

Notes from Coffee and Philosophy Discussion March 2024

The Historical Jesus

Men's prayer breakfast discussed a video on the historicity of Jesus by Jean-Pierre Isbouts.

- There is early testimony of the historical Jesus from non-Biblical sources.
- The sources, except for Biblical narratives, basically cite the testimony of second or third hand witnesses. People like Josephus (circa 37AD to circa 100 AD) and Pliny(writing c 110AD) talk about what the people following the teachings of Jesus believe and how they behave.
- Nearly all scholars believe that a man called Jesus who inspired/led a group of believers did indeed exist.
- One scholar who lost his faith due to tragic life events eventually came back to faith that Jesus existed and was who He said He was because the scholar could refute all aspects of the Bible except the Resurrection... and, if the Resurrection is true, then it is difficult to refute the truth of the gospel.

Heaven and Hell

- Father Tom was asked what he was taught in seminary about the existence of Heaven and Hell. He indicated that he learned that Heaven and Hell were true- that Heaven was the residence of those who have rejuvenated souls in Jesus. Hell is the residence of those whose names are not in the Book of Life, judged by their deeds before the Great White Throne. John 5:25-29 describes judgement.
- Everyone will experience a bodily resurrection (Rev 20).
- No matter how one tries to explain the concepts of Heaven and Hell, logical problems/contradictions seem to arise.
- There is not much description of Heaven in the Bible- Revelation is really the only place with description and that may be highly symbolic, as Revelation tends to be.
- Paul talks about going to a third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4.
- There is a concept of seven heaven in Talmud. Non-canonical apocryphal writings, such as 2nd Book of Enoch mentions ten heavens.

The nature of angels

- The discussion of Heaven and Hell led to a discussion on what angels are like and whether they have a physical body.

- In some ways, the Bible suggests there is no physical body (Luke 20:35-36)- angels do not marry nor do they die. The suggestion is that angels don't have bodily presence or functions.
- In other ways, there is some concept of a physicality with angels- Jacob wrestling with an angel, angels speaking and rescuing Lot, breeding the Nephilim.)
- There is some ambiguity with the women at Jesus' tomb- did they see angel(s), a young man, perhaps a form of Jesus himself?
- When we talk about specific people being able to see or interact with angels, the question occurs- why do some people see the angels and others do not? It might be that God is allowing the angel to inhabit some sort of "person"-type form for some specific reason and has gifted the person who sees the angel in a specific way that not everyone is gifted.
- Can angels take whatever form they want to take- such as Satan taking on the shape of a serpent?
- Another explanation for whether angels seem to have physical, functional bodies is that those "bodies" may only be a tangible spiritual "presence," not really a body the way we would understand "body." Maybe what some people have seen as a "physical body" of an angel is more like a hologram.
- Angels are NOT bits of God that break off the Godhead to inhabit the earth- there is a distinct divide between the Creator and the created.
- Angels don't become people, and we don't become angels. We will be "like the angels" in the Resurrection- meaning we will not die. Being "like the angels" also indicates that we will not be married, based on Luke 20:35. Luke does not speak to what, if any other ways, we will be "like the angels."
- We don't know when God created angels- presumably, some time before our Biblical record.
- Are angels created "in the image of God?"

Seeing God and Living

- The Jews, going back to the Hebrews and Israelites, believed that seeing God was not permissible for man- that a person who saw God could not live.
- There are examples of people who *did* see God and live, however- Moses, John of Patmos (believed to be the writer of Revelation)
- Maybe the answer is that, because God is too overwhelming for us to perceive, no one really ever SEES the totality of God- simply a portion of His splendor that He ordains for us to see.

Nephilim

- This topic of discussion came up in reference to the conversation about the nature of angels- Nephilim, who helped populate the earth after Adam and Eve were banished from Eden, might have been children of angels.
- In Genesis 6:1-4, there is a reference to “sons of God” marrying the beautiful “daughter of men.” This is the basis for the Nephilim race/species/whatever. There are a few other references in apocryphal works and passing references in Numbers and Ezekial- where they are referred to as “giants.”
- The word “Nephilim” can be translated as “giants,” but it can also be translated as “fallen ones.”
- One possible idea is that these “sons of God” were fallen angels- Satan’s crew.
- The Nephilim were evil in God’s sight. In fact, because of their lineage, they were destined to be evil.
- There are other theories about who these “giants” actually were- aliens, a juxtaposition of a multiverse. We don’t have clarity about who they exactly were.
- Genesis cites the population of the Nephilim as the reason the flood was necessary.

Is the Old Testament literal or metaphor/allegory?

- The culture of the time would suggest that a metaphor is a possibility- teaching by storytelling, multiple similar Creation stories from other civilizations.
- St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and Eusebius believed that the first eleven chapters of Genesis were allegory.
- If part or all of the Old Testament is allegory, that would be one way to reconcile what we know today about science, archeology, paleography with the Bible.
- If it is allegory or metaphor, what is it allegory for?

Quantum Mechanics and Prayer

- Quantum mechanics may give us a hint about the effectiveness of prayer.

- It may be that movement makes the quarks observable. It may also be that when we observe quarks, they move.
- At any rate, it seems that observing something changes that thing.
- Perhaps, when we observe something in the form of prayer, a change occurs.
- National Day of Prayer is 5/2/24.
- It is impossible to quantify prayer and the answer to prayers.
- How do we measure the “effectiveness” of prayer?
- We are supposed to pray confidently and **expect** that God will answer our prayers. However, we also know that God’s will be done. How do we reconcile those two ideas?
- One way is to accept that the first step in prayer is simply stepping back from your own heart and discerning what God’s will is. We let God put a longing in our heart. Then, when we pray for that longing, we can be confident that God will grant our prayer because our prayer represents His will.