate among the Jewish people. Most specifically, they could not hold the position of a priest.

Speak to Aaron, saying: ‘No man of your descendants in succeeding generations, who has any defect, may approach to offer the bread of his God. For any man who has a defect shall not approach: a man blind or lame, who has a marred face or any limb too long, a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, or is a hunchback or a dwarf, or a man who has a defect in his eye, or eczema or scab, or is a eunuch. No man of the descendants of Aaron the priest, who has a defect, shall come near to offer the offerings made by fire to the LORD. He has a defect; he shall not come near to offer the bread of his God. He may eat the bread of his God, both the most holy and the holy; only he shall not go near the veil or approach

the altar, because he has a defect, lest he profane My sanctuaries; for I the LORD sanctify them.’ (Lev 21:17-23, NKJV)

Deuteronomy 23:1 expands this prohibition so that any eunuch may not “enter the assembly of the Lord.” This latter phrase is generally taken to mean they were prohibited from entering the Tabernacle, and later the Temple. It should be noted that these passages go into clinical detail about the physical characteristics, and do not use the word eunuch. There is a separate Hebrew word for that, which generally applies to a political position.

The prophets gave eunuchs hope to be included in the people of God. Isaiah, in particular, says:

Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. (Isa 56:1-5)

## Eunuchs in the Old Testament

There is, as previously mentioned, a specific word in Hebrew that is translated eunuch. While it may include the traditional definition, it is often expanded to include certain high officers without regard to their actual physical status.

The first person described as a eunuch or officer is Potiphar, into whose care Joseph was given. Because he was married, the translators generally use the word officer. It is interesting to think that Potiphar may have been a eunuch in the traditional sense, which could explain his wife’s interest in the young slave, Joseph. After Joseph was thrown in prison, he encountered two others who were described as eunuchs. These were the chief butler and the chief baker for whom he interpreted dreams.

While eunuchs in the harem were often overlooked, at least once they had the opportunity to take revenge on their charges. Some time after the death of King Ahab, Jehu killed a subsequent king of Israel. As he rode into Samaria, the queen mother Isabella (Jezebel) put

on makeup and leaned out of a window of the harem to try to get in Jehu's good graces. Instead he asked who was on the Lord's side, and "there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down. So they threw her down." (2 Kings 9:32-33)

Even though eunuchs were not allowed "in the assembly," in Israel, apparently they were allowed in the government. According to Jeremiah 29:2, eunuchs were among the first group of Jews taken into Babylonian captivity. One eunuch was executed by the Babylonians because he was in charge of the men of war. (Jer 52:25) When Jeremiah was thrown into a cistern and left to die, it was Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian eunuch, who begged the king to save him. (Jer 38) This is the first mention of an Ethiopian eunuch in the Bible.

Once the Jews were in Babylon, they had regular contact with eunuchs. When Nebuchadnezzar wanted to train some of the captives and make them government officials, they were put in the care of eunuchs under Ashpenaz. (Dan 1) When the Persians took over, Ahasuerus had seven eunuchs whom he sent to order the queen to come to him; an order which she refused. (Esther 1) Throughout the book of Esther, the king's eunuchs are named, although the King James Version calls them chamberlains. Some took charge of the preparation of the young women, including Esther, who were being prepared for the king. Others were doorkeepers. They generally held positions of honor and importance.

## In the New Testament

Jesus taught about divorce, saying, "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery." (Matt 19:9) When some of his disciples said that this meant it was good not to marry, he responded:

There are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. (Matt 19:12)

Some people may choose to forgo marriage in order to devote their lives to God. In this sense, the monastic system is approved. As long as the monks are devoted to service and are not tempted (1 Cor 7) they may choose to make themselves as if they were eunuchs.

And then we have the most famous biblical eunuch. In Acts 8, Philip is told to go to a deserted road. There he meets up with a eunuch. This person was an important servant of the Kandake of Ethiopia. (That is a title, not a name as the King James Version seems to suggest, spelling it Candace. As sister to the king of Cush, she would bear the royal heir.) Some have wondered whether this should be considered the first gentile convert. Probably not. The fact that he (to use that pronoun for convenience) had traveled to Jerusalem to worship, even if he could not enter the Temple, indicates he was a Jew.

There had been Jews in Ethiopia at least since the reign of Solomon. Ethiopian tradition says that the royal line descending from the Queen of Sheba were descendants of a union between her and Solomon. Whether or not that is true, there is no doubt that the Ethiopian Jewish community has always been quite large.

The eunuch was probably accompanied by a large retinue. It is unlikely that such an important individual, or anyone for that matter, would travel the Gaza road alone. There was too great a danger from robbers. Of all this caravan, the Holy Spirit directed Philip to the chariot of the eunuch in charge. That person was reading from Isaiah 53. When Philip asked if he understood what he was reading, the eunuch recognized that Philip was ready to teach him.

Beginning with the scripture being read, Philip taught about Jesus. He probably had him turn a little

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## Ebed-Melech was the first Ethiopian eunuch mentioned in the Bible.

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farther in the scroll, to the passage quoted earlier from Isaiah 56. This would be good news for the eunuch, for it meant that there was hope that he would no longer be excluded from the worship of God. Philip continued, showing from the Jewish scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. Furthermore, that Messiah would bring salvation from sin.

The eunuch listened to what Philip was teaching him. The chariot had been proceeding at less than a running pace, probably because not all of the retinue were in chariots but on foot. Thus they had plenty of time to study the scriptures. When they approached a body of water large enough, the eunuch asked what kept him from being immersed. As a Jew, he already knew of immersion in water as the primary rite of purification. It was necessary before entering the Temple, but the eunuch was unable to enter the Temple. So when Philip told him that if he believed he could be immersed, he rejoiced. Not only could he participate in something previously forbidden him, but by doing so he would be joined with the Messiah of whom he had been reading.

We are not told any more about this eunuch. Because he "went on his way rejoicing" we can speculate that he spread the gospel when he got home to the Ethiopian Jewish community.

We often pass over the eunuchs in the Bible. Or in the case of the latter one, miss the significance of his faith. The gospel is available to all people, regardless of condition. Those who appear to us to be somehow damaged may be of great value to God. And that is true of us all, because we are all blemished in some way.

# A TERRARIUM

Long ago there was a theory that dinosaurs grew to huge sizes because reptiles grow to fit the environment, for the same reason that Galapagos tortoises are so large. There were several things wrong with this theory. It doesn't account for different sizes of dinosaur (brachiosaur vs T. Rex). Dinosaurs have since been classified as avian rather than reptilian. And the theory that reptile size is limited by environment has been proven wrong. Just try to keep a Nile crocodile in a 40-gallon tank. Even the theory of island gigantism, as in the Galapagos or Aldabra tortoises, has taken a genetic hit; they may be descendants of mainland giants. The theory that size can be limited by putting a reptile in a small tank, though, does have some spiritual applications.

Some Christians live within a tank with four walls. The size of the church building never increases. They go outside the building weekly, but their religion stays inside, and it never grows larger than the building in which it is housed. Are they Christians? Undoubtedly. We must grant them that, because that is something from God. They are not "so-called" Christians. They are not dead Christians. They may be weakened by their environment. If you put an iguana in a small tank it will become stressed and get sick, or even die. So it is with those whose Christianity stays within the confining limits of the church building. They are like those Paul spoke of who take the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (1 Cor 11:28-30)

On the other hand, even caged animals should be taken out and exercised. Their enclosures should be enlarged to grow with them, rather than limiting them to the same space. In like manner, the assembly is meant as a temporary resting place. It is not the totality of our Christianity. It serves a purpose, but that purpose is just a beginning.

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Heb 10:24-25)

Church, the body of believers, is a place of encouragement and training. We provoke and exhort. The love and good works are not limited to those within the body. In fact, it is those without that may need them more. It is in going outside the walls of the church building that we grow as we should. Our Christianity is a daily thing, not something to be put in a box and taken out once, twice, or thrice a week.

The assembly of the church is not intended to be a limiting tank, where we keep our Christianity in the hope that it doesn't outgrow us. If we try to keep it in, it will either get sick and die or it will break the walls. If we are to grow in a healthy manner, we must expand beyond the limits of the congregational assembly. The dinosaurs may have grown large because they were large. We may grow large because that is the will of God.

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