

Say What? Some Puzzles in 1 Corinthians

Some matters discussed in 1 Corinthians are baffling to scholars and casual Bible readers alike.

- Paul says that women should wear head coverings in church as “a symbol of authority . . . because of the angels” (11:10). What do the angels have to do with it? Is Paul afraid that the angels might lust after the earth women (cf. Gen. 6:4)? Are these good angels or bad angels (demons)? Or are human messengers being referred to as angels? Many theories have been advanced, but no one knows for sure what this means.
- Paul refers to people “who receive baptism on behalf of the dead” (15:29). What was this ritual, and what was it meant to accomplish? Was it a vicarious baptism for people who had already died? Was Paul for it or against it? A “baptism for the dead” is practiced today among Mormons but not by any other group that views 1 Corinthians as Scripture. One reason: no one knows for sure what Paul is talking about.