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THE NEW SHOFAR

The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the Incarnation. Christ's birth reverses the tragedy set in motion by Adam's original sin and death, and Christ's resurrection reverses the tragedy of His death. **Tolkien**

Jesus is our King not a consultant or influencer!

The new film "Odyssey" by Christopher Nolan has certainly captured the attention of many across the West. Amazingly, it has even prompted an unprecedented level of enrolments in (ancient) Greek language. Why the Odyssey? Why now? I suspect that our reading from Jeremiah might give us a way of understanding (perhaps) this new interest.

Let us begin with some current affairs. The long-discredited Amnesty International recently dropped this post…*Professor Arday was a victim of a brutal, racist witch hunt…Professor Arday is not the first victim of our toxic, unregulated media culture and unless there is systemic legislative change, he won't be the last, as networks we therefore support the creation of Arday's Law*. That is not a world view that I, as a Christian could in any way accept. Whenever punishment replaces repentance, society has moved far from the Gospels and the Good News of the Kingdom. Notice how those who desire to punish the media and place the blame for Aday's sad death instead of the employment philosophies of the universities are hounded and discredited for being "racist" in a racist society.

This was Jeremiah's problem. He wanted to talk Yahweh, and the saving works of the God of Israel, a message Jerusalem did not want to hear. The King and leading "influencers" of the time were more concerned about trying to be "*like the other nations"*, in this case be more Babylonian than Jews living an outdated moral philosophy. Every time he sought to preach God's Truth, they mocked him, even throwing him into an old well, closing the lid to lock him inside! Doing God's work came at a cost and it was far easier to keep the head down than to remain faithful when all around are pursuing and propagating lies. *Thou hast deceived me, O Lord, and I am … a laughingstock all the day, all scoff at me*.

Odysseus, Jeremiah, Jesus and *Eucatastrophe*

There is another line of thought that cries out from Noland's Odessey. It can be summed up in a word I have longed to use: "*eucatastrophe*." A ***eu***catastrophe is built from catastrophe—literally "to turn down"—and the prefix "**eu,**" meaning "good." Thus, in a story with ***eu***catastrophe (as in the Odessey), at the point of greatest tragedy, you will find that the seeds of a great good have already been sown. We saw it in events like the 1998 Tsunami that battered PNG, and smaller local disasters, down to a personal and individual level. That is very much an apt description of what was happening to Jeremiah.

The Hebrew people remain stubbornly unwilling to face the reality of their sins, how they break the Covenant with the same enthusiasm with which the people of the time of Noah embraced sin in their own time. Then, the earth's population exploded in number, it also exploded with evil… *the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,*

and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). *However, "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord"* (verse 8).

Toward the end of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus utters a despairing line (influenced perhaps by a Talmudic aphorism (a saying that also found its way in *Schindler's List*): *Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire*. The Talmud sees absolute significance in the reverse as well—the destruction of one life—which is closer to the sense of Odysseus's lament. Nolan also gives the pagan Greek hero a line reinterpreting one of Homer's key themes but put in terms of a sayings of Jesus - the Golden Rule only he calls it "Zeus's law". This is summarised as treating strangers and others "as you would be treated."

But in J**ohn 3:16**, Jesus says that God loved the world in such a way as to make provision for their sin in the face of judgment. Just prior to this, in **John 3:14-15**, Jesus alludes to the time Moses was instructed by God to craft a bronze serpent-like staff to hold up at a time when the people were dying due to their sin. All who would look to the staff would live (**Nu 21:4-9**). In the same way, Jesus said, all who **look to him**, when he is lifted up, will have eternal life (**Jn 3:15**). God's love for the world and desire to provide salvation is why God became man. Or to use better wording, "*Christ came into the world to save sinners*" (**1 Tim 1:15**). He is ***the*** guarantee that the seeds of faith, even when planted in "catastrophic" circumstances will bear and/or are already bearing an abundance of much needed fruit. Jesus is the "eu" in all catastrophes, in all its shapes and manifestations, something neither the gods of old nor our contemporary philosophies could achieve and guarantee.

falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus – false in one thing, false in all things

The old Latin saying above picks up the theme of living in a world where deceits are so prevalent they are treated as though they were big "t" truths until deception becomes the norm on which newer falsehoods are constructed. Sir Walter Scott in ***Marmion*** aa warning, one that picks up Odysseus and the Hebrew people at the time of Jeremiah – *O what a tangled web we weave, when we practice to deceive*. It serves as a reflection on the consequences of ***Marmion's*** deceitful actions, which had become increasingly complex and inescapable. He uses a metaphor in describing the way lies entrap the deceiver. The 'tangled web' metaphor highlights how lies and deceit, once begun, become increasingly complex and difficult to manage. That quotation directly refers to the protagonist's web of lies, which ultimately ensnares him. It also points to a universal truth about the dangers of dishonesty and the way one lie often leads to another, creating complications that are hard to escape. That is a helpful insight into the way we have allowed the world to construct a web of lies that is only now beginning to be seen as unproductive lies. No wonder people are being drawn into Noland's world beyond the material, a world of gods, even when those troublesome gods turn out to be little more than reflections of base human failings. We pray that looking at problem gods lead people to the One True God.

The world needs a return to the basic moral values on which our culture, and civilisation has been built, a world view putting God at the centre, not gods manifesting themselves in thunder and lightning, but ***the*** One God who became man, one who lived, died, rose and now reigns. If Odysseus helps in this, then let us give thanks and take it further, deeper by witnessing to what a difference a lived faith brings. In the End, who wants to be like the farmers in the parable of **Matthew 13** where the Evil One ruined the crop with weeds planted *while they were sleeping*.