

# BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #40: KISSES AND KISSING IN THE BIBLE

By John Temples

A quick quiz: what is “the anatomical juxtaposition of two orbicularis oris muscles in a state of contraction”?

Answer: a kiss. Besides remaining a popular pastime for many people, kissing is a Bible subject. There are about 25 different kisses recorded in Scripture, with the words *kiss*, *kisses*, or *kissed* occurring 46 times. Here is a breakdown:

- About 65% of the recorded kisses involved men kissing men (not in a romantic or lascivious way, but the standard Middle Eastern greeting or expression of respect).
- Only six kisses were between men and women outside a family setting (Genesis 29:11, Proverbs 7:13, Song of Solomon 1:2 & 8:1; Luke 7:38 & 45).
- Only three of those six are sensual or romantic kisses (Song 1:2 & 8:1, Proverbs 7:13).
- The other three are acts of worship to idols (1 Kings 19:18, Hosea 13:2, Job 31:27).
- One Bible kiss is allegorical or symbolic (Psalms 85:10).
- There are two instances of women kissing women (Ruth 1:9 & 14).

Interestingly, the first human kiss<sup>1</sup> recorded in the Bible was not a romantic kiss, but was that of a son (Jacob) kissing his father: “Then his father Isaac said to him, ‘Come near now and kiss me, my son.’ And he came near and kissed him....” (Genesis 27:26-27). Also interestingly, the first time the word “love” occurs, it refers to a father’s love for his son (Genesis 22:2, involving Abraham and Isaac). When the prodigal son returned home, his father ran and fell on his neck and kissed him (Luke 15:20).

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<sup>1</sup> The first kiss of any kind recorded in Scripture might be when God breathed into Adam’s nostrils and gave him consciousness or the breath of life.

The first recorded kiss between a man and a woman is found in Genesis 29:11. Isaac had told his son Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman, but to return to his ancestral home (Babylon--modern-day Iraq) to find a wife. He came to a well and met a young lady named Rachel (actually his cousin). Genesis 29:10-12 says, "And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth,<sup>2</sup> and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's relative and that he was Rebekah's son. So she ran and told her father."

There are several kisses recorded in the Bible relating to worship or homage. People in Bible times would kiss a superior to show respect. They would kiss a man's beard or his hand; or, to show real submission, his foot, or even the ground under his foot. (Maybe this is where the expression "kissing the ground he/she walks on" came from.) Several passages in the Bible refer to kissing as idol worship:

- In 1 Kings 19:18, God says, "I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."
- Hosea 13:2--"Now they sin more and more, and have made for themselves molded images, idols of their silver, according to their skill; all of it is the work of craftsmen. They say of them, 'Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves.'" ("The calves" were golden calves, carved images.)

And there is this cryptic passage in Job 31:27--"So that [If] my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand, this also would be an iniquity

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<sup>2</sup> There's a very humorous, and very human, touch to this account of Jacob rolling away the stone covering the well. Back in verse 3 we learn that when it was time to water the sheep, the shepherds would roll the stone away, water the sheep, and then put the stone back in place. The implication is that it took several men to maneuver this stone, which was probably quite heavy. When Jacob first arrived and was talking with the shepherds, he was told that Rachel was arriving with some sheep. Jacob told the shepherds, "Look, it is still high day; it is not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go and feed them" (verse 7). Translation: "Why don't you shepherd guys get lost so I can talk to this girl?" They told Jacob, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." They didn't take the hint, and they also seem to have been saying, "There's not enough of us here yet to roll away the stone." But when Rachel arrives, Jacob is so excited that he single-handedly rolls away the stone and waters the sheep himself! He was wanting some quality time with this girl!

deserving of judgment, for I would have denied God who is above.” Here, Job is defending his integrity before God, saying that he had not done this or that sin. What he means in verse 27 is that his heart has not been secretly enticed by an idol, and he has not kissed his hand as a gesture of worship toward an idol (or the sun or the moon, verse 26). Is this where the custom of blowing kisses came from?

Psalms 2:12 contains a strange admonition in regard to worship: “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little.” “Kiss” here means “worship” or “pay homage.” A few verses before, the Son (a prophetic reference to Jesus) is spoken of as being honored by God; verse 12 is an admonition for men to pay homage to Him also.

What about romantic kisses? As we mentioned above, there are three of those recorded in Scripture. In Song of Solomon 1:2, a bride says of her husband (or her betrothed), “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for your love is better than wine.” And in Song 8:1, she exclaims, “Oh, that you were like my brother, who nursed at my mother’s breasts! If I should find you outside, I would kiss you; I would not be despised.” The background of this is that in the East, brothers and sisters could kiss in public, but it was frowned upon for husbands and wives (or boyfriends and girlfriends) to do so. (Go figure.) So, the girl is saying, “If you were my brother, I could kiss you in public and not be criticized.” Much of the Song of Solomon speaks unabashedly and frankly of romantic and sexual love, which between a husband and wife is holy and without shame.

The final reference to a sensual kiss is in Proverbs 7:13. A harlot, a brazen woman, lures a simple young man devoid of understanding into her home. Her enticements are expressed in stark language. Here is part of it: “So she caught him and kissed him; with an impudent [shameless] face she said to him: ‘I have peace offerings with me; today I have paid my vows.’” (When she says she has peace offerings, she means “I’ve got a lot of food that needs to be eaten.” The whole passage is a warning not to get involved with such women.

There is a beautiful, symbolic kiss in Psalms 85:10--“Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” Even though this is

past tense, it seems to be “prophetic past”--looking forward to the coming of Christ and the restoring of harmony between heaven and earth. Here, I believe, is the meaning: In the garden of Eden, righteousness (meaning God’s justice) and peace were best friends. But sin ruined the relationship. Ever since, mercy and truth were at odds, and righteousness and peace were not on speaking terms. But at the cross, righteousness and peace “kissed” each other--God’s justice was satisfied and mankind could once more be at peace with Him.

Of course, there is one other infamous kiss, the kiss of betrayal by Judas (Matthew 26:49). Unfortunately, many of us can identify with being the recipient of such treachery.

## THE “HOLY KISS”

Four times in the New Testament, Paul tells Christians to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, and 1 Thessalonians 5:26). And Peter says, “Greet one another with a kiss of love” (1 Peter 5:14). Just as we greet each other with a handshake, the early Christians would greet each other with a kiss. (Can you imagine the emotional joy when a Jewish Christian first gave a kiss-greeting to a Gentile believer?)

What made this kiss “holy”? Two things: (1) Men would kiss men and women would kiss women; (2) The kiss was not on the lips, but on the cheek. Dave Miller writes, “Kissing was a common, long-established form of salutation in ancient cultures.... When a guest was invited to another’s house, it was customary for the host to kiss the guest (Luke 7:45). Bystanders saw nothing unusual about Judas kissing Jesus.... Similarly, Paul’s instruction regarding kissing was not an attempt to originate a new practice in the church.... Paul’s purpose was to regulate the well-established custom of kiss-greeting.... Viewed in this light, Paul and Peter are urging first-century Christians to keep their kiss-greeting HOLY.” (Dave Miller, “Kissing and Culture,” *Firm Foundation*, September 1988)

In our culture, a handshake or a hug is the equivalent of the “holy kiss.”

A kiss can send many different messages: I love you...I respect you...I honor you...I have compassion for you. Kissing is an instinctive and normal part of romantic love, which is a gift from God to be enjoyed fully and without shame in the sanctity of marriage. Let us thank God for romantic love! --John Temples