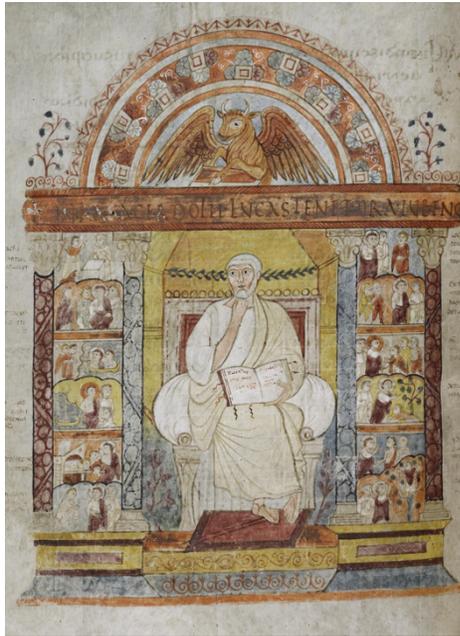


Tips for Reading #1

by Kurtis Peters

- Remember that although this is our scripture today, it is still a text that is vastly removed from us in time, place, and culture
 - Imagine your most difficult cross-cultural communication when you maybe experienced a complete inability to understand what was happening. Then add a couple millennia separating you from that experience.
- Try to hear the conversations that the Bible is concerned with.
 - We often assume that the Bible is speaking directly to us with no mediation (especially when reading some of Paul's letters in the New Testament!).
 - Do your best, though, to imagine the conversation that the Bible is having (maybe those behind Genesis 1 weren't concerned with questions of scientific origins...)
 - On that note, historicity is much more of a modern concern than an ancient one. Even when historicity was important, the ancients expected embellishment and artistry in the telling.
- Be aware that, at least on the surface, some texts may seem to contradict others
 - there are many voices represented in the Bible – we shouldn't expect every text to hold exactly the same view. Allow space for diversity.
 - similar to the very first point above, even the different texts of the Bible are removed from one another by time, place, and culture
 - The Bible is concerned with real people
 - it is not a collection of ideals or of pure morals
 - it is comfortable with the mess and muck of humanity, but it also calls humanity to a better way
 - The viewpoint of God and the viewpoint of the characters (even "heroes") may differ
 - e.g. Samson is the protagonist in his story, but God does not share Samson's viewpoint. The narrator clues us in that we are to critique Samson
- Gender is a tricky one.
 - In the setting of ancient Israel, their god Yahweh was definitely conceived of as a male, though he also sometimes acted in feminine roles, as the Israelites



would've understood femininity. As the Israelites' understanding of God developed, however, they described "him" in increasingly *universal* language, even taking on identities usually reserved by people for female gods. This development lends itself to seeing God as not restricted to one gender and, therefore, lends itself to our modern use of multiple gender pronouns for God (he/she/they/it). In the world and culture of the Bible, however, people still maintained a primarily masculine association with God/Yahweh, and so pronouns for God in the Bible remain masculine.

- In both Old and New Testaments, the Bible typically uses masculine gender for males *or* for groups of mixed gender (e.g. "men" can mean an all-male group or males and females together). Some modern translations translate with inclusive pronouns any time that a mixed group would be possible. This aids perhaps in a more devotional-style reading, so that those who are not male may still find themselves in the text. Other translations maintain the masculine gender, not wishing to hide the patriarchal reality of the text. Some feel that we shouldn't pretend that the Bible is without things that make us uncomfortable.
- In either case, the overarching biblical aim and movement

towards inclusion and liberation is clear, even if it is embedded in a culture we may struggle with.

- (on that note...) Look for the greater narrative arc
 - God is engaging people where they are, and pushes them toward a vision of a restored humanity and creation
 - sometimes we get so deeply immersed in a particular story that it's hard to see that arc, but it's there!

