

Biblical Studies #102

How we Look at Scripture

If we acknowledge God as all-knowing, ever-present, all-powerful, and as the creator and redeemer of all that exists, we then have a firm foundation from which to examine God's word. If I accept this truth, then acknowledging the authority of His word makes sense because He and His word are one. John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Holy Bible does not contain truth (which could imply that some parts are not true) It is truth! So, while we have the benefit of examining scripture from the position of knowing it to be God's truth, let's approach His divine word with the rhetorical question: "Is the Bible true?" In order to answer such a question, we must determine what the Bible claims and then examine those claims.

I will here present that The Bible contains neither History nor Mystery. Things that defy human logic and understanding, and things that function outside the realm of what we would define as natural processes, are mysteries, and as such are issues of faith. However, there are many supernatural things that scripture records that touch on the areas of history and science so that we can examine some of those claims as well. To exclude the possibility of anything supernatural is to place one's faith in observable natural processes limited by man's ability to understand it, and I would rather lean on God than on my own understanding, to borrow a line from a psalmist. On the other hand, the Bible is also packed with Historical claims that can in many cases be easily examined for their accuracy.

So, if we are going to examine the truth claims of the Bible, we should follow some basic rules or agreed upon principals to help us determine the validity of the claim. (The validity of the claim is not in question for some Christians, but it is for many Christians and more importantly God wants us to be ready to give an answer for the joy we carry in our heart.) So, since the Bible uses words to express God's truth, we should first examine linguistic rules, I am not talking about grammar, which is very important, especially to our English teachers, but I am talking about genre. But not just genre, we are talking about context. Not cultural context or even trying to determine what was on the mind of the "autograph" (a term for the person who wrote it). Those are questions for another time. I am talking about linguistic context, and I would propose all of scripture falls into 5 main contexts: Historic Narrative, Poetry, Letters, Parables, and Prophecy.

Now these are broad categories, but they give us a starting place. When we read a Historic narrative, that type of writing has a format, and we can identify that format. It can help us to know that while there may be some amazing things this text can reveal to us, first and foremost, it is an historical account. Now God's word is versatile, and in many places contains multiple contexts. But for the most part, Genesis through Ester, the Gospels and Acts, are written in the Historical narrative format. When we think of Poetry or artistic writing, we think of Job through Song of Songs. Letters or Epistles (Greek for letters), we think of Romans through Jude. Parables (stories with a special and sometimes hidden meaning) are contained mostly in the Gospels. And finally, Prophecy: this is writing that speaks of things to come, and is found in Isaiah through Malachi, and Revelation, as well as the Gospels. As you can see the Gospels contain many contexts.

Hermeneutics is an expensive word for the study of interpretation theory, and while understanding biblical hermeneutics is important for anyone who seeks to proclaim God's truth as a pastor or teacher, there is one of many important rules from this that we should all know and apply when reading God's word: "let scripture interpret scripture". This means that God does not contradict Himself, and if you derive a meaning in one part of God's word that contradicts a clear meaning in another place in God's word, then you have clearly derived an incorrect meaning.

In Christ
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