

Overturing Tables

*Hab_2:2 And the LORD answered me, and said,
"Write the vision, make it clear and display it upon the
tables, that he may run that reads it".*

*Mat 21:12 Jesus ... overturning tables said, "It is
written, ' house is a house of prayer; but you are
hijacking it as a cave for robbers'"*

*2Co_3:3 As you are epistles of Christ..., written not
with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not on
tables of stone, but in tables of the heart.*

To Anne,

My Wife and Life-Long travelling companion.



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Forward

Forward

I envy those with a good imagination. I guess envy is a sin but what else can you do if you desire a good imagination? You can't steal it. If you could, that also would be a sin. Of course there are dangers that come with imagination, so perhaps I should be grateful I don't have too much of it.

Psychologists tell us every human being possesses imagination. But like those possessing money, some are richer than others. Theologians are more inclined to warn us of imagination's dangers. The King James version of the Bible references at least fourteen verses to the imagination of the heart. Most of these are referred to as wicked. One in Luke 1:15 reminds us that Jesus came to scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts. But for all this, the imagination of the heart is a link into the spiritual world and, provided the heart is pure it is a beneficial attribute for seeing God.

Of course Jesus came in the flesh to dispel the false imagination encouraged by the teachers of the law. But it has been a long time since Jesus came and we are inclined to use our imaginations to visualise Jesus and his character. So once again we need to look to a pure and

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accurate imagination so that we interpret Jesus aright.

This is only the forward so, enough of the discussion around Imagination. Except to say this book is a record of a lifetime of questioning that has forced me to examine time and again the difference between what I have been taught as doctrine, what others have tried to tell me Jesus is like and what I have experienced for myself about God.

The Christian life is a journey and in it imagination gets modified by experience and expectation. As the prophets remind us, imagination is close to the longings of heart and is not always accurate. It picks and chooses what it wants to hear and can be dangerous. But it is necessary in a journey of faith because we would not start this journey if we had no picture of what we thought might come at the end.

So, as you can see from the contents list, this is a book of little insights I have accumulated on my journey of faith. It questions the heart more than the imagination. It is dangerous to shape imagination just through culture, education, or peer pressure. It has to be based on a relationship with God Himself. The best way I know of doing that is to examine how biblical characters related to God and test my relationship around that.

Introduction

Introduction

Did you know the Egyptians had more than two-thousand gods?

The most High of all these gods was Amun. Amun's right hand god was Ra - the god of fire. Whenever the Egyptian army went to war. Amun and Ra teamed up to ensure victory. The Egyptian army called this team Amun-Ra. Amun-Ra was a ruthless combination, destroying anything in the way, the army would help the work of Ra by torching everything in its path.

Ra was believed to visit the sky in his chariot each morning and pass through the realms of the underworld each night. If the weather became cloudy while an army was at war, the soldiers would presume Ra was no longer on their side. That may be why they panicked when the Hebrew slaves, shielded by a cloud, crossed the red sea.

The god of the Nile was named Hapi¹. Hapi was the fertility god and very popular throughout ancient Egypt. According to myth, Hapi set out from his home in the heavens, travelled through the land of the dead, emerging in an unknown cave in upper Egypt before taking a journey down the Nile every year. For more than three-

1 *Or hap or hep*

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thousand years people have tried to pin-point the source of the Nile and it is still in dispute today. So the assumption he emerged from a cave in the hills was as good as any other explanation to them.

The "Arrival of Hapi" coincided with the season of floods each year. To appease Hapi and ensure he did not destroy the mud huts along the river's edge, and, of course, to ensure the increase in population, they were required to throw a firstborn male into the Nile as a sacrifice. One year, during a period when the Egyptian population was in decline and the Hebrew population was on the increase there came a devastating flood. A decree went out that they should use Hebrew firstborn sons to sacrifice to Hapi. Now this ties nicely into the story of Moses in the bulrushes of course. It also adds credibility to a young Egyptian princess believing Hapi had brought her a present of a baby in a basket when he arrived that year.

Moses would have been taught all about the Egyptian gods once he started school in Egypt. But, before he got there, he was raised by his Hebrew mother. You know the story. When the princess found Moses in the bulrushes his sister Miriam, who was watching discreetly, ran to get their mother to act as wet-nurse. The Princess then paid his mother to bring up Moses until he reached school age. During these days, Moses' mother would have sung

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the Hebrew nursery rhymes to him in the tradition of all Hebrew mothers. Many of these have been found by Archaeologists on clay tablets. Besides the ancient songs about Father Abraham and Isaac's exploits, how Jacob went down to Egypt and God restored his son Joseph to him, there was also one about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It went something like this:

*The sun was rising over the earth when Lot came to
Zoar.
Yahweh came out of the heavens
He rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and
Gomorrah
He overthrew those cities,
and all through the valley,
the inhabitants cried out from the ground.*

So Moses learned from an early age that the God of the Hebrews also played with fire.

After the incident with the Egyptian soldier who ill treated a Hebrew slave, (you will remember Moses slew the Egyptian and ran into the desert), Moses lived with his father-in-law who was a Midian Priest. That part of the Fertile Crescent was under the rule of a Babylonian king at the time. The Babylonians also had a God who played with Fire. He had two names. If you were a Pagan you

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would call him Nusku; If you were a Zoroastrian you would call him Ahura-Mazda the God of the sun. Zoroastrians believed God made the sun before he created life in order to aid life. Moses' father-in-law, being a priest and quite close to Ur of the Chaldeans, would have very likely been influenced by the Zoroastrian branch of Babylon, So fire from Ahura-Mazda was loving and creative not cruel like god Nusku.

All that is the background. So when God commissioned Moses for a task, he first had to release him from all this clutter of theology in his mind. When God saw Moses turn aside to see the burning bush phenomenon, He saw a chance to move Moses from an intellectual assent by a personal introduction. It was small wonder Moses pondered which god was behind the burning bush. In his mind Moses was asking.'Who are you'?

Are you Ra? If you are then I am dead meat!

Are you Yahweh? If you are I must hide myself lest you punish my sins.

Are you Ahura-Mazda? That might not be so bad - but then, what if you are Nusku?

Fortunately God reads minds and clarified :

"I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." So Moses covered his face, because he was afraid to look at God."

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Once announced as Yahweh, Moses tries to hide his face in case he was punished for his sins. But he still had a question that needed answering, God's answer didn't resolve Moses' question. It did exclude the gods of other people groups leaving Moses with a narrower choice. But which Hebrew God was speaking? Remember, the Hebrews had been slaves to the Egyptians for four-hundred years and had learned to think as the Egyptians thought. The Hebrews would not automatically know which God Moses was talking about.

God continued the conversation:

Then the LORD said, "I have seen how cruelly my people are being treated in Egypt;... now I am sending you to the king of Egypt so that you can lead my people out of his country."

Moses is half listening while still pondering his next question which he rephrases:

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and they say 'What is his name'? What shall I say unto them?

Are you:

EL-YON, (Gen_14:22), the Most High God.

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The God in charge of everything!

EL-SHADDAI, (the supreme Magistrate) who watched over them daily (Gen_17:1).

EL-OHIM, (Team God)²;

The name for God when El-Yon teamed up with roo'-akh (the Spirit) and aw-mar' (the word) for creation purposes for example ³

JEHOVAH (Covenant God) ;

The God who gave his promise to Abraham

But there were two other names the Hebrews used

ADONAI, (Father God,) ;

He who leads and trains those he loves that is mainly translated as 'Lord' in our English translations

2 *The translation Elohim is plural and a clear introduction to the trinity, but is it exclusively so? 'Team God' is my loose interpretation of Elohim [Elohym]*

3 *in the creation account of Genesis ch 1 : roo'-akh (translated spirit), and aw-mar' (translated' word' or' said' or 'commanded'), - the word translated God is El-OHYM (which is plural in the Hebrew), is born out in the repeated phrase 'let us...'; Other examples can be found in Exodus 21 ff when judges are called 'team God' or Elohym. In other places angels are referred to' Team God'- Such as when Jacob wrestled with 'Team god'*

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EL-OAH, (The great and fearful God);

This is the God of Uncle Laban; He and Jacob invoked El-oah when they parted company in Gen 31:42. Later on in history EL-oah became 'Aalah " or Allah - The great, all powerful and fearful God" of Muslim understanding.

As good Christians, we are taught that Hebrews were distinct because they believed in only one God. It is true that Abraham came out from Ur of the Chaldeans because he believed in one God rather than the multiple gods of Zoroastrianism, but being under the Egyptians for four-hundred years, Hebrew people had learned to think differently. They had once again picked up the culture around them and saw one God as a number of different personalities.

*Increasingly
today
Christians want
to name God in
order to limit
his Character.*

Moses was firstly a very intellectual man. Having been to Egyptian University he was equipped to understand life. He had not only learned about politics, languages and economics, but also comparative religions which reinterpreted the expressions of his Hebrew ancestry for the eyes of the Egyptian race. Adding to his dilemma, intellect and learning were getting in the way of his understanding of the nature of the one true God of the

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Hebrews. This God did not communicate through intellect but by relationship. The instigator of this strange burning bush phenomenon told Moses that He was the God of his ancestors. This not only narrowed the choices, but it immediately gave him a picture of the relationship between Abraham and his God. In that relationship God was not equal to Abraham or Isaac, but very much one in charge :

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: say unto the children of Israel, I AM has sent me unto you. ⁴

It was not until later in his spiritual journey that Moses twigged:

Hear O Israel - Elohim (your team god) is in fact one God – Jehovah – the covenant God⁵

Between these two points Moses had to learn to trust this God who hid behind an elusive and unhelpful statement 'I am who I am'. It took a step of faith to act upon a request from a God he could not name. This was different to the relationship of an Egyptian leader, for them naming something or someone gave control over him, her or it.

4 Exo 3:14

5 Deut ch. 6:4 In Today's English, we say Father, Son and Spirit are one God.

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Less and less today Christians see God as '*I Am*'.

Increasingly today Christians want to name God in order to limit his Character. Increasingly I hear Christians, (thinking like the Egyptians), talking of the God of the *Old Testament* and the God of the *New*. Oh, they say, I prefer the loving, forgiving, long-suffering God of the New Testament to the judging, punishing God of the old. In fact, I can count on one hand the number of sermons I have heard based on the Old Testament this past year. We down-grade sin, judgement and God's standards by emphasising only a loving-God. It allows many churches to abolish Hell from the pulpit. Universalism⁶ is finding its way back into the church again, and in doing so it is weakening repentance, sin and such-like doctrines. After all, God loves everyone doesn't he? By *our* logic and understanding of love God will not punish anyone will he? Our society has banned chastisement so God will accept you no matter how you regard him won't he?

I AM what I am - tells a different story. It reminds us that God has attributes or characteristics built into his personality. When we acknowledge God is patient we do not mean his patience never runs out. Ask Noah.⁷ Ask the

6 *Universalism first appears at Babel then in Noah's time when everyone did as the counselled in their own heart. It raised its head again in the late 1800's in the guise of Unitarianism.*

7 *Gen ch. 6*

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people of Babel.⁸ Ask Lot and his wife.⁹ Ask Pharaoh.¹⁰ Ask Belshazzar.¹¹ Ask a rich man named Dives or a poor man named Lazarus.¹² Check out the book of Revelation. God is not limited by love but by '*I AM!*'

If there is one lesson we must quickly learn from this passage it must be to take God seriously. If the recorded age of Moses is correct, it took some seventy years for Moses to finally get to meet the real God of his ancestor Abraham. Like so many today, his intellect had caused him to fit God to his ideas through mental gymnastics and analysis rather than accepting a simple personal encounter. He had assented to God. He had acknowledged him with a tipping of the hat -so to speak. He had heard of the exploits his ancestors had attributed to God and respected their right to believe in him. But now he was faced with a God outside of his preconceived understanding. A God who was not prepared to conform to the concepts of a human mind.

To Moses this was a revelation. He had been comfortable living a quiet life in a small town, doing what most people have done for thousands of years, raising a family and

8 *Gen ch. 11*

9 *Gen 19 : Lk 17:32*

10 *Ex ch. 7 to 12*

11 *Daniel ch. 5*

12 *Lk 16 26-31*

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