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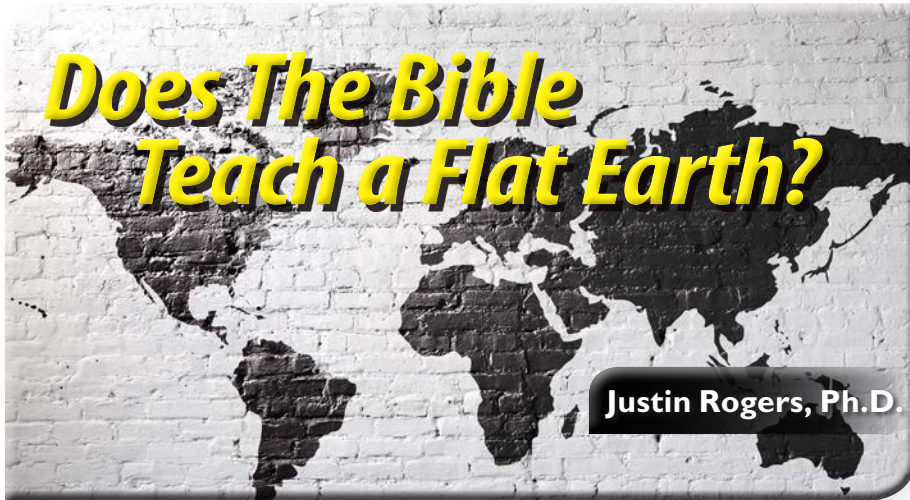
BIBLE TEACH A FLAT EARTH?

Hematidrosis:
Did Jesus
Sweat Blood?

Did God
Approve of
Rahab's Lie?



AP Materials in
Other Languages



[EDITOR'S NOTE: AP auxiliary writer Dr. Rogers serves as an Associate Professor of Bible at Freed-Hardeman University. He holds an M.A. in New Testament from FHU as well as an M.Phil. and Ph.D. in Hebraic, Judaic, and Cognate Studies from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.]

EARLIER this year, basketball star Kyrie Irving drew headlines for advocating a flat Earth.¹ The sports media lampooned Irving for several days until he finally admitted he was wrong.² While Irving initially defended the “science” behind his claim, many others defend the flat Earth position because of what they read in the Bible. But what does the Bible really say about the shape of the Earth? For those with a high view of Scripture, the Bible stands as an unquestioned authority. If the Bible teaches the Earth is flat, then we must believe it, regardless of what pseudoscience says. Indeed, a number of theorists insist a spherical Earth is contrary to the teaching of Scripture. Are they correct?

RESPECT THE GENRE

Flat-Earth theorists marshal a number of biblical passages to

defend their assertion (e.g., Joshua 10:12-13; 1 Chronicles 16:30; Psalm 93:1; 96:10; 104:5). One notices instantly that almost every passage cited in favor of the flat-Earth position occurs in a **poetic context**.³ To be responsible readers of the Bible, we must respect the genre of literature we are reading. Poetry is to be read differently than prose; it is more expressive, emotional, and metaphorical. In fact, taking biblical poetry literally would, in some cases, pervert clear scriptural teaching elsewhere, leading to the belief that there are many gods instead of one God (Exodus 15:11; Psalm 86:8), that humans are really gods (Psalm 82:6), that thunder is the voice of God (2 Samuel 22:14), that God slays sea monsters (Psalm 74:12-14), and that God has wings (Psalm 61:4). Obviously, these passages cannot be understood for what they literally say. So, a common-sense understanding of how poetry functions prevents us from making erroneous interpretive deductions. To insist that metaphorical language must be interpreted literally

is to contradict the original authorial intent.

RESPECT THE AUDIENCE

IN addition to respecting the author's intent, we must also respect the audience's understanding. We often hear cosmic complexities expressed in phenomenological language. In other words, the world is explained as it **appears** on Earth, or in terms we can understand. Even today, we speak of the Sun “rising and setting,” even though virtually every fourth-grade science student knows that, scientifically, this is not the case. Thus, it should not surprise to find the Bible speaking in similar terms (Genesis 28:11; Joshua 10:13; the Hebrew idiom is the Sun “going”). We also describe rain as falling from the sky even though the truth of the water cycle is basic to any elementary ecology. So also Scripture describes rain as though it is contained in a storage compartment above the sky (Genesis 1:7; Psalm 148:4). For God to teach modern scientific astronomy and meteorology to an ancient Hebrew audience would do little good. We know God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), and He always speaks truth (Titus 1:2), but He condescends to express truths in terms humans can understand (e.g., Job 38-41). To hold the Bible's language to modern scientific standards is a failure to appreciate the original audience of Scripture. The **authors** were divinely inspired, but the **audience** was not.

IS THE EARTH FLAT? WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

SO how do these considerations relate to the shape of the Earth? Despite the preceding qualifications about reading and interpreting Scripture, we cannot locate a single verse in the Bible that teaches the Earth is flat. Neither in prose nor in poetry, neither by means of phenomenological language nor metaphor, do we find Scripture communicating a flat Earth. The flat-Earth theory is an **interpretive deduction**, usually based on poetic hyperbole. But is a flat Earth even an accurate interpretive deduction? As we will see, it is **far from obvious** that the Bible teaches the Earth is flat.

Isaiah 40:22: A Flat-Earth?

The golden text for a spherical Earth is Isaiah 40:22: God “sits upon the circle of the earth.” It has been long argued that a ball must be intended, for God could not possibly sit atop something flat. Of course, such a literal reading ignores the poetic context and the obvious anthropomorphism. However, flat-Earth theorists point out (correctly, we may add) that the Hebrew term for “circle” (גֹּחַל, *chūg*) does not **necessarily** refer to a sphere. Instead, they say, the term refers to a disc, thereby communicating a flat Earth. Indeed, the ancient Greek translation renders the term γῦρος (*gūros*), or “ring.” Further, the term “on” (עַל, *al*) can also be translated “above,” without implying contact with an object (e.g., NASB, ESV). So this passage does not necessarily communicate

a spherical Earth, but **neither does it imply a flat Earth.**

The only direct parallel to the language of Isaiah 40:22 is Job 22:14. Here God poetically “walks on the circle [גֹּחַל, *chūg*] of the heavens.” Most modern English translations render the term commonly translated “circle” as “vault” in this context (e.g., ASV, RSV, ESV, NIV). A vault provokes images of the Earth having a rounded top, as though a bowl. In other words, the Earth is conceived (albeit poetically) with a convex lid. Why “circle” appears in English translations of Isaiah 40:22 and “vault” in Job 22:14 is beyond my understanding, although the NKJV is consistent in both.⁴ The term גֹּחַל (*chūg*) is used in both passages, and should probably be translated identically. And a convex “vault” is probably the better option than “circle.”

Ancient Near Eastern thinkers typically conceived of the Earth as having a bowl-shape, with a solid,

convex top (Job 37:18) that was covered by water (Job 26:10).⁵ God poetically “engraves a vault” (אֶת־קַו, *chōq chāg*) over the Earth, perhaps indicating the horizon, or perhaps referring to the bell-shaped vault over the top of the sky (Job 26:10; Proverbs 8:27). The point is that God separates the Earth from the store place of water (cf. Genesis 1:7), and thus carves out a channel above the sky to contain it. Again, these passages occur in **poetic contexts**, and it can be dangerous to impose a **literal meaning** on figurative language, as we have discussed. Unlike God, Job’s friends did not necessarily have a perfect scientific understanding, and are, in any case, speaking hyperbolically in Hebrew poetry. Their words simply reflect a popular expression of God’s complete sovereignty over nature. Nevertheless, one thing is sure: there is no thought of a flat Earth anywhere. The “circle of the earth” is a metaphor to be sure,

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but not even metaphorically is it understood as flat.

It should be noted that the Hebrew Bible does not have an equivalent for the term “sphere,” which in modern Hebrew is the loanword ספירה (*sfirāh*). The word “ball” (דור, *dūr*) occurs in English translations in Isaiah 22:18, but it is clear from Isaiah 29:3 (the only other place the noun occurs) that it refers to a “roll” of items that have encircled a central object. A related verb form is found one other time in the Bible to describe stacked and perhaps “bound” wood (Ezekiel 24:5). In other words, the shape of such an object is beyond the scope of the term. So, **the authors of the Hebrew Bible simply lacked the vocabulary to describe a perfectly round object.** We cannot expect them to say what they did not have the words to communicate.

Joshua 10:12-13: The Sun Stands Still

Flat-earth theorists also cite the interruption of the Sun to “prove” their theory. The passage reports, “The sun stopped [דָּמָם, *d-m-m*] and the moon stood still [עָמַד, *‘-m-d*] until the nation avenged its enemies.... The sun stood still [עָמַד, *‘-m-d*] in the middle of the sky and did not hurry to go about an entire day” (Joshua 10:13). Flat-earth theorists, who apparently also defend a geocentric model of the solar system, argue this passage certifies their position. They argue that, according to the standard heliocentric model, the Sun’s standing still would not interrupt the day at all. The Earth, heliocentrists argue, revolves around the Sun. In order for the Bible **and**

the heliocentric model to be true, the Earth would need to pause its rotation on its axis in order for the Sun to appear to stop. But the Bible does not say the **Earth** stops; it says the **Sun** stops. Therefore, flat-earth theorists, adopting a geocentric model, argue the Earth must be fixed, and the Sun revolves around it.⁶

This reasoning violates one of the principles we have discussed: a failure to account for the audience’s understanding. Joshua was not written to Israelites in outer space. From the point of view of those on Earth, the “day” (or “daylight,” the Hebrew יוֹם, *yōm* meaning both) was extended. Since a day is measured by the Sun, the Sun must have stopped its “going” (בָּוֵא, *bō’*). Indeed, **it appeared to them** that “the sun stopped in the middle of the sky.” This is a clear use of phenomenological language, and it simply means this day was unusually long. Daylight was halted miraculously so as to allow God’s forces more time to conquer their foes. This is the simplest explanation, and was virtually uncontested until recent times.⁷ But even if this passage is used to defend a geocentric model of the Universe (wrongly, I believe), Joshua 10:13 still has no bearing on the shape of the Earth. Flat-Earth theorists will need to look elsewhere for evidence.

The “Immovable” Passages

A number of biblical passages assert the immovability of the Earth (e.g., 1 Chronicles 16:30; Psalm 93:1; 96:10; 104:5). These are often proposed as an “obvious”

rationale for the Earth being flat. But they do not bear the weight loaded upon them. None of these passages necessarily implies a flat Earth, and even if they might be cited as evidence for geocentricity, note that each of them occurs in a poetic context. If we were to hold Bible-believing flat-Earth theorists to the literal implications of these passages, they would have to insist the Earth neither orbits the Sun nor rotates on its axis. And if the Earth is fixed immovably and permanently, God could never destroy it, for its dissolution would violate its immovability (2 Peter 3:10). But, of course, these poetic passages are not intended to be taken literally.

Since each passage employs similar language and is applied for the same purpose, we shall examine just one as representative. The relevant part of Psalm 96:10 states, “The world is fixed; it cannot be moved.” Two Hebrew words in particular deserve attention. One is the word “fix” or “establish” (כִּוֵּן, *kūn*). This term does not fundamentally refer to being fixed in **position**, but rather to being fixed in **permanence**. Such can be said of David’s kingdom being “established” forever (1 Samuel 20:31; 2 Samuel 7:16; 1 Kings 2:12), or of cities that are “established” (Habakkuk 2:12). These are acts of intended permanence.

In reference to the physical world, the term is not used of the Earth alone, but of the heavenly bodies as well. The Sun, Moon, and stars “are established” by God (Psalm 8:3), as are the “heavens” (Proverbs 3:19). Does this mean the Bible

envisions no movement among the heavenly bodies? If one took these passages literally, he or she would be required to say there are no orbits or movements of any astral body anywhere in the Universe. This is, of course, untrue, for even the earliest astronomers could map the stars and motions of the various heavenly bodies, as they serve to mark “seasons, days, and years” (Genesis 1:14). So, if these poetic passages are pressed literally, the Bible teaches that the Earth and all cosmic bodies are static. Is this what the Bible intends to communicate? Of course not. In fact, Scripture elsewhere affirms the movement of heavenly bodies (Jude 13). The Bible simply means to teach that God has programmed His creation to act according to determined, reliable patterns; **in that sense**, he has “fixed” the world.

The other Hebrew term, מוט (*mūt*), is translated “be moved.” Because the Earth does not “move,” it must be flat, right? Well, the term does not fundamentally refer to movement of position. It is the opposite of being “fixed” as expressed by the term כון, *kūn*. Scripture declares the righteous “shall not be moved” (Psalm 10:6; 21:7; Proverbs 10:30), not meaning, of course, that the righteous are paralyzed, but that they can feel secure in their life. To be movable in this sense is to be insecure, uncertain, and unreliable. The term מוט/*mūt* is often translated “slip” or “sway” (Psalm 66:9; 123:1), and can be used of poorly constructed objects that are destined to fall (Isaiah 40:20; 41:7).

The meaning of this term with regard to the world is understandable. The Earth is “set” in the sense that it is well-designed and well-constructed, and therefore functions without deviation, exactly as the Maker intended. It is secure, dependable, and reliable. The season for sowing and reaping, consistent rain, the course of the astral bodies—these are all evidence that the Earth is “immovable” in the author’s intended sense. Derek Kidner appropriately observes: “The first and last lines of verse 10 [Psalm 96] make it additionally clear that this is a prophecy of perfect government, not a pronouncement on—of all things!—the earth’s rotation.”⁸ The “fixed Earth” passages, when taken literally, do not make sense with the rest of Scripture. And even if one presses their literal meaning, they still do not teach the Earth is flat. The “fixed Earth” Scriptures are best read as poetic reflections on a world designed for the flourishing of life.

CONCLUSION

IT seems that the typical passages cited in favor of the flat-Earth theory are drawn from a poetic context, and thus readers must be very careful about taking them literally. However, even if we choose to take every biblical passage literally, we still do not find a clear endorsement of flat-Earth theory. It should also be noted that even the supposed “spherical Earth” passages occur in poetic contexts, filled with metaphor and hyperbole. So, the Hebrew Bible has no official “position” on the shape of the Earth,

whether round or flat. Descriptions of the shape of the Earth in the Bible must be classified with the Sun having wings (Malachi 4:2) or God having arms (Exodus 6:6; 1 Kings 5:3). These are obviously **metaphors**, and few rational readers would press them literally. But again, even if we take poetry literally, and ignore all hyperbole and metaphor in Scripture, we still find no clear statement that the Earth is flat.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ <http://www.nba.com/article/2017/02/18/commissioner-adam-silver-all-star-press-conference>.
- ² http://www.cleveland.com/cavs/index.ssf/2017/02/kyrie_irving_admits_science_su.html.
- ³ See Justin Rogers (2016), “How to Read Biblical Poetry,” *Gospel Advocate*, September, p. 11.
- ⁴ The NKJV has “circle” in both verses, and the KJV has “circuit” in the Job verse.
- ⁵ See David J.A. Clines (2006), *Job 21-37 in Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Nelson), p. 559.
- ⁶ On geocentricity, see B. Thompson and T. Major (1988), “Does the Bible Teach Geocentricity?” <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1151>.
- ⁷ For a history of discussion, see David M. Howard, Jr. (1998), *Joshua in The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman), 5:238-249.
- ⁸ Derek Kidner (1975), *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms in Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP), p. 349.

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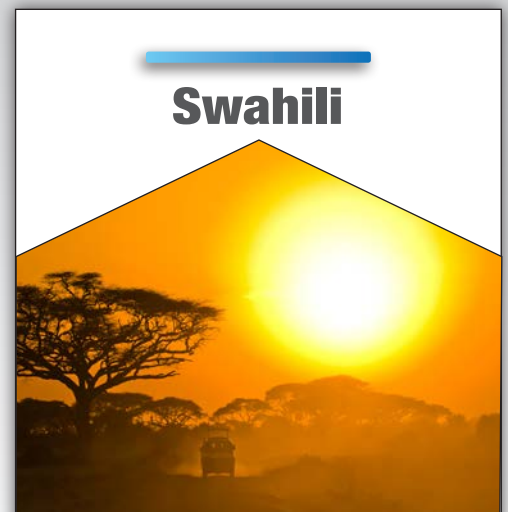
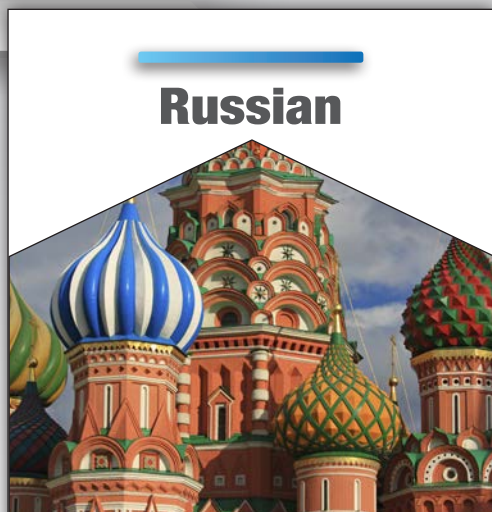
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Did God APPROVE of Rahab's Lie?

Eric Lyons, M.Min.

WHEREAS many Bible passages in both the Old and the New Testament indicate that lying is sinful,¹ critics of the inspiration of the Bible contend that the biblical teaching on this subject is contradictory. The most frequently cited example revolves around Rahab's lie in the book of Joshua and two separate, favorable comments about Rahab in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).

Although some well-meaning Christians may creatively contend that Rahab did not lie in Joshua 2, a simple, straightforward reading of the biblical text indicates that she did. After Rahab hid the Israelite spies on her roof among the stalks of flax (Joshua 2:6), she told the messengers of the King of Jericho (who were pursuing the Israelites) that the men in question had already left, and exactly where they went she did not know (2:4-5). However, (1) the Israelites had not left, and (2) she knew exactly where they were. In fact, after speaking to the king's men, she went back up to the roof to speak with them and to help them safely escape (2:8-21).

According to Bible critics, God is inconsistent in His condemnation

of dishonesty. How can "lying lips" be "an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 12:22), while at the same time God spared Rahab from the destruction of Jericho (Joshua 2:9-21; 6:22-25). How is it that "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 21:8), and yet Rahab be commended twice by New Testament writers?

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace (Hebrews 11:31).

[W]as not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way (James 2:25)?

Is the Bible inconsistent on this subject? And do these verses not prove that lying is approved in some situations?

First, simply because the Bible commends an individual for a righteous act does not mean that God condones everything the person ever did. Just as husbands and wives can be faithful to each other **despite** their short comings, and just as children can be submissive to their parents and yet have fallen short of their parents' expectations many times while growing up, every accountable soul has the potential to be faithful notwith-

standing their regretful sins and imperfections.

Keep in mind that Jesus was the only accountable Person ever to live Who never sinned.² Though Noah, Abraham, Moses, and many others were counted **faithful** (Hebrews 11:7-29), they occasionally disobeyed God's will (Numbers 20:1-12) and acted foolishly or cowardly (cf. Genesis 9:21; 12:12-20; 20:1-18). The apostle Peter, who also served as an elder in the early church (1 Peter 5:1), was guilty at one time or another of having a lack of faith (Matthew 14:31), denying that he knew the Lord (Matthew 26:69-75), and hypocritically withdrawing himself from Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-14). Yet God chose Peter to be a preacher of the Gospel and to pen two of the New Testament epistles. He was **not** chosen **because** of his sins; he was chosen **in spite** of them (and because he repented of his sins and sought to walk in the light rather than wander habitually and rebelliously in the darkness—cf. 1 John 1:5-10). Every saved soul is a former coward, murderer, blasphemer, adulterer, thief, or liar, etc. Every faithful Christian who is walking in the light is tempted to sin, and sometimes (or far more often than we might like to admit) we think, say, or do unchristlike things. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). All faithful followers of God still make mistakes, have moments of weakness, and struggle in a variety of ways, yet they can still "do justly," "love mercy," "walk humbly" (Micah 6:8), and "persevere" faithfully (Revelation 3:10).

Second, keep in mind that Rahab was a Canaanite harlot. The people of Canaan were (generally) extremely wicked. They practiced “abominable customs” (Leviticus 18:30) and did “detestable things” (Deuteronomy 18:9, NASB). They attempted to cast spells upon people and call up the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10-11). They would “burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods” (Deuteronomy 12:30). They were so nefarious that God said they defiled the land and the land could stomach them no longer—“the land vomited out its inhabitants” (Leviticus 18:25). This statement summarizes the level of depravity in Canaan (of which Jericho was a part). Whether Rahab had fully embraced her culture’s debauchery or whether she was more of a victim of her circumstances (as many women have been throughout history), she nevertheless is described in Scripture as a “harlot who lied (Joshua 2:1-8; 6:17,25). Such sinfulness in the life of a Canaanite woman should come as no surprise. But thankfully, the life of Rahab did not continue to parallel her pagan culture. She wanted out, and the Lord provided a way—which leads us to a third point to consider.

Rahab’s recorded words and actions in Joshua 2 reveal a woman in transition—from living like a pagan harlot to embracing the One true God and His ways. Notice her statements to the Israelite spies:

I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea...and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites.... And as soon as we heard these things our hearts melted...for the Lord your

God, He is God in heaven above and on Earth beneath (Joshua 2:9-11).

Rahab then coupled her confessed belief in the existence of Jehovah and His mighty works **with action** (Joshua 2:6-24). She courageously hid the two Israelite spies from the King of Jericho. She treated the spies kindly. She helped them escape the city. She gave them specific instructions on what to do after they made it out of the city (so that they would not be caught by the king’s men). Rahab and her family kept secret the Israelite plan to destroy Jericho. And, as directed, Rahab bound the scarlet cord in her window, and gathered her parents and other family members in her house (according to the spies’ commands) in order to be spared from Jericho’s destruction. Indeed, as the New Testament rightly recognizes, Rahab actively demonstrated her faith in Jehovah (however so uninformed, inexperienced, and flawed her faith still was).

Fourth, **Rahab’s dishonesty is never condoned in Scripture.** She was no more commended in the Old Testament or the New Testament for lying than she was for her harlotry. She was commended and graciously spared from the destruction of Jericho because of her **overall** faith and works at the time—despite the fact that her newly found, courageous faith (which was quickly emerging out of a heavily pagan culture) was **still a work in progress.** Yes, she lied to the king’s men, but she also (1) confessed belief in Jehovah, (2) appealed to Him for help, (3) showed kindness to the Israelite spies, (4) courageously hid them and helped them escape, etc. There is no logical or biblical reason either to deny Rahab’s lie or to criticize her overall, emerging faith in God. If we would

rightly commend a newly recovering alcoholic, pornography addict, or covetous individual who has a temporary set-back in a moment of trying temptation in the midst of a grueling attempt to repent and live a righteous life, could the merciful and gracious God of the Bible not rightly commend Rahab for her overall faith and works in her newfound walk with the Lord?

CAN WE EVER LIE TO PROTECT OTHERS?

SCRIPTURE reveals that everything about God is true. His Spirit, Son, law, commandments, judgments, and works are all true—100% true.³ The simple fact is “God... cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). “It is impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18). His perfectly truthful nature will not allow Him to lie. Furthermore, throughout God’s truthful Word honesty is commended, while dishonesty is condemned.⁴ So, if God is always truthful, and if His Word teaches us to be honest, then how can a faithful child of God ever believe we have a God-approved license to lie, even if a lie is told for the purpose of trying to help others? A person may **feel** like he or she is doing a good thing, but no God-given authority exists for lying (for whatever “noble” reason).

One important lesson that we can learn from God is that we can be perfectly honest and yet not reveal everything we know. God is omniscient (Psalm 139) and has obviously not told us “everything.” We don’t even know everything about the 33-year life of Jesus on Earth (John 21:25). Most of what God knows He has not shared with mankind, but those things that He has truthfully revealed to us are for our eter-

nal benefit (Deuteronomy 29:29). Similarly, whatever situation that we are in, we are to be truthful, but we do not have to say everything that we are thinking or everything that we know about a particular matter. Parents should show maturity and wisdom if their five-year-old son asks them where babies come from. Children's Bible teachers should show discretion if they are asked point-blank questions about sensitive, sinful matters such as pornography, adultery, homosexuality, abortion, or even bestiality (Leviticus 18:23). We may struggle with the best way to address a sensitive topic (which may "get us in trouble" with various ones), but we have no right to lie. We may tell children to ask their parents at home in private. We may speak in broad, truthful generalities. We may let children know that we will plan to talk with them about various matters on a different occasion (i.e., years from now). We may attempt to distract the questioners and pray that God will providentially deliver us from the uncomfortable situation. Whatever course of action the Christian takes, it should be done (1) honestly, (2) wisely (Matthew 10:16), and (3) with sincere and loving motivations (Matthew 6:1-4; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

But what if a person's life is at stake? What if you could save a life by lying? Answer: Although human life is an extremely valuable gift from God (Genesis 1:26-27), the most important thing in this life is not merely to live, but to be faithful to God, regardless of the situation. Jesus could have lied and worked things out to spare His own life, but He died (and rose) for a higher purpose. He submissively fulfilled His Father's will.

Jesus and His inspired spokesmen could have instructed the early church to avoid persecution and death by lying for each other or by denying their own faith in Christ, but they didn't. In fact, to those first-century Christians who were suffering (or were about to face great tribulation), even to the point of death, Jesus declared, "Be faithful until death ["even to the point of death"—NIV], and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Whether a husband or a wife, a mother or a father, a saintly sister in Christ or a spiritual shepherd at a local church, in whatever dire situations people may find themselves, we can creatively attempt to protect families, friends, neighbors, and churches by saying and doing all sorts of things (even by remaining silent), but we should be willing even to die before sinning against the holy God of heaven. Like Samuel, who, with God's blessing, only told a part of the reason why he traveled to Bethlehem in tumultuous times (in order to protect his own life—1 Samuel 16:1-13), we may truthfully only tell

some of what we know about a particular matter in order to save our lives or the lives of others. But, we must be resolved to "be imitators of God as dear children" in all things at all times (Ephesians 5:1). We must be resolved to put away lying (Ephesians 4:28) and to be honest all day, every day.

The story of Rahab should not be used as a license to lie. Instead, we should retell Rahab's story to show the greatness of Jehovah over the false gods of this world and to inspire God's people to courageous acts—similar to many of those works demonstrated by a woman from the pagan city of Jericho some 3,500 years ago.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Exodus 20:16; Leviticus 19:11; Proverbs 6:16-19; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8.
- ² Romans 3:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22.
- ³ 1 John 5:6; John 14:6; 2 Samuel 7:28; Psalm 119:14,151; 19:9; Daniel 4:37.
- ⁴ Leviticus 19:36; Psalm 15:2; Proverbs 16:11; Ephesians 4:28.

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Hematidrosis: Did Jesus Sweat Blood?

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

LUKE, the author of the New Testament books of Luke and Acts, who himself, by profession, was a physician. His writings manifest an intimate acquaintance with the technical language of the Greek medical schools of Asia Minor.

Of the four gospel writers, only Dr. Luke referred to Jesus' ordeal as "agony" (*agonia*). It is because of this agony over things to come that we learn during His prayer "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Only Luke referred to Jesus' sweat (*idros*)—a much used term in medical language. And only Luke referred to Jesus' sweat as consisting of great drops of blood (*thromboi haimatos*)—a medical condition alluded to by both Aristotle and Theophrastus.¹ The Greek term *thromboi* (from which we get thrombus, thrombin, et al.) refers to clots of blood.² Bible scholar Richard Lenski commented on the use of this term: "As clots, *thromboi*, means that the blood mingled with the sweat and thickened the globules so that they fell to the ground in little clots and did not merely stain the skin."³

The Greek word *hosei* ("as it were") refers to condition, not comparison, as Greek scholar Henry Alford observed: The intention of the Evangelist seems clearly to be, to convey the idea that the sweat was (not fell like, but *was*) like drops of blood;—i.e., coloured with blood,—for so I understand the *wjseiv*, as just distinguishing the drops highly coloured with blood, from pure blood.... To suppose that it only fell like drops of blood (why not drops of any thing else? And drops

of blood *from what, and where?*) is to nullify the force of the sentence, and make the insertion of *ajivmato\$* not only superfluous but absurd.⁴

We can conclude quite justifiably that the terminology used by the gospel writer to refer to the severe mental distress experienced by Jesus was intended to be taken literally, i.e., that the sweat of Jesus became bloody.⁵

A thorough search of the medical literature demonstrates that such a condition, while admittedly rare, does occur in humans. Commonly referred to as hematidrosis or hemohidrosis,⁶ this condition results in the excretion of blood or blood pigment in the sweat. Under conditions of great emotional stress, tiny capillaries in the sweat glands can rupture,⁷ thus mixing blood with perspiration. This condition has been reported in extreme instances of stress.⁸ During the waning years of the 20th century, 76 cases of hematidrosis were studied and classified into categories according to causative factors. The most frequent causes of the phenomenon were found to be "acute fear" and "intense mental contemplation."⁹ While the extent of blood loss generally is minimal, hematidrosis also results in the skin becoming extremely tender and fragile,¹⁰ which would have made Christ's pending physical insults even more painful.

From these factors, it is evident that even before Jesus endured the torture of the cross, He suffered far beyond what most of us will ever suffer. His

penetrating awareness of the heinous nature of sin, its destructive and deadly effects, the sorrow and heartache that it inflicts, and the extreme measure necessary to deal with it, make the passion of Christ beyond comprehension.

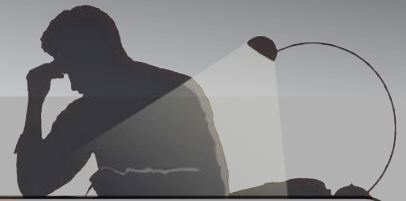
ENDNOTES

- ¹ William K. Hobart (1882), *The Medical Language of St. Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1954 reprint), pp. 80-84.
- ² W. Robertson Nicoll, ed. (no date), *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 1:631; M.R. Vincent (1887), *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1946 reprint), 1:425.
- ³ R.C.H. Lenski (1961), *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg), p. 1077.
- ⁴ Henry Alford (1874), *Alford's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980 reprint), 1:648, italics in orig.; cf. A.T. Robertson (1934), *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press), p. 1140.
- ⁵ Cf. A.T. Robertson (1930), *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), 2:272.
- ⁶ A.C. Allen (1967), *The Skin: A Clinico-pathological Treatise* (New York: Grune and Stratton), second edition, pp. 745-747; "Hematidrosis" (2002), *Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary*, p. 832, <https://goo.gl/U192fY>.
- ⁷ R. Lumpkin (1978), "The Physical Suffering of Christ," *Journal of Medical Association of Alabama*, 47:8-10.
- ⁸ See R.L. Sutton, Jr. (1956), *Diseases of the Skin* (St. Louis, MO: Mosby College Publishing), eleventh edition, pp. 1393-1394.
- ⁹ J.E. Holoubek and A.B. Holoubek (1996), "Blood, Sweat, and Fear. 'A Classification of Hematidrosis,'" *Journal of Medicine*, 27[3-4]:115-33. See also J. Manonukul, W. Wisuthsarewong, et al. (2008), "Hematidrosis: A Pathologic Process or Stigmata. A Case Report with Comprehensive Histopathologic and Immunoperoxidase Studies," *American Journal of Dermatopathology*, 30[2]:135-139, April; E. Mora and J. Lucas (2013), "Hematidrosis: Blood Sweat," *Blood*, 121[9]:1493, February 28.
- ¹⁰ P. Barbet (1953), *A Doctor at Calvary: The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ as Described by a Surgeon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Image Books), pp. 74-75; cf. Lumpkin, 1978.



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The Editor



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Dave Miller

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