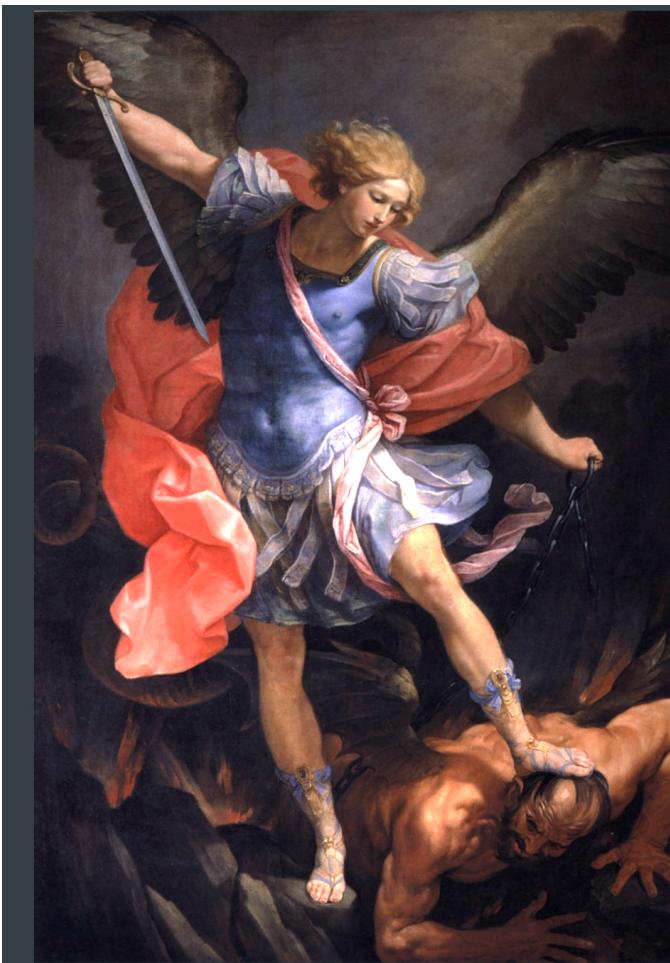


# THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church  
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## This Month's Cover

In in the honor of the feast of Saint Michael the Archangel (September 29), our cover this month is “Saint Michael the Archangel Defeating Satan” by Guido Reni. It is a large painting, 9'7"x6'7". It is oil on canvas, completed in 1635, and is displayed in Santa Maria della Concezione de Cappuccini, Rome.

According to the ancient Hebrew legend, God's first creation was the angel Helel (הַלֵּל),<sup>1</sup> which is translated “Light of God,” or “God's Light-Bearer.” This has been Latinized as “Lucifer,” which also means “Light-Bearer.” Being second to God was more than he could bear, and his pride led him to want to be equal to God. He rallied other prideful angels and tried to overthrow God. The Archangel Michael led an army of righteous angels and defeated him, and he was cast into Hell, where he rules as Satan. This painting portrays Saint Michael standing victorious, his foot on Satan's head.

Guido Remi (1575-1642) was a Bolognese painter of the Baroque era, although he showed a strong influence of the earlier Classical period. At the age of nine, he was apprenticed to the studio of Denis Calvaert. When he was about twenty, he and two of his fellow students moved to the rival studio of Ludovico Carracci. The three formed the nucleus of a prodigious group of painters who moved from Bologna to Rome in 1601. There he was patronized by Pope Paul V (Borghese), and as a result he became the favorite painter of the entire Borghese family, who kept him constantly employed with commissions. His masterpiece was the great fresco “L'Aurora” at the Casino L'Aurora, depicting Apollo led by Aurora, the goddess of the dawn, bringing light to the world. In 1630, the Barberini family, the family of Pope Urban VIII, commissioned him to paint the Saint Michael that is our cover this month.

Although Reni left Bologna supposedly permanently in 1614, he maintained a studio there and one in Naples for the rest of his life.

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<sup>1</sup> This should not be confused with Hillel, the great 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. rabbi.

He was a prolific painter, leaving a huge legacy of paintings and frescoes. He was undoubtedly the most famous Italian painter of his era, and many of his students went on to be famous. His style had a significant influence on Spanish painting, particularly that of Jusepe de Ribera and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo.

Guido Reni died in Bologna in 1642 and was buried there in the Rosary Chapel of the Basilica de San Domenico.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***A Word from the Editor***

We're back! The last couple of years have been rough, but as the Bard said, "All's well that ends well." Despite some difficult times, things have ended well. I am going to resume publishing the Epistle as long as I can, but it will be online, and not in hardcopy. Printing, sorting and addressing about 350 copies for mailing is a major chore, and postage rates (even for bulk mail) have gone through the roof. Also, most of the issues will probably be a little shorter than in the past. My eyesight has failed badly in the last couple of years, so I am a lot slower doing research than I used to be. Also, I have never been a very good typist, and seeing the keyboard is getting harder. Fortunately, I found a very good dictation program at a reasonable price (Wispr Flow), and that is a big help. The only trouble with it is that it requires the Internet, and since I have AT&T, I never know when it will be working. I am looking forward to getting back to writing, because even though I may be going to pot physically, I need to keep my mind exercised. This is a good way to do that, and to share my thoughts and insights with others in the process.

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## ***Rahab – Harlot or Innkeeper?***

In the Book of Joshua, the woman Rahab helps two Israelite spies escape from Jericho (Josh. 2:1ff). Joshua sent two spies to scout out Jericho and find out what kind of defenses they had. The word got out that they were there, and the king sent soldiers after them. Rahab hid them, and when the coast was clear, she let them down on a rope through a window in her home on the outside of the city wall. In ancient times, many city walls were what are called casemate walls, and consisted of two massive, separate parallel walls with apartments and rooms between them. While these rooms

were usually occupied by soldiers, guards, and government offices, they were also often occupied by businesses and private citizens. An inn in a city wall would not have been unusual. It is therefore quite reasonable that Rahab owned and managed an inn in the wall of Jericho, where she lived with her family. She had heard of the wonders that God had done for the Israelites, and she believed. That is why she protected the spies when they came. In exchange for her help, they promised to protect her. They told her to tie a red cord in the window of her apartment. When the Israelites captured and destroyed the city, Rahab and her family were spared. They spent the rest of their lives living in Israel (Josh. 6:25).<sup>1</sup>

In both the Old and New Testaments, Rahab is usually called Rahab the Harlot (Heb. 11:31), although this may be an unfair epithet. There is no evidence that she was a prostitute, and in fact, the Jewish historian Josephus refers to her as Rahab the Innkeeper. This may seem like a “so what” matter, but it is important when we consider that Rahab was an ancestor of Jesus (Matt. 1:5).<sup>2</sup> Exegetes have long tried to get around this problem by pointing out that Jesus was for all people, since even in his own ancestry were a harlot (Rahab) and a Gentile (Ruth). Rahab’s son was Boaz, the husband of Ruth. Originally, the Hebrew alphabet had no vowels, and the consonants for “harlot” (*zonah*) and “female innkeeper” (*zenah*) are the same (*znh*, זָנָה).<sup>3</sup> Most of the early Old Testament books were oral tradition at first. It is likely that in the early days the words got confused, and the innkeeper Rahab came to be unjustly identified as a harlot.

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<sup>1</sup> When the walls of Jericho fell, that does not mean that the entire city wall fell. A great portion of the wall collapsed, and it was through this breach that the Israelite army entered the city and conquered it.

<sup>2</sup> He identifies her as an ancestor of David’s father, Jesse. According to the Bible, David was an ancestor of both Mary and Joseph, thus of Jesus.

<sup>3</sup> Identification of vowels using dots and small lines was not introduced into the Hebrew alphabet until well into the 7th century A.D. The reader simply had to know what vowels were represented, but this was not a problem because the writings were so well known and had been passed down orally from generation to generation. Anyone who could read knew how to pronounce the words. Words that had different meanings but were very close in spelling, like *zonah* and *zenah*, sometimes became confused.

## ***The First Sin***

Who was the first sinner? These days, if you ask anyone who, according to the Bible, first brought sin and death into the world, most people will argue whether it was Adam or Eve. If you read the Genesis story carefully, however, it can be argued that they were both equally guilty. Both ate the forbidden fruit,<sup>1</sup> even though it was Eve who took the first bite. Adam was there through the whole conversation with the serpent, and did nothing to stop her or to interfere, so he is equally culpable. In fact, Adam and Eve had no idea what death is. Death did not come into the world until Cain killed Abel. When God told them that if they ate of the forbidden fruit they would surely die, they could well have asked, “What is die?”

In ancient times, if you asked who the first sinner was, you would be likely to get a very different argument. The rabbinical scholars did not argue whether it was Adam or Eve, but whether it was they or Cain. After all, it was not until Cain’s sin that death came into the world. The Book of the Wisdom of Solomon, although today it is considered apocryphal, was very popular in ancient times. It said that Wisdom, which is equated with God,<sup>2</sup> exonerated Adam and Eve and saved them from guilt or death. It says,

Wisdom protected the first-formed father [Adam] of the world, when he alone had been created; she delivered him from his transgression and gave him strength to rule all things. But when an unrighteous man [Cain] departed from her [Wisdom] in his anger, he perished because in rage he killed his brother [Abel]. When the earth was flooded because of him, Wisdom again saved it, steering the righteous man [Noah] by a paltry piece of wood (Wisdom of Solomon 10:1-4).

The ancient sages argued that Wisdom (God) dismissed the sin of Adam and Eve, even though they had to submit to the punishment of expulsion from Eden. It was Cain’s rejection of Wisdom that

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<sup>1</sup> Tradition identifies the fruit as an apple, but the Bible simply calls it a fruit. From the context and the language used, scholars have generally interpreted it to mean a pomegranate.

<sup>2</sup> It is generally accepted that Wisdom is identified with the feminine attributes of God, those of mercy, forgiveness, and nurturing. This is why the Bible uses “she.” Throughout the Old Testament, Wisdom also often means what we now understand to be the Holy Spirit. Hagia Sophia (Greek for Holy Wisdom), the great basilica in Constantinople (Istanbul), was built by the Emperor Constantine I and dedicated to Holy Wisdom.

brought sin and death into the world. Theologians have also argued that since there was no death in the world, Cain did not know that hitting Abel on the head with a rock would kill him. They said that this is why God did not punish Cain with death. On the other hand, Abel brought a lamb to be sacrificed. This was probably not the first sacrifice, so that would indicate that they did know about death, at least that of animals. Since the story is an allegory, that is a moot point. It is interesting to discuss issues like this, but it is also important that we remember that all that really matters is that there is sin and death in the world, and that is why Christ was sent to us.

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## *Be Wordly Wise*

### *Overseer*

This is an interesting word, especially in that it is one of several related words that mean essentially the same, yet have their own subtle nuances. Overseer is closely related to supervise and, somewhat surprisingly, to episcopal and bishop. All these words are made up of a prefix meaning over, and a root referring to vision. As with many English words, the word oversight can have two very different meanings: the manager has oversight of his staff; leaving Bill off the invitation list was an unfortunate oversight. A related word is overlook: the mountain cabin overlooks a beautiful valley; we overlooked Bill when we made the list. (To add to the confusion, you can look over a fence, and you can also look over the invitation list to make sure you didn't overlook anybody.)

In Greek, *epi-* (επι-) means over or on top, and *scopos* (σκοπος) means watcher, so *episcopos* (επισκοπος) means one who watches over, or overseer. From this we get the word episcopal, which is the adjective for bishop, an overseer of the Church. The word bishop is simply a Germanic corruption of the Greek *episcopos*.<sup>1</sup> Some protestant denominations call the regional overseers supervisors. Supervision is the combination of super-, over, and vision, seeing.

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<sup>1</sup> The word for bishop in many languages is a corruption of *episkopos*: *vescovo* (Italian), *obispo* (Spanish), *bispo* (Portuguese), *bischof* (German), *évêque* (French [*b* and *v* are often interchanged in languages., and *ê* was once *es.*]), *yepiskop* (Russian), *episcopo* (Romanian), etc.

## What Is a Lord?

Christians never think twice when we hear Jesus called Lord, and yet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century very few people understand what that word really means. The word seems to come easily to us, but unfortunately, like so many words that we use every day, we have become so used to it that it no longer has much meaning for us. Words that are overworked tend to lose their power. When the Bible was first translated into English, the word Lord had great significance to its hearers. From ancient times until relatively recently, a lord was a man of great power and authority, meriting much respect and often to be feared. In most ancient societies and extremely so in medieval society, all power and property belonged to the king. He was God's representative.<sup>1</sup> Everyone from the highest nobleman to the lowest slave had to answer to someone above him through the entire hierarchy of authority. Everything was ultimately the king's. He could give power and property, and he could take it away with the sweep of a hand. No matter where you stood in the hierarchy, you had a lord to whom you had to answer, and he also had one to whom he had to answer. Even the king had to answer to God.<sup>2</sup>

It should be no surprise that many lords were just, generous, and wise rulers who were loved by their subordinates, while others were hated tyrants. In the struggle for power, people often rebelled against their lords or secretly disobeyed them. So it is in our relationship with God. Even in the earliest stories of our faith, Lucifer and Adam rebelled in their desire for independence and power.

The word for “Lord” in Hebrew is *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי). This can also be translated as “master” (as in ruler rather than as in teacher, which is *reb* or *rab* [רָב]). The name of God, YHWH (יְהֹוָה), was so sacred

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<sup>1</sup> By Late Antiquity there was a conflict as to whether the king or the Pope was God's representative, leading to a power struggle between the two that lasted for centuries. Each claimed to be supreme, although many argued that the Pope was supreme in the Church, and the king was supreme in political and international matters. This was Henry VIII's rationale for claiming to be both the Head of State and the Head of the Church.

<sup>2</sup> Although there were many differences, in this sense the Medieval feudal system was similar to the Roman system of patronage. This was the source of the concept of *noblesse oblige*, the lord's obligation to protect and provide for the needs of his inferiors.

that by the 7th century BC it was never pronounced aloud by anyone but the high priest, and even by him only once a year on the Day of Atonement. Since vowel pointing did not come about until the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D., and the word was never pronounced aloud, we don't know exactly how to pronounce it. Most scholars agree that its pronunciation was probably Yahweh. Whenever God's name appears in writing, the readers would say "Adonai," Lord, instead of trying to pronounce the sacred name. Whenever in the Bible you see LORD in small caps, it means that the Sacred Name of God (YHWH) was what had been written there in the original text.<sup>1</sup> There was no titled aristocracy in ancient Israel, such as counts, dukes, barons and such, but those who held power held a great deal of it. They were addressed as *Adonai*, Lord, so this title was appropriate for God.

In ancient Rome, the head of a household was the oldest competent male, called the *paterfamilias* (family father). He held extreme power, even to the point of life and death. He decided whom you married, what you did for a living, when you would be officially recognized as an adult, whether your newborn baby would live or be put to death, and even whether you lived or died as long as long as you were a minor in his household. A house was a *domus*, and the *paterfamilias* was addressed as *Dominus*, Lord.<sup>2</sup> Anyone under the influence of the Roman Empire (which would include almost all Christians), immediately recognized the implications of addressing Jesus or God the Father as *Dominus*, Lord. The same would be true among Greeks. The Greek for Lord is *Kyrios* (Κυρίος). They addressed their lords as *Kyrie*. That is used in the Eucharistic liturgy to this day when we say "*Kyrie, eleison*," "Lord, have mercy." This was a standard greeting of a subservient to his lord, especially when he approached him to make a petition of some kind.

As we look back through most of Judeo-Christian history, we must recognize that seeing God as the Lord meant not seeing him as

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<sup>1</sup> When vowel pointing was introduced, they would use the vowels for *Adonai* (*a-o-a*) and the consonants for the name of God, YHWH, which in Hebrew produced an unpronounceable word (Yahowah). This reminded the reader to say *Adonai* instead of *Yahweh*. Early Christian writers, not understanding this, mistranslated it as Jehovah.

<sup>2</sup> This is the source of "dominate" and "dominion." The Lady of the household was addressed as *Domina*. She was more powerful than any other woman in the household, but had nothing like the power of her husband.

the meek and mild Jesus who walks with us in the garden, but as an all-powerful master who is to be adored, obeyed, and if we turn against him, feared. He is the *Dominus*, the *Paterfamilias* of the Universe. The difference between God and the lords of this world is that while even the best of lords is flawed, God is perfect in his justice, mercy, forgiveness, providence, and the love of his creatures.

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## ***Myth, Legend, and History***

When Jesus was on trial before Pontius Pilate, Pilate asked him, “What is truth?” He probably asked the question in contempt, but it is nonetheless a good question. Defining the truth is not as simple as it might seem. Any trial lawyer can affirm that if you have four honest witnesses to an event and they testify in court, you will usually get four different stories. Sometimes they will be quite different, and yet the witnesses are reporting honestly what they observed. Jesus promised us that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth, but that journey through which we are led can sometimes be a very difficult and challenging one. Along the way, we struggle to discern what is really true.

A legend is a gripping story of some extraordinary person or event. It may be true, or it may not. It depends on the nature of the story. The legend of Washington crossing the Delaware with his troops on Christmas Eve to defeat the Hessians at Trenton is true, even though some versions of it may have been embellished. It is told repeatedly, and it is an inspiration to each generation. The legends of Washington and the cherry tree or of his throwing a silver dollar across the Potomac are clearly false, yet they are also told from generation to generation, and perhaps have some value in passing on a valid image of the man.

Likewise, a myth is not necessarily a fictional story. It is a literary genre that tells a story to explain something. Sometimes the story is fanciful or allegorical, and sometimes it is very believable. We tend to throw the word myth around as if it automatically means a fairytale fiction, but that is not what a myth is. The biblical scholar Shauna Dolansky defines myths as “stories that convey and reinforce aspects of a culture’s worldview: many truths.” When we refer to myths in the Bible, this is not meant in any derogatory sense. It is likely that many biblical stories, particularly in the Pentateuch, were

never intended to be taken literally, but were told for the purpose of explaining things. For example, the story of Adam and Eve explains, among other things, why people wear clothes and why women suffer pain during childbirth. Myths and fables are two very different things. A fable is a fictional and usually imaginative tale told for the purpose of teaching a moral principle. An example of this is Aesop's story of the tortoise and the hare. A myth, on the other hand, is told for the purpose of explaining something. It may be a true story, one based on truth, or one that is completely fictional. That doesn't really matter when you consider the purpose of the story. The explanation may be incorrect in the light of modern scientific knowledge, but it satisfied the ancient hearers' need to know.

We must be careful not to be too hasty to relegate biblical stories to the category of myths in the sense of their being pure fiction. Many of the stories that for generations have been thought to be fictional have in recent years been found to be true or based on true events. New technologies and modern archaeological techniques have made some amazing discoveries in recent years, many of which have confirmed biblical stories that had previously been thought to be mere allegories or myths.

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## *A Touch of Trivia*

The War of 1812 was a critical time for the United States, when we almost lost everything we had gained in our war for independence. On August 24, 1814, the British army invaded Washington, DC. They set fire to several buildings, including the unfinished Capitol Building and the Presidential Mansion. A sudden thunderstorm and extremely heavy two-hour rain saved both buildings. The storm also generated a tornado that passed through the British camp. It tore off roofs and threw around several cannons. More British soldiers were killed by debris from the tornado than by American guns during that battle. and the British were driven out of Washington. Many claimed that the storm, which was totally unexpected, was divine intervention. After the repairs were made, the Presidential Mansion was painted white to cover up the smoke damage. From that time on it has been known as the White House.

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