

138 Do you have faith?

Check me out on this. Abraham was a child of his time. He was born into a pagan society, but God saw potential in him. What was God's plan? As I think I might have mentioned once or twice(!), God's plan was to bless the whole earth through Abraham's descendants.

Talk about a long-term project!

But what was Abraham's view of God? Presumably it was more or less the same view as his contemporaries – of a warring deity who had to be placated in some way lest he destroy you, but if you treat God right, he'll bless you and help you flourish.

Or have I got my understanding wrong? Please correct me if I'm wrong in my thinking there.

I'm putting it that starkly because we can all too easily view Abraham – and all the rest of the OT characters – as people who “knew God”.

Well, yes, that's true to an extent. They did know God in the sense that God was gradually revealing himself to them, but that didn't happen overnight, and it didn't happen completely over the lifetime of Abraham, and it didn't happen within a century of Abe's death, and it didn't happen in a millennium, or even two millennia – Abraham lived ~2000 BC, remember.

So, within those 2000 years, people were learning about and, at the same time, they were writing about Yahweh. They told us what God was like, they wrote that “God said this” and “God did that”.

Were they inspired by God in their writing? Yes, I very much believe they were.

Do they tell us exactly what God is like? Now that's a very good question.

Before Jesus came to show us what God is like, could *anyone* know what God is really like?

And do we *now* know exactly what God is like, now that we've seen Jesus? No! We're human, so we still have a distorted view of God.

Did the New Testament writers know exactly what God is like?! After all, they physically *met* Jesus, talked to him, learned one-to-one with him (well, Paul didn't, and he wrote a goodly chunk of the New Testament).

What am I doing here? Am I trying to destroy your Bible-based faith?!

No, I'm saying that our faith is in the Person who caused Holy Scripture to be written, and we can trust that Person to inspire us as we read those Scriptures to get to know that Person as a result of our studies.

What is absolutely remarkable is that although those Scriptures were written by people with a less than perfect understanding of that Person, nevertheless God can and does use those Scriptures – if we trust that Person, if we have faith in that Person – to bring us personally closer and closer to that Person.

Isn't that remarkable?! What an amazing God we worship! Thank you, Father, for the Holy Scriptures. Thank you, Father, for that Living Scripture, that Living Word who lives with us and dwells within us and who brings those Scriptures alive.

“Yes, but *how* do we read the Scriptures if they give us a distorted view of what God is like?”

Good question. And that's the difficult bit; it requires faith. We need to trust God to guide us, and step out in faith, read the Scriptures and try to ask ourselves, “Why did God inspire someone to write this?” and “What was God trying to tell us, through this fallible person?”

In my view, it doesn't require any faith at all to take the line that “What the Bible says is true, right, correct. What it says it means. Live with it!” (That attitude has, in my view, caused the wreck of countless people's journeys of faith.)

It's much harder to read the Bible faith-fully, trusting God to show us which bits are culturally affected by the writer's worldview.

The latter is how I think Jesus viewed the Old Testament Scriptures when he said he didn't come to do away with them but to fulfil (or full-fill) them.

What an amazing God we serve, who is determined to use whatever means possible to get us to know the wonderful love we see in Jesus, our Lord!

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