

Biblical Man Meets Modern Man

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Modern man emerges from his time capsule several thousand years in his past and meets a Biblical man for whom our future has not yet occurred. For the Biblical man it is neither a remote yesterday nor a distant tomorrow; it is merely today.

The Biblical man in this story is not a famous sage or prophet. He is an average man of his time. He is neither rich nor poor; neither exceptionally wise nor ignorant. He spends his days trying to eke out a living from the land on which he lives with his wife and children.

The modern man is middle class, moderately educated, and in the middle of what would be a fairly ordinary life for himself and his family—except for the fact that he is traveling in time.

The Biblical man asks, "What is the world like in your time?" The modern man responds "very different. We do not plow the field, nor do we keep flocks or herds of animals. We do not rise early in the morning to fetch our water, nor do we knead our dough for bread at night. We do not spin yarn for our clothing, nor do we need candles or oil for lamps to provide light in the darkness of the night.

The astonished Biblical man inquires, "If you do not plow then how can you have food to harvest?" If you keep no animals, how can you have meat to eat? How is it that you can have bread without kneading dough?"

The modern man explains, "we labor long and hard in other ways to earn the money with which we purchase all the things that our bodies desire: food to eat, clothing to wear, water to drink, a shelter over our heads, and even light to brighten our nights."

"Surely the place from which you come is heaven," exclaimed the Biblical man. "I would give all that I have if you could take me to your time. My back aches from the plow, my children dread caring for our animals, and my wife would die for water that magically appears at her command and for bread that does not require the pounding of wheat nor the kneading of dough but enters our home like manna from heaven.

With tears in his eyes the modern man retorts, "No, my friend. It is I who would give up everything I have to work with the earth under my feet and the sun over my head. I wish that the children who live under my roof cared for animals that we owned and grazed them on the safety of our land. My heart would rejoice if our lives allowed me to teach them all that they needed to know about life by the glow of our candle light. My wife dreams of a world in which we could drink fresh water from a stream; one in which she had time to make our clothing or experience the joy of smelling fresh-baked bread coming from her hearth every night.

The Biblical man said with a look of puzzlement upon his face, "I don't understand." He continued, "How can you who have so much envy us who have so little? Why would you with

your relative ease and comfort desire our simple lives of toil? How can people who are free to pursue whatever his heart desires yearn for the lives of those who are so bond to one place, one thing, and one small group of people?"

Sensing his confusion, the modern man tried to explain. "I said that things were different in my time; I didn't say that they were in all ways better." The Biblical man interrupted, "Are you slaves to a cruel tyrant? Do plagues and pestilence destroy your bodies or does cruel war devour your land? What in God's name prevents your world from being a paradise?"

The modern man found these questions difficult to answer because he did not fully understand the world in which he lived nor did he comprehend the reasons for his despair. Yet, he tried to explain as best he could. "We are not slaves—at least not in the sense that slaves exist in these Biblical times. We bare a different yoke, one made with our own hands and placed over our own necks. Please recall that I said we earn money with which to supply all our material needs. The earning of this money consumes most of our time. Most of our youth is spent preparing for how to make it, our adult years are spent in the constant acquisition of it or in regretting the lack of it, and our old age depends on having accumulated enough of it. Few of us know how to enjoy the little leisure time that we have in ways that do not require spending money. Those who do are becoming fewer every day. Increasingly we pay others to provide our food. Even water is not free in my time. A man cannot travel for one village to another without some expense." In utter disbelief the Biblical man argued, "This cannot be true for I see that you have feet as we do." "Yes," replied the modern man, "but we do not use our feet for journeys as you do, we require the aid of expensive machines for all but the shortest of trips. We will not walk as far as your stream for water. We will not walk as far as your nearest orchard for fruit to eat. Even our children play games that require little physical movement."

"We have lost even the ability to entertain ourselves." "Surely not" said the Biblical man. "It is true" said the modern man. "You and your family might gather around the fire, share amusing stories, play the flute, harp, drum, or fiddle. You sing the same songs that you ancestors sung and pass those songs on to your next generation. Most of us are bereft of any such talent. If we desire music we must have money with which to purchase it in some form. And even in this sad regard, each person is an island unto himself; often finding entertainment without talking, sharing, or interacting with any other member of his family. We have become slaves without masters. We are held in bondage by invisible chains of our own making."

Pity swelled in the heart of the Biblical man. He cautioned the modern man not to romanticize his agrarian life. He reminded him that in Biblical days life hung in a precarious balance subject to droughts, floods, disease, and locusts. The people of his generation were not content. As the Bible itself records, "When it is day you will wish that it were evening and in the evening you will wish that it were day." Life was relatively short and many lived in fear and poverty. "At least" the Biblical man said, "you do not worry about starving for lack of food."

"I can take little comfort in these differences" said the modern man. Our lives are subject to forces of a political and economic nature that can be as devastating as a tornado or hurricane. These man-made forces can be more deadly than an act of God. They do not strike randomly, but disproportionately upon the weak, the poor, and the powerless. And when they strike they bring

death, suffering, and homelessness that is often greater than natural disasters. These forces deprive people of my world of the things they value most: money. Those who have it have sacrificed too much of their precious time to get it and have lost much of their humanity in the forfeiture. Most tragically of all, even those who have an abundance of wealth will not be able to enjoy it for long because the resources of my world cannot sustain such levels of consumption indefinitely.”

“I have come back in time to see if there is room enough for us here.” Shocked by the frank admission the Biblical man said after a long pause, “We do not welcome foreigners here. Even if you spoke our language, knew our culture, and your ancestors shared the same blood as our tribe, we still would not accept you because you are not of our time. Perhaps it is not too late to save your world? Pray that God will “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” Pray for a world in which men will “beat their swords into plowshares” and “practice war no more.” Pray for a world in which “each man can sit under his vine and fig tree and none shall make him afraid.” I believe that if you sincerely pray for these things and are willing to turn you faith into action then “God will hear from heaven and heal your land” as the prophets have written.”

“Modern man has lost faith in God. We have religions that define our tribes and separate us according to doctrines and traditions. We have places of worship that are as opulent as the materialistic societies that erected them. Don't get me wrong, we have the word of God in all of our holy books, but we lack the true spirit of God in our hearts. Confidence in our technology has led to pessimism in the power of faith. A cold, calculating logic has left no place in our minds for mystery, for belief in something that falls beyond our ability to comprehend the divine except through metaphor, allegory, symbolism, and poetry. To the modern man the supernatural has been reduced to superstition. To modern man there is nothing greater than himself.”

“Our Biblical world suffers from many of the things you describe. There are those who daily sacrifice animals upon alters without lifting a finger to help those in need. There are those who cast children into the fire with the mistaken belief that they can find salvation by sacrificing “the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul.” Our temples and shrines also stand as prisons for our faith to those foolish enough to believe that God can be confined behind the thick walls of their sanctuary. Only a few us understood what the prophet meant when he proclaimed, “The earth is the Lord's with all of its abundance.” We are merely inhabitants on it—not the creators of it. Our belief in the supremacy of God is what makes the equality of man a self-evident truth because compared to the greatness of such a God the differences between people are insignificant.”

“I wish that there was enough faith left in my world to save it. Centuries of abuse by charlatans, egotists, and theocrats in the name of God has created a justified skepticism. Many people with good hearts who continue to attend religious services worship a god who is a culmination of all their beliefs, a projection of their will and values. There is nothing transcendent or transformational in such faith. These people have a well ordered philosophy that they call God, but it all comes from within them and out of their heads. For such people, even the act of prayer is an exercise in “positive thinking,” one where they are trying to change external realities with their own thoughts. Therefore, without consciously realizing it, they, too, believe that they are gods.” He shook his head and opined that it is very rare to find, “True belief in the existence of a

higher power that exists not to serve us or do our bidding, but that created us in His image to preserve and repair the world.”

The Biblical man said, “A society as advanced as yours must have people who are wise, intelligent, and knowledgeable. Appeal to them, they will understand.” The modern man continued, “I do not wish to sound like a misanthrope, but the educated scientist among us are also our leading atheists. You see they have studied our world so closely, with such sophisticated equipment, and with such mathematical precision that they have concluded that the universe created itself without the assistance or existence of a spiritual being.” The Biblical man responded with laughter, “And you said that your world lacked a sense of humor.” “Even a man of my simple logic understands that for every chair there must be a carpenter; if a cup exists there must have been a potter who shaped it. Ergo, if there is a universe, there must be a Creator; if there are natural laws that govern that universe, then there must be a law maker, a law giver; there must be a God.”

“I’m afraid you won’t understand” said the modern man. “It is far more complicated than I can explain, but once you have heard the reasoning it makes a certain sense to say that the universe created itself.”

Somewhat indignantly, the Biblical man responded. “There are many things that I do not understand. I do not know how it is possible to travel back in time, but the fact that you are here proves that it is true whether I understand it or not. Similarly, I do not know the chemical composition of your clothing or how such intricate patterns were formed on your fabric. Yet, my logic tells me that intelligent actions flow from intelligent thoughts. Therefore, your shirt began in the mind of some artist, weaver, or designer who then developed the physical means by which it was produced. I do not need to know who this grand architect was and knowledge of how looms in your generation work are far beyond my ancient brain to comprehend, but I can say for certainty that your shirt did not create itself.”

“If my shirt were the universe” the modern man surmised, then our scientists would tell you “that as it was being spun the shirt itself made certain choices, certain “natural selections” that determined its color, style, and length. Therefore, the fact that it fits me so perfectly is the result of a long series of convenient coincidences.” In exasperation the modern man sighed “I told you that you wouldn’t understand.”

On the contrary said the Biblical man, “After today, I am quite ready to believe a great many fantastic things. I believe in time capsules and shirts that weave themselves and can even believe in a universe that continues to create itself through natural selection because that would require some higher intelligence by which it, the shirt or universe, decides what is best for its survival, what is “fittest” for its purpose as a shirt. These are endowments of mind, qualities that only living things possess. Your world has created many inventions. Have any of your scientists or engineers ever created a thing with a spirit, an independent will to live, grow, and reproduce itself? These things go beyond the limits of mechanics and enter the spiritual realm of metaphysics. At some point your scientist will encounter questions for which they must acknowledge that no other explanation is possible; at some point they must simply say, “It is because that which created it deemed it to be so.”

Return to your time modern man. If your generation has lost God it is because you have you're your prophets. You may have rabbis, priests, imams, and holy men, but you lack prophets for they hold no office, bear no title, and perform no rituals. Prophets arise among every people and at every time in human history to speak the truth. Prophets are men and women who cannot turn a blind eye to the problems of their society. Like Biblical prophets they must speak these truths always and everywhere. They must speak it to kings, wealthy men, and ordinary people. Prophets do not hide from the truth and they do not try to run away from it by constructing their own time capsules.

