

Summary – How God became King

The main message of this book is to do with the gospels – what are they there for?

The answer in short is that Jesus came not just to die that we could be saved via justification by faith, but to start the process of bringing the world back to God's original plan. After Adam went astray that project started again with Abraham. Israel's scriptures speak about a time when God's will would be done on earth as in heaven (Isaiah 40-55). Jesus came to set this in motion. In words used by the gospel writers Jesus came to bring the Kingdom of God.

Wright mentions the creeds. These were written to deal with heresies that appeared early on in Christianity, such as wrong beliefs about the nature of God, whether Jesus really rose from the dead, the nature of the trinity etc. However the creeds go straight from Christmas to Easter. There is no mention about the life of Jesus, his preaching about the kingdom of God and his miracles. This is because these things generally were not doubted. The problem then comes when the creeds are then seen as the basis of Christian faith. When taken in this way the life of Jesus has little importance.

Wright mentions four vital themes (speakers) that run through the gospels. He then discusses whether these have had been turned up too loud or too quiet.

1. The Story of Israel
2. The Story of Jesus as the Story of Israel's God
3. The Launching of God's Renewed People
4. The Clash of the Kingdoms

The Story of Israel

This speaker has been almost completely silent until recently. The Hebrew Bible is a vital prequel that helps us understand the gospels much better.

Matthew – The Story Reaches its Goal

At the time of the exile Jeremiah says it will last 70 years. An angel later tells Daniel that it will be 70×7 years. This has a very Jewish ring to it.

Every 7 days a Sabbath

Every 7 Years a Sabbatical Year (Leviticus 25)

Every 7×7 years a Jubilee (Leviticus 25)

Then 70×7 years the end of Exile (Daniel 9)

Now 490 may not have been meant to have been taken literally but rather that it would be the greatest jubilee of them all.

Matthew arranges his genealogy in 3 blocks of 14. However, $3 \times 14 = 6 \times 7$! And so Jesus comes on the 7th block of 7. In 1:21 Matthew says Jesus will save his people from their sins. Wright points out sin led to exile, and it is quite fitting that forgiveness of sins leads to end of exile.

Mark

Mark has a very dense quotation right at the start which combines passages from Malachi and Isaiah. He picks up themes that when God acts he will do so dramatically and in unexpected ways.

Luke

There is a lot of emphasis on fulfillment. Notably in Mary's song, Zechariah's song and in Jesus sermon in Nazareth (where he quotes Isaiah), at the table with his followers 22:37, and in his discussion with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

John

There is a very obvious theme of New Creation with the "In the

beginning..." start, counting of days like Genesis 1.

The Story of Jesus as the Story of Israel's God

This speaker is often turned up to high. People often view the gospels as showing that Jesus is God, with a quite Western view of God used. The view that John was high Christology and the Synoptics low has been proven wrong. In Mark, Matthew and Luke there is the theme of Jesus coming as fulfilment of God coming to his temple. Jesus tells parables that would have been understood in a Jewish context to have been about God, but these were about what he was doing (Jer 3:14, Malachi 1:6). A lot of the parables about God coming back to judge are then connected to Jesus visiting Jerusalem and judging the temple.

The Launching of God's Renewed People

This is often given too much emphasis with scholars saying that the gospels are just what the early church thought and said than Jesus himself. These are foundational documents that would explain to early members of the church how the movement started and fitted into God's plans. The gospels also give direction as to where the movement is going. Some of Jesus sermon's fitted to the immediate situation but other directives clearly had a much later time in mind such as being thrown out of the Synagogues, and being witnesses to kings. However the gospels are clearly telling the story of Jesus. Though the writers are living in the early church and praying, meditating and writing in that context, they clearly believe that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus had changed the world. __

The Clash of the Kingdoms

This speaker is generally turned off. In Israel's scriptures God judges and will judge oppressive rulers. Notably Pharaoh in Egypt and Babylon. The Psalms are full of God rescuing his people and judging pagan rulers. This is what people were

hoping for at the time of Jesus. It is generally thought that Jesus did not oppose pagan rulers, or did he? The obvious passage is concerning the payment of tax, where Jesus is asked if the Jews should pay tax to the Romans. However, there is much more to be found in the gospels. Augustus is mentioned as giving the command that would lead to Jesus being born in Bethlehem, which was the start of the fall of pagan Rome. When Jesus says his kingdom is not of this world the Greek word *ek* is used, meaning of, out of. He means that his kingdom does not originate in this world, it comes from heaven into this world. In Jesus' discussion with Pilate Jesus talks about overcoming with truth rather than force. Jesus talks about the way pagan rulers Lord over their subjects but Jesus models a different way. At the end of Acts Paul is proclaiming Jesus as Lord in Rome itself. Jesus saying about giving Caesar what is Caesar's has an interesting echo in Maccabees:

⁶⁶ Judas Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army for you and fight the battle against the peoples.⁶⁷ You shall rally around you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people.

⁶⁸ Pay back the Gentiles in full, and obey the commands of the law.'

Finding God in the Psalms

This is a collection of unpolished thoughts on this book which I have been reading over the last month.

What I have taken away which I consider of most importance is that all of creation is worshipping God, and that when we engage in worship, especially singing and praying the psalms,

we are transformed. Like the tree mentioned in Psalm 1 beside a stream that produces fruit at the proper time, worship transforms us.

I also found it helpful to consider the different context of each Psalm. Was it written near the Temple, or after its destruction, or far away from it? Considering the importance of Psalms that focus on Torah, presumably after the destruction of the Temple, such as Ps 119.

I hadn't really considered looking at successive psalms and topics carried over.

N T Wright mentions Time and Space. In regard to Time, the Psalms look back to Israel's covenant with God and times of deliverance, particularly the Exodus. They also look forward in hope to when God will rescue them again.

In terms of space, many Psalms talk of YHWH dwelling at the Temple. Others about YHWH filling the whole earth.

N T Wright recommends reading through the Psalter each month – so 5 a day.

Which came first the Didache or the Gospels?

The Didache definitely has common material with the gospel of Matthew. The Didache presents this as the teaching of the apostles; Matthew presents this as the teaching of Jesus. Is this a significant difference? Surely the followers of Jesus would follow Jesus, and his teaching, if they are faithful.

The Didache does say the teaching of the Lord through the apostles. It also talks about the Lord giving commands such as “Do not give what is holy to the dogs (9:5).”

One point – he does mention Bishops and Deacons (15:1). That surely is not earliest Christianity, as these positions come later.

What about Christology – Matthew presents Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us. The Didache also says “For where his lordship is discussed, there the Lord himself is (4:1).” Similar to “where two or three are gathered in my name... “. It is also interesting that commands from the Torah and from Jesus are put all together and called the commandments of the Lord. Sometimes it is clear that the teaching of the Lord refers to Jesus, but sometimes it seems to be from the Old Testament, e.g. the quotation of Malachi in 14:3.

Brief Summary of Apocrypha

Tobit

Carried away captive to Nineveh. Had a political post with Shalmanesar. Tobit mentions his own righteousness, his givings to the poor, and particularly his burying of Jewish corpses left out. This annoyed the king. He says that those who give to the poor are blessed. He has a son called Tobias. One day Tobit is sleeping outside and bird droppings go into his eyes giving him cataracts and leaving him blind. His son goes on a journey with a young man who is really the Angel Raphael (calls himself Azariah son of Hananiah) in disguise to get money Tobit left with Gabael at Rages. He marries Sarah. She lived in Ecbatana. She had a demon that followed here and that killed seven of her husbands on their wedding

nights. Gabriel tells Tobias how to scare the demon away with a fish – and prayer. They return and heal Tobit with the Fish.

Judith

A town in Israel called Bethulia is besieged by the Assyrian army. They take control of the water supply. After 34 days the people want to surrender. Judith is a beautiful intelligent widow. She goes down with her maid – dressed up beautifully with fine clothes and jewellery. She pretends to be a deserter. The commander, Holofernes, fancies her and wants to seduce her. At a party after a few days she gets the commander drunk and then cuts off his head. She returns to Bethulia with his head. Israel's men go out armed – the Assyrians seek out their commander and find him dead. Then their army is in disarray and is defeated by Israel. Judith was honoured in Israel- many want to marry her but she never marries again.

Wisdom of Solomon

Wisdom at creation of world (Chapter 9). Female. Barren women that are wise are well off. A list of deeds that the patriarchs did by wisdom is given similar to Hebrews 11 (Chapter 10). The souls of the righteous are in the hands of God (Chapter 3).

Sirach

Sirach is a long wisdom book that was very influential with Jews and later Christians. There is an introduction that introduces the author. A particular section of interest is Chapters 44-50 which summarise a large portion of Biblical history and refer to nearly every Biblical book except Esther, It mentions Enoch, Elijah, Abraham, Noah, Moses – loved by God, Aaron adorned with beautiful things, Joshua, Caleb – given a long life, Ezekiel – who had the great vision, David and the prophet Nathan, Solomon had peace and was able to build the temple. Solomon led astray by women and idolatry.

Rehoboam was foolish and split Israel. Hezekiah was good. Isaiah made the shadow go back and the king live longer. In that time God smote the Assyrians. Josiah is like sweet perfume. David, Hezekiah and Josiah were the good kings, the rest were bad. It also mentions that three groups are not a people – the Samaritans, those among the Philistines and those in Shechem.

Of interest to studies of Galatians, it mentions the zeal of Phineas.

Summary: On Rock or Sand?

John Sentamu

1. Introduction

“Stability and hope are linked to purpose and productivity”
There are vast swathes of the country, particularly outside of London, that are in serious economic difficulty with few jobs and low output. And in London growth is found at an individual level with poverty never far away.

A lot of different schemes have been tried to bring economic recovery to cities experience a downturn. Often these have not had an affect on surrounding areas, such as in Liverpool. Some successes include Leeds, and Manchester.

Summary of Fabricating Jesus – how modern scholars distort the gospels



In progress__

Chapter 1

A lot of books appeared recently from Scholars coming out of a traditional fundamentalist background. The fundamentalist background is very rigid and ignores serious questions of issues such as who wrote the Bible, and with what purpose, and in what historical context. The majority of Christian scholars stay in the faith.

A popular defence of Jesus as the embodiment of Israel's God go along the lines of C S Lewis's famous "lunatic, liar or Lord". However, this is overly simplistic and misses out several options such as (i) Jesus was Israel's Messiah and the greatest Jewish prophet, but still only a man, or (ii) the New Testament documents we have are not reliable and so we can't be sure who Jesus was.

Evans talks about misplaced faith and misguided suspicions. Misplaced faith refers to people having faith in the wrong thing such as an inerrant scripture or the gospels must be harmonizable. And in these cases when scholarly research shows these beliefs to be untrue, loss of faith can result. Misguided suspicions refer to the belief that Jesus contemporaries did not accurately pass on what he said, either incapable of passing on his words accurately or not interested in his exact words. So you have followers of Jesus who aren't really interested in following him.

