

If not then what?

In this post I am thinking about the Old Testament. In particular, how do I know it is true? This will not be an answer more in note-ish form .

What does it teach?

That God created the world. He had some sort of early encounter with a man, or group which was unsuccessful and resorted in some type of rift.

Fast-forward a bit and God tries again, through a man called Abraham. God promises him land and that his descendants will be a great nation. In return Abraham has to trust God that he will do this and later circumcise himself and male household, worship God.

Then the family slowly grows and then they go to Egypt for 400 ish years.

After that they leave and go through the desert. This time is particularly important as they get the law and their mandate: What is offered them in terms of land, material blessings etc, and what is required of them, as well as what will happen if they fail. But also promises of redemption if they repent.

Then there is the rather vague time of the judges. After which their is the appointment of a King. Saul first who fails. Then after that David and his line. With Solomon the Temple is built and there are more covenants. The tribes divide and within a few hundred years (700BC ish), due to serious short comings, the North is exiled, never to return and then a few hundred years more the South is exiled. However, it is allowed to return under Cyrus (probably a Zoroastrian). A lot of literature being written about now.

There are lots of prophecies about a coming kingdom, a ruler,

and restoration and that God will come back to the temple and there will be a golden age.

If this is not true then what?

A group of Hebrews who lived in Canaan. Multiplied. Won a few little wars and created a little kingdom. Exiled. Then trying to work out why this happened, and also – what power enabled them to return. Invented or greatly elaborated the law later. Wrote history of the form: we did good, we were blessed; we did bad, we were punished. Then looked forward thinking if we do extra good, then maybe we will be extra blessed.

Problems with traditional.

Historically we know that some details are not true e.g.

-The Angel killing 180,000 Assyrians – they just paid a ransom.

-Jericho – was destroyed well before Joshua.

Some pieces look borrowed, or re-worked from ancient literature.

Creation account. Noah. Isaac and Rebecca?

Problems with alternative

Where did they get the idea of one God from?

What about the law?

There is archaeological evidence verifying many details. David. Solomon. Exile. Amorites.

False dichotomy to try to pigeon-hole ancient literature into perfect historical account or fiction.

Preservation of Israel, after exile, destruction of Jerusalem, and holocaust is bordering on the miraculous.

If the story is largely false, then Jesus is not who he claims.

Christianity is then a fraud.

The New Perspective on Paul

So I haven't posted for a while. I am half way through my Introduction to the New Testament module, and now on Romans.

The New Perspective on Paul – basically this means that recent protestant Theologians have recognised that first century Jews did not believe that salvation was attainable by works only. They also knew that they had a position based on faith and God's choosing of Israel. However, they believe that this special position was linked to their identity as Jews. Thus the works of the law were more to do with marking oneself out as Jewish rather than particular moral codes to earn salvation.

Paul tells the Roman church that faith is for all and is through Christ.

A Light for the Gentiles

In the gospel of Luke, as well as being presented as the hope of Israel, Jesus is clearly shown to be “a light for the gentiles”. This is portrayed in several ways:

1] **Ancestry to Adam (3:23-38)**

Jesus’ descent is traced back to Adam, symbolically the father of mankind rather than just to Abraham, the ancestor of the Jews and the one to whom God made many important promises, which the Jews considered to be fulfilled in their history and future.

2] **Mention of God helping gentiles in the OT (4:24-27)**

In Luke 4 Jesus mentions that the prophets of Israel were sent to help gentiles, in particular Namaan and the widow at Zarephath.

3] **A light to the gentiles (2:32)**

Simeon at the temple prophesied among other things that Jesus would be a revelation of light to the gentiles. This also makes one think of Isa 42, where there is a prophecy of (42:6) a servant who would be a light to the gentiles.

Together these three snippets give a view of Jesus as being of humankind, as well as of the Jews, of God working in measure among the gentiles before Jesus, of God preparing to work more fully among the gentiles and this being brought to fulfilment through Jesus.

Deity of Jesus in Matthew



What would a Jew in the first century of thought of the Gospel of Matthew on first reading, given no prior knowledge of Christianity? What would they thought of Jesus? Would they have considered that he was portrayed as divine?__

Consider the following events:

- He acted like he had authority to forgive sins
- He had control over angels; called them his angels
- He said he would sit at the right hand of God
- He said that he would judge all men on the day of Judgement
- He considered believers as his people
- Jesus said that he was the only one that truly knew God
- He had power over nature
- Jesus considered himself able to give commandments of his own authority
- He rose from the dead and raised others from the dead
- A voice from heaven (God) said that Jesus was his Son with whom he was well pleased.



The Holiness of God in Christ

I have recently been thinking about every aspect of God by looking at Christ. This is nothing bizarre but simply a logical response to verses such as Hebrews 1:3: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." I had spent many years thinking that I need to see God and see that he is much better than everything else: more powerful, more pure etc. However, I have struggled to think of God. I have spent hundreds of hours in quiet rooms trying to think of God and failing to do so. It is hard to imagine an infinite eternal and perfect spirit, as you do not encounter such things ever in real life. There is little for the imagination to latch on to and to connect with – and so little for the emotions to latch on to and connect with.

So I have thought about many aspects of God by thinking about Christ. If I want to think of God's wisdom I think about some of the answers he gave to those who tried to trick him, for example the answers concerning paying taxes to Caesar and marriage in Luke 20. To think about intimacy with God I imagine myself as the woman (I am male but this isn't a problem!) pouring perfume on Jesus' feet, and imagine the nail marks there – the feet that suffered for me.

The theme of God's holiness is something I have wanted to grasp more. This is not to say I have got reasonably far and I can't go much further because it is infinite, rather it is infinite but I have barely got anywhere. Now holiness is to do with purity, the lack of any darkness, and about being set

apart for God's will.

So how did Jesus demonstrate this.

Purity

- Blameless toward women, having healthy pure relationships
- Integrity of speech (telling the truth)
- No selfishness (came to serve)
- No impure anger (not even striking anyone)
- No bitterness, even forgave his torturers
- No profit sought or impure motive

Set-apartness

- Continued focus on God's will (frequent prayer and fasting)
- Went ahead with the torture and rejection despite his senses struggling
- Prepared to face rejection

Personal Evaluation

This essay looks at one way in which this module has challenged my thinking, two new spiritual disciplines I have found beneficial and three ways in which my inner life has been edified. I also make a small comment about possible changes to the module.

This module challenged my view that certain denominations have little true spiritual life in them. After reading chapter nine of the course notes, I was greatly impressed with the Eastern Orthodox Church and appreciate their Bible centred and holistic approach in seeking after God. I have had very little to do with the Eastern Orthodox Church. Based on brief exposures to it I surmised that it was empty and ritualistic,

possibly because of seeing a great emphasis on icons and orthodox priests looking rather serious with long robes and beards. The fact that they place such an importance on the Bible greatly impressed me. They place the Bible on the altar during the service, read through the whole New Testament in a year and sing the beatitudes.[\[1\]](#) I also respect the way they seek after intimacy with God through many different spiritual disciplines including repetition of the Jesus prayer.[\[2\]](#)

A practical method of meditation I found useful was lectio divina.[\[3\]](#) I particularly found the meditatio step helpful and refreshing. Connecting biblical texts with past memories is not something I have tried much. For me, this discipline makes spiritual truths seem more real. For instance, if I read that God is love (1 John 4:8) yet cannot bring to mind any instance in my life where God has demonstrated his love to me then I find it hard to believe. The same holds for all other spiritual truths. Connecting the Bible with past experience in a way proves to me that the Bible is true and helps me believe it. The course notes recommend following a pattern of biblical readings that are progressive and ordered. I now practise lectio divina on a daily basis by taking a small verse or phrase from the lectionary readings. I also use calligraphy to help absorb the chosen phrase.

Another method of meditation I found helpful was the Ignatian meditation in front of a crucifix where we consider what we have done for God, what we are currently doing for him, and what we will do for him in the future.[\[4\]](#) I have found looking back over what I have done for God helpful. I am often very hard on myself and if I can detect any pride or apathy in any of my actions then I consider that whatever I did counted for nothing. In this way I often feel that I have done little of value in my life and feel dejected and weary. If nothing I do is of value, what is the point of trying? Looking back over my life and realising that, despite having many faults, God has used me in many situations is encouraging, and helps me to

face the future with confidence. Looking back at what I have done for God also gives me a realistic picture of where I am so I can aim higher. Looking forward to what I will do for God encourages me to be more like St Paul who said "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care" (1 Corinthians 3:10). This exercise really helps me see the bigger picture for my life and build deliberately and with care.

A subject I would like to see introduced into this module is the holiness of God. It would be interesting to look at how Christians down the centuries have approached God's perfection, his infinite wisdom, power and strength, and the coming judgement and renewal of all things. When the focus is just on love it is sometimes hard to think of God clearly. Many different people claim to have found the way of love, each by following mutually exclusive paths. The subject of God's holiness would help to draw a clear line between God's love and the 'love' of others. It may also be interesting to look at various believer's confrontations with the holiness of God, for example, Daniel (Daniel 10:4-9), the Apostle John (Revelation 1:10-18) and Pascal.[\[5\]](#) It may also be good to add a week's retreat to the module with suggestions of how to spend one hour a day for a week, where each day's meditation builds on what went before.

This module has helped my spiritual life by giving me new tools to aid in meditation, introducing me to new friends and giving me a better vision of the church. The different methods of meditation in this module have given me a set of tools with which I can spend time with God in a more focussed and fulfilling way. I have become familiar with lectio divina, which I now use on a daily basis. I also appreciate the instruction in lesson 16 on practising Ignatian contemplation, though I find visualising events quite difficult – this is something I need to practise. The reading of the Prodigal

Son[6] has given me a deeper insight into that parable so that I can spend much time meditating on it, considering the many different aspects to it. I can also look at other parables and use a similar approach to draw out deeper meanings.

This module has introduced me to a lot of new friends throughout history who have followed hard after God like the merchant looking for fine pearls (Matthew 13:45-46). I have discovered a lot of new people that I want to find out more about and read their work: Augustine, Crysostom, Nouwen, Teresa of Avila, St John of the Cross and many others.

Finally this module has given me a better vision of the church. Rather than focusing on arguments and divisions between denominations this module has given a view of a church with members from across the centuries and across the denominations united in seeking hard after God. This vision helps me to think of the Church as truly being a body – with a focus, and united, every part working together.

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[\[1\]](#) Dewerse, R., *Christian Spirituality*, p. 35.

[\[2\]](#) Dewerse, R., *Christian Spirituality*, p. 35, 36.

[\[3\]](#) Dewerse, R., *Christian Spirituality*, p. 57.

[\[4\]](#) Maas, R. and G. O'Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, p. 177.

[\[5\]](#) Byrne, J.M., *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant*, p. 78.

[\[6\]](#) Nouwen, H.J.M., *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.

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