

Bible Jam “Into Spring” At
Sayville Congregational United Church of Christ

Starts: Wednesday, February 8, 2023
Ends: Wednesday, May 17, 2023

“Study of the Bible without study of the context of life on Earth is just study...”

Meeting Days In Person and Online at 10:15 AM and 7:00 PM

www.sayvilleucc.org for online link.

2/8, 2/15,

2/22 – No Class (Ash Wednesday)

3/1, 3/8, 3/15, 3/22, 3/29,

4/5 – No Class (Holy Week)

4/12 – No Class (Vacation Break)

4/19, 4/26,

5/3, 5/10

It's Already There
by Ray Bagnuolo, ©2023

There is a moving
[movable] cadence to
it all.

Hidden when "hurry"
Is afoot. It is
Anything but hurried.

Maybe it is the "dots"
Steve Jobs spoke of to the
Stanford grads [once].

Maybe, and I think so,
It is the Universe within
Seeking the Universe without.

Or the other way around.

It is there, though,
What-how-ever-it-is. There.
Here. Now.

And I, when I remember,
Get to watch this
Slow-motion eternal "thing"

That tells me..
All is well.. Be.
Still. Chill.

It's Already There.
Looking.
At you.

*Steve Jobs address to Stanford Grads 2005
<https://news.stanford.edu/2005/06/12/youve-got-find-love-jobs-says/>

Wednesday, February 8, 2023

“Study of the Bible without study of the context of life on Earth is just study...”

WELCOME

OPENING: THE BIBLE:

Comfort... Direction... Assurance... Chastisement... Hope... Promise...

Other words: _____

CHECKING IN: Include a word or a passage that brings the Bible to you.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS (WRITTEN CIRCA 6TH-5TH CENTURIES BCE)

“IN THE BEGINNING...”

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But the earth became chaos and emptiness, and darkness came over the face of the Deep—yet the Spirit of God was brooding over the surface of the waters.” GENESIS 1:1-2

ALREADY...

NOTES FROM “THE INCLUSIVE BIBLE” P.5 ON OPENING VERSES.

- (1) The books of Hebrew scripture in general, and of the Torah in particular, are named for the first few words of the text; the Hebrew name for Genesis is “In the Beginning.” Some translators feel that the etymological construction of this phrase indicates that “the beginning” is not a time, but a process—thus rendering it “At the beginning of God’s creating....”

- (2) Hebrew rarely uses the verb *to be* in its sentence construction, and where it occurs, it is usually to make a point. Here the intensity of the verb suggests becoming, indicating that the original creation became a ruination; indeed, the phrase *tohu va-bohu* , usually translated “formless and void,” we have rendered as “chaos and emptiness”—the closest English rendering of the Hebrew might be “topsy-turvy”—and every other time the phrase is used in the Bible, it describes a scene of ruination and desolation. Biblical scholars ... have pointed out the linguistic connection between *tohu* , or chaos; *tehom* , the word here translated “the Deep”; and the Babylonian goddess Tiamat. Here we find a remnant of Goddess imagery in the mysterious, watery chaos from which all life is created, echoed by the feminine Spirit of God (*ruach Elohim*) hovering over the waters the way a bird broods over the eggs in her nest. The phrase could also be rendered “mighty wind” or “breath of God”; in either case, it represents the divine power to recreate and restore that which has been spoiled and destroyed. That is, separate the “waters up there”—the literal translation of the word for sky or heaven—from those here below. The word translated “expanse” or,

in other translations, “vault,” means something hammered out, as a thinly beaten sheet of metal; the sky was often depicted as a vaulted dome.

A BEGINNING BEFORE?

EARLIEST CIVILIZATIONS:

MESOPOTAMIA RELIGIONS DATE BACK TO 6,000 BCE
 CIVILIZATION 4,000 BCE

“THE ENUMA ELISH”

BABYLONIAN EPIC OF CREATION CIRCA 2000 BCE

The Enuma Elish (also known as *The Seven Tablets of Creation*) is the Babylonian creation myth whose title is derived from the opening lines of the piece, "When on High". The myth tells the story of the great god Marduk's victory over the forces of chaos and his establishment of order at the creation of the world.

SUMMARY OF THE STORY

The story, one of the oldest in the world, concerns the birth of the gods and the creation of the universe and human beings. In the beginning, there was only undifferentiated water swirling in chaos. Out of this swirl, the waters divided into sweet, fresh water, known as the god Apsu, and salty bitter water, the goddess Tiamat. Once differentiated, the union of these two entities gave birth to the younger gods.

THE FIRST EIGHT LINES OF THE ENUMA ELISH

When on high the heaven had not been named,
 Firm ground below had not been called by name,
 Naught but primordial Apsu, their begetter,
 (And) Mummu–Tiamat, she who bore them all,
 Their waters commingling as a single body;

No reed hut had been matted, no marsh land had appeared,
When no gods whatever had been brought into being,
Uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined—
Then it was that the gods were formed within them.

GENESIS OF GENESIS?

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/U74xXGRABIM](https://youtu.be/U74xXGRABIM)

A BEGINNING BEFORE? GOOD NEWS OR NOT?

READING/ASSIGNMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT WEEK:

- (1) “JESUS CHRIST AND MYTHOLOGY” BY RUDOLF BULTMANN - CHAPTER 1 (HANDOUT)
- (2) WHAT IS THE APOCRYPHA?
- (3) WHEN WAS THE CANON OF THE BIBLE FORMED?

ALL MATERIALS WILL BE ONLINE. FOLLOW LINKS FROM HOME PAGE.

SIRACH: AN APOCRYPHAL TEXT? FOR SOME.

SUNDAY FIRST READING SIRACH 15:15-20 (ADAPTED)

You are free to keep the Commandments;

It is in your power to be faithful.

YHWH has placed fire and water before us all;

Each must choose one.

Choose life and God.

For God's wisdom is immense;

It is all-powerful and all-seeing;

God sees everything in all creation;

Nothing escapes God.

None is given the strength to tell lies

And not be known.

WHERE IS THE COMFORT? HEALING? ASSURANCE? HOPE? PROMISE?

COMMENTS

CLOSING VIDEO:

CLASS #2: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2023

A. OPENING

B. REVIEW – BEGINNINGS & BULTMANN

- a. “The heart of the preaching of Jesus Christ is the [Kindom] of God.” During the 19th Century exegesis and theology understood the [Kindom] of God as a spiritual community consisting of [people] joined together by obedience to the will of God which ruled their wills. By such obedience they sought to enlarge the sphere of [God’s] rule in the world. They were building, it was said, the [Kindom] of God as a realm which is spiritual but within the world, active and effective in this world, unfolding in the history of the world.” p. 11
- b. Weiss: “...the [Kindom] of God is not immanent (existing) in the world and does not grow as part of the world’s history, but is rather eschatological; i.e., the [Kindom] of God transcends the historical order. ¹ It will not come into being through the moral endeavors of [humanity] but solely through the supernatural activity of God.’ p.. 12

¹ Eschatology

Eschatology (/ˌɛskəˈtɒlədʒi/ ; from Ancient Greek ἔσχατος (éskhatos) 'last', and -logy) concerns expectations of the end of the present age, human history, or of the world itself. The end of the world or end times is predicted by several world religions (both Abrahamic and non-Abrahamic), which teach that negative world events will reach a climax. Belief that the end of the world is imminent is known as apocalypticism, and over time has been held both by members of mainstream religions and by doomsday cults. In the context of mysticism, the term refers metaphorically to the end of ordinary reality and to reunion with the divine. Various religions treat eschatology as a future event prophesied in sacred texts or in folklore.

- c. Book of Daniel v. Jesus: “[The] picture of the eschatological drama was drawn in Jewish apocalyptic literature, of which the Book of Daniel is the earliest still extant. The preaching of Jesus is distinguished from the typical apocalyptic pictures of the eschatological drama and of the blessedness of the coming new age in so far as Jesus refrained from drawing detailed pictures. He confined himself to the statement that the [Kingdom] of God will come and that [people] must be prepared to face the coming judgment.” P.12.
- d. “The earliest Christian community understood the [Kingdom] of God in the same sense as Jesus. It expected the [Kingdom] of God to come in the immediate future. So, Paul, too, thought that he would be alive when then end of the world would come and the dead would be raised.” p. 14
- e. “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the [kingdom] of God come with power.” Mark 9:1 (Attributed to Jesus) p. 14
- f. “This hope of Jesus and of the early Christian community was not fulfilled. The same world still exists and history continues. The course of history has refuted mythology. For the conception ‘[Kingdom] of God’ is mythological, as is the conception of the eschatological drama.” P.15 ff.

- g. What Jesus understood of himself is hard to say, based on careful and extensive exegetical studies of the texts. However, "...the early Christian community ... regarded him as a mythological² figure. It expected him to return as the Son of [Humanity] on the clouds of heaven to bring salvation and damnation as judge of the world." p.16-17ff.
- h. "Shall we retain the ethical preaching of Jesus and abandon his eschatological preaching? Shall we reduce his preaching of the [Kingdom] of God to the so-called social gospel? Or is there a third possibility? We must ask whether the eschatological preaching and the mythological sayings as a whole contain still deeper meaning which is concealed under the cover of mythology. If that is so, let us abandon the mythological conceptions precisely because we want to retain their deeper meaning. This method of interpretation of the New Testament which tries to recover the deeper meaning behind mythological conceptions I call *de-mythologizing*..." p.18

² Mythology

Myth is a folklore genre consisting of narratives that play a fundamental role in a society, such as foundational tales or origin myths. Since "myth" is widely used to imply that a story is not objectively true, the identification of a narrative as a myth can be highly controversial. Many adherents of religions view their own religions' stories as truth and so object to their characterization as myth, the way they see the stories of other religions. As such, some scholars label all religious narratives "myths" for practical reasons, such as to avoid depreciating any one tradition because cultures interpret each other differently relative to one another. Other scholars avoid using the term "myth" altogether and instead use different terms like "sacred history", "holy story", or simply "history" to avoid placing pejorative overtones on any sacred narrative.

C. First Reading 2 Peter 1:16-21 (Inclusive Bible)

We did not cleverly devise fables when we taught you of the power and coming of our Savior Jesus Christ; we ourselves saw the majesty of our Savior. For Jesus was honored and glorified by our Creator God when the voice of the Majestic Glory spoke out, “This is my Own, whom I love, and with whom I am well pleased.” We heard this ourselves—this voice from heaven—when we were with Jesus on the holy mountain. Moreover, we have the prophetic word, which is even more certain. Depend on it for your own good as a light shining in the dark, until first light breaks and the morning star rises in your hearts. At the same time, you need to know that no prophecy of scripture ever occurred by one’s own interpretation. Prophecy never comes through an act of human will, but comes as people have spoken for God under the power of the Holy Spirit.

D. Gospel Reading Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a high mountain to be alone with them. And before their eyes, Jesus was transfigured—his face becoming as dazzling as the sun and his clothes as radiant as light.

Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them, conversing with Jesus. Then Peter said, “Rabbi, how good that we are here! With your permission I will erect three shelters here—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah!”

Peter was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them. Out of the cloud came a voice which said, “This is my Own, my Beloved, on whom my favor rests. Listen to him!”

When they heard this, the disciples fell forward on the ground, overcome with fear. Jesus came toward them and touched them, saying, “Get up! Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, they did not see anyone but Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountainside, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone about this until the Chosen One has risen from the dead.”

E. Ash Wednesday

ASH WEDNESDAY, in the Christian church, the first day of Lent, occurring six and a half weeks before Easter (between February 4 and March 11, depending on the date of Easter). Ash Wednesday is a solemn reminder of human mortality and the need for reconciliation with God and marks the beginning of the penitential Lenten season. It is commonly observed with ashes and fasting.

In the early Christian church, the length of the Lenten celebration varied, but eventually it began 6 weeks (42 days) before Easter. This provided only 36 days of fasting (excluding Sundays). In the 7th century, 4 days were added before the first Sunday in Lent in order to establish 40 fasting days, in imitation of Jesus Christ’s fast in the desert.

It was the practice in Rome for penitents and grievous sinners to begin their period of public penance on the first day of Lent in preparation for their restoration to the sacrament of the Eucharist. They were sprinkled with ashes, dressed in sackcloth, and obliged to remain apart until they were reconciled with the Christian community on Maundy Thursday, the Thursday before Easter. When these practices fell into disuse (8th–10th century), the beginning of the penitential season of Lent was symbolized by placing ashes on the heads of the entire congregation.

In the modern Roman Catholic Church, the ashes obtained by burning the palms used on the previous Palm Sunday are applied in the shape of a cross on the forehead of each worshipper on Ash Wednesday. Together with Good Friday (which marks the crucifixion of Jesus before Easter), Ash Wednesday is an obligatory day of fasting and abstinence, where only one full meal and no meat are to be consumed. Although Ash Wednesday is not a holy day of obligation, it is traditionally one of the most heavily attended non-Sunday masses of the liturgical year. Worship services are also held on Ash Wednesday in Anglican, Lutheran, and some other Protestant churches. Eastern

Orthodox churches begin Lent on a Monday and therefore do not observe Ash Wednesday. (Britannica)

CLASS #3: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2023

OPENING

READING: FROM “WHOLEHEARTED FAITH” CHAPTER 10: *MANY VOICES, MANY MASKS*

(p. 117)

Writing has taught me a special kind of patience, that I am finally learning to apply to my faith. I find myself repeating the same mantras on a day of doubt that I repeat on the day of writer’s block: Be patient. Don’t rush it. Live the questions. Let this play out.

I think you can apply the same principles to reading. I consider myself fortunate that I was an English major. Studying literature teaches you that there is often nothing “plain” or “clear” about a text it was always written in a particular context, almost always for particular context. Interrogation is part of the work. So empath — for the writers, as well as for other readers.

(p.118)

If puzzles me is it, it should be any different with the Bible. If we respect this holy book, should we not ask or questions of it, not fewer? Do we not engage more deeply with those — and those things — we love, not less?

Your confidence in the veracity of scripture might collapse under the accumulated weight of too many whys. But your confidence isn’t your god — and Scripture isn’t your god either. Scripture tells us about God and points us toward God and testifies about others’ encounters with God, but it doesn’t contain the entirety of God, or even of the story of God. And God, I have to believe, *can* handle a million whys and war. In fact, God invites them, because

there's something beautiful about wholehearted pursuit of truth and something hopeful about the earnest desire to understand the One in whom we find our source and our sustenance.

...

I remember the sense of invitation enjoy. I felt when I learned that the word “disciple” does it mean “expert” or “preacher,” “lecturer” or “leader.” Instead, it derives from the Latin word *discere*—“to learn.” We're learners. We're all in process, all just partway through our studies, all nowhere near the completion of our educations. And it gives me no small amount of comfort to witness how patient Jesus was with his disciples—Thomas, who doubted, and Nathaniel, who was sharp-tongued; fickle Peter and finance-challenged Philip (“Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little,” he said, as Jesus prepared to feed five thousand). We're called to be learners at the feet of the Master Teacher, slowly beginning to understand what the life of faith means.

...

P. 119

Note: A reference to “In Memoriam A. H. H.” by Alfred Lloyd Tennyson:

In the aftermath of a friend's death, Tennyson wrestles with his own doubts and his own despair. It's a remarkable, extended and public journey through difficult emotional and spiritual terrain, examining friendship and faith. The poem can easily be found by an online search or using this link:

<https://poets.org/poem/memoriam-h-h>

...

The story of Rachel pp. 121-ff:

(p. 123) When we are reminded that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, often people amplify the echo, in the metaphor of David, the unlikely young shepherd, who conquered a giant, and started a kin-dom. I like to think, too, of Rachel, the unlikely young shepherd, who, strategized with her entire body, loved with a passionate fury, and then gave her life for her child.

- The bigger point here is that there are different ways to read the text...
- ...a kind of reading (or listening) that seeks instead to amplify the richness of multiple perspectives.
- When we try to make the text univocal, reducing it to one voice, we fail to recognize the full possibility of what it has to offer.

p. 124

To understand the Bible and its meaning as “clear” and plain” is to diminish its relevance to peoples across time and space and to fail to recognize that the Bible is anything but univocal.

...

The literary masks of God — at least the ones that ended up in the Bible, or in other religious writings — do have a historical dimension to them, for each bears witness to the way God has patiently accommodated peoples fallen and culturally conditioned conceptions of the divine at a particular moment in history. But I say that these masks are primarily literary, not historical, because I refuse to believe that God engaged in or commanded the violence that some Old Testament authors ascribe to God

All this might sound complicated, but it’s not, not really. We all wear our own masks, which to varying degrees, represent who we are, as well as who we imagine ourselves to be as well who we aspire to be. Even the more fictitious ones can tell us something. We can learn from what lurks in the shadows.

(shadows?)

Notes:

p.125 (From Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved*)

Henri Nouwen writes about the masks of the world — or, rather about liberating yourself from them. “You have to keep unmasking the world about you for what it is: manipulative, controlling, power-hungry, and, in the long run, destructive,” he writes. “The world tells you many lies about who you are, and you simply have to be realistic enough to remind yourself of this.”

The world tells us many lies about who God is too. And my hope in calling us to take care with how we read stories about God, about God's people, and about ourselves, and our communities, is ultimately that we will not give those lies more power than they deserve, which is to say, not much power at all.

It seems too good to be true that God redeemed all things, and yet this is the hope that has been written for us. No matter which angle I perceive this from, it just seems... good. Hard but good. Unbelievable but good. Weird but good.

To return to Tennyson:

Oh, yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final end of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taste of blood;

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
Did not one life shall be destroy'd,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete.

Lectionary Reading for The Second Sunday of Lent; March 5, 2023

John 3: 1-17

¹ A certain Pharisee named Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, ² came to Jesus at night. “Rabbi,” he said, “We know you’re a teacher come from God, for no one can perform the signs and wonders you do, unless by the power of God.”

³ Jesus gave Nicodemus this answer:

“The truth of the matter is,
unless one is born from above,
one cannot see the kingdom of God.”

⁴ Nicodemus said, “How can an adult be born a second time? I can’t go back into my mother’s womb to be born again!”

⁵ Jesus replied:

“The truth of the matter is,
no one can enter God’s kingdom
without being born of water and the Spirit.
What is born of the flesh is flesh;
what is born of the Spirit is Spirit.
So don’t be surprised when I tell you that
you must be born from above.

The wind blows where it will.
You hear the sound it makes,
but you don’t know where it comes from
or where it goes.

So it is with everyone
who is born of the Spirit.”

“How can this be possible?” asked Nicodemus.

¹⁰ Jesus replied,

“You’re a teacher of Israel, and you
still don’t understand these matters?”

¹¹ “The truth of the matter is,
we’re talking about what we know;
we’re testifying about what we’ve seen—
yet you don’t accept our testimony.
If you don’t believe
when I tell you about earthly things,
how will you believe
when I tell you about heavenly things?”

¹³ No one has gone up to heaven
except the One who came down from heaven—
the Chosen One.
As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so the Chosen One must be lifted up,
so that everyone who believes in the Chosen One
might have eternal life.

¹⁶ Yes, God so loved the world
as to give the Only Begotten One,
that whoever believes may not die,
but have eternal life.
God sent the Only Begotten into the world
not to condemn the world,
but that through the Only Begotten
the world might be saved.

CLASS #4: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2023

A. OPENING

B. READING REVIEW: HANDOUT FROM “THE PROPHETIC IMAGINATION”: *RADICAL FAITH AS GIFT*

gift: a thing given willingly to someone without payment; a present.

C. WHO IS WALTER BRUGGERMAN:

Walter Brueggemann (born March 11, 1933) is an American Protestant Old Testament scholar and theologian who is widely considered one of the most influential Old Testament scholars of the last several decades. His work often focuses on the Hebrew prophetic tradition and sociopolitical imagination of the Church. He argues that the Church must provide a counter-narrative to the dominant forces of consumerism, militarism, and nationalism.

Consumerism: a social and economic order that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts.

Militarism: the belief or desire of a government or a people that a state should maintain a strong military capability and use it aggressively to expand national interests and/or values.

Nationalism: is an idea and movement that holds that the nation should be congruent with the state, thus it is an idea that believes in gaining and maintaining the nation’s sovereignty (self-governance) over its homeland to create a nation state. (France, Germany, Japan, for example.)

We will review this handout from last week. A copy is included in this handout/email.

If you have time, please review and consider any questions you might have.

D.

E. SUBMITTED FOR REVIEW IN BY KAREN GUNKEL IN FOLLOW-UP TO “*RADICAL FAITH AS GIFT*”:

FROM “*TO BLESS THE SPACE BETWEEN US*” BY JOHN O’ DONAHUE (PLEASE REVIEW)

“At any time you can ask yourself: At which threshold am I now standing? At this time in my life, what am I leaving? Where am I about to enter? What is preventing me from crossing my next threshold?

“What gift would enable me to do it?

“A threshold is not a simple boundary; it is a frontier that divides two different territories, rhythms, and atmospheres.

“

Indeed, it is a lovely testimony to the fullness and integrity of an experience or a stage of life that it intensifies toward the end into a real frontier that cannot be crossed without the heart being passionately engaged and woken up. At this threshold a great complexity of emotion comes alive: confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope. This is one of the reasons such vital crossings were always clothed in ritual. It is wise in your own life to be able to recognize and acknowledge the key thresholds: to take your time; to feel all the varieties of presence that accrue there; to listen inward with complete attention until you hear the inner voice calling you forward. The time has come to cross.”

F. SCRIPTURE REVIEW

LECTIONARY READY FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 2023

JOHN 4:5-42

PLEASE READ FROM YOUR OWN BIBLE OR SEARCH ONLINE.

SUBMITTED FOR REVIEW: MARCH 15, 2023 – BLOG POST BY JIM RIGBY WWW.JIMRIGBY.ORG

AS AN INTRODUCTION TO A DISCUSSION ON “ATONEMENT THEORIES”, PLEASE REVIEW:

"BLOOD HYMNS" by Jim Rigby

When I was a kid, our church had some really creepy hymns, some of which I can still sing word for word today. Like:

“There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”

I liked the idea of a loving Jesus who invites us to take care of each other, but the idea of a God who got angry at us and of a Son who took the spanking for us seemed very strange, if not insane:

“I know it was the blood,
I know it was the blood for me.
They whipped Him all night long,
They whipped Him all night long,
They whipped Him all night long for me.”

This week, I went back and looked at some of the old “blood hymns.” They were as bad as I remembered. I was surprised to see how many of the hymns used “whiteness” as a metaphor for innocence. I wondered what subconscious connections would occur in a church full of white people in a nation that was and is so abusive to People of Color:

“What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow...”

Many in the church have forgotten that the cross was an invention of Rome, not an angry God. The image of a rabbi on the cross was a symbol of love’s solidarity with the wretched of the earth, not a blood sacrifice to appease a heavenly tantrum.

My own guess is that Paul came up with atonement theories to help people who had trusted in rituals like that of animal sacrifice. Such rituals were very common in hunter gather groups. People were going to eat the animal anyway, so they created rituals to honor the life they were taking and to consecrate the blood they were shedding.

When local religions fell to empires like Greece and Rome, I imagine many local religions plunged into fear and despair. Even when their temples weren't destroyed, it was clear that more powerful gods had arrived on the scene. Would their rituals of atonement still work? The very fact that their culture had been crushed had to convince many that God or the Gods were angry at them.

Just because religion has gone insane does not mean people can simply choose to step out of it. Human beings form many unconscious attitudes in childhood that shape their lives. Some of those beliefs lie locked deep below the level of conscious functioning. People cannot easily be reasoned out of traumatized emotional states. Part of what some religious teachers are trying to do is to build a ladder of rituals and metaphors out of people's nightmares and into the light of day.

It seems likely to me that Paul was trying help people let go of their fear and guilt by saying Jesus had been sacrificed once and for all to satisfy every debt. It sounds crazy now, but my guess is Paul was trying to be helpful. The problem really came when the church tried to make those regional atonement theories work for everyone by shaming and frightening them first, and then offering salvation from a fear they themselves had concocted.

Whether we are Christian or not, we do not experience the meaning Easter by performing theological CPR on ancient atonement theories. Our "cross" is whatever terrorizes us, whatever shames us, whatever dehumanizes us. Our "resurrection" is realizing that life is more powerful than anything we fear. Our "salvation" is realizing nothing we have ever done can make us unworthy of love.

CLASS #5: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2023

ANNOUNCEMENT: CHANGE IN REMAINING CLASS SCHEDULE”:

3/15, 3/22, 3/29,

4/5 – No Class (Holy Week)

4/12 – No Class (Vacation Break)

4/19, 4/26, 5/3, 5/10, 5/17

Sunday, March 19, 2023 – Lectionary Readings

23rd Psalm Psalms for Praying by Nan C. Merrill

John 9:1-41 The Inclusive Bible – Attached.

From Gail Kieser:

“If He [Jesus] wasn’t God,” Stephen Barkley said, “then God was in Him in some manner that we can’t understand. Look at the facts! Hundreds of men, thousands probably, died on crosses, crucified. It was one of man’s favorite barbarisms over a long period of time.

Nobody knows anything about them except the One. This was no obscure death, even though it occurred in an obscure place. The whole world was destined to know about it, and did, and does. The world changed, and is still changing, because of it. No man ever made such a mark on history. Jesus Christ wasn’t an ordinary man and he didn’t speak with an ordinary, human tongue.”

From The Empty Shrine, by William Barrett, 1958.

Attachments for suggested readings (Handouts):

“What Atonement Theories Tell Us About Our Politics” – Christianity Today
March 21, 2022: [Online Link](#)

Living the Questions, “Chapter 1: And Invitation to the Journey” p. 3-10
David M. Feiten & Jeff Proctor Murphy; Harper One, 2012.

A. LENT & ATONEMENT THEORIES

University of Notre Dame Education Department

Three theories of the Atonement [As presented, without modification. Please do so.]

A central part of Christian doctrine is that Christ died for us. More specifically, it is held that Christ died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven. In this way, Christ's death is supposed to be a crucial element of God's plan for our salvation. This event — Christ's death making possible our salvation — is called 'the Atonement.'

The Atonement raises a number of different interrelated philosophical questions:

- 1) Why did Christ die on the cross?
- 2) How does Christ dying make it possible for our sins to be forgiven?
- 3) If God is omnipotent, why couldn't God forgive our sins without Christ dying?

A theory of the Atonement is an attempt to answer questions like these three.

We can distinguish three different theories of the atonement.

1. MORAL EXEMPLAR THEORIES

One sort of theory, which is often described but rarely advocated, is that the purpose of the Crucifixion is to provide us with an example of a morally perfect life, which we might then imitate in an attempt to reconcile ourselves to God.

Two problems for moral exemplar theories: (i) Pelagianism, (See following((ii) the problem of understanding why death on the cross would be morally exemplary if it did not also have some other more central purpose in explaining salvation.

2. THE RANSOM THEORY

An early model of the atonement emphasizes Christ's death as a ransom. One finds this language also in the Catechism, which says that the Crucifixion is "the ransom that would free men from the slavery of sin."

But if Christ's death was a ransom, to whom was it paid, and for what?

The traditional answer to this question is that it was a ransom paid to Satan. The idea is that by sinning, human beings have freely put themselves in Satan's power. God wishes to free us from Satan, and hence from death.

So God has to offer Satan something for which Satan is willing to trade all of us. God's idea is then to send Jesus to earth in human form. Satan is fooled into thinking that Jesus is human, but not God. But Satan sees Jesus performing miracles, and so thinks of Jesus as more valuable than the rest of humanity combined. As Gregory of Nyssa put it,

'When the enemy saw the power, he recognized in Christ a bargain which offered him more than he held. For this reason he chose him as the ransom for those whom he had shut up in death's prison.'

Satan can't condemn Jesus to death by tempting him into sin. So the only way for Satan to trap Jesus is to trade the human beings in his power — all of us — for Jesus. God's triumph over Satan then comes with the resurrection.

Anselm gave several objections to this theory: (i) it seems to make God less than omnipotent; (ii) it is mysterious why God should have to respect any supposed claim that Satan has on us; (iii) it makes God a deceiver.

3. SATISFACTION/PUNISHMENT THEORIES

(St.) Anselm was the first to defend a family of views which, since then, have been the most popular approach to the Atonement.

These views include theses of the following sort:

- Our sins have effect X
- X requires us to be punished with death unless Y is done
- We are unable to do Y
- Christ's death does Y

On Anselm's theory, X=taking away honor from God, and Y=repaying God for this. The reason why we are unable to repay God for this is that, as Anselm put it,

‘No member of the human race except Christ ever gave to God, by dying, anything which that person was not at some time going to lose as a matter of necessity. Nor did anyone ever pay a debt to God which he did not owe. But Christ of his own accord gave to his Father what he was never going to lose as a matter of necessity, and he paid, on behalf of sinners, a debt which he did not owe. ... He was in no way needy on his own account, or subject to compulsion from others, to whom he owed nothing, unless it was punishment that he owed them. Nevertheless, he gave his life...’

Christ gave more than he owed the Father, so the Father owed him a reward. Christ, of his own free will, decides to reward the people who have killed him by freeing them from death.

This is sometimes called a *satisfaction* theory. On this kind of theory, Jesus gives to the Father something more than Jesus owed, and which then can be a reparation for our sins.

Two objections to Anselm's theory: (i) is honor really this important, and does it make sense to say that we have taken away honor from God? (ii) why on this view is the Crucifixion required? Why wouldn't simply coming to earth as a human being be enough?

B. PELAGIANISM:

Pelagianism is a Christian theological position that holds that the original sin did not taint human nature and that humans by divine grace have free will to achieve human perfection.

Also called “Pelagian Heresy”, it is a 5th Century *heresy* taught by Pelagius. A simple search of his name will provide you with interesting information, especially concerning Augustine’s rebuttal of Pelagius and Pelagius’ eventual excommunication in the early 5th Century.

Pelagius’ followers that stressed the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the human will. Pelagius was concerned about the slack moral standards among Christians, and he hoped to improve their conduct by his teachings. Rejecting the arguments of those who claimed that they sinned because of human weakness, he insisted that God made human beings free to choose between good and evil and that sin is a voluntary act committed by a person against God’s law. Celestius, a disciple of Pelagius, denied the church’s doctrine of original sin and the necessity of infant baptism.

C. Psalms for Praying by Nan C. Merrill– 23rd Psalm

O my Beloved, You are my shepherd,
I shall not want;
You bring me to green pastures
for rest
and lead me beside still waters
renewing my spirit;
You restore my soul.
You lead me in the path of
Goodness
to follow Love's way.

Even though I walk through the
valley of the shadow
and of death,
I am not afraid;
For You are every with me;
Your rod and staff
they guide me,
and comfort.

You prepare a table before me
In the presence of all my fears;
you bless me with oil,
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy will
follow me
All the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the heart
Of the Beloved forever. Amen.

D. John 9:1-41

^{9:1} As Jesus walked along, he saw someone who had been blind from birth. ² The disciples asked Jesus, “Rabbi, was it this individual’s sin that caused the blindness, or that of the parents?”

³ “Neither,” answered Jesus,

“It wasn’t because of anyone’s sin—
not this person’s, nor the parents’.
Rather, it was to let God’s works shine forth
in this person.

⁴ We must do the deeds of the One who sent me
while it is still day—
for night is coming,
when no one can work.

While I am in the world,
I am the light of the world.”

⁶ With that, Jesus spat on the ground, made mud with his saliva and smeared the blind one’s eyes with the mud. ⁷ Then Jesus said, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam”—“Siloam” means “sent.” So the person went off to wash, and came back able to see.

⁸ Neighbors and those who had been accustomed to seeing the blind beggar began to ask, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some said yes; others said no—the one who had been healed simply looked like the beggar.

But the individual in question said, “No—it was me.” ¹⁰

The people then asked, “Then how were your eyes opened?”

¹¹ The answer came, “The one they call Jesus made mud and smeared it on my eyes and told me to go to Siloam and wash. When I went and washed, I was able to see.”

¹² “Where is Jesus?” they asked. The person replied, “I have no idea.”

¹³ They took the one who had been born blind to the Pharisees. ¹⁴ It had been on a Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud paste and opened this one’s eyes. ¹⁵ The Pharisees asked how the individual could see. They were told, “Jesus put mud on my eyes. I washed it off, and now I can see.”

¹⁶ This prompted some Pharisees to say, “This Jesus cannot be from God, because he doesn’t keep the Sabbath.” Others argued, “But how could a sinner perform signs like these?” They were sharply divided.

¹⁷ Then they addressed the blind person again: “Since it was your eyes he opened, what do you have to say about this Jesus?”

“He’s a prophet,” came the reply. ¹⁸ The Temple authorities refused to believe that this one had been blind and had begun to see, until they summoned the parents.

¹⁹ “Is this your child?” they asked, “and if so, do you attest that your child was blind at birth? How do you account for the fact that now your child can see?”

²⁰ The parents answered, “We know this is our child, blind from birth. ²¹ But how our child can see now, or who opened those blind eyes, we have no idea. But don’t ask us—our child is old enough to speak without us!” ²² The parents answered this way because they were afraid of the Temple authorities, who had already agreed among themselves that anyone who acknowledged Jesus as the messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why they said, “Our child is of age and should be asked directly.”

²⁴ A second time they summoned the one who had been born blind and said, “Give God the glory instead; we know that this Jesus is a sinner.”

²⁵ “I don’t know whether he is a sinner or not,” the individual answered. “All I know is that I used to be blind, and now I can see.”

²⁶ They persisted, “Just what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

²⁷ “I already told you, but you won’t listen to me,” came the answer. “Why do you want to hear it all over again? Don’t tell me you want to become disciples of Jesus too!”

²⁸ They retorted scornfully, “You’re the one who is Jesus’ disciple. We’re disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but we have no idea where this Jesus comes from.”

³⁰ The other retorted: “Well, this is news! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes! ³¹ We know that God doesn’t hear sinners, but that if people are devout and obey God’s will, God listens to them. ³² It is unheard of that anyone ever gave sight to a person blind from birth. ³³ If this one were not from God, he could never have done such a thing!”

³⁴ “What!” they exclaimed. “You’re steeped in sin from birth, and you’re giving us lectures?” With that they threw the person out.

³⁵ When Jesus heard of the expulsion, he sought out the healed one and asked, “Do you believe in the Chosen One?”

³⁶ The other answered, “Who is this One, that I may believe?”

³⁷ “You’re looking at him,” Jesus replied. “The Chosen One is speaking to you now.”

³⁸ The healed one said, “Yes, I believe,” and worshiped Jesus.

³⁹ And Jesus said, “I came into this world to execute justice—to make the sightless see and the seeing blind.”

⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were nearby heard this and said, “You’re not calling us blind, are you?”

⁴¹ To which Jesus replied, “If you were blind, there would be no sin in that. But since you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.

End of 3.15.23

CLASS #6: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

REMAINING CLASS SCHEDULE:

3/29, (Two Week Break), 4/19, 4/26, 5/3, 5/10, 5/17

- A. SIN, PROMISE...
- B. LENT & ATONEMENT THEORIES
- C. LIVING THE QUESTIONS – ATTACHED PP. 3-22
- D. ATTACHMENT: LECTIONARY: READINGS FOR 3/26/23 W. COMMENTARY PP.23 - 27
- E. CHRISTIANITY TODAY: WHAT ATONEMENT THEORIES TELL US ABOUT OUR POLITICS.
3/21/22

The story of Easter, all Christians agree, is the story of our salvation. “By this gospel you are saved,” wrote Paul, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day” (1 Cor. 15:2–4). It was for “us and for our salvation,” says the Nicene Creed, that Jesus took on flesh, died, and rose as “Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:36).

But *how* did our salvation take place, exactly? The theories of Christ’s atonement tell stories of Easter’s inner workings. And the three most popular models throughout church history—Christus Victor, satisfaction theory, and penal substitution—are also remarkably political. They were shaped by the governmental contexts in which they arose.

I’ve come to love studying atonement theories, because it has clarified and enriched my understanding of God’s character and because learning about those political contexts has shed light on where our society is moving now.

My first exposure to *Christus Victor* was *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, but the theory is dominant among early theologians like Origen, Athanasius, and Gregory of Nyssa. They speak of Jesus redeeming us from oppressive powers—sin, death, the Devil—to whom we’d bound ourselves by our own treachery. Christ “disarmed” those powers and triumphed over them on the cross (Col. 2:13–15). God became incarnate, as Irenaeus wrote, that “He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man.”

That made sense in the ancient Greco-Roman world, where conquest was familiar and a *redemptor* could buy the freedom of someone enslaved or taken prisoner of war. But in the 11th century, as Normans brought the feudal system to England, Anselm, bishop of Canterbury, told a new atonement story.

Explicitly drawing on rules of honor and hierarchy of his day, Anselm's *satisfaction theory* swaps the roles: God the Father, rather than Satan, demands humanity's debt be paid before reconciliation can occur. Here, humanity's sin violates divine honor and requires satisfaction we cannot make, so God becomes human to satisfy our obligation on our behalf. That change of the Father's role persisted when *penal substitution* arose 500 years later alongside the modern legal system. Figures like John Calvin, who studied law before becoming a Reformer, replaced the image of a serf trying to satisfy his lord with a courtroom where God as righteous judge condemns sinners who violate his law. But "Christ interposed, took the punishment upon himself," and "propitiated God the Father," Calvin wrote in his *Institutes*, relying on passages like Isaiah 53:5-6 and Romans 3:25, so that God is no longer "in a manner hostile to us, [with] his arm raised for our destruction."

I understand why penal substitution became "a distinguishing mark" of evangelicalism, in the phrase of the late J. I. Packer. Some of that adoption is theological—compelling cases for the theory abound—but some of it is cultural. I can easily explain penal substitution because we know how a courtroom works. Penal substitution is immediately intelligible in the world of the Reformation, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Industrial Revolution.

In many ways, we still live in that world, but in many ways we don't. I think resurgent interest in Christus Victor, the view that is most convincing to me, is a little-noticed bellwether of this change. A God who crushes evil we're helpless to defeat and who frees us from striving is good news in a culture preoccupied with institutional corruption.

The new or renewed cultural resonance of an atonement theory doesn't prove its truth, of course. Theories can attract fans for perverse reasons. Some Christus Victor proponents, for instance, are too eager to dispense with notions of personal sin.

But the cultural response to a theory can tell us something about the longings and needs of our time. It offers insight into our political dramas and reminds us, too, of the different stories that explain Christ's work on the cross.

CLASS #7: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2023

REMAINING CLASS SCHEDULE:

Two Week Break – We return: 4/19, 4/26, 5/3, 5/10, 5/17

- A. LOOSE ENDS
- B. LECTIONARY READINGS
- C. LIVING THE QUESTIONS - CHAPTER 2 & 3
- D. GLORY & GRATITUDE
- E. SUNDAY'S READING

Gospel Reading *Liturgy of the Palms; The Book of Matthew 21:1-11*

^{21:1} As they approached Jerusalem, entering Beth-Phage at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent off two disciples ² with the instructions, "Go into the village straight ahead of you, and immediately you will find a tethered donkey with her colt standing beside her. Untie them and lead them back to me. ³ If anyone questions you, say, 'The Rabbi needs them.' Then they will let them go at once."

⁴ This came about to fulfill what was said through the prophet: ⁵ "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Your Sovereign comes to you without display, riding on a donkey, on a colt—the foal of a beast of burden.'"

⁶ So the disciples went off and did what Jesus had ordered. ⁷ They brought the donkey and her colt, and after they laid their cloaks on the animals, Jesus mounted and rode toward the city.

⁸ Great crowds of people spread their cloaks on the road, while some began to cut branches from the trees and lay them along the path. ⁹ The crowds—those who went in front of Jesus and those who followed—were all shouting,

“Hosanna to the Heir to the House of David!

Blessed is the One who comes

in the name of the Most High!

Hosanna in the highest!”

¹⁰ As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred to its depths, demanding, “Who is this?”

F. ¹¹ And the crowd kept answering, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee!”

REMAINING CLASS SCHEDULE:

Remaining Classes 4/19, 4/26, 5/3, 5/10.

A. WELCOME & CHECK IN – REFLECTION...

The days gather in the past as we go, with them our memories – sharp or vague as they may be.

So memories hang around, as if in a time-narrative replaying in a rear-view mirror – for a while. Even the best of memories, fade or never really capture all that surrounds the experiences – how could they? But we have among our many exquisite gifts the ability to weave together tethers in the expanding gaps, so the memories cling...even if the narrative changes to keep them present. There is, built in like an LAD*, something that holds the inner story together, important parts stirring an ever-broadening array of settings.

How then do we pass on what is most important to us – to pass on – when the details become “fuzzy” – either from forgetfulness or a new idiom, a colloquialism that is foreign on both sides.

How to tell the story of a recipe, if you never knew the person who created it, whose secret ingredient was, in fact, them?

How to pass on the faith that sustains you? What stories will you tell to pass on what is most important to you?

B. THINK YOU KNOW? “STORIES OF CREATION” – CHAPTER 4, “LIVING THE QUESTIONS”

Think you know the story of creation? Then have a listen to theologian and storyteller Megan Mckenna's version of the story of humanity's beginning:

So God said, “Let there be light.” What’s the light? Consciousness? Understanding? The Jews say it is the soul and the spirit of every human being since the beginning of time to the end. If you know the Jewish tradition every one of us is a shaft or a shard of light that has been shattered, broken and scattered throughout the world. To collect all those and put them together is *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, putting everything back together again the way it should be. So this is literally the creation of every single human being *ever*. That ought to blow your mind for a start. But this is the tradition of the Jews.

The ancient Hebrews who composed what we now know as Genesis were brilliant storytellers—and although their writings have for generations been thought to explain the “how of what happened historically, their stories are much deeper and richer when they are properly understood metaphorically as wrestling with the “whys” of human life.

When we delve into these ancient stories through the practice of thinking theologically, we catch a glimpse of people seeking to answer the eternal question, “What’s the meaning of life?” Their suggestion is a good place to start—that we are made in the image of the Divine, the one who brings order out of chaos and finds joy in the act of creating.

Exercise: What is your eternal question? Or, if you prefer, “What is your BIG QUESTION?”

Exercise: Our Creation Story

C. PSALM 104

Bless Yhwh , my soul!

Yhwh , my God, how great you are!

Clothed in majesty and glory,
wrapped in a robe of light,
you stretch the heavens out like a tent.

You lay the beams for your palace on the waters above;
you use the clouds as your chariot
and ride on the wings of the wind;
you use the winds as messengers
and fiery flames as attendants.

You fixed the earth on its foundations
so it can never totter,
and wrapped it with the Deep as with a robe,
the waters overtopping the mountains.

At your rebuke the waters bolted,
fleeing at the sound of your thunder,
cascading over the mountains, into the valleys,
down to the reservoir you made for them;
you imposed boundaries they must never cross
so they would never again flood the land.

You set springs gushing in ravines,
running down between the mountains,
supplying water for wild animals
and attracting the thirsty wild donkeys;
the birds of the air make their nests by these waters
and sing among the branches.

From your palace you water the highlands
until the ground is sated
by the fruit of your work;
you make fresh grass grow for cattle
and plants for us to cultivate
to get food from the soil—
wine to cheer our hearts, oil to make our faces shine,
and bread to sustain our life.

The trees of Yhwh drink their fill—
those cedars of Lebanon,
where birds build their nests and,
on the highest branches,
the stork makes its home.

For the wild goats there are the high mountains,
and in the crags the rock badgers hide.
You made the moon to tell the seasons,
and the sun knows when to set:
you bring darkness on, night falls,
and all the forest animals come out—
savage lions roaring for their prey,
claiming their food from God.

The sun rises, they retire,
going back to lie down in their lairs,
and people go out to work, to labor again until evening.
Yhwh , what variety you have created,
arranging everything so wisely!

The earth is filled with your creativity!
There's the vast expanse of the Sea,
teeming with countless creatures,
living things large and small,
with the ships going to and fro
and Leviathan whom you made to frolic there.

All creatures depend on you to feed them at the proper time.
Give it to them—they gather it up.
Open your hand—they are well satisfied.
Hide your face—they are terrified.
Take away their breath—they die and return to dust.

Send back your breath—fresh life begins
and you renew the face of the earth.

Glory forever to Yhwh!

May you find joy in your creation!

You glance at the earth, and it trembles;
you touch the mountains, and they smoke!

I will sing to you all my life,

I will make music for my God as long as I live.

May these reflections of mine give God
as much pleasure as God gives me!

May the corrupt vanish from the earth
and the violent exist no longer!

Bless Yhwh , my soul!

Alleluia!

D. FROM SUNDAY: A PASTORAL PRAYER

"O God of all sea sons and settings of our lives, sometimes our doubts and cynicisms close down like a fog and you seem far removed, leaving us vexed and lost. Then the music rises, the rain falls, rainbows slather on oily puddles, a baby giggles, someone stands for justice, the daily composes its poetry, and the fog lifts along with our spirits and our dreams - so we see again that it's all a gift from you. And our eyes glisten - our voices lift in praise for you.

"O God of all creatures and contexts of your creation, sometimes we feel alone, isolated, cut-off -- of little consequence -- and we find no trace at all of your presence.

"Then a friend calls, a letter arrives, a neighbor knocks, a child visits, and love becomes a word made flesh again, and we remember. So we sense once more that it's all a gift and life becomes a "we" again, an "ours", an "us". And the "You" and "Yours" of it is real again. The Kingdom resonant in our midst. 'Thank you.'

"O God of healing and power, sometimes we feel exhausted, defeated, used up, ready to give up; and you seem altogether elsewhere and indifference. Then a child looks at us through bottomless eyes, asks the forever question, demanding an "honest", for now, answer. And awesome how tremors up our spines levers our minds, and we know anew what this life is all about: You. And hope revived. And not giving into temptation. Being delivered from evil. And the Kingdom, power, and glory forever - and love that never ends."

Transcribed from Video: 4/18/23

REMAINING CLASS SCHEDULE:

Remaining Classes 4/26, 5/3, 5/10.

From the Gnostic Society Library: *The Gospel of Mary (Magdalene)*

The *Gospel of Mary* is found in the *Berlin Gnostic Codex (Papyrus Berolinensis 8502)*. This very important and well-preserved codex was discovered in the late-nineteenth century somewhere near Akhmim in upper Egypt. It was purchased in Cairo in 1896 by a German scholar, Dr. Carl Reinhardt, and then taken to Berlin.

The codex (as these ancient books are called) was probably copied and bound in the late fourth or early fifth century. It contains Coptic translations of three very important early Christian Gnostic texts: the *Gospel of Mary*, the [Apocryphon of John](#), and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*. The texts themselves date to the second century and were originally authored in Greek.

Despite the importance of the discovery of this ancient collection of Gnostic scriptures, several misfortunes including two world wars delayed its publication until 1955. By then the large Nag Hammadi collection of ancient Gnostic writings had also been recovered. It was found that copies of two of the texts in this codex – the *Apocryphon of John*, and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* – had also been preserved in the Nag Hammadi collection. These texts from the Berlin Gnostic Codex were used to aid and augment translations of the [Apocryphon of John](#) and the [Sophia of Jesus Christ](#) as they now are published in [Nag Hammadi Library](#).

But more importantly, the codex preserves the most complete surviving fragment of the *Gospel of Mary* – and it is clear this named Mary is the person we call *Mary of Magdala*. Two other small fragments of the *Gospel of Mary* from separate Greek editions were later unearthed in archaeological excavations at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. (Fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* were also found at this ancient site; see the [Oxyrhynchus and Gospel of Thomas](#) page for more information about Oxyrhynchus.) Finding three fragments of a text of this antiquity is extremely unusual, and it is thus evidenced that the *Gospel of Mary* was well distributed in early Christian times and existed in both an original Greek and a Coptic language translation.

Unfortunately the surviving manuscript of the *Gospel of Mary* is missing pages 1 to 6 and pages 11 to 14 – pages that included sections of the text up to chapter 4, and portions of chapter 5 to 8. The extant text of the *Gospel of Mary*, as found in the Berlin Gnostic Codex, is presented below. The manuscript text begins on page 7, in the middle of a passage.

The Gospel According to Mary Magdalene (The Gospel of Mary)

Chapter 4

(Pages 1 to 6 of the manuscript, containing chapters 1 - 3, are lost. The extant text starts on page 7...)

... Will matter then be destroyed or not?

22) The Savior said, All nature, all formations, all creatures exist in and with one another, and they will be resolved again into their own roots.

23) For the nature of matter is resolved into the roots of its own nature alone.

24) He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

25) Peter said to him, Since you have explained everything to us, tell us this also: What is the sin of the world?

26) The Savior said There is no sin, but it is you who make sin when you do the things that are like the nature of adultery, which is called sin.

27) That is why the Good came into your midst, to the essence of every nature in order to restore it to its root.

28) Then He continued and said, That is why you become sick and die, for you are deprived of the one who can heal you.

29) He who has a mind to understand, let him understand.

30) Matter gave birth to a passion that has no equal, which proceeded from something contrary to nature. Then there arises a disturbance in its whole body.

31) That is why I said to you, Be of good courage, and if you are discouraged be encouraged in the presence of the different forms of nature.

32) He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

33) When the Blessed One had said this, He greeted them all, saying, Peace be with you. Receive my peace unto yourselves.

- 34) Beware that no one lead you astray saying Lo here or lo there! For the Son of Man is within you.
- 35) Follow after Him!
- 36) Those who seek Him will find Him.
- 37) Go then and preach the gospel of the Kingdom.
- 38) Do not lay down any rules beyond what I appointed you, and do not give a law like the lawgiver lest you be constrained by it.
- 39) When He said this He departed.

Chapter 5

- 1) But they were grieved. They wept greatly, saying, How shall we go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel of the Kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare Him, how will they spare us?
- 2) Then Mary stood up, greeted them all, and said to her brethren, Do not weep and do not grieve nor be irresolute, for His grace will be entirely with you and will protect you.
- 3) But rather, let us praise His greatness, for He has prepared us and made us into Men.
- 4) When Mary said this, she turned their hearts to the Good, and they began to discuss the words of the Savior.
- 5) Peter said to Mary, Sister we know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of woman.
- 6) Tell us the words of the Savior which you remember which you know, but we do not, nor have we heard them.
- 7) Mary answered and said, What is hidden from you I will proclaim to you.
- 8) And she began to speak to them these words: I, she said, I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to Him, Lord I saw you today in a vision. He answered and said to me,
- 9) Blessed are you that you did not waver at the sight of Me. For where the mind is there is the treasure.
- 10) I said to Him, Lord, how does he who sees the vision see it, through the soul or through the spirit?

11) The Savior answered and said, He does not see through the soul nor through the spirit, but the mind that is between the two that is what sees the vision and it is [...]

(pages 11 - 14 are missing from the manuscript)

Chapter 8:

... it.

10) And desire said, I did not see you descending, but now I see you ascending. Why do you lie since you belong to me?

11) The soul answered and said, I saw you. You did not see me nor recognize me. I served you as a garment and you did not know me.

12) When it said this, it (the soul) went away rejoicing greatly.

13) Again it came to the third power, which is called ignorance.

14) The power questioned the soul, saying, Where are you going? In wickedness are you bound. But you are bound; do not judge!

15) And the soul said, Why do you judge me, although I have not judged?

16) I was bound, though I have not bound.

17) I was not recognized. But I have recognized that the All is being dissolved, both the earthly things and the heavenly.

18) When the soul had overcome the third power, it went upwards and saw the fourth power, which took seven forms.

19) The first form is darkness, the second desire, the third ignorance, the fourth is the excitement of death, the fifth is the kingdom of the flesh, the sixth is the foolish wisdom of flesh, the seventh is the wrathful wisdom. These are the seven powers of wrath.

20) They asked the soul, Whence do you come slayer of men, or where are you going, conqueror of space?

21) The soul answered and said, What binds me has been slain, and what turns me about has been overcome,

22) and my desire has been ended, and ignorance has died.

23) In a aeon I was released from a world, and in a Type from a type, and from the fetter of oblivion which is transient.

24) From this time on will I attain to the rest of the time, of the season, of the aeon, in silence.

The Gospel of Thomas Collection THE GREEK OXYRHYNCHUS FRAGMENTS

In 1897 and 1903 three ancient papyrus fragments from Greek copies of the *Gospel of Thomas* were discovered during archeological excavations on the site of an ancient town at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. These excavations eventually recovered over 5000 papyrus fragments of ancient Greek texts, including both sections from the *Gospel of Thomas* and fragments from the *Gospel of Mary*. (In ancient times, Oxyrhynchus was the chief town of its district and the seat of a local governor. In the Roman period it was a flourishing place with about twenty temples, colonnaded streets, and an open air theatre. When Christianity came, it was famous for the numbers of its monks and nuns. Most of the papyrus documents found had been discarded in the ancient town's garbage sites.)



The three fragments of Thomas found at Oxyrhynchus apparently date to between 130 - 250 CE, and each probably represents a separate unique copy of the Gospel. The textual source of the sayings contained in the fragments was initially unclear; based on the logion found in pOxy 654 – now identified as containing the prologue and first saying – it was speculated they might represent remains of the lost *Gospel of Thomas*. The Nag Hammadi discovery in 1945 which unearthed a complete and well-preserved version of Thomas in Coptic made it possible to definitely identify the Oxyrhynchus texts as fragments from a lost Greek edition of the Gospel.

The three Oxyrhynchus fragments preserve 20 of the 114 *sayings* (or, in Greek, *logion*) found in the complete Coptic version of the *Gospel of Thomas*: pOxy 1 (the abbreviation indicates "Oxyrhynchus papyrus fragment 1") contains logion 26 to 30, 77, and 30 to 31; pOxy 654 contains logion 1 to 7; pOxy 655 preserves logion 36 to 40.

These texts allow careful comparisons to be made between the Coptic text found at Nag Hammadi and the original Greek version (the Gospel was almost certainly written in Greek originally, the Nag Hammadi version is a Coptic translation of this original Greek text). The reader will note close correlation between the two versions – a fact that helps verify the textual integrity of the Coptic *Gospel of Thomas*.



The following English translation of texts from the Oxyrhynchus papyrus fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* is based on the complete digital reconstructions of pOxy. 1, 654, and 655 created by Andrew Bernhard. His proposed reconstructions of various lacunae are heavily indebted to the critical texts of Grenfell and Hunt, Evelyn-White, Fitzmeyer, and Attridge.

Translations of the Greek fragments are followed by versions of the same sayings as they appear in the Coptic text of the *Gospel of Thomas* found at Nag Hammadi (the Lambdin translation is used here).

The Gospel of Thomas Fragments from Oxyrhynchus

PROLOGUE AND SAYING 1 (pOxy 654.1-5)

These are the [hidden] sayings [that] the living Jesus [sp]oke a[nd Judas who] is also Thomas [recorded.] And he said, "[Whoever finds the interpretat]ion of the[se] sayings will not taste [death]."

Coptic version of same saying as found in the Nag Hammadi manuscript:

These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down. And he said, "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death."

SAYING 2 (pOxy. 654.5-9)

[Jesus said,] "Let the one seek[ing] not stop [seeking until] he finds. And when he find[s he will marvel, and mar]veling he will reign, an[d reigning] he will [rest.]"

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be astonished, and he will rule over the All."

SAYING 3 (pOxy. 654.9-21)

[Jesus] said, "[If] those pulling you [say to you, 'Look,] the kingdom is in the sk[y,]' the birds of the sk[y will go before you. Or if they say t]hat it [is] beneath the ground, the fish of the se[a will go in, preced]ing you. And the king[dom of God] [i]s within you [and outside you. Whoever] knows [himself will] find this [and when you] know yourselves [you will know that] you are [children] of the l[iving] father. [But if] you will [not] know yourselves, [you are] in [poverty] and you are the pov[erty.]"

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty."

SAYING 4 (pOxy. 654.21-27)

[Jesus said,] "A per[son old in day]s will not hesitate to ask a ch[ild seven day]s old about his place in [life and] he will [live.] For many of the f[irst] will be [last and] many of the last will be first and they [will become one]."

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a small child seven days old about the place of life, and he will live. For many who are first will become last, and they will become one and the same."

SAYING 5 (pOxy. 654.27-31)

Jesus said, "K[now what is in fr]ont of your face and [what has been hidden] from you [will be] revealed [to you. For there] is [nothing] hidden that [will] not [be made] cl[ear] and n[othing] buried that [will] n[ot be raised]."

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "Recognize what is in your sight, and that which is hidden from you will become plain to you . For there is nothing hidden which will not become manifest."

SAYING 6 (pOxy. 654.32-40)

[His disciples qu]estioned him [and s]aid, "How [should we] fast [and how] should we [pray,] and how [should we do charitable deeds a]nd what [food law should we] observe?" Jesus said, "[Do not lie and that which] you [hate], do not do [because everything is evident before t]he tru[t]h. [For there is nothing hi]dd[en that will not be made clear.]"

Coptic version:

His disciples questioned him and said to him, "Do you want us to fast? How shall we pray? Shall we give alms? What diet shall we observe?" Jesus said, "Do not tell lies, and do not do what you hate, for all things are plain in the sight of heaven. For nothing hidden will not become manifest, and nothing covered will remain without being uncovered."

SAYING 7? (pOxy. 654.40-42)

[bl]esse[d] is [. . .]

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "Blessed is the lion which becomes man when consumed by man; and cursed is the man whom the lion consumes, and the lion becomes man."

SAYING 24? (pOxy. 655d.1-5)

[it] is [. . .]ight [. . . w]orld [. . .]it is [. . .]

Coptic version:

His disciples said to him, "Show us the place where you are, since it is necessary for us to seek it." He said to them, "Whoever has ears, let him hear. There is light within a man of light, and he lights up the whole world. If he does not shine, he is darkness."

SAYING 26 (pOxy. 1.1-4)

". . . and then you will see clearly to cast out the speck that is in your brother's eye."

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "You see the mote in your brother's eye, but you do not see the beam in your own eye. When you cast the beam out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to cast the mote from your brother's eye."

SAYING 27 (pOxy. 1.4-11)

Jesus said, "If you do not fast from the world, you will not find the kingdom of God. And if you do not keep the sabbath a sabbath, you will not see the father."

Coptic version:

<Jesus said,> "If you do not fast as regards the world, you will not find the kingdom. If you do not observe the Sabbath as a Sabbath, you will not see the father."

SAYING 28 (pOxy. 1.11-21)

Jesus said, "I s[t]ood in the midst of the world and in the flesh I appeared to them. I found everyone drunk and none thirsty among them. My soul worries about the children of humanity because they are blind in thei[r] hearts and [they] do [not] see."

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "I took my place in the midst of the world, and I appeared to them in flesh. I found all of them intoxicated; I found none of them thirsty. And my soul became afflicted for the sons of men, because they are blind in their hearts and do not have sight; for empty they came into the world, and empty too they seek to leave the world. But for the moment they are intoxicated. When they shake off their wine, then they will repent."

SAYING 29 (pOxy. 1.22)

"[. . .]he dwells in th[i]s poverty."

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "If the flesh came into being because of spirit, it is a wonder. But if spirit came into being because of the body, it is a wonder of wonders. Indeed, I am amazed at how this great wealth has made its home in this poverty."

SAYING 30 + 77B (pOxy. 1.23-30)

[Jesus sa]id, ["Wh]ere there are [th]r[ee] t[hey ar]e [without] God. And [w]here there is only o[ne], I say, I am with hi[m]. Li[f]t the stone and there you will find me. Split the wood and I am there."

Coptic version:

(30) Jesus said, "Where there are three gods, they are gods. Where there are two or one, I am with him."

(77b) ...Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there."

SAYING 31 (pOxy. 1.30-35)

Jesus said, "A prophet is not acceptable in h[i]s homeland. Nor does a physican perform healings for those who know him."

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "No prophet is accepted in his own village; no physician heals those who know him."

SAYING 32 (pOxy. 1.36-41)

Jesus said, "A city that has been built and established on the summit of a high [m]ountain can neither fa[l]l nor be hi[d]den."

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "A city being built on a high mountain and fortified cannot fall, nor can it be hidden."

SAYING 33 (pOxy. 1.41-42)

Jesus said, "What you hear [i]n your one ear . . ."

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "Preach from your housetops that which you will hear in your ear. For no one lights a lamp and puts it under a bushel, nor does he put it in a hidden place, but rather he sets it on a lampstand so that everyone who enters and leaves will see its light."

SAYING 36 (pOxy. 655i.1-17)

[Jesus said, "Do not worry f]rom early u[n]til late no[r] from ev[ening until m]orning. Worry neither [for y]our [food,] what [you] will eat, [nor] for [your] c[lothes,] what you will wear. [You are] [mu]ch gr[ea]ter than the [lil]lies wh[ich n]either ca[r]d nor s[pi]n. When you have n[o c]lo[thing], what do [you wear]? Who can add to your time of life? H[e it is who w]ill give you your clothing."

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "Do not be concerned from morning until evening and from evening until morning about what you will wear."

SAYING 37 (pOxy. 655i.17-23)

His disciples said to him, "When will you be visible to us? And when will we see you?"
He said, "When you undress and are not ashamed."

Coptic version:

His disciples said, "When will you become revealed to us and when shall we see you?"
Jesus said, "When you disrobe without being ashamed and take up your garments and place them under your feet like little children and tread on them, then will you see the son of the living one, and you will not be afraid"

SAYING 39 (pOxy. 655ii.11-23)

[Jesus said, "The Pharisees and the scribes] to[ok the keys] of [knowledge. They] hi[d them. They did not] go in, [nor did] they [allow those] trying to go [in to do so. You,] however, b[e wi]se a[s snakes and i]nnocen[t as do]v[es.]"

Coptic version:

Jesus said, "The pharisees and the scribes have taken the keys of knowledge (gnosis) and hidden them. They themselves have not entered, nor have they allowed to enter those who wish to. You, however, be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves."