

King David in Prayer



*ncline your ear, O Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.
²Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.*

*You are my God; ³be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all day long.*

*⁴Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.*

*⁵For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.*

*⁶Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;
listen to my cry of supplication.*

*⁷In the day of my trouble I call on you,
for you will answer me.*

*⁸There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.*

*⁹All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.*

*¹⁰For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.*

*¹¹Teach me your way, O Lord,
that I may walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.*

*¹²I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.*

*¹³For great is your steadfast love toward me;
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.*

*¹⁴O God, the insolent rise up against me;
a band of ruffians seeks my life,
and they do not set you before them.*

*¹⁵But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

*¹⁶Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant;
save the child of your serving girl.*

*¹⁷Show me a sign of your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.*

— Psalm 86:1–17 (A Prayer of David)

Master of the Franciscan Breviary
Milan, Italy, active c. 1440–1460

King David in Prayer
in an Initial “A”

c. 1446–1450

Illuminated manuscript with
ink and gold on vellum

5 ¹³/₁₆ × 5 ⁵/₈ inches
147 × 142 mm (sheet)

4 ¹⁵/₁₆ × 4 ⁹/₁₆ inches
125 × 116 mm (image) (actual size)

16-08

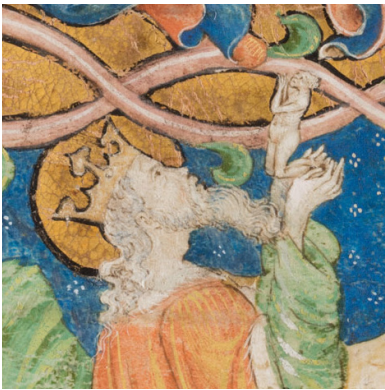


Image

The great King David is kneeling, his hands and head raised to God in prayer. David's golden crown and harp, along with his regal clothing identify this revered biblical sovereign, who, uncharacteristically, is kneeling in homage rather than receiving the obeisance of his subjects. This scene takes place inside of the letter A, which, on the original larger manuscript sheet from which this was cut, was the first letter of the phrase "Ad te levavi," Latin for "I raise my soul to you, O Lord." The cross line of the "A" acts as a separation between the heavenly and earthly realms. David, an earthly monarch, is surrounded by mountains of green and brown, with verdant, wavy vines winding around the initial. With its additional blue flourishes and a pink marbled pattern, the "A" also frames the divine realm of God, creator and ruler of all the earth, who is enshrined above.

God's splendor breaks forth from a background of burnished gold. The billowing raiment surrounding God appears animated by the wind. God's garment is painted with expensive blue pigment, to convey God's unmistakable sovereignty. The gaze of the divine figure is directed down toward David, arms outstretched and hands opened wide in a gesture representing both blessing and welcome.

God is smaller in size than David, in suggestion of the physical distance between them. However, note the outstretched arms, gleaming golden halo, and commanding presence over the scene, by which the artist affirms God's imminence *and* transcendence. Whatever the distance



between God and David in space and time, their connection is intimate. David's devotion to God is apparent in his posture and even more powerfully in proffering a small, kneeling figure ascending from David's hands. The mighty king is reduced to his

knees, the essential, ephemeral part of his being rising heavenward. His very soul is presented to God in prayer. In this manuscript cutting, the artist presents the golden king of Israel, this writer of the Psalms, as exemplification of impassioned prayer petitions and praise—an ideal image to prepare the reader for the Psalms ahead.

Trying to capture the activity and emotion of prayer is no small task for an artist. It is simple enough to portray a person

kneeling, hands clasped and head bowed. Far more complicated is the attempt to emotionally stir or elicit the inner state of prayer in the viewer. The purpose of scriptural illustrations in books and manuscripts is to visually reinforce or "explain" what is happening in the text. In the best of examples, such illustrations will additionally enhance the text emotionally. Sometimes—they will impart new meaning that has been interpreted from the text, even forming a kind of scriptural commentary.

These kinds of precious images, the highly decorated illustrations in illuminated manuscripts, were meant for the viewer to peer at closely. And surely an image such as this may inspire the viewer to read the words on the page and ultimately to actually offer one's soul to God.

This initial is historiated, meaning it is a letter that also includes an identifiable figure or scene. The support for this small hand-painted scene is vellum, specially prepared animal skins (goat, sheep, or calf), used like paper for writing manuscripts and documents, and also as the support for illuminations and miniatures. Production of vellum and parchment was time consuming and thus restricted in use compared to the later-developed early forms of European paper. Parchment was the predominant writing support in Europe from the fourth to the sixteenth centuries, at which time the printing press and continued growth of paper mills supplanted its widespread use. Vellum was used in certain instances, such as the creation of special documents or as the foundation for the gleaming and precious illuminated manuscripts so popular in the medieval period and beginning of the early modern period.

Attributing the artist of medieval manuscripts can be complicated because often many hands worked on an individual book or manuscript, and much of the information on such artists is lost. Close examination of individual sheets or pages, and careful comparison work, may yield conclusions. This kind of close work is called connoisseurship and is a crucial and exciting realm of art historical scholarship. This cutting is attributed to the Master of the Franciscan Breviary, who was a follower of other known manuscript masters. The Master of the Franciscan Breviary takes this name from a two-volume Breviary¹ used by Franciscan monks, now in the Biblioteca Universitaria in Bologna. This artist likely began working around 1440, and was also responsible for a monumental Choir Book (now in the Cornell University Library). This collective material presents the Master as one of the significant proponents of a courtly, Gothic style in mid-fifteenth century Milanese manuscript culture.² The highly decorative flourishes and fanciful quality of this illustrated initial are typical of the Master's work.

1. Breviaries are types of books used in the enactment of the Christian liturgy, or during religious services; they contain texts that are necessary for celebrating the divine office (a cycle of daily devotions practiced by nuns and monks).
2. Robert G. Calkins, "The Master of the Franciscan Breviary" *Arte Lombarda* 16 (1971), 17.

Word

His name and exploits are heralded throughout scripture: humble shepherd boy who becomes a giant-slayer, valiant soldier, aide to the king, fugitive outlaw, and King of Israel.

We're talking, of course, about David, considered the greatest king in Israel's history. His bravery and exploits are etched throughout the pages of the Old Testament. His obedience to God is lifted up even in the New Testament, when Luke testifies on behalf of God that David is "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22).

Yet how can that be, given David's obvious imperfections and legendary indiscretions? As in several of David's psalms, this contrite king candidly shares flaws and failures. His arrogance is stifling. His excesses are alarming. Recall, he ordered more than 40,000 Ammonites slaughtered in retaliation for their mischievously shaving off half the beards of David's soldiers (2 Sam. 10). His adultery with Bathsheba and his blood-soaked attempt to cover his tracks (2 Sam. 11) reads like a murder mystery.

His actions are, at times, reprehensible. Yet scripture offers ample evidence of how much David loved God and how much God loved David. Truly, he was a man after God's own heart. And from his earliest days as a shepherd boy and through every chapter of his extraordinary life, David remained devoted to God in prayer.

David is perhaps best known today as the author of almost half of the 150 psalms included in the Bible. Psalms are essentially supercharged prayers. Theologian and Pastor Tim Keller notes that "because psalms were not simply read, but sung, they penetrated the minds and imaginations of the people as only music can do. They so saturated the heart and imagination of the average person that when Jesus entered Jerusalem it was not surprising that the crowd spontaneously greeted Him by reciting a line from a Psalm: Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord (Mark 11:9; Psalm 118:26)."³

David begins Psalm 86 by sitting quietly before the Lord. Reverently, he reveals his very soul to God. He begins in brokenness and humility, remembering that he is a servant of the Most High. He acknowledges God's greatness and singularity. David then becomes a mediator for his people, remembering how God redeemed them and the responsibility God has placed on him and on them. He asks the Lord to remember God's covenant—all with the intent of glorifying God. David closes the prayer with profound respect for who God is and God's profound trustworthiness and asks for God's blessing.

While Jesus taught his disciples how to pray (Matt. 6), David instructs and inspires us in why and what to pray. "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise... The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:15, 17).

3. Timothy Keller and Kathy Keller, *The Songs of Jesus: A Year of Daily Devotions in the Psalms* (New York City: Viking Press, 2015), vii.

Reflection

As a parish pastor, Eugene Peterson observed the difficulty of teaching people to pray: "Faced with the prospect of conversation with a holy God who speaks worlds into being, it is not surprising that we have trouble. We feel awkward and out of place: 'I'm not good enough for this. I'll wait until I clean up my act and prove that I am a decent person.' Untutored, we tend to think that prayer is what good people do when they are doing their best."⁴

The reverential posture represented in this illuminated manuscript is not to suggest someone piously managing information before God. Instead, as evident in his miniaturized self, extended to the heavens, David is revealing his entire soul to God—all of it: the good, the bad, the ugly. David's prayers are honest, organic, and palpably real. He didn't view prayer as a hasty or last resort. It was his first recourse in difficult situations and his chorus of praise in times of thanksgiving.

Theologians from Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430) to Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–64) all reflected deeply on the Psalms in scriptural commentaries. St. Augustine described the Psalms as "the epitome of the whole Scripture;" Martin Luther said, "They are a rich book for all saints;" John Calvin referred to the Psalms as "the anatomy of all parts of the soul."⁵ We get an intimate glimpse of David's soul in his prayers as well as God's responses in the Old Testament.

If it is true that nothing is sweeter in any language than to hear God speak our name, then it is equally true that God delights in hearing us speak God's name as well. We have the profound privilege of calling upon God anywhere and anytime in our prayers. It is our opportunity to get real with God; to discover with David the reality of God's generosity and grace. A time-tested spiritual practice is to pray the Psalms with David, and then freestyle prayers as may seem good or urgent to do. If putting out prayers feels a little unnatural, start with only a few words, or even a sigh. No need for fancy poetry. Keep it simple. Keep it real.

In her book by the same title, Anne Lamott suggests all of her prayers are variations on *Help, Thanks, Wow!*⁶ Start there. God is gracious and true. God is expecting to hear from you.

4. Eugene Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995), 550.
5. J. Vernon McGee, *Psalms Chapters 1–41* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 1. For additional commentary on the Psalms in historical theology, see: St. Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. 52 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000); Martin Luther, *Luther's Works Volume 10: Lectures on the Psalms (1–75), Volume 11: Lectures on the Psalms II (76–126)*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1974); John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, ed. David C. Searle (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009).
6. Anne Lamott, *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers* (New York City: Riverhead Books, 2012).



Bartolomeo Biscaino

The Finding of Moses

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. ³ When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” ⁸ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. ⁹ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰ When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

— Exodus 2:1–10



Bartolomeo Biscaino
Italian, 1632–1657

The Finding of Moses

c. 1650–57

Etching

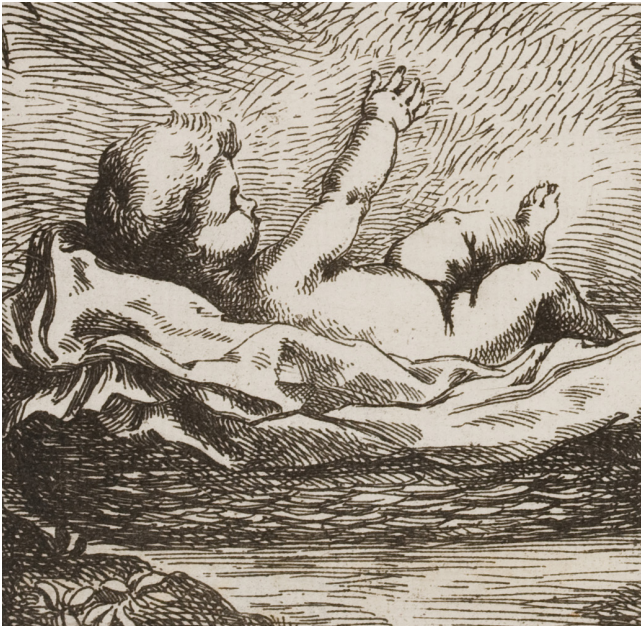
7¼ × 9⅞ inches
184 × 240 mm

93-21

Image

Pharaoh’s daughter’s handmaiden reaches out to grasp the basket by the blanket that the artist imagines Moses’s mother has wrapped him in, her arms ready to embrace the baby. Although Pharaoh’s daughter isn’t his immediate rescuer, Moses’s plump outstretched arm reaches up toward her, visually signaling the eventual connection between him and his surrogate family in Pharaoh’s house. Large rocks, bending reeds, and the women’s arms frame Moses, harmoniously creating a circular composition to feature the child.

When we think of Moses, what image do we envision? Mighty, powerful prophet with flowing hair and beard? Patriarch bearing the stone tablets, or leading his people across the Red Sea? We seldom visualize his humble and threatened infancy. The book of Exodus pulses with energy and foundational basis for Christian and Jewish tradition and belief; it shapes Western history’s spiritual identity. Imagine if Moses the infant had not been hidden and protected by his distraught mother from the Pharaoh’s command to kill all male Jewish babies, or not been generously rescued from his floating papyrus basket by Pharaoh’s daughter. Moses’s mother, knowing she could no longer hide a baby, sent him down the Nile River, in hopes that he would float to the Pharaoh’s palace and be rescued. And although Moses’s sister Miriam watched nearby as he floated in the river, the generous impulse of Pharaoh’s daughter is intensely powerful in light of the potential peril for the baby. Any parent can conjure the dreadful idea of



circumstances necessitating such a dramatic act, and feel utter relief at the notion of the child being safe and well. Happily, as the story continues, Miriam (who is likely the small girl looking knowingly at the right of the etching) approaches Pharaoh’s daughter offering to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the found infant. Of course Moses’s actual mother is the woman suggested to care for the baby until he is weaned and sent to be raised by Pharaoh’s daughter as her own son in the Egyptian court.

Bartolomeo Biscaino, the artist of this lyrical, tender etching, seems to have been deeply exploring these very ideas. Biscaino, who died tragically at the age of twenty-eight of a plague, revisited this particular moment in Moses’s story repeatedly. He created a number of drawings, prints, and at least one large painting of this subject. Biscaino lived and worked in Genoa, Italy; he was strongly influenced by Italian Mannerism and the work of innovative, influential Genoese artist Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (c. 1609–1664). Exaggerated and elongated forms are typical in Mannerist works of art; here, the long, gesturing arms indicate central aspects of the episode. The artist puts this stylistic component to work symbolically. Pharaoh’s daughter points to the baby who will become her adopted child and he reaches for her as well, and the handmaiden’s extension toward him, on command to rescue, meet. Biscaino’s delicacy of line and refined sweetness is typical of the artist’s style, and lends itself beautifully to this poignant moment.

Word

Sometimes God’s generosity shows up in the most unlikely places. On this occasion it appears among the reeds of the Nile River.

Moses...Deliverer. Leader. Judge. Lawgiver. Prophet. He casts a giant shadow throughout much of the Old Testament, and it spills over into the New Testament. In fact, he even makes a glorious cameo appearance during Christ’s Transfiguration, joining Jesus and Elijah on the mountaintop (Luke 9:30).

In Biscaino’s print, Moses doesn’t appear all that magnificent, presented as a chubby baby reaching out from the vegetation to Pharaoh’s daughter and her attendants, perhaps foreshadowing the simple, rustic setting of Christ’s birth many years later.

However, the backstory earns closer examination...an unnamed woman gives birth to a son (a close reading of a section of the Jewish Torah tells us her name was likely Jochebed; she is never mentioned again) during a time when Pharaoh is attempting to curtail the population of Hebrew slaves by killing all of their male newborns. She hides the baby for three months but ultimately gives him up by sending him down the Nile in a waterproof basket, hoping an Egyptian will find and raise him. Fingers crossed.

Pharaoh’s daughter enters the river downstream with her attendants when they come upon the baby in the basket. She recognizes him as a Hebrew baby (perhaps due to circumcision, likely done on his eighth day of life) and brings him into Pharaoh’s household, where he is raised and lives for forty years.

A child saved out of the Nile River reeds becomes a savior of the Israelites, one who will ultimately lead God’s people to the gates of the Promised Land.

From the incubator of Pharaoh’s court emerges Moses, a leader whose thumbprint is all over the Exodus and ultimately a new nation of God’s people.

Only a generous and faithful God would—or could—execute a plotline like this, ensuring that a promise made long ago was kept. Hearing the cries of

God’s captive people and remembering the covenant made with Abraham (Exodus 2:24), God raises up the most unlikely of leaders with the most unconventional of backgrounds to free God’s people.

A child saved out of the Nile River reeds becomes a savior of the Israelites, one who will ultimately lead God’s people to the gates of the Promised Land.

And, once again, the story begins with a baby.

Reflection

God wastes nothing.

God can redeem anything or anyone, including the worst of human intentions, cruelty, and tragedy, and transforms evil into good, for the blessing of humankind and in praise of God’s grace and glory.

Virtually every day provides a gut check on whether I believe—REALLY believe—the opening line of this reflection. Do you?

Millions of refugees displaced and on the move. Suicide bombings. Mass shootings. Disease. Starvation. Corruption. Hate. How is God redeeming all of this tragedy? It seems such a waste.

Frederick Buechner states, “Every morning you should wake up in your bed and ask yourself: ‘Can I believe it all again today?’ No, better still, don’t ask until after you’ve read *The New York Times*, till after you’ve studied that daily record of the world’s brokenness and corruption, which should always stand side by side with your Bible. Then ask yourself if you can believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ again for that particular day. If your answer’s always Yes, it may mean you don’t know what believing means. At least five times out of ten, the answer should be No, because the No is as important as the Yes, maybe more so.”¹

The details of the dreadful story immediately preceding the moment depicted by Biscaino are found in Exodus, chapter 1. Fearing the growing number and power of the Israelites in Egypt, Pharaoh orders the murder of all newborn Hebrew boys by throwing them in the Nile River. Moses’s mother disobeys the order and sets Moses afloat in a papyrus basket. Pharaoh’s daughter spots him as she is bathing in the river, and sends her attendant to save him from certain death.

Now look closely at Biscaino’s beautiful etching.

In it, he captures the exact moment of the redemption in Moses’s life that started the chain of events which eventually lead to the rescue of God’s chosen people from Egypt.

What do you see?

I see the loving, outstretched arms of God in the persons of both Pharaoh’s daughter and her attendant, as they reach out to snatch good from evil. I see the innocent and gentle child, reaching to the women to accept their gracious intervention.

Are you encountering tragedy, suffering, disillusionment or disappointment right now? Then stretch out your arms, trusting that God wastes nothing, and fully intends to redeem this moment for your good, the good of the world God loves, all in praise of God’s glory.

1. Frederick Buechner, *The Return of Ansel Gibbs* (New York: Knopf Publishing, 1958), 129.





Rodolphe Bresdin

Le Bon Samaritain (The Good Samaritan)

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?”²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.”²⁸ And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.”³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

— Luke 10:25–37

Rodolphe Bresdin
French, 1825–1885

Le Bon Samaritain
(*The Good Samaritan*)

1861

Lithograph

24 ¾ × 18 ⅞ inches
629 × 479 mm (sheet)

22 ⅞ × 17 ⅜ inches
562 × 444 mm (image)

84-41

Image

Nature is wild. Dense and complex, varied and beautiful, nature can be as terrifying as it is stunning. Tiny creatures are tucked and moving among compact and lush foliage. Each of the careful details contributes to a cohesive whole that seems woven within a luxurious tapestry. Water birds and thistles, monkeys and iguanas sit amid abundant gnarled tree stumps and grasses, mixed with palm fronds and ferns, creating a kaleidoscope of minutiae.¹ This fantastical scene exudes the energy of the forest or the jungle. The resulting pattern on pattern mimics what we see and experience in nature. In the wildness, we are confronted by overwhelming detail, texture, and pattern. Even the sky adds to the mixture of designs as it breaks through this condensed scene with fluffy clouds and flocking birds. Within the center is a small clearing. Here stands a camel, waiting to carry the Good Samaritan and wounded man to recovery. Nature is wild, but, perhaps, we are not.

This remarkable lithograph is unlike any prior depiction of this well-known story. The Good Samaritan was commonly set in contemporary European surroundings, typically inhabited with figures in European dress accompanied by a horse or ass as the animal. Bresdin’s rendering is distinctive for its impressive scope and conveyance of contemporary ideas of biblical locale.

As the Western world began to advance technologically in the nineteenth century, modernity brought increased modes of transportation with exchange of culture and ideas. Immense shifts in artistic styles and genres progress alongside cultural development, as has always been the case, and art begins to look very different. Many artists depicting biblical subjects attempted to create more historically, geographically, and culturally accurate renderings as a result of travel or incorporating accounts and drawings by those who had traveled to the Middle East.² Bresdin’s camel was drawn in emulation of an illustration in a large travel book describing the expedition journeys of French author Léon de Laborde, *Voyage de la Syrie* (Paris 1837); the specific plate that inspired this camel bears the caption *Ghor méridionale/Dromadaire du désert* (Southern Ghor/Desert Dromedary).³ Contemporary culture in

Bresdin’s lifetime popularized exoticism. The notion and sight of what appeared exotic to Europeans sprang to life in art, literature, and popular culture. The camel, along with a long spear and decorated shield (hidden just behind the grass near the wounded man), and the figures’ dress, reflect the aspiration on the part of many European artists to render more accurate biblical interpretations. Such displays of exoticism⁴ were popular among the intellectual and artistic circles of the time, often with complex political and social underpinnings.

Within this luxurious profusion of plants and creatures, the decorated weapons are put away, perhaps to emphasize the brotherhood of these typically at-odds people. Compassion is at the forefront. The original title for this print was *Abd el-Kader Aiding a Christian*⁵, a recognition of our common humanity which, along with Bresdin’s decision to draw the animal in this story as a camel, tells us something about the artist’s intentions and personal views.

A multitude of influences are apparent in this richly constructed work, perhaps the best known by the artist described as a solitary and eccentric visionary, who was inspired by the literary work of Charles Baudelaire and Victor Hugo and artists such as Hieronymus Bosch, Albrecht Dürer, and Rembrandt.⁶ Bresdin experienced financial and physical hardship throughout his life. Largely self-taught, he lived a bohemian lifestyle around France, and was associated with several artistic and literary circles. Rodolphe Bresdin wasn’t well understood in his lifetime, nor his talents much recognized, despite receiving some critical praise and commissions. However, this remarkable large lithograph did provide income for the artist and his family during and after his life.⁷

The density of detail that Bresdin achieves in this print is astonishing. Better suited to and more easily achieved with etching or engraving, this composition is unusual for the medium of lithography. This masterpiece of lithography remains desirable for collectors today as it was in the artist’s lifetime.

1. The creatures were first traced by the artist inspired by the wood-engraving illustrations from an 1841 French edition of *The Swiss Family Robinson*. David P. Becker, “On Camels in Art: Bresdin’s *Good Samaritan*,” in *Print Quarterly* (1993), 43.

2. It is important to acknowledge that many such renderings attempting to depict indigenous people and culture were neither historically nor culturally accurate, despite any well-intended incorporation on the part of the artist.

3. Becker, 46.

4. Exoticism captured the minds of many Westerners, most fervently in the nineteenth century. The term can be used to define aspects of artistic style as well as a cultural phenomenon. The fascination and influence of non-Western arts and culture on European culture was first stimulated by trading with the East in the early modern period. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, technological advancements in the developing modern world made travel and trade more prevalent, and availability of non-Western objects increased. For artistic circles and affluent society in particular, exoticism became wildly popular and an immense part of European design. Europeans typically viewed such objects, ideas, and cultures as fantastical, opulent, and at times primitive. Publications, travel guides, archaeological expeditions, and exhibitions of objects from far-off lands all further encouraged exposure and excitement about such places. European artists sometimes incorporated specific objects into their compositions (such as the shield and spear in Bresdin’s image), but also were inspired by themes, stories, and designs (and by extension even materials and techniques used to emulate such designs).

5. David Becker discusses the original title and sources/inspiration for the lithograph in D. P. Becker, “Rodolphe Bresdin’s ‘Le Bon Samaritain,’” *Nouvelles de l’estampe*, nos. 70–71, 1983, 7–14. Abd el-Kader was a historical person, an emir of Algeria “who had been captured and exiled by the French to nearby Damascus, Syria. It was in that city in 1860 that he personally saved many Christians and Jews from massacre at the hands of Moslem extremists, prompting Bresdin’s titling of the print, and most probably, its very genesis,” 46. This is a fascinating contemporary example of the “noble foreigner” coming to the rescue—quite apt inspiration for this story’s depiction.

6. Paul J. Sachs, *Modern Prints & Drawings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), 54.

7. Becker notes, “Bresdin often referred to *The Good Samaritan* as his own Good Samaritan for the sales it brought him throughout his later career,” “Rodolphe Bresdin’s ‘Le Bon Samaritain,’” 45.

Word

Why parables? Why not fables?

Aesop’s allegories of The Tortoise and the Hare, The Boy Who Cried Wolf, and The Ant and the Grasshopper have enchanted readers for centuries by building stories around the best and worst of human nature—with often predictable outcomes.

Through a series of trenchant teachings known as parables, Jesus challenges His listeners to consider timeless, transformative truths. Not unlike the Pevensie children discovering the entrance to Narnia concealed in the back of the wardrobe closet in C. S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the forty parables recorded in the New Testament invite the listener into a world where God’s grace and justice are often shockingly revealed; Jesus’s Parable of the Good Samaritan is a prime example of our Lord’s powerful teaching.

Notice how this parable unfolds. It begins with a Jewish scholar asking how he can inherit eternal life. Jesus tests him to recall how Mosaic Law might answer that question. The man responds, correctly quoting a key verse from that law (Lev. 19:18). But “loving God and neighbor” means very different things to the scholar and to Jesus, who, through the parable, takes this learned individual to new heights in exploring what it means to love God and others.

Love is a skeletal concept to the scholar. Jesus puts muscle and flesh on it. That is the power of the parable, an otherworldly way of showing how Kingdom values work in the earthly realm.

Nineteenth-century commentator Daniel Whedon observed that Christ’s parables do three things: they reveal, conceal, and perpetuate. They *reveal* a sacred truth through the power of illustration and analogy. They *conceal* that truth from those who choose to close themselves to it. And they *perpetuate* that truth by being presented in a form that is applicable for future generations.⁸

That makes Christ’s parables universal, transcending time and culture. It’s one of the elements that intrigue the viewer in Rodolphe Bresdin’s lithograph of an idealized Good Samaritan scene. We picture the wounded man as being loaded onto a donkey, as Luke tells us in verse 34. Yet, here the artist places the scene in a more Middle Eastern setting, with an ornately decorated camel taking the place of the donkey. Perhaps Bresdin felt his rendition of this scene more clearly communicated the parable to nineteenth-century viewers, by inviting them to place themselves in the far-away location.

Were the scene to be recreated today, we might picture a car pulled off to the side of the road, with a wounded person being tended to by a stranger of a different race.

That’s the timeless quality of Christ’s parables, where truths echo through two thousand years to land on our eyes and our ears today.

8. Daniel Denison Whedon, *A Popular Commentary on the New Testament*: Volume 5 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1874), 163.

Reflection

An enterprising church advertises itself as “A safe place to hear a dangerous message.” A local Christian radio station has a marketing tagline: “Safe for the whole family.” Somber-sounding ads invite believers to stockpile food for the coming assault on the electric grid, buy gold to hedge against the certain stock market crash, and protect their computer from inevitable identity theft. Is it fear of the unknown, fear of the future, fear of the stranger that drives us?

Scanning local and world news morning and evening, you run the risk of bookending your day with despair. Most news is bad news. The media engines of our world are fueled by fear.

There is a shadowy beauty to Rodolphe Bresdin’s lithograph *Le Bon Samaritain*. A compassionate Samaritan ministering to a fallen Jewish man is the illuminated focal point of this piece and of Jesus’s well-known story in answer to the question, “And who is my neighbor?” But that image occupies a relatively small part of this large print. At first glance, there is a foreboding and overwhelming darkness that surrounds the wounded man and his kindhearted helper. It looks terrifying.

Look closer.

What begins to emerge from the shadows is a profusion of plant, bird, and animal life. It is almost as if the trees themselves are stretching their gnarly branches to embrace the injured person. In spite of how it may often seem, and sometimes against all odds, God’s creation bends toward beauty and goodness.

The message of the Bible is God identifying with those who are hurting, no matter their ethnic origin or beliefs. Rather than advise compassion from the safety of a celestial sanctuary, God sent Jesus to practice and teach compassion for those who *like* us, those who *are* like us and even those who *hate* us.

As long as we are resident in this world we are wise to be wary of strangers. However, according to Jesus we are living and loving our way into a new realm where we no longer regard one another from a human point of view. Barely visible in the distance in Bresdin’s lithograph is the city of Jerusalem. Like Abraham, we too look forward to “the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

In the meantime, we are called to follow our Lord beyond our fears in service to our neighbor. Remember, according to Jesus, a neighbor is *anyone* to whom we can be a neighbor. It’s an act of obedience, love, and courage. It’s an act of generosity.

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