

From the August 4, 2010 Issue

The Eye of the Needle

There have been many attempts to explain—and explain away—Jesus’ statement in Matthew 19:24 that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom.” For example, some commentaries try to connect the “eye of the needle” to a particular gate in Jerusalem through which it was difficult—but not impossible—for a camel to pass. Many rich people like this interpretation.

Such interpretations are rooted in the sort of Bible reading that John Stonecypher warns us about on page 2 of this month’s issue (in his article “Who-ology?”). It’s a way of reading that says “if we can just figure out the original meaning of this phrase by connecting it to some obscure element of Jewish culture, language, or history then we can find a way to make this verse easier to accept.”

I think Jesus was talking about the tiny eye of a sewing needle and a big, spitting, stinking camel. In other words he meant “It’s impossible.” Because, as Jerome just eloquently explained to us above (in “Not By Might”) no one enters the Kingdom by his own effort. We have all been brought into the Kingdom by Jesus. That’s the easiest thing in the world - or the hardest, depending on what you think of Jesus.

~ Jonathan Stepp