



THE ANÁSTASIS CENTER  
FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION & MINISTRY

# Reconstruction

The Deep Roots of Early Christian Theology

# Reconstruction: Objectives

- Deconstructing Christian faith is common
- Common outcomes: Collapse? Holes?
- Why construct at all?
- Early Christianity helps us discern a strong foundation

# Reconstruction: Objectives

- Identify controversial issues commonly debated in Western Christianity
- Examine early Christian views on the issue
- Identify if, where, and why Christians shifted on the issue
- Recover a framework for approaching the issue in today's context



# Reconstruction

## The Deep Roots of Early Christian Theology

- 4/30 Slavery: How the Early Church Got It Right
- 5/7 Women in the Early Church
- 5/14 The Goodness of God and the Healing of Creation:  
Ministry According to Athanasius of Alexandria
- 5/21 Does God Have a Dark Side? Hell in the Early Church
- 5/28 Scripture: How Authoritative Is It? Why Do We Need It?
- 6/4 Scripture: Is the Bible the Product of Empire? Violence?
- 6/11 Politics, the Church, and Jesus' Restorative Justice
- 6/18 Sexual Ethics and the New Creation
- 6/25 The Person, the Face, and the Climb Up the Mountain:  
Gregory of Nyssa and the Shaping of Desire



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Scripture:  
How Authoritative Is It?  
Why Do We Need It?

Mako A. Nagasawa

The Anástasis Center for Christian Education and Ministry

# Outline

- Introduction: Different Stories and Scriptures (15 min)
- Discussion (10 min)
- Is This Scripture the Scripture We Need? (40 min)
- Discussion

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# General Patristic Attitude to Scripture

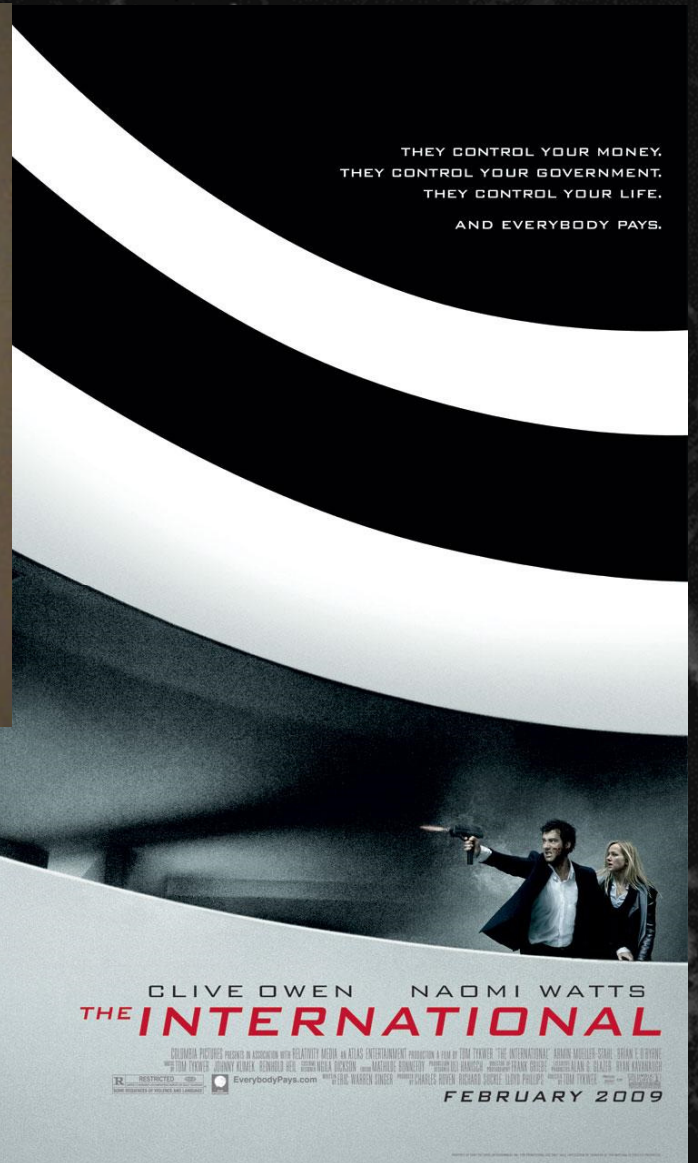
- “For if the days of a man should be as many as all the days of the world from Adam to the end of the ages and he should sit and meditate upon the holy Scriptures, he would not comprehend all the force of the depth of the words. And man cannot rise up to the wisdom of God.”
  - Aphrahat the Persian (c.280 – c.345 AD), Persian Jew, then Syriac Christian, *Demonstration 22.26*
- But *why?*



# What Do These Movies Have in Common?

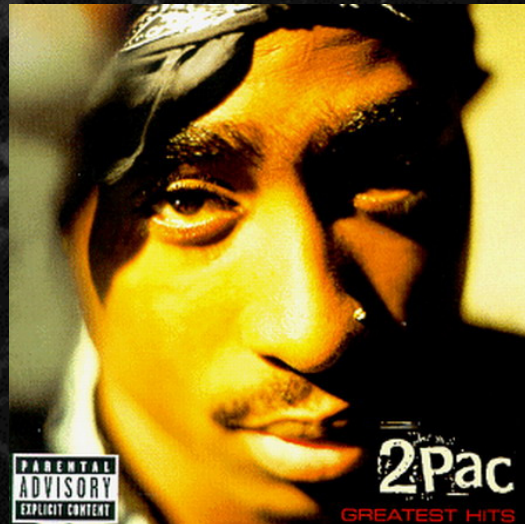
1. Up in the Air
2. The Social Network
3. Romeo and Juliet
4. The Butterfly Effect
5. The Departed
6. Blood Diamond
7. Pay It Forward
8. Boys Don't Cry
9. Gangs of New York
10. Scarface
11. Atonement
12. Moulin Rouge
13. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon
14. My Sister's Keeper

# No Happy Ending: The Evil Banks Win



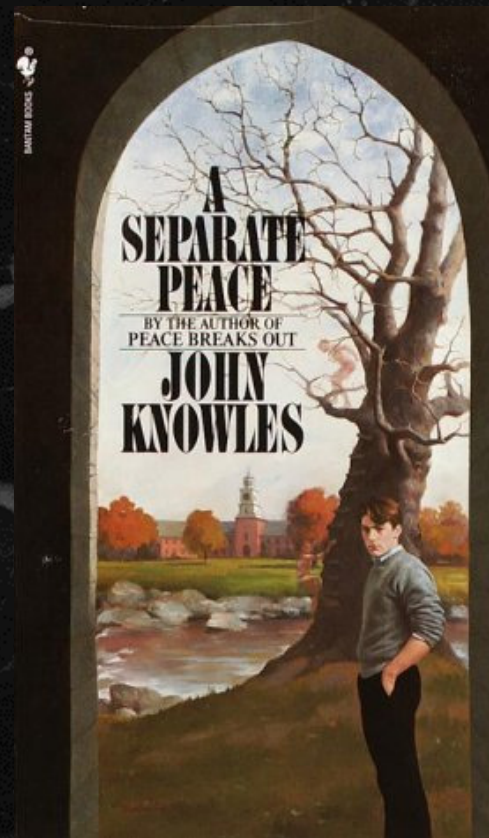
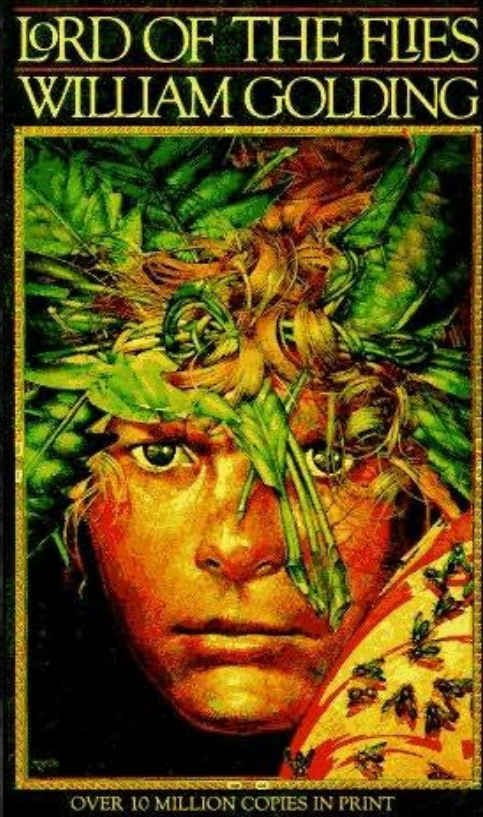
# Songs With No Happy Ending

1. Don't Stop Believing, by Journey
2. Changes, by Tupac
3. The Way It Is, by Bruce Hornsby
4. The End of the Innocence, by Don Henley
5. Fast Car, by Tracy Chapman



# Books With No Happy Ending

1. Lord of the Flies, by William Golding
2. A Separate Peace, by John Knowles



# The Non-Happy Ending



Good and Evil Coexist Forever –  
A Circular Non-Story

# The Happy Ending

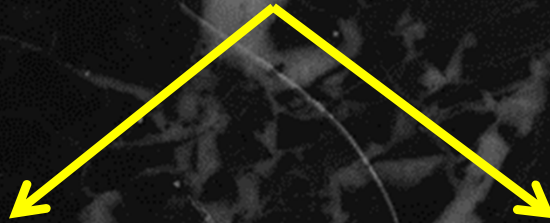


Good Defeats Evil –  
A Linear Story

# Movies With a Happy Ending

1. Every Disney movie
2. The superhero who defeats the villain
3. The kids who stop the robbers
4. The guy and girl who hold out for each other
5. The family that stays together through adversity
6. The natives who beat the invaders
7. The lawyer who persuades the jury of the truth
8. The scientist who beats the disease
9. The teacher who gets through to the kids

# 1<sup>st</sup> Question: Happy Ending Or Not?



**No Happy Ending**  
**Good = Evil**

**Happy Ending**  
**Good > Evil**



[article](#) [discussion](#) [edit this page](#) [history](#)

# Problem of evil in Hinduism

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Hindu answers to the problem of evil** are different from most answers offered in Western [philosophy](#), partly because the [problem of evil](#) within [Hindu](#) thought is differently structured than Western traditions, mainly [Abrahamic](#) traditions.

In the [Hindu](#) tradition the problem of evil is phrased as the **Problem of Injustice**. This problem can be considered in the following manner:

**God is Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Just. Yet injustice is observed to persist in the world. How is this possible?**

In the [Advaita](#) school of [Vedanta](#), this problem is dealt with in detail by [Sankara](#) in his commentary on the [Brahma Sutras](#), 2.1.34-36:

***Brahma Sutra 2.1.34:** "No partiality and cruelty (can be charged against God) because of (His) taking other factors into consideration."*

[Sankara's](#) commentary explains that God cannot be charged with partiality or cruelty (i.e. injustice) on account of his taking the factors of virtuous and vicious actions ([Karma](#)) performed by an individual in previous lives. If an individual experiences pleasure or pain in this life, it is due to virtuous or vicious action ([Karma](#)) done by that individual in a past life.

***Brahma Sutra 2.1.35:** "If it be argued that it is not possible (to take Karma into consideration in the beginning), since the fruits of work remain still undifferentiated, then we say, no, since the transmigratory state has no beginning."*

The opponent now argues that there could have been no "previous birth" at the very beginning of creation, before which [Karma](#) could not have existed. [Sankara](#) replies that it is not so, for the number of creation cycles is beginningless, vide the next verse:

***Brahma Sutra 2.1.36:** "Moreover, this is logical, and (so) it is met with (in the scriptures)."*

[Sankara](#) provides references from the [Vedas](#) concerning the beginninglessness of Creation: "The Ordainer created the sun and moon like those of previous cycles" ([Rig Veda](#) 10.190.3). This shows the existence of earlier cycles of creation, and hence the number of creation cycles is beginningless.

Thus [Sankara's](#) resolution to the Problem of Injustice is that the existence of injustice in the world is only apparent, for one merely reaps the results of one's moral actions sown in a past life, which is compatible with the Justness of an Omniscient and Omnipotent God.

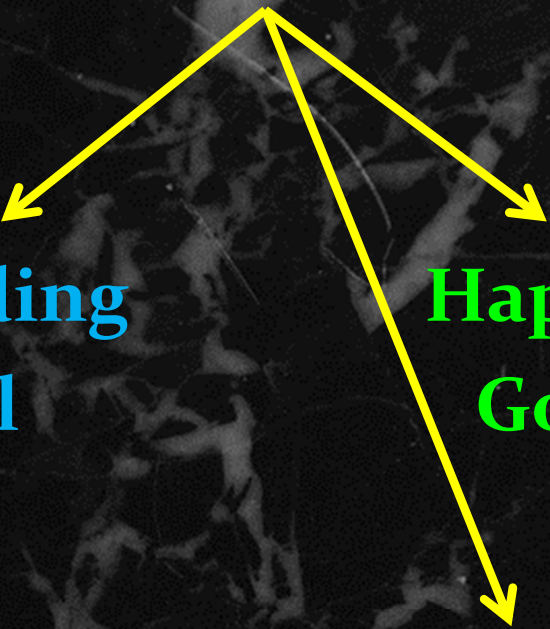
On the higher level of Existence, however, there is no evil or good, since these are dependent mainly on temporal circumstances. Hence a [jnani](#), one who has realized his true nature, is beyond such dualistic notions.

## Sources

- Swami Gambhirananda. *Brahma Sutra Bhasya of Shankaracharya*. Published by the [Ramakrishna Math](#). ISBN 81-7505-105-1
- Mohanty, J.N. *Classical Indian Philosophy*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. ISBN 0-8476-8933-6

## See also

# 1<sup>st</sup> Question: Happy Ending Or Not?

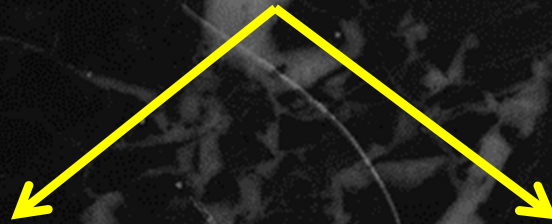


**No Happy Ending**  
**Good = Evil**

**Happy Ending**  
**Good > Evil**

**Unhappy Ending**  
**Evil > Good**

1<sup>st</sup> Question: Happy Ending Or Not?



No Happy Ending

Good = Evil

Happy Ending

Good > Evil

2<sup>nd</sup> Question :

Is the Villain Internal or External?



Internal

External

# Who's the Villain in This Story?

**External** **Internal**

- Snow White



# Who's the Villain in This Story?

**External** **Internal**

X

- Snow White
- Transformers



# Who's the Villain in This Story?

**External** **Internal**

- Snow White
- Transformers
- Lord of the Rings

X

X



# Who's the Villain in This Story?

**External** **Internal**

- Snow White
- Transformers
- Lord of the Rings
- Star Wars IV, V, VI

X

X

X

X



# Who's the Villain in This Story?

**External** **Internal**

- Snow White
- Transformers
- Lord of the Rings
- Star Wars IV, V, VI

X

X

X

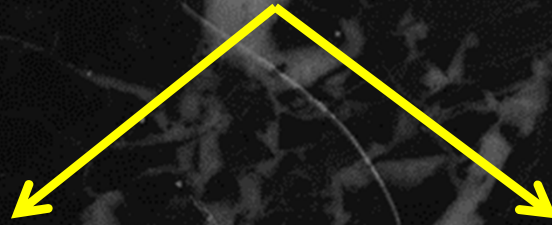
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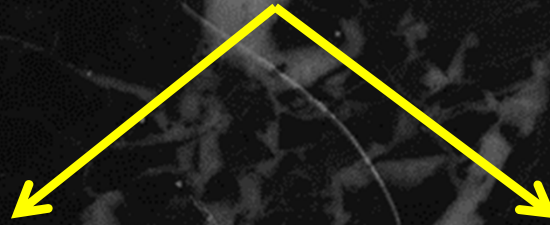
# All Belief Systems



**No Happy Ending**

**Happy Ending**

# All Belief Systems



**No Happy Ending**

**Happy Ending**



**Cycles of reincarnation**

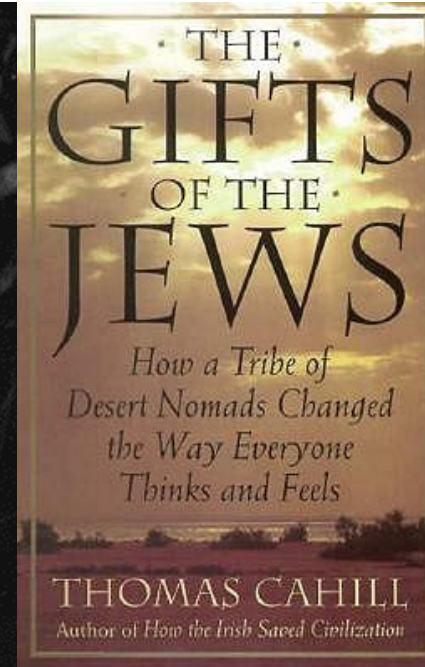
**Escape to nothingness**

**Eternal war of good vs. evil**

**There is no good and evil**

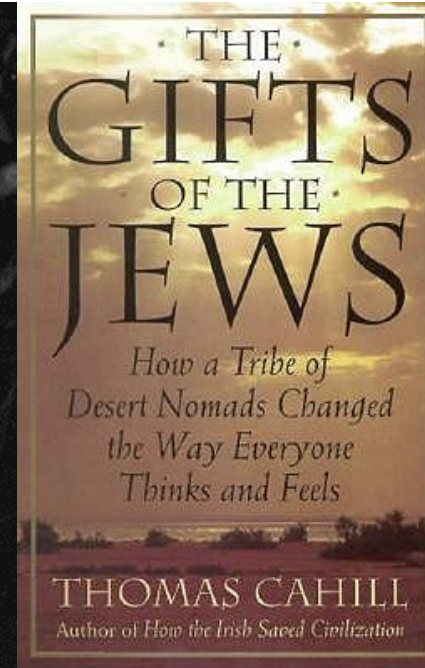
# The First Happy Ending Story

- “On every continent, in every society, Avram would have been given the same advice that wise men as diverse as Heraclitus, Lao-Tsu, and Siddhartha would one day give their followers: do not journey but sit; compose yourself by the river of life, meditate on its **ceaseless and meaningless flow** – on all that is past or passing or to come – until you have absorbed the pattern and have come to peace with the **Great Wheel** and with your own death and the death of all things in the corruptible sphere.” (p.74 – 75)



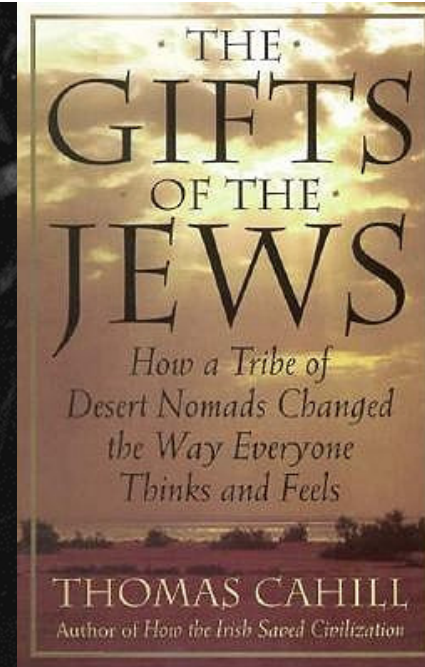
# The First Happy Ending Story

- “Since time is **no longer cyclical but one-way and irreversible**, personal history is now possible and an individual life can have value. This new value is at first hardly understood; but already in the earliest accounts of Avraham and his family we come upon the carefully composed genealogies of ordinary people, something it would never have occurred to Sumerians to write down, because they accorded no importance to individual memories. For them only impersonal survival, like kingship, like the harvest, mattered; the individual, the unusual, the singular, the bizarre – persons or events that did not conform to an archetype – could have no meaning. And without the individual, neither time nor history is possible.” (p.106)



# The First Happy Ending Story

- “For the Jews, **history will be...always something new: a process unfolding through time, whose direction and end we cannot know**, except insofar as God gives us some hint of what is to come. The future will not be what has happened before; indeed, the only reality that the future has is that it has not happened yet. It is unknowable; and what it will be cannot be discovered by auguries – by reading the stars or examining entrails. We do not control the future; in a profound sense, even God does not control the future because **it is the collective responsibility of those who are bringing about the future by their actions in the present**. For this reason, the concept of the future – for the first time – holds out **promise**, rather than just the same old thing. We are not doomed, not bound to some predetermined fate; we are free.” (p.157 – 158)



# All Belief Systems

**No Happy Ending**

**Happy Ending**

**Cycles of reincarnation**

**Escape to nothingness**

**Eternal war of good vs. evil**

**There is no good and evil**

**Internal**

**External**

# All Belief Systems

**No Happy Ending**

**Happy Ending**

**Cycles of reincarnation**

**Escape to nothingness**

**Eternal war of good vs. evil**

**There is no good and evil**

**Internal**

**External**

**New human nature**

# All Belief Systems

**No Happy Ending**

**Happy Ending**

**Cycles of reincarnation**

**Escape to nothingness**

**Eternal war of good vs. evil**

**There is no good and evil**

**Internal**

**New human nature**

**External**

**Theocracy**

**Social progress**

**Individualism**



# All Belief Systems



# Four Possible Stories

- Good Equals Evil in Nature
  - Good Equals Evil in Power
  - Evil Triumphs Over Good
  - Good Triumphs Over Evil
- 
- How would you know what story we live in?
    - Some interpretation of experience

# When Good and Evil Are One: A Scripture That Nullifies History



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- [Main page](#)
- [Contents](#)
- [Featured content](#)
- [Current events](#)
- [Random article](#)

#### search

#### interaction

- [About Wikipedia](#)
- [Community portal](#)
- [Recent changes](#)
- [Contact Wikipedia](#)
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- [What links here](#)
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- [Printable version](#)
- [Permanent link](#)
- [Cite this page](#)

[edit]

# When Good and Evil Are One: A Scripture That Enacts All History

- If “God’s History” Totally Scripted Our History
  - Ash 'arite Muslims: the eternal, pre-existent Qur'an
    - Human accountability in the Qur'an, yet:
    - “No evil befalls on the earth nor in your own souls, but it is in a book before We bring it into existence; surely that is easy to Allah...”
      - Qur'an 57:22
    - Qur'an requires there to be unbelievers, yet:
    - ““Do you then blame me [Adam] for doing a deed which God had decreed that I should do forty years before He created me?”... So Adam got the better of Moses in the argument.”
      - *Mishkat Al-Masabih*, Volume I, Dr. James Robson (translator) (Sh. Muhammad Ahsraf Publishers, Lahore-Pakistan, Reprint 1990), p.23

# Outline

- Introduction: Different Stories and Scriptures (15 min)
- Discussion (10 min)
- Is This Scripture the Scripture We Need? (40 min)
- Discussion

# Discussion

- Good Equals Evil in Nature
  - Good Equals Evil in Power
  - Evil Triumphs Over Good
  - Good Triumphs Over Evil
1. If you saw people doing both bad and good things, over years, what story would you conclude we live in?
  2. If all you knew was that the universe is winding down to coldness and death (the Second Law of Thermodynamics), what story would you conclude we live in?
  3. In your experience, is the main purpose of the Bible to tell us which story we live in?

# Outline

- Introduction: Different Stories and Scriptures (15 min)
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# For Good to Triumph Over Evil We Need a Scripture About History

- For more material and explanation, see Reconstruction 2022
  - Session 3: God's Goodness and the Healing of Creation
  - Session 4: Hell as the Love of God
- Principle: God is good and loving towards us, and "deeds must correspond to their natures"
  - Athanasius of Alexandria (298 – 373), *Against the Heathen* 16.4



# God's Consistent Goodness: Recall Athanasius

- Creation
  - God's goodness required human free will, to love Him and freely choose to always choose God forever
- Corruption
  - The Fall was possible, because of the superabundance of good, but not required
  - God's goodness required human mortality, once human nature was corrupt
- Clinical Trial in Israel
  - Israel was God's partner to diagnose the human condition and hope for a cure in the Messiah
- Cure in Jesus Christ
  - God's goodness required Him to heal human nature and defeat evil in a loving and human way
- Consummation
  - Hell is not necessary, but is based on human choices to shape our natures
  - God loves you, and will always love you

# God's Consistent Goodness: Recall Athanasius

- Creation **Internal consistency**
  - God's goodness required human free will, to love Him and freely choose to always choose God forever
- Corruption
  - The Fall was possible, because of the superabundance of good, but not required
  - God's goodness required human mortality, once human nature was corrupt
- Clinical Trial in Israel **External corroboration**
  - Israel was God's partner to diagnose the human condition and hope for a cure in the Messiah **Israel**
- Cure in Jesus Christ **Jesus, Church**
  - God's goodness required Him to heal human nature and defeat evil in a loving and human way
- Consummation
  - Hell is not necessary, but is based on human choices to shape our natures
  - God loves you, and will always love you

# God's Consistent Goodness: Recall Athanasius

- Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202 AD)
  - *That God is Not the Author of Evil* (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20.4 – 8)
- Athanasius of Alexandria (298 – 373 AD)
  - *Against the Heathen* and *On the Incarnation*
- Basil of Caesarea (329 – 379 AD)
  - *Homily 9: God Is Not the Author of Evil*
    - “It has been conjectured that it was delivered shortly after some such public calamity as the destruction of Nicæa in 368” (Philip Schaff, *Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.2, Bk.8, p.74)
  - *Hexaemeron, Homily 2.4*

# God's Consistent Goodness: Creation

- Creation
  - God's goodness required human free will, to love Him and freely choose to always choose God forever

# God's Consistent Goodness: Creation

- A compilation of quotations, “Human Free Will and God’s Grace in the Early Church Fathers,” found here: [www.anastasiscenter.org/gods-goodness-creation](http://www.anastasiscenter.org/gods-goodness-creation)
- “But if some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for such were they created; nor would the former be reprehensible, for thus they were made [originally]. But since all men are of the same nature, able both to hold fast and to do what is good; and, on the other hand, having also the power to cast it from them and not to do it, some do justly receive praise even among men who are under the control of good laws (and much more from God), and **obtain deserved testimony of their choice of good in general, and of persevering therein.**”
  - Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202), *Against Heresies* 4.37.2

# God's Consistent Goodness: Creation

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- “Because there is nothing evil by nature, but it is by use that evil things become such. So... man was made with a free-will, not as if there were already evil in existence... but on account of his capacity of obeying or disobeying God... For man received power... for it was for the sake of this that I say he was endowed with it... in order that **he may obtain an addition to what he already possesses, which accrues to him from the Superior Being in consequence of his obedience...**”
  - Methodius of Olympus (died 311), *Concerning Free Will* 6.362

# God's Consistent Goodness: Corruption and Mortality

- Creation
  - God's goodness required human free will, to love Him and freely choose to always choose God forever
- Corruption
  - The Fall was possible, because of the superabundance of good, but not required
  - God's goodness required human mortality, once human nature was corrupt

# God's Consistent Goodness: Corruption and Mortality

- “Wherefore also He drove him out of Paradise, and removed him far from the tree of life... **because He pitied him**, [and did not desire] that he should continue a sinner **for ever**, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be **immortal**, and evil **interminable and irremediable**. But He set a bound to his [state of] sin, by interposing death, and **thus causing sin to cease, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh, which should take place in the earth**, so that man, ceasing at length to live to sin, and dying to it, might begin to live to God”
  - Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202), *Against Heresies* 3.23.6
  - Methodius of Olympus (died 311), *Discourse on the Resurrection* 1.4 – 5
  - Athanasius of Alexandria (298 – 373), *On the Incarnation* 8.1
  - Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389), *Oration* 45
  - Ambrose of Milan (340 – 397), *On the Psalms* 47 – 48
  - Maximus the Confessor (580 – 662), *Ad Thalassios* Question 44.5



# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic

- Creation
  - God's goodness required human free will, to love Him and freely choose to always choose God forever
- Corruption
  - The Fall was possible, because of the superabundance of good, but not required
  - God's goodness required human mortality, once human nature was corrupt
- Clinical Trial in Israel
  - Israel was God's partner to diagnose the human condition and hope for a cure in the Messiah

# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic

- God was “**accustoming** man to bear His Spirit and to hold communion with Him... He **adjusted** the human race to an agreement with salvation.”
  - Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202), *Against Heresies* 4.14.2

# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic

- “Place and time and age and season and the like are the subjects of a **physician's scrutiny**; he will prescribe **medicines and diet, and guard against things injurious**, that the desires of the sick may not be a hindrance to his art. Sometimes, and in certain cases, he will make use of the cautery or the knife or the severer remedies; but none of these, laborious and hard as they may seem, is so difficult as the **diagnosis and cure of our habits, passions, lives, wills, and whatever else is within us, by banishing from our compound nature everything brutal and fierce, and introducing and establishing in their stead what is gentle and dear to God...**
  - Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389), *Oration 2.18, 23, 25*

# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic

- “This is the wish of our schoolmaster the law, of the prophets who intervened between Christ and the law, of Christ who is the fulfiller and end of the spiritual law... All these are a training from God for us, and a **healing for our weakness, restoring the old Adam to the place whence he fell, and conducting us to the tree of life**, from which the tree of knowledge estranged us, when partaken of unseasonably, and improperly.”
  - Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389), *Oration* 2.18, 23, 25

# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic

- “In visible things, where a prince goes to stay, if it should happen that that house contains anything that is not clean, **it is put to rights**, and much **cleaning** takes place, and sweet odours are poured out; how much more does the house of the soul, in which the Lord rests require **cleaning**, that He may be able to enter in and rest there, who is without spot or blemish! In such a heart God and the whole church of heaven rests.”
  - Macarius of Egypt (4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century), *Homily 15.45*

# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic

- “Moses came, but he could not bestow a **complete cure**. Priests, gifts, tithes, sabbaths, new-moons, washings, sacrifices, burnt offerings, and every other righteousness, was performed under the law, and **the soul could not get cured and cleansed** from the unclean issue of bad thoughts. Every righteousness of the soul was unavailing to **heal man**, until the Saviour came, the true Physician, who **cures** without cost, who gave Himself a ransom for mankind. He alone accomplished the great, saving deliverance and **cure of the soul**. He set it free from bondage, and brought it out of darkness, glorifying it with His own light. He dried up the fountain of unclean thoughts that was in it. Behold, it says, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.”
  - Macarius of Egypt (4th or 5th century), *Homily 20.6*

# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic

- “After Moses, Prophets were sent to **cure Israel**, but in their **healing** office they lamented that they were not able to overcome the **disease**... The wounds of man's nature pass our **healing**... The evil is irretrievable by us, and needs thee to retrieve it. The Lord heard the prayer of the Prophets. The Father disregarded not the perishing of our race; He sent forth His Son, the Lord from heaven, as **healer**...”
  - Cyril of Alexandria (376 – 444), *Lecture 12.6 – 8*

# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic: The Physician's Motives

- God does not intend or cause evil
- God transforms evil into good outcomes, when His people respond with partnership and integrity
- “Then to show how great is the favor he enjoys from God, Joseph says, ‘You acted against me with evil intent, but **God turned everything to good** for me.’ Hence Paul also said, ‘For those who love God, all things work together for good’.. Opposition and apparent disappointment – even these things are **turned into good**, which is exactly what happened with this remarkable man. In fact, what was done by his brothers had the particular effect of bringing him the kingship, thanks to the creative God’s wisdom **transforming all their wickedness into good.**”
  - John Chrysostom of Constantinople (c.347 – 407), *Homilies on Genesis* 67.19



# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic: The Physician's Motives

- God does not intend or cause evil
- God transforms evil into good outcomes, when His people respond with partnership and integrity

“It is good!”

Humans  
do evil

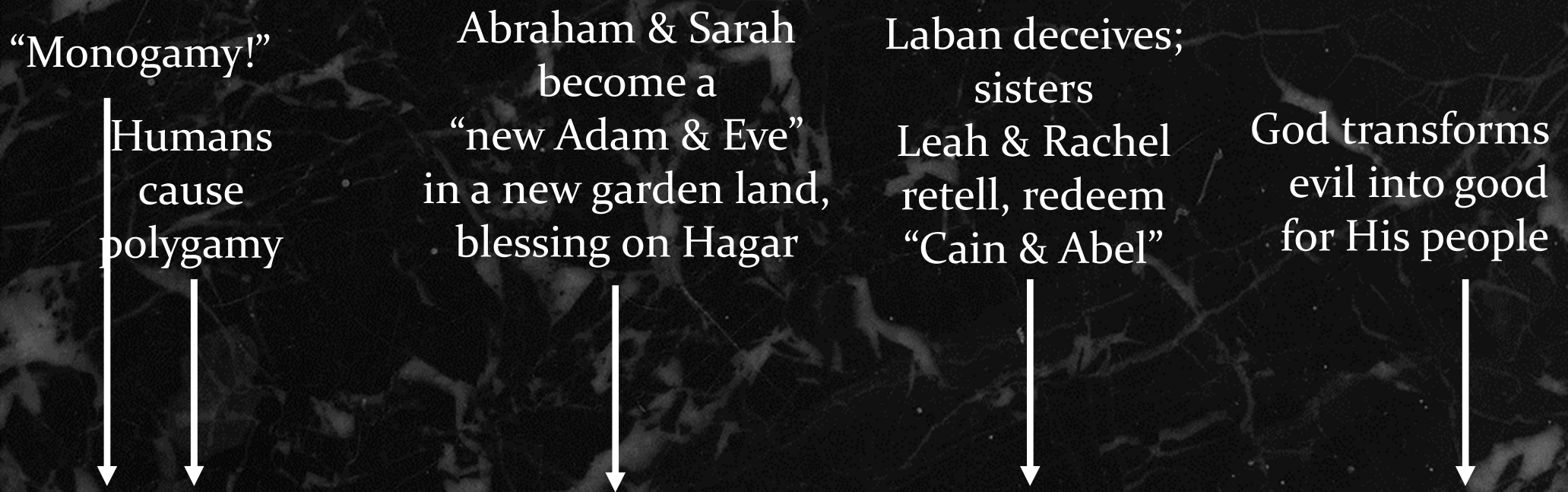


God transforms  
evil into good  
for His people

Narrative of Genesis

# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic: The Physician's Motives

- God does not intend or cause evil
- God transforms evil into good outcomes, when His people respond with partnership and integrity



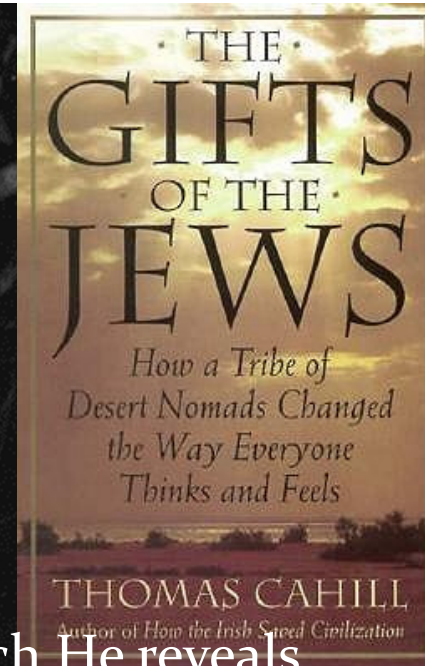
Narrative of Genesis

# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic: The Physician's Methods

- God does not cause everything, but only what He has promised to do (Amos 3:7; cf. Gen.1ff.)
- God's disciplining Israel was educational, for learning and correction
  - “The wound of God is the visitation and healing... If there be evil in the city, which the Lord did not, because the Lord God **will not do anything unless** He has revealed His **education** to his servants the prophets... The Lord God will not do the Word unless He has revealed His secret, or His **correction** to His servants the prophets... what He will do on earth... A clement and kind God always foretells the future, lest He should be compelled to inflict punishments... We refer this to the greatness of mercy, that He does not inflict punishment unless He had foretold it. But He who foretells does not wish to punish those who sin.”
    - Jerome the Translator of the Latin Vulgate (c.342 – 420 AD), *Commentary on Amos 3*

# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic: The Physician's Methods

- God's Scalpel is His Word
  - God speaks to act, and acts as He speaks
    - "Let there be light" (Gen.1)
    - "Surely the LORD God will do nothing except that which He reveals to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7)
    - "Prophets" are those to whom God speaks first
  - God is not an "omnicausal" puppet master
- God's Goodness Discernable Despite Human Evil
  - God does not cause the behavior of all people; He only causes what He has spoken
  - Separates God's speech-acts from the rest of history, including human choices
- God Promises a Victory of Good and Defeat of Evil



# God's Consistent Goodness: Clinic: The Physician's Methods

- The “Coma Ward” in God's Hospital
  - God took human life to protect Israel externally
    - Noah's flood
    - Sodom and Gomorrah
    - Egyptian firstborn
    - Midianites
    - Canaanites
  - God took human life to protect Israel internally
    - Aaron's two sons
    - Uzzah's death
  - God stopped them from inflicting too much self-harm (see Jesus' descent to the dead, next)

# Write Your Thoughts in the Chat

1. In Old Testament biblical narratives, God is a *character* with speaking lines, not “the puppet master” and sometimes not even “the omniscient narrator.”
  - a. Does this make you nervous, relieved, disturbed, fascinated, etc.? Why?
  - b. What questions about the Old Testament does this raise for you?

# God's Consistent Goodness: Cure

- Creation
  - God's goodness required human free will, to love Him and freely choose to always choose God forever
- Corruption
  - The Fall was possible, because of the superabundance of good, but not required
  - God's goodness required human mortality, once human nature was corrupt
- Clinical Trial in Israel
  - Israel was God's partner to diagnose the human condition and hope for a cure in the Messiah
- Cure in Jesus Christ
  - God's goodness required Him to heal human nature and defeat evil in a loving and human way

# God's Consistent Goodness: Cure: The Physician as Patient and Cure

- Recapitulation: Jesus lived a full and fully human life, filling full the hero's journey
  - “He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission; a youth for youths, becoming an example to youths, and thus sanctifying them for the Lord. So likewise He was an old man for old men, that He might be a perfect Master for all, not merely as respects the setting forth of the truth, but also as regards age, sanctifying at the same time the aged also, and becoming an example to them likewise. Then, at last, He came on to death itself, that He might be ‘the first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence [Col.1:18],’ the Prince of life [Acts 3:15], existing before all, and going before all”
    - Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202), *Against Heresies* 3.18.7

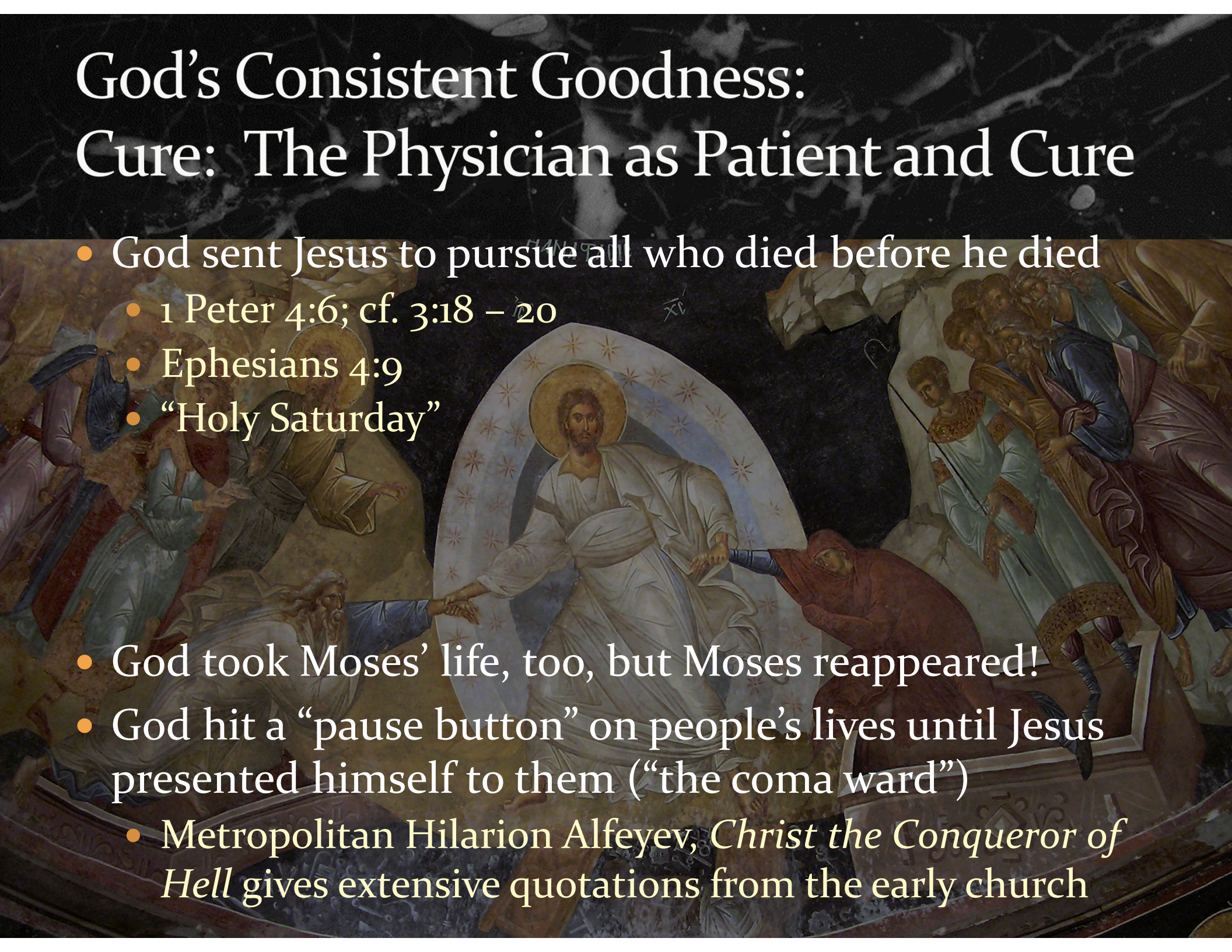


# God's Consistent Goodness: Cure: The Physician as Patient and Cure

- Recapitulation: Jesus lived a full and fully human life, filling full the hero's journey
  - “Though he were a son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8 – 9).
  - “From the things, he says, which He suffered He continually learned to obey God. And being made perfect through sufferings. This then is perfection, and by this means must we arrive at perfection. **For not only was He Himself saved, but became to others also an abundant supply of salvation. For being made perfect He became the Author of salvation to them that obey Him.**”
    - John Chrysostom of Constantinople (347 – 407), *Commentary on Hebrews* 5:9

# God's Consistent Goodness: Cure: The Physician as Patient and Cure

- God sent Jesus to pursue all who died before he died
  - 1 Peter 4:6; cf. 3:18 – 20
  - Ephesians 4:9
  - “Holy Saturday”
- God took Moses' life, too, but Moses reappeared!
- God hit a “pause button” on people's lives until Jesus presented himself to them (“the coma ward”)
  - Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell* gives extensive quotations from the early church



# God's Consistent Goodness: Cure: The Physician as Patient and Cure

- Story Analysis and the Selection of the Gospels
  - The Four Gospels
  - The Gnostic Gospels: Thomas and Judas

# God's Consistent Goodness: Cure: John's Gospel, New Creation

Genesis		John	
In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth (Gen.1:1)		In the beginning was the Word (Jn.1:1)	
	7 Miracles	7 Discourses	7 "I am" Statements
1	Water to wine (2:1)	Second birth (3:1 – 21)	Bread of life (6:35)
2	Nobleman's son (4:46)	Living water (4:1 – 42)	Light of world (8:12)
3	Invalid man (5:1)	Son and Father (5:16 – 45)	Door (10:7)
4	Multiply bread (6:1)	Bread of life (6:22 – 71)	Good shepherd (10:11)
5	Walk on water (6:16)	Children of God (8:12 – 59)	Resurrection, life (11:25)
6	Blind man (9:1)	Good shepherd (10:1 – 38)	Way, truth, life (14:6)
7	Lazarus (11:1)	Upper Room (13:1 – 17:26)	True vine (15:1)
Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and <b>breathed</b> into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being (Gen.2:7)		Jesus <b>breathed</b> on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn.20:22)	

# God's Consistent Goodness: Cure: Matthew's Gospel, New Torah

SECTION  
1

Eden, Ararat



SECTION  
2

Sinai, [Zion]



SECTION  
3

SECTION  
4

SECTION  
5

Nebo



- Structure

- When Jesus had finished **these words** (Mt.7:28)



- When Jesus had finished **giving instructions** (Mt.11:1)



- When Jesus had finished **these parables** (Mt.13:53)

- When Jesus had finished **these words** (Mt.19:1)



- When Jesus had finished **all these words** (Mt.26:1)




- Ending on a Mountain

- Teaching them to observe **all that I commanded you** (Mt.28:19)



# God's Consistent Goodness: Cure: Luke's Gospel, Paradise Regained

## Fall in Genesis 2 – 4

- Had been commanded to spread over the earth
- To proclaim their rule over it
- Two people, a couple
- Walking with God
- Knowing Him
- Disobeyed God's word and 'gained wisdom'
- Ate what was forbidden
- **"Their eyes were opened"** 
- They focused on themselves
- Fell into separation from God
- Recognized nakedness, they clothe themselves
- Could not eat with God as freely as before
- Lost their rule to Satan

## Return in Luke 24:13 – 53

- Under the rule of a foreign power, hoping for liberation
- Two people, possibly a couple
- Walking with Jesus
- Not recognizing him
- Are told God's Word gained true knowledge
- Ate what Jesus encouraged them to eat
- **"Their eyes were opened"**
- They focused on Jesus
- Reunited with God
- "Clothed with power from on high" – Holy Spirit
- Are encouraged to have table fellowship with God and eat with God often (communion)
- Commanded to spread over the whole earth to proclaim Jesus' rule

# God's Consistent Goodness: Cure: Mark's Gospel, Eden Re-opened



# God's Consistent Goodness: In The Gospel of Thomas?

- Gospel of Thomas
  - Not a narrative, not a history
  - Disconnected sayings (“philosophy” is primary, not history)
  - Philosopher, not Messiah (“Hellenistic” not Jewish)
  - Souls escape, but not bodies resurrected
  - Souls of women “become male” (like in Plato’s *Timaeus*)
  - No death and resurrection story



# God's Consistent Goodness: In The Gospel of Judas?

- Gospel of Judas
  - Judas “knows the secret” vs. other disciples are ignorant
  - Jesus will die and leave his body (and all matter) behind
  - Creator God of the Old Testament is evil, not good
  - The “true God” is behind the Creator of matter and bodies
  - Souls escape, but not bodies resurrected

# God's Consistent Goodness: Consummation and Continuance

- Creation
  - God's goodness required human free will, to love Him and relationally ascend into perfection
- Corruption
  - The Fall was possible, because of the superabundance of good, but not required
  - God's goodness required human mortality, once human nature was corrupt
- Clinical Trial in Israel
  - Israel was God's partner to diagnose the human condition and hope for a cure in the Messiah
- Cure in Jesus Christ
  - God's goodness required Him to heal human nature and defeat evil in a loving and human way
- Consummation
  - Hell is not necessary, but is based on human choices to shape our natures
  - God loves you, and will always love you

# God's Consistent Goodness: Consummation and Continuance

- God is forward, not backward, looking
  - “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him” (Isa.64:4; 1 Cor.2:15)
  - Increasingly exquisite foods (Isa.25:6)
  - Increasingly challenging activities (Luke 19:17, 19)
  - Increasing abilities to develop (Rev.21 – 22)
  - Increasing joy in others, for others (Rev.21 – 22)

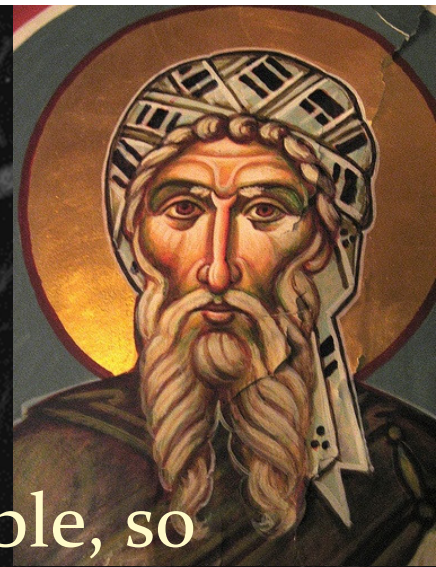
# God's Consistent Goodness: Consummation and Continuance

- God is training our desires to trust Him
  - “Love never ends... The greatest of these is love” (1 Cor.13:8 – 13)
- God's infinite goodness and creativity
  - Constant growth for us
  - Human being, human becoming
    - Reconstruction 2022, Session 4: Hell as the Love of God
  - We ascend infinitely
    - Irenaeus of Lyons (130 – 202), *Against Heresies* 4.38.3
    - Gregory of Nazianzus (329 – 389), *Oration* 38
    - Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 395), *Life of Moses* 2.219 – 248

# God's Consistent Goodness: Consummation and Continuance

- But humans can become backward looking
  - Addictive desire for independence
  - Resentful of others
  - Believe we are “deserving” of better
  - Hostile to the diagnosis and cure

# God's Consistent Goodness: Consummation and Continuance



- Humans can become backward looking
  - People's direction can become "unchangeable, so that on the one hand the righteous **desire** God and always have Him to rejoice in, while sinners **desire sin** though they do not have the material means to sin... they are punished without any consolation. For what is hell but the deprivation of that which is exceedingly **desired** by someone? Therefore, according to the analogy of **desire**, whoever **desires** God rejoices and whoever **desires** sin is punished."
  - Syrian priest John of Damascus (c.675 – 740), *Against the Manicheans* 94.1569, 1573

# Outline

- Introduction: Different Stories and Scriptures (15 min)
- Discussion (10 min)
- Is This Scripture the Scripture We Need? (40 min)
- **Discussion**

# Discussion

1. Is the Bible enough to help us sort among the four options?
  - Good Equals Evil in Nature
  - Good Equals Evil in Power
  - Evil Triumphs Over Good
  - Good Triumphs Over Evil
2. What do you think about the Bible's
  - a. Internal consistency?
  - b. External corroboration (Israel, Jesus, Church)?