



The Bible is an amazing book, and it's more than just a book. It's not just a collection of fun stories. Everything written in the Bible is true! 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that every word of it was inspired by God. It wasn't just a bunch of people setting out to record what God had done. It was a bunch of people writing what God intended for them to write.

The Bible has all different kinds of genres of writing. There is history, law, poetry, prophecy, and love letters. A lot of it is amazing. There's a lot of things that are inspiring. It teaches us who God is, tells us how to follow Him, and even tells us what our future will be like someday. But there's something else about the Bible that isn't always talked about. There are some parts that don't get taught a lot in some churches, and we've never talked about some of them here, because they are strange. I'm not exactly sure how to take some of what's written and teach you how to live that out.

[Author Note: I talk about a book series that I love and explain what I love about it. You can use this illustration word-for-word if you are also into it. If not, choose a book or books that you are passionate about reading.]

I love a good book. Books are powerful for me. A good novel can transport me to an entirely different world. My body reacts as though I'm actually there, holding my breath, heart pounding, anxious to see how it plays out. **No book series does this for me more than the Harry Potter books.** They have some of the best, most relatable characters. As I go through the books, I feel like I'm there with Harry, Ron, and Hermione, just like I'm one of their friends at Hogwarts. Each story has incredible tension, plot twists, and a surprising resolution, all while keeping the overarching story moving forward.

What's amazing is that I know there are seven books. I know Harry's not dying in books 1, 2, or 3, and yet, whenever his life is in danger, I can't put the books down. Like, what if he doesn't get away from the Dementors this time? What if Voldemort somehow succeeds this time? I need to see that he's going to be okay. I have to keep reading, even though I've already read those books and even seen the movies. I just love those stories and find them so compelling and almost irresistible.

The Bible has most of what Harry Potter has and even more! It also has some great characters, intense situations, an overarching story with a significant protagonist, Jesus. It's the most powerful story ever written, because it is God's Word. But it's not just powerful; it can be really strange! It has some really strange stuff in it. It's all true, but that only makes it *stranger*. It's wild enough that Jesus, who is God, walked on water when He was living here on Earth. But then, one of his disciples, a normal young guy, walked on water, too? There was a time when Jesus cast out demons into a bunch of pigs, who went cliff diving to their deaths. Animals talked to people from time to time, starting way back in the Garden of Eden, but then again when a donkey spoke for God. There was more than one occasion where naked people went streaking about without their clothes, not for fun, but it still happened, and God had the biblical authors include it. There was a man who lived in the belly of a fish for three days! How? I don't know, but it happened.

Over the next few weeks, I want to focus on some of the stranger scripture passages. God has said and done some amazing, wonderful, and weird things. What in the world was going on? Why do we think God had included them in the Scriptures? What was He up to, and how can I possibly take these stories and apply them in my life?

I want to start the series at the top. It doesn't get higher than God Himself. Jesus is God. In Jesus, God became human and lived here on Earth for over 30 years before being crucified. He was put to death for claiming to be God, but it was all part of the plan. He came to die, so He could make us right with God. We never could have done that on our own. We all sin, meaning we all go outside of God's plan. The penalty for sin is death and separation from God. But God loved you, anyway! Jesus came to die, and then He was raised from the dead.

Some people like to joke that Jesus is a zombie. I'm not sure I like that joke. I do like jokes in general, but I'm not super excited about joking about Jesus. But the bit goes that since He died and came back to life, it's like He's undead. It has been joked that He was the original zombie, though that doesn't even make sense. Considering Jesus Himself raised multiple people from the dead before He died kind of ruins that line of thinking. The thought of someone coming back to life is pretty strange, though. Where were they in the meantime? Were they in heaven, and did they remember any of it when they came back? What did it feel like? We just don't know.

Anyway, even though Jesus raised others back from the dead, His resurrection is the most astounding, so let's look at it.

**Luke 24:1-7 (NIV)**

*On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words.*

Jesus had more than twelve disciples. Did you know that? He had the main twelve that went with Him everywhere, one, Judas, that turned out to be quite a dud, but then He had many more besides them. He had men and women disciples that followed Him and His teaching, loved Him, and believed He was God as He claimed to be. In this passage, three of His female disciples turned up at the tomb to honor Jesus. Mark 16 records that the women were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James – not Jesus' mom – and Salome. Strangely, church tradition states that Salome's name was actually Mary Salome. So, all three female disciples here were named Mary, and Jesus' mom was named Mary. I'm sure that could get confusing around the table whenever a disciple talked about Mary doing or saying something.

Anyway, when everyone named Mary showed up to Jesus' tomb, it was empty. That was startling to them. Where had His body gone? But the angels were there and informed them that He was gone. He wasn't there, because He was alive. He had risen from the dead, just as He had said He would. I love the last verse. It's wild enough that Jesus' body was gone, not because it had been moved, but because He had risen from the dead. I think it's even wilder that Jesus had predicted it. I suppose it's relatively easy to predict one's death, especially as it draws near. But predicting one's death and resurrection and then actually resurrecting by one's own

power? That's a one-time thing. It had never happened before, and it hasn't happened since. Only Jesus could and did do that.

But here's where the joke about Jesus' being a zombie really falls flat. What do we know about zombies? I know I ask that as though they're real. Bear with me. What do we know? We know they eat people. They're fairly mindless. They're no longer who they once were. Once they become zombies, they brainlessly walk around looking for food, like low functioning animals. Jesus wasn't a zombie at all. When He came back, He came all the way back. He was fully alive, not just in body, but in mind and in spirit.

Jesus interacted with His disciples. He talked with them, He ate with them. He didn't eat them! He ate fish with them. He encouraged them and commissioned them to go and tell other people about Him. He wanted everyone to hear His message, to hear His story, to receive His salvation, as beautiful, and tragic, and wonderful, and strange as all of those true stories may have been.

Jesus didn't just tell them to talk about the good stuff, the easy stuff, though. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus told them to teach people everything that He had taught them. Some of what Jesus taught frustrated people. He didn't offer a free ride and an easy life. Some of what Jesus said made people walk away from Him and quit following Him. Some of it was just too strange to handle, perhaps none more so than what He said in John 6. Jesus had just amassed a huge following, because He had fed 5,000 men, plus women and children, using a single packed lunch. It was amazing. But not everyone was there for Jesus so much as what Jesus could do for them. He wasn't looking for takers, though; He was looking for committed followers, which He is what He was communicating in John 6.

### ***John 6:50-56 (NIV)***

***But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my***

*flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.*

Eating flesh? Drinking blood? Now, that *does* sound like zombie stuff, with some vampire thrown in for good measure! What in the world was He talking about? That's what the people wanted to know in verse 52. What did He mean? How could He, why would He, possibly give them flesh to eat and blood to drink? Thankfully, He didn't mean it literally. You do not have to, and definitely should not, be eating human flesh and drinking human blood. That doesn't make you a follower of Jesus. But the people here were frustrated, disgusted, and didn't want to look past the metaphor. Many walked away from Him.

What then did He mean? In verse 35 of the same chapter, Jesus had just said that anyone that came to Him would no longer hunger, and anyone that believed would no longer be thirsty. Again, He's speaking spiritually, not literally. Every person has a natural longing spiritually, a void that needs to be filled. Jesus is the only one that can make us whole and take away that longing. When we come to Him, we no longer have to search. So, to eat His flesh simply meant to come to Him in faith. To drink His blood meant to fully believe that He was who He said He was. He claimed to be God. Believe it. His blood was about to be shed to pay the penalty for our sin. Believe it.

Telling people that they must eat your flesh and drink your blood is strange. It would be too strange if He was being literal, and it would also limit the number of people who could have followed Jesus. The body and blood would have run out eventually. Thank God He was just using a strange metaphor. Coming to Jesus, having faith and belief in Him, satisfies our soul's greatest longing.

Maybe you know you have a longing, you've been searching for answers, you know something is missing, and you haven't been able to resolve it on your own. Jesus is the answer to that longing. John 14:6 says that He is the only way, the only truth, and the only life. He is life, and the avenue by which we experience life and full life. He died, so you could live. He was raised from the dead, so you could also be raised after death to experience eternal life with Him in heaven.

*John 6:35 (NIV)*