

For The Record (an interlude)

Before diving into the deep nuances of random Bible topics, I wanted to take some time to reflect a little on how I've gone about the blog and reinforce my motivation for starting it. Hopefully, you will get a better sense of my headspace at the moment and what my plans are for the future of the blog.

Why I Am Writing This Blog (again)

As I said in my first blog post, I aim to (1) bring more perspectives into Christian discourse and (2) to show those who aren't Christian that there are more perspectives than what is currently mainstream. But the core issue that inspires me is in that second point, that many aspects of "mainstream" Christianity are inherently flawed, and can lead us to very problematic areas (as they have done in the past). I think the most glaring flaw, as I have mentioned, is the way that the Bible is deified and done so in an uneven manner, where certain verses that are more useful for structuring power and values are prioritized over others. In this blog, I'll admit, I have been extremely hard on the Bible. Hopefully, if you've read through it, you can understand that the reason that I've gone about it this way is to show just how problematic some of it can be if we approach it in the way we currently do, how unclear and conflicting it is at times, and how it absolutely should not be looked at as the final, uncontestable word of God or the peak of morality.

How I Interact With The Bible

I want to cover more aspects of this in this post, but before that, I again want to say that I believe that the Bible is such a beautiful and interesting book that does have divine inspiration in it. I still read it every day, in an effort to not only gain information about it but to gain wisdom from it. Of course, the way I interact with it has changed since I started to deconstruct. The main thing that has changed is that I don't take a lot of it as seriously as I once did. You can kind of see this in the way I talked about the Genesis creation accounts in the last blog post. When you accept that the Bible is written by flawed people with flawed perspectives, there is a lot to laugh at, and everything becomes so much more interesting! Instead of trying to justify or solve a lot of the Bible's problems, you get to dive into why they exist in the first place. (**So TL/DR**, I love the Bible, and I have no issues with it as a product of its time, I only take issue with the expectations put on it by many Christians.)

(EXAMPLE (can be ignored)): For an example, let's look at another interesting predicament in Genesis, where Cain (after killing Abel) is sent to the land of Nod to live the rest of his years. The interesting thing here is that based on the narrative thus far, the only people on earth at the moment are Adam, Eve, and Cain¹, but yet Cain is worried that he will be killed by someone after he is banished (and God confirms this risk as well). This is a contradiction. Now, many generations of Christians have tried to reconcile this hole, all in ways that have proved insufficient. However, the most likely scholarly explanation is that Genesis 4 was originally composed separately from Genesis 2-3, and was likely an *etiology* (which is, again, a story that is made to explain why things are the way they are) for how a certain nomadic people group (the Kenites) came to be. The idea is that just like their ancestor Cain, the Kenites are doomed to wander forever. Eventually, this story was combined with Genesis 2-3, which is why we go from Adam and Eve being the only ones on earth to there being other potentially hostile peoples in the surrounding lands. Another big Genesis etiology is the story where Noah's son Ham sees

¹ We know this because in Genesis 4:1, Eve remarks on being able to produce "a man with the help of the Lord" when she has Cain and then in Genesis 4:25, Eve says the reason for Seth being named such is that God appointed for her another child instead of Abel. There really isn't much room for there to be more kids (& especially not sons) from Adam & Eve in the picture here.

his father drunk and naked and does nothing, causing Noah to curse Ham's son Canaan to being a slave of his brothers as well as Ham's brothers Shem and Japheth (and this etiology exists to justify the people of Israel enslaving and murdering a LOT of Canaanites in the Old Testament). This passage was also used to justify slavery and racism in America, though this is more due to a misreading of text than to a problematic Bible endorsement. But as I've mentioned, the most likely happening is way more interesting than being forced by dogma/tradition to make these verses make sense while treating every word as inspired by God. Another point to make here is that all of these happenings are probably (most likely) fictional!! Acknowledging this makes contradictory elements of the story less important and the message behind it more important.

So, as I've been saying, I read the Bible for the same reason that other Christians do, but I also keep in mind that it is a product of its time and that it has some ideologies that are outdated and backwards considering what we know today. Does this resolve every issue/concern in understanding the Bible? No. However, it does make Bible reading less stressful and intense.

For example, let's talk about how God is portrayed in the Old Testament. All throughout, we see points where God does or says things that are wrathful, genocidal, or just really unsettling, especially given how we see God today. In the story of the Exodus, the murder of all of Egypt's first born sons is commissioned by God. What appears to the writers of this book as an impressive and strategic act of power by a great warrior God reads to us a genocide of many innocent lives, especially since the only person attributed some sort of fault in this story is the leader of Egypt (and even he doesn't have free will here, as his heart is apparently hardened by God (Exodus 10:1, 10:20)). It's the same with the rest of the God-ordained brutal conquests of enemy peoples or the points in books like Psalms where people are praying for the brutalization of their enemy peoples, explicitly including women and children. Many people today try to defend these stories by saying things like "God can do what God wants" or "those people deserved it"², but the more likely (and less problematic) explanation is simply that people at this time expected their God to do things like this for them. In fact, all ancient people groups at this time were thought to have a patron deity that went to war with them. (The Bible says that the "Most High" assigned gods to each people group, and that Yahweh was assigned to Israel this way (Deuteronomy 32:8-9).) Hence, every military victory/decision is attributed to God.

I would argue that this is NOT an actual attribute of God, and more of a bottom up understanding of God by the writers of the Bible.³ Many point out the seeming change of the character of God in the New Testament (where God seems much less genocidal), but I would say that this is the result of a change in how God is perceived by us, not a divine character change. Also, most scholars would say that many of these events (the Flood, the Exodus, Israel's seemingly destructive military victories) didn't happen, or at least, not to the extent that they are presented in the Bible. I personally think that part of the reason Jesus came to earth was to alter this perception by revealing the true character of God. Of course, there is still much more to learn and understand about God, and I doubt we will ever fully see God and other spiritual elements from God's perspective. I mean, even what we know about Jesus is tainted by the views and agendas of the gospel authors. But that very fact is my entire point here. Throughout I and many others' upbringing, many things within Christianity and the Bible have been taught with such certainty that you'd never think of questioning them at the time (or you'd be too scared to question them). Hence, we approach the Bible with a ton of expectations and

² I do think there are points where we have to accept our limited knowledge and realize that God is God (as Job did), but turning our brains off and not at the very least questioning these things is, in my opinion, not what God intended.

³ It's important to admit that this opinion, of course, is coming from my bottom up understanding of God, but there really is no escaping that. I have no qualms with the writers of the Bible considering God in this way, but I do humbly disagree, and hopefully I explain why relatively well.

prerequisites of the text (complete divine inspiration, inerrancy, univocality, historicity, etc.), and we run into contradictions, problematic divine endorsements, scientific inaccuracies, and more. These types of problems have played a role in some pretty horrible historical events, like the Crusades, imperialism, slavery, witch hunts, anti-Semitism (including the Holocaust), and more. They also continue to be a part of the oppression of many marginalized communities today, and it's up to us to be more cognizant of how these dogmas we uphold may continue to perpetrate these cycles of oppression.

However, if we take these expectations of the Bible away, none of these problems really matter (which works to the detriment of many anti-religious talking points). This also allows us to engage with the Bible more honestly, as we are looking for the *most likely* understanding of events and commands in the Bible based on cultural context, not just the one that supports our expectations/presuppositions the most. My faith journey has caused me to open my mind to new possibilities in this regard, and I write this blog to challenge others to do the same and advocate for a Christianity that will bring people closer to God while not misleading them with dogmatic beliefs/traditions that only lead to harm and confusion. Unfortunately, many authorities within Christianity chose instead to continue to push these dogmas/indoctrination for the continued structuring of power and values, as well as the continuation of the unfair systems that are in place. In my experience, doing this only pushes potential believers away from the faith and leads people to label religion as a device of control.

My approach does come with its drawbacks, though. For one, there is a massive gray area when it comes to what to believe and how to live one's life when you can't take everything in the Bible as coming directly from God. Even though there are verses that are very clearly sourced from human beliefs at the time, there are many others that *could* be under this umbrella, but also could be important parts of being a Christian today. These types of gray areas are what I hope to dive into in future posts.

In the meantime, I'd like to point out a great resource for studying the Bible in the way I'm proposing here. **The Bible For Normal People** (founded by Dr. Pete Enns) is a podcast/website/organization run by Christians that basically explains some of the hard-to-understand parts of the Bible with the help of modern Biblical scholarship. They have a podcast (accessible for free on pretty much any podcast platform) with hundreds of episodes covering the Bible (called The Bible for Normal People) and the practical aspects of being a Christian or person of faith (Faith for Normal People). They also do video lectures through their website on a pay what you can basis (as long as you pay before the lecture). So for very little money, you can learn A LOT about the Bible and about the practical aspects of being a Christian. They also have written guides to certain books of the Bible for purchase online. They've been very helpful to me post-deconstruction, and even if some of what I'm saying here is a little progressive for you, these resources are definitely worth exploring. Here's a link to the website, and be sure to check out their social media (IG & Tiktok) as well.

<https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/>