

LIBRARY OF RICKANDRIA PRESENTS

11 OF THE STRANGEST PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE

— AND WHAT THEY ACTUALLY SAY —



THE HOLY BIBLE
KING JAMES VERSION

SCRIPTURE BREAKDOWN BY VCG
— SEPTEMBER 2026 —

LIBRARY OF RICKANDRIA PRESENTS

11 of the Strangest Passages in the Bible - and What They Actually Say

SCRIPTURE BREAKDOWN BY VCG | SEPTEMBER 2026

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Abstract

The Bible contains scenes that remain startling even after centuries of interpretation: a donkey speaks; a hand writes judgment on a palace wall; Moses is hidden in a rock while divine glory passes by; priests consult the mysterious Urim and Thummim; Ezekiel sees living creatures beside wheels covered with eyes; Revelation calls a lake of fire the "second death"; and Job is confronted with Behemoth and Leviathan.

This paper asks a narrower question than sensational retellings usually do: **What does Scripture actually say, what can history or textual study independently establish, what conclusions belong to interpretation, and what remains unknown?** Biblical quotations follow the King James Version used by the Library of Rickandria project; individual passage references are linked externally to the KJV at BibleGateway. Historical and scholarly claims are linked to museums, academic journals, lexicons, and other external research sources.

The purpose is not to explain the strange away. It is to keep the strange from becoming a blank check for certainty.

How We Are Reading These Passages

Scripture	What the biblical text explicitly says, including its immediate literary context.
Textual history	How a passage is represented in manuscripts, translations, and the history of transmission.
History & archaeology	What inscriptions, artifacts, institutions, languages, and ancient cultural evidence can independently illuminate.
Interpretation	What readers infer about meaning, symbolism, theology, or connections between passages.
Psychology of reading	How human preferences for pattern, certainty, and closure can shape our handling of ambiguity. Psychology can describe a reading tendency; it cannot decide whether a theological claim is true.

A Word About Mystery and the Human Mind

Strange texts exert a particular pull because readers naturally want unresolved patterns to close. In psychology, *need for cognitive closure* refers to a desire for definite knowledge rather than ambiguity. Kruglanski and Webster's work describes a tendency to "seize" on an available explanation and then "freeze" around it when closure is strongly desired. That research does **not** mean that every firm interpretation is psychologically biased, and it cannot tell us whether a doctrine is true. It does give us a useful methodological warning: when the text leaves a gap, our minds may be eager to fill it.

So throughout this paper, "we do not know" is treated as a legitimate research conclusion rather than a failure of imagination.

External research: [Kruglanski & Webster, 1996 \(PubMed\)](#) [Webster & Kruglanski, 1994 \(PubMed\)](#)

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The Eleven Passages

The following sections use the same discipline each time: begin with the wording of Scripture, add external evidence only where it is relevant, and identify interpretation as interpretation.

1. The Urim and Thummim: Israel's Mysterious Instruments of Judgment

The Urim and Thummim are among the most intriguing objects in the Hebrew Bible because the text treats them as important while giving remarkably little explanation of what they physically were.

"And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the LORD..."

[Exodus 28:30](#)

Numbers later says that Joshua is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will "ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD" ([Numbers 27:21](#)). Near the end of Saul's reign, the narrator says that the LORD did not answer Saul "neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets" ([1 Samuel 28:6](#)). These texts establish function more clearly than mechanism: the Urim and Thummim belonged to Israel's priestly system and were associated with obtaining divine judgment.

External reference works commonly describe them as a priestly oracular device, often connected with lots, while acknowledging that their exact form and operation are uncertain. That is already enough to distinguish the biblical data from later reconstructions about glowing stones, spelled-out messages, or lost technology.

What about David and the ephod?

David repeatedly "inquired of the LORD," and in [1 Samuel 23:6-12](#) Abiathar arrives with an ephod. David then asks whether Saul will come to Keilah and whether the city will surrender him. It is reasonable to connect this priestly consultation with the kind of inquiry associated elsewhere with the Urim. Yet the passage does not explicitly say, "David used the Urim and Thummim." That connection should therefore be described as an inference rather than a quotation.

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE	WHY IT MATTERS
They were associated with the priestly breastpiece and with seeking judgment before the LORD.	Their shape, material, and exact method of operation are not explained.	A mysterious object does not need an invented mechanism to remain genuinely mysterious.

External research: [Encyclopedia.com - Urim and Thummim](#)

2. Balaam's Donkey: When the Seer Cannot See

Numbers 22 creates a deliberate reversal. Balaam is the seer, but the donkey sees the danger first. Balaam is the professional speaker of oracles, but the animal becomes the one given speech.

"And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?"

[Numbers 22:28](#)

Only afterward does "the LORD open the eyes of Balaam" so that he sees the angel standing in the way ([Numbers 22:31](#)). The point is deeper than the novelty of a talking animal. The celebrated visionary is spiritually blind until God enables sight, while the animal he beats has repeatedly saved his life.

The historical Balaam question

At Tell Deir 'Alla in modern Jordan, archaeologists found an Iron Age plaster inscription that names a "Balaam son of Beor" and presents him as a seer. The Biblical Archaeology Society summarizes the archaeological context as roughly around 800 BCE. The inscription does not tell the story of Numbers 22-24: there is no talking donkey and no

reproduction of the biblical plot. What it does show is that a Balaam son of Beor was remembered as a seer in a nonbiblical Transjordanian tradition.

That distinction is essential. **External attestation of a name and role is not the same as archaeological verification of every event in a narrative.**

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS The LORD opens the donkey's mouth and later opens Balaam's eyes.	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE Archaeology cannot test whether the donkey spoke.	WHY IT MATTERS The narrative exposes the limits of spiritual prestige and makes divine control of revelation the central irony.
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External research: [Biblical Archaeology Society - Deir 'Alla inscription](#)

3. The Handwriting on the Wall: Belshazzar's Last Night

Daniel 5 places us at a royal banquet where vessels taken from the Jerusalem temple are used for drinking while the guests praise gods of metal, wood, and stone. Then a hand appears and writes on the wall.

"MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN."

Daniel 5:25

Daniel interprets the words as a verdict: the kingdom has been numbered, the king has been weighed and found wanting, and the kingdom will be divided. The chapter then says Belshazzar is killed that night. The supernatural spectacle matters, but Daniel's speech tells us what the narrative is about: pride, sacrilege, remembered warning, and judgment.

Belshazzar outside the Bible

Cuneiform evidence is important here. A British Museum cylinder of Nabonidus includes a prayer for Nabonidus and "Belshazzar, his son." That evidence independently establishes Belshazzar as a real royal son in the Neo-Babylonian world. It does not independently establish the handwriting on the wall. Archaeology supports the historical setting at one point; the miracle claim remains a claim of the biblical narrative.

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS Daniel says a mysterious hand writes a divine judgment against Belshazzar.	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE The artifact evidence does not verify the supernatural writing.	WHY IT MATTERS The passage's force lies in the verdict: the king who would not humble himself has been weighed.
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External research: [British Museum - Nabonidus cylinder naming Belshazzar](#)

4. "Thou Shalt Not Seethe a Kid in His Mother's Milk"

The command appears three times in the Torah: [Exodus 23:19](#), [Exodus 34:26](#), and [Deuteronomy 14:21](#). Its wording is specific. Its rationale is not supplied.

"Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk."

Exodus 23:19

One popular explanation says this was a Canaanite fertility rite. The attraction of the theory is obvious: it would place the prohibition within Israel's rejection of surrounding cults. Yet the supposed Ugaritic evidence has not securely demonstrated such a ritual. TheTorah.com's survey notes that the damaged text once invoked for the claim does not establish a goat boiled in milk. Other proposals include compassion, separation of life and death, firstfruits symbolism, and even idiomatic readings.

The range of competing explanations is evidence in itself: the original rationale remains debated. Later rabbinic law developed a much broader separation of meat and dairy, but that is a history of interpretation and halakhah, not the literal wording of the three Torah commands.

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE	WHY IT MATTERS
Israel is told three times not to cook a young goat in its mother's milk.	The Torah does not explain why this specific act is prohibited.	A repeated theory is not automatically an established historical fact.

External research: [TheTorah.com - origins of the meat/milk prohibition](#) [HTS Theological Studies - lexical discussion of the verb](#)

5. Moses Sees God's "Back Parts"

Exodus 33 contains one of the Hebrew Bible's most difficult descriptions of divine presence. Moses asks to see God's glory. He is told that he cannot see God's face and live, and is placed in a cleft of the rock.

"And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen."

[Exodus 33:23](#)

The tension is immediate because the same chapter also says that the LORD spoke to Moses "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" ([Exodus 33:11](#)). A few verses later, Moses cannot see God's face. The language therefore resists a simplistic reading in which every occurrence of "face" means the same physical thing.

Francis Landy's 2023 study of Exodus 33:12-34:8 describes the passage as turning on questions of dialogue, distance, metaphor, corporeality, and ineffability. Calling the language anthropomorphic identifies the phenomenon - Scripture speaks of face, hand, and back - but does not by itself settle how the manifestation should be understood.

The narrative also moves from Moses asking to *see* glory to the LORD proclaiming his name and character in Exodus 34:6-7. That literary movement is worth noticing: the revelation is not reducible to anatomy.

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE	WHY IT MATTERS
Moses receives a real but limited manifestation of divine glory; the KJV says he sees God's "back parts."	The passage gives no anatomical description of what Moses perceived.	The text emphasizes both revelation and limitation: Moses is shown something, but not everything.

External research: [Francis Landy, Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament \(2023\)](#)

6. Jesus and the Woman Taken in Adultery

John 7:53-8:11 is both a famous story about Jesus and an important case in New Testament textual history. The KJV includes the passage and gives us the well-known words:

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

[John 8:7](#)

The scene is sometimes summarized as Jesus simply contradicting Moses. The legal background is more complicated. [Deuteronomy 22:22](#) speaks of both the man and the woman in an adultery case; in John 8 only the woman is presented. [Deuteronomy 17:6-7](#) also requires multiple witnesses in capital cases and places the first act of execution upon the witnesses. John itself tells us that the question was a trap: "This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him" ([John 8:6](#)).

The manuscript question

Many of the earliest surviving Greek witnesses to John do not contain this passage in this location, while later manuscripts preserve it, sometimes in different locations. Chris Keith's survey describes the judgment that the passage was not part of the original form of the Gospel of John as near scholarly consensus, while emphasizing that its earlier tradition history remains a separate question. The NET Bible's textual note provides a convenient list of witnesses and variant locations.

That is a textual-critical conclusion, not a claim that the story has no antiquity, no theological value, or no place in the KJV. A KJV-focused study should read the passage honestly while also acknowledging its manuscript history.

What did Jesus write on the ground?

The text never tells us. Suggestions range from the accusers' sins to legal material or prophetic texts. Those proposals

may be interesting; none should be repeated as though John supplied the answer.

The closing sentence also matters: "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" ([John 8:11](#)). Mercy and moral seriousness remain in the same scene.

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS Jesus frustrates a trap, the accusers leave, he does not condemn the woman, and he calls her away from sin.	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE The text does not tell us what Jesus wrote; the passage also has a complicated manuscript history.	WHY IT MATTERS Textual history and interpretation are different questions and should not be collapsed into each other.
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External research: [Chris Keith, Currents in Biblical Research \(2008\)](#) [NET Bible - textual note on John 7:53-8:11](#)

7. Jesus Curses a Fig Tree When "the Time of Figs Was Not Yet"

Mark says Jesus is hungry, sees a leafy fig tree, finds no fruit, and curses it. Then comes the detail that makes the episode especially puzzling:

<i>"for the time of figs was not yet."</i>	Mark 11:13
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The literary arrangement is important. Mark narrates the curse, then Jesus' action in the temple, and then returns to the withered tree. Scholars often call this kind of structure an intercalation or "Markan sandwich." George Guthrie's study argues that the tree and temple scenes should be read in light of one another. On that reading, the tree functions as an enacted sign of judgment: visible promise without the fruit God seeks.

That interpretation has strong contextual support, especially given prophetic uses of fig and fruit imagery. It is still an interpretation rather than a sentence Mark explicitly writes. Other scholars have argued that the episode's function is more closely tied to the teaching on faith and prayer that follows.

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS Jesus curses the tree; Mark notes that it was not fig season; the tree is later found withered.	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE Mark does not insert a sentence saying, "The fig tree represents the temple."	WHY IT MATTERS Literary placement can strongly guide interpretation without turning an inference into a quotation.
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External research: [George H. Guthrie, New Testament Studies \(2021\)](#) [Alternative discussion in Journal for the Study of the New Testament](#)

8. The Lake of Fire and the "Second Death"

Revelation's final-judgment imagery is severe and easy to flatten into later vocabulary. The text itself deserves to be followed carefully.

<i>"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."</i>	Revelation 20:14
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The underlying Greek term translated "hell" in this verse is Hades. That matters because Revelation does not simply equate Hades with the lake of fire: Death and Hades give up the dead and are themselves cast into the lake. J. David Woodington's study notes that Revelation uniquely links the "second death" with the "lake of fire" in this explicit way.

Christian interpretations then diverge over how the apocalyptic imagery corresponds to final reality. Traditional eternal-conscious-punishment readings emphasize texts such as [Revelation 20:10](#) and other judgment passages. Conditionalist readings emphasize the vocabulary of death and destruction. Other approaches stress Revelation's symbolic mode. Those are theological interpretations built from the text; they should not be smuggled back into a single word as though no interpretive work has occurred.

One of the strangest details is also one of the most important: **Death itself is defeated**. The following chapter looks toward a creation in which "there shall be no more death" ([Revelation 21:4](#)).

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS Revelation directly calls the lake of fire "the second death" and depicts Death and Hades being cast into it.	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE The image by itself does not settle every later theological dispute about the nature or duration of punishment.	WHY IT MATTERS The vision culminates not only in judgment but in the abolition of death.
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External research: [J. David Woodington, Journal for the Study of the New Testament \(2019\)](#)

9. Melchizedek: The Priest-King With No Recorded Beginning or End

Melchizedek appears abruptly in Genesis 14 as king of Salem and priest of the most high God. He blesses Abram; Abram gives him tithes; and Genesis moves on. Psalm 110 later declares, "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" ([Psalm 110:4](#)). Hebrews builds a sustained argument from those texts.

"Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God..."

[Hebrews 7:3](#)

The wording has generated centuries of speculation. Some readers have identified Melchizedek with a heavenly being or a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ. Others argue that Hebrews reasons from the literary presentation in Genesis: no father or mother is named, no genealogy is supplied, and no birth or death is narrated. Gard Granerod argues that Hebrews 7 uses an "argument from silence" consistent with interpretive techniques used elsewhere in the chapter.

The phrase "made like unto the Son of God" deserves special attention. Hebrews does not simply say, "Melchizedek was the Son of God." The comparison itself becomes evidence that the passage is using Melchizedek in service of its larger Christological argument.

Melchizedek beyond the New Testament

Second Temple Jewish literature shows that Melchizedek had already become a figure of intense speculation. The Qumran text 11Q13 (11QMelchizedek) presents an exalted eschatological Melchizedek involved in liberation and judgment. Scholars disagree over exactly how the figure should be classified - angelic intermediary, divine title, or something more complex. That disagreement is historically useful: it shows that the mystery did not begin with modern readers.

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS Genesis names Melchizedek as king of Salem and priest of the most high God; Hebrews uses him to explain Christ's priesthood.	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE Scripture does not provide his genealogy or a simple one-sentence identification with Jesus.	WHY IT MATTERS The mystery should serve Hebrews' argument rather than eclipse it: Christ is the center of the comparison.
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External research: [Gard Granerod, Biblica 90 \(2009\)](#) [Rick Van de Water, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha \(2006\)](#)

10. Ezekiel's Wheels Full of Eyes

Ezekiel 1 gives us a storm, fire, four living creatures, wings, faces, wheels, a firmament, a throne, and an overwhelming manifestation of glory. The wheels are described as "a wheel in the middle of a wheel" and their rims as "full of eyes round about them four" ([Ezekiel 1:16-18](#)).

"This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD."

[Ezekiel 1:28](#)

That final sentence is the narrator's own identification of the vision. Ezekiel 10 later identifies the living creatures as cherubim. The scene therefore belongs first to biblical throne and temple imagery, not to a modern technological category.

A throne that can move

Dale Launderville's study describes Ezekiel's vision as a transformation of the traditional cherubim throne into a mobile throne-chariot. That mobility makes theological sense in a book addressed to exiles: the divine presence is not

confined to the Jerusalem temple. The later history of Jewish interpretation developed this imagery extensively in traditions often called Merkabah or chariot mysticism.

Modern spacecraft readings usually begin by mapping wheels, fire, noise, radiance, and motion onto technology familiar to us. That is an analogy. It is not Ezekiel's stated category. The text says "eyes"; turning each eye into a camera sensor adds a modern mechanism that the vision itself never supplies.

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE	WHY IT MATTERS
Ezekiel sees wheels full of eyes moving with cherubim beneath a throne, and calls the vision the likeness of the glory of the LORD.	The text does not describe a spacecraft or provide a mechanical blueprint.	Beginning with Ezekiel's own theological category prevents modern analogy from masquerading as exegesis.

External research: [Dale Launderville, Catholic Biblical Quarterly \(2004\)](#)

11. Behemoth, Leviathan, and the KJV "Unicorn"

Job's final divine speeches contain some of the Bible's most debated zoology. The temptation is to force each description into a modern species chart. The text's rhetorical purpose is broader: Job is confronted with wild, immense, untamable life that lies beyond ordinary human control.

Behemoth

"Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee; he eateth grass as an ox."

[Job 40:15](#)

Behemoth has extraordinary strength; its bones are compared with brass and iron; and "he moveth his tail like a cedar" ([Job 40:17](#)). Identifications have included the hippopotamus, elephant, extinct animals, and literary or mythic monsters. The 2025 *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Monsters* notes both the history of the hippopotamus identification and Behemoth's larger literary role within Job's confrontation with divine power.

Leviathan

Job 41 asks whether Leviathan can be drawn out with a hook. The creature has terrifying teeth, tightly joined scales, smoke from its nostrils, and an image in which its breath kindles coals. Elsewhere the biblical term operates in different registers: [Psalm 104:26](#) places Leviathan among creatures of the sea, while [Isaiah 27:1](#) uses dragon and serpent imagery in an oracle of judgment. Recent scholarship therefore discusses both possible animal backgrounds and ancient West Asian chaos-monster traditions.

The KJV "unicorn"

"Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?"

[Job 39:9](#)

The Hebrew term behind the KJV "unicorn" is commonly transliterated *re'em*. Brown-Driver-Briggs and modern lexicons commonly identify it as a wild ox or wild bull and connect it with Akkadian *rimu*. The biblical context emphasizes strength and refusal of domestication. [Deuteronomy 33:17](#) also speaks of the animal's "horns" in the plural.

Two questions therefore need to stay separate: **What does the KJV say?** It says "unicorn." **What animal did the ancient Hebrew term designate?** That is a historical-linguistic question. Translation history and zoological identification are not the same question.

WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	WHAT IT DOES NOT SETTLE	WHY IT MATTERS
Job describes immensely powerful and untamable creatures, including Behemoth, Leviathan, and the re'em rendered "unicorn" in the KJV.	The text does not provide modern taxonomic labels for every creature.	God's argument to Job concerns creaturely power under divine rule, not a zoology exam.

External research: [Oxford Handbook of Biblical Monsters - Behemoth](#) [Oxford Handbook of Biblical Monsters - Leviathan](#) [Brown-Driver-Briggs / Strong's lexical summary of re'em](#)

What These Eleven Passages Have in Common

At first the material looks random: priestly objects, talking animals, royal judgment, dietary law, a divine manifestation, a disputed Gospel passage, a cursed tree, apocalyptic fire, a mysterious priest, living wheels, and biblical monsters. Several patterns emerge when the passages are read together.

The limit of human perception. Balaam cannot see the angel until his eyes are opened. Moses receives revelation but not unrestricted sight. Ezekiel repeatedly reaches for "appearance" and "likeness." Job is asked whether he can master realities greater than himself.

Judgment. The Urim belongs to priestly judgment. Belshazzar is weighed. The fig tree withers. Revelation places the dead before the great white throne. Strange imagery often carries a remarkably direct moral claim.

Mediated revelation. Priests inquire; Daniel interprets; Moses receives only what is permitted; John sees a vision; Hebrews interprets earlier Scripture. The Bible repeatedly portrays revelation as given through forms, people, visions, texts, and limits.

The limit of human control. Human beings do not control Leviathan, the timing of judgment, the content of revelation, or every question a text leaves behind. The strange passages repeatedly place the reader in the position of someone being shown something without being shown everything.

Things the Bible Never Tells Us

Some questions remain unresolved not because nobody has tried hard enough, but because the text never supplies the missing information.

- What the Urim and Thummim physically looked like.
- What Jesus wrote on the ground in John 8.
- What Moses visually perceived when the KJV says he saw God's "back parts."
- The original rationale for the law against seething a kid in its mother's milk.
- A modern species identification that accounts for every detail of Behemoth or Leviathan.
- A mechanical drawing of Ezekiel's wheels.
- Melchizedek's genealogy.

That last example is especially appropriate: the absence of Melchizedek's genealogy becomes part of Hebrews' own argument. Sometimes what a text does *not* narrate becomes part of how later Scripture reads it.

Common Claim vs. What the Text Actually Establishes

COMMON CLAIM	WHAT THE TEXT / EVIDENCE ESTABLISHES
The Urim and Thummim were glowing gemstones that spelled answers.	Scripture associates them with priestly judgment but never explains the mechanism.
David definitely used the Urim and Thummim every time he consulted the ephod.	The association is plausible; not every narrative explicitly names them.
Balaam is known only from the Bible.	The Deir 'Alla inscription also names a Balaam son of Beor as a seer.
Archaeology proved Daniel 5 exactly as written.	Cuneiform evidence attests Belshazzar as Nabonidus's son; it does not independently verify the supernatural hand.
Pagans definitely boiled goats in milk as a fertility rite.	The often-cited Ugaritic evidence does not securely establish that practice.
Moses literally saw God's human-shaped back.	Exodus uses bodily language but does not anatomically describe the manifestation.
Jesus simply abolished Moses' adultery law in John 8.	The legal situation is already irregular, John calls it a trap, and Jesus ends by calling the conduct sin.
There is no manuscript issue in John 7:53-8:11.	The passage has a complicated transmission history and is absent from many early Greek witnesses.

COMMON CLAIM	WHAT THE TEXT / EVIDENCE ESTABLISHES
Mark explicitly says the fig tree represents the temple.	The literary structure strongly invites comparison, but the symbolic identification remains interpretation.
The second death is simply another name for Hades.	Revelation depicts Death and Hades themselves being cast into the lake of fire.
Hebrews explicitly says Melchizedek was Jesus.	Hebrews says Melchizedek was "made like unto the Son of God."
Ezekiel says he saw a spacecraft.	Ezekiel identifies the vision as the likeness of the glory of the LORD.
The KJV unicorn proves a modern horse-like unicorn.	The KJV word renders Hebrew re'em, commonly identified lexically with a powerful wild bovine.

Why Strange Passages Attract Strange Explanations

There is a recurring pattern in popular interpretation. A text leaves an unexplained detail. The reader feels the discomfort of uncertainty. An explanation appears. It fits enough features to become memorable. Repetition gradually strips away words such as "perhaps" and "possibly." Eventually people remember the explanation as though it had been in the verse.

Psychological research on need for cognitive closure offers one vocabulary for this tendency: ambiguity can intensify the desire for a stable answer, and the desire for closure can encourage early commitment to an explanation. Again, that does not adjudicate theology. It simply gives the reader a practical checklist: **Where exactly does the text say that? Is the claim Scripture, history, textual evidence, tradition, inference, or speculation?**

External research: [Kruglanski & Webster - motivated closing of the mind](#)

Seven More Strange Passages Worth Studying

The number eleven belongs to this paper, not to the limits of biblical strangeness. The following passages deserve their own future studies.

Genesis 6:1-4 - The sons of God and the Nephilim

The passage joins the "sons of God," the "daughters of men," and the Nephilim in a compressed narrative that has produced heavenly-being, royal, Sethite, and other interpretations. The expression "sons of God" elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible can denote heavenly beings, which is one reason the supernatural reading has substantial historical support.

External research: [KJV text](#) [Bible Odyssey / HarperCollins Bible Dictionary](#)

1 Samuel 28 - Saul and the woman at Endor

Saul, unable to receive an answer through dreams, prophets, or Urim, seeks a woman with a familiar spirit and asks for Samuel to be brought up. The narrative speaks of the figure as Samuel and has him predict Saul's death, raising difficult questions about the nature of the episode.

External research: [KJV text](#)

2 Kings 2:23-25 - Elisha and the bears

Young people mock Elisha, he curses them in the name of the LORD, and two she-bears come out of the wood. The short narrative leaves many details unstated, which makes confident reconstructions of age, injuries, social setting, or motives especially vulnerable to overreach.

External research: [KJV text](#)

2 Kings 6:1-7 - The floating axe head

A borrowed iron axe head falls into the water. Elisha cuts a stick, casts it in, and "the iron did swim." The text supplies the event but no physical explanation.

External research: [KJV text](#)

Isaiah 20 - Isaiah walks naked and barefoot

The prophet's own body becomes part of the message: Isaiah is commanded to remove sackcloth and footwear and becomes a sign concerning Egypt and Ethiopia. Biblical prophecy can be enacted as well as spoken.

External research: [KJV text](#)

Ezekiel 4 - An enacted siege

Ezekiel constructs a model of Jerusalem, lies on his side, measures food and water, and performs a prolonged sign of siege and judgment. The strangeness belongs to prophetic communication itself.

External research: [KJV text](#)

Matthew 27:52-53 - The saints rise

Matthew says graves were opened and many bodies of the saints arose, entered the holy city after Jesus' resurrection, and appeared to many. The Gospel gives no names, later biographies, or explanation of what happened afterward.

External research: [KJV text](#)

Research Summary

The table below separates the strange element from what the text establishes and what remains open. Its purpose is not to flatten the passages, but to make the paper's method visible at a glance.

PASSAGE	STRANGE ELEMENT	WHAT IS ESTABLISHED	WHAT REMAINS OPEN
Exodus 28; Numbers 27; 1 Samuel	Urim and Thummim	Priestly means of divine judgment/inquiry.	Physical form and exact operation.
Numbers 22	Talking donkey	The LORD opens the donkey's mouth and Balaam's eyes; Deir 'Alla separately attests a Balaam son of Beor as seer.	The miracle cannot be archaeologically tested.
Daniel 5	Writing hand	A divine verdict against Belshazzar; cuneiform independently names Belshazzar as Nabonidus's son.	The supernatural writing is not independently verifiable.
Exodus 23; 34; Deuteronomy 14	Kid in mother's milk	The practice is prohibited three times.	The original rationale.
Exodus 33	God's face/back	Moses receives a limited manifestation of glory.	What Moses physically perceived.
John 7:53-8:11	Woman taken in adultery	Jesus frustrates a trap, refuses condemnation, and commands no more sin.	Original textual location; what Jesus wrote.
Mark 11	Withered fig tree	Jesus curses the tree; the temple action sits between curse and discovery.	The full symbolic force of the episode.
Revelation 20-21	Second death	The lake of fire is called the second death; Death and Hades are cast into it.	How apocalyptic imagery corresponds to final reality.
Genesis 14; Psalm 110; Hebrews 7	Melchizedek	King-priest used to explain Christ's priesthood.	His complete historical identity and genealogy.
Ezekiel 1; 10	Wheels full of eyes	A throne vision associated with divine glory and cherubim.	Precise visualization and mechanics.
Job 39-41	Unicorn, Behemoth, Leviathan	Powerful untamable creatures under God's rule.	Modern taxonomic identification of every term/detail.

The Larger Lesson: Strange Does Not Mean Meaningless

One of the easiest mistakes in reading unusual passages is to assume that the mysterious detail must be the main point. Often it is not. The donkey is remarkable, but Numbers is interested in Balaam's blindness and God's control of revelation. The handwriting is spectacular, but Daniel is interested in pride and judgment. The wheels are

unforgettable, but Ezekiel says he is seeing the likeness of the glory of the LORD. Leviathan is terrifying, but God's questions to Job concern mastery. Melchizedek is mysterious, but Hebrews is interested in Jesus Christ.

The strange detail attracts us to the passage. The surrounding Scripture tells us where to look after we arrive.

The strange parts of Scripture deserve more study, not more imagination.
Where the Bible speaks, examine it carefully. Where it is silent, do not make speculation speak with the authority of Scripture.

Scripture, History, Interpretation - and Humility

Historical research can genuinely illuminate Scripture. The Deir 'Alla inscription tells us that Balaam son of Beor was remembered outside the biblical text. Babylonian records establish Belshazzar as a real royal son. Lexical research helps explain how Hebrew *re'em* became the KJV "unicorn." Manuscript study forces us to handle John 7:53-8:11 honestly. Literary analysis helps us see how Mark connects the fig tree and the temple. Qumran literature shows that Melchizedek became a focus of Jewish speculation before or around the rise of Christianity.

None of those disciplines makes interpretation unnecessary. They make better interpretation possible.

They also have limits. Archaeology cannot excavate Balaam's donkey speaking. A cuneiform tablet cannot measure Moses' encounter with divine glory. Textual criticism cannot tell us what Jesus wrote in the dust when no surviving text gives the words. Psychology cannot decide whether Ezekiel actually saw a supernatural vision.

Those are different kinds of questions. Confusing the domains creates bad arguments in both directions: faith should not be disguised as archaeology, and archaeology should not be asked to answer theological questions it cannot answer.

Conclusion: Let the Mystery Remain Where Scripture Leaves It

The Bible's strangest passages reward careful reading because they force a distinction between curiosity and knowledge. Curiosity asks: What were the Urim and Thummim really? What species was Leviathan? What did Jesus write? Was Melchizedek secretly somebody else? Were Ezekiel's wheels machinery? What exactly did Moses see?

Knowledge asks a second question: **What evidence do we actually have?**

Sometimes the answer is more than we expected. An ancient inscription really does mention Balaam son of Beor. Babylonian evidence really does name Belshazzar. Mark really does interweave the fig tree and temple scenes. The textual history of John 8 really is complicated. At other times the evidence simply ends. When it ends, our certainty should end with it.

The translators of the King James Bible themselves defended marginal alternatives where underlying words or senses were genuinely difficult, and they quoted Augustine's principle: "it is better to make doubt of those things which are secret, than to strive about those things that are uncertain." That sentence is unusually appropriate for a study of strange passages.

External research: [The Translators to the Reader \(1611 KJV preface\)](#)

Read closely. Compare Scripture with Scripture. Study the history. Examine the languages. Use archaeology where archaeology can speak. Take manuscript evidence seriously. Listen to competing interpretations. Notice the mind's desire to turn uncertainty into certainty.

Then keep the categories clear: where Scripture speaks clearly, let it speak clearly; where interpretation is strong, call it interpretation; where evidence is uncertain, say so; and where Scripture leaves a mystery unresolved, let it remain a mystery rather than turning speculation into revelation.

"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

External Sources and Further Research

All source links below point to external websites. Biblical passage links throughout the paper point to the KJV at BibleGateway. The original online edition of this paper is linked separately at the top of the document and in every footer.

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