

INTRODUCTION
The Complete Visual Bible
By Stephen M. Miller

An Atheist complimented me today.

Perfect timing. Wonderful compliment.

I was taking a last pass through this book, polishing the writing and making sure I had all the pictures and maps ready to go to the editor. All the while I was wondering what to write in this intro, one of the last things I do before sending a book on its way.

I was in Revelation and nearly done with my polishing when the atheist's e-mail came. He's a photographer in Germany. I had e-mailed him yesterday, asking permission to publish one of his photos.

"After thinking a while," he wrote, "I have decided that you may use it for the book you are writing on the Bible.

"To tell you frankly," he added, "I am a decided atheist and thus felt kind of strange about the intended context for the use of the photo. So I read samples of your previous books on the Internet.

"Actually, I found them written with care and sensitivity, and your approach will surely be interesting."

I stopped working.

I sat for a while and thought about what he had said.

I looked out the window of my upstairs home-office. Past the lavender blooms on our redbud tree and the brownish green buds on the ash. To the homes of my neighbors.

There's one neighbor whose wife works half the nation away, but who comes home when she can.

Next door to them is another couple. The husband was recently diagnosed with lung cancer; he's younger than me.

Across the street there's a couple who brought my family some food several years ago when they heard our high school son was in the hospital, deathly sick with a virus he eventually managed to beat, barely.

On Sunday mornings when it comes time to back the car out of the driveway and go to church, those neighbors of mine stay home. Of the 10 houses I can see from my window, only one household attends worship services.

I write for the other nine. And for my atheist friends and colleagues.

So I figure you can imagine how I felt when I read today's e-mail.

Books like this take a full year of my life, researching and writing. It sometimes worries me that I'm spending all that time creating something that works only for religion insiders—as though I'm singing to the choir, when what I want to do is sing to the rest of the world.

So today, on the last day of another year's long work—a day before the start of a new year on a new book—an atheist writes to tell me he has heard my song, and it's not so bad.

I wonder. What would an atheist say if I told him that he, an unbeliever, has become the voice of God—heaven-sent to encourage a believer?

Coincidence is not a deity, he might argue.

Not always, I would agree. But sometimes.

Today, perhaps.

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