

TRUTH & RIGHT

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WHY I BECAME A CHRISTIAN: PART TWO

It was about 2am on a Monday night that I finally got tired of sitting-up at night in a cold sweat, and I finally got the gumption to go to my parent's bedroom, lightly tap on their bedroom door, and very nervously declare I wanted to be baptized. Well, my parents, groggily (so groggily in fact that to this day, I don't know if they even remember this happening) advised me to make sure that this is something I was ready to take on, and if so, that I should go forward on Wednesday night. Well, as soon as those words came out of their mouth, I pacified my fears because little to their knowledge, from our move and reaching an awkward age, I had cocooned myself in a place where I was nervous to put myself "out there" in front of people (mostly adults). So, I told myself, "You must still be too young, Nathan." That made me feel better for a time, and I let Wednesday night come and go without doing what I knew was right. Even sadder, from this moment, I carried this "your not old enough" rational in my mind for many years, and it was further justified by the fact that I was not seeing others my age being baptized their self, and I thought, "If it is so important, why aren't they doing it?" So, Wednesday after Sunday after weekday after weekend passed, and I continued to attend church and occasionally, I would have a night where I felt so very alone in this world and I would think about my days on the farm, and the animals that had so quickly come and gone and how my fate was no different than theirs. Then fear would dot my brow with perspiration, and I would calm my thoughts by praying to God, but, as so many of us do, forgetting to do His will completely.

Life went on. I grew from a little boy to a young man. We moved again and were now

attending the Wellsburg church of Christ. The people who surrounded me in the church, at that time, were the worst group of "church friends" I had ever had. They were not the best examples and didn't seem to put God first, second, or one hundredth on their priority list, and so, I got even more comfortable in my place in life. I thought, "Well, you surely aren't as bad as they are. So, you are good." This is the danger in comparing yourself to others, something the Bible has never commanded, but no doubt, a trick the Devil uses to his advantage. I was now mentally being dragged to church. I had become a teenager. and I had too many other things on my mind: girls, being the "popular" kid for the first time, girls, sports, and did I say, "Girls?" Notice, I left out school, because like God, it was something I always assumed I would get to eventual. Assumptions, another great trick of the Devil. I gradually stopped caring about death. The world told me this was my time and I needed to focus on living, because no moment in life would be as good as it was to be young. What lies. Still, I bought them hook, line, and sinker...

This continued from eighth grade till the summer before my senior year. It was like a mirage, it seemed to be continuing the same way it always had, but again, that all to familiar word "finality" gradually began to creep back into my world. I tried to focus my attentions on keeping life the same as it had seemingly been every year leading up to this one, enjoy time off from school and prepare for football season. I wasn't worried about

life after school, that's all I had ever known, and as we all do, I had fooled myself into believing that this was life. For forever and always, this was the way life would be. However, as my mom often told me while I was bemoaning the fact that I was growing older, "Well, you can't stay the same age, Nathan. You have two options in life, you can either get older or die." As morbid as that looks on paper, believe me, it was even more morbid to hear out loud. Still, she was right, and sometimes little conversations like that pay big dividends down the road, be it later that day or later that lifetime. Thankfully, God was patient enough with me throughout all of this that He would spare my life until I made the decision to be baptized. A decision I should have made many years before my trip to a summer camp on the other side of a cornfield in the middle of nowhere Ohio.

It sounds weird, but the push that finally sent me off the cliff and soaring into the skies of doing the Lord's will was the peer pressure I received from the great Christian friends I got at Camp Noah. As a young man, I was fortunate enough to attend Camp Noah, a weeklong summer camp that former Wellsburg church of Christ minister Bill Carroll ran based on principles of the Bible. That fateful summer, I had decided that I had no desire to go to some "baby, Christian based" camp. I had determined that I was too grown-up for that. I was too cool. You know how we all think we are too "mature" for so much during that time in our life. Well, I had decided that I was not only too cool for the camp, but somewhere along the line, I had begun to believe that I was too cool for God. I saw it as something only hypocritical people in outdated dress clothes cared about on Sundays and Wednesdays. Even then, I had seen members of the church, people who were supposed to be an example, do nothing more than reinforce my being okay with not fully serving God. They talked about each other, got insanely angry and jealous of each other, and they tried to beat the Word of God into your head instead of being patient and kind. Church became a burden to attend. It drained me more than the world did, and there were times when I sincerely hated it. What had become of me? I needed to open my Bible for the answers, but I looked to the "successes" of people in the world as a measuring point as to what kind of a man I

was to become.

The year Camp Noah changed my life, very nearly didn't happen. All this animosity toward "boring, old" church had bled into my day-to-day life, and I hadn't even realized. This was actually the second year I was attending Camp Noah, and I figured I had been there once and seen it all, and what I had seen, I didn't desire to be apart of again. It was "too corny" for me. In fact, I so completely disinterested in attending that I literally was on the floor of our van begging my parents not to make me go the entire way to camp. Again, my mindset was worried about other things, like the phone number I had just got from the girl I had a huge high school sized crush on. "She can't wait a WEEK to talk to me," I had thought. "This is literally going to be the longest and worst week of my life."

Still, my parents made me go, because I had signed-up months before. Little did I know how much this would impact me for forever. That year at camp, I was in the oldest boy dorm. It was an eclectic mix of ornery kids from all over Ohio. I soon found out that I was the only one in the cabin who wasn't a Christian. Our counselor wasn't some stuck-up, terrible dictator as I had assumed he would be. He was one of the best Christian examples I could have had at that time. He was a Christian man by the name of Gary Lucas who attended the Barnesville church of Christ in Barnesville, Ohio, and he was as ornery as the rest of us in the cabin. He was not stuffy, pretentious, and self-righteous, as I had seen so many people in the church become. He was the opposite. He was humble, kind, obedient. He was flawed but perfect. To this day, he is still one of my examples of what the definition of a Christian man is to be. He challenged us to grow-up in Christ and to be more responsible for our actions. It wasn't anyone else's fault but ours if we weren't serving God correctly. This cut me deep, because I knew I wasn't. I had developed an excuse for every occasion when it came to Christianity, and he showed me with his Bible why those excuses were no good. At night, he would lead us in devotion, turn out the lights, and leave us alone in our cabins. This gave us time to talk about love, life, and the pursuit of eternal salvation. Us campers, we stayed up every night, way too late, talking, philosophizing, learning from each other. For the first time in my young

life, when the lights went off, it wasn't just God and I having a discussion with, it was many other voices, and thankfully, they were Christian voices. They would ask me things like, "How are you not baptized?" Things that I did not have answers for.

By the end of that week, I had grown more in my beliefs in Christianity than I had in five years. I learned more than how shoot a bow, how to secretly smuggle a pizza into camp from a local pizzeria, and how to beat our counselors at softball. I learned how to be a better man, a Christian man.

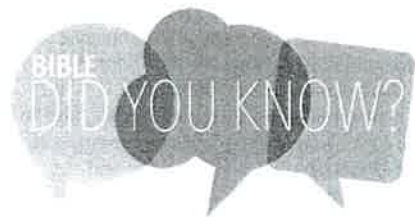
I still remember our last night there, another moment of finality. I remember Rob, one of my closest friends out there, sharing with us his fears of returning home. "Why would you have fears of returning home," I asked? I'll never forget this young Christian man with tears in his eyes and fear in his heart, telling us how he didn't want to return home because he knew that he was going to let God down. Like me, he had set-up a world around him that was destining him to fail as a Christian rather than to succeed. He told us he had already been failing in his Christian walk in life, and that the people he had chose to surround himself with at home were ones he knew would easily lead him astray again. My heart went out to this young man, because he was saying the things I was feeling inside my heart. Like me, like us all, he was struggling. He was looking for a hand to lift him up, not shove him down. From moments like this one I shared with Rob and my other cabin mates, I realized that no matter what part of life you are at, you are going to deal with circumstances that try to drive you from God, and you have two choices, whether to obey these things or to not obey them. I had finally matured enough to realize it was way past time for me to obey the Lord.

As I left my friends, my new family that week, I didn't speak too much on the way home. That week, I had witnessed friendships, baptisms, and a sense of pride in being a Christian that I had never fully experienced before. To this day, I still love singing "As the Deer" in our hymnals, because every time we sing it, it takes me back. Back to a little camp on the other side of a corn field in middle of nowhere Ohio, and for a moment, I hear not only the congregation surrounding me

sing it, but the voices of Rob and Gary and my friends at Camp Noah and Bill Carroll and my Grandma Sams and the many, many Christian men and women who had patience with me, who loved me, who inspired me to be better than just another man. I hear them sing, "You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you," and I yearn to hear them again. Daily, I fight to hear those voices again, and I imagine that on the day I breathe my last, before I go, I will hear those voices singing, welcoming, "You alone are my strength my shield, to you alone may my spirit yield. You alone are my heart's desire, and I long to worship you." I can't wait to join that chorus. A chorus of all the voices that have led me home. Won't that be a beautiful day?

As far as when I was baptized? It was the day I returned, July 24th, 1999. I was working in the attic of our house with my father. We were putting insulation in the top of our house. It had to be 100 degrees in that attic working then. I had been thinking about baptism all day, and in the middle of placing insulation, I finally had enough of the countless moments of contemplating. I told my father, "I want to be baptized, and I would like to do so now." At that point, I had no clue what an amazing journey I was about to embark upon. I just knew I wanted to be a part of my Lord's church, my Lord's army, and that I wanted to dedicate my life to Him. So, that day, I was finally buried in baptism and rose a Christian. Never again would life be the same, and for the first time in my life, that was more than alright with me.

- Nathan Marshall



***The Bible has been
translated into more
than 1,200 languages.***

People, Places, and Things of the **BIBLE**



WHEN WAS THE HEBREW BIBLE WRITTEN?

Was the Hebrew Bible written earlier than previously thought? That's what a recent study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* suggests.

The TAU researchers analyzed multi-spectral images of 16 Hebrew inscriptions, which were written in ink on ostraca (broken pottery pieces), using a computer software program they developed. The ostraca, which date to 600 B.C.E., according to the researchers, were excavated from the Judahite fortress at Arad in southern Israel.

The researchers say they were able to identify at least six different handwriting styles on the inscriptions, which contained instructions for the movement of troops and lists of food expenses. A TAU press release notes that "the tone and nature of the commands precluded the role of professional scribes."

So when was the Hebrew Bible written? What does literacy in the Iron Age have to do with it?

Scholars have debated whether the texts of the Hebrew Bible were written before 586 B.C.E.—when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, razed the First Temple and exiled the Jews—or later on, in the Persian or Hellenistic period. If literacy in Iron Age Judah was more widespread than previously thought, does this suggest that Hebrew Bible texts could have been written before the Babylonian conquest?

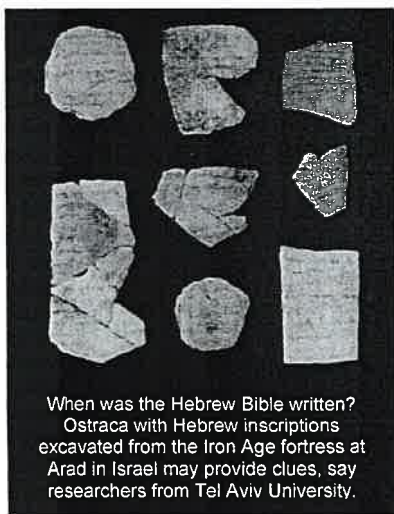
The Tel Aviv University researchers think so, based on their study of the ostraca from Arad.

Not quite, says epigrapher Christopher Rollston, Associate Professor of Northwest Semitic languages and literatures at the George Washington University. In a lengthy blog post analyzing the TAU study, Rollston contends that there is not enough information from these ostraca to make estimates about the literacy of Iron Age Judah. Rollston points out that, according to a publication by Yohanan Aharoni, the original excavator at Arad, the 16 ostraca came from different strata dated across the seventh and early sixth centuries—and therefore do not all date to 600 B.C.E. Moreover, we cannot tell how many of these inscriptions were written at the Arad fortress and how many came from elsewhere.

"Rather than arguing on the basis of 16 ostraca (that ended up at Arad) that we have a 'proliferation of literacy,'" Rollston says, "I would simply conclude that we have some readers and writers of inscriptions at Arad. That's all we can say."

Rollston notes that he and others have argued, however, that there is enough epigraphic evidence from ancient Israel to conclude that "already by 800 B.C.E. there was sufficient intellectual infrastructure, that is, well-trained scribes, able to produce sophisticated historical and literary texts."

"Additional detailed, sophisticated and substantive scholarly arguments for the early dating of the Torah have been made by William Schniedewind, author of *How the Bible Became a Book*, and Seth Sanders, in *The Invention of Hebrew*," observes Candida Moss, Professor of New Testament and early Christianity at the University of Notre Dame, in *The Daily Beast*.



When was the Hebrew Bible written?

Ostraca with Hebrew inscriptions excavated from the Iron Age fortress at Arad in Israel may provide clues, say researchers from Tel Aviv University.