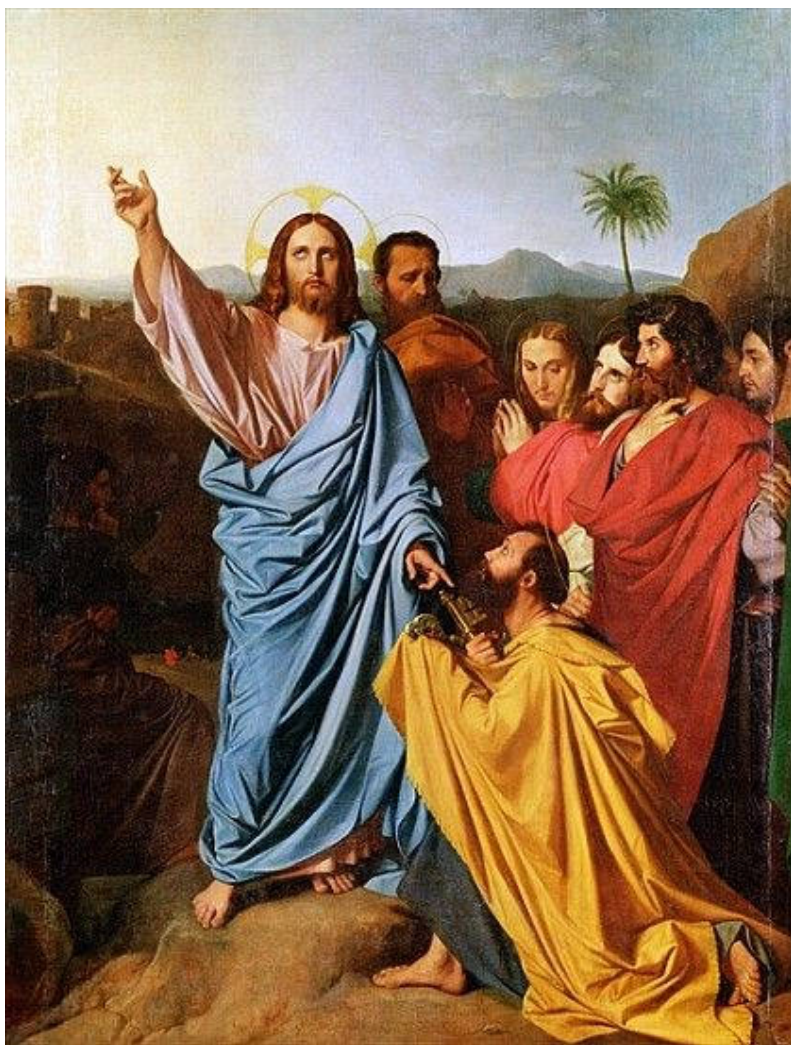


THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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January 2021

This Month's Cover

Our cover painting this month is *Christ Delivering the Keys to Saint Peter* by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. It is oil on canvas, and was completed about 1820. It is a very small painting, measuring only 11¾"x8½", roughly the size of a modern sheet of letter paper. It is owned by the Musée Ingres in Montauban, France. In 2015 it was put up for auction at Christie's in London with an estimated value of £150,000. Christie's has many Ingres works, and we cannot find whether this one has yet been sold. Ingres executed the painting as a birthday gift for his friend Jean-François Gilibert, and presented it in 1821. It remained in the hands of Gilibert's descendants until it was sold to a fashionable hotel in Bordeaux in 1987, after which it was purchased by the Ingres Museum in Montauban.

Matthew 16:13-20 tells the story of the Confession of St. Peter (January 18). In this usage the word confession does not mean acknowledgment of sin, but rather testimonial of faith (*cf.* "Be Wordly Wise" below). When Jesus asked the Apostles who they thought he was, Peter immediately answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus then told him, "You are Peter [*Petros*, Greek for Rock], and on this Rock will I build my Church." He allegorically gave him the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, which is interpreted as establishing him as the chief of the Apostles (*cf.* "The Keys of the Kingdom" below). On this passage is based the legend that Saint Peter is the guardian of the Gates of Heaven (the "Pearly Gates").

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) was a French Neoclassical painter who was enamored of the styles of the past and very much opposed to the newly rising Romantic style. Although he considered himself primarily a painter of histor-

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ical subjects, he is best known for his portraits, for which he was much in demand during his lifetime. He painted only a few religious subjects. The French culture of the early 19th century, following on the heels of the French Revolution, was very materialistic and anti-clerical, so most French religious art, including that of Ingres, was usually severely criticized.

Ingres was born in 1780 into a modest Provencal family in Montauban. His talent was recognized early, and he received good training in Provence. At some time in his teens he moved to Paris, where he made his Salon debut and won a prize for one of his early classical paintings. In 1806 he moved to Rome, where he was strongly influenced by Italian Renaissance art. He then went on to Florence, where he continued gaining recognition and acclaim. In 1824 he achieved widespread fame for his *Vow of Louis XIII*, which was in the style of Raphael. In 1836, indignant about being harshly criticized for his *Martyrdom of Saint Symphorian*, he returned to Rome to become the director of the French Academy there. In 1841 he returned to Paris for good. In his later years he repainted some of his earlier works, and moved to a new style, the Orientalist. In that style he painted what is probably his most famous work, *The Turkish Bath*. Although he disliked the Romantic and Academic styles, critics maintain that his work had a significant influence on both, as well as on the later styles of the Impressionists and Picasso. He died in 1867 at the age of 86.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

Jesus said to Peter, “Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). This is often understood to mean whatever may be brought against the Church, evil cannot prevail in the end. If we consider this carefully, however, that may not be what Jesus meant. Gates are defensive safeguards, not offensive weapons. They cannot go on the attack. They are designed to hold back an attack, and the only way they can prevail is to hold it back

effectively. The temporal Church is called the Church Militant because it is at war with the powers of evil. Saint Paul even describes our armor (Eph. 6:10-17). Jesus implies that we are expected to take that war directly to the gates of Hell itself, and that ultimately those gates will not prevail against the attack of the forces of righteousness. In other words, we are to go on the offensive, and our victory is assured. There is no promise that the battle will be easy—in fact we assured that it will be extremely difficult—yet we are also assured that we will triumph.

Light and darkness are opposites, but they are not equals. Since darkness is nothing but the absence of light, light can dispel darkness, but darkness cannot dispel light. The tiniest candle can drive away at least some of the darkness, and the only way the darkness can prevail against it is if we leave the candle untended and let it burn out. Only if we fail to maintain the light can darkness overcome it. In romantic legendry a vampire can come out as soon as the last of the daylight is gone, and he must flee back to his hiding place at the first sign of dawn. The darkness does not force him to emerge, it allows him to do so. The light, however, forces him to seek the safety of darkness or die. So it is with the war between good and evil. The light of righteousness can destroy the darkness of evil, but it must be brought to the darkness before it can do so..

As Christians, we are warriors against the powers of evil. If we fail to confront that evil head-on, then the darkness that ensues is an invitation for evil to advance. A warrior without armor and weapons is not only useless, but can also be a hindrance to those who are prepared to fight. Saint Paul has described our armor, and the Church has provided us with our weapons. It is now up to us to use them. Our weapons are the Holy Spirit, prayer, Holy Scripture, the Sacraments, and a knowledge of the teachings of the Church. With these we can shine the light of Christ through the gates and directly into Hell, and dispel evil forever. Christ promised us that victory, but he put it into our hands to engage the battle.

Father Rick Losch

Annual Parish Meeting

At the Annual Parish Meeting held on Sunday, December 6th, Roy Underwood and Ethel Scott were elected to the Vestry for terms expiring on December 31, 2022, replacing Hiram Patrenos and Madelyn Mack whose terms expired December 31st, 2020. Other members of the Vestry are Joe Moore and Rosalie Dew whose terms expire on December 31, 2021. Because of the need to keep the meeting as brief as possible due to the COVID restrictions, the usual reports of various parish organizations were not made. If you have questions regarding the work of an organization, you are encouraged to speak to the leader of that organization. The Vestry met following the Annual Meeting and elected the following officers for 2021: Roy Underwood, Senior Warden; Rosalie Dew, Junior Warden; Hiram Patrenos, Treasurer; and Fr. Losch, Clerk. Thank you to Mr. Patrenos and Ms. Mack for their dedicated service to the Vestry and St. James'.

Hiram Patrenos

Every Member Canvass

Thank you to everyone who has returned their pledge cards. If you have not yet completed your pledge card, it is not too late. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the church. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James'. Cards may be placed in the Alms Basins or mailed to St. James' Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470.

Hiram Patrenos

Parish Directory Update

We will be updating the Parish Directory during January. Please review it for an errors and/or omissions and give any additions or corrections *in writing* to Hiram Patrenos or e-mail them to him at patrenoj@bellsouth.net. The updated directory will be available on the first Sunday of February.

Hiram Patrenos

Be Wordly Wise

Confession

When we hear the word confession, the first thing that normally comes to mind is acknowledgment of sin or guilt. While that is a valid definition, it is historically only a secondary one. For centuries the primary meaning of confession was testimonial or declaration of faith, belief or trust. This is why Saint Peter's acknowledgment of Jesus' Messiahship is called the Confession of Saint Peter, and Saint Augustine's biography is called his *Confession*. The word derives from the Latin *confessus* which is the past participle of *confiteor*, acknowledge. The Latin prefix *con-* has two meanings. It can mean together, but it also can be used to express intensive force, as it is used here. The other root is the verb *fateri*, declare or vow. Thus a confession is an intense declaration of faith, guilt or intention.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

Mustard is a basic condiment in every kitchen, but did you ever wonder where the name came from? The Romans were not particularly fond of unfermented grape juice as a drink. They called it *mustum* (we call it must), but they did like to drink it in one form. They mixed it with a pulverized seed they called *granum sinapis*—we call it mustard seed. In its raw state ground mustard seed is very hot (e.g. Chinese mustard). Acid reduces its spiciness. That is why standard prepared mustards are made with vinegar (Chinese mustard is not), and why the Romans used low-acid grape juice instead of acidic wine. Since there is not much acid in grape juice, it produced a very hot (spicy) drink that was guaranteed to get their attention. They called it *mustum ardens*, “fiery wine.”¹ Just as we do in English, they often elided phrases into single jargon words. They elided *mustum ardens* into *mustardum* or mustard.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ The usual Latin word for wine is *vinum*, but *mustum* can also mean wine.

The Most Annoying Song of Christmas

You may wonder why we have a Christmas article in the January issue, now that Christmas is all over. It is because Christmas is not all over. We remind you that while Christmas begins at sundown December 4, the Christmas Feast does not end until sundown January 1 (the end of the Christmas Octave), the Christmas Festival ends at sundown January 5 (the Eve of the Epiphany), and the Christmas Season ends at sundown February 1 (the Eve of the Purification). So, merry Christmas!

The song “The Twelve Days of Christmas” has been called (perhaps justifiably) the most annoying song of Christmas, yet it is evident that it is here to stay.¹ Its nature leads most people to assume that it is of medieval origin, but it comes to us from much later than that.

Despite the fact that these days Christmas decorations appear on store shelves before Halloween, Christmas does not actually begin until sundown on December 24, and it lasts twelve days, ending at sundown on January 5. This represents the traditional time from when Jesus was born until the visit of the Magi, whom the King James Version calls Wise Men.² In reality their visit was probably several months later.

There is a long-standing myth that the song was a secret code of Christian instruction that originated during the 16th century persecution of Roman Catholics in Britain, but there is no evidence whatever to support that.³ In fact, all the evidence points to its originally being a late 18th century children’s

¹ Some have given that dubious honor to “The Little Drummer Boy.”

² They were not kings, and no translation identifies them as such. We also have no idea how many there were. Medieval tradition calls them kings and says that there were three, probably because of the three gifts.

³ The late William Studwell was a renowned historian specializing in Christmas carols. He, along with the majority of historians, has debunked the Coded Christian Instruction theory. We are sorry to throw cold water on your “fun fact” knowledge, but he also refuted the myth that “Ring Around the Rosie” is about the Black Plague.

game. The first known copy of it appeared in 1780 as a poem in a children's book called *Mirth With-Out Mischief*.¹ Most historians think it originated as a "memory-and-forfeits" game, in which each player adds an item to a list, and the other players have to remember the list as it expands. "The House that Jack Built" and "The Court of King Caracticus" are examples. These games were very popular in the 18th century, and were thought to be good tools for developing children's memories.

There have been many variations of the "Twelve Days of Christmas" game. Some have included "ships a-sailing" and "bears a-baiting," and in some the mother instead of the true love gives the gifts. In early versions there were four "colly" birds (an archaic word meaning coaly, or black). It is thought that the five gold rings refer to a ring-necked pheasant, and are thus consistent with the bird theme of the original poem.

There is no evidence that the poem was used as a song until 1909. In that year the English musician Frederick Austin set it to music with the tune we know today. He also changed colly birds to calling birds. His version is still the most popular one.

PNC Financial Services calculated the cost of the twelve gifts. The total would be \$38,993.59. If, as the song indicates, the list for each day were given (a total of 364 gifts) it would cost \$170,298.03. You might want to stick to a necktie.

(Thanks to Tanya Pal at Vox.com for much of this information)

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last eight years of *The Epistle* are now 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+

¹ A first edition recently sold at Southeby's for \$23,750. If that is beyond your budget, you can buy a paperback copy on Amazon for \$18.75.

Lead Poisoning in Ancient Rome

Scholars have argued for centuries about what caused the demise of Rome, and one theory (although not accepted by all) is that lead poisoning may have been a factor. Lead is chemically known as a heavy metal. Heavy metals build up in the body and stay there. They are not dissolved and eliminated as less dense metallic elements are. Heavy metal accumulation causes symptoms such as spasms, speech impediments, joint pain, gout, inability to make decisions, dementia, insanity, and ultimately general organ shut-down and resultant death.

Most Roman cities had extensive underground water systems that carried water from the aqueducts to fountains all over the city. These were the primary source of drinking water. Most of the water pipes were made of lead. Modern scientific analyses have shown that the lead in their water was several times the maximum that is acceptable today to the FDA and EPA.

Although their water would have caused an unhealthy level of lead in their bodies, there were also many other sources of lead. While the super-rich ate from gold or silver dishes and the poor used wooden or ceramic ones, a large portion of privileged Romans ate from pewter. Pewter today is an alloy of tin, copper and antimony, but in ancient times it also contained lead. Acidic foods (including wine) can pick up tiny amounts of lead, which are then ingested. Over time this can introduce a significant amount of lead into the body. Studies have shown high levels of lead in some ancient Roman bones.

The major source of ingested lead for the Romans, however, was not their water or their dishes. It was an artificial sweetener called *sapa* (concentrate), of which they were extremely fond.¹ Sapa was made by boiling down the unfermented juice of sweet grapes, often mixed with honey, to about one third of its original volume. This produced a thick sweet grape syrup that they would use for all sorts of purposes, including sweetening

¹ The Romans and Greeks knew of sugar, which was imported from India, but it was used only as a medicine, not as a food. They also used honey.

baked goods and wine (they loved wine sweetened with spices and honey or sapa). A fourth century AD Roman cookbook has over 100 recipes that call for sapa. This sounds harmless enough except for one major problem. Sapa was always boiled down in lead pots. There is a reason that lead was used for this when it was not otherwise used for regular cooking. They did not know the chemistry of it, but they discovered that when sapa is made in lead pots it is sweeter and tastes better. The reason is that chemicals in the grape juice bond with the lead to form lead acetate (“lead sugar”), which is sweet, thus enhancing the sweetness and flavor of the sapa.¹ They considered sapa made in ceramic or bronze pots to be inferior. One teaspoonful of sapa contained more lead than the maximum a human should be safely allowed in a day, yet the average upper-class Roman consumed several times that every day.

Documents from their lifetimes show that at least four emperors were particularly fond of sapa. They were Tiberius, Gaius Caligula, Nero, and Elagabalus (Marcus Aurelius Antoninus). The last three were clearly mad,² and it appears that Tiberius might well have gone mad in his old age. At best he lived a life of utter decadence and sexual depravity in his elder years. Madness is a major symptom of heavy metal poisoning.

There were too many factors that contributed to Rome’s fall to lay it entirely at the feet of lead poisoning. Notwithstanding, since the primary consumers of large amounts of lead were the upper classes and thus the leaders, there can be no question that it played a noteworthy role in that fall. A little lead in the brain can cause a lot of muddled thinking and bad decisions, and there was no shortage of those in many of Rome’s leaders.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ You can make sapa at home quite easily and safely as long as you don’t do it in lead vessels. Just add a little honey or sugar to commercial grape juice and boil it down to about a third of its volume. It is good on pancakes.

² Caligula went insane soon after he ascended the throne. Nero went mad during his reign, which at first was not all that bad. Elagabalus, a transgendered teenager, loved to swim in a pool filled with sapa-sweetened wine.

The Keys of the Kingdom

Early readers of the gospels would have had no trouble understanding the meaning of the story of Jesus giving Peter the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. This was something they all would have recognized. Many rich men of the time—both Jews and Gentiles—had a servant who was entrusted with great authority in the household. This was the chief steward. He was usually a slave, but he was highly trusted and privileged, and generally lived much better than most free men of the time. He was not only in charge of all the other slaves in the household, but also oversaw his master's business affairs including his finances. He arranged his daily schedule, decided which of the master's clients could meet with him privately that day, and often even decided who should be invited to his master's dinners and where they should sit. He was a combination of butler, social secretary, business manager and chief financial officer. Often he even functioned as the head of the household when the master was away. He was the most trusted member of the household, sometimes even more than the master's own family. This was a huge responsibility, and it was an extraordinary honor to be appointed chief steward. When a man was so appointed, there was a public announcement ceremony to make it widely known that he was entrusted with this authority. With much ceremony the new steward was presented with the keys not only to the gate of the villa, but to every door in it.

When Jesus told Peter, "I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 16:19), the Apostles understood immediately that Jesus was appointing him his chief steward. Since Peter later became the first Bishop of Rome, it was reasonable that much of the early Church also accepted his ecclesiastical descendants, the subsequent Bishops of Rome, as the chief stewards of Jesus' household the Church. Since in the absence of the master the chief steward was the *de facto* head of the household, the Bishop of Rome was often called Papa, as were many bishops. In English this title morphed from Papa to Pope.

Richard R. Losch+

The Donkey and the Elephant

Many people wonder how the donkey and the elephant came to be the symbols of the Democratic and Republican parties. In 1828 Andrew Jackson, the first candidate of the newly formed Democratic Party, ran against incumbent John Quincy Adams of the Whig Party. Jackson's opponents called him Andrew Jackass. Instead of being offended, Jackson was amused, and put a donkey on all his posters.¹ The donkey became an unofficial symbol of the party thereafter until in the 1870s, when the *Harper's Weekly* political cartoonist Thomas Nast used it in a cartoon.² From then on the Democratic Party generally accepted Nast's cartoon donkey as their official symbol.

The Republican Party was formed in 1854, and in 1860 Abraham Lincoln was its first member to be elected President. In the early 19th century soldiers referred to being in combat as "seeing the elephant." An 1860 political cartoon warned that Lincoln would lead us into war, and used an elephant as his symbol. It became loosely associated with the party until again Thomas Nast used it in a cartoon. In 1876 the *New York Herald* accused Ulysses S. Grant of planning to run for a third term. In a mocking cartoon Nast depicted all the political parties as animals, using the donkey for the Democrats and labeling an elephant "The Republican Vote." In subsequent years Nast used the elephant in many cartoons to symbolize the Republicans. It caught on, and soon became the accepted symbol of the party.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This can be an effective way to defuse an insult. Martin Luther hated the term "Lutheran," which was used as an insult by his opponents. His disciple Philip Melanchthon encouraged him to use the term and thus destroy its pejorative effect, and today it is the standard term for his followers. When Hillary Clinton called her opponents a "basket of deplorables," many Republicans started proudly calling themselves "Deplorables."

² Nast's cartoon of Saint Nicholas, based on Clement C. Moore's description in his poem *A Visit from Saint Nicholas* ("'Twas the night before Christmas"), is the source of most modern depictions of Santa Claus. Before that he was portrayed as a tall thin man in bishop's robes.

Interpreting the Bible

Bishop N. T. Wright tells of a woman who was in tears in church on the Sunday after the death of Princess Diana. The reason was that the priest, thinking that just about everything that could be said about that tragedy had already been said, preached instead about the Virgin Mary and never mentioned Diana. The woman was in tears not so much about Diana's death, but out of frustration from trying to tie in that death with what the priest had said about Mary. It never occurred to her that he would not have preached about Diana, because that was what she expected to hear. She could find no connection, because there was none. Bishop Wright points out that many people read the Bible in the same way. They open it up with preconceived ideas of what they expect it to say about any given subject, and then try to read those ideas into the text. This is one of the reasons that there can be so many different interpretations of almost any given passage of the Bible.

A classic example of this is in the variety of concepts of what Heaven is, about which the Bible actually tells us very little. Jesus often told us what it is *like*, but little about what it *is*. I know many people who, when they have lost a loved one, find consolation in the pagan thought that, "Uncle Harry is in Heaven now, fishing/golfing/whatever with Jesus." I am always tempted to reply firmly, "No, he is not!", but I usually keep quiet, because their bereavement is not the time to correct their theology. Equally pagan ideas are that the dead get wings and become angels, or that we will spend eternity soaring about as disembodied spirits playing harps and singing hymns (I am not sure how a disembodied spirit can play a harp, but I will let that go for the moment). None of these ideas is even hinted at in the Bible or in any of the Church's teachings. Some of them are consistent with the teachings of the pagan Greek philosophers Plato and Plutarch (who was a contemporary of Saint Paul), but Paul and the other Apostles would have shuddered at the thought of any Jew or Christian thinking that way.

Nonetheless, Plato's teaching has seriously infected much

Christian common thought, especially in modern times. He taught that the material world is corrupt and evil and our goal is to escape the corrupt mortal body and set free the pure immortal soul. That is wholly unacceptable to orthodox Christian thinking, yet multitudes of Christians will swear that this is taught in the Bible. They can often even support their argument by quoting biblical verses completely out of context.

What this all comes down to is that we must be careful when studying the Bible (or anything else) not to approach it with preconceived ideas and then try to twist its meaning around to fit those ideas. That is a hard thing to avoid, because it often forces us to have to change our ideas, and we do not like doing that. Keeping a closed mind can be very comfortable, as it provides us with security.¹ One of the biggest mistakes that many make is to pick out individual verses or short passages and try to interpret them out of context. The context of a verse is extremely important to its meaning, as is also the social and cultural situation that was the background to that verse. If you are unwilling or unable to learn about these, leave the interpretation of the verse to those who know what they are talking about. For example, I often hear people say that Jesus said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” and then use that as a justification for vengeance. It is true that Jesus said that. It is not a quote from the Scriptures, though, but from the Code of Hammurabi, an 18th century BC pagan Mesopotamian king who wrote a code of law. What Jesus said was, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ *But I say to you, ... if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also*” (Mt. 5:38f). That is quite different.

¹ I submit that one of the major problems in today’s society is that we have become so addicted to security that we automatically reject anything that might offend us. This leads to feeling threatened by anyone who disagrees with us. That in turn can lead to anger and even irrational rage and a desire to lash out against them. It also encourages us to seek a “safe space” where we will not be offended, and that in turn leads to censorship and the suppression of free speech. Sometimes a little offense can be good for us.

Most people who want to study the Bible do not know Hebrew or Greek, and are thus forced to study a translation. This is always a problem, because there are not many words in any language that have an exact equivalent in another. The best we can do is to come up with a word that is as close as possible to the meaning of the original. Words have subtle nuances. For example, “I like chocolate,” “I am fond of chocolate” and “I am partial to chocolate” all mean essentially the same thing, but each has its own delicate shade of meaning. Even if we can read the original language, we must remember that words change meaning over time. Many Hebrew and Greek words do not have quite the same meaning in their later biblical forms as they did in earlier classic forms of the languages. My recommendation to those who cannot go to the Hebrew and Greek is to get five modern translations that are widely recognized to be good ones.¹ Read the passage you want to study in each of these translations, then note any differences. In most cases this will give you a pretty good clue as to what the original meant. A consideration of the specific words that different translators choose to translate a given Hebrew or Greek word can give a better idea of what the original writer probably had in mind.

By all means study the Bible, and do so frequently. You will sometimes find that a passage you have read a dozen times before suddenly jumps out at you with a wholly new meaning. This can be the Holy Spirit speaking to you, but do not presume to think that what the passage says to you at that moment is necessarily what God intends it to say to the whole world for all time. We still need to trust in God’s guidance of the Church, and accept its teachings on the interpretation of the Holy Bible.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This should not include interpretive versions such as *The Good News Bible*, but should be actual translations. It should also not include the King James Version. While that was magnificent scholarship for its time, its time was four centuries ago. Not only have many of the English words changed meaning over the centuries, but we have since discovered earlier and more authentic documents than were available in the early 17th century.

A Touch of Trivia

When the characters in *The Big Bang Theory* speak Klingon, it is really Klingon that they are speaking. In the first *Star Trek* movie James Doohan (Scotty), an expert at mimicking accents, created several Klingon words. That inspired linguistics professor Marc Okrand to create a Klingon language for the movie *Star Trek III*. It includes grammar rules, dictionaries, and a book on pronunciation. It is so thorough that *Duolingo* has a course on Klingon, and it is one of the languages in the Bing Translator.

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JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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