

Chapter Notes shared by Mike Grammer of Toronto - Intro and Ch 1

EHRMAN

Intro—pages 2-4. Ok, let's begin. My knowledge of this is dim and limited to the bits of writing I've read here and there, but my own impression is this: that Jesus' ministry was what it was because it was an **active** ministry---because he didn't wait for the students and supplicants to come to him. He went out to them instead. You see this concept of delivering the message as a central feature of Christianity. The sages of the time—Rabban Gamaliel, Rabbi Tarfon, Rabbi Akiva---they were all respected—very, very much. But my impression is that they were also kind of aloof and hermit-like. Maybe we can look at Jesus' greatest impact being that he empowered his followers by doing rather than by just saying.

The need for humans to categorize and apex people isn't new and won't ever probably go away. Canonization simply carries on the tradition to a lesser extent.

4, bottom, that is already an interesting thought as to why such debate

5, mmph. Not “born” divine and realizing his “divine potential”?

6, sort of begging the question—how adept was Jesus as a political player? An equal question....why should the governor—the highest official in Judea---be “summoned” to take any notice of him?

8—“Arian” = “Aryan”? I wonder.

CHAPTER 1

12, my remembrance of Greek mythology is rusty, but were there not some notables who followed this path at birth? (indeed, see 23) And..it WOULD be curious to know what his activities were as he grew to adulthood.

I also am not clear how established Hindu and Buddhist spiritual thinking was at this period of time.

12 middle—terrific, I love it!

13. Consider whether Christianity **needed** Apollonius as an opposing figure in order to make critical growth advances.

14 bottom, there's **some** basis in Jewish writings too---the birth of Samuel, the birth of Isaac.

21, a strong Spongian flavour here—harking back to his views of the New Testament writing being heavily rooted in the Jewish books and writings that had come before and were known to the populace.

22. So, hmm. Lots of things getting at here. Does divinity matter at all? Ouch! What *do* people worship (and on a semi-tangent, is religion simply the study of human self-absorption?). And lastly, “God made man in his own image”. Is this about man making God in his own image? One has to think that a God could effect procreation any way he or she wanted to, including with a thought. But no, no---the God chooses the human way of sex to make it happen. Why did the gods—or storytellers, anyway, need this connector?

23. Indeed, this is a rather interesting thing for me. Jesus could have been the brother of God, the cousin. Why the son?

29, here and beyond. The “holy” Roman Emperor. Although I know relatives did “interact”, I don’t think a Holy Roman Emperor ever served concurrently or consecutively as a pope, did they?

30, the reluctant divinities are sometimes worshipped all the more

33, Roman religion of actions—that is a useful and very interesting point

40, He is/we are dancing around something we need to deal with, which is: how are each of us defining “divinity”? Is it along the lines of “the doing of miraculous things” or is it along the lines of “the paragon of virtues”? I do think most people have the capability to be divine in at least some respect, that they can aspire to what *they* consider to be good traits. Also, should there be a consciousness element? i.e. if you know you’re divine then you’re probably not? And, getting at his divine pyramid...where and when do divinity and reality intersect? I chatted with Deb a bit about this over the holidays---that when I have had the chance to do and feel what I believe is “magic”---in my case most recently, when I took my music keyboard to a (thankfully slowly) terminally ill artist friend of mine’s studio and played while he sketched (and he sketched while I played)---I told her that for me? Magic isn’t about making possibilities real. It is about making *reality possible* It is about a Rohr-like getting at stripping away your masks and false selves and touching something resonantly real. This way may lie madness, but “divinity” in this conception is something shared and occurrence or circumstance-based instead of resident in a person. From talking with her, I get a clear sense that Christie has for many of you a portion of divinity about her. Is that generated from the difficult circumstances of her health and how she has chosen to live?

And so---was Jesus divine at his birth because of the nature of it? Did he stay divine throughout the whole course of his life, or did he just touch on divinity at times? Was he, as in the “Roman model” only divine posthumously? Would he have been divine on his own, without the teachings of the apostles and Paul? If “heralds” are needed, does that lessen someone’s divinity? These are all questions I hope we get to wrestle with as we make our way through the book.

41, in a way, the worship of multiple gods allowed for the play of individuality in early worship.

42, bottom, that is a rather telling thought---yes, if we were to go back in time ourselves....

44, it is equally hard to project what ancient Jews thought as it pertains to Abraham, Moses, etc. Today, I would be pressed to find a Jewish person who considered Moses to be an

extension of God. He was the tablet, the scriptorium upon which God wrote his laws, edicts....and maybe thoughts, hopes and dreams for his people Israel. You notice that the land and the people are *not* named for Moses, but instead for Jacob. It is to Jacob that God made it most plain that his people would be numerous and multiply. At least what we take note of, Abraham fathered just two children—Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac likewise fathered two children, Jacob and Esau. Jacob had a dozen sons and a daughter. It *is* from him that the multitudes flowed. Does that make Jacob divine? Not to us, no?

Another point to make about Moses---many of our Sabbath prayers invoke “the God of our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (modernism has taken hold, thankfully, and the prayer now includes the God of our mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah). Not Moses. Not Noah. These 3.

Even when Moses parted the sea and raised his arms to make the Jewish armies victorious, he did it as a vessel through which God worked---not through and of his own doing or making. There, at least in my limited understanding, I get a different feel from Christianity, where Jesus is himself the originator of his miracles.

44-45, a good summation. We like to say he was a nice Jewish carpenter who tried to do some good in the world. But Jewish teachings that I have been exposed to (perhaps a lack in this regard) do not take any note of Jesus of Nazareth (where e.g. his contemporaries such as Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Yonatan are noteworthy figures).

49, hmm yes

49 bottom, indeed. “Thou shalt have no other God before me”. But that doesn’t exclude some level of divinity.

52-53, it could be that there was a nascent and elemental struggle too, with the idea of pure monotheism and the human driving need for hierarchy. A hierarchy of an immutable and somewhat inapproachable “one” doesn’t work too well with our species. The idea of henotheism makes sense to a degree—the community didn’t live in a vacuum in those days

54, that’s as may be, but one thing that isn’t really specified is what those powers actually were. Nor how often these midrange divinities would interact with the regular human. One of the key passages in the Book of Life reads “The Great Shofar is sounded and a still, small voice is heard. The angels in heaven tremble as they proclaim “Behold, the Day of Judgment”. The hosts of heaven are arraigned in judgment for in thine eyes even they are not free from guilt”. So in this most important of prayers, even angels are given human qualities of fear and vulnerability. Let us start to think of angels as “signposts” that pop up at important events in the Jewish history and see where that takes us.

55, certainly, you do get more of this in the Passover story. It is the Lord who slays the firstborn sons of Egypt, not the Angel of Death (though there’s a song at the end that suggests perhaps otherwise). And when he brings his people out of Egypt, it is stressed that it is him and not a “fiery angel” or a messenger. The Hebrew words “v’lo saraf” (i.e. “not a seraph”) are explicitly used

55, the Ten Commandments. Think about the first “commandment”. It’s not really a commandment, is it? But implicit in it is the follow-on for all the others. *because* “I am the Lord your God”, God can command us to do all the rest. It is classic establishment of authority.

Let’s engage in a little exercise. Melding my divinity “recipe”

Awesome/amazing/wonder/powerful/pleasure and beauty = God as King (and creator)

Admiration/self-growth/meaning = God as Judge (and lawgiver)

Inspiring/hope/love/happiness = God as Saviour/Deliverer

Sadness/yearning/transcendent-painful grace = God as (s)he who remembers

Is it coincidence that during Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we read about all these manifestations of God?

56, the promise to Hagar: there is another way to look at this. This oldest book, reflecting the oldest history, can look at things and say that the Jewish people were not ready yet for human prophets. So in this vestigial, elemental, primordial Judaism, angels had to step in and take that role.

57, when we move on to the burning bush, there is still no room for a human prophet yet. Because the detailed framework of law and duty and commandments that flavours the entirety of our religion after Sinai hadn’t happened yet. Only once that framework is in place can human interpreters of the interplay of that framework with actual behaviour take their places on the stage.

58. That is true. The “im” ending is meant for plural use. I believe elohainu is the singular. This is a little beyond me, but my best understanding is that elohim are only multiple manifestations of the one God and are not thought of as actual (demi)gods.

58-59, I confess I know nothing of either of these books

61, have already talked about Moses’ performance of his “miracles” and a possible view of that

62, But since Enoch and Noah and the flood have come up 🤔 This is a tanjink of the first order, way off of our topic, but I have been thinking about it over the last day or two, prompted a bit by some of the thoughts on this book. Perhaps it’s better to say that the process has catalyzed percolating these thoughts up to my conscious level. The thing is, I am quite uncomfortable about the story of the flood in some ways. Granted, we’re given to believe that we had fallen into the muck of darkness and evil. Now. Rather than starting from absolute scratch, God decides to erase the canvas but keep the frame. First, that is something interesting---that he is using an element of the existing world to wash it clean and start again. Is that divine laziness? A divine preference to rework rather than rebuild? Next, OK, bad humans begone. But what did the gentle giraffe, the mighty lion, the humble

sheep---what did the animals do to deserve to be consigned to the same fate, except for the lucky pairs?

I have written in my Chronicles before that God can be angry---that, in fact, I look at war as the manifestation of God's anger. While it is not the most attractive divine feature, it is nevertheless one with which God's people would have had to grapple. Is there divine remorse then? We are told that before God remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God remembers his covenant with Noah. That one comes first, and it is the first we see in any writings of God the Obligated.

Sorry about that, back to the regular programming.

62-63, if you've put yourself through seeing the Russell Crowe version of "Noah", you will remember the Nephilim. It is interesting that these Valhalla-like and Ragnarokian passages existed all this way back and that already the making of war was a somewhat exalted art.

64, so we are looking to break from "divine" and instead characterize as superhuman, but having lost those meritorious features that clothe divinity. And isn't this running counter to the hypotheses he's developing? In these passages, while the wrongdoers may have started out as divine, God is looking to distance itself from them now and, perhaps, withdrawing or taking away their divinity when that happens.

65-67, for who can stand in this judgment if not one of the populace, one of those judged? Is this person Adam as he was meant to be before Eve and the serpent got involved?

Bottom 67-69, OK, so for this we really need to look at what the second commandment says. We are not to worship false gods or idols. In the sort of thing that Jews *love* to do, this (when we think of it) opens the field wide. It may not be a breach of the commandment to worship something other than God proper—an "ally" of God if you will? An aspect of him/her (as we shall see expounded on). The problem is still hierarchy. Which of the two powers has the final say? Also, the monotheistic rabbis would have wanted to avoid the all-too-human traits of conflict, aggressiveness and jealousy at God's level.

70-71, so now we're really getting onto shifting ground. Egypt, Greece, Norse---they all have a god set aside for wisdom, at least one. We are getting to the point of defining "divine attributes". Wisdom is one that spans most cultures and religions, an aspired-to attribute.

72, wisdom could be seen that way, yes. Or reverse it---the angel(s) could be seen as distinct manifestations of divine attributes—that particular side or facet of God which can be viewed and assimilated by the human being.

73, if I ever needed evidence that I shy away from being a pure logician, this would seem to be it, since logic doesn't make it into my recipe at all. This is part of a bigger thing that doesn't seem to stay on my corkboard. For many people, divinity comes with some aspect or sense of "purity". I don't honestly think that the concept of purity has much to do with what I look for or view as divine. That may be because I think I'm/we're better because of our flaws, because they give us things to improve upon. And it's a misused word because it's hard to grasp for me,

intellectually or maybe even emotionally, what I'm supposed to go after when it comes to "pure". Untainted by evil? Evil's an even more dangerous and charged word.