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ART REFERENCES

PREFACE WITH ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1:17 JUST PITH: AN INTRODUCTION

The book begins with a discussion of the hindrances that prevent reading the Bible as secular literature and offers a sketch of the various audiences for whom this book is intended. It then considers how our limited view of the Bible throughout history has inspired ideologies, events, and attitudes that range from beautiful to annoying to horrifying—yet many of which are only loosely grounded in the text. The chapter concludes with an enticing list of some of the strange, beautiful, and confounding things revealed by a close reading of the secular Bible and suggests the extent to which understanding the Bible as literature might offer true enlightenment.

2:23 PICK YOUR GOD: CONTENT OR BENT

A short description of the evolution of the Bible addresses the common misconception that the Bible is a non-evolving, uniform text. It segues into an explanation of two opposite versions of God and of creation in the Book of Genesis that are usually conflated into one version by other retellings: the seven-day version, placed first (but actually written around 600 years later) to “correct” the earlier Adam-and-Eve version, which appears second. One version represents God as composed, the other as temperamental. They place different emphases on morality, and offer conflicting ideas about the relationship between men and women, about humans’ respect for the environment, and about the nature of fate.

3:33 WONDER WOMEN: EVE, RUTH, ESTHER

A second-person point of view pays homage to Eve’s innocent and then noble spirit, and traces this spirit through Ruth and Esther in their respective Biblical books. The chapter debunks the myth of the serpent as Satan and the partaking of the tree of knowledge as evil. It demonstrates the ways Ruth, a Moabite, who puts love before religion, is an extension of Eve’s spirit, which will birth David’s lineage. It reveals the ways Eve’s spirit is further manifested in Esther, a Jewess turned

Persian queen by marrying king Ahaseurus, one of the most powerful leaders in the ancient world, giving Esther a position that allows her to use her shrewd wit to overcome evil.

4:39 "IN A WORLD OF PATRIARCHAL POWER . . ." (A TRAILER FOR SATIRE?)

Freed from traditional religious and cultural myths, a "Martian" observer discovers that much of the Book of Genesis is a satire on power rather than a glorification of Israel's patriarchs. The chapter's outsider point of view reveals darkly humorous scenarios about those whom God stands behind despite their immoral or violent natures: Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob with his sons Simeon and Levi in their handling of the rape of their sister Dinah, and Jacob's son Judah, who has sex with his own daughter-in-law Tamar. In this satiric context, the ritual of circumcision takes on a different throb than in modern religious settings.

5:49 THE STRAIGHT MAN AND ABRAHAM: INAUGURAL HUMOR

God is put in a new light by viewing Him in the role of a straight man as a foil to Abraham, whose overblown reactions and interruptions to God's miracles and the upcoming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah become increasingly comedic. Genesis is packed with dark humor, as in the story of Lot and his daughters. The chapter includes a fresh interpretation of the Abraham and Isaac sacrifice story, which turns out to be more about blindness than blind faith. It also includes analysis of many artworks such as Hansellar's depiction of Lot and his daughters, and Caravaggio's, Brunelleschi's, and Ghiberti's depictions of Abraham and Isaac.

6:57 SIBLING SIZZLE: CHILD PSYCHOLOGY BUSTED

A stroke of genius in the Book of Genesis is its suggestion that the primary energizer of the human condition is a battle between rejection and jealousy—a battle dramatized in stories of parental favoritism and sibling rivalry. This chapter explores a contemporary clinical psychologist's advice on how to minimize the rejection, angst, and aggression created by sibling dynamics and demonstrates how Genesis makes such advice look optimistic, even unrealistic, next to the stories of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Rachael and Leah, and Laban and Rebekah. The chapter also considers how the use of piety weakens the initial raw depiction of sibling sizzle in the story of Joseph and his brothers.

7:87 EPISTLE TO HOLLYWOOD: THE REAL STORY OF MOSES

A film consultant critiques the Book of Exodus for a producer who desires more authenticity than any past filmmaker. This close look reveals a story completely unlike typical Sunday school and Hollywood conceptions. The Lord's personality is unexpectedly obsessive-compulsive, as He demands absurd lists of instructions, creates interminable cycles of failures that undo His miracles, and repetitively hardens the Pharaoh's heart so the Israelites are oppressed over and over again. Moses, with "uncircumcised lips" that initially fear speaking to the Lord, is obsessed with moving his magic staff up and down, turning the action on and off like a child. This chapter also includes a discussion of filmmaker Krzysztof Kieslowski's *The Decalogue* that extends the meanings of the Ten Commandments.

8:99 DISCIPLE LOWLIGHTS: TRUST AND DISGUST

The Gospel of Mark largely centers on the creative fire between Jesus and his disciples, which lowers to a flicker due to the disciples' spiritual impotence. This chapter discusses Jesus's case for using metaphor and parable interpretation as a test for entry in the Kingdom of God. It shows the many ways the disciples fail to pass: they are clueless about the parable of the seed, confused by the division of the loaves of bread, halfwits when Jesus walks on water, and shocked by the consequences of standing against authority. Mark connects the disciples' inadequacies with our own, but Jesus is patient. An analysis of paintings by Isenmann, Giotto, and Caravaggio clarifies how Judas is symbolic of a group betrayal by all the disciples, not just his own.

9:111 FROM HALLOW TO CALLOW: MARK TO JOHN

A Q&A format reveals Mark, the earliest gospel writer, as rendering Jesus's character with morality, humility, humor, and creativity, and exposes the Gospel of John as replacing these qualities with a Jesus obsessed with witless glory. Includes an explanation of how John dehumanizes Judas, muddles Mark's insightful Pontius Pilot, and turns Mark's solemn crucifixion—made moving by its absence of resurrection—into an insatiable manifesto of insecurity. Covers a fresh explanation of the importance of women in Mark's depiction of the crucifixion. Eventually we see that John tilts away from a Jewish Jesus at odds with his own community's authorities and more towards a Jesus at odds with Jews, as if they were outsiders. Despite some meaningful passages, John generally replaces a tragedy of universal significance with a meaningless plot littered with careless dialogue.

10:143 REALLY, JESUS: SCENES FROM ACADEMIA

Four surprising, rarely considered aspects of Mark's gospel are illuminated, made more vivid by being cast as anecdotes set in modern academic settings. A professor uses one of Jesus's quotes about family to explain his commitment to studying *Moby Dick*; another professor defends her use of an offensive scene in an Ingmar Bergman film by recalling the metaphoric definition of the Holy Spirit in Mark and Luke; an art class studies a performance art piece performed by Jesus on the subject of defilement and then mimics it; and an art history professor jettisons her art history book to discuss the ways paintings of the crucifixion add to and distract from the gospel's descriptions of the event.

11:161 EPISTLE TO LUKE: CRINGES AND CHEERS

A startled writer pens a personal letter to Luke celebrating his momentous additions of parables to Mark's gospel. The writer also highlights details that make him wince: manipulative birth scenes of John the Baptist and Jesus, depictions of Jesus's youth that undermine his courage in the book of Mark. The epistle touches on Jesus's confrontation with Satan (including its later use by Dostoevsky); the complex parables of the sinful woman at Simon the Pharisee's home and the good Samaritan; Jesus's surprising, Zen-like response to ambition; stunning responses on the hypocrisy of lawyers; and ideas about wasted potential in the parable of the prodigal son and the parable of the talents. The letter notes some strong additions Luke made to Mark's tragic ending, but also recounts the ways he flubbed it.

12:179 HUMMUS IN EPHEBUS: A PAGAN CONVERSATION

A dialogue between two lovers visiting Ephesus, who banter about their sexuality and identification with pagan art while discussing highlights of the books of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and Revelation. The dialogue reveals how the Artemis of Ephesus statue ironically appears to be the prototype for the bizarre depiction of Jesus in Revelation, and underscores the fine line between idols and church sculpture. It also touches on Paul's stances on sexuality and his definitions of love, leading to speculation of Jesus's sexuality and a discussion of early church councils on Jesus's humanity. Includes the relevance of Emerson's "Divinity School Address," Flannery O'Connor, and Miguel de Unamuno to Paul.

13:211 EXISTENTIAL MENU: ECCLESIASTES, JONAH, JOB

An existentialist considers three different recipes of Biblical dread, all of

which are startling in a canon where one expects a meaningful universe. The writer of Ecclesiastes poetically dismantles everything civilization holds dear—wisdom, wealth, strength, skill, being human rather than animal—showing how each is undone by irony, vanity, subterfuge, and chance, but then offers a subtle solution to this void. In the Book of Jonah, the Lord plays the “Other,” scaring the hell out of Jonah, who cannot get in sync with Him, and leaving Jonah with comic angst in a more complex story than the legendary Jonah-and-the-whale myth. The Book of Job, finally, shocks readers with a deal made between God and an affable Satan. God, with the attitude of a show-off coach, is tempted into a bet with Satan and tosses him an innocent Job, as if Job’s mere purpose is to come off the bench to take existential blows from Satan, the ultimate saboteur of truth.

14:229 DAVID MR. BIG BALLS: AN ICON ICED

This is a short introductory examination of David. It reconsiders the details of the David and Goliath story that, contrary to popular myth, casts David as a self-confident, arrogant winner, not an underdog. It includes an analysis of Michelangelo’s, Caravaggio’s, and Donatello’s shocking depictions of this widely known but misunderstood story in 1 Samuel, the details of which most people have gotten wrong.

15:233 HOW TO BE KING DAVID: SAUL 101

When taken together, 1 and 2 Samuel are best understood as a psychological novel about David. Here the complex themes of 1 Samuel are explored through three lessons—“Samuel Studies,” “Entrance Studies,” and “Jonathan Studies”—that address David in second person, so he beholds his predecessors’ and his own mistakes and moral turpitude. First, David studies tribal dynamics used and abused by Samuel. Then David’s key entrances are analyzed, ranging from initiations into Saul’s house, where he dodges Saul’s spears of jealousy; to the profane entrance into a “crap cave” where, while Saul takes a dump, the hidden David cuts a piece of Saul’s robe to flaunt his vulnerability; to joining the Philistine army and committing slaughter on his enemy’s behalf. “Jonathan Studies” forces David to face his manipulative sexual relationship with Saul’s son Jonathan and Saul’s homophobic remarks.

16:253 I SPY DAVID: DETECTING JOAB, DOPPELGANGER

This is an intimate first-person observation of 2 Samuel, a continuation of the subtle psychological novel about David. The observer spies between the lines to discover David’s dishonest character, first seen as he tacitly allows his general Joab, a shadowy alter-ego, to lop off parts

of the House of Saul. There are glimpses into David's heart as it flips between spring fever and winter frost: his love-hate relationship with Joab; a murderous affair with Bathsheba; grief over his daughter's rape by his son, whose shame turns love to hatred; sadness over Absalom's revenge for the rape; Ahithophel's sleazy advice for Absalom to have public sex with David's concubines on a roof; and uncertainty as David relinquishes command to his son Solomon, as brutish as he is wise.

17:285 EPISTLE TO GRAPHINK: THE ILLUSTRATED JUDGES

A letter from a consultant to a graphic novel publisher advises avoiding graphic novel conventions for an edition of the Book of Judges. Because the tales in Judges employ surrealistic elements—panoramic actions zooming onto nightmarish details; leaders with quirky traits; plots with large time jumps; dream reoccurrences linking the mini-plots—the consultant suggests a series of surreal illustrations modeled on Rene Magritte's non-action, still-life paintings, ironic counterpoints to the frenetic, bloody horrors of Judges. The epistle provides an analysis of six contexts in Judges: the refrain ("And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord"); the gutting of Eglon by Ehud; the "heroine" Jael's staking of Sisera's brain to the ground; the defeat of the Midianites by the comically weak Gideon and insecure Lord; Jephthah's unwitting sacrifice of his daughter; and Samson, who tells the Philistines, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle," before going on a surreal rampage.

18:301 BRAINS-AND-BREASTS POETRY: PROVERBS, PSALMS, SONG OF SOLOMON

This is an analysis that covers the strengths and limitations of the poetic verses in Proverbs, which work like wisdom pills; Psalms, which bounce between the sentimental and the furiously angry; and Song of Solomon, which drip with wet-dream sexuality. To clarify the value of each of these books, the analysis considers the whirlwinds of poetic activity that build on the Bible's poetry themes centuries later: William Blake adding new fire to Proverbs; Emily Dickinson infusing air into Psalms; John Donne using dark humor and wit to pop open the sexuality of Song of Solomon.

AFTERWORD

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