

INSPIRED

SLAYING GIANTS, WALKING ON WATER, AND LOVING THE BIBLE AGAIN

Rachel Held Evans

WISDOM STORIES

WISDOM IS NOT A SINGLE DECISION, BUT A “WAY” OR A “PATH” THAT THE SOJOURNER MUST CONTINUALLY DISCERN AMID THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF LIFE.

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WHAT ARE THE WISDOM STORIES?

- ▶ Christian OT is based on the Tanakh (tä-'näḵ), the Hebrew Bible.
 - ▶ Catholic canon - 46 OT books
 - ▶ Eastern and Oriental Orthodox canon - 51 OT books
 - ▶ Protestant canon - 39 OT books; corresponds to Tanakh with number difference reflecting the splitting of several texts
 - ▶ Some books of the Tanakh not found in the most common Protestant canon, but found in some versions of Anglican and Lutheran canons.
- ▶ 4 Sections of the OT
 - ▶ 1st 5 books - Pentateuch (Torah)
 - ▶ History (Israelites, conquest of Canaan, defeat & exile to Babylon)
 - ▶ **Poetic & Wisdom books; questions of good & evil in the world: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes**
 - ▶ The Prophets - warning of the consequences of turning from God
- ▶ 40 different identified authors of OT!
- ▶ JESUS' ONLY SCRIPTURE WAS THE OLD TESTAMENT, WHICH IS ¾ OF OUR BIBLE.

MIDRASH - words to ponder

- ▶ Simple definition: Midrash interprets not only the text before the reader, but the text behind and beyond the text and the text between the lines of the text.
- ▶ In rabbinic thinking, each letter and the spaces between the letters are available for interpretation!
- ▶ Ex: *Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.* Genesis 29:17
 - ▶ Both Leah and Rachel were considered beautiful by Hebrew standard's, but the Hebrew interpretation says that Leah's eyes were made *tender* from crying at the prospect of marrying Esau. God heard her cries and she became the most fruitful of the 4 matriarch's of Israel.
 - ▶ The Talmud says that Leah's tears were the result of her tender heart and her concern for the welfare of the children of Israel.

JOB: A WAGER BETWEEN GOD AND SATAN

- ▶ *3 Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause.”*
- ▶ *4 So Satan answered the Lord and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.*
- ▶ *5 But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!”*
- ▶ *6 And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life.” Job 2:3-6*

WHAT KIND OF GOD PLACES HIS MOST LOYAL AND OBEDIENT SERVANT INTO THE HANDS OF SATAN?

“THEODICY” - Why God allows suffering and evil to persist in the world

- ▶ No where does the Scripture tell us why God allowed Job to suffer, but he eventually rebukes Job’s tormenters and returns Job’s health, his wealth is doubled and he has 10 more children. He dies at the age of 140!
- ▶ God never tells Job about the wager with the Devil!
- ▶ Theological Reasoning: Job’s tormenters told him that basically “*He reaped what he sowed.*” He must have great sins to have fallen so far from God’s grace. NOT!
- ▶ Job’s faith never fells; he questions God, but stays true.
- ▶ The Bible reflects the complexity and diversity of the human experience, with all its joys and sorrows...Job, unlike the learned theologians, argued with forth righteousness and courage.
- ▶ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, called the story of Job “the greatest poem of ancient or modern times.”
- ▶ It is prime wisdom literature.
- ▶ **WHY?**

“The person in pain is a theologian of unique authority.” Ellen Davis - OT scholar at Duke Divinity School

- ▶ *“The one who complains to God, pleads with God, rails at God, does not let God off the hook for a minute...is at last admitted to a mystery. She passes through a door that only pain will open, and is thus qualified to speak of God in a way that others, whom we generally call fortunate, cannot speak.”*
- ▶ **DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH DAVIS?**

“WHEN TIMES ARE GOOD BE HAPPY; BUT WHEN TIMES ARE BAD, CONSIDER THIS: GOD HAS MADE THE ONE AS WELL AS THE OTHER” Ecclesiastes 7:14

- ▶ **WISDOM IS SITUATIONAL!**
- ▶ It's not just about knowing *what to say*; it's about knowing *when to say it!*
- ▶ It's not just about knowing *what is true*; it's knowing *when it's true*.
 - ▶ When your friend is sitting in the ashes with a body covered in seeping sores, it is time to be silent. It's time to listen and grieve.
- ▶ To engage wholly with the Bible's wisdom is to embrace its diversity and not fight the diversity....
- ▶ “*For everything there is a season...a time to mourn, and a time to dance...a time to tear, and a time to sew, a time to keep silence, and a time to speak, a time to love, and a time to hate.*” Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4, 7-8

NOT AN OWNER'S MANUAL...

- ▶ No single prescription for all people in all circumstances...it wouldn't fit the complexities of life.
- ▶ **“Pervasive interpretive pluralism”** - Catholic sociologist Christian Smith - *“the reality that even among people devoted to its truth, the Bible yields different interpretations and applications of its many teachings...the Bible is [not]...a straightforward blueprint for living...on which the faithful will always agree.”*
- ▶ Timothy Beal - Florence Harkness Professor of Religion at Case Western Reserve University - *“The Bible canonizes contradiction.”*
- ▶ Beal writes that to use the Bible as a tool of *“black and white answers is to remain in a state of spiritual immaturity...[if we ignore the spiritual struggles inherent in the Bible]...we perpetuate an adolescent faith....It's not about the end product but the process.”*
- ▶ **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO YOU?**

Psalms, many were written during the Babylonian exile, as a book of wisdom is not just a book of joy and thanksgiving...

- ▶ Exultations - “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth!”
- ▶ Laments - “I am worn out from my groaning. All night I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.”
- ▶ Confessions - “I know my transgressions, and my sin is always with me.”
- ▶ Anger - “I cry out by day, but you do not answer.”
- ▶ Interrogations of the divine - “How long, LORD? Will you hide yourself forever?”
- ▶ “THE PSALMS IS SMUDGED WITH HUMAN FINGERPRINTS...as poetry the Psalms function is not to explain, but to give us poetic images or stories that express the contradictions and complexities of our human experience.”

The books of wisdom, especially the Psalms...

- ▶ Invite us to rejoice...
- ▶ To wrestle...
- ▶ To cry...
- ▶ To complain...
- ▶ To offer thanks...
- ▶ To shout obscenities...
- ▶ WITHOUT SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND WITHOUT FEAR!
- ▶ LIFE IS MESSY...THE GOD AND BIBLE KNOW IT'S MESSY...

JESUS TURNS TO THE PSALMS AT HIS MOST VULNERABLE MOMENT...

- ▶ Hanging from the Roman cross between two thieves, while Mary and loved ones watched in dismay, he cried

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Matthew 27:46

- ▶ Taken straight from Psalm 22 -

1 My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?

*Why are You so far from helping Me,
And from the words of My groaning?*

*2 O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear;
And in the night season, and am not silent.*

- ▶ When all hope was lost and the darkness of the day and of the end of life overwhelmed the Christ, only the poetry of the Psalms would do.

Embracing the stories of life, the stories of the Bible that are complex and confusing enables us to participate in the Scripture's *wisdom tradition*.

Our Heavenly Father,
May we always walk with the Holy Spirit
So that we may receive your divine
strength, wisdom, and direction all the
days of our lives.
Amen