



A Holy Book is not enough

In an age of the awareness of many holy books and the accompanying religions of many holy books, what makes the Bible special? How do we respond when people ask how our holy book differs from the Koran, the Vedas and the Upanishads, or the far more recent Book of Mormon? We can certainly respond by explaining the doctrine of the inspiration of Holy Scripture, but it may make far more impact by simply responding that a holy book — even the Bible — is not enough. This season of special remembrance of the incarnation of Jesus Christ — the God-man — challenges us to ponder this very thought.

The Old Testament: previews of coming attractions

God Himself dwells in light inaccessible. While the heavens declare His glory and the firmament shows His handiwork (Ps. 19:1), He — as He is in Himself — is the invisible God. In His essence He is too high, too great, and too wonderful for us to comprehend. Our puny minds quickly exhaust themselves trying to contemplate what is infinite, eternal, immense, and unchangeable. And even if we could, we would be brought to condemn ourselves as unholy beings before this awful holy Being. *“Woe is me, for I am undone”* (Is 6:5). To try to know God in Himself is like the mythical Icarus trying to fly to the sun with wax wings. Soon the wax wings of our minds and our hearts melt and we fall back to earth. This is the essence of all religions of speculation about God.

Yet, the theme of the covenants of the unfolding Old Testament is the theme “God with us!” God Himself came to men during that time in what were called “theophanies”, i.e. appearances of God, e.g. to Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18:1ff.), to Jacob (Gen. 32:24-30), to Manoah and his wife (Jud. 13:1-23), to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (Dan. 3:25), etc. God’s glory — the very presence of God Himself — was manifested in both the tabernacle and the Most Holy Place of the first temple (Ex. 40:34, 1 Kings 8:10-13). God Himself promises — in ways unique to the revelation given in Holy Scripture — that He will come to man. He is and will be called “Immanuel”, i.e. God with us (Is. 7:14). His name is “Wonderful” because He is the Mighty God (Is. 9:6, cf. Jud. 8:13). Malachi — the last of the Old Testament prophets — peeks at what is to come when he promises that *“the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple”* (Mal. 3:1). These are so many “previews of coming attractions” in the Old Testament Word of God. They tell us that this holy book is not enough. Something far greater is to come. The Lord Himself will come into human history to be the Savior of His people (Is. 45:15-25).

The New Testament: God with us!

In the fullness of times God brought forth His only begotten son, born of a woman, born under the Law (Gal. 4:4). In a story more amazing than that given in any other holy book, God speaks to the virgin Mary and tells her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the power of God Himself will overshadow her such that the Holy One to be born of her will be called both Jesus and the Son of God (Lk. 1:31, 35). Without controversy, this is the mystery of godliness, i.e. how God revealed to man the truth of Himself, *“God was manifest in the flesh”* (1 Tim. 3:16). The New Testament of our holy book, the Bible, is unmistakably clear that the child born to Mary is nothing less than God Himself. Not infrequently the various books of the New Testament begin with this fulfillment of what was promised in the books of the Old Testament:

“In the beginning was the Word, i.e. the self expression of God, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh and dwelt, i.e. tabernacled, among us,

and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth ... No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared, i.e. exegeted, Him."

John. 1:1, 14, 18

The God whose glory dwelt among His people in the Old Covenant and was declared by the words of those covenant books came to this world in the flesh of the one called Jesus. There is no way the Divine Being can come closer to His creation than this! No other holy book declares anything like it.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together ... For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Colossians 1:15-17; 2:9

All of the Old Testament shadows of God's glory dwelling among His people now pass away before the substance, i.e. the body, which is Christ (Col. 2:17). The invisible God — whose nature our highest imaginations cannot grasp — is exhibited to man in the incarnate Son.

"God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by a Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high..."

Hebrews 1:1-3

God, indeed, spoke by the prophets, but He did more! He came into history and spoke through the Word made flesh — His Son. And, what is more, He acted in history to do what no words of any holy book alone can do: He Himself became the savior of His people by taking away their sins. Immanuel — God with us — is named Jesus because *"He will save His people from their sins"* (Matt. 1:21). By Him God Himself purchases His Church with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

The holy book of the Old Testament was not enough. The fulfillment of all the promises, types, and figures of God appearing to man had come: God was manifest in the flesh in Jesus Christ. The ministry of the New Covenant calls people to behold the glory of the Lord Jesus in all of Scripture and thereby to be transformed into His image from glory to glory, cf. 2 Cor. 3:18.

For all ages of the Christian Church: behold Your God!

He who beholds Jesus beholds the Father (Jn. 14:9). *"The Eternal was made in time, the Infinite became finite, the Immortal (became) mortal, yet continuing eternal, infinite and immortal — is that singular expression of divine wisdom, goodness, and power wherein God will be admired and glorified unto all eternity."* (John Owen).

Behold in the God-man — the theanthropic Person — the love, mercy, goodness, and kindness of God! Behold in Him the repository of all of the truth of God (Jn. 1:17)! To attempt to grasp the truth of God from the Bible without reference to Christ is like trying to drink from a spring that is cut off from its source.

Behold here the resolution of the great dilemma faced by all humankind: To attempt to know God in Himself is to be destroyed; to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is life. *"This is eternal life, (to) know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom (He) sent"* (Jn. 17:3). By the crucified God-man justice is satisfied at the cross so that mercy might flow from the sacrificed Immanuel, cf. 1 Jn. 1:7, 9. By the resurrected God-man life is bestowed upon dead sinners, cf. Eph. 1:19f, 2:5. By the ascended and reigning God-man a Kingdom for eternity is being

established from people of every tongue, and tribe, and nation, cf. Rev. 5:9f, 7:9. Holy books may declare things that flow, ultimately, from human imaginations; the Bible declares God who came into human history so that we might know Him and be saved by Him to His glory.

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is the root of the Christian faith. It is the foundation of everything else that we believe about God and His ways with humanity. It is a call to all to behold the true and living God in Jesus Christ.

To the atheist:

What C.S. Lewis said of Jesus Christ is very true. Either He was a liar, or He was a lunatic (on the order of a man who calls himself a poached egg!), or He was exactly what He claimed to be: *“I and the Father are one”* (Jn. 10:30, cf. Jn. 8:58). There is no place for saying there is no God when the only begotten Son has demonstrated Him and seen fit that this demonstration be recorded in Holy Scripture for all to view. Behold the God before whom you will stand as Judge, cf. Acts 17:31!

To the agnostic:

You cannot say we *cannot* know when Jesus says *“Truly, truly I say to you...”* There is no doubt, i.e. *“without controversy”*, God was manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Behold the God whose very life as recorded in the four Gospels must dispel your profession to be unable to know God.

To the Christian:

Let all the lines of Holy Scripture lead you to Jesus Christ — the God-man, so that you might derive all of the comfort that God has provided for you in the Gospel, cf. Is. 40:1ff. As surely as the God-man Jesus granted forgiveness, hope, compassion, strength, and life itself during His earthly ministry, He does the same today for *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever”* (Heb. 13:8). Behold your God!

Whether or not you celebrate Christmas, do not keep yourself away from contemplating, drawing comfort from, and celebrating the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Even the holy book the Bible is not enough for you! Do not be like the Pharisees who searched the Scriptures thinking that in them they had eternal life, but who missed the fact that the Scriptures speak of Christ, cf. Jn. 5:39. Behold your God in the face of Jesus Christ, and in so doing you will be affected in a way no other holy book can affect you: You will be transformed more and more into the image of Christ, by the Spirit of the Lord, 2 Cor. 3:18. Behold your God!

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