



Who is the God of our imagination? I mean, how do we think of God? Who or what comes to mind?

It's a question worth exploring.

You see, a lot of people say they believe in a sort of "higher intelligence", a God who is said to have made everything, and yet when you ask them specifically about this God, you're likely to get a whole range of answers.

Some people say they tend to see the God of the Old Testament as a bit too patriarchal and jealous at times. He seems, well, a bit mean, and ever ready with retribution.

On the extreme, a renowned atheist recently described God as: "*a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.*" (Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 2006)

Yet, many believers prefer what they seem to see as the gentler Jesus of the New Testament – someone who loved little children.

So, how do you see God?

Well, to begin with, what we have is the Bible, the most printed and published book ever in history! It's a witness; the only testimony we have that tells us about God – who He is and what He is doing. And, it is important to note what is called "the Christology" of this unique book.

Simply put, the God "of the Old Testament" was none other than Jesus Christ Himself! Jesus was God who came to live among us, and to reveal God the Father.

The writings of Jesus' friend John, and as found in the Book of Hebrews, plainly state that it was Jesus who made the world; it was Jesus who spoke everything into existence.

John described Jesus as: "*God is love.*" He went on to write that "*in God there is no darkness at all.*" (1 John 1:5)

The problem exists where some casual Bible readers argue that: wasn't it God who sent a flood and drowned humanity in the days of Noah? Wasn't it God who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone?

Wasn't it God who sent devastating plagues on ancient Egypt? And, wasn't it God who told the ancient Israelites to utterly destroy the peoples in Canaan?

How could He be the same God in Jesus, they ask, who willingly suffered and paid for the sins of the world?

Well, to begin with, we must understand the depravation and wickedness of some of the ancient peoples, who allowed their children, for example, to pass through the fire to their god Molech.

Do you know what this was? This was nothing else but child sacrifice in the name of religion! It was this, among other abominable practices, that caused God to intervene at various times in history.

Yes, we may read about the gentle Jesus who blessed the little children who came to Him. But let's think carefully then how this same Jesus might feel about the killing of innocent, little children?

Could a just God have remained silent on, for example, the horrific time of ethnic killing of all baby boys – thrown into the Nile to be eaten by crocodiles – by the Egyptians? There are other records in the Bible, too, where the killing of children occurred.

Certainly such acts, in individual cases or widespread throughout society, are an indicator of just how depraved and wicked people can become.

Now, God is a God of justice. Nothing escapes His attention. He is a God of passion; a God of feeling.

Listen to what He says as recorded in the Book of Jeremiah, *“Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.”* (Jeremiah 31:3)

That term “loving kindness”: There’s really no singular English word that can convey the Hebrew “khesed” (a word that is used some 240 times in the Old Testament) – the nearest we have in English that describes God is “loving kindness” or even translated elsewhere in the Bible as “mercy”.

So, the question remains, how does God deal with the “wicked”?

Did you know that God gave Noah 120 years to preach a message of repentance before the flood came?

Did you know that God visited Abraham to discuss the outcome of the “exceedingly wicked” citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah?

Of course, we may ask: How is all this relevant to us in our times?

Naturally, we want “God” to be good and gentle and kind, but we don’t really want Him meddling in our private affairs, do we? By that I mean, haven’t our own sins in this world piled high to heaven?

May I ask: What is abortion but the condoned killing of baby children?

Millions of children are being killed each year in our world. The ancients at least claimed some sort of religious overlay, but are not ours killings of convenience?

We don’t even call them babies anymore – that would be too personal. We instead label them as embryos or fetuses.

How do you think God feels about those we kill – those who are being formed *“in His image and His likeness”*?

Now, of course, if we don’t believe in God (and therefore our accountability to Him), then the “survival of the fittest” mode means nothing less than a dark and deadly world.

There are few of us, however, believe it or not, whose work is to witness that there is a God, an awesome, powerful, righteous, loving God – a God, however, Who may not necessarily fit “the God of our imagination”.

This God is real, and personal, and He tells those of us willing to listen that He’s coming “quickly”.

If we turn to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, where we’re given a glimpse of the world at a time of economic upheaval, war and suffering, we would do well to also note the condition of this society:

“For her sins [the sins of this society] have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.” (Revelation 18:5)

God doesn’t hide from us what He’s going to do.

He is a God of Justice, as much as He a God of mercy and compassion, and the pages of scripture testify to: Who He is; what He has done in the past; what He’s doing now, and, what His plans are for the future.

You know, we really have only one recourse: we need to genuinely turn and seek God, and come to know Him.

Can we turn from our sinful ways? Are we able to ask His forgiveness? Do we doubt the extent of His grace?

For the MessageWeek team, I’m John Klassek.

One thing is certain: an encounter with the real God is bound to change us forever; but, persisting with “the God of our imagination” is a convenient risk too great to contemplate. □



By John Klassek