

The first twelve chapters from the forthcoming:

The Lost ePistles
From
The Dead Sea
iParchment

If the Bible were a laptop, what emails would you find in the inbox?

Edited by Dave Hopwood

1. God

Genesis chapter 1

creator@bigidea.nothing

to

planet@friends.unique

Okay. Let's think. I know.

Let there be... space, time, amoeba... no I'm getting ahead of myself. I know! Let there be... light! Brilliant. Love it. More light, lots of light. Big light. Little light. Flashlights. Wind up torches. Fantastic. Light on, light off. Light on, light off. On. Off. On Off. On – now that bit can be called er... day. And light off... that can be called night. Bit tired now. I'll finish this email tomorrow.

Back again! Got another idea.

Let there be... some space. More space. Lots of space. Great, that separates the two runny bits, which I think would be better named... gravy! No, that's not right. Dr Pepper? Frappuccino? No! I know - water. That's it, the runny bits can be water. And the dry bit in the middle can be... the sky. Think I'll go and explore the sky for a bit. I feel in the mood for some hang gliding. I'll finish this email tomorrow.

Back again! Day three now.

Let's have some dry ground because it's all bit wet down there, the people will be getting soaked all the time and have nowhere to park their cars. What are people? Wait up – you ain't seen nothing yet! Now the watery bits they can be called sea – that's it. Now let's bring on some growing things – things with seeds and leaves and blades – yes let's have some grass, that's good, and how about some trees, oaks, palms, ash, willow... this could take a while... I'll be back...

Day four. I mean, I call it day four, but I haven't actually fixed any dividers yet, created time if you like - till now! Yep. Today is the day we put lights in the sky and dates in the calendar. Start all the clocks and switch on your hourglass. Night and day is now a progressive thing. Today I haven't invented just days, oh no, and not just weeks, no – I'm talking about years. Life is now a long thing. A minute to make a couple of tea, a lifetime to make a wise person. Time - the fourth dimension... time – for... a lie down...

Day five everybody. Fish and birds. Millions of the things. And I just created the most popular sports in Britain... fishing and bird watching... enjoy.

Day six. Now it gets complicated. We're talking dogs, cats, unicorns, velocer raptors, three-toed sloths, sabre-toothed tigers, woolly mammoths... oh and to top it all off. People. Arms, legs, livers, buttocks, intellect, emotions, desires, freedom of choice. Could it get any better?

Day seven. Today I invented the lie in. Not the li-on that was day six. The lie in. And the breakfast in bed. Perfect.

2. Adam

Genesis chapters 2-4

adam@1stgardenproducts.eden

to

cain@lostin.nod

Dear Cain

How's the holiday? We're missing you here like mad. Your mother's pregnant again and to be honest not looking forward to the birth, all those labour pains, she says it's like pushing a three piece suite through a keyhole. Work's picking up but all that digging is hard, hard, hard. The ground at this time of year is like concrete. We haven't invented concrete yet of course but when we do I'm sure it'll be like this ground. I miss the garden, the soil there used to be so easy to work.

Have you got yourself a girlfriend yet? I'm sure it would lift you out of the doldrums, ever since you and your brother had that little misunderstanding you've not been the same. He's not been the same either of course.

Bumped into that talking snake again the other day. Remember him? He doesn't say much nowadays, does more laughing. In fact we call him the laughing snake now. I shut him up a few times by jumping on his head with my hobnail boot but he always bounces back. Laugh laugh laugh. Drives me mad. Fancy an apple, he says. Yea, and I'll shove it right up the place where his back legs used to be... At least he can only slither along these days, makes it easy to stomp on his head when he gets annoying.

Your mother's business is going well – *figleaves-R-us*. She's designed a few new outfits. I still wander around naked from time to time but she goes bananas if she catches me, says it's not decent, says the neighbours might have their curtains open and catch me. Not that we have any neighbours. Or curtains. She makes me wear all her new outfits, says I'm her guinea pig. Great! Who came up with that name anyway? Oh yea... me! The other day I had to walk around in some fig-leaf jeans crossed with leggings – figgins she calls them. I called them figgin all right and all, felt like a right dodo wandering around in them. I was very glad we didn't have any neighbours with their curtains open that day. She says her business will take off soon, we just need some customers. At the moment I have to buy everything she makes. She's started giving me loyalty points, says I can have a free pair of figgins when I get a million. Great! So far I've got 3000 palm shirts, 5000 grass skirts and a couple of hundred holly-leaf boxer shorts. Don't mention it to your mother but I never wear the boxer shorts - it's a bit of a prickly situation. I've got so many clothes I'm building new wardrobes like there's no tomorrow. Which of course is a distinct possibility since we met that snake. There never was going to be a 'no-tomorrow' situation until that regrettable incident with the fruit crumble. I still can't face apples. Your mum made some snakeskin boots the other day but I couldn't go near them, that's a bridge and a heel and sole too far for me.

We miss you son. Specially now Abel's not around. We miss you both – but we can't... have Abel back. Not since you sent him... well... we don't quite know where you sent him. No one's been there before. There's just a dark patch on the ground where he fell and a mound of earth where we put his body. Your mother still thinks he might get up again one day but I said don't hold your breath. Cause I don't think he is. We haven't got a word yet to describe what state he's in – but I feel I need to think of one dead quick. No... no... just can't come up with anything yet.

Why did you do it? We know you two had been arguing for a long time, but there was no need for that. Were you jealous in some way? I remember when you were kids you never quite got over it when he was first born, you were no longer the only child. Not quite as spoilt anymore. That was shock to the system. Still, you didn't really need to give Abel the kind of shock to his system with that rock the way you did. I still remember that sound now. I was out digging to plant some potatoes and it was as if the whole earth shook for a second, I heard you two shouting and there was that horrible cry and a crack and a thud... and then silence. And I wanted to hear the two of you shouting again, knocking the life out of each other. But it was too late, you'd already knocked the life out of your bother forever.

Sometimes I catch her crying, your mother I mean. See her sitting under a tree somewhere sobbing the aches out of her heart, she misses you both so much. I try and talk to her but that's not the same since the tree incident. We don't communicate in the same way, I feel I can't get through to her, I feel so isolated sometimes, alone though I'm right here with her.

We still have good times though, still mess about together, still go for walks and see those magical sunsets. Still swim and canoe in those mighty rivers that cross near here. And... she still gives me a good ribbing sometimes. Aye aye aye. Remember how she always did that? Just cause I've got one less than her. And you. And anyone else you meet on your wanderings. One less than everyone really...

Text us soon, you've still got that Blackberry haven't you? And did you take the Apple with you when you left?

Love

Adam

3. Eve

Genesis chapters 2-4

eve@figleavesRus.eden

to

cain@lostin.nod

Where are you? Everything's falling apart! You're father's being hopelessly positive it's driving me mad. I wanna kill him! I wanna hit him with a rock and... oh... you don't need to hear that.

I gave birth to you! I went through hell to get you into this world. Why have you run off now? I know you fell apart after all that with your brother, but we still love you. We can never stop loving you. Everyone makes mistakes. I should know. I started the trend. I invented mistake-making.

Is that why all this is happening? Is it because of me and what I did? It is isn't it? He said we would die and look at us. Marriage is on its last legs, Abel's under that mound of earth and you're lost out there wandering in no man's land.

I miss you so much Cain, you are so much like me. We understand each other, I miss the chats we had, the times we spent together. You have to let go of what happened, you have to forgive yourself otherwise it'll be like acid in your veins, it'll burn you up and they'll find you dead in a ditch somewhere with a foul expression on your face.

Come home Cain. Stop your running. I want you back. I have a great new outfit planned for you. And a perfect pair of snakeskin boots.

Mum

4. Abraham

Genesis chapters 11, 12 & 16

abe@nofixedabode.underthestars

to

yhwh@beyondthestars.forever

Dear Lord

I'm here again, sitting under those stars. I can't escape them can I? Every night they turn up again, twinkle twinkle, like a nudge from the heavens. 'One day you're gonna be a dad.' Every time I sit here and look up I get that message again, it'd better not be a joke, you know Sarah's got a weird sense of humour.

I'm trusting you here, you can see that, putting everything on the line. I remember very clearly the offer you made, stay put in Haran after dad died and slowly fade away with no family or children to continue the line, or set out for Canaan and be fruitful. Don't let me down now.

Like the stars you said, numerous you said. Too numerous to count. Well I certainly can't count those fireflies up there in the night sky. Can this tired old traveller really sire a million babies? And Sarah? Produce all those kids? It's laughable.

My neighbour back in Haran used to worship those stars, they *are* amazing I have to say. Shame he couldn't see beyond them. I tried to tell him but he couldn't get it. Said those lights up there were the eyes of the gods. I didn't dare tell him you were using them as a text message to me.

I've got to be honest I had an idea. Now don't shout me down but Hagar's pretty fit. She could bear a small nation. She's healthy, and strong, I could nip behind the tent one day... I mean, I know it sounds like plan b, but what harm could it do? And it would take the pressure off Sarah. You know, the burden of making a baby weighs heavily on us every night. She suggested it!

My dad always wanted to get to Canaan. He had big plans. 'One day lad,' he used to say, 'one day we'll get to the land of milk and honey. And you'll love it.' That was his big dream. Hard to make your dreams come true though. He just got tired in the end and stopped at Haran. Never left. Didn't stop talking about it though, still claimed we'd start travelling again, up-sticks and make that final trip to the promised land. But he always had that sad, wistful smile when he did, like he knew that he'd never make it now. He'd be laughing now if he knew we were heading for his dream home. Maybe he does know. Maybe he's in another promised land somewhere. I hope so.

Don't forget now, Lord, my idea about Hagar, that plan b. Worth considering don't you think, eh? Ah those stars, those stars...

5. Sarah

Genesis chapters 21 & 22

sarah@confused.com

to

yhwh@youdidn'tpromisethis.whywhywhy

Dear Lord

What's going on? I know you know. I'm not stupid. No one's saying anything but we both know. Isaac's for the chop isn't he? Is this some kind of sick joke? I mean, after years of hopes and doubts and dreams and nightmares we actually produce a child, and let me tell you, I was the only one doing the pushing and the screaming that day. And after all that – this!

I DON'T UNDERSTAND. ☹

It's not fair. I know that old story of Job the men tell round their campfires at night with its famous oft-quoted line, 'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away...' but that is no comfort. Believe me. There never was a bigger case of the Lord giveth-ing and the Lord taketh-ing than this. It's madness.

Don't you remember those stars? And all those rich, rosy promises before we set out? A new life you said, a new future with a new family. There we were in Haran, me not able to lift my head up when I went to the well, me the shame of the town because of the 'no kids' situation. 'The Lord hasn't blessed her,' they all said with their pitying smiles. I knew the stories that went around. And then suddenly my ancient mad husband comes home and claims you've promised him the impossible. Descendants! Did you hear? Descendants!

So what's going on? Are there no stars in the sky all of a sudden? Have the lights gone out up there? I don't think so, every night we get the reminders, and if you take my son from me then you'd better shut out the night sky. Throw a blanket over it and keep it covered forever. Otherwise every night is a lie, every show of stars is a sham. Because we won't have descendants. We won't have more children than fires in the sky. And how will it look then? How will the people around look on Abraham's God. 'Oh he promised that old couple a bright future, but he's reneged on his promise.' That's what they'll say.

D'you want everyone saying that? The God who can't be trusted! Come on! I might have laughed before when you talked about me giving birth but there's no laughter in my life now. Unless you expect me to give birth again, go through all the pain and scream one more time, because miracle or not, I'm not sure I'm up to it. It's not my body I doubt, it's my heart.

We trusted you! That's why I can say this. Lord, we are not strangers. We've been through too much together. Don't spoil the relationship now please.

Sarah ☹

6. Isaac

Genesis chapters 21 & 22

miracleboy@homeless.onacamel

to

ishmael@notforgottenbrother.wilderness

Dear Ishmael

Dad's dead. Sorry, there's no easy way to say it. Best just to come out with it. I wanted to let you know, and I thought you might want to help me bury him. There's a patch of ground where mum's buried, it's the only lad we own now.

Dad had six other sons but they're not here anymore, he gave them each a part of his inheritance and then sent them away. I know we haven't seen much of each other over the years and dad abandoned you and your mum when you were just a teenager, but I know too that you're someone special. You're not like my other step-brothers, you're like me. You've been chosen, you're gonna prosper and your kids will found a new nation. I guess you were born under the same promise as me. So it seems fitting.

Come and bury dad, let's give him a decent send off. Please.

I know you must have very mixed feeling about us. Dad told me that you were born in the wrong time, my mum and your mum did not get on, especially not once she was pregnant which is crazy cause it was her idea. Jealousy creeps out of the undergrowth and mugs you when you least expect it eh? Mum had this great plan to sidestep trying to have me and then it backfired and she was jealous as hell about your mum having a baby. Maybe that was the time she realised just how much she still wanted to have a child.

And then for a while you were me, apparently. You were the promised golden child, the boy who would produce the future. The answer to all my dad's insecurities about not having an heir to pass his life on to, his way of living forever, sorted. Till it all went sour. I've picked up bits and pieces of the story over the years, but it seems Dad got another message from God about you not being the baby that solved all the problems. Your mum and mine continued to fight of course and dad realised that he'd made a mistake, he should have trusted those stars in the sky, the sign that he saw every night. He panicked then and argued with my mum and in the end he let my mum send you away. There were rumours of angles rescuing you, that's what they say, but you know the truth better than me... Our family has certainly had its fair share of dysfunction, eh?

Things have been going good for me lately, I hope they have for you too. I'm married now to a beautiful girl, Rebekah. She's a sassy woman, I can tell you, knows her mind. Plus she put me back together after mum died. I hear you're great with a bow and arrow by the way, if you're still mad with me at all, don't bring it when you come!

Cheers, hope to see you,

Isaac

7. Rebekah

Genesis chapters 24 & 25

rebekah@paininmybelly.thesofa

to

miracleboy@hardatwork.thefield

Hi Wonderboy

I er... I've got some big news for you. No, it's not that new plough you were hoping for, Amazon emailed to say they are heartbroken about it not getting to us on time but it's still in the post at the mo. Apparently there's been a strike by Parcel Force chariot drivers.

No it's bigger news than that. You know how you said you're not a great man of God, not like your dad. Well, let's just say history's about to repeat itself and you mister – are a number one man of prayer.

Plus you're pretty good at a few other things too.

What am I talking about?

Babies my gorgeous guy!!! We are having one! Well, when I say one, I mean two of course. YES!! Twins! Can you believe it?

So you see – all that praying you did – it worked, God has given us an instant family. Now obviously it wasn't just the praying. There were one or two other factors as well mister. Well done! Nudge nudge... 😊😊

So here we are, about to become parents. Can you believe it? It seems only two minutes since I first saw you, that young naïve man walking in that field. I fell for you straight away you know, I just couldn't believe my luck. Practically fell off my camel. I was smiling like a Cheshire cat behind that veil I had to wear. You weren't smiling though, I remember you looked so sad, so so sad, you had just lost your mum of course...

Ow! I don't know about two babies in here but it feels like a few dozen, and they're fighting like cat and dog. Plus I could kill for a bacon sandwich, and there's no way I'm getting one of those! But I just keep getting these cravings. It's so unfair. OW! There they go again. I have a feeling these boys are not getting on, I think they're arm-wrestling at the moment. And the one on the right's winning.

I prayed about it, because to be honest - it's been getting me down, can't sleep, can't get comfortable, it's like walking around with a tornado in your stomach. I saw this picture in my mind of two nations inside me – battling for supremacy. Can you believe it? We pray for a baby and I give birth to a civil war!

Anyway, come home from your travels soon, I miss you, miss you, miss you. You'll see a difference in me! No, not a haircut. The waistline, lover boy.

A million kisses,

8. Jacob

Genesis chapters 32 & 33

wideboy@doubledealing.prodigal

to

esau@redhaireverywhere.wellscaryhunterkiller

Dear brother

I'm coming home. I have one request. Please don't kill me. I'll do anything you want. Seriously - I'm a rich man now. I can get you anything. Anything. I know you could beat my brains out, you always could, and I know you want to and I guess you should. But things have changed. Uncle Laban saw me right. I twisted his arm a bit and I have plenty of his stock. Took a lot of wrangling and haggling, but you know me.

Plus you're an uncle now and a brother-in-law – you have a load of new nephews and two gorgeous new sisters-in-law, both beautiful... well, sort of... it's a long story, should have gone to Specsavers. You wouldn't hurt a guy with a big family would you?

Or a limp. I mean you really couldn't hit a guy with a stagger could you? I met this angel and he beat me up. I can't run fast anymore. I think maybe God was trying to tell me something. I got a new name too, a prophetic one - which means I must have a future, and if you kill me – it'll be a very short one. And that can't be right can it? You kill me and you'll be messing up God's plans. You see I'm a wrestler now, well, not in your league, don't get any ideas. But I wrestled with the angel and then he said that can be my name forever, the guy who wrestles with God. Israel. Got a certain ring to it hasn't it?

So you see, you can't kill Jacob because he's gone for good now, and you don't know yet whether you want to kill Israel. You need to get to know him. So what do you say? I'm sorry bro, I took everything and ran, like a right ol' prodigal son. I cheated you and dad, and I messed up everything. And if that sounds like a well-rehearsed speech that's only because it is. I've thought about this a lot. I need you to forgive me, because without that I've no future.

See you soon,

Jake

9. Esau

Genesis chapters 27 & 33

esau@macho.killingmachine

to

runaway@lousystinkingcheat.selfish

Dear brottherr

Not uuse-d to this tecnological stuff so i hope youo can reed this.

So yer commin home? You'v got a nerv mate. You gotta helluva nerve. D'you know whot its bin like here?

No, cours yoo don't cause you been away livin it up, havin a grate time with Laban and his ladette dortas. An now your filthy stinkin rich you wanna come home an have everythin bak as it wos, rite?

Well, we'll see. I had to be the one providn for the old man. I had to be the one puttin up with mum's moode swinggs cause her bright eyed favrit boy wasn't here, even tho it was her idea ya shld run away.

She doesn't like me, never did much, she preffered yoo with yer soft hands and yer sweet face and yer clevver brane. Jus like her, too many sharp ideas in yer hed.

Hav I missed ya? No. No. NO! geddit? No. Do I want ya bak? nott sure.

Ya get older and ya fink about fings. i got a famly too, ya know. I got byootiful wives too, includin one of uncle ishmael's dortas. She;s a byoouty. Luv her. Mum and dad arnt so keen. Think they want ta ferget all about unlce ishmael. Well too late, I went and got me another wife wen yoo left. see yoo wosnt the only one went ta see rellativs - i was madd about what ya dun. so I wanted to get me own bak. So I went ta see uncle ish and I got me a dorta too. so don't preach ta me bout famlys.

i ain't gonna kill yas, dont think so anyways, frall me angr i don wanna hrt ya. Ya chang, othr things matta now. lets see how it goes when we meet, you and this limp o yours. Don't bovver wiv yer cash and yer presents, wast o time, ya cant by me.

See ya soon ya say, well, not if I see ya first.

E

10. Joseph

Genesis chapters 37 & 39

joe@sweetdreamer.pharoahsnick

to

littleben@onlyproperbro.canaan

Dear Ben

Been through some things since I last saw you! What a rollercoaster! Thrown in a well (did the others tell about that?), sold into slavery, worked my way up to manager, attacked by the boss's wife, thrown into prison, worked my way up to manager again. But in prison. But at least I'm in charge of someone emptying the toilet buckets now instead of me emptying the toilet buckets. Plus I get perks, like time on the prison internet.

Remember those dreams? I still have 'em – you have to hang onto your dreams Ben. Even if they're on a slow train coming. Even if it seems that the trains been completely derailed. You have to hang on. Dreams can keep you alive, they're like hope. Like water in the desert. It's imaging something better, like the old seers say – 'without a vision of something you just curl up and die'. I don't want that. Plus, I get to interpret dreams as well now, not just have them myself. So I'm like one of them ancient wise seers myself.

For instance I met these two sad guys in here, well one of them was sad the other had a bright future. Both dreamt weird dreams, and most times it's the prison food, but on this occasion I could tell they meant something. Sure enough, not long after one of them was dead and the other free. I told the one getting out to remember me, but that was eighteen months ago. D'you think he might have forgotten? I didn't bother telling the other one, I didn't fancy going where he was off to.

I think about you all a lot, about the old days when we were a family together. I dream about that too, I have a dream that one day we'll all be reunited and I'll be king of the world! Okay the king bit may be a bit far-fetched but there's still time to get us all back together. All I need is to get promoted from prison manager to prime minister then I could arrange it. Sure. And I just saw the sphinx fly past the window.

Are you on FaceScroll? We could be friends, then I could find out what's happening with everyone? Who fancies who etc. and when Simeon and Levi are gonna do their next sponsored slaughter. Better go, I'm in charge of the keys and I have to lock up at night and read a bedtime story to all the other prisoners. We don't have actually have any stories in here so I make 'em up. At the moment I'm in the middle of this one about Abraham Potter, this boy who goes to a school of Egyptian magic and turns out to be the one who can save the known world from the evil Nimrodimort. D'you think I might be able to get it published one day? Might sell a few copies?

I'll tell it to you if... sorry... when we next meet.

Keep dreaming,

Joe

11. Tamar (1)

Genesis chapters 38

tamar@brokenhearted.misused

to

judah@brokenpromises.bigsurprise

Dear Judah

Remember how you were going to let me marry your son Shelah, after my first two husbands died? Remember how you conveniently forgot to let me know when he came of age? Remember how you abandoned me, for fear I had some kind of deathwish and would cause your third son to die the way the other two had done? Remember how you broke your promise to me, leaving me childless and without a man?

Well mister, remember something else. Because I do. Remember that day you came sheep-shearing and spotted a prostitute by the road and thought you'd have quick one on the side? Remember how you promised to pay her with a sheep and left your ID as a down-payment? Remember how much of a good time you had? Well, it's payback time. Because I remember all these things too.

How?

Because I have your ID. Because you owe me a sheep. Because I was that prostitute! Sucker! You lied to me, you pushed me out of your life and thought you could forget me forever. No way. You promised me a son and you stole him from me.

Well here's something else you can remember now. You're going to have a grandchild. Two in fact. Cause I'm pregnant and you're the daddy. So congratulations big man. And when they come to drag me away and to stone me for infidelity I'll tell them, I'll tell them you paid me for sex and I did it because you broke your promise. It's child support time Judah. I have my babies and you have two new mouths to feed.

See you at the christening.

Tamar (aka Talulah the prostitute)

12. Aaron

Exodus chapters 7, 8 & 9

brother@mouthpiece.sparepart

to

mo@princeturnedprophet.smellyshepherd

Hi Bro

Just wanted to say thanks for including me in this big show of yours. Man it's incredible. When I threw down my staff in front of Pharaoh yesterday and it turned into that snake! How awesome was that? Of course not as awesome as the moment Pharaoh's magicians threw down their staffs all did the same thing. That was impressive and a bit of a shock, and of course I panicked a bit, which was I ran around for a while leaping out of the way of the snake's fangs. You of course were as cool as cucumber. And then the most impressive bit – when my snake/staff swallowed their snake/staffs. That really put the prophet among the false prophets. I see they've all had to drop out of the rambler's club because none of them has a walking staff anymore! Result!

I'm sure you know what you're doing bro but do be careful. I mean that was well cool turning the Nile into blood, especially as the Nile is a well Holy place for them, but it does smell a bit. And we can't get fish-fingers anywhere now, or a bottle of Aqua Nile. Maybe you need to think these things through, I mean don't go doing anything daft like conjuring up a load of frogs or gnats or lice or flies or locusts or ladybirds will you? That would be very disruptive. And frankly, just a little bit like showing off. Obviously we do want Pharaoh to get the point and let us all go, but at the least inconvenience really.

A spot of bad weather might be useful, like a blustery day or some showery intervals, but don't overdo it and call up a hail storm or complete darkness or anything. And if you're planning on making anyone ill, then just a few coughs and colds will be fine thanks, don't go giving people boils on their bottoms or pestilence or a deadly plague or anything like that.

I have to say you've clearly grown in confidence since you ran away all those years ago – have you been on an assertiveness course or something? And as you invited me a long time to be your voice do feel free to actually let me speak won't you? At the moment I can't get a word in edgeways. You said you told God you couldn't do the talkie bit – well, I think someone was underselling themselves that day, eh?

Better go, my staff is hissing at me, I think he wants a dead rat or some dried grasshoppers. See you tomorrow for another action packed day. I don't suppose you could miracle up a new cloak for me could you? One like that one Pharaoh had on last night?

Bye for now

Aaron