

THE TWO BIBLES

There are two plain sources of light into the nature of things, and how they work. One is the world we see every day, often called Nature, which Christians call Creation. The other is the Holy Bible, which is omitted from the published list of best-sellers because it is always at the top.

THE CREATION

This world and the galaxy in which we orbit, set among billions of others in a vast cosmos, is enough to make you feel small. It frightens some people, but it need not. Events here do not work according to God's will in any perfect way, but you can find traces and patterns, the "fingerprints of God", in more than just a vague suggestive way.

Creation reveals God by the order and design of things, more particularly by the design and structure of the scientific laws that have been reliable building blocks for natural life. It reveals the awesome qualities of God, his greatness and her mystery. It speaks of the continuity of existence, the faithful patience of God. Lastly, it witnesses to God's extravagance, abundance, sheer over-the-top beauty and life force.

Creation does not reveal God's will in the evil and suffering we undergo. Most of these are our own fault, not personally but politically or culturally. There are random events, random cancers, accidents and these are not "acts of God" as insurance policies used to say. However, God can take these as raw materials and turn them into something good, that is God at work.

THE HOLY BIBLE

The sixty six books of the Bible make up a library covering thousands of years in history. Historians who study these periods are made up of *the gullible* – "every new lump found on Mt Ararat must be Noah's Ark" – *the open sceptic* – "what did it mean in its time and context" – and the *cynical* – "it can't be right so what I can find that is suspicious in it."

Over time, people build up a respect for its veracity, but more importantly for the way it speaks for God directly into their experience and into their era. Over centuries, this "speaks for God" experience in different places was recognized as being the same, and the books were shortlisted and canonised.

The Bible reveals God through lots of historical events, showing his purpose in them, and therefore showing his character (what is he like?). These stories are most reliable for our journey today when someone, for instance a prophet, tells of it in advance so that we know that we had “better pay attention to this one real closely”. There are thousands of these in the Bible.

The way things were written is, by any account, simply inspired. The bible is brief, punchy and penetrating, most of the time (there are some long-winded bits too), like all good literature. However, there is more in this inspiration than just good writing.

It hangs together across the centuries, speaks to the human heart despite cultural differences, and resonates clear and strong with God’s spirit at work in Jesus’ life, the world and in our own life. It is Spirit-inspired. You can see a picture build up. To get this, you have to read it on its own terms, get on its wavelength – be open and sceptical, not gullible nor cynical.

So when you read something terrible, don’t just say “what a terrible God ”. It may be something the persons involved thought was a good idea, not God. Or it may be that you need to realize that there is some really nightmare stuff that goes down in real life and that God can still act to reveal himself in those situations too. And if he does, one thing is for sure, it won’t be nice. Ask yourself, what must the situation have been like in which that was the best course of action?

You can see by now that some of the goings-on in the Bible do not reveal what God is like, but they say more about the context which God is seeking to redeem. Cultural values, forms of expression, political systems, circumstantial stuff – think carefully about these.

And lastly, the English phrasing can be awkward. That’s because we are translating from three languages – Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek. There is always something lost in the translation. Sometimes, frankly, there is a cultural bias in the translators. Read more than one translation and get the sense of the meaning behind the words.

CONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE TWO

The same Spirit wrote them both - creation and bible – so you are on to a good thing when you see the consistencies. There is one way forward - the bible interprets the creation, and the creation opens us up to the bible.

God is great, unrestricted, outside of time and space. The whole cosmos is smaller than God, and exists within dimensions of time and space that do not contain God. On the other hand, we are created beings within those dimensions. Our perceptions have double trouble. Our understanding is locked in to our limitations, and also weighted down by strong bias due to our culture, foolishness, age group, sin, or trauma, etc.. In order for us to be able to cope, God acts within history so that we can see it and get it. In turn, God expects us to act within our lives today, the very here and now, in order to express what we believe and what we are becoming. Reality is a lot more than just spiritual thoughts and sublime feelings.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO

Nature is not as clear as the Bible on the particulars. It sets the scene, prompting questions of purpose and life, time and eternity, power and gentleness, beauty, right and wrong. It prompts awe, and art, and solidarity with one another. Strong as they are, the message in these experiences is blunt. You can get it a bit wrong quite easily. It is the Bible which is “sharper than a two-edged sword”, getting down to the nitty gritty. Sadly, many people don’t get the Bible because they live their lives contained within a bubble of technology and clock-control – they are never in touch with nature.

It is in the events of Jesus Christ that it all comes to a head. That is the cornerstone, the matrix of definitive revelation. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus of Nazareth.

Read the story in its layers of context. These layers, all too briefly are – the Jewish history and expectation of a deliverer, the Roman Empire’s invasion and occupation of Jesus’ homeland, and the pre-modern middle eastern ways of thinking and communicating.

CONCLUSION

Creation prompts the questions with blunt strength and extravagant beauty. The Bible prompts assurance, not necessarily answers, of a relationship with the creator of it all. That relationship draws us back into sync with the original purpose in the creation including the reason for making you! Welcome to the wild adventure!