

# THE EPISTLE

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

In honor of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holt Cross (September 14), our cover this month is *The Dream of Saint Helena* by Paolo Veronese. Painted in 1570, it is oil on canvas, measuring 6'6"x3'10", and is displayed in the National Gallery, London. The painting is based on a woodcut of the same subject by Raphael. Saint Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, was a Christian. Constantine did not formally convert until his deathbed, but he legalized Christianity in the Roman Empire, and strongly supported the Church. In AD 326, Saint Helena journeyed to Palestine to locate important places and events in Christ's life. This was a reasonable quest, because it was less than 300 years since the Resurrection, and the Christians in Palestine had treasured and to the best of their ability protected these places over the centuries. According to the legend, she had a dream in which two angels revealed to her the location of the cross on which Jesus had been crucified. It would not have been a full Latin Cross as we usually depict it, but the cross-piece (or a fragment of it). This also is not unreasonable, since the Romans would have left it at the site, and his disciples might have retrieved it and hidden it away after the Resurrection. The painting shows Saint Helena asleep at a window, through which is depicted her dream of two *putti* showing her the Cross. There is a stark contrast between the beautiful and delicate Helena in her rich fabrics, the infant *putti*, and the harsh reality of the sturdy and heavy wooden Cross.

Paolo Spezapreda (1528-1588), a.k.a. Paolo Caliari, is commonly known as Paolo Veronese. He is ranked with Titian and Tintoretto as the trio of the greatest masters of the Venetian High Renaissance. He is also considered one of the greatest of

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the Mannerist school that preceded the Baroque. Mannerism emphasized proportion, balance, and ideal beauty, and was noted for its use of color. Veronese, the son of a stonecutter, was born in Venice's largest mainland possession, Verona, from which he took his common name. At the age of 13 he was apprenticed to Antonio Badile, whose daughter he would later marry. One of Badile's greatest altarpieces contains sections that were almost certainly painted by his young apprentice. Veronese's reputation spread quickly, and in 1552 he received a major commission from Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga to paint an altarpiece for the Cathedral of Mantua (now Caen, France). There he was strongly influenced by the ceiling frescoes of Giulio Romano. After completing the work there, he moved to Venice, where he spent the rest of his life. There he produced hundreds of paintings and frescoes, mainly of religious, historical and mythological subjects. He died in Venice in 1588.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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

I love Chinese food, even though I know that most of what we call Chinese food would not be recognized in China. I usually buy it rather than cooking it myself, but not long ago I tried making some Lo Mein. I did not have a recipe, but it seemed that by using a little common sense it should be fairly clear what needed to go into it. I am not a great cook anyway, and it was, to put it kindly, terrible. I was reminded of what Dr. Eli Lazorin-Eyzenberg said, that both cooking and interpreting the Bible require not only some skill, but also a basic knowledge of the ingredients and how they work together. Interpreting the Bible from a translation is like determining what went into a good pottage just by tasting it. In a good dish, each ingredient enhances the flavor and texture of each of the others, so that the result is much more than the sum of its parts. So it is with the Bible and any other book. The original words and their nuances, the culture of the region, times in which they were written, and the values of the people involved, are all in-

gredients that work together to influence each other. This can impart a meaning vastly richer than the sum of the parts alone.

This is not at all to say that you should not study the Bible unless you have mastered the languages and customs of its origin. That is like saying that you cannot benefit from a meal unless you have mastered how to cook it. It will still taste wonderful and nourish your body, even if you have no idea what went into making it. All it means is that you should not try to interpret it to others, other than telling them how good it looked and tasted, and how much it may have strengthened you. Treat your study of the Bible the same way.

*Father Rick Losch+*

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## ***Be Wordly Wise***

### ***Acolyte***

Today when we hear of an acolyte, we generally think of an altar boy (and in many parishes today, an altar girl). The word is exclusively a noun, although it is increasingly used incorrectly as a verb. “To acolyte,” like “to waitress” or “to fellowship,” is an abomination to the ear of any grammarian. Although the word in general use is ancient, its use as an ecclesiastical term goes back only to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In the Medieval Church, Acolyte was originally a Minor Order, which is a lesser ecclesiastical office appointed and ordained by the bishop. Originally it was older teenagers, not young boys, who served at the altar. It was almost like a pseudo-apprenticeship, assessing whether the young man might have a calling to the priesthood. The word came into English from the Medieval Latin *acoluthus*, which derives from the Greek *akolouthos* (ακολουθος), follower or attendant. That in turn came from the Greek prefix *a-*, together, and *keleuthos* (κελευθος), path, road or journey. Anciently, then, an acolyte was a sidekick or companion. Today the word is also used secularly to mean a follower or assistant, and in the Church as a layman who assists the priest in the services.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## “Father, Into Thy Hands ...”

One of Jesus' last statements on the cross before he died was, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Whether he said it in Aramaic or in Hebrew, all the Jews present would have recognized it immediately. It is Psalm 31:5, and for thousands of years, observant Jews have concluded their evening prayers either with this verse, or with the first 5 verses of the psalm. It is the last words they say when they are in bed and prepared to go to sleep, and like the “Now I lay me down to sleep” prayer, it is one of the first bedtime prayers taught to little children. If they can, they say it in Hebrew, the formal language of their faith. In Jesus' day every faithful Jew knew most of the Psalms by heart, and often recited appropriate portions of them, particularly in times of great trouble or great joy. It is probable that as Jesus was dying, he recited the first five verses of Psalm 31 as follows:<sup>1</sup>

In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed:  
deliver me in thy righteousness.

Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my  
strong rock, for a house of defense to save me.

For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's  
sake lead me, and guide me.

Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for  
thou art my strength.

Into thy hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me,  
O LORD God of truth.

As is so often the case, we have the problem of finding the right word to use in translation, and thus we lose an important aspect of what has been said. The Hebrew word that we translate “commit” or “commend” is *afqid* (אָפִּיד). To commit something to someone means to put it into his care, and there is no implication in the word as to what will happen to it thereafter. *Afqid*, on the other hand, means to place something into

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<sup>1</sup> It is also likely that when he said, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1) that he did not fear that God had forsaken him. He was reciting Psalm 22, which parallels his suffering, but is a strong affirmation that even when it may look like it, God does not forsake us.

the hands of another with the full expectation of getting it back later in at least as good condition as when it was handed over. An analogy would be to deposit money into a bank account. We hand our money over to the bank with the full expectation of having it returned to us in full in the future, and probably with interest. The clear meaning of this verse in Hebrew is that we submit our spirit (our life and soul) into the hands of God, in full trust that it will be lovingly cared for and returned to us again. There could be nothing more appropriate than this passage as a bedtime prayer, or for Jesus on the cross as he faced death, trusting in his Resurrection.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***The Mark of the Beast***

The Book of Revelation,<sup>1</sup> probably more than any other book of the Bible, provides a plethora of passages that can be taken out of context to justify almost anyone's opinion on almost any subject. Because of that, it is necessary that it be studied carefully, not only in the light of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD meanings of its original language, but also in that of the culture and customs of the times. When the Book of Revelation was written, there were no Christians as we think of that term today. The followers of Jesus, most of whom still called themselves The Way, saw themselves as a sect of Jews who sought to practice the Jewish faith in a newly enlightened way that was taught by the Jewish Jesus. When John wrote Revelation, the separation between Christians and Jews was just in its infancy. This is a book written by a Jew for mainly Jewish readers, and it makes many references to things that any Jew would have understood, but are completely missed by most modern readers.

One of these things that is frequently misinterpreted is the Mark of the Beast (Rev. 16:2 et al.). In the first place, the Mark

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<sup>1</sup> It is Revelation (singular), not Revelations (plural). It is the account of God's revelation in a vision to Saint John the Divine (meaning John the cleric, not the John the god). The erroneous plural probably came from confusion with Jeremiah's Book of Lamentations, which is plural.

of the Beast is not to be confused with the Number of the Beast, which is 666 (Rev. 13:18) and most probably refers to Nero.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have disputed for almost 2000 years as to just who or what the Beast is. It is identified as many things, ranging from Satan to the Antichrist, and from a single despotic ruler (Nero?) to a vast secular empire (Rome?) or a global secular union of nations that is antipathetic to Christ. According to Revelation, the Beast will put his mark on the forehead and hand of those who have turned away from God. The significance of this would have been immediately clear to both Greco-Romans and Jews. Many Roman slaves were branded or tattooed on the forehead or hand with their owner's mark or name, as a means of identifying and returning them if they ran away.<sup>2</sup> In most Christian baptismal rites, the baptizer traces a cross on the forehead with blessed oil or the water of baptism, saying words to the effect of, "You are marked as Christ's own forever."

The Jews also saw the significance of the mark. The Torah commands, "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. . . Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead" (Deut. 6:6ff). To this day many observant Jews practice this command literally with the use of what are called *Tefillin* (תְּפִלִּין), also known from the Greek as Phylacteries. These are a set of two small black leather boxes with leather straps, containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with verses from the Torah. Using the straps, one *tefillah* is bound to the forehead, and the other to the back of the hand, and they are worn during the reciting of the morning prayers. They symbolize one's being bound to God. When

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<sup>1</sup> Nero's persecution of the Christians, which was the first, had taken place only about two decades before John wrote the Revelation. It was still very much present in the memory of John's readers.

<sup>2</sup> This was rarely done to slaves who were known to be loyal or trustworthy, and there were a great many of these. The Romans preferred not to have slaves identified as such. They feared that if the slaves realized how numerous they were, they would revolt. The slave rebellion led by Spartacus in 73 BC proved that this fear was not unfounded. The slave population in 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Rome is estimated to have been as high as 35%.

John's Jewish readers read about the Mark of the Beast, which marks the forehead and hand of those who have abandoned God, they would immediately have recognized it as the evil equivalent of the *tefillin*, which mark them as God's own.

The Mark also recalls Jerusalem in Ezekiel's time, when the city was under siege by the Babylonians in retribution for its turning from God. Ezekiel was commanded to mark the righteous on their foreheads. "[Go] through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it" (Ezek. 9:4). All who did not have the mark were slaughtered, but those who did were saved (think also of Ash Wednesday). The Mark of the Beast in Revelation is the exact opposite. It marks all who have turned from God and will be destroyed at the end times.

A common mistake made in reading Revelation is taking it as a literal prophecy of what is to come. Biblical prophecy is not a direct foretelling of the future, but rather an allegorical guide to how we are to look at, interpret, and respond to coming events. A good example of this is a current issue today. Regardless of which side one takes on it, Covid vaccination is a controversial topic that has inspired many fiery arguments. I have heard claims that it is Revelation's Mark of the Beast. Whether vaccination is good or bad, this claim is nonsense. In the first place it is not on the hand or the forehead, but in the upper arm, and it does not leave a mark. Secondly, Revelation says that those who do not bear the Mark will be cut off from secular society and can neither buy nor sell. Granted, for a while those in power got carried away and people without "the card" were restricted in many ways, but it is pushing it a bit far to compare that with the situation described in Revelation.

Revelation clearly warns us of the horrors of a society that has abandoned faith and walked away from God, and we certainly need to heed those warnings. It is also dangerous for us, however, to take the allegorical prophecies of Revelation literally, and try to apply them to specific events in today's world.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Neolithic Building Plans***

Ancient builders were amazing, in that for the most part they had no blueprints as we think of them today. Each day, the master builder would draw plans and give instructions for his workmen to follow. Most of the construction was in the master builder's mind, and final plans were rarely drawn out in advance. Usually, the only thing that was drawn in advance of starting construction was a plat designating the outlines and ground preparation for the project. Even so, a master builder would have an image in his mind of the finished building.

A prehistoric method of hunting, in regions where the terrain permitted it, is called corralling. A box canyon is a canyon that is closed at one end, like a cul-de-sac. Southwestern American Indians would stampede game into a box canyon, driving them to the narrow closed end where hunters would be waiting.

In the Middle East there are few such natural traps, so neolithic hunters built stone-walled corrals for the same purpose. These corrals, called desert kites, were huge, often with walls thousands of feet long that enclosed many thousands of square feet. Some of them as old as 10,000 years still survive. In order to fit the terrain, these walls are very irregular, meandering around hills and out-cropping rock formations.



Recent archaeological digs in Jordan and Arabia have uncovered 9000-year-old stone slabs with drawings that match almost exactly the shapes of nearby desert kites. At first this was a puzzle, because the kites are so large that their shapes can be seen only from the air. Being scientists, they were not tempted by space alien theories, and they tried to figure out how these people could have made such accurate drawings without modern technology or an arial view. Then they realized that these were not drawings of the kites as they were, but plans for them as they were to be built. It appears that they were ancient blueprints, and the oldest ever found.

It is not certain that these were construction plans, even though considering their accuracy, that is the most likely explanation. While there is sufficient evidence for their being able to build according to the directions indicated by the drawing, there is no evidence that they had the ability to draw so precise a picture of something that was already there, but which they could not see as a whole. It is possible, however, that the drawings had a ritual purpose for invoking the spirits to guide the animals into the kites. They may also have had the dual purpose of planning the kite, and then ritually enhancing its use. It was previously believed that true-to-life depictions did not appear in the Middle East until about 2000 B.C., but now that belief must be re-evaluated.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Holy Bible, Hoy Qur'an***

Christians, regardless of the degree of authority they give the Bible, believe it to be a holy book. Notwithstanding, there does not seem to be any distinction among Christians between the terms Bible and Holy Bible. Whether they take it literally or not, and whether it is in its original languages or in translation, they still believe that it proclaims the inspired Word of God, and thus deem it holy. Strict Muslims, on the other hand, are careful about the use of the adjective Holy. They believe that the Angel Gabriel dictated the Qur'an to Muhammad word for word in Arabic, conveying to him the exact words of Allah, and commanding him to learn and recite them exactly (the Arabic word *qur'an* means recite). Because of this, to them the Qur'an is truly Holy only when it is in Arabic. Translations are revered and treated with the utmost respect in that they convey the teachings of Allah, but the adjective Holy (uppercase H) correctly applies only to the Arabic original. Many modern Muslims are much more liberal on this matter, but to a strictly observant Muslim the Arabic version is the Holy Qur'an, and any translation, though honored, is simply the Qur'an.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Dispensationalism and the Rapture***

Two modern Christian teachings,<sup>1</sup> Dispensationalism and the Rapture, have become very popular in Fundamentalist and Evangelical Protestantism, especially in America, even though they are rejected by most of worldwide Christianity.

Dispensationalism teaches that history is divided into several distinct Dispensations, in each of which God dealt with humans in different ways, with different demands and expectations. The three Dispensations most significant to Christians are the Pre-Abrahamic Dispensation in which the world was entirely pagan, the Jewish Dispensation in which God selected the descendants of Abraham through Jacob to prepare the way for Christ, and the Christian Dispensation in which God favors only the followers of Christ. Strict Dispensationalism has faint echoes of an early Christian heresy, Manichaeism. This heresy, which was influenced by Persian Zoroastrianism, taught that there are two Gods, an evil, violent and materialistic God of the Old Testament, and a good, loving and spiritual God of the New. Dispensationalism does not teach this dualism, but the idea of discrete “Dispensations” in each of which God treats mankind differently is uncomfortably reminiscent of this.

The Rapture<sup>2</sup> teaches that at the end times Christ will return and transfigure all the righteous, living and dead, and take them into heaven with him. Two groups will be left behind: those whose evil living has condemned them to eventual damnation, and those who are as yet unworthy of salvation, but have the potential to be saved if they repent and reform their lives. There are many interpretations of the nature of the Rapture, most of which are rooted in various concepts of Millennialism. Millennialism is the belief that there will be a thousand-year period

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<sup>1</sup> We call them modern because they were first widely taught in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and spread rapidly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>2</sup> The word Rapture has nothing to do with ecstasy or bliss. It comes from the Latin *raptura*, seizing, and refers to Christ's seizing us up from the earth. *Raptura* is also the root of the word raptor, a predatory bird such as an eagle or osprey, that snatches up its prey from the surface of the water.

during which Christ reigns physically on earth. Some say that this will be a time of perfect peace and harmony, while others teach that the righteous will live in bliss, while the unrighteous will suffer hardship and torment (the “Great Tribulation”). Most Christians worldwide reject both concepts, arguing that the thousand years in Revelation (20:2ff) are metaphorical and refer to the undefined time that the Church prevails on earth.

The doctrine of the Rapture is based mainly on three Bible passages. In Matthew 24:40-41, Jesus says in two short parables, “One shall be taken, and the other left.” If we go back to the Greek, however, it says one shall be received (*paralambonetai*, παραλαμβάνεται) and the other sent away (*aphietai*, αφιεται). This does not imply a snatching away, but appears more like the Last Judgment, where some shall be welcomed and others rejected. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, Paul says that “the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.” Here again we have a reference to the Resurrection of the Dead at the end of the world. The traditional interpretation is that all the dead shall be raised, good and evil alike, and all shall then be judged. It does not seem like there is any indication of a rapture of the righteous where the unrighteous are left behind. The third passage, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, is the most compelling in support of the Rapture, yet it also is open to a wide variety of interpretations. It says, “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven, ... and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.” There is no other passage in the Old or New Testaments that parallels this one. The nearest things to it are the story of the Transfiguration, in which a cloud envelops the transfigured Christ, and that of the Ascension, when he is taken up into a cloud. Being in the air, however, is a common metaphor for transcendent or spiritual existence, and this is how the Church interpreted this passage for centuries. As we can see in the Risen Christ, the resurrected body is an exalted state that is not subject to the limitations of physical earthly existence, and thus

is symbolized by meeting the Lord “in the air.” Nonetheless, those who teach the Rapture tend to take this passage literally.

Dispensationalism and the Rapture as they are modernly taught are primarily the ideas of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Irish preacher and theologian John Nelson Darby (1800-1892). He was educated as a lawyer and had never formally studied theology, yet he was ordained a priest in the Church of Ireland.<sup>1</sup> He was vehemently anti-Catholic. In 1831 Darby renounced the Church of Ireland and joined up with a movement of Pentecostal Evangelicals known as the Plymouth Brethren. During that period, he developed his thoughts on Dispensationalism and the Rapture, based on ancient ideas that were never widely accepted until then. These ideas spread slowly in Great Britain, but in America they were embraced by Cyrus Scofield (1843-1921), a prominent Texan Presbyterian minister, theologian and writer. In 1909 Scofield published the Scofield Reference Bible, a thoroughly annotated study Bible that immediately became extremely popular in most Protestant denominations, and is still widely used today. The doctrines of Dispensationalism and the Rapture are extensively taught in it. They caught on quickly, and have become an integral part of the teaching of many American Protestant denominations today.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***The Epistle is Online***

The last eleven years of *The Epistle* are online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top. On a mobile device, click on the blue menu at the top right and select the “Epistle” page. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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<sup>1</sup> The Church of Ireland is the established church in Ireland (now only in Northern Ireland). It is an offshoot of the Church of England and is a part of the Anglican Communion, but it is very strongly influenced by Protestantism (mainly Calvinism), and in many respects is closer liturgically and theologically to Presbyterianism than to traditional Anglicanism.

## *The Hanging Gardens of Where?*

Of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World,<sup>1</sup> six unquestionably existed, and we know exactly where they were. The one that has never been found, and therefore whose very existence has been challenged, is the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. According to several ancient Greek writers, as well as to the Jewish historian Josephus, the Hanging Gardens were built by King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon for his wife Amytis, who was homesick for the lush mountain forests of her Median homeland. The Greeks considered it a marvel of engineering that included a water-lift irrigation system that was centuries ahead of its time, and may well have been the inspiration for Archimedes' greatest invention, the water screw. There are several reasons for arguing that they may have been no more than a figment of the ancient imagination, like Atlantis. There are many descriptions of them by non-Babylonians, mainly Greeks, but none in any Babylonian documents, of which thousands survive. The ruins of ancient Babylon lie about 50 miles south of modern Baghdad, and they have been extensively excavated. Nothing has been found that even hints of such a wondrous structure. Some have suggested that they may not have been in Babylon itself, but in Nebuchadnezzar's Outer Palace. Unfortunately, the millennia have not been kind to that, and there is very little of the Outer Palace that has been preserved.

Another answer to the question has been proposed, and archaeologists and historians are increasingly leaning toward it as a possibility. The Hanging Gardens may not have been Babylonian at all. They may have been Assyrian, located in Nineveh, and built by the Assyrian king Sennacherib (r. 705-681 BC), who conquered Babylon almost a century before the time of Nebuchadnezzar II (r. 605-562 BC). When Sennacherib defeated Babylon, he diverted the Euphrates River away from the

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<sup>1</sup> These were (chronologically) the Great Pyramid of Cheops, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus in Persia, the Colossus of Rhodes, and the Pharos (Lighthouse) of Alexandria.

city. There is no evidence that Nebuchadnezzar ever restored it, yet all the descriptions of the gardens say that they drew the irrigation water from the Euphrates.

The strongest argument for Nineveh, however, is that while there is no Babylonian mention of any gardens, many Assyrian documents refer to Sennacherib's extensive horticultural projects in Nineveh. Also, several of his inscriptions mention his building of a palace in Nineveh with a spectacular garden that he calls "a wonder for all peoples," which included a groundbreaking irrigation system very similar to the alleged Babylonian one described by the Greek historians Strabo and Herodotus. Finally, archaeological finds in Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh reveal gardens that were very similar to the ancient descriptions of the so-called Hanging Gardens of Babylon. It seems likely, then, that the Hanging Gardens of Babylon were in reality the Hanging Gardens of Nineveh.

This raises the question, of course, of how all the classical historians could have gotten it so wrong. It is not as surprising as it might seem. Most of the later classical writers considered all of Mesopotamia, including Sumer, Assyria and Babylonia, to have been one nation. They often conflated Nineveh and Babylon as a single city, and Josephus frequently conflated Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar as one person. The reason is that there were two Babylonian empires. Sennacherib defeated the first, but moved the Babylonian religious cult to Nineveh and retained much of Babylonian political structure. In 616 BC the Babylonian Nabopolassar rebelled, defeated the Assyrians, and established the Second Babylonian (or Neo-Babylonian) Empire. This would later be ruled by Nebuchadnezzar II, who defeated Judah and destroyed Jerusalem in 597 BC. These three empires all shared a common culture, religion, language (Akkadian) and land, so they were often viewed as one.

It is probable, then, that the Hanging Gardens really did exist, but that they were Assyrian rather than Babylonian, and were built by King Sennacherib in his capital, Nineveh.

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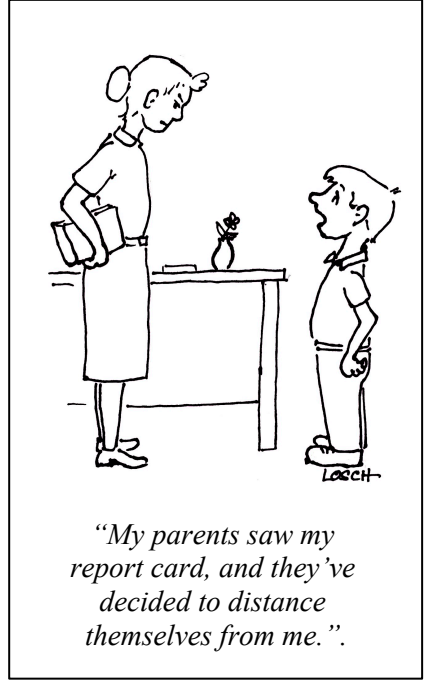
## A Touch of Trivia

More Americans died in the Civil War than in World Wars I and II, Korea, and Vietnam combined. If their 620,000 names were arranged on a wall like the Vietnam Memorial, it would be a mile long. The war killed 2% of the American population, which would be equivalent today to 6,600,000 men. Two thirds of them died from disease rather than from battle. The camps were breeding grounds for measles, dysentery and typhoid, which were usually fatal under those conditions. Over a million contracted malaria, and many thousands died from it.

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JAMIE

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