

Genesis

What difference does it make to be reading the Old Testament as a Christian in contrast to a non-Christian Jewish person?

- Do we, then, read the NT to understand the OT? Or do we read the OT to understand the NT? Or is the OT to be read independently of the NT?
- Jeanne: I love reading the same book that Jesus did! There is connection in that!
- Katie raises the interesting issue of "prophecies." Do the prophecies of the OT PREDICT what is to happen in the NT? Or what you say that the whole OT is in some way consistent with what is going to happen in the NT?

Exodus

Someone asks you how there can be two creation stories in the Bible. If the Bible is true, there can only be one or else one would be right and the other not! How would you respond?

- Mike: ...we need to be careful that in our human desire to seek the one "perfect" and clear answer to a particular Bible issue (like the creation story), that we do not lose sight of the big picture. That is, that BOTH creation stories contain information that can bring us to a closer understanding of our Lord. One story is not "right" at the expense of the other.
- Chad: Maybe if we just accept the fact that God created and it was good should be enough. If we don't sweat the details, it probably would be for the best!
- Perspective on authorship: Is it simply a matter of two different ways of recollecting? Or a person modifying the telling in light of new context?
- [Noting that there are four gospels instead of one harmonized one...] Even aware of conflicts and contradictions between the Gospel accounts, together they conveyed the truth better than any one alone could do. Same things goes with trying to talk about God and creation.
- Terry: There were three blind people. They encountered an elephant...
- Lisa: ...like the popular telephone game, stories can change as they are passed from person to person. Perhaps though, the author (s) of Genesis noticed the two stories within their culture and wanted to include both to let the rest of the world know that they weren't entirely sure which one was true either. Having both stories would at least make available all of the possible information regarding creation for future generations to explore and wrestle with also.
- Jackie: Both stories were kept in the Old testament to give each reader chance to see two sides of God. Whether it is right or wrong. The reader decides.

Leviticus

God said that "in the day" they would eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. (1.17) The serpent said they wouldn't. (3.4) Who was right?

- Fred: The way we look at death might determine who was right. Did God mean death to be a spiritual one, or perhaps death of the innocent man? If so, man surely died when he ate of the tree. If it were a physical death God spoke of, the serpent was right, for Adam and Eve lived and procreated with mankind increasing in numbers. However, since God created life and all in it, he surely would have known the consequences of eating from the tree and the difference between the two types of death. So perhaps the real question is not who was right but rather what is meant by death. How's that for redefining the task? :)
- Joe Leavengood: This inspired a long essay in me which I'll spare you all. Here is a Reader's Digest version: Both God and the serpent spoke truth, because humanity both lives and dies, and has lived and has died, and will live and will die. God is not chronologically challenged, but gives us time as a means of keeping everything from happening all at once and overwhelming us. Death may have no hour at all and yet it is in every hour and day. With no knowledge of or context for understanding death or even of pain, nor for reasoning the implications of obedience or disobedience, nor for grasping the transitory nature of corporeal life, the conversations between Adam and Eve and the serpent were non sequiturs. The context for all of this is only found in the greater Bible, and really the reading and understanding of which is only possible to us as part of living life in our given day. Our time is still biblical: we now know that we live and die and live again in Christ.
- Emmy: I'm sensing that none of us want to take sides on this issue as we say both God and the serpent were "right". In the most basic sense, since Adam and Eve continue to live God is wrong. We seem to all be searching for ways to reconcile this "problem". Are we afraid to admit that God was wrong? or that God could change God's "mind"? Perhaps, as a loving parent, God had compassion on Adam and Eve and had a change of heart regarding their punishment--deceding not to punish them with death, but rather with pain, toil, etc. Afterall, God spent a lot of time creating--to destroy the people would be to destroy part of that creation, making it incomplete.
- Kathleen: I don't believe that "day" means a 24 hour day. I believe that now that we know about millions of years of evolution that "day" in the creation verses can be interpreted as evolutionary time frames. But I do agree that both were right in the sense that all humans undergo physical death but since Christ's death and resurrection we also have life everlasting and will in the long run not truly die. It does seem odd to me though that with this interpretation the serpent in Genesis is by words spoken predicting the eternal life that results from Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection.
- Keri: Do we have any indication that this was the day a(n) (eventual) death sentence was handed out? Do we have indication that, had Adam and Eve not eaten of the tree of the knowledge of the garden of good and evil, they would not someday die? I suppose you can turn what I just said into a rather circular argument by suggesting that it is evidenced by God's saying that in that day they should surely die. Death is reality for humanity, since we have it must have come from somewhere, and here is where it came from, thus... That being said, I still don't read anything that suggests we would be immortal.

Numbers

*How does the following quote from T. S. Eliot (Murder in the Cathedral) apply to the story in Genesis 3?
The last temptation is the greatest treason:
To do the right deed for the wrong reason.*

- Bill: There seems to be a reversal between "Murder in the Cathedral" and Genesis 3. In "Murder", the main character is invited to seek martyrdom in order to obtain earthly glory and revenge, i.e., "the right deed for the wrong reason". However, in Genesis 3, the invitation seems to be to do "the wrong deed for the right reason". The wrong deed is to eat of the tree (God clearly forbids this!), but the right reason is that they "will be like God" (an admirable goal!).
- Rosey: They were innocent victims.
- At the heart of sin is the desire to be "like God," to take His role as Creator and for us to have life revolve around ourselves and our own wishes. Eve and Adam knew God's instructions yet let their own self-interest rule their decision to disobey. Notice that there was no asking God for any further clarification of the rule. Instead they took the advice of an animal. They ate the fruit which was the "right" (necessary) deed to have their eyes "opened" but for the wrong reason--the desire to be like God.

Deuteronomy

Why didn't God require Cain's life for killing Abel? (I.e., why not capital punishment for Cain?) What then about Genesis 9.6?

- Anjel: In Bill Moyer's PBS special on Genesis, there was a rabbi who offered up that Cain's exclamation of "My punishment is greater than I can bear!" really should have been "My sin is greater than I can bear!" I found that "sin" and "guilt" over sin are two alternate interpretations of the Hebrew word that is translated as "punishment." The NET bible just says that "punishment" is the proper interpretation -- according to whom?? If "sin" or "guilt" is substituted, then you have a Cain who, as God is pronouncing his punishment, has a sudden realization of the gravity of his actions and actually feels remorse for what he has done. That possible interpretation makes the most sense in analyzing why God does not kill Cain. The pronouncements in chapter 9 that seem to support capital punishment as appropriate for taking a human life also come on the heels of God wiping out all human existence and starting over. Perhaps He felt that He didn't lay down a sufficiently clear cut prohibition on murder the first time he created humans, so He was going to cover His bases this time and leave nothing to chance.
 - Good observations, Anjel. This is a good example of how the NET Bible can be quite helpful. It notes that "sin, iniquity" is the root and usual meaning of the word, and that it gets extended into the concepts of "guilt" and "punishment." Their argument for "punishment" is based on a reading of the incident on the whole, and I guess I agree that I do not find too much regret, remorse, or repentance in Cain's behavior. He seems to me to be an example of one who cannot see beyond himself. The self-awareness of Adam and Eve becomes the self-centeredness of Cain.
- Karen: Perhaps in exiling Cain and cursing him, God gives a punishment worse than death.
- Juliet: Although Cain is the first born throughout the story Able is the chosen child. He was also more respectful (bringing the choice of his crops) of which was the chosen offering of God. Where was God going with this? God knew what Able was going to do, and was he already punishing him for this crime? ... Did God "play" Cain against Able to see the result? I would guess that the answer to this could go back to the two creation stories. How is God seen? Is God omnipresent and omnipotent (Genesis 1), or is he creating a work in progress (Genesis 2:4)? Either way through the passage, God is cool and calm. Not the usual harsh God of the OT. Or did God punish

Cain in this way knowing that he was a man of the soil, and knowing how much it would hurt him to not do this work? In this the Cain and Able story God passes judgment, in Genesis 9:6 God is giving that parental judgment to the people. In Gen 9:6 God has realized that humans don't have a clue of logic (proof being, A/E and the Apple C/A and death) God is starting to work on training humans, realizing now that these things he created need a bit more guidance than he thought they would. Possibly still could God be continuing his curse of the sins of Adam and Eve? In Genesis 3:17 one of the punishments was "Cursed be the ground because of you, By toil should you eat of it/ All the days of your life." Could this part be a continuation of the curse, because of the curse of the land (Cain.)

- Joel: What would have happened if Cain repented his sin?

Joshua

From TIOT, p29: "Any adequate theological reading of the Old Testament must take into account the diverse theological voices that speak through its texts."

What challenges does such an acknowledgement pose? What potential gifts does it offer?

- Lisa: Diversity - theological or otherwise - should be seen as an opportunity for learning. To learn from the diverse theological voices of the OT, however, may cause us to question our 'own' traditions. In a course I took last Fall, "Spirituality & the Pastoral Ministry", guest speaker Dr. Stierna talked about a 'natural tension' in Lutheranism which did not seek out easy answers. I think that, scripturally, the OT presents just such a challenge. (And none of us are too comfortable w/ challenges.)
- Bettye: challenges created by diversity.....misunderstanding, pre-existing bigotry may limit, diminish, or negate the views of one set of voices....keeps us and other generations from the "whole picture". Gifts from diversity....diverse voices add dimension and color to story....a broader base of information from which to interpret and get closer to "the truths" of the story...diversity creates new ways of thinking, hearing, responding.
- Matthew: Once we acknowledge that what Christians term the 'Old Testament' was written by many authors drawing on a wide variety of traditions and viewpoints, our first response should be one of caution. We must take care to not fall into the age-old trap that has beset both Jews and Christians for millenia: that of believing that every text has only one 'right' interpretation, that this interpretation must be preserved in 'purity,' and that all other interpretations are not only wrong, but harmful to the 'one, true faith.' As twenty-first century exegetes with a great wealth of historical discovery about the Bible and its authors available to us, we must also take pains to consider the context in which the extant texts of the OT were written, and thus avoid taking too literally (or seriously) what are essentially cultural adiaphora that for one reason or another are given extensive treatment in a given text. On the positive side, knowing that the OT was cobbled together from many divergent sources over a substantial period of time is helpful in that we can bring to bear other sources of knowledge about what was going on in the lives of the OT authors in order to more fully understand what they were saying. Also, comparing and contrasting the P and J traditions in Genesis, for example, can provide a better understanding of both, and engender deeper thought about God. Finally, I find exciting, invigorating really, the notion that what we have in the OT are records of the most cherished beliefs and bitter arguments of ancient people about the one God; it is satisfying to me to know that people have had concern over, and love for, God, for thousands of years.
- Alison: The challenges in having such a diverse group of voices is that we do not know which one is the "right" one. It is up to the reader to interpret and find out which meaning is right for them. We must be careful and not say that there is a wrong and a right, because none of us were present

at the time this was written. We can only use it as a guide for our lives and world that we live in today.

- Doesn't this make the Bible totally relative and subjective?
- Matthew: I think that her ideas were likely more in keeping with the idea I expressed that knowing the diversity of the OT witness to God should help us to avoid being too rigid in adherence to one monolithic idea of what God is like and what God wants from us.
- Brian: One of the biggest challenges that it presents is in the how we communicate scripture as truth to those who are not yet followers of Christ. We have to understand that people outside of Christianity often have deep, serious questions about things that we commonly accept on faith. If we're honest, scripture is often times confusing enough to those of us coming from a place of faith. To a skeptic, different authors and voices brings to question the consistency, reliability, and authority of scripture. These kinds of questions, however, can begin to be addressed by this same diversity. If we can understand that the common link between all of the diverse voices of the Old Testament is the presence of God in the midst of each unique experience we can begin to communicate how God is revealed. Diverse experiences reveal God's character, God's nature, and the depth of God's love for people from all kinds of backgrounds and experience... a lot like the way God continues to be revealed in our lives today.