

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF JORDAN PETERSON'S BIBLICAL SERIES

by Aerik Vondenburg

aerikvondenburg.com

2018

Jordan Peterson is a Canadian author and professor of psychology at the University of Toronto, socio-political gadfly, and internet demi-celebrity. He is most known for his criticism of left-wing political correctness and support of men's rights.

What especially interests me about Peterson is his talks on religious subjects, which is in my own purview, so I thought I would take a look at what he said in a series of lectures that he gave on the subject. The following is from his *Biblical series I: Introduction to the Idea of God*, which is available on Peterson's Youtube channel, and at:

<https://jordanbpeterson.com/transcripts/biblical-series-i/>

According to Peterson, we do not understand how the books of the Bible came about or how they were put together. However, scholars actually do now have a good idea at this point. For more information on this topic I recommend (to start with) the books of Bart Ehrman Ph.D (author of *Misquoting Jesus; Jesus Interrupted; Forged; etc.*) and Richard Elliot Friedman Ph.D. (author of *Who Wrote the Bible; etc.*).

Peterson asserts that without the Bible we are lost and “susceptible to psychological pathology,” and yet the Bible (especially the Old Testament) is not only filled with tales of such

pathology but has influenced its adherents to succumb to pathological behavior throughout the history of its existence (e.g. The Inquisition; Holy Wars; etc.). For more on this topic, see my book: *The Genesis of Revelation*. Moreover, there are plenty of people in the world who are not adherents to the tenants of the Bible and yet do not exhibit any signs whatsoever of “psychological pathology.”

According to Peterson, the Bible is a “comedy.” This is peculiar due to the fact that the actual definition of the word comedy is not just a dramatic work that has a happy ending, as he contends, but a humorous work that contains a comic element. Indeed, the history of comedy can be traced back to the plays of the ancient Greeks, who defined comedy as a bawdy type of farce; the satirical lewdness of which the ancient people found to be humorous. I am not sure what humor that could be referred to in a biblical sense, except perhaps for some sporadic instances of unintentional comedy – e.g. the talking donkey (Numbers 22:30).

It is telling that Peterson actually admits in this lecture that he does not understand what is really going on in the Bible, and yet he presents himself as a champion of Judeo-Christianity. In other words: he believes in something that he does not understand. Despite his admission, he asserts that we should let the scriptures be the models of how to live. In other words: we should live by something that is not understood, which conflicts with his assertion that faith in religious mythology (or what he refers to as the “underlying dream”) and rational thought are not contradictory.

At this point, we have come to the end the first installment of his series. There appear to be 14 more segments. I did attempt to listen to the second installment (Biblical Series II: Genesis 1: Chaos and Order). I got as far as approximately two minutes in, in which Peterson states that Jesus is the same “force” that God used in the biblical creation story, and cannot be dismissed as “superstition” because it is so “strange.”

(sigh . . .) This will be as far as I am willing to go. I am unable to take this seriously.

Jordan Peterson may be a qualified psychologist but is clearly less insightful when it comes to biblical subjects. Indeed, something that I noticed about these lectures is that he

comes off as someone who is desperately trying to make sense out of something that he himself clearly does not understand; and yet, this has not stopped him from presenting himself as an expert; nor has it stopped his followers from exalting him as some sort of wise and heroic father figure.

Something else that I noticed about Peterson from some of the interviews that he has done is not just his pugnacious polemics but also his rhetorical evasiveness. But what concerns me even more is something that he asserted in one particular interview, in which he stated that “facts are not necessarily true,” and confessed to the transgression of “gerrymandering the definition of truth” (source: Waking Up with Sam Harris #62 – What is True.) Apparently, for Jordan Peterson, the truth is something that can be manipulated to suit one's own needs and beliefs. Indeed, he also asserted in the same interview that truths that lead us to our demise must not be true, and refers to his own type of truth as “Darwinian.” However, not only would any qualified epistemologist confirm that the truth can not be interpreted in such a self-serving way but the Darwinian paradigm that Peterson is professing conflicts with the biblical creed that he is simultaneously trying to promote.

Peterson's positions have earned him praise not only from the usual right-wing actors but most notably from the misogynist incels (i.e., involuntary celibates), many of whom blame women's equality for the predicament. Many in this group support Peterson's idea of “enforced monogamy,” which is the idea that women should be forced to marry men (which he stated in a 2018 New York Times interview with Nellie Bowles). According to Peterson, this should be done in order to prevent single men from becoming frustrated and committing crimes (e.g., the 2018 Alek Minassian incident). This is not just ridiculous due to the obvious reasons but it also contradicts Peterson's own anti-socialistic “equality of outcome” stance.

It is apparent that Jordan Peterson is a conflicted man. A man with one foot in the modern progressive world, and one foot still stubbornly planted in the regressive old-world; a world that was, not coincidentally, at the height of its power during the European Dark Ages. Indeed, in the biblical series lectures he openly wrestles with this dichotomy.

Nevertheless, it must also be acknowledged that Jordan Peterson has an inadvertent

role to play in society as a transitional intermediary for those on the threshold of evolutionary growth. He is a gateway figure who has the ability to help lead hardened fundamentalist out of a darker age. Yes, he quotes the Bible, but he can also quote Nietzsche. Therefore, the good news that can be gleaned from the Peterson spectacle is that he is encouraging rudimentary steps for those who are usually the ones who are most hesitant to move forward into this evolutionary era. And for that I salute him.