

I have read the Bible on a regular basis for over 20 years, I know it was a late start.. Not as a typical book with a beginning, a story line or theme and with a conclusion. The Old Testament does have a beginning with Genesis, with many in between writings and an end with the Prophet Malachi. The New Testament is similar beginning with Matthew and ending with Revelation. I look at the Bible as a book with many stories, peoples actions and reactions and events. The details of the stories may not be important. I should look beyond the details for the important meaning which may not be too obvious. I should look for how God would like for me to live out my life. Sometimes the same story or event is told by different scribes or prophets with different details and therefore producing a different understanding. And isn't this to be expected?

It does seem obvious that no one person can fully understand God and God's will for us. Good heavens, we regularly have trouble understanding our spouse, our children, our parents and our friends. How can we ever hope to understand God. Looking only at the biblical words of an event or action or at conflicting stories, we can see significantly different meanings. Moses came down from the mountain and found the people worshipping a golden image. He told the Levites to go into the camp from one gate to the other and kill brother, neighbor and friend and 3000 were killed that day. Or the Moses that came down from the mountain with the ten commandments with a commandment to love neighbor as yourself and do not murder. Or we read that a father's sin will be visited on the sons to the third and fourth generation. Then we read the prophets saying "No, each person is responsible for their own sins". We read that if you violate the Sabbath you should be stoned to death, but Jesus tells us that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. I think it is important to look for the real meaning of a story or event and not just the details. As mentioned earlier, the meaning may not be obvious in the details.

One of the important messages to look for in these stories and events in the Old Testament and New is hope.

John L McKenzie, S.J. said that it is no exaggeration to say that the Old Testament breaths an atmosphere of hope throughout . He also says that there is no word in Hebrew that corresponds exactly to "hope" and no precise concept of hope in the sense of "desire accompanied by expectation". Hebrew words which frequently express hope are Kawah "to expect" and batah "to trust or have confidence". Abrahams life seems to be the very embodiment of hope especially in the sense to trust and having confidence. With the New Testament there seemed to be a change. There was a Greek word for expectation but it was a neutral word. It could be to expect good or evil. The word does appear in the New Testament in this sense. Hope as a religious concept in the New Testament is a much enriched development of the Old Testament hope. This concept is most fully developed in Paul's letters, especially his letter to the Romans. God can accomplish the impossible. This hope is the liberation of all creation from sin.

Paul said "in hope that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.' For me this New Testament hope is a significant message. As McKenzie said, "thus we are saved through hope which is God's love." He says that God is the God of hope. With faith and love, hope forms the great triad. The Resurrection is a message full of hope.

In our readings today, we read in Isaiah "They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down." And Jesus said "Do not worry about your life what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will wear." As a young boy growing up in the 1930's, I walked two miles to school every day, sometimes in scorching heat, sometimes in freezing cold. I never worried that the school uniform was a bib overall or that there wouldn't be food on the table or a roof over my head. At that age, I think it is

common to have that simple faith that Jesus talked about. But I suspect that my parents did worry and I learned as an adult to worry over these things. This puts me into that category that Jesus refers to as “you of little faith”. Hope then is what helps me through the inevitable setbacks in life that never entered my mind as a child.

God created a challenging world for us. I believe God did this for a purpose. God may have done this to let us experience both good fortune and setback and tragedies . Overcoming setbacks and tragedies makes us stronger and more appreciative of good fortune, like spring, if we have one this year, is more appreciated following a tough winter. Hope I believe is a core ingredient of overcoming set backs and tragedies.

Jesus says in today’s gospel that you cannot service two masters. We have many examples of his wisdom. Which master was Joseph serving when he sold the Pharaoh’s surplus grain to the people first for their personal belongings, then their livestock and finally took them as slaves? In our current political atmosphere, do we see some politicians serving their political party rather than the people? Do some protect their organization, their corporation, church or educational institution rather than the people they serve? People who experience these kinds of situations on the negative side, will need hope to work through the results of people serving the wrong master.

Scripture is full of stories about stiff necked, rebellious people serving the wrong master. Most people it seems have had, or are having or will have a rebellious streak. Usually rebelling against obedience to someone, something or to God’s will. It is probably true that it is proper to rebel in some situations, but to God’s will?

Do we too often hurt ourselves when we do not obey God? Obedience to God is a special obedience. I like Joseph of Copertino’s definition of obedience to God which is “Obedience is a little dog that leads the blind.” Hope is a big part of that obedience to God.